

# Quarterly

**GREEN** *adj.* 1 Having the spectrum color between blue and yellow. 2 In leaf; grass-covered; verdant; as, *green hills*; also/without snow; mild; as, a *green Christmas*. 3 Not arrived at perfect or mature form or condition; unripe. A- Of or due to immature or unskilled judgment or lack of knowledge; inexperienced; also, gullible. 5 Not seasoned or made ready for use; new; fresh; unrefined; raw. 6 Pale-greenish; pale; sickly; wan. 7 Characterized by strength or youthful vigor; flourishing. See synonyms under **FRESH**.

— *noun* 1 The color of spring foliage; the color in the solar spectrum between the blue and the yellow. 2 A grassy level or piece of ground covered with herbage; a common; specifically, a golf putting green, or a whole golf course; links. 3 A green pigment or substance. 4 *pi.* The leaves and stems of young plants, as dandelion and spinach, used as food: usually boiled. 5 *pi.* Leaves or branches of trees; wreaths. 6 Something green used as an emblem.

— *verb* To cause to become green; become green or covered with verdure. [*<OE.grenc*] — **GREEN-LY** *adv.* — **GREEN-MESS** *noun.*

# Quarterly

## Notes on seeing Some Recent American Art in New Zealand

Lucy R. Lippard

It is a curious, even eerie experience to be confronted in the mid-1970's, in New Zealand, by work made primarily in the later 1960's in New York, work with which I grew up as a critic and with which I have been intimately involved ever since. Because it is not new work, it is a nostalgic experience. Because it is, according to my taste, important work, it is a stimulating experience. And because it is work that has not been seen in New Zealand until now, it is a problematic experience. I was, rather condescendingly, amazed to discover how well-informed about, even familiar with this work were the New Zealand artists seeing it for the first time; much of the art being made in Auckland now either bypasses or is already extending the issues exposed here.

All of which raises questions about the premises by which such an exhibition exists at this time and in this place. Just before I left for New Zealand I read an article by the Australian Terry Smith on "The Provincialism Problem" (*Artforum*, September 1974), in which he states with absolute accuracy that despite the proliferation of reproductions and writings about New York or metropolitan art, both these and the work itself when and if it finally arrives, are separated from their real context — from the other art made at the same time and the factors which combined to make this particular art "successful". Thus cultural exports (like "Some Recent American Art") "arrive in the provinces devoid of their genetic contexts" and isolation gives them "a connotation perhaps unsuspected by their makers — they can hardly fail to reinforce a vicious circle of conservatism .... Such exhibitions cannot fail to be counterproductive until they are redundant, that is, until the receiving country has founded an authentic, sustaining culture of its own."

The prospect is not encouraging on this level if for no other reason than the fact that New Zealand is a small, distant country unlikely to produce the kind of market that for better or worse attracts and even seems to produce an internationally marketable art. The most interesting source available seems to be the authentic, if almost extinct, culture of the Maoris, and some of the younger artists drawing ideas (rather than imagery) from anthropology may be on the most auspicious track in that regard. In any case, my agreement with Smith's statements was mellowed but not mitigated by the intelligent and knowledgeable and critical response to the American exhibition by the New Zealand artists I met.

Nevertheless, I must admit that the first thoughts I had about the show, wholly in spite of my respect and admiration of organizer Jennifer Licht and the exhibiting artists, revolved around the problem of "cultural imperialism" — a phrase often applied to this exhibition during its Australian tour. I came to New Zealand under the auspices of the Museum of Modern Art with mixed and guilty feelings because no matter how much I might learn from the trip (thereby better equipping myself to combat the manipulators), I am well aware how such a show can be and has been used for the wrong political ends above the heads and intentions of its participants. Eva Cockcroft has made a strong case for the connections between the MOMA International Program and the CIA, on the basis of history, patronage, staff and goals. ("Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War"; *Artforum* June 1974). She points out that the more dissident the participant the more useful he or she can be "as a propaganda weapon demonstrating the virtues of 'freedom of expression' in an 'open and free society'." Having been involved

myself for years in actively protesting the values of the corporate powers behind New York museums, as well as those of the US government (and for that matter, those of the art world), and having been threatened with arrest on several occasions in the Museum of Modern Art, I was all too sensitive to my reversed position as an envoy to New Zealand for that same institution. It doesn't make me feel any better that the offer was preferred on the basis of my criticism rather than of my political record. I can hardly be proud that the two can be severed so easily. Several of the artists in the show are also "dissidents", though only Richard Serra made this visible; in his videotape *Television Delivers People*\*, he states that "popular entertainment is basically propaganda for the Status Quo" and provokes questions about "entertainment" as unpopular as abstract art, as well as still more pressing questions about the responsibility of artists toward the uses to which their work is put. Is art totally extra-political? Are artists (and critics) more free from worry about how their products are used than corporations which manufacture napalm? Can art be used, or is art useless?

POPULAR  
ENTERTAINMENT IS  
BASICALLY  
PROPAGANDA FOR  
THE STATUS QUO.

**Richard Serra**  
**Television Delivers People.** 1973. Colour, sound;  
6 minutes.  
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

As it turned out, my own culturally imperialist services were not in demand in Auckland; I did not after all have to speak at the opening nor shill for MOMA and I was free to enjoy Maori art, the magnificent landscape, new art and new friends. The dilemma, however, remains, as much for the audience as for the participants. The value of cultural exchange should indeed be exchange — dialogue, a two-way track. If travelling exhibitions were not so official, prestigious and pretentious; if they consisted of more recent, less formed, less acceptable work, more of an exchange might be possible. The videotapes accompanying the American show were most viable on this level. We discussed the possibility of the University doing a much more comprehensive video show, but it would be expensive, and funding for less prestigious compilations — ones which could not be introduced by the American ambassador — is hard to find. I have long been an advocate of exhibitions and books so confusing and directionless in themselves that the audience is forced to make its own choices from scratch rather than reacting predictably to an already edited version of established taste. So-called "conceptual art", while only one of many tendencies, can be sent around very cheaply and would have been a good choice for such an exhibition (preferably not of just American art) around 1969, had officialdom been able to understand and acknowledge its strengths at that time. Perhaps the visited countries should request certain kinds of work or shows, but that would return to some version of the culture hero exhibition since you can't ask for what is not yet known. In any case, I hope that in the future, under the impetus of the esthetic and moral issues raised by "Some Recent American Art", concerted efforts will be made on a less institutionalized basis, to further a more realistic and aware level of exchange. And I hope, contradictorily, that in the meantime these questions do not detract from the very real achievements of the artists whose work is being shown.

\*Because this tape was in colour and the proper video equipment was not available it was not shown in Auckland.

# Some Recent American Art

Alan Wright

Artists in America in the past couple of decades, have entertained a concern with the object which has questioned the validity of all previous aesthetic theories and applications. The result of this revolution has produced an artform which is closer to human existence since it makes the spectator's visual and physical response to the art object, the sole content of the work. Previously the question of meaning, and the importance placed upon it, had confused the whole issue of the relationship between spectator and work. Since no two people could interpret the same image in the same way, it was questionable whether art could in fact communicate a 'message' at all. Following an examination of perception, artists began to make use of their discovery that objects, art or otherwise, have no intrinsic value in themselves; it is the spectator's perception or more broadly his experience through his senses which determines his 'idea' of reality. Art was now thought to reside not in the object but in the beholder's response. Consequently the object as an end in itself, became subordinate to its potential as a proposition eliciting an individual experience, and finally altogether redundant. The two movements known as Minimal and Conceptual art, illustrating this development, were covered by the exhibition some Recent American Art at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

Generally, the exhibition demonstrated the new importance accorded sculpture after 1964 in a situation usually dominated by painting. Oddly enough, many of the sculptors such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd were originally painters until they realized that the illusionistic side-effects of painting were too unsuited to their new ideas. Morris said he gave up painting because of the discrepancy he felt between the process and the end result. Morris' first sculpture, completed after his move to New York in 1961, called *Box With The*

*Sound Of Its Own Making* consists of a wooden box enclosing a tape recording of Morris making the box. It illustrates his concern with the fusion of process and end result in a manner far more explicit than any painting.

