



# Between the Lines

**Cultural Moment / How art exposes hidden dimensions**

*After six decades of creating groundbreaking works that toy with the relationship between art and its surroundings, conceptual artist Daniel Buren tells Maïa Morgensztern about his latest endeavour to reshape how we see the world – from Cape Town to Rio de Janeiro*



It's six o'clock in the evening in Rio de Janeiro and the sun retreats behind the horizon, casting its final glow over the beach. On the sixth floor of the Copacabana Palace, A Belmond Hotel, a guest gently closes the windows overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and switches on the lights. An unfamiliar green halo shines through, piquing the interest of passersby on the footpath. A few floors below, another light comes on, radiating bright pink. Soon, hundreds of windows will blink with contrasting hues, following the soft rhythm of hotel guests coming in and out of their rooms. Depending on the viewer's location, the display can be experienced as both public art and an intimate colour field.

It's the work of Daniel Buren, a French artist who often produces pieces that defy the usual artistic conventions – spilling out of gallery windows, blocking entrances or appearing unsolicited on bus-stop benches in Los Angeles. At 86 years old, Buren is one of the most vital and creatively energetic artists working today. A pioneer of minimalism in France, he rose in reputation in the 1960s by enforcing sets of immutable rules throughout his practice, reducing painting to its most basic and rigorous elements. Most signature among those rules is his use of vertical stripes, an 8.7cm wide white and single colour strip that he repeats obsessively as a visual leitmotif, a fingerprint that challenges the traditional architectural spaces and natural vistas in which they are placed. He calls his stripes his "seeing tool", disrupting the viewer's focus through repetition of the motif. "I like to use primary colours and bright tones because they offer the best dramatic effect, allowing us to see details in the landscape we might have otherwise overlooked," Buren explains.

He is set to collaborate with six Belmond hotels throughout 2024: Copacabana Palace, Mount Nelson, Hotel Cipriani, La Residencia, Villa San Michele and Castello di Casole. The series, entitled "*Haltes Colorées, travaux in situ pour MITICO, 2023-2024*" (Colourful Halts), is part of MITICO, a project put on in conjunction with Galleria Continua. Here in Rio, Buren fits the windows with translucent glass let natural light in. Buren insists we do not confuse the result with an aesthetic cover-up; he uses his work purely to make us reconsider the environment in which it's contained. "For this project, I wanted to deconstruct the world-famous facade of the Copacabana so we can see it again with fresh eyes," he says.

Born in 1938 in Boulogne-Billancourt, Buren started to use the term "*in situ*" early in his career to describe his bold conceptual pieces that move about the world, specific to place, and challenge not how we view art, but challenge how we see the world through art. "My studio is where I currently work! The world is my oyster!" Most of his vast output is immobile – and often transient. Yet his significant oeuvre and attitude has had a permanent impact on the art world, questioning the nature of what art is and how and where it should be valued. In 1986, Buren won the Golden Lion for his French pavilion at the Venice Biennale – where he has exhibited more than 10 times – and in 2007 he was awarded the prestigious Praemium Imperiale for painting by the Imperial family of Japan.

It was during a trip to Japan that he discovered the beauty of shakkei gardens. The concept of "borrowed scenery", which takes root in a 17th-century Chinese treatise called Yuanye, is an edited view of a landscape designed to highlight a detail or a perspective. "I would never claim the beautiful colonnade of the Palais Royal as my own," Buren says of the backdrop of his most emblematic work, *Les Deux Plateaux*, in which he placed more than 250 striped

marble and concrete columns across the courtyard of the palais in Paris. When this intervention appeared in the 1980s it caused controversy among traditionalists – much like the Eiffel Tower and the Centre Pompidou before it – around how contemporary art should or should not reshape historical landmarks.

Now, whether creating a pathway around the famous fountain of the Hotel Cipriani in Venice, experimenting with mirrors and the mountainous backdrop of Mount Nelson in Cape Town, or setting up a multicoloured pergola at La Residencia in Mallorca, Buren offers new ways of seeing. Later this year, the artist will dig into that Asian shakkei heritage again to reveal a set



of unique panoramic vistas of Castello di Casole in Tuscany. Three geometric shapes decorated with his black and white stripes will be placed around the expansive estate, like witnesses of a timeless dance between the artist and his ever-changing canvas.

Buren admits that working *in situ* is "both a blessing and a curse". Once an artwork is dismantled, it can never be shown anywhere else. The opening of his 1967 "Manifestation" series, created with Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni, was a fair warning of what was to come. As the audience gathered in Paris's Musée d'Art Moderne, people watched the four artists preparing for an event that never took place. By the time they realised the set-up was the performance, it was too late. The artists had removed their work and were gone.

*Belmond is proud to partner with Galleria Continua on MITICO, a six-location global commission of new works from Daniel Buren*

**Photographs** / Opening pages and opposite: Photos-Souvenirs: Daniel Buren, *L'horizon, Infiniment: travaux in situ et situés*, Galleria Continua / Dubaï, Mars 2023. Details. ©DB-ADAGP, 2024. This page: Daniel Buren, *Prismes et miroirs: Haut-relief 7*, 2019, Detail. Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Prismes et miroirs: Haut-relief 8*, 2019, Detail. ©DB-ADAGP, 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua.