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White Cube and the art market. Are white walls really so innocent?

Introduction

In his 1979 book *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Brian O'Doherty criticised the theory of the clean, white gallery space. Its publication met with a degree of interest among artists and critics which was unexpected by the author. Many received it enthusiastically and some said: "I wanted to write it myself"[1].

His main criticism was levelled at the white cube which, contrary to appearances, is a far cry from a neutral space. As the author pointed out, it is an historical construct. Through severing all ties with reality and through the sterilisation of the art environment, the white cube as the venue of art presentation, sacralises all that will potentially be exhibited there. The white cube was responsible for the "sublimation of art", liberating it from all extraneous contexts. Therefore, the new strategy appropriated a kind of moral capital underpinning the idea of the "autonomy of art", also in the market sense. This is because a work of art displayed within the white cube broke free, at least theoretically, from any constraints other than the act of pure reception. This assumption, too, was undermined by O'Doherty, who tried to prove that entering such a gallery, the visitors do not feel at ease and their perception of art is not free from the impact of the context of its presentation.

This article attempts to revisit the concept of the white cube in the context of the historical evolution of ways of thinking about art exhibitions. It seeks to point to the genesis of the ubiquity of "white walls" as

» 1 A. Cain, *How the White Cube Came to Dominate the Art World*, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-white-cube-dominate-art, access 11.06.2019.

a "neutral" manner of displaying works of art and moreover poses a question about a possible connection between the development of this strategy with politics and economics (the art market), which was something O'Doherty implied. The article will also outline the relationship between the purification of exhibition interiors and the process of a growing autonomy of art seen as the empowerment of artistic activity and its liberation from the impact of different external circumstances. According to commonplace opinions, the ubiquity of the concept of displaying art within an abstract white space coincided with the birth of Conceptualism and its demand of creating art which would not respond to the expectations of the art market. This claim, however, finds no unambiguous confirmation in theory and fact, although it is not completely unjustified, either. It can be seen as a statement which results from the dissemination of the white cube model as the leading exhibition strategy at a time when Conceptualism was an extremely popular art current.

The underlying idea of this text is a conviction of the impossibility of the assumption of neutrality of the white cube in both the semantic and market aspect. The text moreover aims to address the concept of art not for sale, or free from commercial considerations and to answer the question whether the idea of the white cube has at any point of its history been associated with "not making a living on art"?

Two exhibition models and their significance

One does not need to look far to assess whether artworks were presented on colourful walls in the era preceding the idea of the white cube. Suffice it to see pictures from the main Louvre gallery, where works by great masters are shown against a red background, as was historically the case.

The difference between the way of displaying old and contemporary art inspired the US curator Ronald Jones to come up with a concept of an exhibition dedicated to two pre-eminent twentieth-century artists who contributed significantly to the development of so-called artistic avant-garde movements of their time: Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp[2].

Can these two artists be displayed side by side during the same show? If so, how to do it? Such questions haunted Jones during his studies aimed at designing the exhibition concept. One of his first inspirations was a note found in a New York archive. It was made in Picasso's hand at the request of the American artist and animator of art life Robert Henri, who collected information about the artists who arrived in the USA to escape from World War I which was ravishing the European continent. Henri

» 2 See *He Was Wrong*, the exhibition website, https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/picassoduchamp/more-about-the-exhibition/, access 4.08.2019.

tried to come up with a list of participants of the *Armory Show* (1917). Picasso's list included diverse artists, e.g. Henri Matisse and Ferdinand Leger. Duchamp was the last name on the list, even though the Frenchman's name was misspelled as "Ducham" because the Spaniard knew him only by hearsay.

Picasso's mistake became one of the symbolic reference points for Ronald Jones. The error can be interpreted in a completely new light when seen in relation to the Cubist's statement after Duchamp's death: "He was wrong". Picasso's misspelled note and his opinion about his ideological rival determined the exhibition title: *Picasso – Duchamp: He was wrong!*[3] The exhibition poster features graphic silhouettes of both artists, who seemed to be preparing for a boxing match. The image did not specify who the curator believed was wrong. In order to grasp the meaning of this juxtaposition, one should realise the difference between the artistic positions adopted by both the protagonists of the show curated by Jones. The tension between them was succinctly summed up by Maria Poprzęcka in an interview published in Polityka weekly:

"If at the moment of Duchamp's death someone had asked about the most important artist of the 20th century, the answer would most likely have been Picasso. Yet, one hundred years later he seems at bottom a traditional artist. What did Picasso do? He made oil paintings on canvas. This means he did not really depart from a very traditional medium of painting or prints. When we look back on the 20th c. from the perspective of ours, we can see that it was Marcel Duchamp who was the most important and influential artist"[4].

Jones saw the relationship between Picasso and Duchamp much the way Poprzęcka did. Jones saw Picasso as a representative of an old-fashioned world of traditionally construed art, while Duchamp represented innovation. This was reflected in the manner of displaying the works of both artists. The Spaniard's works were put in a gallery labyrinth built of walls painted in uniform colours (some were burgundy and others navy blue). The Frenchman's works were displayed within a sterile white cube.

During a curator's tour of the exhibit, one visitor asked Jones about the underlying idea of this arrangement. The curator explained that he intended to show the argument between the two giant artists, only one of whom deserved to be called a genius, he believed. The US curator appreciated Duchamp by showing him as a precursor of a new way of thinking about art. According to Jones, by contrast Picasso represented a purely

» 3 *He Was Wrong*, the exhibition website, https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/picassoduchamp/more-about-the-exhibition/, access 16.06.2019.

» 4 A. Świerczewski, *Duchamp. Sarkastyczny kpiarz, nieuchwytny geniusz, rozmowa z Marią Poprzęcką*, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1766140,1,duchamp-sarkastyczny-kpiarz-nieuchwytny-geniusz.read, access 16.06.2019.

visual approach to art and as a result was markedly less innovative. This was to be borne out by two quotes which the exhibition reiterated: "If only we could pull out our brain and use only our eyes" (Pablo Picasso), "I was interested in ideas rather than in visual products. I wanted to restore the painting as a being at the service of the mind" (Marcel Duchamp). According to Jones, we owe to Duchamp the shift from aesthetics to the meaning of the work.

Asked about the connection between the white cube and the colourful walls on the one hand, and the market life of art on the other, Jones hesitated and then curtly responded that Duchamp was honest as he was selling ideas, whereas Picasso flirted with the public, selling paintings and sculptures. Only when still pressured, Jones admitted that it was the Spaniard rather than the Frenchman who was more successful on the art market. Did the colour of the walls contribute to the potential of commercialising art? Were the white walls more innocuous and not subject to the rules of the market? What was the significance of Marcel Duchamp in the process of linking the idea of the white cube with the autonomy of art and its freedom from any commercialisation? Before any attempt to answer these questions is made, it would be in order to identify the historical sources of the white cube concept.

Why the White Cube?

While we owe the dissemination of the term "white cube" to O'Doherty's critical stance, the very idea is far earlier. Its canonisation is most often tied with the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) in 1929 and the reforms which this institution experienced in the 1930s and in the three decades after World War Two. The idea has its roots in the latter half of the 19th century, in reflections on what art should be shown to the public.

Public galleries which began to operate at the end of the 18th century mostly applied the exhibition system taken over from the private collections in which they had originated. The works were shown as a kind of "wall paper", gathered and hung side by side without any space in between. They covered the walls nearly completely. This corresponded to the connoisseurs' conviction that it was only this way of displaying artworks which enabled any comparisons of different authors' styles.

