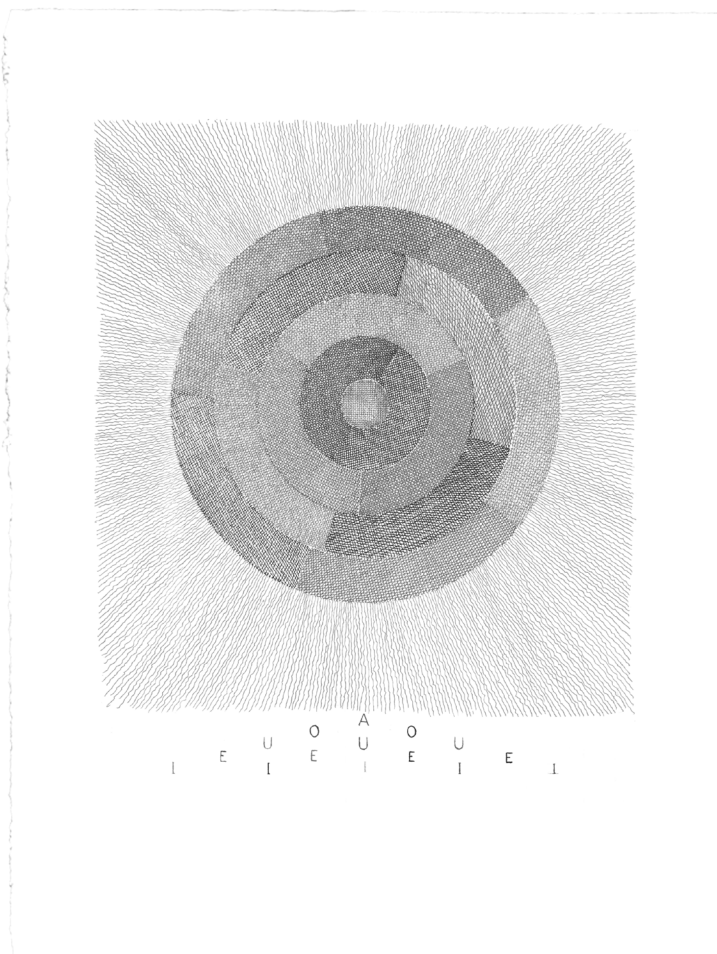


IMMA
MAIN GALLERIES – EAST WING
26 APRIL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2018

**IMMA Collection:
Brian O'Doherty Language and Space**



IMMA is pleased to present *Brian O'Doherty Language and Space*, in association with fine art print studio Stoney Road Press, Dublin. This exhibition marks the artist's lifelong commitment to exploring line, language and perception. It focuses on a selection of drawings from the 1960s to the present day, from which Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland has published limited edition prints, as well as including a number of works by the artist from IMMA's National Collection.

All of the works evoke the discourse between mind and body that has absorbed this extraordinary artist throughout his career. Many are inspired by Ogham script - an ancient Celtic translation of the Roman alphabet into a writing system of twenty linear characters. No Irish artist - indeed any artist - has placed Ogham so centrally to his or her work as O'Doherty/Ireland. In the mid-1960s, the artist brought this 1,500 year old language into New York's avant-garde dialogue, at a moment when the pared-down, geometric forms of minimalism gave way to conceptualism (the art of ideas rather than visual forms). He further condensed Ogham's code to mind/body concerns implicit in the words ONE HERE NOW, and focused on Ogham's five vowels: vowels A O U E I: A = I, O = II, U = III, E = IIII, I = IIIII. In their linear appearance and implied sound, the vowels have been the basis for a vast range of drawings in various series and numerous sculptures since the 1960s, in what art critic Lucy Lippard has called "an amazing array of relationships".

This exhibition is a timely celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the artist's performance *The Burial of Patrick Ireland* (1972-2008) at IMMA in 2008.

Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland is a figurehead of Irish and international contemporary art. Over the past sixty years, he has invoked various identities in pursuit of his art. In 1972, as a patriotic gesture in response to Bloody Sunday and the political and civic unrest in Northern Ireland, O'Doherty performed *Name Change* at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, as part of the annual Irish Exhibition of Living Art. In a performance in which he enunciated the Ogham vowels, Brian O'Doherty then signed a document in the presence of a Notary Public, changing his name to Patrick Ireland. Masked and reclining, the artist was painted orange and green by fellow artists Robert Ballagh and Brian King, giving him the appearance of an atrocity victim. This piece is noted as the first performance artwork in Ireland by Áine Phillips in her recently published book 'Performance Art in Ireland: A History'. The documentation artwork *Name Change*, 1972, is included in the first room of this exhibition.

For the next thirty-six years Brian O'Doherty continued as a writer, whilst Patrick Ireland worked as an artist. On 20th May 2008, following the establishment of a power-sharing government and peace in Northern Ireland, the effigy of Patrick Ireland was placed in a coffin and his identity was waked and buried in the formal gardens of IMMA. During this performance called *The Burial of Patrick Ireland*, the artist reassumed his birth-name Brian O'Doherty. We encourage visitors to view the headstone of this artwork and its inscribed words ONE HERE NOW in ogham script. For the exact location in our 17th century formal gardens, please ask any member of our Visitor Engagement Team.

Room 1

The artworks in this room call to mind a quote from Robert Rauschenberg, that Brian O'Doherty was "always a line man". The works not only demonstrate the artist's command of line, but also reveal his systematic and coded approach to colour and spatial/linear compositions.

Rope Drawing #128: Flipped Corner (Green/Blue) (2017) is a stellar example from a unique series of temporary installations called Rope Drawings. The artist has exhibited Rope Drawings throughout the United States and Europe since 1973. A Rope Drawing is a 'drawing' in space using thin rope or string as line to create a quasi-architectural structure. Rope drawings are planned using the proportions of the installation site, usually a gallery or internal museum space. When you view the line with one eye to precisely frame an area of colour on the wall it will bring a new entity into being which seems to advance from the wall. The artist creates viewpoints and sightlines for you to find as you move around it.

In the recent *Rotating Vowel* series (2014), the lines of the Ogham script have slid into curves, segments and arcs. Schematically, each drawing reads outwardly from core to edge (cumulatively) in vowel formation following Ogham's order: A O U E I

Room 2

The eleven *Structural Plays*, of which the prints are exhibited here, were originally created in the 1960s. This series of rendered grids and notational marks is inspired by language,

Ogham's lines and the game of chess. The *Structural Plays* are scripts for performances, borne from the artist's investigation into the changed meaning of words via tone of voice and facial expressions.

The two white grids on the floor set the scene for a Structural Play. After reading the artist's explanatory note overleaf, we invite you to step into the grids and perform the words.

Brian O'Doherty at Stoney Road Press, by James O'Nolan

I first met Brian O'Doherty in 2008 when he was on a visit to Dublin from New York. He was here to bury himself in the hallowed grounds of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Or at least his former self. Or one of his former selves.

To confuse matters further I was in IMMA to meet him, but on behalf of The Hugh Lane Gallery. They had commissioned him to make a limited-edition print which was to be produced by Stoney Road Press. We had a brief chat in the café and hit it off well enough for him to send me a detailed drawing to work from. The result was *Shimmering 'I's*, the first fruit of a ten-year collaboration with Stoney Road.

Later we figured out how to register the complex web of coloured hatching he favoured, using separate etching plates, and I began to understand that these were not just drawings, they also possessed a voice, an Ogham voice. Later, working on the Structural Plays, I appreciated that not only had they a voice, but many could be performed as well. I suppose it could be said that these were the first prints I worked on that were all singing and all dancing.

Many large-scale etchings followed, each with their own technical challenges, not least the facsimile edition of his 1960s work *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, with its intricate assemblage of print and collage. In 2014 we spent the best part of a year working on *Rotating Vowels*, a set of circular images exploring language and movement.

This exhibition also celebrates the publication for the first time in book form of the ground-breaking *Structural Plays*, Stoney Road's most recent project with the artist. It is still difficult to believe they were devised in the late sixties, the only language performances of the period.

