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ALL WHITE The Perfect Gallery analyses what makes for the ideal art space, through the eyes of a TV makeover team



The architecture of spaces and places

Sarah Walters finds out about the work of Christian Jankowski and a bid to create The Perfect gallery

COULD Cube's new show be the first time a gallery in Manchester – maybe even beyond – has welcomed people in to an entirely empty space?

It's true that Marina Abramovic talked the Whitworth Art Gallery into putting its whole collection into storage so she could take over for more than two weeks, but she replaced the traditional wall hangings with unique performance art.

Cube, though, have unapologetically replaced its collection with absolutely nothing.

If The Perfect Gallery sounds like a slightly crazy idea, the show all starts to make sense when you understand the brain behind it and the original concept that informed it.

Conceived by German artist Christian Jankowski, known for his work with psychics, pastors and TV shows, The Perfect Gallery sought to analyse what makes for the ideal art space – examined through the eyes of a TV makeover programme.

Working with one of the team from BBC's House Invaders, Jankowski originally transformed London's Pump House Gallery – upsetting some regulars into the bargain – when the decision was made to whitewash out the original features and create a 'white box' space.

But it was this, says Cube's creative director Jane Anderson, that made her most interested in bringing the show to Manchester.

"I was interested because it looked at the architecture of spaces and places," says Jane.

"Cube was purposely designed as an architecture centre so we actually had our 'makeover', as it were, when we were built in 1998.

"But this takes a new look and has this prankster element of doing it like a TV makeover show. In the 12 years since we opened, the gallery has picked up a lot of scars. It's been really hard work getting it looking ship-shape again for this show!"

The film of the London transformation will be showing in Cube's new cinema space, but otherwise the staff will be the only feature in the gallery space.

"The gallery will look empty apart from some information on the way in and the staff, who will be trained up to be part of the artwork and to tell people about the architecture of Cube," adds Jane.

"We are inviting people to make suggestions for changes or improvements and we will have a feedback book in the space."

To complement the show, Stephen Hodder – architect at Hodder + Partners, which designed Cube – will give his first talk about his firm's original vision for the perfect gallery.

"It's been more work than you'd imagine getting this ready," laughs Jane. "But that adds to the fact that people can now see a purpose-built gallery in all its glory."

"I think that the project needs this empty space to work – I don't think it would work if it was alongside other pieces of work; it would divert from the architecture."

»Until September 11 at Cube Gallery, Portland St. Free. Stephen Hodder presents Cube in on August 19, 6pm-8pm (free, but booking essential via info@cube.org.uk).