In the same year Donald Judd's move from painting to three dimensional objects underlies the limitations he felt of working a medium which was essentially illusory.

In the early sixties this dissatisfaction with painting had shown itself in a number of quarters even within painting itself. By 1959, Frank Stella, in such works as *Die Fahne Hoch*, had developed aspects already apparent in the work of Pollock, Newman and Reinhardt, by stressing the non-illusory potential of painting, and thus forcing the work to appear more as an object than an image. He achieved this by deliberately sacrificing internal relationships within the picture to the idea of the picture as a whole: its size and shape determining the character of the pattern inside the limits of the edge, a practice termed 'deductive structure' by Michael Fried. (1). At the same time using wider stretchers and colour which had no allusions to nature such as black, aluminium, copper etc., and later still, shaped canvases, Stella was able to produce a completely non-referential abstract painting which functioned as an object.

Stella's early work seems to have had an important effect on the work of both Judd and Carl Andre and contributed in no small degree to the formation of their new ideas. Andre's *Cedar Piece* completed in 1964 relies, like Stella's, not on the compositional convention of balancing one area against another, but on the repeated use of a common module. This form of composition, of ordering through standardised parts, ultimately relates to the compositions of Pollock and Newman which, because of the absence of hierarchical part to part distinctions within the picture, produced a total image. (2) Since there were no internal relationships inside, the spectator came to relate the total image to the gallery space in which it was hanging. Consequently the painting began to look more like an object, a resistant flat surface, rather than a window onto an imaginary world.

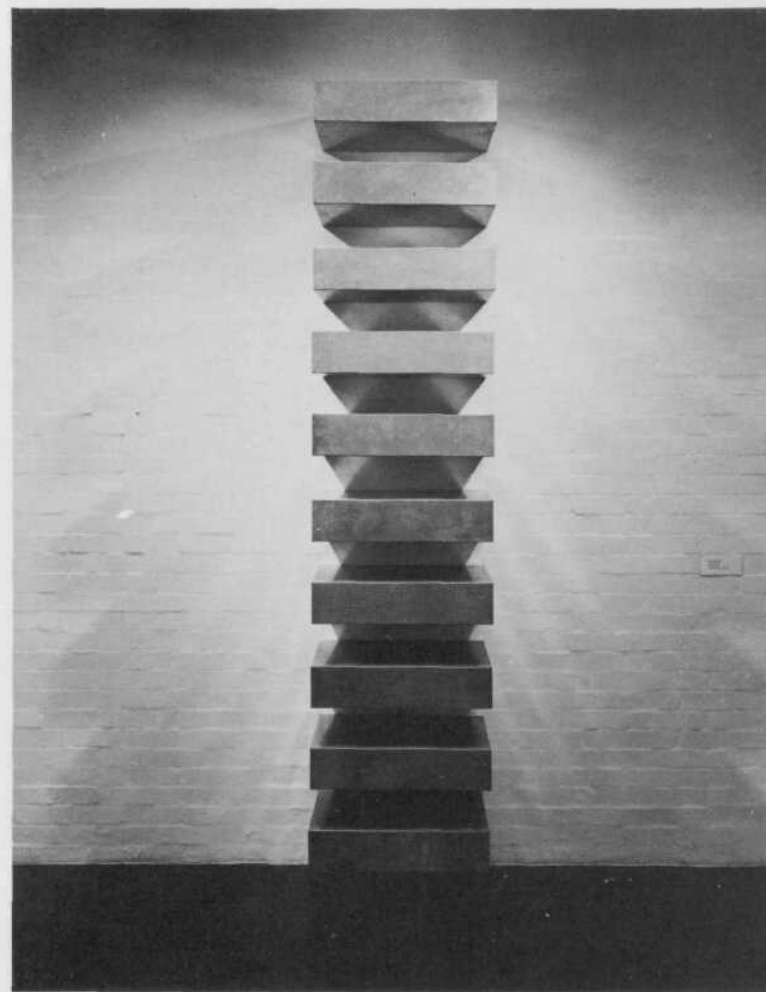
As we have seen, this move towards the object had by 1960 reached quite a sophisticated degree, but only in painting. At the same time Andre and Judd began to think along the lines that since the best painting was moving inevitably towards the three-dimensional object, then the best hope for a true post-Pollock abstraction lay in the area of three-dimensional art itself: sculpture. Their friendship with Stella and their interpretation of his work supplied the point of departure. (3)

In 1966 an exhibition called *Primary Structures*, held at the Jewish Museum in New York, brought together the work of the three major Minimal sculptors, Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Robert Morris. The work was described by uninformed critics as 'sterile', cool, antiseptic and minimal because of the apparant absence of subject and the blatant use of precise industrial finishes which eschewed all sense of personality and warmth from the work.

For an art audience brought up on a decade of Abstract Expressionism, the complete denial of personal facture was an overt attack on their values. Even the immaculate handling of Reinhardt's work from the mid fifties had done little to prepare the way. But ever since Duchamp ever-increasing numbers of artists had inferred that the artist's conceptual order was far more important than the way in which he wielded a brush; impersonality did not necessarily go hand in hand with neat technique. Robert Rauschenberg, by painting two almost identical 'expressionist' works called *Factum I* and *Factum II* in 1957, proved that no value could be placed on the subjective and spontaneous action since it could be just as easily simulated. In these ways the aesthetics of the subjective and ultra-personal were found to be no longer convincing. It was in the wake of such a feeling that Minimal and Conceptual art could develop.

The suspicion that the subjective had never been a viable factor was demonstrated by Jasper Johns who, already in the early fifties, had begun to question the whole idea that art could communicate a subjective message, or, come to that, any message at all intended by the artist. With his 'Flags' and 'Targets', Johns confused the spectator by drawing attention to gross contradictions and ambiguities between object and images. The works defied definition or resolution of any kind by creating a number of alternatives by which they could be seen. Johns is saying that 'things' have no intrinsic value, that art is mute, and any meaning or message associated with art is in the spectator's perceptual experience of it. In this way he established the perceptual and intellectual contribution of the spectator as its own reason for being. (4) With this basic premise established, other artists of the sixties like Claes Oldenburg could complain that "the absence of subject matter did not help people to see the real content of a work, and I don't suppose the obvious presence of say a hamburger will either." (5)

