Donald Judd was born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, in 1928. At Columbia University, New York, he studied philosophy and art history and began to produce his earliest paintings.

In the early 1960s, he switched from painting to sculpture and started to develop an interest in architecture. Though he shunned the term “minimalism” Donald Judd became one of the movement’s leading artists as it emerged as a counterforce to Abstract Expressionism. Whereas Abstract Expressionism focused on gestural, intuitive expression, Minimalism dealt solely with materials and space. The work of art became a product of the interaction between the object, the viewer, and the environment.

In his 1965 treatise “Specific Objects,” Judd championed recent work that was neither painting nor sculpture. He endorsed “the thing as a whole” rather than a composition of parts. Judd’s earliest freestanding sculptures were singular, boxlike forms constructed of wood or metal. As his exploration of three-dimensional space became more complex, he developed a number of strategies to subordinate a work’s individual components to the whole, by using rows and progressions of systematically recurring forms. In its repetition of serial forms and spaces, the vertical stack of Untitled (1969) literally incorporates space as one of its materials along with highly polished copper, creating interplay between forms and spaces.


2. Images of works by Jackson Pollock can be found on the Guggenheim Museum’s Web site at guggenheimcollection.org.
Show *Untitled*, 1969
A note to teachers: The scale of this work is very important. If possible project the image on a surface where it can be seen at its full height of 9 feet.

- Brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you look at this work. When done, compare your list with another student’s. Is your word list highly consistent or very different? Discuss your responses.

- Donald Judd began making Minimalist work while Abstract Expressionism still dominated the art world. Show students a work of Abstract Expressionist art, perhaps a painting by Jackson Pollock. Describe how are these works are related. How are they different?

- Placement and repetition are central to Judd’s work. Although this work is untitled, it contains very specific information about how it should be installed in the gallery or museum. Think about some alternative ways that these ten units might be situated. What other arrangements might Judd have considered? Do you think he chose the best one? Why? Why not?

- It was very important to Judd that his work be seen as a whole, rather than as individual parts. Do you think he was successful? Explain your response.

- List the qualities that you value in a work of art. Does this work satisfy those criteria? How? How not?

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**FURTHER EXPLORATIONS**

- In the early 1960s Donald Judd abandoned painting, stating that “actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.” What is your reaction to this statement? Do you agree, disagree, or have a mixed reaction?

- Judd spent his lifetime exploring various large-scale geometric forms, industrial materials, and recurring arrangements for his work. Choose a geometric form, material, and arrangement for a work that you would like to create. Make a drawing or model for your work and explain the choices you have made.

- Judd used many industrial materials that had not previously been considered for making art, including stainless steel, concrete, plywood, brass, copper, Plexiglas, and galvanized iron (often enameled or anodized). Some have even called Judd’s use of materials “sumptuous.” What material would you consider sumptuous? How would you create a work of art using the material you have chosen?

- Even though the limited parameters of Judd’s work may at first seem very restrictive, they create many possible outcomes. Complete the table below and then create sketches or models for some of the works that could be created within these stringent specifications. You may want to use graph paper to keep the scale consistent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFIGURATION</th>
<th>GEOMETRIC FORM</th>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>MATERIAL</th>
<th>COLOR</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PLACEMENT</th>
<th>CONTINUE THE TABLE: MIX AND MATCH THE POSSIBILITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>3-d rectangle</td>
<td>5’ x 3’ x 2’</td>
<td>Poured glass</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>On the floor</td>
<td>Mix and match the possibilities</td>
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“It is what it is, and it ain’t nothin’ else. . . . There is no overwhelming spirituality you are supposed to come into contact with. . . . It’s in a sense a “get-in-get-out” situation. And it is very easy to understand. One might not think of light as a matter of fact, but I do. And it is, as I said, as plain and open and direct an art as you will ever find.”

Dan Flavin was born in Queens, New York, in 1933. Although he studied for the priesthood for a time, upon completing military service in Korea, Flavin returned to New York to study art history at the New School. In 1959, he took drawing and painting classes at Columbia University.

