





## 60-07 CONCEPTUAL ART AND MINIMALISM

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movements — Conceptual Art and Minimalism.

- They emerged in the 1960s, and represented twin assaults on the inherited conventions of Western art-making, each dismantling a different pillar of the tradition. Minimalism — associated with Donald Judd and Carl Andre — stripped sculpture and painting down to their barest geometric essentials, rejecting illusion, metaphor, and personal expression in favour of industrial materials, repetition, and an insistence on the literal presence of the object in real space.
- Where Minimalism still granted primacy to the physical artwork, Conceptual Art went a decisive step further: for artists such as Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth, the idea itself was the work, and its material realisation — if it existed at all — was merely incidental. Both movements shared a profound scepticism toward the art market's fetishisation of the unique, handcrafted object, and both were shaped by a broader cultural climate of anti-authoritarianism, the influence of Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy, and the social upheavals of the Vietnam War era.

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Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968),  
**Fountain**,  
1917,  
Porcelain urinal (readymade),  
36 × 48 × 61 cm,  
Original lost; replica at Tate  
Modern, London

**Marcel Duchamp** (1887–1968), **Fountain**, 1917, Porcelain urinal (readymade), 36 × 48 × 61 cm, Original lost; replica at Tate Modern, London

- Although I have talked about this work before it is essential to mention it as a precursor to Conceptual Art.
- In 1917, **Marcel Duchamp** submitted a mass-produced porcelain urinal to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York. He signed it '**R. Mutt**' and titled it **Fountain**. The Society's board, despite its promise to accept all entries for a fee, rejected it. The object was never displayed. Duchamp had posed a question that would detonate a century of art: does the artist's hand matter, or is the idea enough?
- The response was immediate and hostile. The board called it '**immoral**' and '**not art by any definition.**' Duchamp's ally **Beatrice Wood** wrote in **The Blind Man** magazine: '**Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it.**' That single sentence became the founding manifesto of Conceptual Art, though the term would not exist for another fifty years.
- Duchamp was already infamous for his **Nude Descending a Staircase** (1912), which had scandalised the Armory Show. By 1917 he was living in New York, playing chess obsessively, and growing bored with what he called '**retinal art**' — painting made only to please the eye. He wanted art that served the mind. The urinal was manufactured by the **J.L. Mott Iron Works** company — 'R. Mutt' was a pun on the firm's name and the comic strip character **Mutt and Jeff**.
- The original **Fountain** disappeared, probably thrown away. **Alfred Stieglitz** photographed it before it vanished — that photograph is the only record.

Duchamp authorised replicas in the 1960s, and in 2004 a poll of 500 art professionals voted **Fountain** the most influential artwork of the twentieth century, beating **Picasso's Guernica**.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Duchamp — doo-SHOMP

Stieglitz — STEEG-litz

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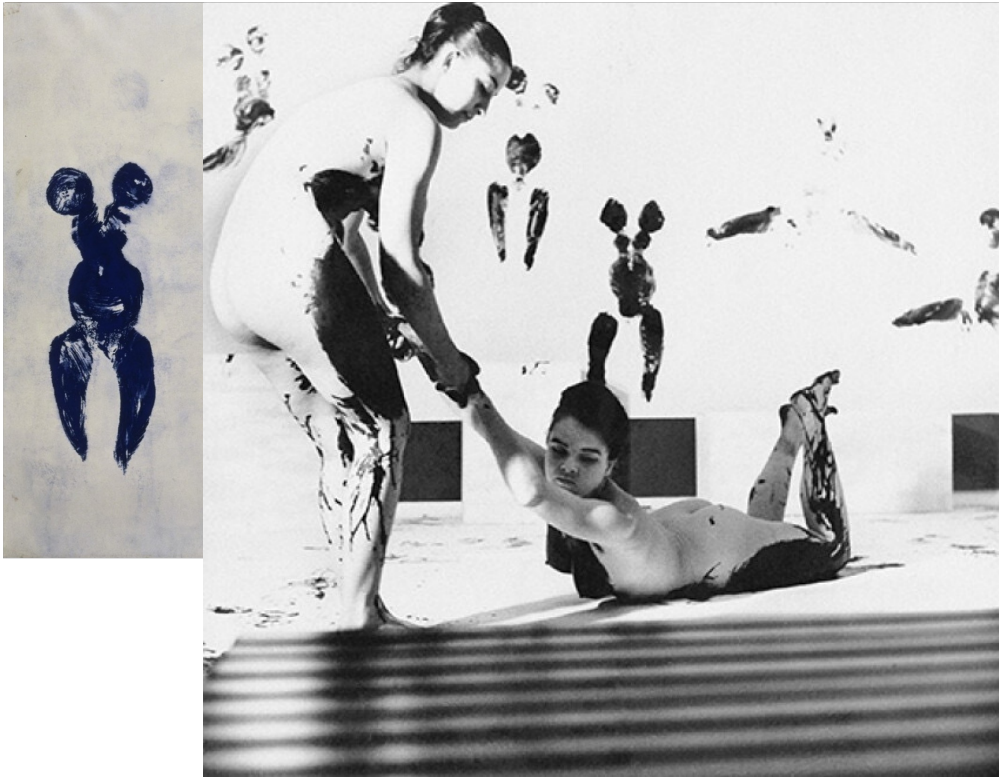
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Yves Klein (1928–1962),  
**Anthropometry of the Blue Period (ANT 82)**,  
 1960,  
 Dry blue pigment in synthetic resin on paper, mounted on canvas,  
 156.5 × 282.5 cm,  
 Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris



