

Introduction

David Raskin

Gail Hastings' collection of interviews seeks to counter narrow interpretations of Minimal art, especially those claiming that Minimal art, which emerged in the mid 1960s, is a reductive practice. That misunderstanding dates to its earliest critics, but it neither fits her own experiences nor what she thinks the artists proclaimed. Minimal art is spring loaded with creative energy, and what that force creates is space.

The central issues debated by Hastings and the six scholars, curators and collectors she interviewed in 2015 determine whether Minimal art is a subtractive formal practice or an expansive sensual one and, also, whether it was a short-lived American movement or a widespread tendency in Western art and culture that spanned the twentieth-century. For readers new to Minimal art, this volume is a good introduction to historical practices and changing understandings. For artists and art historians, these conversations hold fresh insights into prominent figures, from Kazimir Malevich to Sol LeWitt, while engaging in many who are little known or largely forgotten, such as Charlotte Posenenske and George Ortman. For scholars, there are remarks that invite

further research, such as the names of adventurous gallerists in Europe in the 1960s who first showed this art.

When I completed *Donald Judd's Skepticism* in 1999, historical studies of Minimal art were becoming more common. There were important overviews by Maurice Berger (1989), Frances Colpitt (1990), Edward Strickland (1993), James Meyer (1995), and Caroline Jones (1996), and more focused scholarly studies written mainly but not exclusively for exhibition catalogues—Barbara Haskell (1988), William Agee (1994), and Alex Potts (1998) were three of many. But the conversation was still dominated by a few compelling and competing critical interpretations, some decades past due: Rosalind Krauss (1966), Michael Fried (1967), Hal Foster (1986), and Anna Chave (1990). In the course of my own research, I recall how productive it was to consider whether Judd had used the word 'materialism', because it helped stimulate my dedicated examination of his vast body of writings and interviews and ultimately resulted in a deeper understanding of the intellectual, artistic and political context for his statements. More fresh reconsiderations appeared soon afterwards, with studies by Potts (2000), Shiff (2000), Marianne Stockebrand (2004), Jo Applin (2006), Joshua Shannon (2009), and others. By the time I published a book on the aesthetic experience of scale (*Donald Judd*, 2010), many already recognised there was no such closed category as Minimal art but, rather, a broader set of practices that pursued both material limit conditions and the sensual creation of space. Certainly, the ever-growing number of visitors to the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, could see these two registers firsthand in the exhibitions, which include Judd's one hundred untitled works in mill aluminium (1982–1986), John Chamberlain's crushed-car sculptures (1972–1983), Roni Horn's solid copper cones (1986–1991), and Ingólfur Arnarsson's line drawings (1991–1992).

Among the many artists who engaged this twinned pursuit of materials and volumes, Judd often insisted that each credible work of art created specific spaces with both empirical dimensions and affective ones. I counted thirty-three publications with the words 'space' or 'spaces' in the title in Judd's personal library in Marfa—from Sigfried Giedion's classic of architecture (1962) to Gaston Bachelard's celebrated poetics (1969) to physics books intended for a general readership ([Judd Library: Judd Foundation](#)). The text I did not locate was the one I most expected, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974 French; 1991 English), since the translation was particularly fashionable for US academics in the 1990s and has received some 16,000 citations in the literature according to Google Scholar. While it is clear that Judd did not use any abstract treatise for guidance, he also faced the same decision with each work of art as many other artists: which ratio between the polarity of durable and ephemeral qualities should be emphasised?

What is most important about this collection of interviews is that it offers a wide range of possible answers to this question and, so, establishes the foundation for the next stage in the reception and understanding of minimalism. Hastings interviewed five of the six in January 2015; the conversations build on one another, and are both focused and expansive. Marianne Stockebrand, Director Emeritus of the Chinati Foundation, has most recently been instrumental in bringing significant attention to Judd's late 'multicolored works', and these in turn have brought latent qualities of Judd's earlier pieces to the forefront. As she explained to Hastings: 'The great achievement of his work is that he integrates different aspects into *one* form. That makes his work look simple, while it isn't. It is difficult to understand space'. Egidio Marzona, an early collector of minimalism in the broad sense (Arte Povera, Minimal Art,

Conceptual Art, Land Art, etc.), continued this theme while addressing a great many artists. 'Space', he explained, pointing to an early work by Carl Andre, 'is the most important thing for this art [...]. If I placed these wood blocks by Carl in the garden and left them there, it would forfeit the work; the work would be nothing'. Daniel Marzona, a dealer who has authored two books that include works from his father's collection, continued this theme about the significance of space in Minimal art. Discussing many US and European artists who began working in the 1960s, he said, 'I fully agree: reductionism doesn't say that much and a full account of space and its importance in this type of work is still to be written'. In some ways that has been the project of Gregor Stemmrich—a main catalogue essayist for the exhibition, *Minimalism in Germany: The Sixties* (2012)—who has sought to distinguish European practices from US ones. He offered: 'Minimal art equated structure and material—there is no hierarchy between them. That was very important because the material is what is actually there. It is not reduced [...]. This opens the space for the viewer, if they are attentive to it'. Art historian Richard Schiff has written frequently on Donald Judd and put a different emphasis on the issue of attention. '[W]hat I am describing [(the materiality of space)] has nothing to do with the viewer. That is the difference. You don't need the viewer. The object has space. It is not phenomenological. It becomes phenomenological for anyone when they have their experience, but this is about an artwork that has material space.' Renate Wiehager, the curator of *Minimalism in Germany: The Sixties* and head of the Daimler Art Collection, Stuttgart and Berlin, has curated large exhibitions from the 1950s to the present, including *Zero*, a European movement with material and spatial concerns. Many of these artists are little known, and her ambition has been 'to place formally reduced pictorial concepts and geometrical abstraction, as independent artistic phenomena, alongside classical Minimal art that stemmed

mainly from the New York art scene in the 1960s [...]. The central thesis of our exhibition series was that there is a history of impact to be discovered that starts with the 'emigration' of European Bauhaus and Constructivism in the 1930s, their reception in the US and their continuation in contemporary art'.

Though Hastings' interviews will not put an end to debates about how best to understand Minimal art, they do suggest the current state of affairs beyond the academy. To greater or lesser extents many artists in the twentieth-century investigated how specific materials created particular spatial experiences. What we choose to call those artists counts not one bit. What does matter is that we train our eyes to value the specific qualities of each moment. Then, we will truly have a way forward.