This exhibition policy was criticised by recipients in the second half of the 19th c. Thanks to the activity of the reformers of museum policy such as e.g. economist William Stanley Jevons (1835-1882), John Cotton Dan (1856-1929) and Charles Eastlake (1793-1865), numerous changes were introduced into the presentation of artworks and as a result the mu-

seum wall was no longer invisible. Gradually, ever new museums in various countries adopted similar standards; paintings were to be hung at eye level (of an average viewer) or higher. As a consequence, the lower part of the museum wall was revealed, which prompted museum staff to start debates on the colour of the previously hidden walls.

Of paramount importance for the development of a new way of thinking about art exhibitions were also texts by Benjamin Ives Gilman (1852-1933), a secretary of the Boston Museum in the years 1893-1925. In 1918, he published his first empirical study on how to visit a museum (*Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method*)[5]. In the text he proposed the term museum fatigue to denote an institutional convention of displaying artworks, which requires some effort on the part of the public[6]. It was the desire to counter this perception fatigue that seems to be the major objective factor for the changes in the manner of exhibiting works, ranging from academic convention to the white cube.

In Europe, the architecture of the Bauhaus had a crucial importance for the shift in the thinking about exhibition venues. Its characteristic model of functional and to some extent purist architecture which gave up any decorativeness and monumentality characteristic of historical styles for the sake of a clear-cut structure adjusted to the user's needs was due to the introduction of white-painted walls. While the theoreticians of the Weimar School did not prescribe white walls as the obligatory background of museum exhibitions, their reductionist vision of architecture had a strong impact on many imitators and ultimately greatly contributed to the introduction of this solution[7].

It was only in the 1930s that the colour white began the standard colour of gallery and museum walls. Of importance in this respect were German exhibitions held since the 1930s, which leads to a rather uncomfortable conclusion that the cultural policy of Nazi Germany contributed to the dissemination of the idea of the white cube. This was the suggestion of Charlotte Klonk, a German art historian: "In England and France white only becomes a dominant wall colour in museums after the Second World War, so one is almost tempted to speak of the white cube as a Nazi invention. At the same time, the Nazis also mobilised the traditional connotation of white as a colour of purity, but this played no role when the flexible white exhibition container became the default mode for displaying art in the museum"[8].

» 5 B. I. Gilman, Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method, Cambridge 1918.

» 6 B. I. Gilman, "Museum fatigue", The Scientific Monthly 1916, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 62-74.

» 7 K. Murawska-Muthesius, P. Piotrowski, From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum, New York 2016, p. 70-72.

» 8 The White Cube and Beyond, an interview with Charlotte Klonk, https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/white-cube-and-beyond, access 11.06.2019.

Naturally, the Germans were, "unfortunately", first. However, if we ask who did it consciously, it was Americans who beat others, more specifically MoMA's first director Alfred Barr. He was the first to "cement" the white cube as an exhibition strategy. While the white cube had actually emerged earlier at the Harvard Art Museum and at the Wadsworth Atheneum (early 1930s), it was the simplifications introduced in the space of the *Cubism and Abstract Art* show from 1936 went down in art history as the first case of a fully conscious use of the white wall as the background of contemporary art. The launch of the new MoMA building in 1939 concluded a certain stage of transformation of exhibitions space: a shift from a gallery wall densely covered with painting towards the spatial emptiness of the white cube, where the architectural elements were reduced to the bare minimum.

However, the application of the white cube in commercial galleries took place only after the Second World War, in the 1950s. If, then, we can see the use of the white cube as the demonstration of attempts to liberate art from market considerations, the attempts failed. They were unsuccessful in that the art market adjusted quickly. It took if for granted and soon appropriated in extenso. Symbolically, the crowning achievement of the process of the idea of the white cube being taken over by the commercial art world may be the launch in 1993 of Jay Joplin's White Cube Gallery in London. The appropriation of the notion of the white exhibition cube in the very name of commercial activity in the field of art led to its definitive subordination to the art market, no matter if today Joplin's gallery walls are neither white (they are painted light grey), not cube-shaped (the rooms are irregular in shape)[9].