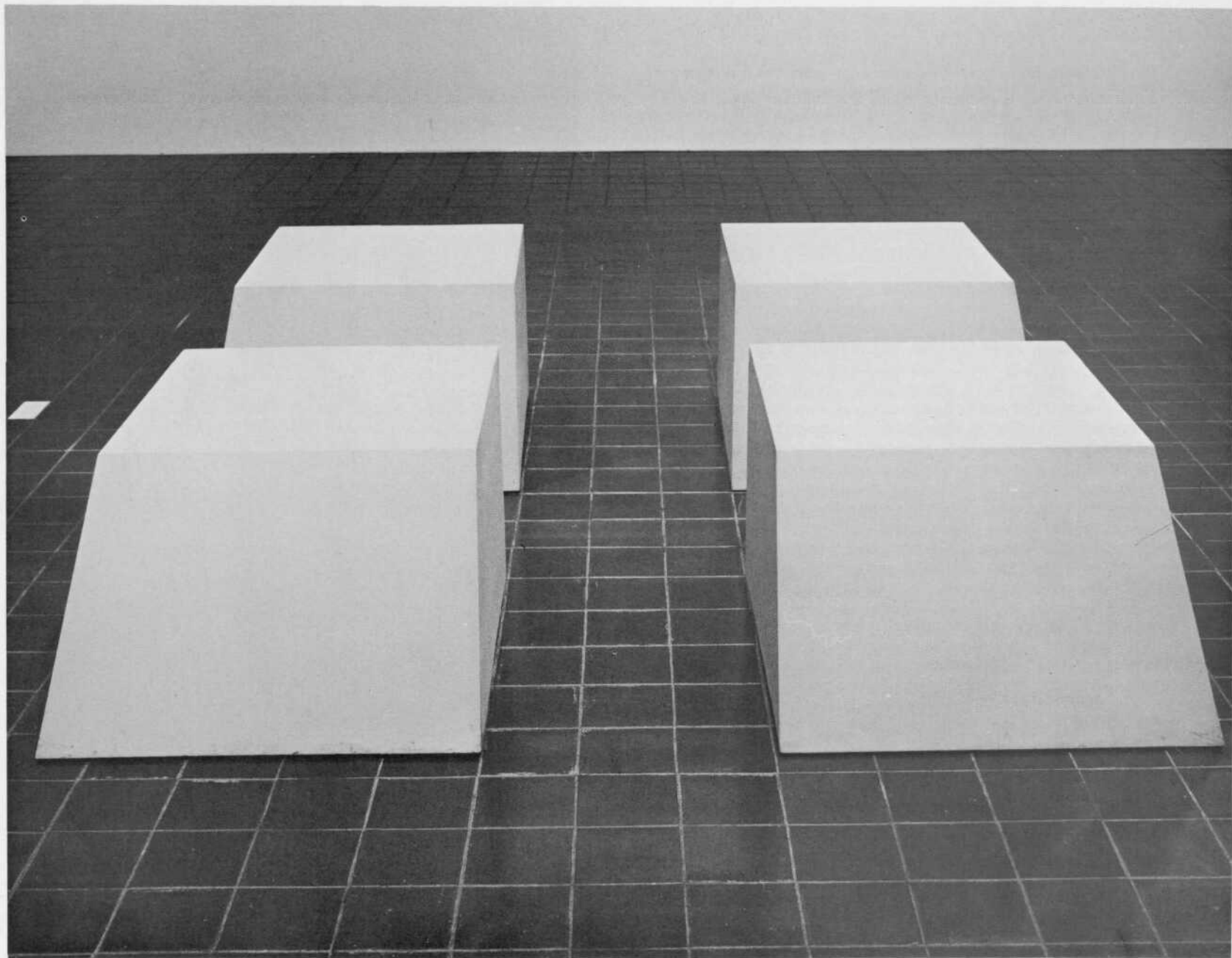
Although the meaning of art lay in the spectator's reaction, this did not necessarily mean that the art object was less important but, as Morris noted in this Notes on Sculpture, "less SELF-important." (6) In the viewer's total experience, the art object was only one term among many others such as the surrounding space, the light source, the viewer's field of vision and his physical movement in time and space. This led many artists to treat sculpture as a situation or place. Andre's *Lever* which originally consisted of 139 firebricks (7) was originally designed for a specific area. He deliberately chose a room with two entrances so that, from one entrance, the spectator had a view of an uninterrupted row, and a view down the row from the other. Similarly with Judd's *Cantilevered Stack* (Plate 1), the dimensions of each unit and their distance apart are based on the height of the wall against which it was to be hung. In this way the proportions are derived from the nature of the surrounding space and one serves to bring attention to the other. Undoubtedly the most spectacular example is the work created by Robert Irwin which consisted of blocking off the entire end wall of the first gallery with a silk curtain stretched at a 45 degree



1

angle to the wall.

The active realisation that sculpture is not basically concerned with formal relationships but with the varieties of experience which surround the perception of form was probably helped by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on Phenomenology (8). Ponty regarded seeing as an existential act and was the first to bring into prominence the fact that the spectator has to reconstruct the artwork for himself according to his own perception, which includes not just the art object but the space in which it stands and the presence of all other environmental factors. (9)



Morris in his *Notes on Sculpture* suggests that this emphasis on situation can only be produced by works which avoid what he calls "intimacy". Prime examples are the formal factors of hierarchical part to part distinctions, colour and small scale. These serve to break up the sculpture into clearly separated parts thus focussing the viewer's attention on the work and not on its relation to its space. Forms which do not separate into their parts are 'the simpler forms which create strong gestalt sensations', (10) what Morris calls Unitary forms. When we see one of the simpler regular polyhedrons like a cube, it is not necessary to view each side or list every one of its facets for a sense of the whole or gestalt. In other words any form which has a strong gestalt directs emphasis upon the form in its relationship to the space it occupies. Morris' work from his second series of grey polyhedra (Plate 2) has a very strong gestalt in the sense that from no matter which angle we view it, we have a firm sense of the whole. Each element is identical, and their position equidistant, thus avoiding hierarchical distinctions of shape and placing within the sculpture. The gap instead of weakening the whole, becomes an active ingredient and enables the spectator to enter the work and experience it as a three-dimensional situation.

In terms of scale, if it were smaller, the spectator could not walk through it and it would lose its function as a situation. If it were higher than the average viewer, he would lose all sense of its gestalt and the work would consequently separate into its parts. The work is also plain and impersonal with all traces of the artist's hand removed. All kinds of "surface incident" (11) bringing about relationships within the work are avoided. The light grey colour of the work seems neutral and inactive, but intentionally so, because 'intense colour, being a specific element, detaches itself from the whole to become one more internal relationship.' (12)

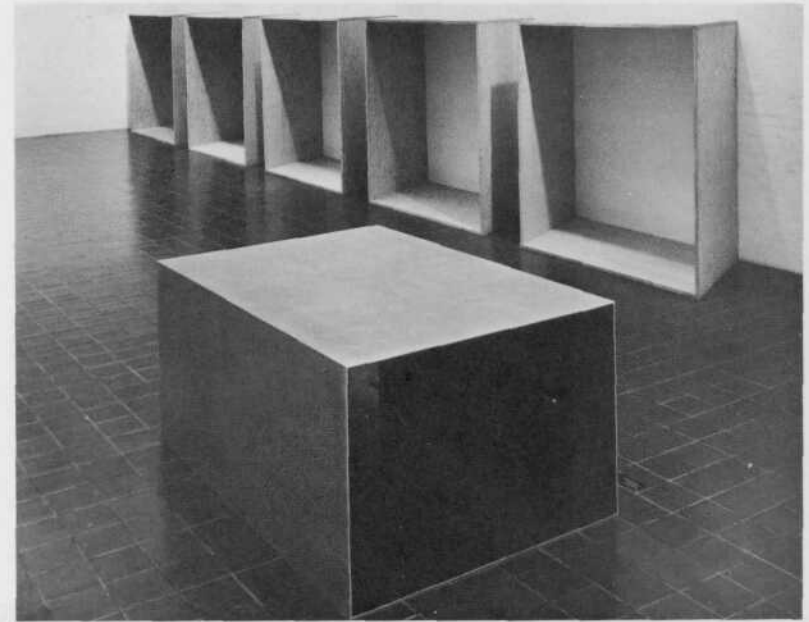
In order to avoid internal relationships Judd uses modules or identical units arranged in a symmetrical fashion. In his *Cantilevered Stacks* and *Row of Boxes* (Plates 1 & 3) what we see is not a list structure of a specific number of units, but a stack and a row; we see the whole. Similarly in Andre's 139 bricks we see not just the sum of the parts, which according to logical analysis would be the total reality, but the row. (13)

By 1965 Judd had begun to use arithmetical progressions as a way of having asymmetrical pieces that didn't involve composition. (Plate 4). Although this may at first seem contrary to his earlier theories, Judd thought that very simple progressions, because they were easily recognised by the spectator, tended to support the autonomy of the whole in the same way as his symmetrical works:

'You don't walk up to it and understand how it is working, but I think you do understand that there is a scheme there, and that it doesn't look as if it is just done part by part visually.' (14)

Since they avoid internal separation they do not fall into the typical European trap of composition about which he spoke so scathingly.