In the summer of 1961, while working as a guard at the American Museum of Natural History, Flavin started to make sketches for sculptures that incorporated electric lights. Later that year, he made his first light sculptures, which he called “icons.” Although the title and the use of light bore religious connotations in the traditional association of light with the divine and sacred, Flavin used the term ironically, explaining, “My icons differ from a Byzantine Christ held in majesty; they are dumb—anonymous and inglorious.”

Flavin named a new abstract art form that stressed perceptual, rather than transcendent, experience. He rapidly extended this technique into what became his mature style: installations, usually temporary, using white or colored fluorescent light tubes.

The composition of the nominal three (to William of Ockham), dedicated to the 14th-century English philosopher, exemplifies Flavin’s use of the fluorescent tube as a basic building block. greens crossing greens (to Piet Mondrian who lacked green) transforms and even inverts the conventional museum experience by literally invading the viewer’s space and prohibiting access to the gallery. The reference to Mondrian is in keeping with Flavin’s practice of dedicating individual works to family, friends, or historical figures of significance to him.


Show the nominal three (to William of Ockham), 1963

greens crossing greens (to Piet Mondrian who lacked green), 1966

- While Flavin works with ethereal “light,” he also works with mundane, manufactured fluorescent fixtures with no attempt to hide or adorn their industrial forms. Where have you seen these fixtures used? Why might Flavin have chosen these over more decorative possibilities?

- Few artists are more closely identified with a particular medium than Dan Flavin. After 1963, Flavin’s work was composed almost entirely of light, in the form of commercially available fluorescent tubes in ten colors (blue, green, pink, red, yellow, ultraviolet, and four whites) and five shapes (one circular and four straight fixtures of different lengths). Do you see the exclusive use of these lights in making his work as limiting or liberating? Explain your response.

- By selecting light as his medium, Flavin connects the viewer to one of the most elemental components of existence. Try to generate a list of phrases that contain the word “light,” such as “Light at the end of the tunnel,” or “I’ve seen the light.” What are the symbolic associations of light? Do any of the phrases you thought of relate to your impressions of Flavin’s work? Explain your response.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Consider various industrial materials that could be used to make art. Looking through commercial catalogues maybe helpful in considering your options. Make diagrams (or as Flavin would call them “proposals”) that show how this object (or objects) might be used to create a work of art. Describe your installation plans to your classmates and explain why you have chosen this particular object.

- Flavin would frequently title his works to pay tribute or acknowledge people who were, in some way, important to him. Some were historical figures including the Russian Constructivist designer Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), and the medieval scholar William of Ockham (1280–1349), who wrote, “It is vain to do with more what can be done with less.” Flavin also titled works after people in his life including, art historian Robert Rosenblum, friend and colleague Ward Jackson, and his fiancée Tracy. For whom might you title an important piece of your work? Why?
"When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."  

b. 1928

Sol LeWitt was born in 1928 in Hartford, Connecticut. After receiving his B.F.A. degree from Syracuse University and serving in the Korean War as a graphic artist, he moved to New York in 1953, just as Abstract Expressionism was gaining public recognition. He found various jobs to support himself, including working for the young architect I.M. Pei as a graphic designer. This contact proved formative, for as LeWitt would later write, "An architect doesn’t go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He’s still an artist."

For LeWitt and his colleagues, Abstract Expressionism had become an entrenched style that offered few new creative possibilities. LeWitt began to create works that utilized simple and impersonal geometric forms, exploring repetition and variations of a basic form or line as a way to achieve complex works. Perhaps most importantly, he evolved a working method for creating artworks based on simple directions, works that could be executed by others rather than the artist. The fertility of this approach is demonstrated by the aesthetic richness and variety of the wall drawings, none of which were drawn by him. LeWitt rejects the notion of art as a unique and precious object. Formulated from an initial idea outlined in a diagrammatic sketch accompanied by a set of instructions, his works are installed on the wall of the gallery or museum by a team of assistants, who rigorously follow the artist’s directives. Some instructions are simple and straightforward, and some are long and complex. By placing his drawings directly on the wall of the gallery or museum, LeWitt merges his drawing with the architecture, while also calling into question ideas about permanence, value, and conservation.


Sol LeWitt’s methods challenge what we traditionally think about how works of art are created. With your students, look at *Wall Drawing #146* and discuss the following questions.

