
Intimately identified with processes of collecting and exhibiting art, works by Broodthaers concomitantly recognize the affiliation of the museum with marketing. The work of Daniel Buren also bears witness to the idea that exhibition spaces are by no means neutral or exempt from certain conditions. In Buren’s work, the art institution is perceived in terms of specific sites or buildings that provide architectural and/or institutional points of reference, while in Broodthaers’s the art institution is more generally understood as a cultural construct.

Buren’s work is rooted in his early search for ways to strip painting of illusionistic and expressive reference, which culminated in 1965 with his decision to reduce the pictorial content of his canvases to the repetition of mechanically printed, alternating white-and-colored vertical bands 8.7 cm in width. Commercially obtained, prefabricated material with vertical stripes is intended to be an anonymous, painted sign/design. This sign, which “remains immutable,” varying only with respect to its color, has been used by the artist throughout his career to provide the “internal structure” of each work. The color of the stripe alternating with white is not necessarily chosen by Buren, inasmuch as color in his aesthetic scheme lacks associative or metaphoric meaning.

Since the end of 1967, Buren has worked *in situ*. Possibly the first artist to adopt this Latin phrase to describe pieces made with reference to a particular location or situation, he associates the term with the hundreds of works he has produced worldwide over more than three decades. The form and content of these works, most of which have been conceived for temporary exhibitions, are governed by how and where the artist
decides to place the striped material in relation to other materials. Having elected to direct his concerns away from the canvas field by means of his generic painted stripes, Buren integrates each work with its visible context and invisible institutional frame. Thus inseparable from the non-art reality into which it is inserted, a work by Buren more often than not circumvents the delegated exhibition space of the museum or gallery under whose auspices it is shown.

Two works of 1968 are seminal. The first was realized in March in the middle of the night, when Buren pasted single, rectangular sheets of green-and-white striped paper on approximately two hundred billboards and surfaces with signs throughout Paris and its environs. He placed the striped rectangles randomly over or beside existing texts, advertisements, or graffiti, thus juxtaposing stripes — his sign for painting — with signs having nothing to do with art. In speaking of this work, Buren has emphasized that he accomplished it anonymously and without permission; that is, “without invitation, and without commercial support and without a gallery.” Unsigned by the artist and possessing only the “backing” of the billboard, the two hundred “paintings,” dispersed throughout the urban landscape, commingled with the everyday reality of street images and messages. Through the deliberate negation of traditional presentational methods, along with his authorial self-effacement, Buren brought together art and non-art representational systems.

The second work in April/May took issue, once again, with preconceived assumptions about the institution of art in relation to the institutions for it. For the first half of a two-part work in the invitational ‘Salon de Mai’ exhibition of 1968 at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la
Daniel Buren  Photo/souvenir: Travaillé in situ (Exterior)  1969
(Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp)
Ville de Paris, he adhered a fifty-four-foot-long and fifteen-foot-high, green-and-white striped paper rectangle to a wall in the exhibition space. Secondly, he hired two so-called 'sandwich men,' frequently seen in Paris in those years, to walk in the vicinity of the museum wearing their customary placards. In place of the usual publicity for shops, announcements of films, etc., the placards, front and back, of Buren’s sandwich men were covered with the same green-and-white striped paper that appeared on the wall in the museum. Circulating through the streets, the striped placards referred to the work inside the exhibition while they denounced the divide between art and non-art frameworks of display.

The first solo exhibition by Buren took place in 1968 at the Apolinaire Gallery, Milan, where he glued green-and-white striped material to the outside of the gallery’s door. This was not a work about empty space on the model of Robert Barry’s *Closed Gallery Piece* (see p. 87), but was a work that literally closed the door to the exhibition area so as to metaphorically open it up for questioning. By covering the door with stripes, Buren substituted the door frame for a traditional frame and by using the door in place of a canvas, he furthered his nascent rebellion against traditional installation modes. As his many works throughout the next decade would demonstrate, this rebellion was to be accompanied by an ongoing debate between painting and the physical and intellectual premises of its presentation.

A work at the Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp in 1969 linked together the interior exhibition space and the exterior of the building in which the gallery was located. In this instance, Buren applied striped paper, scaled to the show’s invitational poster, to a flat plinth outside the building. The striped material extended from a hydrant at the side of the building to the doorway, and from the doorway into the gallery itself. Instead of hanging traditional paintings on the gallery walls, Buren gave shape to the work on the basis of architectural detailing and the extension of the stripes from the building’s exterior to its interior. As Buren commented, ‘the piece inside the gallery, thus dictated by the situation outside, uses only the space available as a result of the given architecture.’

