

The US artist Robert Irwin will present his new installation Double Blind in the Secession's main gallery. The work is a response to the properties of the space, a way of working for which the artist has coined the term "site- conditioned." Double Blind is one of only a few site-conditioned installations that Irwin has realized in Europe and the most recent opus in the artist's long-term engagement with the themes of perception and experience, with light, aesthetics, and questions of reality and illusion.

For his exhibition Dotting the i's and Crossing the ts: Part I in spring 2012 Irwin cut a single square out of each of four tinted windows in the Pace Gallery in New York, allowing the sounds and smells of the surroundings outside to permeate the exhibition space. On facing walls he hung high gloss polished monochrome paintings in black and white whose surfaces reflected the environs: windows, other works, the exhibition room, visitors. The intervention was at once subtle and effective and presented in condensed form many of the questions about art that have been with Irwin for decades, first and foremost the question of how we perceive our environment. "You don't think whether it's art or not art. It's just about what you're seeing or not seeing," is how he described his approach to art in an interview. For his work Scrim Veil – Black Rectangle – Natural Light, first realized for the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1977 and now re-installed there thirty-six years later, the intervention in space was likewise minimal. "But the room was not quite empty—and in Mr. Irwin's work, 'not quite' can mean the entire world."

Irwin's exploration of perception and experience dates back to the beginning of his career as an Abstract- Expressionist painter in Los Angeles in the 1950s. Soon plagued with doubts about the adequacy of the panel painting as a depiction of reality, in the 1960s he pioneered the Californian Light and Space movement, which also included Larry Bell, John McCracken, James Turrell, and Doug Wheeler. Using Plexiglas, translucent fabrics, reflecting surfaces, and fluorescent tubes he sought to forge a connection between his works and their environment. A central question that ushered in a change of paradigm in his work was: "What kind of a 'reality' was this that allowed itself such abstraction as to demand that the world end at the edge of my canvas? Yet what kind of a world would it be if there were no such limits?"

In his efforts to find an art form not limited by the size of the canvas, Irwin in 1970 gave up his studio and with it the idea of art defined by its status as an object in favor of art as a phenomenon. Since then he has been realizing works that he calls "site-conditioned." Unlike "site-dominated," "site-adapted," and "site-specific" works, which refer to and involve a specific location but remain self-contained works of art, his installations only become phenomena in response to the space surrounding them and the conditions prevailing there. This makes it impossible to transfer them to

some other location. An inherent quality of these works is their ability to transcend the boundaries between art and architecture, art and landscape, art and urban planning, and art and utility. Since the mid-1970s Irwin has realized almost sixty of these site-conditioned works, including the rendering of the plaza and the rooms housing the permanent collection of the Dia Foundation in Beacon, New York, and the garden of the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Currently, two new works—Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow & Blue³ II,I and Piccadilly—are showing at Pace London in the historic rooms of the Royal Academy of Arts.

Double Blind is Irwin's response to the characteristic features of the main gallery at the Secession. The room's absence of windows makes it a neutral container for art, its hermetically sealed quality enhancing the impression of a massive, isolated volume. The grid structure of the ceiling and floor underscore the room's austere appearance and lend it rhythm. The world outside nonetheless becomes tangible through the daylight streaming in from above. The changing intensity of light in the room allows visitors to sense different times of day and what are frequently rapid changes in the weather. The installation Double Blind consists of thirty room-high frames with translucent fabric stretched over them following exactly the lines of the grids that define the room and thus forming three volumes. Depending on where the viewer is standing and on the direction and intensity of the light, the appearance of the installation changes, as does that of the room itself. The door to the garden behind the Secession building stands open, allowing the viewer to see and sense the world outside.

"I asked myself, what is the actual subject of art? What justifies its high standing ...? Art that takes, say, politics as its subject is politics, not art. But politics can take many forms... The one subject of art is the pure perception of humans to see and see again." Robert Irwin, 2013

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