

When you begin your reading for this week on page 44 the first thing that gets discussed is how the term ‘Minimalism’ was (*not unlike others in art like Cubism, Impressionism, etc.*) created by a critic– not the artists. However, it was a designation based on characteristics the critics saw in the work.



You will also read the author discussing the historic referents for the movement: in particular Duchamp.

Barbara Rose, Clement Greenburg and Bruce Glaser were all famous art critics of the time. The reason our author makes reference to things they said is because these critics were driving the art market and trying to frame the things they saw artists doing in a way viewers could understand.

Notice some of the similarities between this painting by Rothko and the minimalist sculpture on page 44 by Richard Smith.



Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

We have reviewed some of the ideas filtering into the artwork of the 1960s and 70s. Pop art took its lead from Dada.



Pop continued into the 1970s but it was the ideas of pop and one direction of the New York School that motivated our next exploration—Minimalism.

The New York School yielded two directions in painting-- Abstract Expressionism and Color Field Painting.



Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist)



Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

It's helpful when studying art to remember that any time we look at a new style or movement, we can also see how it relates to, builds on or rejects, art that came before.

With Minimalism the connections to Duchamp are clear and even to the color field paintings of Rothko.

Their work and ideas were a direct rejection of works like Pollock both for the idea that the artist's emotions mattered and for the elitism they thought this work represented.



Jackson Pollock, Number 1 (Lavender Mist)



Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

Minimalism

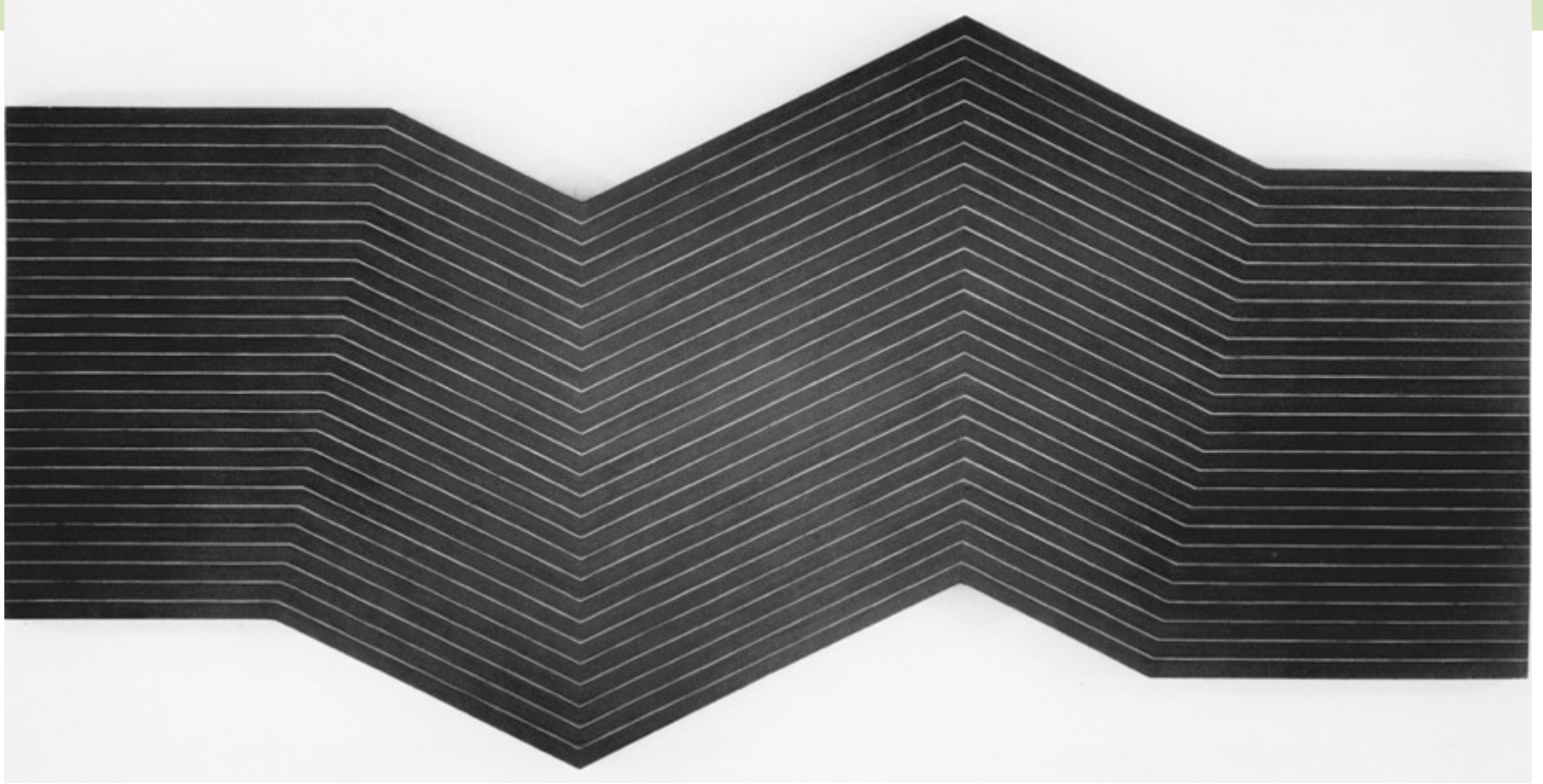
Is defined as a style or technique (in music, literature, or art) that is characterized by extreme spareness and simplicity. It is an abstract art consisting primarily of simple geometric forms executed in an impersonal style.