The idea of not making money on art

Art history in Europe is a history of gradual liberation of artists from the impact of various external conditions of the creative process. This process was accompanied by a growing fame of the artistic professions, which went a long way from the ancient occupation of slaves, unworthy of a free man (a conviction about the demeaning nature of physical work) to, successively a craft, a privileged position at royal and ducal courts, a task of academics, and finally today's free activity (an independent freelancing artist). The evident liberating transformations in the field of art were strongly linked with the financial aspects of creative activity. In fundamental terms, we may say that artists, like any other person, have had to earn money to sustain themselves. They also need money to create at

» 9 C. Jencks, "Opening up the White Cube" [in:] idem, *The Story of Post-Modernism: Five Decades of the Ironic*, Iconic and Critical in Architecture, Hoboken 2012.

all (creation of conditions conducive to the creation of art, purchase of necessary materials, etc.). Artists, in varying degrees at different times, were then, unless they obtained other funding, dependent on those who offered them commissions. Breaking free from this dependence was one of their prime objectives.

How to make art, however, counting on some income and remain at the same time to the greatest extent possible independent of external influence? How to make decisions about what one creates and at the same time make good money? This dilemma became widespread first in modern times and led e.g. to the establishment of the Royal Academy in Paris.

The launch of the Academy did not free the related artists from the expectations of those who gave them commissions and their money. However, this did change the character of their relationship. This meant the professionalisation of art life and related exhibition activity. Now it was artists, hoping to obtain commissions from admirers of their mastery, showed their works at the Salon in Paris. They were no longer commissioned works but mostly made on the initiative of the artists themselves, who participated in a competition assessed by a professional jury. The winner could rely on social acclaim and lucrative contracts, e.g. from the royal court. Financial motivation was present, then, but was veiled as connoisseurship. To maintain this camouflage that sublimated art it was necessary to develop the narrative of the artistic genius free from any motivation other than an artistic one (*art for art's sake*).

Before long, in the second half of the 19th c. this approach was verified by the market. It absorbed an excess of artworks made for the purpose of the Salon. These works were traded by art dealers, who catered for wealthy burghers and so-called bourgeoisie. Works were displayed in private galleries, in large numbers. Soon, however, the model began to crack. Those who purchased new artworks were said to have poor knowledge about them and to have little if any appreciation for the real value of art; they thus easily succumbed to fads. Artists who were not appreciated by the new clientele, most likely because the latter were disappointed, pointed out that in order to be noticed and sold, art has to resort to "prostitution", i.e. cater to the lowest tastes. The fear of being seen as a conformist in the realm of art led artists to the adoption of the idea of artistic independence. This process recognised the artist as the author of the work of art and directly contributed to the aforementioned reform of the exhibition system, which involved the change in the manner of presenting works of art – no longer densely packed on a wall, with captions indicating the authors' names. An "escape" from the allegation of the artists' solely financial motivation was, then, one of the key reasons for commencing reflection on exhibition strategies.

The risk incurred by the Impressionists, who departed from studio painting for the sake of open-air spontaneity did not make them bankrupt only because a few art dealers trusted in the value of their art and took efforts to sell it to American collectors. Impressionism may, then, be seen as a breakthrough in art history, not only because it offered a new concept of imagery but also because the concept itself was a result of creative pursuits of the artists themselves and not a reaction to the fads within the artistic community. A shift in thinking about art triggered the first attempts at changing the way it was displayed. Exhibitions held in artists' ateliers were different from those organised by art dealers in that they included innovative arrangements, such as the display of paintings on easels rather than on walls.

