

## Lecture Notes

### Syllabus 4/11/05 – I. FORMALIST ABSTRACTION AND II. MINIMALISM

#### I. FORMALIST ABSTRACTION : also called (POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION or GREENBERGIAN ABSTRACTION)

About Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting":

Constructs a history of Modernism according to the argument he tries to make. Says what the entire history of modern painting was doing was engaging the question of pictorial space, working away from a tactile space (illusionistic space that you feel you could walk thru & your body could inhabit) toward optical space (flat space that can only be traveled through with the eye)

The Qualities Of Greenberg's Late Formalist Modernism Are:

- **THE SELF-REFERENTIAL (AKA SELF-CRITICAL OR HERMETIC) ASPECT:**
  - **ABSTRACT PAINTING ("pure painting") THAT'S TOTALLY ABOUT ITSELF**
    - Painting must turn inward and be about painting, sculpture about sculpture.
    - Must be SELF-referential and purge references to anything that has to do with other media or literature.
    - Purging "literature" from painting means purging all the referential content (like figures, history, mythology, religion etc.) that refers a painting to anything outside itself
    - Then what's left is what ONLY painting can provide or what ONLY sculpture can provide.
    - **Important because:** Then it won't be threatened by other media because no other art form or reproduction can give you the same thing
  
- **OPTICAL SPACE**
  - **A NEW KIND OF FLAT PICTORIAL SPACE** – not one you could walk thru illusionistically as in classical Renaissance works with windows having perspective that look like you could step through them, but a space that can ONLY be traveled through with the eye.
  - modernism created "optical space" – (if 1 person were responsible for Post Modernism it could be Greenberg because his criticism was so influential that Post Modernism was partly a reaction to his criticism)
    - He uses Matisse's Red Studio as an example of optical space. You have a flat space but intuitively you know it represents depth & he leads us thru it optically.

Post-painterly color field abstractionists are a close "2<sup>nd</sup> generation" after color field abstract expressionists from the last test.



- **01\_ Interior Landscape – 1964 – Helen Frankenthaler**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**
  - Frankenthaler saw Pollack’s unprimed canvas stained from the paint
  - She was well aware of Greenberg’s theories and excitement about paint actually becoming part of the canvas through staining
  - She wanted to explore this further with new product: ACRYLICS
  - More interested in the color field than the gesture, so she poured paint (rather than Pollack’s drips and splashes and dribbles) and moved canvas around to conduct the flow and staining of paint into the canvas
  - Greenberg thought it was fabulous

**Greenberg introduced these next two painters to Frankenthaler**



- **02\_ Kaf – 1959-60 – Morris Louis**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**
- **THE WASHINGTON COLOR SCHOOL**
  - Kaf inspired by Frankenthaler and built on her method
  - He constructed frames with stretched canvas and knobs that controlled tilt of canvas
  - Poured paint. Paint flowed on the surface in response to tilt



- **03\_ Warm Sound in a Grey Field – 1961 – Kenneth Noland**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**
- **THE WASHINGTON COLOR SCHOOL**
  - Did same as Louis. They did many series exploring color and fields of color
  - Greenberg called painters such as Frankenthaler, Morris and Louis **“post painterly color field abstractionists”**:
    - PAINTERLY = mark of the brush, the heroic gesture of Pollack and deKooning
    - POST-PAINTERLY = removing one more step in the process of abstraction: removing the heroic artist content



- **04\_High A Yellow –1967 – Jules Olitsky**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction”)**
  - Field of color created by spraying tiny little dots of yellow pigment in layer upon layer
  - Results: unified field of yellow creating some kind of depth
  - Experimenting with how to apply the paint so the field of color produces as certain effect.
  - Perfect example of optical space. Olitsky puts strokes at the top to destroy the illusion of depth



- **05\_ Orange and Green – 1966 – Ellsworth Kelly**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction”)**
  - **HARD EDGE PAINTING** – shapes of color easily defined
  - Kelly the leader of hard edge painting. Color fields with hard edges.
  - Used primary and secondary colors for a long time



- **06\_Mandorla – 1988 – Ellsworth Kelly**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction”)**
  - **HARD EDGE PAINTING**



- **07\_Die Fahne Hoch– 1959 – Frank Stella**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**

➤ **HARD EDGE PAINTING**

- Means “the high flag”
  - Reference to Jasper Johns flag
  - Saw Johns and read Greenberg and studied art; decided to take all these ideas and took idea the rect. Shape echoed the support. Elim the colors and made stripes so that if you cut it down the middle and separate into 4 parts you get 4 concentric rectangles.
  - This painting perfectly criticizes itself (a la Greenberg theory) because it is totally about itself: it echoes the shape of the support and eliminates all other distractions.



- **08\_Jasper's Dilemma– 1962-3 – Frank Stella**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**

➤ **HARD EDGE PAINTING**

- Referring to the same things Johns did with his flag, including the series with the afterimages in complimentary colors



- **09\_AgbatanA III – 1968 –Frank Stella**
- **FORMALIST ABSTRACTION / POST-PAINTERLY COLOR FIELD ABSTRACTION (Greenbergian Abstraction?)**

- Edge of canvas is curved
- From Protractor Series
- This is called the “**shaped image**” critically important to the birth of **Minimalism**. Rather than paint an image to echo the support, he’s made a support to conform to the image
  - Suddenly the painting is now a physical object and spectator is aware of its “objectness” or “thingness” which is not a quality of painting
  - Now resembling sculpture
  - Greenberg had a hard time with this

## **II. MINIMALISM**

- **Donald Judd in article “Specific Objects” says Minimalism “exists somewhere between painting and sculpture”**
  - Called every work he made “Untitled” because he didn’t want title making specific reference to anything other than itself. Tony Smith, on the contrary, fashioned his works after actual objects (Cigarette. Die etc.)
- **Minimalism is a reaction to/departure from/ in opposition to Greenberg’s Modernism**
- **Michael Fried— art historian/critic, professor at Johns Hopkins championing Formalist Modernism the same time as Greenberg (Remember: Formalist Modernism is Greenbergian Abstraction and is concerned with matters pertaining to form (formal elements, composition, style etc.)**
  - **Fried Wrote “Art and Objecthood” – a scathing critique of Minimalism**
  - **In the progress of Modernism everything had been moving toward the goal of “pure art.” Abstraction seen as following this goal by eliminating the things that don’t belong**
  - **Fried saw a danger in “specific objects” (Minimalism). This would undermine Greenbergian theories/valid art because Stella’s paintings were taking on a shape and acting like sculpture and Judd’s stuff was sculpture acting like painting.**
  - **Claimed specific objects (minimalism) act more like theater than art because they intrude upon spectator’s space**



- **10\_Die – 1962 – Tony Smith**
- **MINIMALISM “Primary Structure”**
  - Die as in singular form of dice
  - An object planted in the spectator’s space



- **11\_Cigarette – 1961-66 – Tony Smith**
- **MINIMALISM “Primary Structure”**
  - Sculpture made to affect viewer in his own space.
  - Core ten steel
  - “Primary Structure” – a large scale object with no big meaning other than its shape and the shape’s effect on viewer in the space



- **12A,B\_Untitled – 1965 – Donald Judd**

- **MINIMALISM, “Specific Objects”**

- Aluminum boxes were mass produced commercially
- He coated them with various lacquers or pigment and placed them in a certain order on the wall
- Investigating seriality and that’s it
- Judd a leading minimalist –
  - wrote “Specific Objects” to explain this new art that had Greenberg and Fried so upset: **between painting and sculpture.”**
  - undermining Greenberg’s rigid theories while continuing to pursue abstraction & objectivity
  - DIDN’T CALL IT MINIMALISM since the word connotes a lack of something when these artists felt the works had a lot to offer. He called it **‘The New Three Dimensional Work’ or ‘Specific Objects’**. Specific because they engage something very specific, in this case, **seriality**.