**Yves Klein** (1928–1962), **Anthropometry of the Blue Period (ANT 82)**, 1960, Dry blue pigment in synthetic resin on paper, mounted on canvas, 156.5 × 282.5 cm, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

- On 9 March 1960, at the **Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain** in Paris, **Yves Klein** directed three nude female models to cover themselves in his signature ultramarine pigment — **International Klein Blue (IKB)** — and press their bodies against sheets of paper pinned to the walls and floor. A string ensemble played Klein's **Monotone-Silence Symphony**: a single sustained chord for twenty minutes, followed by twenty minutes of silence. An audience in evening dress watched. Klein never touched the canvas. He called the models **'living paintbrushes.'**
- The critic **Pierre Restany** declared it **'a baptism into a new world of colour and sensation.'** Others were appalled. The art historian **Thomas McEvilley** later noted the uncomfortable power dynamic: a suited male artist directing naked women. But Klein's intent was radical — he wanted to separate the artist's gesture from the artist's body entirely, making the creative act purely conceptual and directorial.
- Klein was a **judo black belt** who had trained in Japan, a Rosicrucian mystic, and arguably the first performance artist. He had already exhibited **The Void** (1958) — an entirely empty gallery painted white. He patented IKB in 1960, making a colour itself a work of art. He was obsessed with immateriality: he sold **Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility** — empty space — for gold leaf, then threw the gold into the Seine.
- Klein died of a heart attack aged just 34, only two years after the

Anthropometry performances. His dealer **Iris Clert** said he had '**burned himself out like a comet.**' Despite his short career, he anticipated performance art, body art, monochrome painting, and conceptual practice. His legacy is enormous — from **Marina Abramović** to **Anish Kapoor**, artists continue to grapple with his ideas about the immaterial.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Klein — KLINE (rhymes with 'mine')

Anthropométrie — on-tro-po-may-TREE

Restany — res-tah-NEE

Rosicrucian — roh-zih-KROO-shun

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Piero Manzoni (1933–1963),  
**Merda d'artista (Artist's  
 Shit)**,  
 1961,  
 Tin can, printed paper, and contents,  
 4.8 × 6.5 cm (each can),  
 Tate Modern, London (and other  
 collections worldwide)

**Piero Manzoni** (1933–1963), **Merda d'artista (Artist's Shit)**, 1961, Tin can, printed paper, and contents, 4.8 × 6.5 cm (each can), Tate Modern, London (and other collections worldwide)

- In May 1961, **Piero Manzoni** produced 90 small tin cans, each allegedly containing 30 grams of his own excrement. The label, printed in Italian, English, French, and German, read: '**Artist's Shit, Contents 30 gr net, Freshly preserved, Produced and tinned in May 1961.**' Each can was numbered, signed, and priced at its weight in gold — at the time, roughly \$37. It was a savage joke about the art market, authenticity, and the cult of the artist's body.
- The Italian critic **Germano Celant** later described the work as '**the most radical gesture in post-war European art.**' Whether the cans actually contain what the label claims remains debated — opening one would destroy the artwork. In 2007, can no. 83 was X-rayed at a museum but results were inconclusive. **Agostino Bonalumi**, Manzoni's friend, claimed the cans contained plaster. The ambiguity is the point: Manzoni forced buyers to accept the artist's word on faith, just as the market accepts an artist's valuation on faith.
- Manzoni was the son of a wealthy canned-meat manufacturer in Cremona — the irony of tinning his own bodily product was deliberate. At 27, he was part of Milan's avant-garde scene, deeply influenced by Klein's monochromes but determined to go further. He had already created **Achromes** — entirely white canvases — and signed living people as artworks, issuing them certificates of authenticity.
- Manzoni died of a heart attack in his studio at just 29, in February 1963. The cans have appreciated spectacularly: in 2016, can no. 69 sold at **Christie's Milan** for **€275,000** — vastly exceeding the gold-weight price. The art market

had proved Manzoni's thesis for him. As the artist **Bernard Bazile** demonstrated when he opened can no. 80 in 1989, revealing a smaller sealed can inside — Manzoni's joke had layers, possibly literal ones.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Manzoni — man-ZOH-nee

Merda d'artista — MAIR-da dar-TEE-sta

Celant — cheh-LAHNT

Bonalumi — bon-ah-LOO-mee

Achromes — AK-rohms

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Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945),  
**One and Three Chairs**,  
 1965,  
 Folding chair, photograph of a  
 chair, and enlarged dictionary  
 definition,  
 82 × 37.8 × 53 cm (chair),  
 Museum of Modern Art, New  
 York

**Joseph Kosuth** (b. 1945), **One and Three Chairs**, 1965, Folding chair, photograph of a chair, and enlarged dictionary definition, 82 × 37.8 × 53 cm (chair), Museum of Modern Art, New York