You can imagine how this style may have departed from the work & ideas of Rothko as it mixes together the integration of art and life.

The other artist mentioned in our book that influenced both Rothko and Minimalism was the Russian Kasimir Malevich. His piece, *Black Square* from 1913 focuses attention on simple geometric shapes. Malevich was an artist associated with the Communist Revolution and wanted to make artwork that anyone could understand.

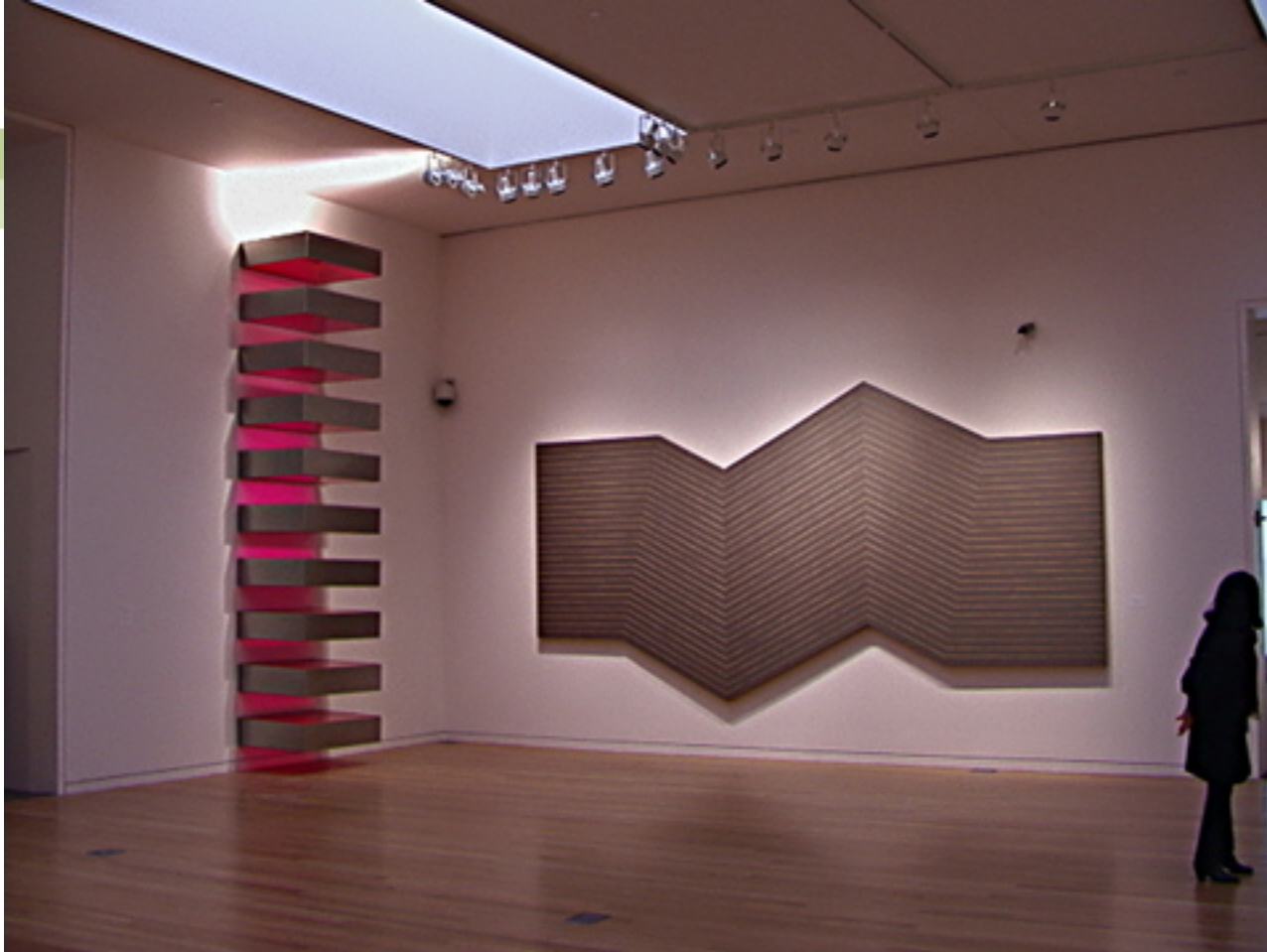


The 1960s: Minimalism



This is a painting, where the subject and painterly touch were eliminated to exclude anything unnecessary. Frank Stella claimed he was not making a painting of something--- but rather the paintings itself was something. The painting is an object. He created large, geometric paintings that had irregular shapes.

FRANK STELLA, *Nunca Pasa Nada*, 1964. Metallic powder in polymer emulsion on canvas, 9' 2" x 18' 4 1/2". Collection of Lannan Foundation.



It's often difficult when looking at artwork in slides or a book to really understand what the work looks like. This Minimalist piece by Frank Stella is canvas stretched over a shaped form. each line is created by laying the wood of the stretcher down and tracing it. Stella would say that this is a painting/sculpture--- it's an object. And it doesn't refer to anything other than itself.

It's not a painting of something (like a tree or a bottle or a person) but simply an object that references painting.

Within Minimalism we find:

Artists who gravitated toward regular, geometric forms or modular sequences with untreated surfaces.

In painting, subject matter was eliminated as well as painterly touch to exclude anything unnecessary.

Artists not interested in expression or sensitivity but in the necessities of painting.

Sculpture was not on a pedestal but directly on floor to stress continuity with real space.

Artists united in the attempt to **treat works of art as objects instead of vehicles for abstract ideas or emotions...**





Artists were not interested in expression or sensitivity but in the necessities of painting. In this case, the large scale minimalist painting by Barnett Newman uses the primary colors, red, yellow and blue with simple geometric shapes. The large field of red reflects off the white of the room and engulfs the viewer in a field of red. But other than color and shape, there is no subject.



The artists were united in the attempt to **treat works of art as objects instead of vehicles for abstract ideas or emotions**. This is a slide that shows the scale of the painting as it is being installed.



I've included this image so you can get an idea of the scale of these paintings. When you think about a viewer walking up to the work and standing in front of it you can imagine the painting takes up the entire peripheral vision. The viewer has the impression of being engulfed by the red.

And as you can see the painting reflecting off the floor, it may even cast a glow on the body of the viewer as well.

