

# RISD MUSEUM

*Sol LeWitt*, February 27, 2004-May 2, 2004

Sol LeWitt (b. Hartford, Connecticut, 1928) is widely considered to be one of the most important living American artists. In the mid 1960s, LeWitt pioneered Conceptual Art, which rejected the value traditionally placed on the artist's role as craftsman and highlighted instead the thought processes involved in art-making.

This exhibition presents four major works dating from 1980 to the present, three of them recently acquired by the Museum: *Inverted Six Towers* (1987), a large, white wood sculpture from the "Open Cube" series; the white-on-black *Wall Drawing #327* and *Wall Drawing #328*, which were first realized in Tokyo in 1980 and have not been on view since; and *Wall Drawing #1115*, designed by LeWitt specifically for this show. Using diagrams provided by LeWitt, the three wall drawings have been executed by the artist's studio assistants, supported by RISD students and the Museum's technical crew.

LeWitt's wall drawings were born out of the artist's desire "to do a work of art that was as two-dimensional as possible." Created anew at each site, these collaborative works are carried out by hands other than the artist's at any site designated by the "owner" of the piece - the holder of a certificate signed by the artist and accompanied by a diagram and instructions. In LeWitt's words, "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." While the plan represents the artist's theoretically pure idea, the end product testifies to the inevitable intrusion of subjectivity and "messy" reality that accompanies any human endeavor and which becomes part of the piece.

In contrast to these two works, the new mural is realized in vivid primary and secondary colors, demonstrating LeWitt's transition from the more austere early designs to dynamic recent compositions. It features a sequence of circles within a large square painted on a white wall. Both the circles and the square are segmented into broken bands of vibrant color that seem to pulsate visually.

When the exhibition closes in May, all of the wall drawings will be painted over. As the owner of the certificates for the two black-and-white drawings, the Museum may recreate them at any time in any space, as long as the plans are followed accurately.

For forty years, LeWitt has remained true to his early principles while continuing to experiment with new possibilities for his art. He has questioned established notions of what art is and opened new directions for what it can be. In the process, he has challenged our very reliance upon rationality. As he states in his seminal document *Sentences on Conceptual Art* (1969): "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach."

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## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

*Inverted Six Towers*, 1987

White-painted wood

Purchased in honor of Phillip M. Johnston, Director of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1998-2003; accessioned by the 2002-03 Fine Arts Committee; Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.24

*Six Towers*, achieve an astonishing level of complexity using a very limited formal vocabulary. The restraint of the 1970s gave way to greater optical play as the cubic modules became finer and denser in their layering in the 1980s. In the later works, the overall form is more prominent than the individual cubes, so that the configurations suggest elaborate architectural complexes. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, LeWitt created a series of white, open, modular structures based on the cube.



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

*Wall Drawing # 328*, 1980

White crayon on black wall

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.1.2

On a black wall, a white circle within which are white vertical parallel lines, and a white parallelogram within which are white horizontal parallel lines. The vertical lines within the circle do not enter the parallelogram, and the horizontal lines within the parallelogram do not enter the circle.



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

*Wall Drawing # 327*, 1980

White crayon on black wall

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.1.1

On a black wall, a white trapezoid within which are white vertical parallel lines and a white square within which are white horizontal parallel lines. The vertical lines within the trapezoid do not enter the square, and the horizontal lines within the square do not enter the trapezoid.