- At just twenty years old, **Joseph Kosuth** created the work that would become the textbook definition of Conceptual Art. **One and Three Chairs** presents a real folding chair, a full-scale photograph of that same chair, and a blown-up dictionary definition of the word 'chair.' Three versions of the same thing — the object, its representation, and its linguistic concept. Which one is the 'real' chair? Kosuth borrowed directly from **Plato's theory of Forms** and turned it into an art installation.
- The critic **Lucy Lippard** called Kosuth's proto-investigations '**the purest form of conceptual practice**' and included him in her landmark text **Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object** (1973). Kosuth himself wrote the influential essay '**Art After Philosophy**' (1969), arguing that '**the only claim for art that can be made is art's existence as an idea.**' For Kosuth, art was a proposition — like a sentence in logic — not a visual experience.
- Kosuth grew up in Toledo, Ohio, and was studying at the **School of Visual Arts** in New York when he made this piece. He was reading **Ludwig Wittgenstein** voraciously — the philosopher's investigations into language and meaning shaped everything. In the mid-1960s, New York was the centre of the art world, but Kosuth was deliberately rejecting both Pop Art's commercialism and Abstract Expressionism's emotion.
- The work's installation rules are part of its concept: each time it is shown, the hosting museum must use a local chair, photograph it on site, and print the definition from a local dictionary. So the physical components change with

every exhibition — only the idea remains constant. MoMA acquired it in 1966. Kosuth went on to create neon text works and massive public installations, but **One and Three Chairs** remains his defining statement — the moment art declared it could exist purely as thought.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Kosuth — koh-SOOTH

Wittgenstein — VIT-gen-shtyne

Lippard — LIP-ard

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Lawrence Weiner (1942–2021),  
***A 36" × 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall***,  
1968,  
Language (text-based work),  
Dimensions variable,  
Various collections

**Lawrence Weiner** (1942–2021), ***A 36" × 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall***, 1968, Language (text-based work), Dimensions variable, Various collections

- **Lawrence Weiner** decided that language itself could be sculpture. This work — a statement describing the removal of a square of wall material — does not need to be physically executed to exist as art. The text is the work. It can be spoken, printed, painted on a wall, or simply thought. Weiner codified this in his famous '**Declaration of Intent**' (1968): '1. The artist may construct the piece. 2. The piece may be fabricated. 3. The piece need not be built.' Each option, he said, was equal.
- The critic **Alexander Alberro** described Weiner's practice as '**the most radical reduction of art to its conceptual core.**' Weiner's dealer **Seth Siegel** was equally revolutionary — he organised exhibitions in catalogues rather than galleries, arguing that the printed page was a valid exhibition space. Weiner's texts appeared in Siegel's landmark **January 5–31, 1969** show, which is widely considered the first Conceptual Art exhibition.
- Weiner grew up in the **South Bronx** in a working-class family. He dropped out of high school, hitchhiked across America, and was briefly involved with the **Beat Generation**. Before turning to language, he made **Cratering Pieces** (1960) — explosions detonated in a field in Mill Valley, California. When a group of teenagers accidentally trampled one of his outdoor sculptures, he realised the physical form was irrelevant. The idea survived the destruction. That insight changed everything.
- Weiner became known for his distinctive typographic style — block capitals in the Franklin Gothic font, often painted directly onto gallery and museum walls

worldwide. He lived on a houseboat in Amsterdam for decades and was famously gruff, insisting he was '**not a poet**' but a sculptor. He once said: '**Art is not a metaphor for something. Art is a thing in itself.**' He produced over a thousand text-based works before his death in 2021, and his influence runs through **Jenny Holzer**, **Barbara Kruger**, and every artist who uses words as material.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Weiner — WY-ner

Siegelaub — SEE-gul-owb

Alberro — al-BAIR-oh

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On Kawara (1932–2014),

***I Got Up,***

1968–1979,

Rubber-stamped postcards,  
9 × 14 cm (each),

Various collections including  
MoMA, New York



**On Kawara** (1932–2014), ***I Got Up***, 1968–1979, Rubber-stamped postcards, 9 × 14 cm (each), Various collections including MoMA, New York

- Every morning for nearly twelve years, **On Kawara** sent two postcards to friends and acquaintances. Each card showed a tourist image of the city he was in. On the back, he rubber-stamped the words '**I GOT UP AT**' followed by the exact time he woke, his address, and the recipient's address. That was all. No commentary, no emotion, no elaboration. The accumulated postcards — thousands of them — form a vast, forensic map of one human life measured in the simplest possible terms: where, when, and the bare fact of consciousness.
- The curator **Anne Wheeler** wrote that Kawara's work '**transforms the mundane into the monumental through sheer repetition and commitment.**' The art historian **Jeffrey Weiss** described the postcards as '**a conceptual pulse — proof of life transmitted daily.**' The work sits alongside Kawara's other serial projects: the **Today** series (date paintings begun in 1966), **I Met** (lists of people encountered daily), and **I Went** (maps of his daily routes).
- Kawara was born in Kariya, Japan, and witnessed the aftermath of the **Hiroshima bombing** as a thirteen-year-old. He rarely spoke about this, but the preoccupation with existence, time, and mortality that runs through his work seems inseparable from that experience. He left Japan in 1959, travelling through Mexico and Europe before settling in New York in 1965. He gave almost no interviews and refused to be photographed. His reclusiveness was itself conceptual — the work, not the artist, was what mattered.
- Kawara's commitment to process was total. If he could not finish a **Today** painting by midnight, he destroyed it. The postcards had to be sent the same

morning. When he died in 2014, his studio instructions specified that no posthumous exhibitions should include biographical photographs. A retrospective at the **Guggenheim** in 2015, titled **Silence**, honoured this wish. The show contained only the work — and the work contained only time.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

On Kawara — on kah-WAH-rah

Kariya — kah-REE-yah

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Sol LeWitt (1928–2007),  
**Wall Drawing #853 and #832**,  
1971,  
Graphite on wall,  
Dimensions variable,  
Various installations; MASS MoCA, North  
Adams, Massachusetts



**Sol LeWitt** (1928–2007), **Wall Drawing #853 (the left two) and #852 (the one on the right)**, 1971, Graphite on wall, Dimensions variable, Various installations; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts

- **Sol LeWitt** is the crucial bridge between Conceptual Art and Minimalism, and his wall drawings embody both. **Wall Drawing #852 and #853** consists of a written instruction that LeWitt never executed himself. He wrote the instructions — a kind of score — and teams of assistants, students, or museum staff realised them. Each installation looks different, but the concept remains identical.
- In his landmark 1967 essay '**Paragraphs on Conceptual Art**', LeWitt declared: '**The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.**' This single sentence defined a generation. Yet unlike the purest Conceptual artists, LeWitt cared intensely about visual outcomes. The wall drawings are ravishing — dense, rhythmic grids and colour fields that shimmer with optical intensity.
- LeWitt grew up in Hartford, Connecticut, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. He worked as a graphic designer, served in the **Korean War**, then took a job at the reception desk of **MoMA** in the late 1950s, where he encountered **Ad Reinhardt** and the emerging Minimalists. His early white box structures (1965–66) established him as a Minimalist, but the wall drawings pulled him towards the conceptual — the idea that a set of instructions could generate infinite visual variations.
- LeWitt produced over 1,200 wall drawings before his death in 2007. At **MASS MoCA** in North Adams, Massachusetts, a retrospective occupies an entire football-pitch-sized building — 105 wall drawings spanning his career. Each one was installed by hand over months by teams of assistants following his

instructions precisely. There is enormous variety in the drawings, some are black and white, some straight lines, some curved, some cubes, some stars and so on.

- LeWitt once said: "**What the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has a physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea.**" It is this philosophy that places him at the exact intersection of idea and object, thought and form.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

LeWitt — leh-WIT

MASS MoCA — mass MOH-kah

Reinhardt — RINE-hart

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## Conceptual Art: Summary and Legacy

Sol LeWitt (1928-2007),

**Wall Drawing**

**#118:**

1971,

50 randomly placed  
points connected by  
straight lines,

Art Institute Chicago

Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), Wall Drawing #118: 50 randomly placed points connected by straight lines, 1971, Art Institute Chicago

- This is another example of Sol LaWitt's work. 50 randomly placed points connected by straight lines
- Conceptual Art emerged in the mid-1960s as a radical challenge to the art object. Its founding principle was simple and explosive: **the idea is the work**. The physical object — painting, sculpture, installation — was either secondary or entirely unnecessary. Duchamp's readymades provided the historical precedent. Kosuth, Weiner, and LeWitt provided the theoretical framework. Kawara, Klein, and Manzoni provided the performative and bodily extremes.
- The movement's key texts define its scope. **Sol LeWitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art'** (1967) insisted the idea was the machine. **Joseph Kosuth's 'Art After Philosophy'** (1969) declared that art was a proposition, not a visual experience. **Lucy Lippard's Six Years** (1973) documented the **'dematerialisation of the art object'** — art shedding its physical body in favour of language, instruction, documentation, and process.
- The legacy is vast. Without Conceptual Art there would be no **YBA movement** — no **Damien Hirst**, no **Tracey Emin**. There would be no institutional critique by **Andrea Fraser** or **Hans Haacke**. **Jenny Holzer** and **Barbara Kruger's** text-based work descends directly from Weiner. The Turner Prize, founded in 1984, has been dominated by artists working in conceptual modes. Today, when an artist submits an empty room or a written proposal and calls it art, they are operating in the space that Duchamp opened and Kosuth, Weiner, and LeWitt made permanent.

- The criticism has been persistent. The public has often asked: '**But is it art?**' The conceptualists answered: that question is the art. By forcing viewers to consider what art is — rather than simply looking at it — Conceptual Art changed the terms of the debate forever. It did not replace painting or sculpture. But it ensured that from the 1960s onwards, no artist could avoid the question of **why** they made objects, not just **how**.



Frank Stella (b. 1936),  
**Die Fahne Hoch!**,  
1959,  
Enamel paint on canvas,  
308.6 × 185.4 cm,  
Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York

**Frank Stella** (b. 1936), **Die Fahne Hoch!**, 1959, Enamel paint on canvas, 308.6 × 185.4 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

- We now come to Minimalism.
- **Frank Stella** was twenty-three when he painted **Die Fahne Hoch!** — a monumental canvas of symmetrical black stripes separated by thin lines of raw, unpainted canvas. There is no illusion, no gesture, no hidden meaning. The stripes follow the shape of the canvas itself, turning at the centre to create a cross pattern. The title — German for '**Raise the Flag**' — is taken from the Nazi anthem, the **Horst-Wessel-Lied**. Stella chose it not for political reasons but because the song's marching rhythm matched the painting's relentless, mechanical pattern.
- When included in MoMA's **Sixteen Americans** exhibition in 1959, the **Black Paintings** caused an uproar. Many critics called them empty. But **Carl Andre** wrote the catalogue essay and declared: '**Art excludes the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes.**' Stella's own statement was even blunter: '**What you see is what you see.**' That five-word sentence became the unofficial motto of Minimalism.
- Stella had graduated from Princeton just a year earlier, where he studied history and was influenced by **Jasper Johns'** flag paintings and the stripe paintings of the Abstract Expressionist **Barnett Newman**. But where Newman's stripes (or 'zips') suggested spiritual transcendence, Stella's were deliberately flat, uninflected, and anti-metaphorical. He used commercial house paint and a house painter's brush. He wanted to kill the idea that abstract painting had to be about something beyond itself.