James O'Nolan, Co-Director, Stoney Road Press.

Artist's note on the *Structural Plays*

The *Structural Plays* came from minimal restrictions, a curiosity about the effect of emphasis and facial expression on language (which I had learned from earning my living on television when I first came to the U.S.), and from the psychology of chess. When people are talking to each other there are three streams of information in progress: one, what is said; two, how it is said (inflection, emphasis, irony, parody, etc.); three, the way facial expression and body language edit what is said. Opportunities here run from all three being perfectly consonant (the nature of common discourse) to varying contradictions between them, which opens, I suppose, a new kind of theatre if you want it.

My program was to remove the third stream, isolate the first, and

structure the second. Thus, you could extract from a sentence or simple conversational exchange (casual, practical, or emotional) all meanings in it, precisely framed. Take the first structural play: "I am here now" (which includes two of the three words that kept me busy for thirty years). As the emphasis runs along the line (remember those balls hopping along the syllables in the movie sing-alongs?) the sentence yields four different meanings, each inputting a different situation.

I am here now, first person emphasis, implies reassurance, perhaps arrogant control of some unnamed situation. An emphasis on the "am" implies an emphatic response to some rebuke (is the telephone involved?); the "here" emphasis implies several somewhat blurred readings, including now that I'm here, let's get on with it, whatever it is; the "now" may say I won't be here for long, or is a response to someone who has been waiting. Each emphasis implies meanings outside the grid, outside the sentence in the everyday arena of activities where language shades, obscures and delivers ambiguous meanings. When I was making these plays, I'd overhear snatches of conversation that were perfect scenarios - in the subway, standing in a queue, at the supermarket. Example: "Where were you that day" "I don't remember". Sometimes an emphasis would fall on a dud word, which made no sense. This false emphasis yielded no meaning. False emphasises, which are quite unsettling, are part of the plan too. Underlying all this I suppose, is a conviction that communication is difficult, meaning elusive and misunderstanding always at hand (this of course, is big news). Thus is the language of bureaucracy flattened by the pressures to be unambiguous or, in the case of diplomacy, by the pressure

to be exactly ambiguous. On my grids, moving figures deliver language into precise configurations of meanings. Or so I thought.

On the grid, language turns into movement. The "conversation" - always between two figures - is composed of a few sentences, each sentence of a few words. The two grids are three by three, twenty inches per cell, not less than four feet apart. The number of words in the sentences determines the number of squares the speaker walks. The performers speak alternately. Thus, WHERE were you? is followed by the other performer's where WERE you?, and back again to performer number one for the YOU. Each claims three squares after speaking. Each shared sentence is occupied by two people. As in Vowel Grid, the speaker dispossessed of his/her identity, becomes a function of language. Language becomes motion as the number of words entitle the performer to walk the same number of squares. But what kind of motion?

The movement of each speaker is plotted to reflect, echo, mirror and (sometimes) contradict the other. The notion of mirroring is fundamental. There is symmetrical and asymmetrical mirroring. Through the movements, (right angles, diagonals, zigzags) each sentence 'sees' itself, is reflected on the other grids as it is spoken and performed. Through motion, the performers 'reflect' each other's sentence. The figures are dressed in white. Their faces are not occluded. I see them white on white in a white space. The only thing that has shape and colour is the sound + motion of each word, each sentence. I thought of having the performers move as they spoke, but that detracted from the concentration on language, then on

movement. The latter way is clearer and invites a mildly ritualistic effect which contrasts with the frequent banality of the language. Early on, I favoured a bit of Noh-Play formality, all in white plus silver masks. Later a more casual approach seemed better.

All this was done between 1967 and 1970. I wrote down many conversations, got into the habit of it, became rather obsessed. I graphed quite a few. Ultimately I selected ten. Sol LeWitt (who did his first serial piece for that Aspen in 1967, which is where he saw the Structural Play) said I'd like to see one performed. But in 1967 I didn't want them performed. I thought they should be performed in the mind only. Of course, I changed my mind later. Recently I'm changing my mind again. Partly because the drawings for the plays are self-contained and may be appreciated privately.

