

MINUS SPACE

Aspects of Minimal Art

Curated by Per Jensen and Naomi Spector

January 31 – February 28, 1978

Julian Pretto 176 Franklin Street N.Y.C.

“Aspects of Minimalism” – which includes works by Carl Andre, Stephen Antonakos, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Robert Morris, Robert Ryman, and Fred Sandback – came about partly in response to the opportunity to use a new and very stimulating exhibition space: the ground floor at 176 Franklin Street. It is a long room of varying widths, and its ceiling is remarkable not only for its height but for its being formed of rhythmic rows of rounded arches. Its character is not alone in its measurements and physical elements but in its unusual, soft atmosphere. Unlike more finished gallery or museum rooms, its walls and floor are a bit rough, the windows have not been hidden with perfect walls, and its outstanding quality is that it is a particular place – not a passive space. Though empty, white, and well lit; it is not neutral. Indefinite remnants of a former life still linger there. Its feeling is one that sometimes has been present in certain European sites in which such art has been seen, but that is rare in New York. In short, this area feels old. In addition, its dimensions are ample enough for a number of works of different scales to be seen comfortably together, but not so vast that they cannot relate to each other.

Moreover, the gallery is situated just far enough off-West Broadway to enable it to avoid some of the run-of-the-mill traffic; and it is sometimes possible to see exhibitions there with only one or two other visitors present – which is a rare pleasure. This and the relative quiet of that neighborhood are circumstances which allow the experience of the whole space to enter into a concentrated viewing of each work.

One effect the place has on the works is that it seems to provide a kind of harmony that harder, more angular, and more brightly lit spaces tend to exclude. While the works seem completely available visually and mentally, there is something less tense in the atmosphere here which allows the group to exist together comfortably.

Though of course not unrelated to begin with, these artists nonetheless do present a wider range of ideas and sensibilities than is frequently realized; and it is one of the intentions of the show to allow each work to be seen individually – not only as not part of some movement, but as distinct within each artist’s own range of ideas as well. The works have not been selected with the idea of trying to “represent” an artist – this is difficult enough to do in a retrospective exhibition. Nor have they been chosen to conform to any tight theme. Rather, they simply have been selected for qualities which it was felt would work well in this particular room, with the other works present. For the most part, these are works which are relatively low-key in color, with a preponderance of soft brown, grey, and blue tones which relate to those of the elements of the room. One unusual result of a selection like this one is that these works date from a rather wide range of years – from 1961 to the present.

The scale of the works varies greatly also, and an attempt has been made in the installation to use the perspective operative at certain distances within the room to bring the works into a kind of natural easy pacing which a viewer might feel upon entering at one end and walking around through the space. Thus, the placement of the Robert Morris work just past the center of the room, where it is widest, means that it is seen from one side first. As it is approached, its largeness, its weighty feel, and the power of its presence become gradually stronger. Its unusual height and material have an almost kinesthetic effect.

It is practically unavoidable that the exhibition be dominated by rectangles of various kinds, but it is equally impossible not to sense the absolute integrity of each individual mentality. The boxes of Morris, Judd, and LeWitt might be thought of as paradigms of how distinct these artists are from each other.

The issue of simplicity, or plainness, in representing a box shape yields its interest in view of the variations here, as each is as clean, clear, and direct as the others. Only the vivid diversity within the straight approach is of real interest.

Judd’s seemingly airtight box projecting off the wall appears to be as elegant and fast a solution to the problem as is possible. The flawless stainless steel vertical sides, six inches high, are just about at eye level. This means that many people will first see only the opaque band, without knowing anything about the top and bottom planes. But even once the transparency and rich green color of these two planes have been penetrated visually, in a way no

more knowledge has been revealed, for the inside is finished with the same impassive perfection. The concrete assertiveness and finesse look completely central.

LeWitt's set of three white columns in a row on a flat base rise from the floor near the entrances. The columns are composed of three stacked modular cubes each. The cubes are of three sorts: 1. a complete cube of six planar sides, 2. a cube with opposite sides removed, and 3. a cube with one side removed. This piece "232" is one of eleven works in a system which ranges from pieces with two to eight columns. The system is one of those ideas which seem at first to be easily graspable, but which begin to become increasingly complicated very quickly. Making this work physical is partly a way of getting it straight. The difficulty in seeing things here stems not only in the variations already mentioned, but in the differing positions of the various kinds of cubes within a column and the differing positions of the removed sides within particular cubes. Every set, every column, and every cube looks different depending upon the viewing angle. The wonder, visually, is that they look as pure and simple as they do.