- The **Black Paintings** made Stella the youngest artist to have a retrospective at MoMA (1970, aged 33). He went on to make wildly exuberant shaped canvases, baroque reliefs, and enormous sculptures — the opposite of his early austerity. But **Die Fahne Hoch!** remains the starting gun for Minimalism. Every stripe in the painting says the same thing: a painting is a flat surface with paint on it. Nothing more. That was revolutionary.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Die Fahne Hoch — dee FAH-neh HOHKH

Horst-Wessel-Lied — horst VES-sel LEED

Stella — STEL-ah

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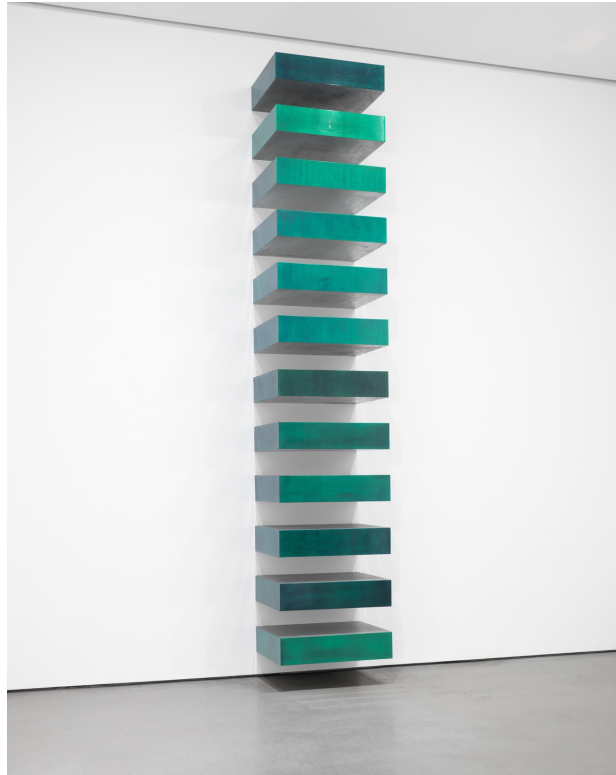
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Donald Judd (1928–1994),  
**Untitled (Stack)**,  
1967,  
Lacquer on galvanised iron,  
Each unit 22.8 × 101.6 × 78.7 cm,  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Donald Judd** (1928–1994), **Untitled (Stack)**, 1967, Lacquer on galvanised iron, Each unit 22.8 × 101.6 × 78.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- **Donald Judd's** stacks are among the most iconic images of Minimalism. **Untitled (Stack)** consists of twelve identical rectangular boxes made of lacquered green galvanised iron, mounted vertically on a wall with equal spaces between them. There is no base, no pedestal, no composition in the traditional sense. The boxes are not arranged — they are **stacked** according to a mathematical rule. The space between each unit equals the height of each unit. The whole runs floor to ceiling. The decisions are predetermined; the result is absolute.
- In his seminal 1965 essay '**Specific Objects**', Judd declared that the most interesting new work was '**neither painting nor sculpture**' but something between the two. He rejected the word 'sculpture' for his own pieces, calling them simply '**objects.**' The critic **Michael Fried**, in his famous attack '**Art and Objecthood**' (1967), called Minimalism '**theatrical**' and therefore not art. Judd was unbothered. For him, the object's relationship to the viewer's body and the surrounding space was precisely the point.
- Judd had been an art critic himself for **Arts Magazine** before turning to making objects. Born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, he studied philosophy at Columbia University and served in the **Korean War**. His critical background gave him an intellectual precision that intimidated dealers and fellow artists alike. He was notoriously demanding about fabrication — every edge, every surface, every joint had to be industrially perfect. He never made the works himself. They were fabricated to his specifications by **Bernstein Brothers** sheet metal fabricators in New York.

- In 1971, Judd left New York for **Marfa, Texas**, where he bought an entire former army base and spent two decades installing his work and others' in permanent, purpose-built spaces. The **Chinati Foundation** — 100 mill-aluminium boxes in two enormous artillery sheds — remains one of the most extraordinary art experiences in the world. Judd died in 1994 of lymphoma. His insistence on industrial fabrication, serial repetition, and the primacy of real space over depicted space defined Minimalism's core.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Judd — JUD (rhymes with 'mud')