The opposition of the artistic community to earning money as the sole reason for taking up art was then partly correlated with the simultaneous changes in art exhibition strategies. This culminated between the world wars, first of all among the Dadaists. Active here, apart from Marcel Duchamp, was Tristan Tzara, the author of the 1918 Dadaist manifesto. The text of the manifesto included a question whether earning money was the aim of art and then pointed out that a work of art serves other purposes. The critique of a commercial approach to art was not unambiguous, then, if strongly implied. The question about the status of art posed in the manifesto was interpreted as "rhetorical" since it was immediately followed by a statement that art serves the purpose of individual expression and its commercial aspect was thus questioned. Naturally, this conclusion was only wishful thinking. That the artists connected with the Dadaist movement had to find subsistence remained as topical as ever. They objected to both public museums and private galleries and the exhibition concepts they developed. Their artistic statements took place in cafés and venues which were not formally related to art display.

The divergent approach to the commercial contexts of art life before and after Dadaism and the relation between the approach to money and ways of art exhibition become very evident when we compare the two artists referred to jointly above: Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp.

While the latter is sometimes seen as completely uninterested in earning money on art, the former is synonymous with commercial success.

Roughly at the time when the French Dadaist shocked the New York high society, his competitor from the Stockholm exhibition Pablo Picasso started cooperating with the art dealer Henry Kahnweiler. Pursuant to the agreement they both signed, the agent had the exclusive right to sell all of the artist's works and paid for them in advance, even before they were created. The Spaniard's accepting a fixed fee from his dealer was very symbolic and indicated that the latter has no impact on what the artist would

create. Picasso was in this way provided for and had full artistic freedom. The ideal postulated by French academics was finally implemented.

In the meantime, Duchamp disarmed the "innocuous" agreement between Picasso and Kahnweiler with his statements related to art. He laid bare Picasso's prime intention of selling paintings in the traditional sense of the term. The Spaniard's challenging the public consisted only in the proposition of a new form yet retained the conventions of the art market. The similar motivation of Picasso and e.g. the Impressionists to try to interest the audience and convince them of the new concept of art was reflected in the relationship with the next art dealer, Paul Rosenberg. He paid Picasso a permanent salary against the sales of works by 19th--century masters to American collectors. It can therefore be said that the success of Impressionism sustained avant-garde art. In symbolic terms, this interdependence actually compromised the power of Picasso's artistic innovation; rather, he remained on the side of the conservative model of relations in the world of art, while Duchamp seemed to propose something completely different. He seemed to break free from the artist-art dealer system in which Picasso was stuck. "Through the character of Picasso's exhibitions and with the approval of the artist himself, Rosenberg – according to Fitzgerald10 – endeavoured to sustain the image of Picasso as a contemporary master in the midst of the masters of the past rather than as a rebellious revolutionary"11. Such a construction of the image of the Spanish Cubist revealed a significant tension between the early period of its rebellious history and the later period, more classical in its meaning. In other words, it can be concluded that Picasso's association with the art dealers who paid him a fixed salary compromised the controversial nature of his works, as can be seen from the comparison between *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the small still-lifes from the blue and pink periods. Perhaps Picasso, who had to provide for himself and gain material stability in the face of the instability of his personal life, sacrificed, possibly not entirely in line with his own preferences, the concept of an artistic experiment to fight for the inclusion in the pantheon of great masters appreciated by a wide audience. In this he was largely successful as he left to his heirs a total of 312 million dollars.

The initial positions of Duchamp and Picasso are comparable since both began with a scandal. While the Frenchman's painting oeuvre was not extensive, at least one of his paintings has gone down in history – *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. Due to the level of controversy it

» 10 M.C. Fitzgerald, *Picasso and the Creation of Market for Twentieth Century Art*, New York 1995.

» 11 P. Juszkiwicz, "Od Salonu do galerii. Krytyka artystyczna i historyczna zmiana", *Artium Quaestiones* 2002, vol. 13, p. 245.

triggered, the work can be likened to Picasso's aforementioned *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Creating it, Duchamp transgressed artistic canons. He redefined the painting act both formally and semantically. Additionally, he referred to kinetic photography. The controversy surrounding the presentation of this work pushed him in a completely different direction than Picasso. He was provoked to go even further. In 1923, he even decided to stop working at all. In an interview with Show magazine, he was asked what his livelihood was since he had not been creating for almost half a century. He answered: "*Tell Show* that I'll respond as soon as I have received a full financial dossier from all the members of their editorial team"[12].