Included in the group exhibition ‘18 PARIS IV 70,’ *140 stations du métro parisien* (1970) was not installed in an exhibition space but in the Paris Métro and was in operation before the exhibition opened. To accomplish this work (redone in 1973 using orange and white stripes), Buren glued blue-and-white striped rectangles in the upper right-hand corner of all of the large billboards found in one hundred and forty stations of the underground transportation system. The striped rectangles took their place among the commercials and entertainment publicity occupying the billboards, each of which, fortuitously and ironically, was set apart from the underground station wall by a large ceramic tile frame. Thus placed within actual frames, 140 stations… interposed painting with mass-media imagery and advertising. It could be seen, moreover, at many different intervals as a matter of course during routine travel throughout the city.

Like 140 stations… *Toile/Toile, Toile/Toile* (Sail/Canvas, Canvas/Sail, 1975) overcomes the dichotomy between non-art and exhibition contexts in that it both exposes and mends the gap between the two. A work in two phases, the first takes place on an expanse of water where, on an appointed day, a regatta of nine boats, rigged with striped sails of different colors, participate in a race. With ‘paintings setting sail,’ canvases sails and painted canvases serve two normally separate functions at once. For the second part of the work, the sails are later mounted on the walls of a museum in the order of their boat’s arrival at the finish.
[250] Context as Content: Surveying the Site
line of the race. When installed on a wall, the sails—thus detached from their masts and bereft of their usefulness—function purely as large, decorative, shaped canvases.

Buren derives the content of each of his works by uncovering aspects of its surrounding context. Having set himself the task of wiping out illusion by applying vertical stripes to existing surfaces, he has been able to work within delegated exhibition spaces as well as outside them. A partir de là (Starting from there, 1978) was an exhibition that addressed conventions of exhibiting art. In preparation for this solo exhibition at the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, Buren, with the director, Johannes Cladders, researched nearly ten years of the museum’s history and learned that it had consistently followed the same approach to installing paintings. For the exhibition, he covered the walls of all of the rooms of the museum, formerly a private house, with vertically striped linen. On the first floor Buren used blue, on the second red, and on the staircase brown, as the alternating color. Rectangular voids formed by cut-outs from the striped linen represented the spaces where paintings, selected from a cross-section of the museum’s numerous exhibitions, had at one time been hung on the wall in the very same place.

Buren’s exhibition may be thought of as a retrospective survey of the Städtisches Museum’s exhibition history as well as being a solo exhibition of one artist. Rhetorically asking, “is the wall a background for the picture or is the picture a decoration for the wall?” Buren has observed that “in any case, the one does not exist without the other.” With its emphatically striped walls pierced by rectangular voids that represented absent paintings, A partir de là could not be cut out from the encompassing framework of the museum. Bringing all of the museum’s walls into active service in the production of pictorial content, the work negated the neutrality of passive wall surfaces.

A work in the permanent collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, conceived for ‘Europe in the Seventies: Aspects of Recent Art’ held at the museum in 1977, demonstrates the complete coincidence of a work with its architectural and institutional setting. Up and Down, In and Out, Step by Step: A Sculpture (1977) utilizes the interior staircase (known as the Grand Staircase) that, leading from the museum’s main entrance to the permanent collection on the second floor, provides access to galleries containing art from different centuries. When striped paper is cut and glued to the risers of its steps, the Art Institute’s staircase becomes an object with a sculptural presence of its own. Comparable to the sails of Yole/Triole..., the steps similarly retain their functional purpose, or, as the Marxian term would have it, their “use value.” Simultaneously a sculpture and a staircase, Up and Down..., may be said to ‘elevate’ visitors en route to look at art in the museum’s ‘hallowed halls.”

In contrast to other works in the Art Institute’s collection, Up and Down..., is exempt from placement within rooms exclusively devoted to the permanent collection and interacts with the museum as an architectural and cultural whole. Fusing sculptural form
with architectural function, it defines the museum's main stairway, in all of its grandeur, as the institution's symbolic pedestal and core. While other works are subject to classification and relocation, generally in isolation from their original historical or cultural conditions, *Up and Down...* cannot be considered apart from the architectural and institutional reality with which it coexists. Because it ceases to exist when the striped paper is removed, it can never be confined to storage. However, it may reappear at any time at the curatorial staff's discretion either with its green-and-white stripes or in another color.

In each new set of circumstances, Buren discovers aspects of a site or situation that he turns to the purposes of his art. *Watch the Doors Please* (on view October 1980–May 1982) had been proposed in 1976 for inclusion in the Art Institute of Chicago's exhibition in which *Up and Down...* for logistical reasons, was shown instead. *Watch the Doors Please* took advantage of the fact that the Art Institute of Chicago extends over an active railroad line. A large window overlooks the tracks, which run beside and under the building. With permission from Chicago's Regional Transportation Authority, Buren adhered waterproof vinyl printed with five differently colored stripes—white with red, blue, yellow, purple, and green—to the central double doors of the entire fleet of 156 commuter train cars that service the city's south side and suburbs. A schedule at the window informed visitors when to expect a two- or four-car train to pass by—the sequence of door colors having been determined randomly each day at the railroad yard.

