### Unit 4: (one week) Minimal Form and Maximal Space

Unit IV Form and Thought in the late 60's

At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Identify artists and describe qualities associated with Conceptual Art, Minimalism, and Land Art Course Goals: 1,2,4,5, GE: 1,4,6,7, Core Skills: A, D, E
2. Define key terms associated with these movements and artists Course Goals: 1,2,4 GE: 1,4,6,7, Core Skills: A, D, E
3. Question the theory and philosophy behind the movement, with emphasis on Sol Lewitt and Robert Smithson. Course Goals: 2,3,4,5,6 GE: 1,4,6,7,9 Core Skills: A, B, C, E, F, G
4. Discriminate between Land Art and Environmentalism.
5. challenge ideas of authorship and the production of artwork

### Artists covered:

* Helen Frankenthaler
* Willem De Kooning
* Morris Louis
* Barnett Newman
* Jackson Pollock
* Ad Reinhardt
* Marc Rothko

## Unit Student Assessments & Activities

### Introduction (ULO 3-4)

Venus of Willendorf, 20,000 bce

### Minimalism

So here we have a bunch of artists, all basically making boxes and wanting the art world to accept them as Capital “A” Art. So how could it be that none of them get along? Today we look at the Minimalists, and interestingly, we see that the more similar the work of artists is, the more likely it is that they are going to need to describe what it is that they personally are doing, and how it differs from others who are doing a very similar thing. First, we backtrack a bit and look at the work of the sculptors who were working at the same time as the Abstract Expressionists. Although they followed tendencies from European Modernism (found object assemblage, balanced compositions, biomorphic shapes), and AbEx tendencies (the brushed aluminum surfaces of David Smith look like expressionist brushwork, for instance), these artists were also free to follow Greenberg’s advice that “each art should preserve it’s own opacity bla blah.” This meant that sculpture in the 1950s often worked in it’s own world, inventing modernism on it’s own terms.

Next we look survey the work of artists grouped under the name Minimalism. Unlike the Abstract Expressionists, or even the Pop artists, these are not artists who felt grouped in a common purpose. In fact they often occupied distinct perspectives on the work and their reason for producing it.

Robert Morris made boxes that were more about places to perform, or making the viewer aware of his or her body in space, than the craft of making them. Frank Stella painted lines, but never wanted to give up the history of painting or painterly illusion, even when his pieces resembled aluminum slabs suspended on the wall. Donald Judd wanted more than anything to upend traditional concepts of art, and creates the “Specific Object” that is “neither painting nor sculpture” by drafting plans for factory produced objects constructed of exotic industrial materials. Anne Hamilton also produces boxes, but hers are hand crafted, cared for, lovingly painted and talked about as if they were babies carried to term. Sol Le Witt saw that the Idea was as interesting as the piece, and produced descriptions of works that were then brought to completion by assistants in his absence.

No matter the distinctions these artists made amongst themselves, they still created a collective body of work that felt cohesive enough to outside observers, and seemed relevant enough in it’s comments on modern life, assembly, and mass production, to earn the lasting label of Minimalism.

Similarly cohesive, yet distinct in it’s fascination with organic shapes, new and expressive materials, and interest in the actual means of production were the process artists who we look at next. And then finally, a quick look at Op art, which in our computer savvy world still impresses with it’s use of tight geometrically controlled lines.

### After this class you should be able to

#### Define the following:

* Minimalism
* Op art
* Process Art

#### Recognize artwork by the following artists:

* Alexander Calder
* Louise Nevelson
* David Smith
* Dan Flavin
* Donald Judd
* Sol Lewitt
* Robert Morris
* Frank Stella
* Anne Truitt
* Eva Hesse

#### Answer the following:

* How do the work of sculptors from the 1950s differ from Minimalist artworks?
* How does work by Frank Stella differ from the work of Victor Vasarely?
* Why did Anne Truitt and Robert Morris dislike each other's artwork?
* How did Frank Stella and Donald Judd disagree about Minimalism?

### External Links for further reading:

* [Louise Nevelson Foundation](http://www.louisenevelsonfoundation.org/)
* [Donald Judd Foundation](http://www.juddfoundation.org/)
* [Anne Truitt Foundation](http://annetruitt.org/)
* [Robert Ryman](http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/robert-ryman) on PBS
* 1972 filmed interview of [Frank Stella](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cN_rRCfRdmQ)

Well, we’re back to The Monk by the Sea, and you’re probably noticing how much I like to reference this piece by now. The distinction I’m making this time is between the classical notion of Man vs. The Wild, and our more contemporary notions of the fragility of the globe. We now live in an age where we think about preserving the wild as much as protecting ourselves from the elements. But first we have to back up a bit, to the beginnings of any environmental movements, to artists not making necessarily political statements, but just working in the landscape as movers of dirt.

If anything is this lecture can group all these artists together, it would be the notion of Scale. We start with artists still working within the gallery setting, but pushing the envelope of what can still fit within four walls. In some cases the expansion is illusionist in nature, by use of mirrors which reflect space, or lights which fill the room with their glow. Other times it is by perceived weight, or presence, as with Serra’s steel pieces threatening to crush the viewer, or De Maria’s Earth room, which crams enough of the outside indoors in order to remind us of the difference in magnitude.