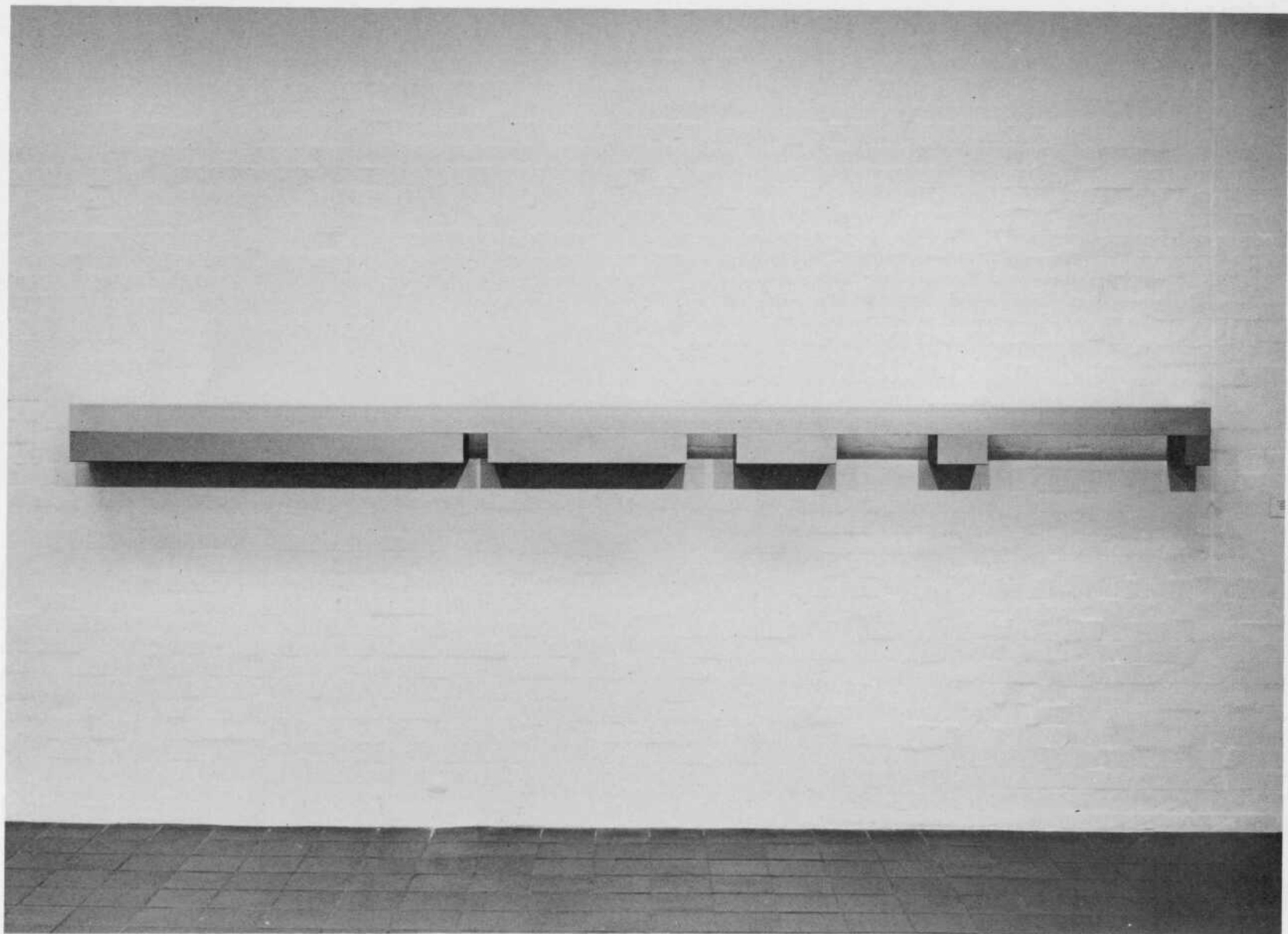
In like manner his use of perspex in the aluminium box (Plate 3)



3

does not necessarily compromise his earlier insistence on materials which avoid any form of illusion or allusion. The perspex interior serves to reflect the surrounding space and tie the work in with the rest of the room, which is, as we have seen, one of the cardinal principles of his art. He is still using materials literally; the reflective potential of perspex is after all one of its chief qualities. Although the perspex interior breaks down into a wealth of reflections, the aluminium casing is sufficient to provide a temporal gestalt against which the inside is measured. The spectator still has to face the object for what it is.

In the years after 1965 the use of systems as a way of arriving at a whole were widely used by a large number of artists. Sol LeWitt's *B258* (Plate 5) is one of three possible variations of a cube in a cube. (15) LeWitt has proffered a concept, uninfluenced by its eventual visual" form, which he follows up with every possible variation. "One must not be influenced by how art looks." (16). This emphasis on the conceptual decision is LeWitt's method of "eliminating design and relational factors in favour of wholeness". His system serves to stress the finished work as object, as existing phenomena, by reducing as many signs of the artist as he can and all occasions for 'intimacy'. Art objects and our experience of them are just as much objects in the world as anything else.

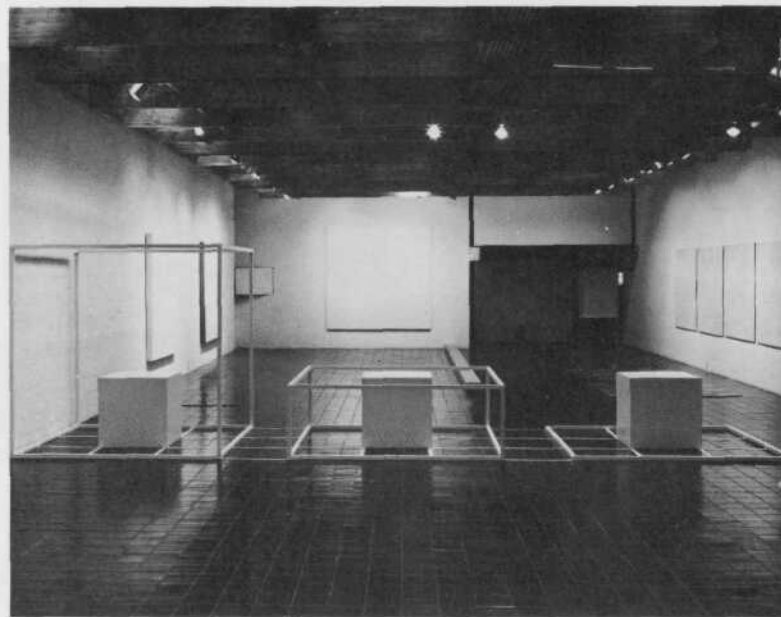




This last attitude was carried to an even greater definition by artists often known as Conceptual. As with Minimal art it is the experience which is the essential factor but Judd's insistence on being able 'to see what I've done' (17) does not hold true for the conceptual artist who proffers the concept itself as the proposition. Since experience is continually changing, an art that tries to duplicate it several times by offering a static art object, is not consistent with the conditions of human existence. For the artist the experience of making art is of far greater meaning than the end-product. The frustration Morris felt prior to 1961 at being unable to fuse the process with the end result led him eventually to make the means, the end. In a transitional work of 1965 (Plate 6) Morris began using felt, a material which hung in a configuration directly dependent on the way it was cut and supported. In the finished object we can quite readily see the means in the end result. Additional to this is the implication that since the material is not resistant to further formal changes, form is only a by-product of art and not a central issue. In Morris' polyhedra, form was important insofar as it could redirect attention from itself alone to the overall situation and ultimately to the viewer's experience in space. It is only in the years immediately after the Felt pieces that Morris' concern with experience takes on a more conceptual bias. His third work in the exhibition, called *Money*, rather than depicting something concrete, documents by letter a series of financial arrangements between himself and the Whitney Museum. The event, as it is revealed to the spectator, transcends the object, and the framed two-dimensional pattern of letters lends itself to the imaginative reconstruction in the spectator's mind.

The straight presentation of phenomena without comment is also seen in Baldessari's Video-tape entitled *Walking Forward - Running Past* of 1971. Apart from the choice of a very common event, it is a very slow and painful examination of how a film works. Each still is changed by hand and the slick editing of the professional ignored. It is an investigation not of representation but of how film acts and how it relates to other objects. This presentation of phenomena acts in the same way as Minimal sculpture's unitary forms: as propositions for experience.

