

This exhibition features works by the artist Brian O'Doherty layered in time and space. They concern the building that SIRIUS occupies, Irish history, and literature as a medium that unfolds durationally. Together, they reiterate O'Doherty's key themes: language, the self, perception, and ideology.

The works are mostly borrowed from Irish museums and private collections. They include pieces from the holdings of O'Doherty's close collaborators and a study for *One, Here, Now*, a mural that he made at SIRIUS in 1996.

O'Doherty's multiple links to Ireland extend through the layers of SIRIUS' history and space, to the water and the sky beyond, and along and across the time he lived. In "reading" his works in and through time, this exhibition proposes an a vital relationship that he establishes: with each and every one of us, here and now.

Curated by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes. Produced by SIRIUS.

East Gallery

Brian O'Doherty was born in Ireland in 1928. He studied medicine, and then emigrated to the United States in 1957, where he embarked on an art-related career. In the 1960s he became influential in the New York art scene in multiple functions, all of which served his vision of the importance of art in society: he was an artist, critic, editor, television host, filmmaker, novelist, and art funding programme director. He passed away in New York late in 2022.

Like many Irish emigrants, O'Doherty departed Ireland from Cobh. The building SIRIUS occupies was likely one of the last that he saw. This is the former headquarters of the Royal Cork Yacht Club, designed and built in the 1850s for the Anglo-Irish. A residency here in 1996 gave O'Doherty the opportunity to reflect on his origins and Ireland's social and political divides.

O'Doherty was an avid reader of James Joyce, appreciating his manipulation of time and use of the (expanded) English language. Joyce's literary output, also generated in self-imposed exile, gave O'Doherty a framework to think of home away from home. His iconic installations known as "rope drawings" are comments on the unsettling but true-to-life experience of engaging with Joyce's writings, especially *Finnegans Wake*, 1939. O'Doherty approached reading it sometimes as disabling and annoying, making him silent, and sometimes as projecting lively, darting lines in the world, as in the rope drawings, but also lines of text.

HCE Redux, 2004

This Rope Drawing originates from an invitation to exhibit in Dublin, at the "Protestant" university, Trinity College, 1985, and in a gallery with a Brutalist architectural design: a "purgatory" in the institution that did not allow Catholics, like Brian O'Doherty, to study until 1979. "Redux" indicates a "revived" version of this installation, first shown in an exhibition entitled *Joyce in Art* at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, 2004, and currently in yet another colonial building, this time in the thematic frame of time (life

and death) and reading: the pages on the table are the beginning of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, 1939.

The vertically written letters "HCE", framed by the ropes, are the initials of the male protagonist of that book. By giving no fixed names but merely initials that can stand for e.g. "Here Comes Everybody", Joyce indicates his aversion to fixed notions of identity. As an Irish emigrant like Joyce, Brian O'Doherty found in the writer's work a familiar place, an Irish, but also a critical voice, far from the Catholic orthodoxy that both gladly left behind.

The Doodles Family (p.299), 2004

This drawing resembles other works in the artist's oeuvre that are organised in a grid. This one is made up of the "sigla" or signs that Joyce used to construct *Finnegans Wake*. The capital "E" for HCE and the "Δ" for ALP's (river) delta can turn around their axes and stand for the changeability of identity. The drawing, made in the context of the *Joyce in Art* exhibition, Dublin 2004, implies that Joyce has been a "lozenge" (or soothing medicine) for all of the artist's life. In a letter by the artist, Joyce is described as the "damnably brilliant" writer who keeps "PI/BO'D", i.e. both the visual artist and the writer O'Doherty "honest". In 1984, O'Doherty recorded a reading of the opening pages of the *Wake*: an impressive, a virtuoso performance.

Documentation of Performance Entitled Name Change, 1972

As an Irish emigrant, O'Doherty was shocked at the Bloody Sunday massacre in Northern Ireland, 1972, and began to create his visual art under the stereotypical name of Patrick Ireland. He "buried" this persona in 2008 to both acknowledge and further the "Peace Process" on his home island. This coat was used in the performance with which the *Name Change* was marked (at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1972). It is a doctor's coat, referring to a past "persona" and profession of the artist. In the performance, the white-clad artist was on a stretcher, being painted from head and foot. First he looked like the Irish Tricolour, then the helpers overlapped and the result appears to foreshadow the "dirty protests" of the Hunger Strikers in Northern Ireland, 1982: a low point of the "Troubles".

Here, the coat also signifies the artist painting the *One, Here, Now* wall paintings in this building's central gallery as artist in residence at SIRIUS in 1996. It also conjures the many ways in which the artist is now both absent and present here.

