

Sol LeWitt: Photography

Opening: April 2, 2004, 6:00 p.m.

Duration: April 3 – May 30, 2004

BIOGRAPHY

Sol (Solomon) LeWitt was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1928 into a family of Russian Jewish descent. His father was a doctor, his mother a nurse. From an early age he displayed an interest in art, an interest which was encouraged by his family. He studied fine art in college and later in graduate school.

LeWitt first traveled in Europe in 1950, where he showed a particular interest in Old Masters and fresco painting. He was drafted into military service, during the U.S. – Korean War and served for nearly two years in California, Japan and Korea.

After the war LeWitt moved to New York City and studied at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School (now the School of Visual Arts). He worked in magazine production and as a graphic designer for the architect I. M. Pei. This experience proved to be important in his later utilization of assistants to execute his designs: in LeWitt's words, "an architect doesn't go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He's still an artist."

During the rest of the 1950's he continued painting and sketching, but was unsatisfied by the results. He maintained a studio in downtown New York and formed part of the avant-garde artistic and intellectual circles that were taking shape there.

In the early 1960's he worked at the Museum of Modern Art, first in the bookshop and later as a night receptionist. His co-workers at the museum included young artists such as Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman and Robert Mangold, who were working as guards, as well as the art critic Lucy Lippard, who was working in the museum library. These contacts proved to be crucial in the development of theory-driven artistic movements that dominated the rest of the 1960's. During this period LeWitt also forged close personal and artistic relationships with artists such as Eva Hesse and Chuck Close.

Sol LeWitt's first individual show took place in 1965 at the Daniels Gallery in New York. It was soon followed by numerous individual and group shows as LeWitt became an important presence in the New York City art world.

LeWitt writings of the 1960's and early 1970's were scant but seminal. Texts such as "Sentences on Conceptual Art" and "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" were quickly seized upon as manifestos of the Conceptual Art movement. They continue to influence young artists and students today.

In 1978, Sol LeWitt had a mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The show consolidated him as a major figure in late 20th-century art. Soon afterward he moved to Italy, and in 1982 was married to Carol Androccio. He returned to New York City in 1986, although he continues to travel extensively.

Sol LeWitt has been commissioned to create monumental and memorial works around the world, such as the Holocaust Memorial in Washington, D.C. and several other museums and public buildings. He has published numerous artist books and has also designed furniture, stage sets, wine labels, scarves, floor tiles, carpets and ceramics. He has also designed a stage set for "Dance", a collaboration with the composer Phillip Glass and the choreographer Lucinda Childs.

A large-scale retrospective of LeWitt's work was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2000. The show later traveled to the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Four years in the making, the show was widely acclaimed in critical circles as well as by the general public.

In recent years, LeWitt has focused on creating works and exhibitions for specific sites and challenging spaces while also producing a large output of gouache paintings on paper. He has also dedicated himself to the cataloguing his vast output, with two volumes of wall drawings catalogues and a catalogue of his concrete block structures published thus far.

Sol LeWitt resides in Connecticut and travels frequently. He and his wife are active collectors of contemporary art and they oversee the LeWitt Collection, a large and important collection of art since the 1960's. Well-known in artistic circles as a generous benefactor, LeWitt is also famed for zealously protecting his privacy. He rarely grants interviews or allows himself to be photographed.