



MUSEU
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**The History of Exhibitions: Beyond the Ideology of the
White Cube (part one)**
Course in art and contemporary culture
19/10/2009 - 30/11/2009

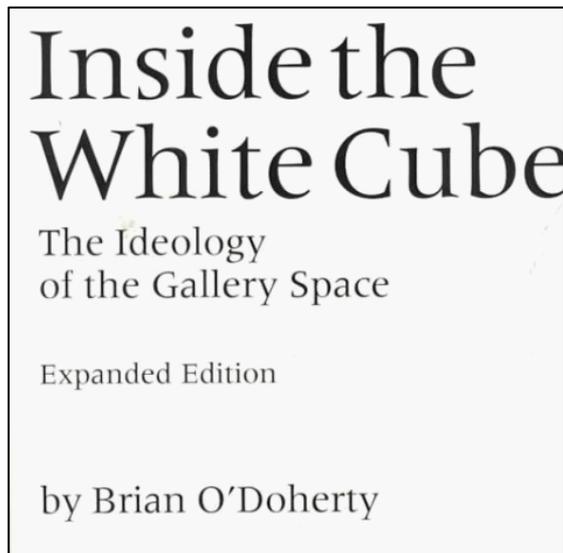
Beyond the Ideology of the White Cube
Brian O'Doherty in discussion with Bartomeu Mari
30/11/2009 - Auditorium MACBA - 7 pm

“Few essays have garnered as much immediate response as Brian O’Doherty’s “Inside the White Cube,” originally published as a series of three articles in *Artforum* in 1976, and subsequently collected in a book of the same name. According to myth, the issues of *Artforum* containing O’Doherty’s texts sold out very quickly, and as he himself has remarked, many artists he spoke to at the time told him that they themselves had been thinking about writing something similar. This is to say that the main concern of the essay—how to deal with the white cube convention for gallery design—was shared by many of his contemporaries. Naturally, O’Doherty was writing not only within the specific context of post-minimalism and conceptual art of the 1970s, but also from the point of view of artistic practice. Aside from being a prominent critic, O’Doherty was also an installation artist, having worked since 1972 under the name of Patrick Ireland (in protest against the British Army’s involvement in Ulster).”
Simon Sheikh¹

“The history of modernism is intimately framed by [the gallery] space; or rather the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and in the way we see it. We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the *space* first. (...) An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of twentieth century art; it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains.

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art”. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. (...)

A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. (...)



¹ Simon Sheikh, “Positively White Cube Revisited”, e-flux journal, n.3, 02/2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/38>

Unshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. Their ungrubby surfaces are untouched by time and its vicissitudes. Art exists in a kind of eternity of display, and though there is lots of “period” (late modern), there is no time. This eternity gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there.” **Brian O’Doherty**²

Brian O’Doherty

Brian O’Doherty, formerly Patrick Ireland, is an artist and writer. He has had numerous exhibitions in Europe and the United States, including several retrospectives, the most recent of which was at New York University’s Grey Gallery in 2007. His alter ego, Patrick Ireland, aged 36, was buried at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2008. The name, a political act, was assumed after the Derry, Northern Ireland massacre of 1972. He is the author of several books and novels, including *Inside the White Cube*, *Studio and Cube*, and *The Deposition of Fr. McGreevy*, which was nominated for the Man Booker prize. He lives in New York with his wife, the art historian, Barbara Novak. He is currently creating a stone labyrinth on Belfast’s Falls Road.

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² Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (1976), Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 14-15