

Week 9, Lecture 17, Early Conceptual Art: Sol LeWitt and others

“The idea is the machine that makes the art” – Sol LeWitt

key decade: 1970s
terms: Conceptual Art

I. Conceptual Art – late 1960s New York,
quickly international, peaked in 1970s, still going strong today

A) Roots and precursors

- 1) Minimalism and Pop (Stella, Warhol)
- 2) Fluxus attitudes (George Brecht)
- 3) transcendental signifiers in Europe (Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni)
- 4) above all, the growing influence of Duchamp and the “anti-retinal”

B) Practitioners from various places (centered on New York and English language)

- 1) Robert Morris 61-63 (later Minimal, Performance, Process artist)
- 2) Joseph Kosuth ‘65-66 + (writer/theorist, infl. by Duchamp readymades)
- 3) Sol LeWitt ‘66-67 + (formulator of “Paragraphs” ‘67 / “Sentences” ‘69)
- 4) On Kawara ‘66 + (b. Japan, dialogue with LeWitt, postcards/ calendar boxes)
- 5) Douglas Heubler ca. ‘70 + (time-based)
- 6) Pop-inflected stand-alone Richard Artschwager ‘63 + (simulated furniture)
- 7) Art & Language, Coventry U.K. ‘68 + (Terry Atkinson, Mel Ramsden, Michael Corris et al.)

C) Main characteristics of Conceptual Art

- 1) Idea-based (form is incidental, medium *supposedly* of conceptual interest only, but note that photo + text are key components)
- 2) Artist role anti-heroic and impersonal (bureaucratic, administrative aesthetic?)
- 3) Execution impersonal (*if made at all*), often delegated, sometimes readymade
- 4) Language a crucial component
- 5) “The work can be made. The work does not have to be made to be art.”
(LeWitt)
- 6) Anti-object, anti-market?

II. California variants

A) Practitioners

- 1) Bruce Nauman (studied in Davis California)
- 2) John Baldessari (teaches still in Los Angeles)
- 3) Edward Ruscha (still based in L.A.)

B) Characteristics

- 1) Typically funnier, “stupider,” more deadpan than New York
- 2) More interested in engaging Pop as a way art can look, mass media as readymade

SLIDE LIST (selected)

prime precursor: Duchamp Fountain 1917, With Hidden Noise 1916, Air de Paris 1919, Monte Carlo Bond 1924
added impetus from: Cage 4'33" 1952, Stella black paintings 1958-59, Warhol Campbells Soup Cans 1962, Klein monochromes and "Zone of immaterial pictorial sensibility," 1960s, George Brecht's Event scores: (Chair Event 1960, Three Aqueous Events 1961)

Manzoni, Socle du Monde (Base of the World) 1961
Morris, Litanies, 1963 (and withdrawal certificate)
Morris, Fountain 1963
Morris, Three Rulers 1963
Kosuth, One and Three Chairs, '65
LeWitt, wall drawings, 1968 to the present
Heubler, Duration Piece, 1970
Artschwager, Table with Pink Tablecloth, 1964
Artschwager, 100 Locations, 1968
Nauman, Portrait of the Artist as a Fountain, 1966-60
Nauman, My Last Name Exaggerated 14 Times Vertically, 1967
Nauman, Acoustic Wall, 1969, and Wilder Gallery Installation, 1970
Nauman, One Hundred Live and Die, 1984
Baldessari, An Artist is not merely the Slavish Announcer, 1967-68
Baldessari, Cremation Project, 1970
Ruscha, Every Building on the Sunset Strip, 1966
Ruscha, Wax, 1970
Ruscha, Metal Shavings 1974
Ruscha, Not a Bad World, Is It? 1984
On Kawara, Wednesday, Dec. 12, 1978

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

4.651 Art Since 1940
Fall 2010

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.