Whose Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III, Barnett Newman

Minimalist anti-elitist intention



Donald Judd
15 untitled works in concrete
1980-1984, detail
Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

- By the time we see Minimalism emerging in art, the modernist vision, which had originated in a dream of liberating art, as well as society, from the tyranny of old hierarchies, had itself become elitist, even even academic.
- **Minimalism sought to liberate art from elitism by using simple forms, industrial materials and engaging with viewers in real space.**

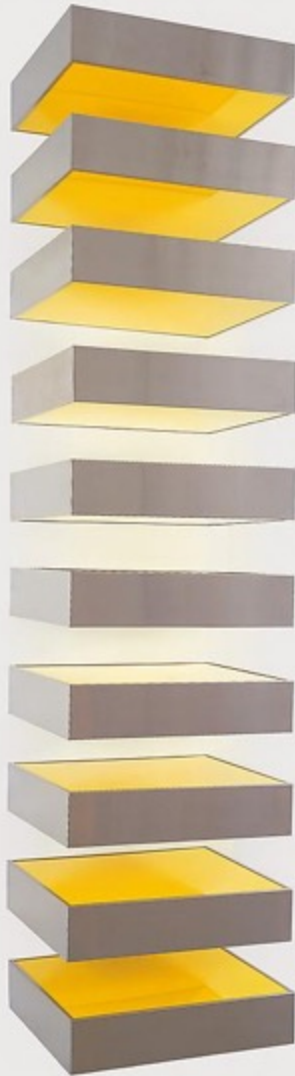
Rejection of Modernism

It became apparent to many that the worldview fostered through Modernism (and by the Western humanist tradition) was flawed, corrupt, and oppressive.

Events since World War Two (like the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War and Feminism), and the perception of those events, gave rise to the notion that Modernism has played itself out and is now floundering.

Minimalism rose in this context. While maintaining an anti-traditional, non-representational form, it also rejected the elitism that was fostered in Modernism.

Minimalist use of industrial materials



Minimalism, a predominantly sculptural movement emphasized the *objecthood* of the art object.

Donald Judd was one who embraced industrial materials and multiple units.

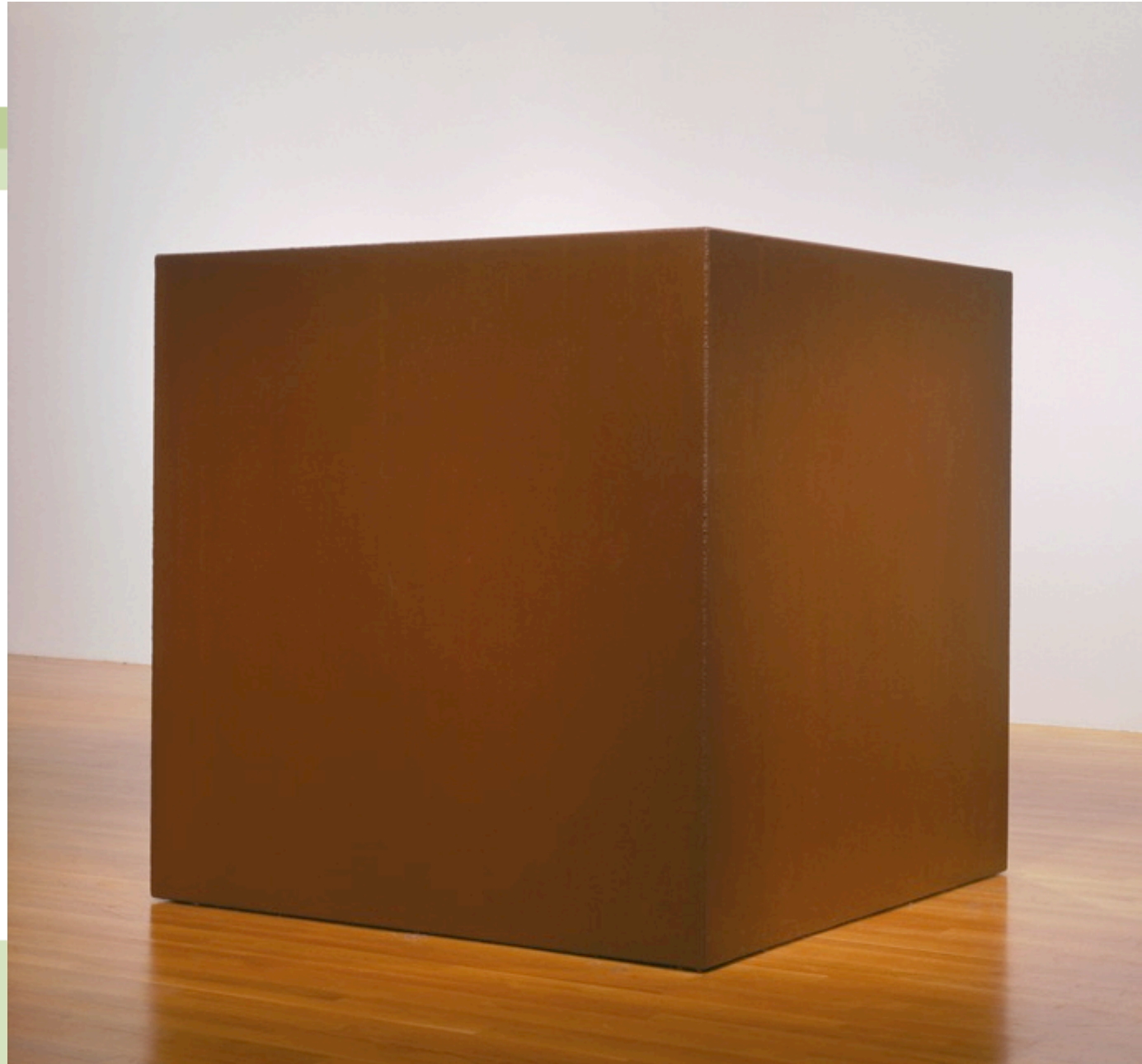
This piece uses steel and colored fluorescent plexiglass.

