

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

Contact: Alyssa Plummer
Tel: 212/998-6782 or alyssa.plummer@nyu.edu

First retrospective of work by pioneering conceptual artist travels from Dublin to New York University

***Beyond the White Cube: A Retrospective of Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland* on view at NYU's Grey Art Gallery April 17 through July 14, 2007**

New York City, February 15, 2007—The first retrospective of one of the most fascinating and complex figures to emanate from the New York art scene in the 1960s, *Beyond the White Cube* includes over 70 artworks. On view from April 17 through July 14, 2007, at New York University's Grey Art Gallery—the only American venue for this show of work by a pioneering conceptualist who is known by the two names of Brian O'Doherty and Patrick Ireland—the exhibition features a selection of paintings, sculptures, installations, and drawings spanning his variegated career.

Born in Ireland in 1928, Brian O'Doherty has also been an accomplished critic, television presenter, filmmaker, and educator. In 1972, he adopted the rubric Patrick Ireland as his artistic alias—and with which he has signed all of his subsequent artworks—as a patriotic and artistic protest against the “Bloody Sunday” massacre in Derry earlier that year. In 1976, he wrote three essays for *Artforum* that later became *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. In them, he convincingly argued that the antiseptic white walls of commercial galleries have helped determine the meaning of modern art as much as the artworks themselves. O'Doherty has also been editor of *Art in America* (to which he contributed a number of articles under the pen name of Mary Josephson), was art and architecture critic for the *Today* program, was an art critic for the *New York Times*, and served as part-time director of the visual-arts and film/video programs of the National Endowment of the Arts.

Beyond the White Cube focuses on the visual work through which O'Doherty/Ireland has consistently explored perception, language, and serial systems. Trained as a physician, O'Doherty simultaneously pursued art while studying in Dublin. Moving to New York in 1961, he experimented with Minimal and Conceptual art practices, working alongside other key artists such as Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, Eva Hesse, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Smithson.

Organized by the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane director Barbara Dawson and former head of exhibitions Christina Kennedy, *Beyond the White Cube* presents works from O'Doherty/Ireland's Labyrinth, Chess, and Ogham series, as well as recent abstract paintings and a Rope Drawing. The latter, the most recent realization of a series begun in 1973, is one of his signature installation works comprised of taut strings that frame and unframe colorful vistas for moving spectators. Also included in the exhibition is Ireland's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*,

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY GREY ART GALLERY 100 WASHINGTON SQUARE EAST NEW YORK NY 10003
tel: 212.998.6780 fax: 212.995.4024 e-mail: greycastle@nyu.edu <http://www.nyu.edu/greycastle>

based on an electrocardiogram of his friend, along with the contents of the legendary journal *Aspen 5+6*, for which O’Doherty served as guest editor. The combined issues have been heralded as one of the earliest conceptual exhibitions.

The installation at the Grey opens with the artist’s exploration of identity. As he notes, “We are all capable of infinitely more than our single persona allows us to do in a society and culture which defines the limits of the self. I believe in a diversity that allows us to undertake various roles, as everybody does in life, I’ve just simply materialized them.” *Five Identities*, a photographic work from 2002, portrays all of O’Doherty’s alter egos. Most famously, Patrick Ireland was adopted as an alias—and certified by a Notary Public—during a performance piece protesting the “Bloody Sunday” massacre in Derry when British troops infamously opened fire on unarmed peace demonstrators. In addition to Patrick Ireland (seen here as artist/activist, his face obscured by a stocking), his alternative identities include Sigmund Bode (adopted in 1950 as a fictitious art historian), Mary Josephson (adopted in 1973 as a pen name under which he wrote art commentary for *Art in America* and *Artforum*), and William Maginn (an early appropriation of the 19th-century Irish wit and writer) as well as O’Doherty himself, clad in jeans and a leather jacket. As his compatriot Oscar Wilde put it, “. . . in being true to a single self, a sincere man may be false to half a dozen other selves.”