According to many studies, Duchamp never showed any liquidity. In addition, on June 8, 1927 he married Lydie Sarazin-Lavassor for money. This marriage of convenience was preceded by the conclusion of a prenup stating that the wife would pay the artist a fixed salary as long as he painted and played chess. Since he played almost continuously, the marriage broke up and the couple divorced on January 25, 1928[13]. Many years later Lydie Sarazin-Lavassor described this marriage in a book with a rather subversive title: *A Marriage In Check: The Heart of The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelor, Even*[14]. Duchamp himself commented on it in one of his later interviews: "I realized at one point that it was not necessary to burden life with too much weight, too many things to do... with a wife, children, a house in the suburbs, and a car... And I realized this relatively early on"[15].

Duchamp's self-declared indifference to money was apparent in his deliberate provocation of bourgeois tastes and his questioning of the rules of traditional aesthetics. Although he did not seek to sell his works, thanks to his acquaintance with the Arensbergs, American collectors of contemporary art, he did not have to pay rent as the collectors paid it in exchange for the ownership rights to the *Large Glass*, a work that was yet to be created. Besides, Duchamp earned money by teaching his friends French.

The very fact of the Dadaist's rejecting ideas for the sake of money is not tantamount to his total lack of interest in earning it. Some of his subsequent works take up the question of making a living; the 1923 poster *Wanted* shows an amount of 2,000 USD and *Monte Carlo Bond*, or a series of bonds with the artist's portrait, meant to amass an amount necessary for testing his own innovative system of playing the roulette in

» 12 F. M. Naumann, "Duchampiana II. Money is No Object", Art in America 2003, p. 67.

» 13 J. Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture*, Berkeley/London/New York 1995, p. 188.

» 14 See L. Fischer Sarazin-Levassor, *A Marriage In Check: The Heart of The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelor*, Even, Dijon 2007.

» 15 F. M. Naumann, "Duchampiana II. Money is No Object", *Art in America* 2003, p. 67.

one of the most famous casinos16. In the second half of the 1920s, Duchamp made several transactions in the art market. He bought over 80 works by Francis Picabia and 27 sculptures by Brancusi, which he then sold at a profit[17]. Ultimately, before his death Duchamp amassed a total of 360,000 US dollars.

In the context of the different attitudes of Duchamp and Picasso towards the idea of making money through art described here, the way of reading the exhibition from the Stockholm museum, where the Spaniard was shown as one of the old masters and the Frenchman as a modern artist in a white cube, changes slightly. The demarcation line between the two rooms and between the two creative attitudes, is also an expression of the changed way we understand the relationship between creating art and earning money from it. Picasso represents the classical approach, where art is a product and an object. Duchamp is a symbol of a change in thinking, of art as an idea. Art exists regardless of whether someone pays for it or not. In this way, the colourful walls behind Picasso's paintings expressed the commercialization of his art, and the white walls surrounding Duchamp's works expressed the ambivalent role of money in his activity.

Conclusion

In the period of over 50 years since the death of Marcel Duchamp, the interest in his work has been constantly growing. Numerous exhibitions held in the most prominent institutions (New York in 1973, Paris in 1977, Venice in 1993) and many publications devoted to him, written by renowned art critics and historians, have established his position as the king of the artistic avant-garde. There are many reasons for this admiration, the most convincing of which was most likely his constant games with the audience.

Duchamp's example shows, however, that artists never meant "not do earn anything" through their art, but rather wished to free themselves as far as possible from the necessity to follow the tastes of the audience. Opposition to the entanglement of art in the market mechanisms reached its climax in Duchamp's attitude, yet it did not mean a complete renunciation of the art world. Duchamp was not a Diogenes of contemporary

» 16 P. Read, "The 'Tzank Check' and Related Works", [in:] R. E. Kuenzli, F. M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp. The Artist of the Century,* London 1996.

