

## Breakthrough in the White Cube

A site-specific sculptural project at Sarieva / Gallery, Plovdiv

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The project “Breakthrough in the White Cube” attempts to move along the edge of several presupposed contexts whose convergence is impossible: the closure (1) of the idea and its author within an isolated space (2) without access, as an already conservative, dead idea; the opening of the front façade as a hinted indication of what is happening inside; the consumption of the artwork as a commercialized product, as a concept opposed to the essential aims of art. In this context, Sarieva Gallery is perhaps the space most suitable for visualizing the construction of the white cube with an open front façade.

The architectural cavity, with a compact internal volume of 423×404×355 cm, and a cubic capacity of 4.23×4.04×3.55 m = 60.66666 m<sup>2</sup>, accommodates works by sculptors who primarily engage with the resource of space, and in particular with its elements – volume, scale, dimensions, proportions, relations, materiality. To these characteristics, they respond with their own position, which is expressed again through the same elements – volume, scale, dimensions, proportions, relations, materiality. Within this space, their ideas are depressurized and opened toward the viewers, oriented with one façade toward the street. The concept of a closed spatial cavity facing the street is a vertically oriented drawer addressed to a hypothetical consumer. The display window – the divider between interior and exterior – is not merely glass, but a razor-sharp barrier between viewer and artwork. It is a window into an aesthetic aquarium. It is a maximized aperture of a camera obscura that, instead of receiving information, projects it from the artist’s consciousness into the socialized rhythm outside.

Within the concept of the breakthrough in the white cube, two modes of public display are allowed. One enables continuous external observation with a closed entrance, while the other allows entry into the space, but within limited working hours. When it comes to sculpture, both modes of viewing are part of its meaning. In the first case, we are aware of scale, structure, and place (Carl Andre) (3). In the second, we lose a clear sense of these fundamental elements, but gain emotional sensations of physical presence, tactility, and spatial dynamics through movement (Richard Serra) (4). From this follows the impossibility of forming a substantial understanding of the works if one of the two is missing – yet it remains worth experimenting: to what extent a work gains or loses if this condition is inevitable.

- (1) While researching the archives of Saint Martin’s College of Art, the art historian Hester Westley discovers an almost forgotten project—a pedagogical experiment from 1969, aimed at liberating participants and rethinking art as education. Twelve students—including Richard Deacon (sculptor), Tony Hill (director), Tim Jones (artist), Ian Kirkwood (artist), Ted Walters (artist), Deirdre McArdle (sculptor), David Millidge (businessman), Greg Paulson (sculptor)—were locked in an empty white room for eight hours a day over the course of a semester. They were not allowed to leave and were under constant observation. Each student was given a specific material and had to work with it for an undefined period of time, without feedback from instructors. The program, known as “*The Locked Room*”, represents one of the most radical episodes in British art education. Students began their academic training by attempting to erase tradition, art history, and above all their own previous work—a post-retrospective of modernist critiques of classical paradigms from the early 20th century. Under the guidance of Peter Kardia, Garth Evans, Gareth Jones, and Peter Harvey, *The Locked Room* was a perceptive response to the emerging conceptualization of artistic practice in the post-1968 world. Such an educational model sought to provide an alternative to traditional teaching methods. Its paradox-based pedagogy aimed to find ways of liberating the students themselves. It emphasized the importance of practice in which the teacher distances themselves from “the duty of telling the student

what to do." The program demonstrated the belief that the greatest danger to artistic practice is the routine of habit. Thirty-seven years later, the participants of *The Locked Room* still reflect on the value of their unconventional student years. Following this unusual pedagogical example, the act of enclosing the artist within a white (working-exhibition gallery) space opens an entirely new discourse. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-9-spring-2007/year-locked-room>

- (2) In 1976, the artist and writer Brian O'Doherty introduced the theory "*Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*". It became a central principle in contemporary art discourse. The phrase refers to a spatial confinement that absolutizes artistic intentions in the staging of ideas and visualization of concepts. The white cube is described as a neutral, sterilized environment—a vacuum designed to eliminate context and emphasize the autonomy of the artwork. It symbolizes the separation of the artwork from time and space, as well as from real-world conditions. O'Doherty argues that the white cube is a cultural construct—an ideological space whose characteristics are as much a part of the artwork as the work itself. Today, however, its fixed and sterile nature is increasingly seen as a limitation, especially in light of participatory and dynamic contemporary practices. Nearly fifty years later, this reading has begun to fracture the necessity of its hermetic condition, and artists no longer feel compelled to rely on such a rigid classical structure. <https://artviewer.org/outside-the-white-cube-at-form-space>
- (3) The progressive concept of Carl Andre of "sculpture as form, sculpture as structure, sculpture as place" reflects his shift from traditional understandings of sculpture toward a more minimalist, site-specific approach. It emphasizes material and its placement, rather than the creation of a representational form. Sculpture as form refers to the basic, often geometric, shape of the work itself. Sculpture as structure emphasizes the physical construction and arrangement of materials. Sculpture as place considers the interaction between the sculpture and the environment it occupies. <https://www.artforum.com/features/an-interview-with-carl-andre-210546/>
- (4) Richard Serra points to his long-standing interest in creating objects that, in his words, "reveal the structure, content, and character of space." With each step, the relationship between the body, the sculpture, and the surrounding environment shifts. In this state of heightened sensory reflexivity, "you are forced to acknowledge the existence of space above, below, to the right, to the left, to the north, to the east, to the south, to the west," and "all your psychophysical coordinates, your sense of orientation, are immediately called into question." [https://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2012/08/27/richard-serras-delineator-comes-to-moma](https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/08/27/richard-serras-delineator-comes-to-moma)