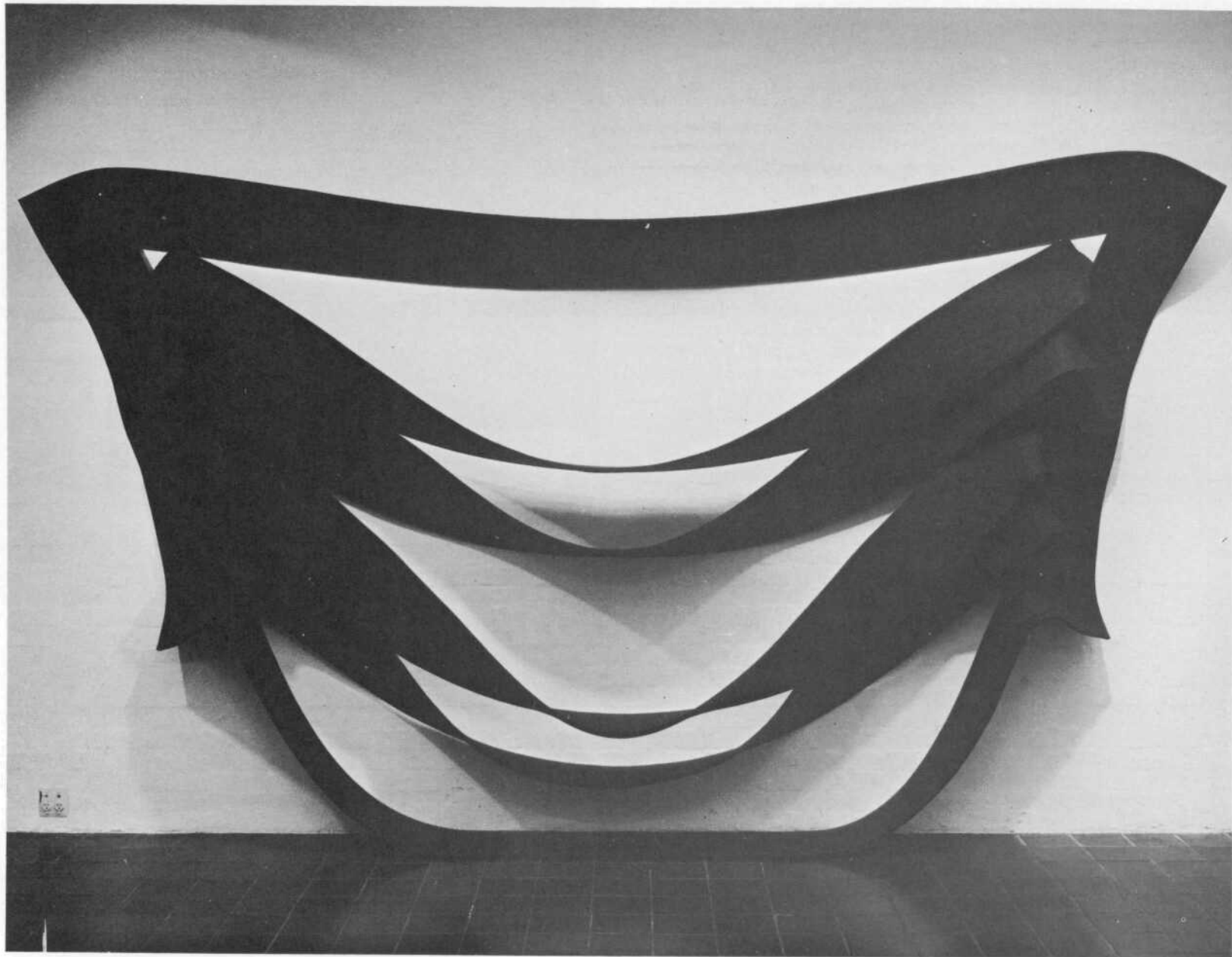
Conceptual art implies there is no distinction between aesthetic and real experience. In the use of pre-existing phenomena like elements of weather, gases and social conventions (as in Morris' *Money*), the artist implies that life supplies the raw materials and that the experience to be had is essentially the same as 'real' experience. The only difference is one of quantity: since the art experience is focussed in an art situation, it is more intense, but in quality not different from natural events. Education has led the spectator to expect a special experience out of art, different in quality to his experience of the world. With such expectations, he is bound to feel at a loss, confronted only by his own pre-conceptions.



5

## NOTES

1. Michael Fried, *Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings*. 1st published in Artforum, Vol. V, No. 3. (November 1966.)
2. Often referred to as One-Image art in literature on the subject.
3. It is an open case whether Stella was conscious of his "object" leanings. Stella's own remark, quoted by Fried that his deep stretchers 'makes the picture more like a painting and less like an object by stressing the surface,' suggests that the Object sculptors' interest in his work was a mis-interpretation. It is true that for a number of years Stella was able to maintain the semblance of object art by varying shape and deductive structure, but when he began to use artist's colour instead of commercial pigment with industrial overtones, he renounced all three-dimensional aspects for an aesthetic consistent with Greenberg's ideas on optical illusionism.
4. John's reconstitution of art as object and the importance of making the total image congruent with the physical limits of the work, made him as important as Stella for the development of Minimal art. His example was probably even more crucial, for Stella himself derived a great deal from Johns in his work of 1958. His importance for Robert Morris is summed up by Morris in his *Notes on Sculpture*, Part IV:  
'Jasper Johns established a new possibility for art ordering . . . the work was looked at rather than into and painting had not done this before.'



Notes continued from page 9

- Johns took painting further to a state of non-depiction than anyone else . . . (he) took the background out of painting and isolated the thing. The background became the wall. What was previously neutral became actual, while what was previously an image became a thing.'
5. Oldenburg, 1962. Quoted in E.H. Johnson, *Claes Oldenburg*, p.50.
  6. Robert Morris, *Notes on Sculpture*, Part 1-4. Artforum Feb 66, Oct 66, June 67, April 69.
  7. The original work exhibited in the Primary Structures exhibition was made in 1966 and consisted of 139 fire bricks. The reconstruction, exhibited in *Some Recent American Art*, was made in 1969 and consisted of 137 units.
  8. Especially *Sense and Nonsense*, 1948. translated by H.L. and P.A. Dreyfus, Evanston, Northwestern University Press 1964. And *Signs*, 1960, translated by R.C. McCleary, Evanston, 1964.
  9. As evidence that these artists were aware of the new ideas as they appeared in the writings of Merleau-Ponty, it is worthwhile quoting Donald Judd's reply to a question put by Bruce Glaser, printed in Battcock's *Minimal Art*, p.p. 150-151. In reply to a question about Judd's use of symmetry to avoid composition, he states his reason as being to avoid the "qualities of European art so far". These qualities he says are "linked up with . . . rationalistic philosophy". "European art" is based on systems built beforehand, *a priori* systems; they express a certain type of thinking and logic that is pretty much discredited now as a way of finding out what the world is like." The rationalist system he refers to is obviously logical analysis, which makes investigations into phenomena as autonomous entities. The alternative of which he is very aware is Phenomenology, which investigates phenomena in their complex relationship to their context.
  10. Notes on Sculpture, Part I. *ibid*.
  11. *ibid*.
  12. This kind of ordering appeared in Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland's stripes of colour of the sixties, but by acting as an armature for the presentation for pure colour values, they performed an entirely different function.
  13. Quoted in Coplans.y. *Donald Judd*.
  14. For a detailed description see L. Lippard, *Changing, Essays in Art Criticism*, p. 154 ff.
  15. *ibid*.
  16. Bruce Glaser, Questions to Stella and Judd, Battcock, *Minimal Art*, p. 148 ff.