- LeWitt likens his method of creating art to that of an architect. He has stated, “An architect doesn’t go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He’s still an artist.” Do you agree or disagree with LeWitt’s line of reasoning? Explain.

- This work was executed, not by Sol LeWitt, but by a team of assistants according to a set of directions written by the artist. It is LeWitt’s premise that the art is in the idea. Do you think that it is important that the artist actually draw or paint the work, or is it equally valid that the artist conceive the work and have others execute it? How does this method of making art change what we mean when we call a work “an original”?

- This work is drawn directly on the wall, and in many cases will be destroyed at the end of an exhibition. How do you feel about art that is created to exist only for a short time and then destroyed? How does making a drawing that will later be painted over challenge traditional ideas about the importance and value of the art object?

- The fact that this work can be re-created many times in different settings raises a key question: Must a work of art be unique?

### FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- LeWitt’s directions for *Wall Drawing #146* state: “All two-part combinations of blue arcs from corners and sides and blue straight, not straight, and broken lines. September 1972. Blue crayon: dimensions vary with installation.” If you were given these directions, a blue crayon and a surface of your choosing, create the drawing that would result from you interpreting these directions. Compare your solution with those that your classmates create. How does making a drawing according to written directions help you better understand LeWitt’s methodology?

- Each student should create directions for a drawing. The artist may stipulate the media, size, tool(s), color(s), shape(s), placement of all elements, or only some. Then ask students to exchange directions and create the drawing based on their classmate’s directions. This activity can be done with traditional art materials or by using drawing applications on a computer. How is the finished drawing different or similar to what the author envisioned? Describe the process of creating a drawing from someone else’s directions.

- LeWitt’s drawings are frequently labor intensive, requiring many people and many days to complete. If your school has an empty wall in need of art, try a class collaboration to create a LeWitt-like wall drawing. Teams of students can collaborate both in writing and diagramming the project and then following the written directions to execute it on the wall. In keeping with the spirit of LeWitt’s work, the finished drawing can either be a temporary installation that will soon be painted over, or a lasting addition to your school environment.
“I once taught art to adults in a night course. I had a woman who painted her back yard, and she said it was the first time she had ever really looked at it. I think everyone sees beauty. Art is a way to respond.”

b. 1912

Agnes Martin was born in 1912 in Saskatchewan, Canada, and grew up in British Columbia. She came to the United States in 1932 and received her B.S. and M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. During the 1930s and the ’40s, she taught at public schools and colleges, but would later comment that teaching “is the worst thing you can do if you’re an artist. It takes all the emotional energy.”

In 1957, she settled in lower Manhattan and the following year had her first solo exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery. By the late 1950s, she was developing the highly simplified abstractions for which she would become best known. Her paintings consist of a simple system of interlocking horizontal and vertical lines in an almost exclusively six-foot-square format. Because of her geometric style, critics frequently associated Martin with Minimalist artists. But Martin’s goals were different: her fragile lines that cross expanses of lightly applied, atmospheric color reveal a spiritual quest. Her arrangements shift in scale and rhythm from work to work. The grid in White Flower—composed of intersecting white lines that form rectangles punctuated by symmetrical white dashes—resembles woven fabric.

The titles of her paintings—Mountains, Dark River, Starlight, Leaf in the Wind, Spring—attest to Martin’s persistent engagement with themes of the natural world, albeit in an abstract manner. She expressed her own emotional response to nature through the most extreme economy of formal means. “Anything,” Martin claimed in 1972, “can be painted without representation.”


What words would you use to describe the look and feeling of this painting? Why?

The titles of Martin’s paintings frequently reference natural forms. The title of this work is *White Flower*. Are there ways in which you can link elements of this work with qualities you associate with a white flower? Are there ways that this painting seems to defy a connection with its title? If you were to choose a new title for this work what would it be? If you were to create an abstract painting titled *White Flower*, what would it look like?

Since the 1960s Martin has consistently organized her paintings by utilizing a grid. She has said that she did not choose the grid as a format, that it chose her. To her, the grid represents innocence, wholeness, boundlessness, quiet, and absence of ego—an expression without words. What do you think she meant by this? Describe your associations with the grid as a format. Are they similar to or different from Martin’s association?