Marfa — MAR-fah

Chinati — chih-NAH-tee

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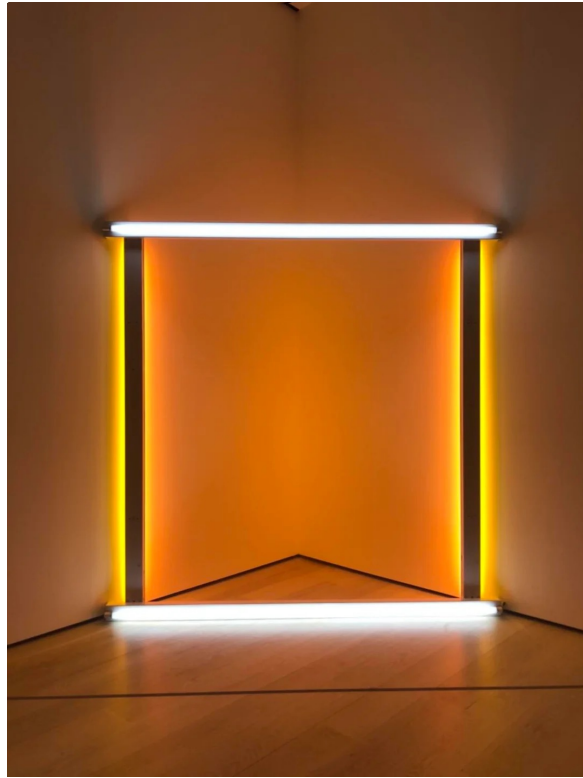
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Dan Flavin (1933–1996),  
**Untitled (to the "Innovator"  
of  
Wheeling Peachblow)**,  
1968,  
Pink, yellow, and daylight fluorescent  
light tubes,  
244 cm height (each tube),  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Dan Flavin** (1933–1996), **Untitled (to the "Innovator" of Wheeling Peachblow)**, 1968, Pink, yellow, and daylight fluorescent light tubes, 244 cm height (each tube), Museum of Modern Art, New York

- **Dan Flavin** worked exclusively with commercially available fluorescent light tubes — the same kind found in offices, car parks, and supermarkets. **Untitled (to the "Innovator" of Wheeling Peachblow)** consists of vertical tubes in pink, yellow, and daylight white, placed in a corner. The title references a type of Victorian art glass from Wheeling, West Virginia — a characteristically playful Flavin gesture, linking industrial hardware to decorative art history. The light floods the surrounding walls with soft colour, transforming architectural space into luminous experience.
- The critic **Rosalind Krauss** wrote that Flavin's work '**dematerialises the sculptural object into pure luminosity.**' That was the radical move: light has no mass, no surface, no edge. It fills space but occupies none. Flavin's friend and rival **Donald Judd** made solid objects; Flavin made immaterial ones from mass-produced components. When his first solo show opened at the **Green Gallery** in 1964, many viewers were bewildered. Was it sculpture? Was it architecture? Was it a lighting display?
- Flavin was born in Jamaica, Queens, to a devoutly Catholic family. He studied for the priesthood briefly before turning to art. He served in the US Air Force as a meteorological technician — monitoring light and atmosphere, as it turned out, was good preparation. His twin brother **David** died in 1962, and Flavin dedicated his breakthrough piece, **the Diagonal of May 25, 1963** — a single gold fluorescent tube mounted at 45 degrees — '**to the young man who died**

**but was not exhausted.'** That work, and that dedication, launched his entire career.

- Flavin limited himself to a palette of commercially available colours and standard tube sizes (two, four, six, and eight foot). He never custom-manufactured anything. This democratic approach — anyone could buy the same tubes from the same hardware store — was essential to Minimalism's rejection of artistic preciousness. When he died in 1996, his last major project was an installation in a deconsecrated church, **Santa Maria Annunciata in Chiesa Rossa**, Milan — flooding a sacred space with coloured light. It remains permanently installed. The former seminarian had, in a sense, come full circle.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Flavin — FLAV-in

Peachblow — PEECH-bloh

Chiesa Rossa — kee-AY-zah ROSS-ah

Krauss — KROWSS

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Carl Andre (b. 1935),  
**Equivalent VIII**,  
1966,  
120 firebricks,  
12.7 × 68.6 × 229.2 cm,  
Tate, London



**Carl Andre** (b. 1935), **Equivalent VIII**, 1966, 120 firebricks, 12.7 × 68.6 × 229.2 cm, Tate, London

- One hundred and twenty firebricks arranged in a rectangle two layers high, six across, and ten long. That is the entire physical description of **Equivalent VIII** — the most controversial artwork in British gallery history. **Carl Andre** made eight 'Equivalent' sculptures in 1966, each using 120 bricks arranged in different configurations but occupying the same volume. The work sits directly on the floor with no plinth. You could walk on it. You could step over it. The Tate bought it in 1972 for £2,297.
- When the purchase became public in 1976, the **Daily Mirror** ran the headline '**What a Load of Rubbish**', and the ensuing tabloid storm became the most famous public art controversy in Britain. The **Sunday Times** called it '**the costliest joke in the art world.**' Someone poured blue dye on the bricks in protest. The Tate's director, **Sir Norman Reid**, defended the purchase stoically, but the scandal haunted the institution for years. The critic **Rosalind Krauss** later called the bricks '**a poem about materiality.**'
- Andre grew up in Quincy, Massachusetts, where his father worked in a shipyard. He studied at Phillips Academy alongside the painter **Frank Stella**, whose early stripe paintings influenced him enormously. Andre's breakthrough insight was that sculpture should occupy the ground plane — not rise from it on a pedestal. He called his floor pieces '**cuts in space**', comparing them to roads, fields, and swimming pools. His materials were always industrial and unmodified: bricks, metal plates, timber beams, hay bales.
- Andre's reputation was permanently shadowed by the death of his wife, the Cuban-American artist **Ana Mendieta**, who fell from their 34th-floor apartment

in 1985. Andre was charged with murder, tried, and acquitted in 1988. The case remains deeply divisive in the art world, and feminist protesters have picketed his exhibitions ever since. His art — flat, democratic, and emphatically material — endures in major collections worldwide. **Equivalent VIII** remains on permanent display at Tate. The bricks are still just bricks. That is still the point.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Andre — AHN-dray