Plates

- 1 **Don Judd**  
**Untitled.** (1968). Galvanized iron. 10 units, each 6 x 27 x 24" hung at 6" intervals, overall height 9'6".  
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
- 2 **Robert Morris**  
**Untitled.** (1966). Fiberglass, 4 pieces, each 24 x 36 x 36".  
Dwan Gallery, Inc., New York
- 3 **Don Judd**  
**Untitled.** (1969-71). Aluminium tube and blue plexiglass, 3 x 6 x 4", tube 1/4" thick.  
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
- 4 **Don Judd**  
**Untitled.** 1970. Anodized aluminium tube with chartreuse boxes, 8" x 13 1/2" x 4".  
Locksley-Shea Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 5 **Sol LeWitt**  
B258. 1966. Baked enamel on aluminium, overall 6'9" x 24'2 1/2" x 6'9".  
The museum of Modern Art, New York, Elizabeth Bliss Parkinson Fund, 1968.
- 6 **Robert Morris**  
**Untitled.** ca. 1970. Felt, 6 x 15', 1" thick.  
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

## MEDITATIONS ON THE EXHIBITION SOME RECENT AMERICAN ART

For those whose knowledge of art comes mostly from books, an encounter with the real thing can often be a shock. An exclusive club could be formed from all New Zealanders who have ever walked out dazed from the Musee de l'Orangerie because they entered prepared only with a picture post card knowledge of Monet's ponds. In New Zealand where an endemic fondling of art books to some extent short circuits our understanding, experience tends to be vicarious; and the movement which had come down to us tidily labelled "conceptual" or "minimal", had, until the advent of this exhibition, no greater reality for us than the photographs and prose of the latest art books allowed. It is to be hoped however, that by now, this country has sufficiently come of age one way and another to withstand the sort of trauma first visited upon it some twenty years ago by, of all people, Henry Moore.

Though most of the work in this show is ostensibly new, the situation which people find themselves in when confronted by it, is an old one. For the umpteenth time in history, the ontological slot normally reserved for what people think of as art, has been usurped by something which the established procedures of criticism cannot handle. If we accept, however, that the language of criticism should be able to cope with the widest range of phenomena, say from Egyptian pyramids to Chinese calligraphy, then the perennial problems of art do not deepen; they merely widen. But for those whose idea of a work of art is limited to the discreetly proportioned and finitely framed or pedestalled "set-piece", the problem is perhaps in part the personal one of not being able to activate at will the more reliable of one's emotional responses in the very place where one most expects to be able to do so — the art gallery. There are also discomfiting side effects to this show in that it reminds us that our affair with the arts may have been taking place in a house built on sand. To make the assertion which some have doubtless made in connection with these works, that there are things or events in the world which do not comply with the definition of art, presupposes that one can actually state that definition. But so far as is known, no one has ever been able to perform this feat satisfactorily. That art can be destroyed by the violation of a set of rules, is a myth widely believed in; but to counter it, one need only ponder a fact conveniently forgotten in this well legislated land, that the most adored of the local deities, the goddess Rugby, was herself conceived when an equally adored goddess named Soccer was imaginatively violated by a small boy on the playing fields

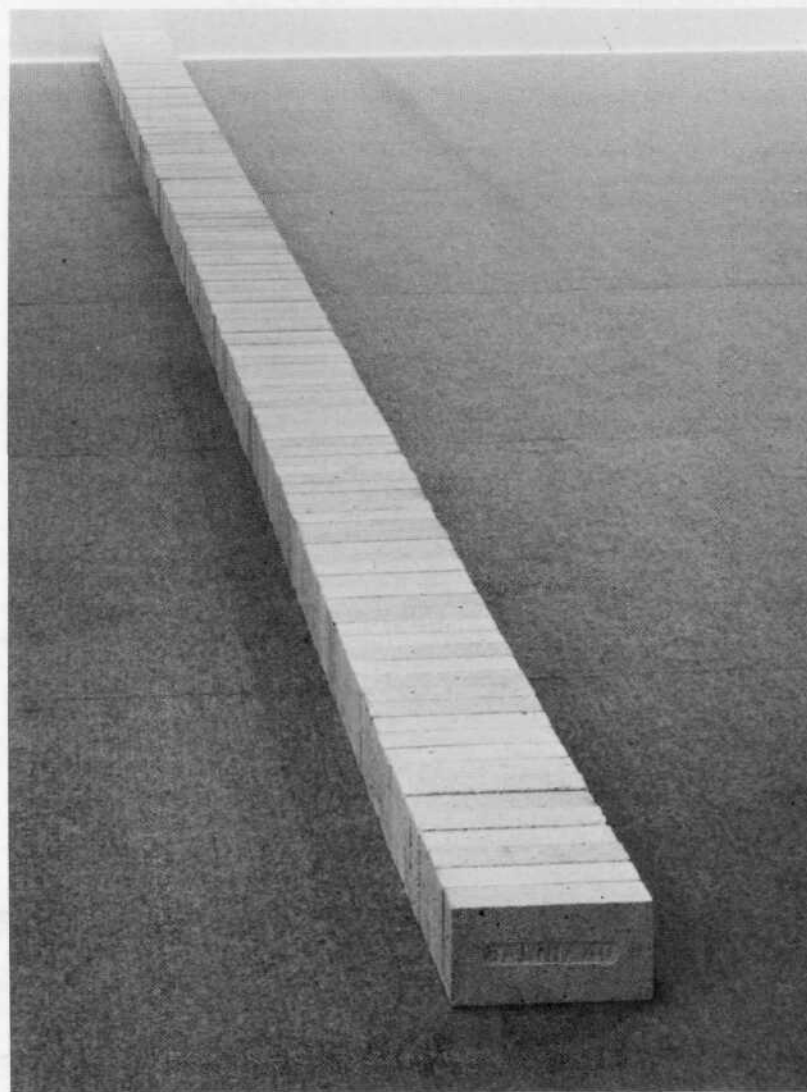
of an English public school. It is not unknown in this respect for a philosophy of love to maintain itself and spread by means of violence. But in truth there is little in this show which could not conceivably have been done during or just after the First World War. The Futurists come to mind with their works composed entirely of coloured gas, and of course the Dadaists who really had the last say on all these matters and who on occasions even had the wit and grace to provide axes, saws and other instruments of destruction for the convenience of a predictably irate public. It seemed to them as artists perhaps, only fair that those inveigled into walling themselves up in a house of rage, should at least be given a chance to escape or unwind, and in doing so, unwittingly contribute to the very spirit of Dada. But the artists of the present show are not of this mood. There is an all too familiar academic and painfully unspontaneous ritualistic dignity about most of the things they say and do, as if the public's reaction, and perhaps their own even had been calculated down to the last angstrom-wide drop of adrenalin. Moreover the fact that the works in this exhibition — some of them beautiful and exquisitely made — were crated up and sent here as if they were the crown jewels, when a technical adviser with a cheque book and a set of specifications in his pocket would have done, gives the lie to any claim on the part of artists that the art object is a thing of the past, or in any sense dead, dying, non-existent, unimportant, "dematerialized" or valueless. As William Rubin remarked recently in *Artforum* (Oct. '74): "One of the things I find surprising, if understandable, is how often artists who create things which really don't want a museum environment — indeed are alien to it — nevertheless want them exhibited at a museum". In the case of ephemeral happenings, earthworks and other site or time-bound things, the artists are pretty insistent that they and their work be immortalized on film. Rubin goes on to say that "a great many conceptual works are far more comfortable in an art magazine than in a museum", which would support the view that many artists are using the gallery merely as a photographic studio from which to launch their work in a thoroughly traditional pictorial manner on the international magazine network which with jungle-drum-like efficiency carries the message to every nook and cranny of a McLuhanized world. One wonders how long artists can go on wanting to have their cake and eat it too in this way, before realizing that their behaviour is a tragi-comic replay of the grand old 19th Century tune of bourgeois intransigence. But perhaps deep beneath all the conscious layers of interesting chat, the contemporary artist has this dark primaevial urge to make it into the magazines in much the same way that those great turtles make it up their beaches to lay their eggs and die. But in the face of the conceptual/minimal artists' avowed aim to do away not only with the art object but also with the distinction between art and non-art, it is paradoxically, this very intransigence — some would call it hypocrisy — which fortunately will ensure the continuance and survival of art as the ontological separatist movement that it has always been; sufficiently removed from "ordinary", "real" or

"natural" things like life and death to provide a metaphysical leverage point for our existential understanding. Mechanics does not have the monopoly of this simple law.