Martin has stated, “Anything can be painted without representation.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your response.

When asked about how to look at her work Martin recommends doing the same as when we look at the ocean: “You just go there and sit and look.” How does this recommendation influence your appreciation of her work?

Can you sense a relationship between Martin’s painting and this poem? Are there any qualities or values embedded in this poem that seem to manifest in Martin’s painting? Martin has chosen to praise the quality of humility in this poem. Choose another human characteristic and write a poem that expresses the qualities you associate with that trait.

Martin has lived in New Mexico for more than 30 years. To her, the straight horizontal line relates to the vast plains of New Mexico. Her paintings are heavily influenced by the elusive desert light.

Think about a landscape that you have experienced. Envision that place and recall how the air smelled. What were the weather conditions? What time of day was it? What season of the year? Create an abstract painting that through color and line expresses the essence of that place and your experience of it.

Martin has studied Asian philosophies—especially Taoism, a Chinese religion and philosophy advocating simplicity and selflessness. Taoism is interested in intuitive wisdom, rather than in rational knowledge, and concentrates on observation in order to discern the nature of the universe. Research the basic teachings of Taoism. Can you find instances where this philosophy seems to relate to Martin’s work? Describe the parallels you discover.
“I want to make art for people who watch the Golden Girls and sit in a big, brown, Lazy-boy chair. They’re part of my public too, I hope.”  

10

< FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES >

1957–1996

Born in Cuba in 1957, Felix Gonzalez-Torres spent time growing up in Puerto Rico, where he attended the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. He moved to New York City in 1979, and continued to study of photography, earning degrees from Pratt Institute and the International Center of Photography.

Gonzalez-Torres’s work subtly combines personal experiences and ideas from art theory with political points of view. His installations of piles of paper and sweets indicate a direct connection with the Conceptual and Minimal Art of the 1960s. But by inviting museum visitors to help themselves to a sheet of paper or piece of candy, these works negate the claim to artistic autonomy that is characteristic of Minimal art by questioning the uniqueness of the artwork. Simply through their selection and arrangement, everyday items such as store-bought candies become infused with a poetic aura. His work transfers the private emotion into the public arena, making us aware of the general relevance of such themes as illness, death, love, and loss.

Untitled (Public Opinion), a 700-pound spill of black-rod licorice pieces, was made as a protest against the heightened nationalism he witnessed during the first Gulf War. For Gonzalez-Torres, the rods of licorice resembled missiles. Free for the taking and replaceable, Gonzalez-Torres’s perpetually shrinking and swelling sculptures defy the macho solidity of Minimalist form, while playfully expanding upon its ideas and materials.

In 1995 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum organized a retrospective of his work. Gonzalez-Torres died in 1996 at the age of 38.


EXPLORATIONS

Show Untitled (Public Opinion), 1991

Usually museums do not allow visitors to touch works of art on display. Gonzalez-Torres, however, was interested in making art that would encourage viewers to actively participate and created work that invites museum visitors to touch and even eat the art. Do you think Gonzalez-Torres’s way of involving the public in his work is meaningful?

In making work that can be replenished, Gonzalez-Torres (like Sol LeWitt) comments on the concept of originality in art. Does it matter that all of the pieces are replaceable? Is it still art if it can be reproduced? What happens to this work if the candy manufacturer stops making black rod licorice, or decides to wrap it in foil rather than cellophane?

How does the mass (700 pounds) and placement (in a corner, on the floor) affect the impact of this work? Gonzalez-Torres stipulated that although 700 pounds is an ideal weight for this work, the owner or curator can decide how large or small to make it. How might changing the placement or number of candies affect the work’s meaning?

Gonzalez-Torres’s work often deals with personal and global concerns such as AIDS, U.S. foreign policy, gun control, racism, sexism, and homophobia. Because his work can be interpreted in a number of different ways, he generally left his works untitled, with a more specific reference in parenthesis. What are some ways you can think of to link this work with its title?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Untitled (Public Opinion) is made from “black rod licorice candy, individually wrapped in cellophane”. What positive or negative connotations and characteristics come to mind in association with this material? Gonzalez-Torres has also used Baci chocolates and Bazooka bubble gum to create works of art. Is there a type of candy that has particular associations for you? Write an essay that describes all the aspects of that candy including its shape, color, smell, memory associations, and, of course, taste. If you were to use this candy to create a work of art, excluding the brand name of the candy, what would you title it? How might you use it to create art?