<http://bcove.me/fz6id1kc>

DONALD JUDD, *Untitled*, 1969. Stainless steel and colored fluorescent plexiglass on steel brackets, ten units, 6 1/8" x 2' x 2' 3" each, with 60 intervals.

The interest in the object led to a new emphasis on the physical space in which the artwork resided.

In part, this development was inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's writings on phenomenology, in particular, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945).



TONY SMITH, *Die*, 1962. Steel, 6' x 6' x 6'. Museum of Modern Art, New York (gift of Jane Smith in honor of Agnes Gund).

While Minimalist Artists were interested in:

- Paring down form
- Art not about anything other than the piece (it doesn't reference anything)
- Use of industrial materials

Imagine what it would feel like to experience this piece in a gallery (or on a roof like I am here).
It is 6 foot x 6 foot x 6 foot.

The piece is rusted. Taller than most of us. Extremely stabile as a square. It may even muffle the sound.

To experience the piece viewers walk around it.
No passive viewing here.



Me with TONY SMITH, *Die*, 1962. Steel, 6' x 6' x 6'. Whitney Museum.

Merleau-Ponty's central thesis is what he later called the "**primacy of perception.**"

He believed humans first -- perceive the world,---then we do philosophy (the thinking part). First we perceive—then we think.

This is a critique of the Cartesian notion “I think, therefore I am”, and Descartes dualism of mind and body.

What is characteristic of his account of perception is the centrality that the body plays.

We perceive the world through our bodies; we are embodied subjects, involved in existence.

So this artwork is designed to be experience by the human body in a space.



TONY SMITH, *Cigarette*, 1961. Steel,

It is a rejection of pictorial illusion (pictures of things in the real world) and trust in real space.

Most minimalism was 3-dimensional since real space is in 3-dimensions.



Donald Judd at Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1970
Photo by Richard Einzig, Brechten-Einzig Ltd.
Judd Art © Judd Foundation Licensed by VAGA,
New York, NY Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery Archive

Notice Judd's piece hanging on the wall in back. It's one of his Untitled plexiglass and metal sculptures seen earlier.



Richard Serra

It's impossible to get an idea of the work of Serra without actually experiencing them.

Richard Serra, *matter of time*.
Rusted steel.



American sculptor Richard Serra's works are BIG—his most recognizable works are monumental steel sculptures. He has made great blocks, spheres and stacks of rust-colored metal sculptures, and has shaped large plates into curves, planes and other forms that are tied to—and define—the (often outdoor) space they occupy.

<http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/richard-serra--october-26-2013>



Minimalism's sense of 'theatricality' stimulated much subsequent work in the fields of installation and performance art, where it helped facilitate engagements with the spectator's perception of space and time.