Adjacent to his explorations of identity—including an ongoing photographic self-portrait titled *The Transformation, Discontinuity and Degeneration of the Image* begun in 1969—is a site-specific Rope Drawing specially created for the Grey Art Gallery presentation. With his “drawings in air,” Ireland deconstructs gallery spaces, exercises that culminated in his theoretical treatise *Inside the White Cube*. For the site-specific installations—of which he has created over one hundred—stretched cords activate walls of color. Most recently, installations deal with the theme of domicile, as doorways beckon, and the viewer’s perception of space is set into motion, as walls constantly appear to shift, advance, and recede.

O’Doherty has also been obsessed with chess since childhood. Among the numerous works inspired by the game is *Bishops Cross*, 1966, in which a glass “X,” embodying that piece’s diagonal trajectories, rests on a mirrored game board. Strategic and cerebral, as well as rigorously geometrical, works from O’Doherty’s Chess Series share key characteristics with another important body of works, the Labyrinths. Like chess boards, mazes involve calculated progressions through space. Whether entered or not, a labyrinth—an archetype in the artist’s work—suggests a perceptual experience involving both mind and body. *Finnegan’s Wake*, James Joyce’s labyrinthine novel, also provided inspiration.

O’Doherty created his Ogham sculptures between 1967 and 1970. In the ancient Irish Ogham script, which translates 20 letters of the Roman alphabet into angled strokes, he found the perfect serial system that allowed him to combine concept, language, and repetition. Onto vertical, minimal sculptures of polished aluminum or Plexiglas, O’Doherty etched three words—ONE, HERE, NOW—in the Ogham script. “ONE obviously had to do with unity, the Absolute. HERE had to do with position, thus with the ghost of composition. NOW collapsed past and future into the present,” he explains. This ancient language also provided the artist with a visual system that he subsequently explored in numerous abstract drawings and paintings.

O’Doherty’s background as a medical doctor and researcher has likewise fed his art. In particular, working in the Experimental Psychology Labs at Cambridge University in 1957, he designed experiments to test perception and cognition. An early, key watercolor, *The Five Senses*

of the Bishop of Cloyne, 1967–68, integrates the grid and the Ogham language to explore the senses. The title refers to an 18th-century Irish empirical philosopher, George Berkeley, who served as the Bishop of Cloyne, and who, as the artist observes, “fused sensation and object with idea.”

Erudition and visual play clearly endeared the young artist to elder luminary Marcel Duchamp, who agreed to pose for a portrait comprised of an electrocardiogram that O’Doherty took on April 4, 1966. Duchamp also contributed to the May/June 1967 issue of *Aspen* that O’Doherty guest edited. Spending a year to assemble the magazine, O’Doherty nicknamed it his “one-man show for that year.” This impressive “exhibition in a box,” measuring 8 x 8 x 2 ½ inches, features films, records, and texts as well as a do-it-yourself sculpture by Tony Smith, artworks by Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt and Mel Bochner, and the commissioned essays “The Death of the Author” by Roland Barthes and “The Aesthetics of Silence” by Susan Sontag. Also combined onto one reel were films by Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Morris, Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, and Hans Richter, as well as a recorded interview with Merce Cunningham and musical selections by John Cage and Morton Feldman.

O’Doherty, it seems, rarely rests. In addition to *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, he also published the survey *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*, which appeared in 1974. An accomplished novelist, he has written several fictional works, including *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*, which was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2000.

Accompanying *Beyond the White Cube* is a comprehensive catalogue with contributions by Alexander Alberro, Nora M. Alter, Hans Belting, Anne-Marie Bonnet, Hubert Damisch, Barbara Dawson, Ingmar Lahnemann, Thomas McEvelley, Brenda Moore-McCann, David Moos, Mark Rosenthal, Jan Van Der Marck, and Mary-Ruth Walsh. *Beyond the White Cube* originated at the Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane in Dublin, Ireland, where it was supported by a generous grant from the Luce Foundation. The Grey Art Gallery presentation is made possible in part by the Dunphy Family Foundation, Dr. Brenda Moore-McCann and Professor Shaun R. McCann, and the Abby Weed Grey Trust. Public programs are supported by the Grey’s Inter/National Council.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003

Tel: 212/998-6780, fax: 212/995-4024

E-mail: greycastle@nyu.edu

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU staff, faculty, and students: free of charge

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