Mendieta — men-dee-EH-tah

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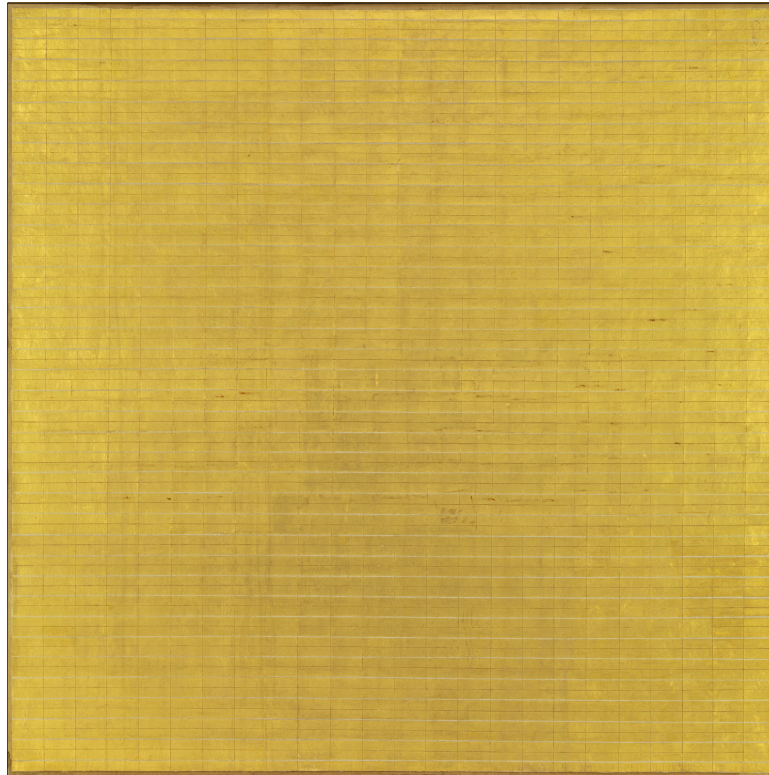
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Agnes Martin (1912–2004),  
**Friendship**,  
1963,  
Gold leaf and gesso on  
canvas,  
190.5 × 190.5 cm,  
Museum of Modern Art,  
New York

**Agnes Martin** (1912–2004), **Friendship**, 1963, Gold leaf and gesso on canvas, 190.5 × 190.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- **Agnes Martin's** grids look Minimalist, but their intent is spiritual. **Friendship** is a six-foot-square canvas covered in a delicate grid of incised gold-leaf lines on a white gesso ground. Stand back, and you see a luminous, shimmering field. Step close, and the imperfections emerge — slight waverings, tiny catches where the leaf resisted the tool. The grid is hand-drawn, not mechanical. It breathes. Martin described the work not as a formal exercise but as an attempt to evoke **'the feeling you have when you look at a landscape or a flower.'**
- The critic **Holland Cotter** of the **New York Times** wrote that Martin's paintings **'give minimalism a soul.'** The art historian **Briony Fer** called them **'meditations on perception itself.'** Martin was included in major Minimalist exhibitions, but she rejected the label emphatically. **'My paintings are not about what is seen,'** she said. **'They are about what is known forever in the mind.'** She considered herself an Abstract Expressionist, not a Minimalist — the grid was a vehicle for emotion, not an end in itself.
- Martin was born in Macklin, Saskatchewan, and moved to the United States as a young woman. She studied at Columbia and settled in **Coenties Slip** in lower Manhattan, near **Ellsworth Kelly**, **Robert Indiana**, and **Jack Youngerman**. She lived with severe mental health challenges throughout her life, later diagnosed as **schizophrenia**. In 1967, at the height of her New York success, she abruptly left the city, gave away all her possessions, and drove a pickup truck to New Mexico. She did not paint for seven years.
- When she returned to painting in 1974, working in a remote adobe studio in

**Galisteo**, her palette softened to pale washes of colour. She lived alone, growing vegetables, refusing most visitors. **'The best things in life happen to you when you're alone,'** she said. Tate Modern held a major retrospective in 2015. The **Harwood Museum** in Taos holds a permanent gallery of her late works. Martin's insistence that Minimalism's geometry could carry transcendent feeling — that rigour and spirituality were not opposites — remains her unique and enduring contribution.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Agnes — AG-nis

Coenties Slip — KOON-teez SLIP

Galisteo — gal-is-TAY-oh

Macklin — MACK-lin

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Robert Morris (1931–2018),  
**Untitled (L-Beams)**,  
1965,  
Painted plywood (later  
versions in stainless steel and  
fibreglass),  
244 × 244 × 61 cm (each),  
Whitney Museum of  
American Art, New York