The problems of performing are more difficult than you might imagine. It's easy enough to remember the conversations. They're short and of no great complexity. The play's scenarios have been read aloud by two people sitting side by side, which is not a bad way of getting to know emphasis, speed of reading and control of meaning. It's the movements that are tough to remember. That's where you need good performers. Actors may have trouble ridding themselves of the notion of acting. You need just two executive intelligences. Speaking the sentence with its single travelling emphasis isn't a piece of cake either. It can't sound too formal; spoken at the right speed, it should have a memory of its casual origin. Badly done, the players appear quite stupid. Well done, they seem to have some value, a value that comes in part from their origin in a time when the paradigm of art practice was changing

radically. I would like to think they were part of that. Language, precisely framed, turned into motion, symmetries, mirroring, with implied scenarios mutating in the minds of the attentive witness - which tends to contradict the rage for order and precision. To my mind, there's something close to chaos (hysteria?) about precision and exactitude.

Brian O'Doherty

Extract of a letter from the artist to Liam Kelly, former director of the Orchard Gallery, reproduced in the catalogue 'Language Performed / Matters of Identity', Patrick Ireland, published by the Orchard Gallery 1998.

Artist Biography

Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland is one of the most complex and controversial figures to emanate from the American Art scene of the 1960s. A qualified medical doctor and emerging artist when he left Dublin in 1957, O'Doherty moved first to Boston and then to New York where he became a pioneering figure of Conceptualism; an art movement that prizes ideas or concepts over the formal execution of the work. O'Doherty produced many seminal works including *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (1966-'67) and the first 'exhibition in a box', the renowned *Aspen 5+6* (1967), which you can see in our concurrent IMMA Collection exhibition *Coast-Lines*. Today he stands as an important figure in the history of contemporary art.

Major retrospectives of O'Doherty/Ireland's work were held at the National Museum of American Art (1986), The Elvehjem Museum of Art (1993), The Butler Institute of American Art (1994), and Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane (2006) which travelled to the Grey Art Gallery, New York (2007). O'Doherty/

Ireland's art is held in numerous private and public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Centre George Pompidou, Paris; Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Dublin; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; National Museum of American Art, Washington D.C.; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle WA; Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Associated Talks and Events

For a full programme of IMMA talks and events programmed in association with this exhibition, please see the IMMA website, www.imma.ie

Exhibition curated by Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections.

IMMA would like to thank Brian O'Doherty for his support of this exhibition.

Brian O'Doherty Language and Space is in association with Stoney Road Press. Our thanks go to Co-Directors James O'Nolan and David O'Donoghue.

We are grateful to the lenders who have generously agreed to loan works: Stoney Road Press, Dr. Brenda Moore-McCann, Brian O'Doherty and Barbara Novak, and to those individuals who wish to remain anonymous.

Rope Drawing #128: Flipped Corner (Green/Blue) is presented courtesy of the artist, Simone Subal Gallery and P!

Thanks are due to artist Fergus Byrne, who has worked with Brian O'Doherty/ Patrick Ireland on various occasions.

IMMA would like to thank our invaluable IMMA Members and Patrons, all of whom have made this exhibition possible.

IMMA also wishes to thank those who have generously donated artworks to the IMMA Collection and acknowledges the valuable contribution they have made to the development of the National Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art.

Further events relating to this exhibition include *ONE HERE NOW: The Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland Project* at Sirius Arts Centre, Cobh. Associated

events and exhibitions are also taking place throughout April and May 2018 at Crawford Art Gallery, Lewis Glucksman Gallery UCC, Cork Opera House in collaboration with Liz Roche Company and National Gallery of Ireland. See www.siriusartscentre.ie for details.

Gare St. Lazare's theatre piece *Here All Night* includes original artwork *Hello, Sam* by Brian O'Doherty. The production launched in The Abbey Theatre in April 2018, beginning a national tour.

Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask any member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.

Front cover
Brian O'Doherty
Rotating Vowels v, 2014
Etching
92 x 73.5cm
Edition of 40
Image courtesy of the artist and Stoney Road Press

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