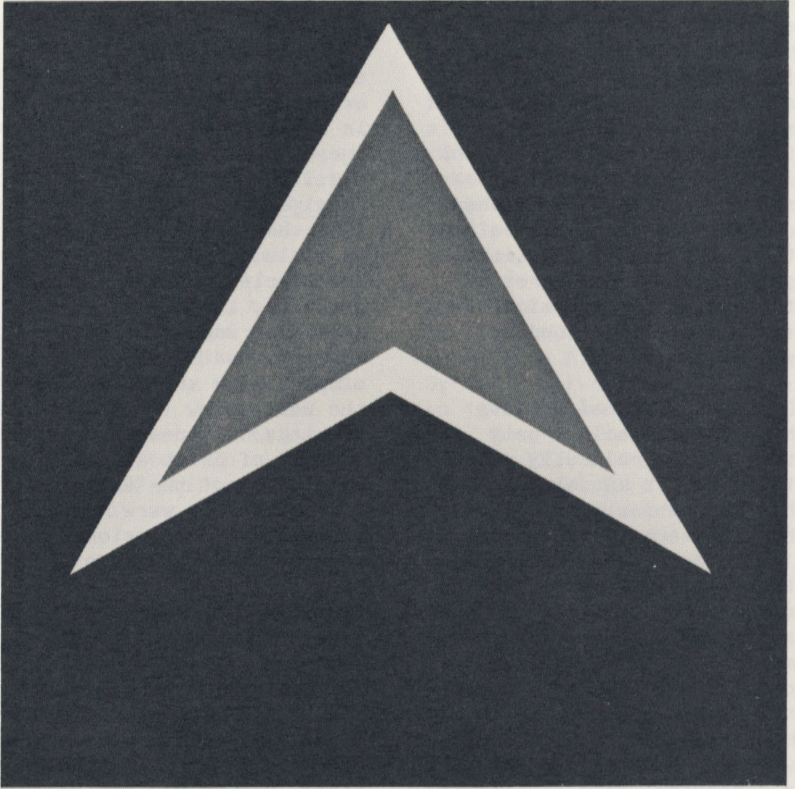


Sol LeWitt
MATRIX/BERKELEY 63

University Art Museum
Mid-August - September, 1983

Star - Light Center, 1983



Sol LeWitt's modular open cubes, first shown in 1966 in New York, are among the clearest and most elegant examples of minimal sculpture. The pieces, whether single modules or complex, multi-part structures, are the result of a strict, pre-determined logical system that excludes the factor of the artist's personality. These works, as well as those by other leading minimalists, were fabricated in factories or by assistants according to specific plans provided by the artist. Other minimalists made their works from stock manufactured components such as fluorescent tubes (Dan Flavin) or bricks (Carl Andre). The abstract, geometric objects made by these artists are the antithesis of the extravagantly emotional paintings and sculptures of the abstract expressionist artists of the preceding generation.

LeWitt influenced artists here and abroad not only through his radically reductive artwork but also through his theoretical writings. In his landmark statement of 1967, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," LeWitt defined the movement that was emerging as a natural extension of the minimalists' rational methodology: "In conceptual art, the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.... When the artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair." Several minimal artists, including LeWitt, had abandoned painting in favor of three-dimensional forms in order to avoid the illusionistic space of traditional European painting. Wanting to establish a distinctly new art,

they rejected the formal and aesthetic values of a type of painting they felt already had been fully exploited. LeWitt's brilliant solution to the problem of illusionism in two-dimensional work was to draw directly on the wall surface. These wall drawings, often in mural-sized scale, have continued to occupy LeWitt since 1968. The earliest of these drawings were composed of the four basic kinds of line: vertical, horizontal and two diagonals. They were executed by assistants according to LeWitt's explicit instructions (which, in abbreviated form, became the titles of the works, e.g., Vertical Lines, Not Straight, Not Touching). By 1972 the system had expanded to include broken lines, arcs and circles. Done in graphite, ink or chalk, the drawings range from dense, complex webs of lines to simple, airy articulations of the wall area. Most of these drawings disappeared beneath a layer of paint at the conclusion of the exhibition for which they were made, but others were commissioned as permanent installations.

LeWitt not only rejects the categorizations of painter, sculptor or draughtsman, but he also denies that one art medium is more important than another. Various media have occupied him at different times, but he has had a consistent interest in the creation of books and prints. They offer him a means of disseminating his ideas widely and economically as well as being ideal formats in which to present the finite systems he develops. LeWitt has produced dozens of his own books, beginning with the 1966 Serial Project No. 1.