Central Gallery

Brian O'Doherty problematized the supposed "neutrality" of exhibition spaces in his "Inside the White Cube" essays published in *Artforum* in 1976. There he argued that the sparse white walls, as much as the works shown there, have defined what art is.

He saw such white walls as invested with political and economic agendas – the macro-level stories in our connected, polluted, warring world.

SIRIUS, as both an institution operating in the art sector and the former Royal Cork Yacht Club clubhouse, is inevitably entangled in these realities. It is fitting that O'Doherty filled its white walls with color, when he painted *One, Here, Now* in 1996,

during a residency here. This floor-to-ceiling piece references Ogham, an ancient alphabet once popular in Ireland. It is ironic that this mural has lived, for most of its existence, hidden behind the white walls of the central room. It is as if SIRIUS encapsulates the intrinsic contradictions of art's presentation.

Between 1972 and 2008 O'Doherty worked under the moniker Patrick Ireland, which he adopted as a reaction to the massacre in Derry, Northern Ireland, known as Bloody Sunday. He anticipated many current questions in art and research, whether advancing institutional critique, a social art practice or examining the interplay of word and image. His passing in November 2022 shines a light on the imponderability of time. "One, here, now" as a motto, rather than obsessing about the present and the individual, appears to connect to many pasts, disciplines, people and places – and envisages a future that art helps to shape.

Aspen 5+6, 1967

This magazine double issue from 1967 was, as Brian O'Doherty said, "my one-person show for that year." He seems to have approached the editorial task as an artist, not (only) as a critic or academic, thus connecting art and research, form and content, but also Europe (ten years after leaving from Cobh) and the US, as well as pre WWII and post-War work. The stellar cast of contributors provided conceptual art (Duchamp), visual poetry, European Dada, US minimalism, music, dance, performance, and the formats of spoken word, interview, critical and (again multi-disciplinary) academic writing. The artistic aspect seems then to be a holistic one – and one empowering others: readers and viewers. From Roland Barthes, O'Doherty commissioned the famous "Death of the Author" essay, placing emphasis on the readers' active contribution. The white sculptural box (by Tony Smith) then logically turns all who take the various items out of it, in order to consider and place them – into curators and researchers: artists.

Dedicated to S.Mallarmé, with contributions from: R.Barthes, G.Kubler, S.Sontag, S.Beckett, W.Borroughs, A.Robbe-Grillet, J.Cage, T.Smith, L.Moholy-Nagy, R.Morris, R.Rauschenberg, M.Feldman, M. Cunningham, M.Duchamp, H.Richter, N.Gabo, R.Huelsenbeck, D.MacArgy, M.Bochner, Max Neuhaus, S.LeWitt, M.Butor, and D.Graham.

Portrait of Marcel Duchamp, (1966) 2012

Brian O'Doherty, as the medical doctor he was, in 1966 rented an ECG machine and, with his wife, Barbara Novak, invited their near neighbours on Manhattan's Upper West Side, the Duchamps, to dinner. Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), was then a grey eminence in the New York art scene. His ready-mades from 1917 onwards had revolutionized art by making it more thinking-based, world-related: conceptual. He then stringently stopped making art (or so he said). He confided in O'Doherty that "the others take me to be a has-been". O'Doherty did not. His ECG portrait proved that Duchamp was, even when silent, still creating (observable) forms, with his brain, breathing, and with his heartbeat – i.e. that one should not forget the body when focusing on thinking.

This work thus shares in an “Aesthetics of Silence”, to put it in the terms of Susan Sontag’s seminal essay, published in Brian O’Doherty’s *Aspen 5+6*. John Cage, another friend of Duchamp’s (and Joyce-reader) in *Aspen* considered there to be no such thing as silence, as there is always noise, or we at least hear our circulation.

The ECG portrait gave O’Doherty the opportunity to manipulate it: to make a light box, with the heartbeat slowed down. In this way, he “extended” Duchamp’s “life” to last 300 years. It’s a move that complicates time (and silence), as well as O’Doherty’s own presence here and now.

Time Piece, N. 4, ink on paper, 1967

O’Doherty was in the formative late 1960s clearly thinking about time and the possibilities for it to move in a non-linear way, which Einstein’s relativity theory had posited in the early twentieth century. Thinkers about history repeating itself do the same, like Giambattista Vico, whom James Joyce had read and used for the manipulation of time in his writings, something resembling “hyperlinks” before the internet. Joyce had also already in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916, made his young alter ego Stephen Dedalus situate himself in his classroom (SIRIUS was once used as a school), moving out to Ireland, Europe, the world and the universe. Connecting large- and small-scale temporal units here, O’Doherty makes us realise the human being’s short presence on this planet: what we may now describe as awareness of the Anthropocene.

Writing both left to right and right to left reminds one of the zig-zagging of Ogham lines and ropes in O’Doherty’s oeuvre, but also of Leonardo’s mirrored writing – and cultures, whose writings move in other directions. Looking back in time means and necessitates looking at difference and situating oneself also geographically in connection with all that is around us.

The Fallibility of the (Left) Hand, 2012

Witnessing one’s body ageing and failing over time is hard for anyone. For an artist with a doctor’s knowledge of medicine, this process must have been particularly poignant – or perhaps just more familiar for longer. From the Duchamp portrait onwards, the awareness of needing to think with and through the body was always a presence in Brian O’Doherty’s art. During rehabilitation in 2012, he needed to regain and exercise the control of his leading hand: he produced with this drawing a mesh of wobbly lines that simultaneously reveal and hide – or rather: use – the lapses of control over the pen that would have brought career-ending despair to most artists. For O’Doherty, vulnerability and fallibility are clearly facts of life. Humanity can be shown, its results can even be shared: the work was a gift from the artist to the curator of this exhibition. No wonder that those honoured by such disarmingly generous gestures make sure that there is a legacy, an afterlife. Such an immensely human vision of social warmth, expressed in any and all ways possible, demands to be shared.

Ireland, A Modest Proposal, 1980

The water’s edge in Ireland is something that the artist problematizes in this highly charged and yet poetic work. We viewers can situate ourselves easily, yet, as the SIRIUS

as a site of emigration and displacement amply clarifies, human beings can move or be moved. The suggestion here is that (those on) the landmass of the six Northern counties of Ireland are re-distributed in the Republic, thus sharing the experience of other instances of both plantation and migration. As the title indicates, this is something that concerns Patrick Ireland personally, and it is as biting an indictment of British colonial rule on the island as Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* from 1729 was: to ease starvation among the indigenous population by offering children as fricassee. Well into the "Troubles", yet just before the Hunger Strikes, this work practices exchange between populations, a for some unpleasant but arguably necessary contact. It also removes the land that some have for too long occupied, and it dares to name a reality: for many in the South, the North did not exist.

The work's placement here adds sailing to fishing as bucolic past-times for the privileged – and shows what a charge reading canonical literature and using the (colonial) tool of mapping can have in artistic interventions in contemporary socio-political affairs, modestly.

Ogham Column: One, Here, Now, ca. 2003 (Maquette)

The artist started using the words One, Here, Now, translated into the ancient Celtic language of Ogham (c. 2/3 —c.7th century A.D.) in the late 1960s within the context of Conceptual art, of which he was a pioneer. With Ogham, twenty letters of the Roman alphabet are translated into four sets of lines either above, below, or across a median. This is a structure similar to that of serial music. The sculpture therefore can be perceived, simultaneously, as a linguistic code but also an abstract drawing, and a musical score. The three words were used individually in many different media, until coming together in this work. Philosophically, they represent the essence of what it is *to be* in the world in terms of a self (I/One) in space (Here) and time (Now). Each cannot exist without the other. Each continually changes from second to second, minute to minute. The sculpture is a remarkable contemporary metaphor for the experience of reality through the use of ancient signs that constitute language, music, and visual art: the cultural systems we use to try to make sense of the world.

(Brenda Moore-McCann)

Art Since 1945, 1975, remade in 2018

Brian O'Doherty was asked to write an authoritative history of art since 1945. That year comes with associations of death, which black-on-black, square artworks from Kazimir Malevich to Ad Reinhardt on the title page confirm. The writer received and spent the advance from Praeger publishers – and then did not wish to tell that story. He felt that artists' voices should be heard, and that art dealing with 1945 (and after) demanded a different approach, and audiences did, too.

Instead of writing, O'Doherty let his visual artist alter ego Patrick Ireland respond to the book commission. A woodworker was involved and a sculpture came into being that forms the centrepiece of this display. O'Doherty's history of art since 1945 is a knowledgeable and respectful one – and (thus) without words.

As a boy, O'Doherty's elderly aunt had told him of her youth, of seeing people with green mouths from eating grass: the Irish Famine around Europe's year of Revolutions, 1848,

had not that long passed. As a youth in rural Ireland, he had overcome Typhoid: death was a known entity.

“Brian O’Doherty: Reading Time” is through this book object an exhibition both of and about art, it is about writing and reading and about remaining silent.

With its silence, we mark Brian O’Doherty’s passing on 7 November 2022.

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The curator and academic will conduct a Summer School on issues related to Brian O’Doherty’s work at SIRIUS between 6 and 11 June 2023.

Please contact team@siriusartscentre.ie for information.