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

### Sculpture, Minimalism, Conceptual Art, and Earthworks

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

1. Identify artists and describe qualities associated with Conceptual Art, Minimalism, and Earthworks 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:

* David Smith
* Louise Nevelson

#### Minimalism

* Donald Judd
* Dan Flavin
* Frank Stella
* Sol Lewitt

#### Earthworks

* Robert Morris
* Robert Smithson
* Richard Serra
* James Turrell

## Unit Student Assessments & Activities

### Introduction (ULO 3-4)

Venus of Willendorf, 20,000 bce

We've seen a couple sculptors so far, but most of the work we've seen so far has been painting. This week we do a little catchup, and see what's been happening so far in the world of three dimensions. We start with two sculptors from the 50's **David Smith** and **Louise Nevelson**. 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 artworks should concentrate on their own specific medium. This meant that sculpture in the 1950s often worked in it’s own world, inventing modernism on it’s own terms.

We then look into a couple art movements that are loosely tied together, Minimalism, Conceptualism and Earthworks. Many of the artists in these groups could be placed into more than one category, so I've pulled out some representative samples just to give you a flavor of these different movements.

#### 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. 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.

**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. **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.

#### Earthworks

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 the environmental movement, when earth artists were 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 **Robert Morris** and **Richard Serra**, 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.

Next, we follow these tendencies into the open air, and look at **Robert Smithson** and **James Turrell**, two artists who 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 canvasses for artistic ideas.

### Textbook : Read Chapter 8 Minimalism and Conceptual Art (ULO 1-3).

Please read Chapter 8 in *Twentieth Century American Art* by Erika Doss, pages 161-179. Then test your understanding by answering the Textbook Review Questions in the next section.

### Textbook Review Questions (self assess): (ULO 1-3)

The answer to these questions can be found in chapter X of *Twentieth Century American Art* by Erika Doss.

Answer these questions as best as you can after reading this weeks chapter in Twentieth Century American Art. You can try the quiz multiple times. You will be graded on the completing the quiz but you are allowed to make mistakes and correct your answers. Use this as an opportunity to test your comprehension of the material and see what you missed, and as preparation for the midterm and final.

Q: Which of these was NOT a political event of the 1960's? A. soldiers returned from World War II B. The moon landing C. Martin Luther King gave his "I have a dream" speech D. the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was founded ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: What is NOT what Frank Stella meant when he said "what you see is what you see"? A. Paintings are like clouds, whatever you see in them is yours to take away. B. His paintings are only what you see when you look at them, nothing more. C. Every painting is an object, painters must see that they are making a thing. D. You can see everything in his painting without any confusion. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: Whose works, made of colored light, were influenced by both gestalt psychology, and philosophy? A. James Turrell. B. Dan Flavin C. Donald Judd D. Sol LeWitt ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: How did Hans Haacke make political art that directly confronted the MOMA and Guggenheim art museums? A. By making art that directly tied the financiers of the museum to their shady business dealings. B. By charging them with under-representing both minorities and women. C. By doing performances where he stripped naked inside the museums. D. By charging them with being anti-American for showing liberal filth. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: What was Peace Tower? A. A collective artwork protesting the Vietnam war. B. An anti-war protest song by The Doors. C. An art gallery in Los Angeles. D. A memorial to John F Kennedy ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: What is body art? A. Performances where the artist uses his or her body as a direct means of experience. B. A common term to describe figurative artworks. C. Artists creating by painting directly on the participants skin. D. A genre of art described as obsessed with body image. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

### **Readings**: (ULO 3, 4)

#### Self Research

We have already covered a lot of material this week in the textbook, so I'm not assigning an additional reading. Instead, I am going to encourage you to do a little research on your own. Go to the [Robert Smithson Website](http://www.robertsmithson.com/), dedicated to his life's work, and looks around. Take a look at the artworks, and then dig into the section called essays which contains writings by Smithson, Interviews and selected essays. You will be asked to summarize one of them in the discussion forum.

website: http://www.robertsmithson.com essays: http://www.robertsmithson.com/essays/ess.htm

### Presentation: Artist Slideshows (ULO 1-4)

Please watch the following slideshows:

* [Unit 2-1: EuropeanInfluence](http://jonathangabel.com/documents/art125/ppt/Art125Unit02-01.EuropeanInfluence.pptx)
* [Unit 2-2: LineAndGesture](http://jonathangabel.com/documents/art125/ppt/Art125Unit02-02.LineAndGesture.pptx)
* [Unit 2-3: ColorField](http://jonathangabel.com/documents/art125/ppt/Art125Unit02-03.ColorField.pptx)

### Presentation: Artist Slideshows (ULO 1-4)

Please watch the following slideshows:

### Presentations: Artist Videos (ULO 1-4)

Please watch the following video:

### Interactive activities: artwork identification, and terminology (multiple chances, self assess)(ULO 1, 2)

#### Identify names of XXX Artists

Q: Select all the artists who are Minimalists A. Donald Judd B. Dan Flavin C. Frank Stella D. Sol Lewitt E. Helen Frankenthaler F. Ad Reinhardt G. Claes Oldenburg ANSWER: A,B,C,D POINTS: 5 TYPE: MS

Q: Select all the artists who are Earthworks Artists A. Robert Smithson B. James Turrell C. Frank Stella D. Hans Hofmann E. Chuck Close ANSWER: A,B POINTS: 5 TYPE: MS