The print medium has been a longtime favorite of LeWitt's because the method involved is analogous to that which LeWitt has followed in the fabrication of all of his work. Traditionally, when an artist is invited by a professional workshop to create a print edition, the printing is done by trained printers according to the model the artist provides. The new series of color etchings in the current MATRIX exhibition was printed at Crown Point Press in Oakland. These etchings explore seven variations on the star, from three-pointed to nine-pointed forms. Each star is inscribed within a barely visible circle which in turn is enclosed within a square. Each of the seven star types is then printed in four combinations of colors or color values: a blue center with red and yellow; a red center with blue and yellow; a dark grey center with light grey and white; and light grey center with dark grey and white. In all, there are 28 prints in the series. It is accompanied by a smaller series of seven double-star etchings.

Like the Dutch neoplasticist painter Piet Mondrian, LeWitt has always used only pure, unmixed primary colors plus black and white. In the new prints and in some of the recent wall drawings, however, he has altered the pure color. For example, the rich blue that appears in the prints is a mixture of Thalo blue and black.

The star form is new to LeWitt's art, although his drawings since 1976 have focused on colored geometrical shapes, flat and volumetric, rather than on line. LeWitt made a series

of star drawings on the white walls of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Perugia, Italy earlier this year, and a six-pointed star on a wall at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York last year. These new drawings and prints are a continuation of the formal permutations that characterize LeWitt's art, but they are now more emblematic and painterly than ever before.

According to LeWitt, "What the work of art looks like isn't important..." Nonetheless, his works have always had a strong visual appeal. The elegance of the clear, simple idea is apparent throughout his oeuvre; as LeWitt himself said (in his 1969 "Sentences on Conceptual Art"), "It is difficult to bungle a good idea."

LeWitt was born in 1928 in Hartford, Connecticut. He received a B.F.A. from Syracuse University, New York in 1949 and served in the U.S. Army in Japan and Korea in 1951-52. He has also taught in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, Cooper Union, the School of Visual Arts and in the Education Department of New York University. LeWitt currently divides his time between New York and Italy.

Constance Lewallen

Note: Also on view in Gallery A from the Museum collection is LeWitt's Squares With Corners Torn Off, 1975, a series of 15 paper drawings. LeWitt has made torn and folded paper pieces since 1966 as "another way of making grids with no drawn lines."

Works in MATRIX:

Stars - Red Center

Stars - Blue Center

Stars - Light Center

Stars - Dark Center

All of the above are sets of 7, 1983, etching and aquatint, 21" x 21", editions of 10.

Double Stars, set of 7, 1983, etching and aquatint, 15" x 27", edition of 25.

All works are lent by Crown Point Press, Oakland, CA.

Sol LeWitt's list of exhibitions is extensive. There have also been hundreds of articles and reviews written about his work. Complete biographical and bibliographical information is contained in the catalogue for his 1978 retrospective exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art, NY (see one-person exhibitions). A selection of exhibitions and articles which have occurred subsequently are listed below.

Selected one-person exhibitions since 1978: The Museum of Modern Art, NY, '78 (cat; travelled); John Weber Gallery, NY, '78, '80, '82; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, '81 (cat.); Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France, '83 (cat.); Daniel Weinberg Gallery, S.F., '81.

Selected group exhibitions since 1978: Paula Cooper Gallery, NY, '78, '81, '82; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Biennial, '79, '81 (cats.); Hayward Gallery, London, Pier + Ocean, '80 (cat; travelled); Cologne, W. Germany, Westkunst, '81 (cat.); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, '60-'80, '82 (cat.).

Selected bibliography about the artist since 1978:

Hess, Thomas. "Sol LeWitt and the Blizzard of Cubes," New York Magazine, Feb. 27, '78.

Kuspit, Donald. "Sol LeWitt the Wit" (review), Arts Magazine, April '78.

Wooster, Ann-Sargent. "Sol LeWitt's Expanding Grid," Art in America, May '80.

Russell, John. "Sol LeWitt" (review), The New York Times, Dec. 17, '82.

Armstrong, Richard. "Sol LeWitt," Arforum, March '83.

Selected bibliography by the artist:

"Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," Artforum, June '67.

"Sentences on Conceptual Art," Art-Language (England), vol. 1, no. 1, May '69.

"Wall Drawings," Arts Magazine, May, April '70.

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