- **13\_Exhibition:Green Gallery – 1964 – Robert Morris**

- **MINIMALISM, “Primary Structure”**

- Began as minimalist sculptor
- Developed an interest in installations / art that affects the space it’s in
- Selection of basic, neutral fabricated pieces to be experienced as objects and how they intrude on the viewer’s space
- Could be thought of as an outgrowth of Constructivism – El Lissitzky’s



Proun Room (see 2/09 CuboFuturism...Slide#5) has taken on 3 dimensional form and intrudes into the room



- **14\_Sculpture in Series A – 1967 – Sol Lewitt**
- **MINIMALISM “Primary Structure”**
  - Lewitt – Minimalist AND Conceptual artist – wrote “Paragraphs and Sentences on Conceptual Art”
    - **“The idea is the machine that makes the art”**: it’s the idea by the artist that’s important. The execution of it by someone else is secondary.
    - Out of Minimalism we are touching on Conceptual Art (he may not have been there when it was created but it was his idea)
  - Lewitt drew out specific instructions for this piece and gallery built it
  - Made on 2-D grid with 3-D structures growing out of the grid
  - About The Grid: Clement Greenberg said, based on his reading of Cubism – “all of abstraction is based on the universal idea of the grid coming out of Cubism.” Often self-conscious use of the grid by artists of the 60s and 70s is a reference to Modernism Theory



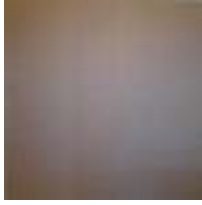
- **15\_Wall Drawing #652 – 1990 – Sol Lewitt**
- **MINIMALISM**
  - Again, specific instructions sent, often with instructions for a certain duration to be in existence – it’s about the machine
  - **The artist’s idea is what makes the work of art – the execution of it is secondary**



- **16\_37 Pieces of Work – 1969 – Carl Andre**
- **MINIMALISM**
  - **Working with the grid as well**
  - 36 metal pieces make up 36 squares plus itself as a whole = 37
  - **Between painting and sculpture: Flat like a painting but on the floor like a sculpture**
  - **It’s sculpture existing in your space – undermines Greenberg’s categorization of art by making something that engages space as well as flatness**



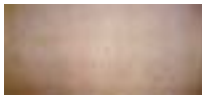
- **17\_36 Pieces of Work – 1969 – Carl Andre**
- **MINIMALISM**



- **18\_Night Sea – 1963 – Agnes Martin**

- **MINIMALISM**

- Minimalism also manifests itself in painting
- Referring to Greenberg's theories very much
- History of painting leading up to this:
  - You can see the modernist grid which refers all the way back to Cubism;
  - geometric abstraction of Mondrian and deStijl horizontals and verticals;
  - notion of primary structuring elements;
  - engages shape of the support by echoing the horiz and vert of the canvas
- No pretense of anything more than presenting something to be what it is
- Subtle, quiet, simple, evocative, very large, precise, flawless
- The simplest expressive means can still be very beautiful/pleasing



- **19\_The Dylan Painting – 1966 – Brice Marden**

- **MINIMALISM**

- Beeswax with particles of pigment suspended in it. That's it, that's all.
- You get a sense of the light capturing qualities of the medium
- Doesn't make heroic, personal brushmarks here. Simply creates effect with subtle color = minimalism.



- **20\_Cold Mountain 5 – 1989-91 – Brice Marden**

- **MINIMALISM**

- Minimalists fell out of favor after 70s, and then there was a return of interest in 90s.
- Influenced by calligraphy and expressive Japanese 19<sup>th</sup> cent painting
- Subj matter is simply line and layers of line on surface so they are formalist
- A stick painting – used lots of different materials



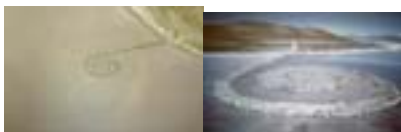
**21 A, B\_Contingent – 1969 – Eva Hesse**

- **MINIMALISM**
  - Not a true minimalist but
  - These works do function as “specific objects” (they intrude into viewer’s space)
  - Her art engages more than Minimalism:
    - engages issues of process and
    - characterized by some kind of metaphorical reference to some kind of human content
      - mother died of brain tumor, and so did she at a young age
      - these panels are poured latex & gauze reminiscent of bandages or even skin

### **III. EARTHWORKS**

- **clearly related to minimalism:**
  - **it exists in a space**
  - **often, they are primary structures in a space**
- **Opposed to anything Formalist Modernist**
- **Reasons Earthworks made:**
  - **To draw attention to it (very visible)**
  - **To call attention to ecological issues**
  - **To circumvent commodification of art in the gallery system. This art couldn’t be bought and sold in a gallery (however, money is required for upkeep).**