- The words Public Opinion can be interpreted in many ways. Create a work with the title Public Opinion. What are the similarities or differences between your completed work and Gonzalez-Torres’s? What aspect of public opinion have you addressed in your work?

- Gonzalez-Torres made work that dealt with personal, political, and social issues. Choose an issue of personal relevance and create a work of art in any form or combination of forms that comments on this issue.

- Gonzalez-Torres’s work has challenged traditional museums and gallery spaces by encouraging viewers to dance with one another, or eat, or take away part of the art. Create a plan for a work of art that invites participation by the public. How do you want them to participate? In what? How will you let them know what they should be doing? How will the participation of viewers contribute to completing the work and making it more meaningful?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW
http://www.chinati.org/index.html. Located in Marfa, Texas, the Chinati Foundation is a contemporary art museum dedicated to the ideas of its founder, Donald Judd. Its mission is to focus on art and artists associated with the Minimalist movement.

DONALD JUDD

DAN FLAVIN
Flavin, Dan. “in daylight or cool white,' an autobiographical sketch.” Artforum (Los Angeles) 4, no. 4 (December 1965), pp. 21–24. 

SOL LEWITT


AGNES MARTIN
Agnes Martin: Writings–Schriften, ed. Dieter Schwarz. 

FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES
Avgikos, Jan. “This is My Body: Felix Gonzalez-Torres.” 
Artforum (New York) 29, no. 6 (February 1991), pp. 79–83. 
MODERNISM Modernism was a phenomenon which first arose toward the end of the 19th century as artists sought to find a visual equivalent to contemporary life and thought. Modernism encompasses many of the avant-garde movements of the 20th century and is characterized by the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression.

POSTMODERNISM Art, architecture, or literature that reacts against earlier Modernist principles, as by reintroducing traditional or classical elements of style, and/or by carrying Modernist styles or practices to extremes.

POST-MINIMALISM Although Minimalist art of the 1960s had a stripped-down, prefabricated look, striving to be free of content, art with Minimalist tendencies from the 1970s onward typically became more content-laden. The term Post-Minimalism was coined by art historian and critic Robert Pincus-Witten in Artforum (November, 1971), where he pointed out the more embellished and pictorial approach.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM (New York, ca.1940). Movement of mid-20th-century painting that was primarily concerned with the spontaneous assertion of the individual through the act of painting. Generally, Abstract Expressionist art is without recognizable images and emphasizes the qualities of paint itself and its ability to convey emotional and mental states or to record an artist’s movements in creating a painting. The Abstract Expressionist movement centered in New York City and is also called the New York school.

ILLUSIONISTIC The creation of visual references within a work of art that refer to the material world.

MINIMALISM (New York and Los Angeles 1960s). Minimal art refers to painting or sculpture reduced to the essentials of single or repeated geometric forms. Industrially produced or built by skilled workers following the artist’s instructions, it removes any trace of emotion or intuitive decision-making. Minimal work does not allude to anything beyond its literal presence, or its existence in the physical world. It is generally characterized by precise, hard-edged geometric forms; planes of unmodulated color, and mathematically regular compositions, often based on a grid. Minimalist art rejects the artistic subjectivity and heroic gesture of Abstract Expressionism. In Minimal art what is important is the viewer’s experience and perception.

ICON a representation of a religious figure, venerated as sacred.

INSTALLATION an artwork designed for a specific gallery space; its components are often arranged within that space to be viewed as a single work of art.

CONCEPTUAL ART (international, ca. 1966) Conceptual art is based on the notion that the essence of art is an idea, or concept, and may exist distinct from and even in the absence of an object as its representation. Conceptual art emerged at a time when both art institutions and the preciousness of the unique aesthetic object were being challenged by artists and critics.

GRID network of parallel, evenly spaced, horizontal and vertical lines.

MONOCHROMATIC pertaining to one or more shades of a single color.