

Sol LeWitt

Sol LeWitt was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1928, and attended Syracuse University. After serving in the Korean War as a graphic artist, he moved in 1953 to New York, where he worked as a draftsman for the architect I. M. Pei. LeWitt had his first solo exhibition at the Daniels Gallery, New York, in 1965, and the following year Dwan Gallery, New York, mounted the first in a series of solo exhibitions. He participated in several significant group exhibitions of Minimalist and Conceptual art during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1966, and *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, in 1969. His renowned text “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” was published in 1967. LeWitt’s work was included in Documentas (1977 and 1982) in Kassel, as well as the Skulptur Projekte (1987) in Münster and the Istanbul Biennial (1989). Major retrospectives of his works were organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1978, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2000. *Drawing Series . . .*, a presentation of LeWitt’s early wall drawings, was installed at Dia:Beacon in Beacon, New York, in 2006–18. LeWitt died in 2007 in New York. A retrospective of over one hundred wall drawings from 1969 to 2007 opened at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in 2008 and will remain on view for twenty-five years.

1. *Wall Drawing #411 B: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane*, 1984

India ink wash on wall
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

2. *Wall Drawing #411 D: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane*, 1984

India ink wash on wall
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

3. *Wall Drawing #411 E: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane*, 2003

India ink wash on wall
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

1–3. Drawn by Hidemi Nomura and Jo Watanabe, May 2003

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When Sol LeWitt executed the first of his wall drawings in 1968, he inaugurated a new genre that he would explore for the next four decades. As with his sculptures and prints, the wall drawings are the result of a set of instructions carried out, in this case, directly on a chosen wall. Those instructions are normally brief and relatively simple—"ten thousand straight and ten thousand not straight lines"—and so their results vary in complexity and scale. The earliest of these works were drawn by LeWitt. But the series quickly evolved into a form of visual score, to be interpreted by a qualified assistant or group of assistants in a specific location, in perfect analogy with the tradition of musical composition and interpretation.

Despite LeWitt's definition of the idea as the "machine that makes the work," he often capitalized on circumstance, and the role of the assisting drafters could be as influential to the piece's fabrication as the architectural quirks of its site. Sometimes the physical particularities of the drafters, such as their height or arm length, are inevitably transferred into the work, determining its appearance. In fact, LeWitt regarded his works as "musical scores," in which the conceptual program that determines the composition, literally stated in the title, is always self-evident. "All decisions are made beforehand, so execution becomes a perfunctory affair," he stated in his landmark credo, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), adding that "in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work."

The three variations on *Wall Drawing #411: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane* (1984 and 2003) explore possible geometric shapes within a designated ten-foot-square area of wall. In their imposing physical guise, LeWitt's works reveal a compelling, luminous beauty that speaks as much to the senses as to the intellect. For even though the preset programs can be readily grasped, what is unexpected is their exhilarating presence. Experienced as a kind of aesthetic excess, this is the sensory equivalent

of the works' breathtaking logical consequence, a confrontation of what has been called "the purposelessness of purpose."