Earthworks are always “site specific” (they don’t move)



**22 A, B\_Spiral Jetty – 1969-70 – Robert**

- **Smithson**
- **EARTHWORK**
  - Smithson researched sites thoroughly – geographical and cultural history etc. Spiral Jetty reflects:
    - Indian mythology/legend: whirlpool at the bottom sucked salt into lake from the ocean
    - Microscopic organisms with spiral form that exist in this environment
    - His interested in physics, universe, Entropy (matter tends towards the condition of Entropy – matter will try to be dispersed). The spiral gives people the experience of winding in or out, from going from the center to the periphery

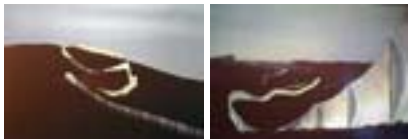


23 A, B, C\_Stone Enclosure,

• **Rock Rings – 1977-78 – Nancy Holt**

• **EARTHWORK**

- **She was a photographer married to Smithson**
- Stonehenge-like enclosure made of schist rock indigenous sedimentary to region
- 2 concentric circles with other holes that line up like camera lenses
- Different light cast as day progresses

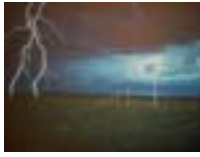


24 A,B\_Running Fence – 1972 – Christo and

• **Jean-Claude**

• **EARTHWORK**

- Early work involved wrapping things which evolved into work that branched out
- In Sonoma and Marin Counties
- 7 miles
- Took 5-7 years
- Elaborate preparations including legal/ecological/environmental studies.
  - Left breaks in fence so caribou could go through
  - Sea lion breeding ground at fence's end in the Pacific had to be considered
- Saves every scrap of ephemera from preparations. All of it and preparatory drawings sold and money goes to his Foundation to help fund the next project.
- Fence of parachute material roll along hills and countryside all the way to Pacific Ocean.
- **Purpose was to call attention to the hills in a way people hadn't seen them before.**
- **His pieces always position themselves on a site that makes people look at them and the site in a new way**
- Expands notion of what art is
- Comes out of Minimalism in some ways in that it is a Primary Structure in a space. But its meanings raise questions about art in the environment, art in everyday life, undermines commodification and yet exploits it to further the project. Very complex undertaking and yet eloquent and simple.



25 A, B, C\_Lightening Fields – 1977

- – Walter de Maria
- **EARTHWORK**
  - Really wanted to undermine the gallery, commodification system so he used natural materials and made works from earth that could not be bought or sold.
  - Testing idea of what art is.
    - Once filled a museum with rich aromatic dirt. Simply meant to be experienced/felt/smelled.
  - This work must be visited only if you spend 2 nights and one day and stay in the lodge because they want you to experience the whole spectacular thing unfolding, and viewed from safety of lodge.
  - Made a grid of 1,000 lightening rods in area prone to electrical storms
  - Set up to orchestrate this natural phenomenon



- 26\_A Simple Network of Underground Tunnels and Wells – 1975 – Alice Aycock
- **EARTHWORK / SITEWORK**
  - Created simple network of underground narrow tunnels
  - Participatory sculpture that challenges peoples' phobias



- 27\_ Afrum-photo – 1967 – James Turrell
- **EARTHWORK / CALIFORNIA LIGHT & SPACE ARTISTS**
  - Developed interest in light on surface of things – (grew up as surfers waxing surfboards and cars etc.)
  - Localized variation of minimalism
  - Used resins, plastics etc. capturing, reflecting, or incorporating light
  - This work has NO physical substance – it's done completely with halogen lights and mirrors



**28 A, B\_Guggenheim Installation – 1992 – Dan**

- **Flavin**
- **EARTHWORK**
  - NOT a California Light and Space Artist but they knew of each other's work
  - Neon tubing used in this installation
  - The work is about the physical tubing but also about the way it transforms space around it and casts and reflects light in the space



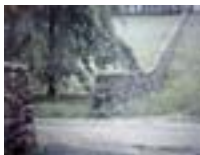
**29 A, B\_Roden Crater – 1987 – James Turrell**

- **EARTHWORK**
  - Most famous work
  - Built up/sculpted rim of extinct volcanic crater and built a way for visitors to go down inside.
  - Must be experienced over a period of time: looking at sky etc. passing by through opening.
    - Changes constantly.
    - After a period of time it begins to look like a flat cutout.