Serra's large scale pieces are designed to be experienced. Viewers walk into and around the pieces. Because they are so massive, with angled walls of rusted steel all space and sound is felt.

The pieces change the space and with the most minimal of shape and material provide a phenomenal, physical experience.





Serra also created works made by splashing melted iron against a wall.

He was interested in how the metal takes its form from the space that exists and discourages any kind of metaphorical reading. The burning and violent action suggests danger and vulnerability.

It was an experience that could not be moved without destroying it.

Richard Serra, *Splashing*—1968—originated with a list of verbs associated with sculpture leading to this performance where he threw molten lead against the wall in Leo Castelli Warehouse.

Metal is: Physical, active, liquid, solid, fluid, hot, malleable, etc.

It helped him think about the material, Steel, in a new way.



Robert Morris was also an important Minimalist.

His piece, *Box with the Sound of it's Own Making*, is an unadorned wooden cube, accompanied by a recording of the sounds produced during its construction.

Morris set forth a vision of art pared down to simple geometric shapes stripped of metaphorical associations, and focused on the artwork's interaction with the viewer.

However, in contrast to fellow Minimalists he explored new notions of chance, temporality, and ephemerality.

Ideas reminiscent of Dada.

Box with the Sound of it's Own Making, 1961, Wood,
3 ½ hours of sound.



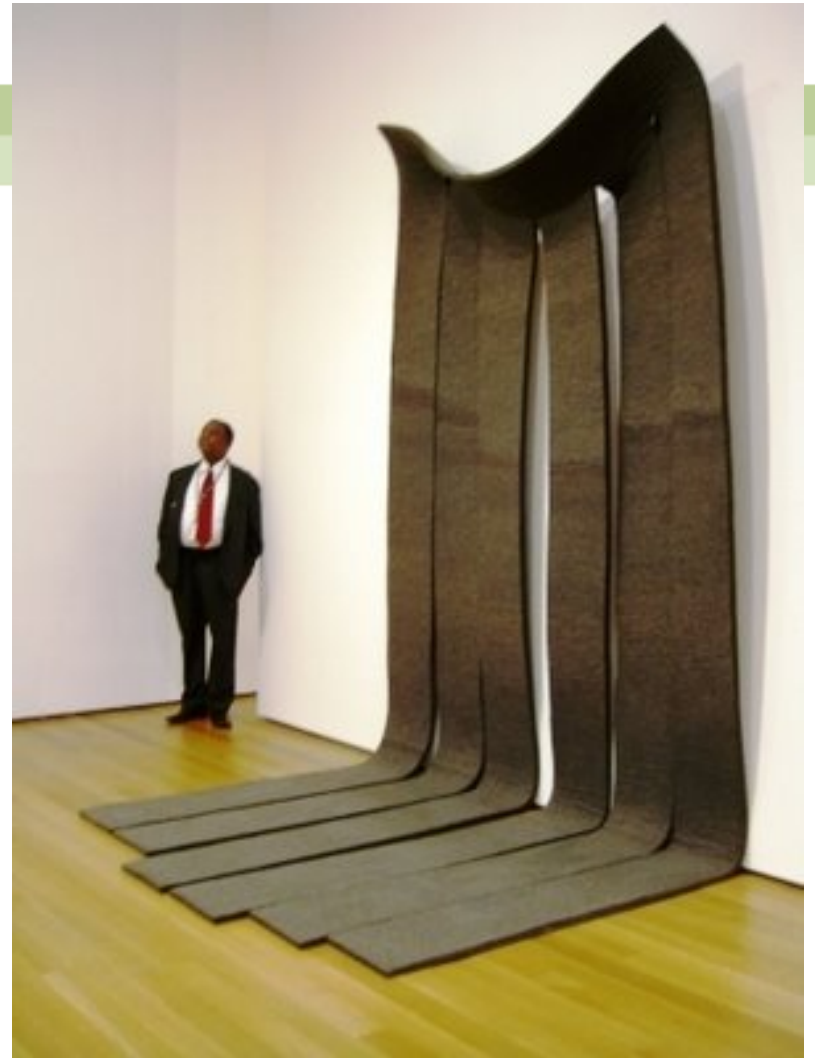
Morris typically arranged these into ‘situations’ where ‘one is aware of one’s own body at the same time that one is aware of the piece’. This work demonstrates the principle. As the viewer walks around the four cubes, their mirrored surfaces produce complex and shifting interactions between gallery and spectator.

