

Minimalist Art Now is the first museum exhibition tracing the development of minimalist painting and drawing from 1980 to the present. The works in this exhibition emphasize a particular suspicion of systems that organize and thereby limit art and thought. The subtle ways in which the minimalists of today celebrate the beauty of mathematical, geometric, and logical formalism—while questioning those very methods and goals—demonstrate the tension of our relations to conceptual and technical systems. The works also elevate the importance of process on its own terms, focusing attention on the technicalities of their own materials and methods rather than ignoring or obscuring these details of composition.

Process can take the form of language-based or formal symbolic content, as in the layered film subtitles of Stefana McClure (Irish, b. 1959, lives in U.S.) and schema for documentation of baseball pitches by Janet Cohen (American, b. 1960). Compositional method can also depend more neutrally upon the residue (intentional and accidental) of repeated physical gestures as in the gampi paper pieces of Jill Baroff, the dripped-paint grids of Teo Gonzales, the monoprints of Louise Wiesenfarth, and the rock circumscriptions of John Cage.

Patterns and divergences among images emerge and disappear upon the surface of the enormous textile-like vertical drawings of Tayo Heuser (American, b. 1954), the intimate, tightly controlled grids of Agnes Martin (American, b. Canada 1912), John Andrews (American, b. 1960), and Robert Jack (American, b. 1971), and rule-governed drawings of Gerhard Mayer (German, b. 1962). Color relationships receive very different treatments in Kate Shepherd's (American, b. 1961) painted panels with their slightly distorted geometric imagery and Stephan Gritsch's (Swiss, b. 1951) weave of finely painted colored lines. The tension between machine-made and human-made is explored in the fastidiously dotted yet whimsical canvases of Mark Ferguson (American, b. Japan 1964), the burnt-paper images of Davide Cantoni (Italian, b. 1965), and the delicate mappings of Marco Maggi (Uruguayan, b. 1957). Finally, craft and domestic traditions are delightfully questioned and transformed in the inventive woven paper wall-sculptures of Seong Chun (Korean, b. 1968), and the bold and tender *Letters to the Mother* of Elena del Rivero (American, b. Spain, b. 1952).

In the minimal art of today we can experience directly the relation of human beings to formal systems. Despite the rigorous—perhaps even obsessive or compulsive—methodologies of these works, they are deeply personal, attempting always to privilege the human presence of the artist and viewer within the work and our experience of it. From its origins in the exquisite grids of Agnes Martin and subtle white canvases of Robert Ryman, the single most important and lasting contribution of 1960s minimalism is its subtly human mode of questioning. *Minimalist Art Now* presents a study of methods by which artists question and recast the role of systems in art and life.

While some artists shown in this exhibition are just emerging into prominence, especially in the influential New York art scene, many are represented in the country's leading art museums.

This exhibition surveys one of the most fascinating and compelling currents to come out of the art scene of the past three decades, namely, the resurgence of systematic and minimalist painting and drawing. Rooted in the austere tradition of sixties minimalism exemplified by Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, and Richard Tuttle, this new body of severe art values the same expanses of black, white, and gray, the same geometry of lines, bands, and grids, and the same less-is-more seriousness of vintage minimal art.

Minimalism is widely acknowledged as a key movement of postwar art. Recent single artist retrospectives of Barnett Newman (1905–1970)—arguably the father of the minimalist movement, Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Dan Flavin, all testify to the lasting impact of this subtle aesthetic on the history of art. Nevertheless, in the wake of recent surveys of minimalism at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Guggenheim Museum, and Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, we are left asking what happened to minimalism in the almost three decades since various forms of political, video, and installation art came to dominate the art world. These exhibitions have surveyed masterpieces of the minimalist aesthetic and occasioned considerable new debate regarding what is and is not minimalist, but each has focused on the heyday of minimalism in the 1960s and 1970s, at the expense of presenting the progress of minimalism from 1980 to the present.

The show features works of art from the collection assembled by Middleton native, University of Wisconsin alumnus, and art scholar Joseph Cunningham, and his partner Bruce Barnes. This exhibition was organized by the Elvehjem Museum of Art with guest curator Cunningham, a member of the Elvehjem Council, who now lives in New York City. An expert on twentieth-century fine art, Cunningham received his BA from UW-Madison and PhD from the City University of New York Graduate Center. This exhibition brings to Wisconsin a collection, built with the curatorial eye of a native Madisonian, of contemporary paintings and works on paper, many by artists previously not shown in the Midwest.

RECEPTION

A free public reception will be held at the Elvehjem Museum of Art, 800 University Avenue on Friday, February 4 from 6-7:30 pm. Live music by The Monroe Chamber Trio and refreshments are provided.

LECTURE

Before the preview reception at 5 pm on Friday, February 4, curator Joseph Cunningham will give a gallery lecture on the exhibition.

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