**30 \_Nine Spaces, Nine Trees – 1983 – Robert Irwin**

- **EARTHWORK**
  - In L.A. at “The Temporary”
  - Outdoor installation commissioned.
  - Irwin interested in challenging viewers perceptions of the changing environment around them



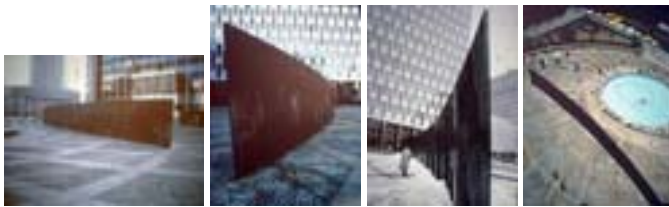
**31 A, B, C\_Storm King Wall**

- – 1997-98 – Andy Goldsworthy
- **EARTHWORK**
- **Chronologically he fits into “POSTMODERN” (1990s and after)**
  - At Storm King Art Center in NY.
  - Winds thru forest thru pond on other side
  - Inspired by New England stone walls
  - Multiple Meanings: Talks about travelling/journey/settler migration/partitioning & ownership

#### **IV. OTHER RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**



- **32\_One Ton Prop (House of Cards) – 1969 – Richard Serra**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
- **Not Minimalism because it has energizing, fearful aspect**
  - His stuff usually involves element of danger.
    - Did “Hurling Lead” with molten lava
  - House of Cards = huge cor-ten steel slabs are JUST BALANCED!



- **33 A, B, C, D \_Tilted**
- **Arc – 1981 – Richard Serra**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
  - 80s Carter administration – gov’t sponsored commissions for artists to do art for federally owned public spaces
  - Serra commissioned to create permanent, site-specific sculpture for Federal Plaza in NYC
  - Studied site and put up minimal sculpture
    - Big, heavy out of cor-ten steel that rusts naturally & quickly
    - Arc spanning counter to curves of fountain and pavement
    - wanted people to have to walk around it to experience it
  - People hated it.
    - it blocked their view and their path
    - thought it was an eyesore
  - Battle ensued in courts. Govt said they had right to remove & move it to new location. Sera said no, it was site specific. Finally, Serra lost and it was hauled away.



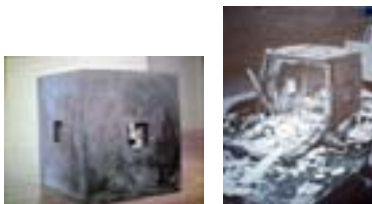
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- **34 A, B, C, D\_Vietnam Veterans' Memorial – 1981-3 – Maya Lin**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
  - Maya Lin was commissioned to do this as an architect student who won competition as her Sr. Thesis Project
  - Controversy:
    - Conservative politicians didn't like Asian American woman getting this commission for an American memorial
    - Others didn't like concept. Called "the great black gash of shame"
    - People didn't like it c/o it was anti heroic, speaking of shame rather than valor.
  - Point was : this was a Memorial not a Monument. It was a site of mourning and healing.
  - Names engraved of all killed chronologically
  - Polished granite – you can see your reflection



- **35 A, B \_Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Soldier Group – 1984 – Frederick Hart**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
  - Constructed in answer to controversy of Vietnam Veterans' Memorial
  - For the people who wanted more figurative, heroic monument. Figures looking toward Wall.



- **36 \_Bound Grid – 1971-2 – Jackie Winsor**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
  - Related to minimalism: Grid. Primary Structure.
  - Sticks bound with twine – hours of painstaking manual labor
  - It's about the process of human activity requiring patience, dedication



- **37 A, B \_Exploded Piece – 1980-81 – Jackie Winsor**
- **RELATED SCULPTURAL TENDENCIES**
  - Minimalist Primary Structure
  - Concrete cube with windows, with dynamite inside

- Explodes it, then reassembles it to add history of process and expanded context