

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 245-3200 Cable: Modernart

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968, a major summer exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art (July 3 - September 8), explores a significant identifiable change: the development in abstract art that is maximal in color and minimal in form and an unprecedented interaction between painting and sculpture.

To demonstrate his thesis, Guest Director E. C. Goossen, well-known critic and now Chairman of the Department of Art at Hunter College, has restricted his selection to 57 works by 33 artists whose similarity in formal means allows the visitor to perceive their distinct differences. Among them are Paul Feeley, Donald Judd, Ellsworth Kelly, Barnett Newman, Tony Smith, Frank Stella, as well as some younger less well-known artists. Some of the works chosen are familiar, but were included because of their historical significance; most of them, however, have seldom or never been seen before, and several were made specifically for this occasion.

"The new attitude has been turning art inside out; instead of perceptual experience being accepted as the means to an end, it has become the end in itself.... The spectator is not given symbols, but facts, to make of them what he can. They do not direct his mind nor call up trusted cores of experience, but lead him to the point where he must evaluate his own peculiar responses. Thus what was once concealed within art - the technical devices employed by the artist - is now overtly revealed; and what was once the outside - the meaning of its forms - has been turned inside." This "art of the real," however, does not strive to be realistic - i.e. like the real - but to be as real in itself as the things we experience every day: the things we see, feel, knock against, and apprehend in normal physical ways.

In an essay in the catalogue* accompanying the show, Mr. Goossen traces the development of this trend. At the time abstract expressionism was reaching its

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968 by E.C. Goossen. 64 pages; 50 illustrations (9 in color). Paperbound \$2.50. Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Ltd.

fulfillment, artists of a different persuasion were working toward a less "painterly" solution in the creation of an American-type abstract art, such as Alexander Liberman, represented by a 1950 painting, and Tony Smith, who was then developing a modular system as seen in The Louisenberg (1953-4). During the same period Ellsworth Kelly experimented with the power of pure color, and in such pictures as Painting for a White Wall (1952), he literally turned color into subject matter.

In the late 50's Frank Stella abandoned variegated color and painterliness; starting with a rectangle or cross, he enlarged upon it by a simple series of equally broad stripes that was his picture. The external shape was determined by the initial shape at the center, and in order not to end up with leftover areas at the edges, he notched them out. The result was a "shaped canvas." In later experiments, he invented series after series of interpenetrating and overlaid shapes using color coding... to identify and hold the colored bands with a minimal, flattened space. Examples on view are Taftonboro I (1962) and study for Gur II (1967).

The late Paul Feeley on the other hand, developed an interchangeable relationship of figure to ground by means of two undulating, interactive shapes. Ultimately he created these shapes in intersecting planes of painted wood, or in fully round constructions of fiber glass. Five works are shown dating from 1962 to 1965-8.

Other painters did not move toward shaped canvas or constructions but toward a reduction of painted forms that resulted in "field" painting or in the symmetrical organization of centered, simplified non-images.

Morris Louis kept reducing even the area that the hues occupied in the vast expanse of raw canvas. In the last series before his death, referred to as the Unfurled, he placed the central space between the ribbons of color more widely apart, thereby increasing the distance over which the eye must travel to pull the image together, or if one's gaze is fixed on the empty center, calling peripheral vision into action. Alpha Tau (1961), an example of this series, is in the show.

In Kenneth Noland's most recent paintings, something similar occurs in respect to peripheral vision. But since Noland carries his varigated horizontal stripes across the whole field, the eye can only handle parts at one time, except when the picture is seen from one end, where the perspective assists one's understanding of the physical situation.

And in the minimal paintings by Patricia Johanson, for example, we are expected to grasp a single narrow strip of color extending 28 feet along the middle of an empty field of raw canvas. "Such pictures remind us that painting had reached the minimal several times before in this century -- in O'Keeffe's Blue Lines of 1916, and in Malevich's Suprematist Composition: White on White (1918?) (on view in the Museum's collection galleries), but in the Johanson we are asked to cope with the irreducible facts physically rather than intellectually," Mr. Goossen observes.

"Color seems to work best with minimalist sculpture," Mr. Goossen says, "as in some of Lyman Kipp's larger pieces (a model of his Albatross is on view), or in Sanford Wurmfeld's three-dimensional color chart, a 7 1/2 foot painted wood called 111-12. As for John McCracken's slab of sheer color wittily titled There's No Reason Not To, it is hard to tell whether one is confronting a painting or a sculpture. What is surprising," Goossen adds, "is the variety that such sculpture and painting have been able to provide, given conditions and limitations that we once might have thought could lead only to empty repetition and boredom."

This variety is partly the result of the interchange between painting and sculpture, which had already begun in the early 1960s. Carl Andre's early stacked sculpture Cedar Piece (1960-64) is distinctly related to Stella's first black pictures; Darby Bannard's paired rectangles in his painting Allure-Allure (1961) suggests a number of box and three-dimensional plane pieces by Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and others; while Agnes Martin's painting of stacked and grid structures such as Bones Number 2 (1961) find their equivalent in Judd's wall sculpture, Larry Poons' grid paintings, and Sol LeWitt's space cages. "When we put all these and other seemingly similar works together, subtle differences appear,
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and the full richness of the new vocabulary for forms becomes visible," Mr. Goossen points out.

Tony Smith has taken an entirely different route. Die and Free Ride (1962) are the simplest possible resolutions of the essence of the cube. "To confront one of these works is to know the cube on a scale that allows us to experience it fully without being handed ideas about it.... Perhaps more than any other sculpture at this time, Smith has found the precise amount of the real we can bear in art, for his work has a monumental power rarely available to other approaches."

The exhibition has been installed in the ground floor gallery and in the Sculpture Garden by Wilder Green, Director of the Exhibition Program, and Mr. Goossen.

