



Daniel Buren WORKS

February 1 – April 23, 1989

In HIRSHHORN WORKS—a special exhibition program—invited artists choose a site in the building or on the grounds to create a temporary work of art. The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden believes that having artists work on site, using the museum as both studio and medium, will give visitors a better understanding of the museum.

Daniel Buren explores the dynamic relationship between the perception of a work of art and its context. Since 1965, he has been using what has become his signature—alternating white and color vertical stripes that are invariably 8.7 cm wide—to mark buildings, vehicles, statues, and other objects in public places. These buildings or objects with their concomitant social, political, or economic structures and symbolic functions become the frame and support for his simple, but often lush and beautiful, paintings and determine how they are seen. Buren's placement of stripes throughout city spaces and his activist stance emerge from the Minimal and Conceptual movements of the 1960s as well as the political and intellectual climate of that period.

The following text is edited from an interview with the artist, which took place in December 1988.

Phyllis Rosenzweig, Associate Curator

PR: Why the stripes and why precisely 8.7 cm? Is there a special significance in this measure?

DB: There is no reason for the stripes per se; they are the result of a natural process that began around 1964 as my work developed. I was doing large paintings that were painted except for the parts first covered with masking tape. When the tape was removed, it left large vertical stripes that revealed the support on which the rest had been painted. In the fall of 1965, while buying supplies for my work in the famous Marché Saint-Pierre in Paris, I found a striped linen that was generally used for cushions and mattresses. It was fine, very lightweight cotton and resembled the awnings used to cover the terraces of cafes and restaurants in Paris and elsewhere in the world. This material looked exactly like what I had been trying to do formally with paint for more than a year—though less successfully. I bought several meters and immediately started to work with it. The stripes became a pattern, a sign, that I later called my visual tool. This sequence of alternating white and color stripes of a particular width, namely 8.7 cm, is the only stable element I have used without exception since 1965. But that doesn't mean I will use it forever. Everything else in my work—from ideas to the materials themselves (wood, linen, paper, glass, etc.)—is always changing, depending on the purpose, time, and location. Thus I

use 8.7 cm because it was the width of the stripes I found on that first linen cloth. I don't know why this measurement is used in material all over the world, but it never creates an optical illusion and 8.7 cm is said to be the approximate distance between the center of the eyes on an average human being. I like it, regardless of any scientific explanation. And I continue to use that measurement because it makes it possible for me to measure any space or surface I mark with it without using any tool other than my own eyes.

PR: Can you generalize about what aspects of a site influence the nature of your projects?

DB: By definition, I cannot because the sites are so different. I have no rule except that I cannot forget the existence of the site, which implies as many ways of thinking as the locations are diverse. The space, location, and ideology that surround the work, including the people I work with, the context of the show, and the title of the show all contribute ideas to the work. For me, a work with no location doesn't exist. The site leads to the specific shape of the work, just as the body of a bird is made for flying but a cow never will. For 25 years, this practice has kept me from using a studio. My studio, in fact, is where I am. Thus my studios are multiple, open, and public.

PR: Your project for the Hirshhorn is not yet titled, but what is the significance of the titles of your exhibitions/installations? They are

very straightforward yet provocative, poetic, sometimes even humorous. Is that intentional?

DB: I do hope it is. I have always used care in forming my titles and believe they are, if not a very important part of the work, at least one small element of it. However, I have no one method in choosing or using them. Some are purely descriptive like *Fourteen Skylights Minus One* (Venice Biennale, 1976). Others, such as *To Transgress* (Leo Castelli Gallery, 1976), are more abstract. Sometimes the title is suggested by the work, sometimes it suggests a line to be followed by the work, and sometimes it has no direct relation to the work. This is usually the case when I want to title a work before I know what I can or want to do. The title then will be general and abstract, but it will start to have a more specific meaning as soon as the work is completed and visible. Some titles are plays on the meanings or sounds of words. Those games are generally in French, although my titles usually are in the language of the country where the work has been executed. Since 1969, I have included in many of my titles the subtitle "Work in Situ." When I began using "Work in Situ," most people did not know what it meant. Today the phrase is so misused that I try to avoid it. For over 20 years I have also used the supratitle "Photo-Souvenir" to precede captions of pictures when they are published. "Photo-Souvenir" indicates that a photograph is neither the work nor its copy and can never replace it.

BIOGRAPHY

Born Boulogne-Billancourt, France, 1938. Lives in Paris.

Because Daniel Buren believes lists of solo and group exhibitions reveal little about his work, no such lists have been compiled. Complete documentation of his projects from 1967 to 1988 can be found in the exhibition catalogs *Documenta 5* (Kassel, West Germany: 1972) and *Eight Contemporary Artists* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1974) and the books *Discordance / Cohérence* (Eindhoven, Netherlands: Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, 1976) and *Daniel Buren: Photo-Souvenirs, 1965-1988* (Villeurbanne, France: Art Edition, 1988).

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Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Smithsonian Institution

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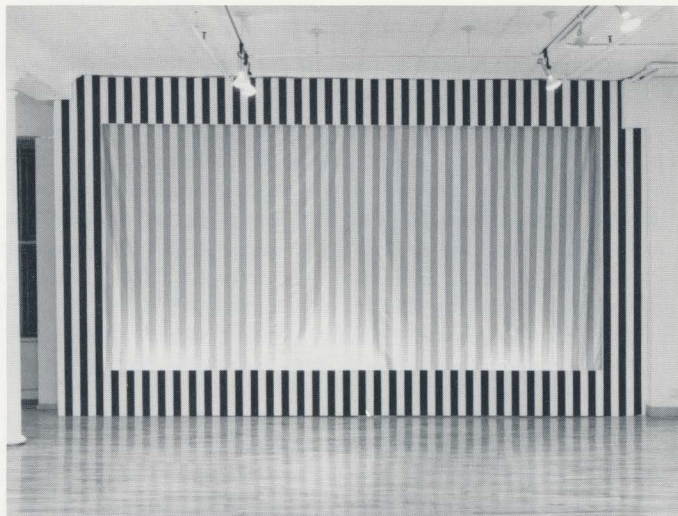


Photo-Souvenir. Untitled (Work in Situ), 1988. Fan, canvas, paint, wood; 240 x 148½ x 70 in. Photo courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York.

Cover. *Photo-Souvenir. Les Deux Plateaux*, 1985-86. 260 free-standing columns of various heights, lights, and a sunken, artificial stream. Permanent installation, Cour d'Honneur du Palais-Royal, Paris. Collection Le Patrimoine National-Monuments Historiques. Photo: Daniel Buren, courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York.