» 17 Asked if this did not interfere with his vision of not creating for profit, he answered: "No. A man must live. It happened because I didn't have any money. Man has to eat something. Food, always food, and painting for painting's sake are two completely different things. Both can be done simultaneously, without the need to destroy either. Therefore, I did not attach much importance to the sale of these works" (F. M. Naumann, "Duchampiana II. Money is No Object", *Art in America* 2003, p. 70).

art, although some think so, but he was closer to this attitude than other contemporary artists.

Ronald Jones, by juxtaposing Duchamp and Picasso via two different exhibition strategies, only indirectly referred to the differences in their approach to the art market. His exhibition was an illustration, if perhaps not a fully deliberate one, of the link between the mental revolution brought about by the ready-made concept to contemporary art with changes in the way of thinking about exhibition spaces in their non-commercial (mainly educational) function. The observations made in this article seem to suggest that the idea of the white cube was only a secondary connection with the attempt to liberate art from the influence of market rules. In other words, the white cube, the autonomy of art and the idea of freeing artists from market systems are the canonical themes of modern art history that have developed in parallel and each of them has its own, separate history. The moment of their meeting was the period between the 1930s and the 1950s, when it seems that for a short time they were intertwined on the level of declarations, i.e. theoretical assumptions, and not artistic practice. This relationship, however, was neither permanent nor based on solid foundations. The trace it left behind, expressed in the alleged reluctance of some artists to make money, is rather a result of individual reflections of those who, for certain reasons, did not have to or did not want to make money from their work, rather than an expression of a broader artistic rebellion.

The proposal to free art from the commercial context, i.e. to change the perception of art in such a way that artists' creations are not products, seems to be the most coherent in the case of practices based on the idea of social activism and interventionism, although there we also deal with the issue of remuneration for work. Actionism and interventionism are, however, examples of a departure from the idolatrous treatment of art within the space of the refined white cube as a testimony to the revealed truths. Ephemeral forms of post-conceptual art therefore appear as a chance to break with the aesthetization of art in the white gallery. In practice, however, this kind of art can also be absorbed by the market. Ideas and their documentation are as commercialised as the works of art which were previously sold.

Consequently, the demand for social emancipation of art as expressed in the slogans "art for art's sake" and "autonomy of art", like the idea of the white cube itself, does not seem to effectively protect artistic creativity against its commercialisation. An interest of viewers in a particular type of work generates a desire to own it. This, in turn, naturally drives the supply. Works of artists who did not care about making a profit during their lifetime are often sold after their death. Today it is difficult

to imagine a work that cannot be sold either as an object (thing) or as an idea (concept of a work of art). Most of them end up in commercial white galleries, where they are presented in special lighting, like products in a shop window. Copyright law, which conceives a work as an intangible good and therefore does not require its recording in a material medium, is very helpful for the commercialisation of ideas. The best evidence of the fact that the art market absorbs everything is the sale of a draught as a work of art18. Ultimately, therefore, today not only does the colour of the walls cease to matter, but the walls themselves become irrelevant, both in the context of artistic production, presentation and sale of its products. During online auctions, real walls have been replaced by the web page wall19. Prices for virtually sold works of art are rising steadily, as is the sector's share in the overall art market. The idea of the white cube has thus entered a completely new, virtual, zone. New phenomena render some of the questions posed in this text partly obsolete in the current reality. They become a reflection of historical transformations. The entry of art into the web space changes many of the existing relations, art exhibiting and marketing included. ●

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» 18 I mean here Ryan Gander's *I Need Some Meaning I Can Memorize* presented, among others, at Documenta 13 in Kassel. On the ground floor of the Fridericianum Museum, the artist left a completely free space in which a slight draught could be felt. The work was then sold to a private collection in the form of documentation explaining how to create a draught.

» 19 A web page wall is the place with information e.g. about goods and services.