Other exhibitions on view at the Museum during the summer are Cartier-Bresson: Recent Photographs, James Stirling: Three University Buildings, Recent Acquisitions: Painting and Sculpture, daily film showings, and an exhibition of stills from films of Greta Garbo. In addition, a selection from the Museum's collection of works of art in all media is on view.

The Museum is open daily from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sundays from 12 noon to 6 p.m. On Thursday evenings the Museum remains open until 10 p.m. A film is shown at 8, and a concert given in the Garden at 8:30 p.m. every Thursday.

Photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. 245-3200.

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968

July 3 - September 8, 1968

Wall Label

A new kind of art has been developing in the U.S.A. over the last two decades. It has characteristics that are typically American. Though abstract, it is related, in attitude, to the great tradition of objective realism that dominated our art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This "art of the real," however, does not strive to be *realistic*—i.e. *like* the real—but to be as real in itself as the things we experience every day: the things we see, feel, knock against, and apprehend in normal physical ways.

This art seems to be an attempt to break with the main European tradition, in which content is considered to be dependent upon the successful balancing of different or unequal parts *within* the work. Even the most contemporary abstract European art deals with subtleties and complexities of composition, which by extension constitute editorial statements about the world quite outside of art. Such art tends to generalize about universal dynamics on an idealistic level. However, the works in this exhibition, and particularly the most recent ones, avoid compositional incident, and reduce structure to the simplest orders: symmetry, frontality, and systems such as the grid, the module, the parallel, etc. Thus we are drawn into a direct confrontation with the work rather than to an interpretation of it; its realness as an object is intensified.

This distillation of formal and compositional means has been variously called "minimal art," "ABC art," or "literalist art." Its simplicity is deceiving. It has been creating a new vocabulary of forms and has revived our sense of the realness of vision and the pleasure of sensory experience.

E. C. Goossen

Director of the exhibition

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968

July 3 - September 8, 1968

Wall Label - First Garden Wing Gallery

Many painters in the 1950's and 1960's selected a particular element or quality from the work of their abstract-expressionist forbearers, emphasized it, and made it carry the burden of pictorial means and interest. They reduced compositional relations to a minimum by turning to "field" painting, as in the case of Ralph Humphrey; or to centered images, as in Kenneth Noland's concentric circles, to axial symmetry as in the work of Agnes Martin, Darby Bannard, and Morris Louis. Most of them also explored the properties of color and the method of its application. Noland and Louis soaked or stained the raw canvas, Bannard sought the anonymous glossiness of house paint, Reinhardt and Martin worked with matte color. Ray Parker and Humphrey made their pictures tactile through textured surfaces.

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The Museum of Modern Art

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968

July 3 - September 8, 1968

Wall Label - East Wing Gallery - Northern Half

At the time abstract expressionism was reaching its fulfillment, artists of a different persuasion were working toward a less "painterly" solution in the creation of an American-type abstract art.

Jasper Johns, who refused to abandon "subject matter," nevertheless selected subjects consistent with the two-dimensionality of the canvas surface. In this way he avoided the construction of a fictional world within an illusionistic space. At the same time he made the pictorial surface palpable.

Alexander Liberman was a forerunner of the "hard edge" school that developed in the late 1950's. His Minimum of 1950, though hardly appreciated at the time, prophesied the austere anonymous paint surfaces and the radical reduction of image that would become essential to the minimalism of the 1960's.

Meanwhile Ellsworth Kelly was making constructions after observed real things, such as a window in a building, or the light reflected on the water beneath the arch of a bridge, predicting the "shaped" canvas of the 1960's. Image and picture thus became identical. He also joined together single panels of color, which are not simply parts of a composition, but retain their physically distinct identity.

In 1954-1955 Tony Smith produced a series of paintings based on a modular scheme. Eleven of these are exhibited. Louisenbergs '68 is a recent enlargement of painting No. 8. Originally the paintings were intended to be placed throughout a building in such a way as to co-ordinate the viewer's experience as he moves through a time-space sequence. The modular and grid system used by Smith was prophetic and appears frequently in the work of later artists.

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968

July 3 - September 8, 1968

Wall Label - Feeley, Judd, and Morris Galleries

A variety of explorations into the nature of the sculptural object and our experience of it occurred after 1960. Paul Feeley extracted the two-dimensional shapes he had invented in his paintings and re-created them in three dimensions. Donald Judd and Robert Morris sought unified three-dimensional forms wherein the spectator would be led to grasp the whole before the constituent parts. The parts, instead of being internally related and balanced, are organized in the simplest, most expected structural ways consistent with the materials employed. At the same time new angles of vision were explored. Three-dimensional objects were hung from the wall or ceiling, or spread low over the floor.

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THE ART OF THE REAL: USA 1948-1968

July 3 - September 8, 1968

Wall Label - Frank Stella Gallery

At the same time as the painters shown in the preceding gallery were intensifying and simplifying their pictorial means, other artists, like Frank Stella, began to challenge the conventional rectangular shape of the canvas itself, because it still carried with it associations of illusionism. Illusionism always suggests that the subject of art is something other than itself. The desire was to arrive at a coalescence of subject and object, which is a property of all real things. By making the viewer more and more conscious of the physicality, rather than the intellectuality of his experience, the rhetoric of the past is pushed aside. He is forced therefore to respond with direct immediate feelings, rather than with preconceived ideas.

At the same time, this new attitude toward the "real" encouraged sculptors to explore possibilities inherent in the literal physicality of their art. They, too, simplified forms and composition in order to arrive at the same kind of subject-object unity. They employed basic, matter-of-fact organization and construction: grids, close-packing, and stacking, often further unified by smooth industrial surfaces.

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