

# **sentences on conceptual art**

**sol lewitt**

- 1 — *Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.*
- 2 — *Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.*
- 3 — *Illogical judgements lead to new experience.*
- 4 — *Formal Art is essentially rational.*
- 5 — *Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.*
- 6 — *If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results.*
- 7 — *The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His willfulness may only be ego.*
- 8 — *When words such as painting and sculpture are used, they connote a whole tradition and imply a consequent acceptance of this tradition, thus placing limitations on the artist who would be reluctant to make art that goes beyond the limitations.*
- 9 — *The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter is the components. Ideas implement the concept.*

- 10 — Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.
- 11 — Ideas do not necessarily proceed in logical order. They may set one off in unexpected directions but an idea must necessarily be completed in the mind before the next one is formed.
- 12 — For each work of art that becomes physical there are many variations that do not.
- 13 — A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewers. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist's mind.
- 14 — The words of one artist to another may induce an ideas chain, if they share the same concept.
- 15 — Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken), to physical reality, equally.
- 16 — If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature; numbers are not mathematics.
- 17 — All ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.
- 18 — One usually understands the art of the past by applying the conventions of the present thus misunderstanding the art of the past.
- 19 — The conventions of art are altered by works of art.
- 20 — Successful art changes our understanding of the conventions by altering our perceptions.
- 21 — Perception of ideas leads to new ideas.
- 22 — The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.
- 23 — One artist may mis-perceive (understand it differently than the artist) a work of art but still be set off in his own chain of thought by that misconstrual.
- 24 — Perception is subjective.
- 25 — The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is neither better nor worse than that of others.
- 26 — An artist may perceive the art of others better than his own.
- 27 — The concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.
- 28 — Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.
- 29 — The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.
- 30 — There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious.
- 31 — If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist's concept involved the material.

- 32 — *Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.*
- 33 — *It is difficult to bungle a good idea.*
- 34 — *When an artist learns his craft too well he makes slick art.*
- 35 — *These sentences comment on art, but are not art.*

This text first appeared in *O-9*, no. 5 (January 1969), pp. 3–5.

**conceptual art:** a critical anthology  
edited by alexander alberro and blake stimson

the MIT press • cambridge, massachusetts • london, england

©1999 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Adobe Garamond and Trade Gothic by Graphic Composition, Inc. and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Conceptual art : a critical anthology / edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-01173-5 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Conceptual art. I. Alberro, Alexander. II. Stimson, Blake.

N6494.C63C597 1999

700—dc21

98-52388

CIP

<b>Michael Baldwin</b> , Remarks on Air-Conditioning: An Extravaganza of Blandness	32
<b>Adrian Piper</b> , A Defense of the “Conceptual” Process in Art	36
<b>Hélio Oiticica</b> , General Scheme of the New Objectivity	40

## II 1968

<b>Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler</b> , The Dematerialization of Art	46
<b>Terry Atkinson</b> , Concerning the Article “The Dematerialization of Art”	52
<b>Yvonne Rainer</b> , Statement	60
<b>Hanne Darboven</b> , Statement to Lucy Lippard	62
<b>Georges Boudaille</b> , Interview with Daniel Buren: Art Is No Longer Justifiable or Setting the Record Straight	66
<b>María Teresa Gramuglio and Nicolás Rosa</b> , Tucumán Burns	76

## III 1969

<b>Michel Claura</b> , Paris Commentary	82
<b>Gregory Battcock</b> , Painting Is Obsolete	88
<b>Dan Graham</b> , Art Workers’ Coalition Open Hearing Presentation	92
<b>Editors of <i>Art-Language</i></b> , Introduction	98
<b>Sol LeWitt</b> , Sentences on Conceptual Art	106
<b>Ian Burn</b> , Dialogue	110
<b>Lee Lozano</b> , Dialogue Piece	112
<b>Mierle Laderman Ukeles</b> , Maintenance Art Manifesto, Proposal for an Exhibition, “CARE”	122
<b>John Murphy</b> , Patron’s Statement for “When Attitudes Become Form”	126
<b>Piero Gilardi</b> , Politics and the Avant-Garde	128
<b>Jean Clay</b> , Art Tamed and Wild	136