For some Carl Andre's *Lever* lies well within the long sixty year old shadow cast by Duchamp who in the end outdid everybody for all time by "doing" nothing for the latter part of his life. It was a famous and courageously honest "nothing" filled with consummate chess. But *Lever* could also be seen in the light of a very ancient and as yet unnamed tradition composed of paradigmatic or seminal works, ideas and actions which have strained the meaning of "meaning" to the limit. But if the subject of a work of art is to be the phenomenon of art itself, then the question arises whether the result could ever be art in the usual sense any more than the air under the bird's wing could be called a bird. Better to call it meta-art than to go on indulging in this linguistic slight of hand. Science, philosophy and logic have been swallowing their own metaphysical tails for some time now, and historically it was only a matter of time before art would do the same.

When foreign visitors to Japan are told that areas of raked white sand, best viewed by moonlight were laid down centuries ago by great artists, their responses are somewhat similar to those of visitors to the present show. Fine grain critical techniques in the hands of skilled operators emotionally uninvolved in either phenomena can detect and reasonably demonstrate differences between conceptual/minimal art and the sand gardens, but to the passionate eye and perhaps to the time-shrunk view which the reversed telescope of future art history will get of things, the differences will be as "minimal" as the art forms under comparison. The urban noble savage and casualty of our time, the economic pragmatist, no longer has or feels the need of the transcendental resources of mind which would have enabled him to withstand these perceptual crises and see that widely divergent phenomena such as the Sistine Ceiling and Carl Andre's *Lever* are essentially two species of the same genus. But the pragmatist for whom simplicity is just another form of poverty and therefore failure, is bent on quick and easy returns on whatever it is he imagines he has invested in by entering a gallery, and would prefer a quantitatively clever Carl Andre, physically present and juggling gold plated bricks at a sufficient rate to trigger the human clapping reflex, to one merely laying them out qualitatively on the floor before the show and for no *apparent* reason. How, he asks, could one possibly know about the moon by looking at a lot of sand in the middle of the day.

With meaning variously shifting its weight from the art object to the act causing it and from there to the cognitive and metaphysical beliefs or preconceptions of both the artist and non-artist, it is hardly surprising that the art object has, in the meantime, withered to a terminal condition as minimal as a surveyor's peg, a meaningless object in itself, but which can, if one knows the rules, be used for defining enormous areas. And the pain got from stubbing one's foot against it in long grass, merely serves to define one's ignorance of the fact that one stands on surveyed ground. Under conditions of ultra-peace



**Carl Andre**  
*Lever*. 1966(reconstruction 1969). Firebrick,  
137 units, each 4½ x 8% x 2½", overall length 29'.  
The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Emperor Shih Hwang-ti could have defined his empire with a packet of pins, but obviously a wall was more in keeping with the times.

Much of the work in this show which gets its meaning symbiotically from the parasitic relationship it enjoys with the indispensable "ready-made" gallery setting, is a continuation of the genre of objects in a state of situational shock pioneered by the Surrealists and Dadaists. And the corollary of this is that the time honoured collections of painting and sculpture in adjoining rooms of the gallery are in on the act, and are being knocked slightly out of alignment with our most fond imagined absolutes. Like any primitive man with two sticks. Carl Andre's aim was fire when he brought *Lever* into contact with gallery milieu, and he probably knew that the tinder of public and critical opinion was dry enough again after sixty years to start something big.

With the gap increasing between the simplicity of the art object and the complexity of the rationale, it is understandable that artists feel the need to shore up their work with words almost as if the words were as much a part of the work as the buttresses were to the strength and unity of a gothic nave. But what is disturbing is that in many cases the recorded conversations, diary extracts, credos and all the other marginalia we have come to expect in our catalogues, scarcely get above the sort of obfuscating clichés one associates with the intellectual third world of the hired hall guru. A notable exception was Mel Bochner; those who heard him speak were charmed by his erudite and articulate rambling, even though at times it did remind one of a Bauhaus textbook gone soft over the years.

With group exhibitions gaining the unity of aesthetic meaning which their individual exhibits have lost, the writing might be on the wall for the return of an age of anonymous collective art, and perhaps a decline in the cult of individualism. In terms of the 7,000 year long globe wide episode which for want of a better word we now call "art", the conceptual/minimal movement is no more than a spoon of plankton to the whale; but in the narrower here-and-now sense it could be seen as a precursor in cognitive terms of the sort of moral show-down the urban West will have to face if it is to continue, let alone survive. It is child's play to "dematerialize" the art object or art itself, while the more obvious targets, money, status and the ego, to say nothing of the universal empty stomach remain as intact as they ever were. Let us hope that the artists and their coterie critics and apologists are not too naively specialist or career minded to be aware of the enormous implications of what they are doing.

In a culture like New Zealand's where the understanding of art is seen practically as an inalienable right of its citizenry, and obscurity in the matter as a virtual breakdown of democracy, people tend on the whole to make things easy for themselves by embracing only the more obviously picturesque of visual stimuli. Similarly the scholars who have finally realized that there is very little to be said about art that does not apply equally to other things, have taken to the relatively safe zones of iconography, sociology, biography, the psychology of perception, the

evolution of form and style, and even in some cases, psycho-analysis. But conceptual/minimal art has no iconography, form or any of the more usual categorical knobs on which to hang learned discourse. Least of all is it picturesque. There is only the object or distillation of a thing whose advent seemed logically and historically inevitable ever since the philosophers had shown that it was possible to strip art of all those accidental qualities, which were once though essential, and still have something left. Some may find this embarrassing; but this idea is basic to certain forms of ancient drama, which as Coomaraswamy said, "can move the heart when not only representation but song, dance, mimic and rapid action are all eliminated, emotion as it were springing out of quiescence". But for those accustomed to cuddling an entire Cheshire Cat, it is hard to make do with just the reality of its smile.

It must be strange for people travelling out from the States with this show to see the ideas of the Sixties passing themselves off here in New Zealand as the very latest thing, but perhaps it would have been no less strange for a cultured European septuagenarian visiting the States some ten years ago and seeing there, what to him would be a rehash of things he thrived on as a youth. But even more strange and perhaps a little eerie is that in a wastefully affluent consumer orientated age of planned obsolescence in most things including art, people, artists and critics alike, seem as willing to see a living and infinitely possible idea, safely immured in the vaults of art history, as they are to junk a slightly tarnished but otherwise mechanically sound Pontiac. Like any threatened species reverting to a migratory pattern to avoid extinction in its own increasingly predator ridden or polluted habitat, the avant garde can always thumb ride out of it all on these travelling shows or in the pages of glossy magazines to the intellectually quieter places like New Zealand perhaps, where people are less inclined to think of art as just another marketable product or gartered leg in the Follies line-up; here today and gone tomorrow. Ten years in the States is a very much shorter time span than it is here in New Zealand where the general inflationary process has not shrunk the value of life as ferociously as it has money.

The artist's ego will always get in the way of any well meant intention to dissolve the art/non-art differential, just as its always one's own fat head that prevents one from glimpsing infinity between two opposed parallel mirrors. Art is not likely to disappear for the conceptual artist, any more that the world did for the members of all those other Apocalyptic movements that have peppered history with their various brands of negation. If art does vanish down into the crevices of life, it will do so in spite of the artists and for reasons external to art.