**Robert Morris** (1931–2018), **Untitled (L-Beams)**, 1965, Painted plywood (later versions in stainless steel and fibreglass), 244 × 244 × 61 cm (each), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

- Three identical L-shaped forms, each eight feet tall, placed in different orientations — one standing, one lying on its side, one resting on its two ends. They are objectively the same. They look completely different. That is the entire point of **Robert Morris's L-Beams**. The work demonstrates that perception is not fixed — it is shaped by the viewer's body, position, and movement through space. The same object, rotated, becomes a different experience. Morris called this **'the phenomenological encounter.'**
- Morris published his hugely influential **'Notes on Sculpture'** essays in **Artforum** (1966–69), drawing on the phenomenology of **Maurice Merleau-Ponty** to argue that sculpture should not be an isolated object but a relationship between object, space, and viewer. The critic **Annette Michelson** called the L-Beams **'a lesson in seeing — three objects that teach you that your body is part of the meaning.'** **Michael Fried**, predictably, hated it — his essay **'Art and Objecthood'** (1967) attacked the 'theatricality' of precisely this kind of work.
- Morris was born in Kansas City, studied engineering, served in the Army Corps of Engineers, then moved to San Francisco where he was involved with **Anna Halprin's** experimental dance workshops. Dance profoundly influenced his approach: the body in space, the viewer as performer. In New York he became part of the **Judson Dance Theater** alongside **Yvonne Rainer** and **Simone Forti**. His first Minimalist show at the **Green Gallery** in 1964 featured stark grey plywood forms that looked like industrial props.

- Unlike Judd, who remained committed to the object, Morris was restless. By the late 1960s he had moved into **Anti-Form** — piling felt, dirt, and thread in shapeless heaps. He later turned to land art, mirror installations, and even figurative drawing. His 1971 poster for the **Castelli-Sonnabend Gallery** showed him bare-chested in chains and a German helmet — a deliberately provocative self-portrait that scandalised the art world. Despite his many shifts, the **L-Beams** remain his most influential work: the moment Minimalism declared that the viewer's body was inseparable from the art.

### **Pronunciation Guide**

Morris — MOR-iss

Merleau-Ponty — mair-LOH pon-TEE

Halprin — HAL-prin

Castelli-Sonnabend — kas-TEL-ee SON-ah-bend

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## Minimalism: Summary and Legacy

Robert Morris (b. 1931),  
**Untitled**,  
1965, reconstructed 1971,  
Mirror glass and wood,  
Each cube: 91.4 x 91.4 x  
91.4 cm - overall display  
dimensions are variable,  
Tate Modern

Robert Morris (b. 1931), **Untitled**, 1965, reconstructed 1971, Mirror glass and wood, Each cube: 91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm - overall display dimensions are variable, Tate Modern

- Another example of Robert Morris's work.
- Let me recap.
- Minimalism emerged in New York in the early 1960s as a reaction against Abstract Expressionism's emotional excess. Its core tenets were brutally simple: **no illusion, no metaphor, no gesture**. What you see is what you see. The artists used industrial materials — steel, aluminium, fluorescent tubes, firebricks — fabricated to specification, not shaped by the artist's hand. Serial repetition replaced composition. The factory replaced the studio. The floor and wall replaced the pedestal.
- The key figures — **Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Robert Morris**, and **Agnes Martin** (however reluctantly) — shared an insistence on the literal presence of the object. Judd's essay '**Specific Objects**' (1965) was the movement's manifesto. Morris's '**Notes on Sculpture**' provided its phenomenological theory. Stella's '**What you see is what you see**' provided its slogan.
- The legacy of Minimalism extends far beyond the gallery. It shaped architecture — from **Tadao Ando's** concrete spaces to **John Pawson's** pared-back interiors. It shaped design — Apple's entire aesthetic philosophy descends from Minimalist principles. It shaped music: **Steve Reich, Philip Glass**, and **La Monte Young** developed Minimal music in parallel with the visual artists, sharing a commitment to repetition, process, and duration. The fashion of **Rei Kawakubo** and **Jil Sander** draws on Minimalist restraint.

- The criticism was fierce. Hilton Kramer called it '**the art of boredom.**' **Michael Fried** attacked it as theatrical. The public often found it incomprehensible — Andre's bricks being the most famous example. But Minimalism's real achievement was philosophical: it forced art to confront its own physical reality. After Minimalism, sculpture could be anything — **light, space, language, earth, the viewer's own body.** By stripping art to its barest elements, the Minimalists paradoxically opened up every possibility that followed.



## 60-07 CONCEPTUAL ART AND MINIMALISM

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- The legacy of these two movements has proved vast and largely inescapable. Conceptual Art's insistence that art could take any form — a photograph, a text, a performance, an instruction — effectively dismantled the boundaries between artistic disciplines and made possible the sprawling pluralism of contemporary practice. Installation art, relational aesthetics, institutional critique, and the text-based strategies ubiquitous in galleries today all flow directly from the Conceptual tradition.
- Minimalism, meanwhile, shaped architecture, design, and the visual language of public space in ways that extend far beyond the gallery wall — its influence is visible in everything from the clean geometries of Donald Judd's steel sculptures to the interior aesthetics of the contemporary museum itself.
- Taken together, they shifted the fundamental question of art from how something is made to why it is made at all, a question that has defined artistic debate ever since.
- Thank you for your time and attention.



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