The cubes were originally installed in the garden at Tate Museum in London.

Robert Morris,
Untitled, 1965



<http://www.pacegallery.com/newyork/exhibitions/12613/on-the-floor>



Beginning in the late 1960s, Morris, who had previously made geometric plywood and steel forms, began to use more malleable media, such as felt, inviting the material's properties and chance operations—in this case, gravity—to play a role. **He called this Process Art.**



Carl Andre, *Firebricks 120 units*, 1966-69

There were many artists involved in Minimalism in various ways.

Carl Andre created objects in real space, on the floor, to be walked on or around.

He used pre made, standard units of prefabricated elements (sheets of metal, bricks) arranged in numerically determined structures.

This may hopefully remind you of Marcel Duchamp. The artist did not make the materials. He simply used them.

Andre said his intention was to sensitize his spectators to gravity. A phenomenal experience.



Andre believed the properties of materials--lead, copper, aluminum--could be transmitted through the audiences feet. At the same time, the individual industrially made parts could be reconfigured to fit any space.

Aluminum- Copper Alloy Square, 1969, Carl Andre



The most practical manifestation of Minimalist ideas can be seen in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D. C. conceived and constructed in the 1980s.

The Memorial was designed as a place to for people to grieve.

The memorial is made of highly reflective black granite.

The thin slabs are sunken into the earth and inscribed with more than 58 thousand names of men and women who died or were lost in action in the course of the Vietnam War.

Lin envisioned the construction of the monument quite literally as a cut into the earth, a metaphorical wound in the nation's landscape, with the potentiality to heal through the monument's resurrection.



Marked with the years 1959 and 1973 at its farthest points left and right respectively, the monument escalates to the center, with the walls reaching over ten feet at the apex.

Maya Lin imagined the names themselves would be the only concrete reality. The reflective surface opens a world the living can never enter but could conceptually experience.

Can you identify the Minimal elements of the memorial?



This is one of MAYA LIN's drawings indicating her idea for the memorial.



Maya Lin won an open call for ideas. But it was a very controversial memorial. See more: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuxjTxxQUTs>

Negative reactions to the Lin's design created controversy in two areas.

1. Was a reaction to the memorial itself. Many felt it was not heroic enough. It was so different than previous memorials that present figurative sculptures inspiring pride and heroism. **These people felt the selected design was too unconventional, its black color and its lack of ornamentation led some public officials to voice their displeasure, calling the wall "a black gash of shame."** To deal with this controversy, an additional sculpture was added to the site. Entitled, The Three Soldiers, by Frederick Hart, the piece is more traditionally inspired.

2. Many reacted negatively to Lin's ethnicity, Asian. **The Vietnam War was one of the longest and most controversial wars in United States history. A stated goal of the memorial fund was to avoid commentary on the war itself, serving solely as a memorial to those who served. Lin focused her design to that end.**



MAYA YING LIN, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D.C., 1981–1983. Black granite, each wing 246' long.

Minimalist anti-commodity intention



Warhol's multiple images of soup cans or Marilyn Monroe reflected grocery store shelves and consumer culture emerging globally. This is a photo of TVs in an electronics store.

'It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly. '

Bertrand Russell

- Pop art arose in a time during U. S. history when consumer culture was exploding.
- Many of the artists were bringing attention to this reality with irony, humor or parody.
- By the time we reach the 1960s many artists (and theorists) were trying to find ways to push back against the emphasis on buying and selling more and more things, an important dynamic of capitalism.
- Even though the minimalist works were bought and sold, they reflect the beginnings of this anti-commodity idea we will see developing even more next class.

Next class we look at the 70s & Environmental Art, Land Art, Site Specific Art and Conceptual art

We see artists working outside the gallery and making artwork that can't be bought or sold--Anti commodity art.

It evolves from Minimalist ideas as well as important things happening in popular culture.



A photo documenting the work of Richard Long who made artwork on long walks in nature.