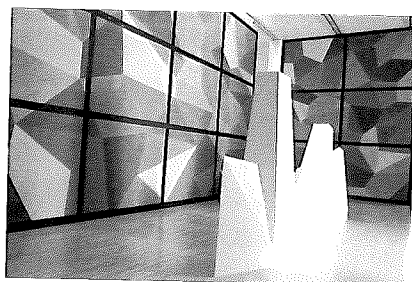


Gary Garrels

Thoughts on Exhibitions



Installation view of *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective*, San Francisco MOMA, 2000

There are countless works of art, artists, and ideas about art from which an exhibition might be organized, and there are usually numerous preconceived conclusions that affect a curator's choices. For me, being a curator is constantly to test my preconceptions and my thinking in what I hope may be a parallel process to the work of an artist.

This is a physical as much as a conceptual process. Art remains situational and physically obdurate. There is no substitute for moving from place to place and constantly looking. In this way, experience and information are layered, impressions are tested. I'm always working to keep my eyes and mind open, reconsidering, remembering, finding the things that remain alive to me through time and experience.

Out of this constant process, projects emerge. It becomes evident to me that an idea, an artist, an object, or some group of objects are ones to which I want to return. Some projects take on a specific and concise character; others prove to be daunting in scale. Some may be worked on quickly; others may unfold over years. Whenever I embark on organizing an exhibition, it is because I want to be closer to a certain artist and/or specific objects, to work with them, learn from them. In turn, I think about what other people might gain from

what I would do, an audience that includes not only friends and peers but an unknown public.

Each exhibition is a complete production, entailing everything from the overall concept to the most utilitarian detail. The selection and presentation of work sits in front of me at every stage of development. Organizing an exhibition is very different from writing an article or book. Yet, it is not only the physical situation of objects or spaces that I keep in mind, but also the social and intellectual frame around them. The practical issues are no less fundamental: the budget and the character and commitment of the team of people who are involved. Each aspect inflects the others and the whole. The success of an exhibition is attributable not to its great expense or scale, but to the integration of all the following concerns: ensuring that it is well executed, physically precise, and visually engaging, and grounded in a larger frame of cultural, social, political, historical, and philosophical issues.



Gary Garrels, born 1951, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, U.S.

Current position: Chief curator of drawings and curator of painting and sculpture, Museum of Modern Art, New York. **Former positions** include chief curator and curator of painting and sculpture, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; senior curator, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; director of programs, Dia Center for the Arts, New York. **Selected exhibitions:** *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective* (2000, San Francisco MOMA, traveling exhibition); *Jasper Johns: New Paintings and Works on Paper* (1999, San Francisco MOMA); *Katharina Fritsch* (1996–97, San Francisco MOMA); *Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s* (1995–96, San Francisco MOMA); *Photography in Contemporary German Art: 1960 to the Present* (1992, Walker Art Center). **Selected publications:** Essays in catalogues for the exhibitions listed above

words *of* wisdom

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