



ARTFORUM

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REVIEWS

New York

SOL LEWITT, Museum of Modern Art; KATE MILLETT, Noho Gallery; GERHARD RICHTER, Sperone Westwater Fischer Gallery; HEIDI GLÜCK, Bertha Urdang Gallery:

SOL LEWITT'S exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art is a retrospective that never calls itself one. It brings together works from 1962 to 1978 in an installation which, as good silent partner, doesn't detract from the art on view.

It makes clear, for example, the absence of a linear development in LeWitt's work at least after 1965, which I find refreshing. Ideas were picked up, dropped, works made, destroyed, made again at a later date; it is impossible to draw the deterministic line, to say it all went like this.

We're faced with ideas for art and the forms they were given, in some cases, 13 years after their inception. How do they appear? They seem remarkably visual for works many have held for nonvisual, more often the form, the visualization, than the idea. And they have an integrity sometimes missing in works by others from around the same time. Take works made for the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern (Krefeld, London) in 1969, which for the most part overdepended on the space and lost their meanings once they were outside of it; LeWitt's wall drawings self-destructed, and thereby saved themselves from becoming the sentimental leftovers of attitudes that were bound to change. Even LeWitt's structures are still self-contained, complete and coherent enough in themselves to be readable in a museum basement. But how would rope look (Barry Flanagan, *2-Part Rope Piece*) in storage, like art or like rope?

If you're closer in age to art students than to LeWitt, you're inclined to point out the contradictions: the triumph looks mixed at best. Is this proof of the resiliency of LeWitt's ideas and forms, or of the effectiveness of his process of pickling? How is it that there are so many forms in the exhibition which, out of the context of the years during which they were developed, look like well-preserved monuments to ideas that shouldn't need any?

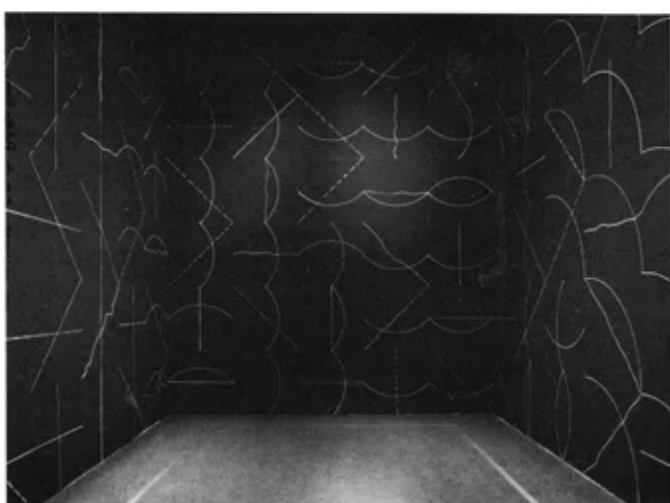
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everybody, as the three new wall drawings on colored grounds are everything to everybody? They yield a bigger wow, confirm a conception many have of what art should be, but they fail to advance the premise. And LeWitt? Is art that's clear, complete, conceptual, and now colorful, witty too? What is funny, the postcards, A GANG OF COLONS for Jenny Licht, are kept, literally, in the wings. But what's the point of wrestling further with a body of work that has its own answers built in? LeWitt himself has an explanation, which is often no explanation, for everything.

I question the relevance of this exhibition for a lot of people younger than LeWitt who have attitudes and approaches very different from his, people into art who aren't as glib (they can't afford to be), or as willing to produce work as consistent as a Chrysler. LeWitt reacted against his predecessors by moving in the direction he did in the '60s, or at least so that story goes. I'm skeptical of theories like this, about LeWitt's beginnings, that chart out about-faces in the way art has developed; I think they're the concoction of people who'd make better war strategists than theoreticians. But, on the other hand, it's fairly clear that (1) LeWitt's art has too many of its own answers to constitute an alternative for anyone else, and (2) it can't be a beginning, because it marks out a dead end. Is it LeWitt's turn to be pre-empted?

KATE MILLETT's "The Trial of Sylvia Likens" wasn't the kind of exhibition you expect to see in Soho Noho, PS.1 or in any other New York art context. You didn't just slip into it. It was clear, inelegant and meaty, and conveyed heavy personal feelings. It twisted your head around, and that appealed to me. Of course, for anyone used to confrontations with Minimal art it would be easy to hate the show for the way it played to the many, for the footprints on the floor telling you where to go, the taped narration, the scrawl on the walls, even the coverage in the *Voice*. Art, thank god, has gotten away from this. But the reaction I describe is perhaps a way of seeing things in the dark, symptomatic of art that has become pretty tight in its own definition. In other contexts I know, in certain cities in Germany or perhaps in France, one kind of art doesn't preclude the other. And here, is Millett's exhibition the answer?

The exhibition revolves around an event—the torture death in Indianapolis in 1965 of a 16-year-old girl named



Sol LeWitt, *All Combinations of Arcs from Corners and Sides; Straight, Not-Straight, and Broken Lines*, 1975, white chalk on black walls, 16 x 39 x 49'.

Sylvia Likens—and Millett's response to it. As the tape playing in the exhibition relates, Millett first read about it in *Time* magazine shortly after it occurred and was filled with outrage and fear; she understood it as a death that had happened because of existing notions of women's (girls') sexuality, that it meant "trouble" and had to be suppressed. She saw the death as an atrocity against all women, something that could happen to her or to anyone she knew, something that other women knew could happen to them. And in the last 13 years, Millett has investigated, written,

made art and exhibited about this death. It has been her way of coming to terms with it, of exorcising it.

I liked the fact that the exhibition dealt with subject matter art does not ordinarily deal with. It has an urgency about it; it was clearly the expression of things that had to be expressed. In places, it scrawled on the walls, hung out xeroxes, did what it had to do to get the facts across, it made direct statements. (Even some of the sculpted tableaux, *The Five Defendants in Court Awaiting Sentence*, to take one, though clearly interpretive and emotional, made the

Kate Millett, "The Five Defendants in Court Awaiting Sentence," tableau from "The Trial of Sylvia Likens," 1965-78, mixed media, 14 x 4 x 4'.



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Sol LeWitt

MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art

By Barbara Flynn

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—*Barbara Flynn*