Next, we follow these tendencies into the open air, and watch artists push the boundaries of what you can even call a sculpture. Jetty’s, buildings, cities, mountains, all of the earth’s natural and man-made surfaces become possible expressions of artistic ideas.

### After this class you should be able to

#### Define the following:

* scale
* sublime
* monumental
* Plato's Cave

#### Recognize artwork by the following artists:

* Cristo and Jean-Claude
* Michael Heizer
* Nancy Holt
* Gordon Matta-Clark
* Richard Serra
* Robert Smithson
* James Turrell

#### Answer the following:

* What relationship to Earthworks artists have to environmentalism?
* What parallels can be drawn between Jackson Pollock and Richard Serra?

## 50-60 sculpture:

How is Greenberg's influence also apparent in the work of sculptors in the 50s and 60s? How is it apparent in the work of David Smith?

## Minimalism

Minimalism take a very specific position on the relationship between *form* and *content*. Describe the position, and examine its relationship to ideas of *purity.* It is possible to completely separate form and content?

* What is Donald Judd’s main point in his essay “Specific Objects”:

1. Painting should not tell stories like literature, but should be about color.
2. There is a new type of art that he calls “three dimensional work”, that is neither sculpture nor painting, but is its own thing.
3. Painting should be built up part by part, composed of pieces.
4. Artwork that depicts something from the real world is not as compelling as simple geometric shapes.

* Which is one way Frank Stella and Donald Judd disagreed about Minimalism?

1. Frank Stella identified himself as a painter, while Donald Judd wanted artworks to break from the division between painting and sculpture.
2. Frank Stella wanted to incorporate narrative into his works, Donald Judd didn’t.
3. Donald Judd wanted to make artworks with expensive materials, while Frank Stella wanted art to be made from cheap materials.
4. Frank Stella wanted to paint from the European tradition of artists like Victor Vasarely, Donald Judd wanted to make sculptures that had no influences.

* How do the work of sculptors from the 1950s differ from Minimalist artworks?

1. 50's sculptors were more interested in figurative work, minimalists in abstraction.
2. 50's sculptors were more interested in color, minimalists in form.
3. 50'x sculptors were more interested in carving, minimalists in fabricating.
4. 50's sculptors were more interested in composition, minimalists in concepts.

* How does work by Frank Stella differ from the work of Victor Vasarely?

1. web question
2. web question
3. web question
4. web question

* Why did Anne Truitt and Robert Morris dislike each other's artwork?

1. Morris followed Donald Judd's beliefs in minimalism, Truitt added feminism into her work.
2. Truitt found Morris' sculptures poorly constructed, he found hers to be too pretty and fussy.
3. It goes back to a bad breakup they had after a long romantic relationship.
4. Morris wanted his pieces to be bright and bold, Truitt thought his work looked too bright.

* Plato’s metaphor of the cave can also be seen as a metaphor for the work of James Turrell because:

1. the experience of viewing light in his pieces is like the philosopher leaving the cave and viewing daylight for the first time.
2. in the depths of the cave, one is forced to look a the mirror of their own humanity.
3. the claustrophobia of his pieces is similar to crawling through a cave.
4. when Plato finds the ring in the cave, and puts it on his finger, he becomes invisible.

* What relationship do Earthworks artists have to environmentalism?

1. Earthworks are powerful artistic statements because they require ecological destruction on a grand scale.
2. It's complicated, because some earthworks completely disrupt natural environments, while others seek to reclaim polluted wastelands.
3. Earthworks artists believe that if we destroy the planet we will destroy life on earth.
4. Earthworks are not about environmental concerns, but only about scale.

* What parallels can be drawn between Jackson Pollock and Richard Serra?

1. Both of them grew up in the west, and are interested in the vast horizontal landscape.
2. Both Pollock and Serra are interested in removing content from their artwork.
3. Both artists started by making murals during the depression.
4. Both artists are interesting in pushing towards greater scale in their work.

Scale : 1. a certain relative or proportionate size or extent: *They built a residence on a yet more magnificent scale.* : 2. a standard of measurement or estimation; point of reference by which to gauge or rate: *We have no scale by which to judge his achievements.*

One of the ways American art from the 1940’s until today differs from earlier European art is the use of scale. Explain how this is true using artists from at least three of the movements we have studied.

* [Revisiting Hours: Robert Smithson's Passaic](http://www.mrld.net/pdfs/Smithson_by_Rasor.pdf:) *Mitchell Rasor looks back at Robert Smithson's trip to Passaic, New Jersey*
* [Seeking Art's Verities In Passaic][smithson2] *Benjamin Genocchio revisits Smithson's Passaic 38 years later*

[smithson2]: [http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0DEFDE1738F936A35755C0A9639C8B63&pagewanted=all

# Artists for further research

For every artist that we study in class there are dozens more who we are unable to cover. Looking for more? Check out these artists who didn't make the cut:

## 50s 60s sculpture

* Kurt Schwitters
* Joseph Cornell
* Julio Gonzales
* Barbara Hepworth
* Henry Moore
* John Chamberlain
* Barnett Newmann (again)