T. GARRITY

## NOTE ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

### Lucy R. Lippard

Lucy R. Lippard, who has been a free-lance art critic since 1965, was born in 1937. She received her B.A. from Smith College and her M.A. from New York University. In 1968 Miss Lippard was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to prepare her forthcoming book called *Ad Reinhardt: Art as Art*. She is also the author of *The Graphic Work of Philip Evergood* (1966) *Pop Art* (1966), *Tony Smith* (1970, being published in Germany), and the editor of two companion volumes, *Surrealists on Art* (1970) and *Dadas on Art* (1970). Miss Lippard's critical essays have appeared regularly in the leading art journals as well as *The Hudson Review*, and from 1965 to 1967 she was a contributing editor to *Art International*. She has organized numerous exhibition catalogues, including *557,0871955,00013,549,000* in Seattle, Vancouver, and Buenos Aires. She teaches at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

### Alan Wright

Alan Wright has been a lecturer in modern art in the Art History Department at the University of Auckland since 1971. He is also a practising abstract painter.

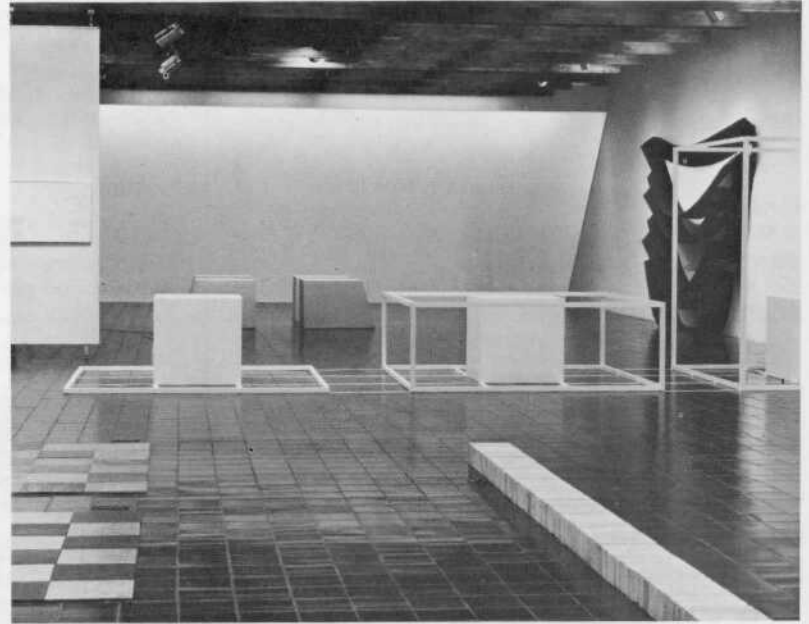
### Tim Garrity

Apart from high schooling in England, four years in Japan and two years in Italy, he has spent his life in New Zealand. Graduated in philosophy and psychology, Canterbury University (N.Z.) Now librarian at the Auckland City Art Gallery.

### Cover Illustration (Detail)

Joseph Kosutk

Titled (Art as Idea as Idea). 1967  
Photostat, 48 x 48"  
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.



A GENERAL VIEW OF PART OF THE EXHIBITION (WEST GALLERY)

Rear: *Robert Irwin*. Untitled. (1974) stretched translucent cloth. Made specifically for the Auckland City Art Gallery, New Zealand.

Extreme left, middleground: *Robert Morris*. Money, (1969-73). Typewritten letters with inscriptions in ball-point pen and felt-tipped pen on paper and photocopies. 23"x68" (framed) Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

Extreme right: *Robert Morris*. Untitled. (ca. 1970) Felt 6'x15'x1". Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

Rear Middle ground: *Robert Morris*. Untitled. (1966) Fiberglass, 4 pieces each 24"x36"x36" Dwan Gallery, Inc., New York.

Centre: *Sol LeWitt*. B258. (1966). Baked enamel on aluminium. 6'9"x24'2/4"x6'9" Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Right foreground: *Carl Andre*. Lever. (1966 reconstruction 1969). Firebrick, 137 units, each 4!1/2"x8% x2/2", overall length 29'. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Left Foreground: *Carl Andre*. Pb/Mg Plane and Cu/Fe Plane. Both 1969. Both 36 metal units each %"x1'xr, overall 6'x6'. John Weber Gallery, New York.

LOCATION: The new entrance to the Gallery is off Kitchener Street via the Sculpture Garden and the Edmiston Wing.

TELEPHONE: 74-650. POSTAL ADDRESS: Auckland City Council Private Bag.

GALLERY HOURS: Monday to Thursday 10 am to 4.30 pm, Friday 10 am to 8.30 pm, Saturdays and Sundays 1 pm to 5.30 pm.

GIFTS AND BEQUESTS: Gifts to the Art Gallery in the form of *cash from income* upwards to \$100 are allowable for purposes of income tax deductions. Gifts in the form of paintings, or other property do not qualify for such deductions. Gifts to the Art Gallery of money or property would not attract gift duty, and the value of such gifts made during the donor's lifetime would not form part of his dutiable estate. An exception to this is where an intending donor declares a gift to the Art Gallery, but reserves to himself, during his life, an interest in the property so that the full beneficial interest does not attract duty, but the property remains part of the donor's estate and qualifies for purposes of estate duty.

AUCKLAND GALLERY ASSOCIATES: The aims of the Associates are to stimulate and sustain public interest in the Art Gallery; to extend the Gallery's influence throughout the community; and to acquire funds through gifts, subscriptions and bequests, for the purpose of adding to the Art Gallery's collection of paintings, drawings and sculpture. Any member of the public is eligible for membership. Members are invited to previews of exhibitions arranged by the Art Gallery, to lectures, discussions, film evenings, and social functions arranged by the Associates. Regular newsletters are sent out, and Members also receive the Art Gallery's *Quarterly*. Further information can be obtained from the Honorary Secretary, C/o Auckland City Art Gallery. The *Quarterly* is published by the Auckland City Art Gallery and is concerned with presenting information about works of art acquired by the Gallery. Subscriptions: \$2.00 a year; single copies 50 cents; free to members of the Auckland Gallery Associates. Printed by Wakefield Press Limited, 34 Wakefield Street, Auckland 1.

#### CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE

His Worship the Mayor Sir Dove-Myer Robinson, JP  
Dr R.H.L. Ferguson, *Chairman*  
Councillors  
L. E. Adams  
J. P. Anderton  
G. D. Barnaby  
A. C. Coulam  
H.D.B. Dansey, MBE  
Rev W.S. Dawson  
K. S. Dobson  
F. G. Hill  
Mrs S. M. Horton  
C. M. Kay, JP  
Mrs C. A. Tizard  
Mrs E. D. P. Walker

#### CO-OPTED MEMBERS

John Stacpoole

#### ART GALLERY SUB-COMMITTEE

Geoffrey Rix-Trott  
Mrs C.A. Tizard  
John Stacpoole  
Prof Beadle

#### STAFF

Earnest W. Smith, *Director*  
Eric Young, BA (Liv. England) *Curator of Paintings & Sculpture/Registrar*  
Anne Kirker, DIP FA (Auck) *Curator of Prints and Drawings*  
Dr Walter Auburn, *Honorary Consultant (Prints)*  
Robin Ashton, FIIC *Head Conservator*  
Eileen Maitland, AIIC *Conservator, National Conservation*  
Ian Bergquist, DIP FA (Auck), *Trainee Conservator*  
Michael P. Shepherd, *Trainee Conservator*  
Tim Garrity, BA DIP NZLA, *Librarian and Editor of the Quarterly*  
Dorothy J. Wherry, *Secretary of the Art Gallery*  
Ross Ritchie, *Exhibitions and Graphic Designer*  
John Parry, *Exhibitions Technician*  
Paul Jackson, *Exhibitions Assistant*  
John S. Daley, MNZIMBI, *Scientific Photographer*  
Brenda Gamble, *Programmes Secretary*  
Jackie Adolpho, *Shorthand Typist*  
Alison Greenhalgh, *Typist/Clerk*  
Laurie Teixeira, *Foreman Attendant*  
Douglas Mitchell, *Senior Attendant*  
Andrew Milliken, *Attendant*  
Paul Riffond, *Attendant*.