*Watch the Doors Please*, a work in motion as well as *in situ*, reversed traditional modes of viewing art. Subject to the conditions of real time and place, it came to viewers, who had to wait for the work as well as for the train. Significantly, the expansive glass window functioned like a huge transparent canvas in that its black horizontal and vertical mullions resemble gigantic, over-lifesize stretcher bars. The passing trains with their striped doors—like emblematic paintings freed from stationary walls—were not an illusionistic image but an actuality. Replacing both picture frame and canvas, the window made possible the total fusion of observed reality and art.

When commuter trains pass under the Art Institute, commerce and culture visibly intersect. Because of the coincidence of railroad line, museum building, and window frame, Buren was able to capture everyday
realities within the physical and cultural frame of a prestigious art museum. Outside of the museum, the colored rectangular doors of the trains could be viewed at station platforms as they opened and closed, as transitory flocks of color flashing past trestles, houses, and shrubbery, or in relation to the Chicago skyline.

Traveling back and forth between the institutional framework of art and the reality of the city outside the discourse of art, *Watch the Doors Please* operated on various levels: as painting and/or as decoration, and/or even simply as a safety feature alerting passengers to watch their step upon boarding the train. It was a work that totally fulfilled Buren's aspiration for an art that, dispensing with the traditional canvas, does not hide the context in which aesthetic practice is conducted.

A work realized at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, California for 'Andre' Buren, Irwin, Nordman: Space as Support' marked an important transition in Buren's career. Rather than single out one aspect or detail of an architectural whole, as he had done in the Art Institute's *Up and Down...*, Buren here dealt with the entirety of the museum's interior space.

*Sculpture/Statistic. A Drawing in situ and Three Dimensions* (1970) confronted the complexity of the museum's architectural space in which dominoing, multi-level planes of concrete, projecting into the interior, intersect one above another at emphatic angles. The exhibition areas of the museum, located on six different levels, are connected by ramps whose railings form low, concrete parapets that continue from the inside to the outside of the building. Buren adhered perpendicularly cut blue-and-white striped paper to the tops of all of the museum's interior and exterior parapet walls. He also glued paper cut paralleled with its printed stripes and defined by the width of the wall section from the top to the bottom of all wall surfaces. By means of these ribbon-like bands, he demarcated the juncture of the walls' many intersecting axes. The vertically cut stripes broke up the severity of the harsh, concrete space, while the repetition of the stripes as rectangles along the tops of all the parapets analyzed the nature of the fractured space diagrammatically, tying it together visually. The vertical stripes also connected the indoor space of the museum with the outdoor space.

All in all, the Berkeley installation transformed the architectural barriers of the museum into unifying, rather than divisive, structures in that Buren interpreted the wall partition as an independent element of the work, not as a neutral element of an enclosure. This installation anticipated works by Buren of the early 1980s in which the walls of a given exhibition space, constructed out of vertically striped canvas, were to become material entities in their own right rather than mere backdrops. In ensuing works, painting was set on a par with architecture and vice versa.

Buren has articulated the theoretical basis of his work in an extensive body of writings. In 'Function of the Museum,' he pertinently wrote: 'The Museum is an asylum. The work set in it is sheltered from the weather and all sorts of dangers, and most of all protected from any kind of questioning.' He further stated that a work, which 'does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency — or idealism.'

Sharing affinities with the oeuvre of Buren, Michael Asher's project production rests on his analysis of the contextual conditions affecting an exhibition site. Whereas Buren's aesthetic endeavor principally pertains to the redefinition of painting, Asher's pertains to sculpture. Just as Buren has succeeded in the task of avoiding illusionistic forms of representation through the agency of architecture and other functional structures, Asher has sought to reveal facets of reality without creating a previously non-existent material object.

Asher's participation in two major exhibitions in New York in 1969, *Anti-illusions. Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney Museum and *Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art, presage works that survey and portray their support systems. In both these works, Asher created perceptual conditions rather than perceivable objects. At the Whitney, an invisible current of air, barely detectable to the touch, was produced by an air blower concealed in the ceiling above a passageway between two of the exhibition areas. Fully satisfying the theme of the exhibition by virtue of its materiality, the work - made of the all-pervasive, ubiquitous substance pertaining to existence — in no way visibly altered its surroundings.

For the *Spaces* exhibition, Asher constructed an enterable room whose walls absorbed sound in proportion to a visitor's distance from the two openings for entry/exit located diagonally opposite from each other. As visitors moved away from/toward the openings, ambient sounds from the street and the