The row of flat hot rolled steel plates which form the twenty foot long "Secret Work" of Carl Andre lives up to its name in perhaps a new sense in this exhibition. Positioned along the far end of the left wall as the room is entered, it is likely to be seen more or less from its left end first. It lies along the floor right up against the angle formed by the wall, and is therefore intimately tied into the room itself. The great height of the room is probably most relevant to this work, and its apparent low profile masks a meaning and a means which are strongly felt and surely realized formally and poetically.

The Mangold "Brown Wall" from 1964 is very likely among his most architecturally related paintings. The different-sized rectangular cut-outs at the upper left and upper right corners of what would have been a solid, thick, eight-foot square painting clearly bring the wall behind it into the work visually. Moreover, they relate to all the various planes, corners, and shapes around the painting. The work's metal borders, though painted over, still tend to emphasize these connections.

Two small paintings in the show by Ryman relate in unexpected ways to several of the other works. There is the natural color of the linen, the rows of modular strokes – along one edge and down the center respectively – and the straightforward involvement with the way materials are used. It is only unfortunate that practical considerations prevent their being hung on the wall unframed. Still, the clarity of their intentions – particularly the aesthetic importance of everything visible in the work – is quite apparent.

The very evident interdependence of site and work in Sandback's case can be seen in different aspects as the viewer moves around the room. A regular trapezoid whose top horizontal rests high on the wall and whose bottom edge lies along the floor a short distance out from the wall, it may imply an incisive plane. From other angles off to the sides, the left and right lines seem to veer unexpectedly in relation to each other and to the wall and surrounding space. The modesty of the thin blue-grey fiber lines have surprising, and succinct, visual range and strength.

The grey-blue right half of the wall on which Antonakos' incomplete blue neon square is anchored is the softest color he has used in such a way to date. As this work was conceived for this exhibition, it may be that this is due to the feel of the place. The free-standing right edge of the wall, the placement of one arm of the right angle of blue neon along the center of the wall where the white area meets the blue, and the relative lack of color spill and modification between the tube and the colored wall all tend to emphasize the spatial potential here and the open ambiguity as to the limit of the square were it to be completed.

Naomi Spector
January 30, 1978

"Aspects of Minimalism"

List of works in the exhibition:

Carl Andre: "Secret Work", 1976, Washington D.C., hot rolled steel, ten units each measuring 1/8" x 18" x 24", overall size 1/8" x 18 x 240"

Lent by Sperone Westwater Fischer

Stephen Antonakos: "Incomplete Blue Neon Square at the Center of a Wall Half Painted Blue", 1978, neon and paint, tube size 20" x 20", wall size variable

Lent by John Weber Gallery

Donald Judd: Untitled, 1968, stainless steel and green plexiglass, 6" x 27" x 24"
Lent by Leo Castelli Gallery

Sol LeWitt: "Variations of Three Different Kinds of Cubes, 232", 1967, refabricated in 1975, baked enamel on steel, 54" x 90" x 18"
Lent by John Weber Gallery

Robert Mangold: "Brown Wall", 1964, oil paint on wood, 96" x 96"
Lent by John Weber Gallery

Robert Morris: Untitled, 1966, fiberglass, four units each measuring 1' x 4' x 4', overall size 1' x 8' x 8'
Lent by Leo Castelli Gallery

Robert Ryman: A painting of 12 strokes, measuring 11 ¼" x 11 ¼", signed at the bottom right corner", 1961, oil and gesso on unstretched linen, 11 ¼" x 11 ¼"

Lent by John Weber Gallery

Robert Ryman: Untitled, 1961, oil on gesso on unstretched linen, 16 ½" x 16 ½"

Lent by John Weber Gallery

Fred Sandback: Untitled, 1967, remade in 1978, acrylic fiber 9'3" x 16'
Lent by the artist