#### Identify artwork images from the slideshows

Q: This Artwork is by: A.David Smith B.Donald Judd C.Marc Rothko D.Duane Hanson Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/smith.1964.cubiXIX.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Louise Nevelson B.James Rosenquist C.Helen Frankenthaler D.Barnett Newman Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/nevelson.1958.skyCathedral.2.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Donald Judd B.Jasper Johns C.Ad Reinhardt D.Robert Morris Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/judd.1968.1900s.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Dan Flavin B.Richard Serra C.Louise Nevelson D.Chuck Close Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/flavin.1977.untitled.inhonorharoldjoachim.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Frank Stella B.Arshile Gorky C.Dan Flavin D.David Smith Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/stella.1962.grandCairo.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Sol Lewitt B.Jasper Johns C.James Rosenquist D.David Smith Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/lewitt.60s.123454321.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Robert Morris B.Marc Rothko C.Frank Stella D.Willem De Kooning Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/morris.1961.boxForStanding.empty.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Robert Smithson B.James Rosenquist C.Robert Morris D.Morris Louis Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/smithson.1970.spiralJetty.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.Richard Serra B.Louise Nevelson C.Hans Hofmann D.Robert Smithson Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/serra.2006.band.jpg

Q: This Artwork is by: A.James Turrell B.Donald Judd C.Jackson Pollock D.Richard Serra Answer: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC IMAGE: images/turrell.77-2002.rodenCratersEye.jpg

#### Multiple Choice Definitions

* sublime
* monumental

Q: Define the sublime A. inspiring awe or terror through size or strength B. A ska punk band from the East Coast C. The secret ingredient in Sprite and Gingerale D. The epic battle between humanmankind and the natural world ANSWER: A,B POINTS: 5 TYPE: MS

Q: monumental artworks are A. Large in scale B. famous and big C. dedicated to famous people D. extremely old ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

### Discussion Board Question relating to slideshows and readings (ULO 1-4)

Now that you have become familiar with the artists and concepts presented in this unit, it is time to start making connections. Here is your chance to apply what you learned in the readings to some of the artwork you have seen.

**First**, you will start a thread by answering the Essay question below.

**Then** you will reply to at least two (2) other students posts to get the discussion going.

Please make sure you meet the **due dates** for these posts.

#### Essay Question:

Please select one of the essays by or about Robert Smithson from the website in the readings section. Briefly summarize the main points presented in the piece and describe how it relates to what you have learned about the Earth Art movement. Feel free to include your personal opinions or observations.

### Additional Artists to Study (ULO 1)

*You will not be tested on the following material, but if you are interested in studying further anything we discussed this week, these artists could also fit into this category*

* Alexander Calder
* Tony Smith
* Anne Truitt
* Eva Hesse
* Nancy Holt
* Gordon Matta-Clark
* Michael Heizer
* Cristo and Jean-Claude

### Optional links for further self-study (ULO 1-4)

*You will not be tested on the following material, but if you are interested in studying further anything we discussed this week, these links are a good place to start:*

* [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)
* inteview with [James turrell interview](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/egg/215/turrell/interview_content_1.html)
* [Revisiting Hours: Robert Smithson's Passaic][smithson1] *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*

Q: What is Donald Judd’s main point in his essay “Specific Objects”: A. There is a new type of art that he calls “three dimensional work”, that is neither sculpture nor painting, but is its own thing. B. Painting should not tell stories like literature, but should be about color. C. Painting should be built up part by part, composed of pieces. D. Artwork that depicts something from the real world is not as compelling as simple geometric shapes. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: Which is one way Frank Stella and Donald Judd disagreed about Minimalism? A. Frank Stella identified himself as a painter, while Donald Judd wanted artworks to break from the division between painting and sculpture. B. Frank Stella wanted to incorporate the figurative into his works, Donald Judd didn’t. C. Donald Judd wanted to make artworks with expensive materials, while Frank Stella wanted art to be made from cheap materials. D. Frank Stella wanted to paint from the European tradition of artists like Renoir, Donald Judd wanted to make sculptures that had no influences. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: Plato’s metaphor of the cave can also be seen as a metaphor for the work of James Turrell because: A. the experience of viewing light in his pieces is like the philosopher leaving the cave and viewing daylight for the first time. B. in the depths of the cave, one is forced to look a the mirror of their own humanity. C. the claustrophobia of his pieces is similar to crawling through a cave. D. when Plato finds the ring in the cave, and puts it on his finger, he becomes invisible. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: What relationship do Earthworks artists have to environmentalism? A. It's complicated, because some earthworks completely disrupt natural environments, while others seek to reclaim polluted wastelands. B. Earthworks artists believe that if we destroy the planet we will destroy life on earth. C. Earthworks are powerful artistic statements because they require ecological destruction on a grand scale. D. Earthworks are not about environmental concerns, but only about scale. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC

Q: What parallels can be drawn between Jackson Pollock and Richard Serra? A. The gestures in Serras thrown lead piece are similar to Pollocks gestures with dripped paint. B. Both of them grew up in the west, and are interested in the vast horizontal landscape. C. Both Pollock and Serra are interested in removing content from their artwork. D. Both artists started by making murals during the depression. ANSWER: A POINTS: 5 TYPE: MC