

## Management Leadership through Art and Literature

Shyam Sunder's Remarks to the Yale University Art Gallery Board of Trustees  
Betts Classroom, Evans Hall, Monday, April 28, 2014, 1 PM.

Origin of the course in attempts to teach leadership and creativity to students of management

Frustration with the social science approach to leadership

Resorting to arts and humanities

Introduced to Jock Reynolds by Sherlyn Scully and Gabriel Rossi who asked David Odo and Molleen Theodore to help us with Kate Ezra's support

Three editions of the course so far

YUAG Part: two out of seven class sessions about art (the other five for literature)

Session 1:

Art viewing exercise with David and Molleen,  
Introduction to Hass Art Library and research resources,  
David and Molleen selected some 25-30 works on display; each student had to select one piece for his or her own study of leadership/creativity/ideas/innovation/person/struggle behind the object of art  
Students study the object and the artist over the following five weeks through library resources

Session 2:

Final presentation to the class and write up on their analysis of art and the artist

It has been an enriching experience for the students, and me. Unique, inspiring. Students are very proud (bringing their parents and grand parents to their presentations)

Going Forward

1. Can continue the current mode
2. Assembling an exhibition on one or more selected theme for Evans Hall
3. Since it would be difficult to secure the works of art in Evans, perhaps their electronic versions could be displayed in our new facilities
4. Work with the School of Art to display students' work in Evans Hall on a rotating basis, curated by members of the class.

Any other suggestions?



### *Assignment Instructions*

A list of some 30 works of art in the collection of Yale University Art Gallery (at York and Chapel) is posted on Classes V2. We shall not assume that members of the class are artists or are art historians (certainly your instructor is not). We shall start the class on October 25th with Yale University Art Gallery curator David Odo giving the class a “looking exercise” about various ways in which one might look at art. After Mr. Odo’s introduction, members of the class will have the chance to see the listed works of art in the Gallery and each person will choose (preferably a different) one to work on.

These pieces are chosen because many people think that each of them represents an act of leadership by its creator. In your first assignment, you are to pick one of the works from the list (if the same work is chosen by more than one member of the class, they will be expected to work independently on their project), and return to study the piece in the Art Gallery during several weeks of this course. You will write a short (500-750 words) report on how you think the artist thought, worked, produced, marketed himself/herself, etc.—as reflected in your chosen work. What is the environment the artist may have worked in? What kind of the reaction he may have hoped for, and actually faced from those who saw his/her work? You should feel free to reference other works by the same artist and of course, the work of other artists in the context. Remember that you are not being asked to be an art historian, or to praise the work, only to study it carefully, and write your own reactions and analysis informed by your judgment.

In order to allow you a full six weeks to study and conduct research on your chosen piece of art, the art assignment is due at 4 PM of the last meeting of the class (December 13<sup>th</sup>). The October 25 class will include a lesson in conducting research on art by an art librarian who will also give you access to art databases.

A few resources:

[orbis.library.yale.edu](http://orbis.library.yale.edu)

[oxfordartonline.com](http://oxfordartonline.com)

[artstor.org](http://artstor.org)

<http://ecatalogue.art.yale.edu/search.htm>

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## Sol LeWitt, *A square for each day of the Seventies*, and seizing a mantle of Leadership

Stephanie Hawkins, '2014

In the mid 1960's, when Sol LeWitt was coming into practice as a professional artist, Abstract Expressionism and Dada were largely giving way to the next "renewal" of art that included Pop Art and Minimalism. Not seeing himself as particularly Duchamp-ian, believing that Abstract Expressionism had run its course<sup>1</sup> (he claimed in reference to Abstract Expressionism "An idea is finished when it is codified by academics."<sup>1</sup>), and disdaining Minimalism<sup>2</sup>, LeWitt instead elected to proceed outside these artistic sub-disciplines. Working alongside other artists (with whom he had become acquainted working routine desk and security jobs at the MoMA)<sup>3</sup>, LeWitt became instead one of the leaders of the Conceptual Art movement.

In his early public writing, LeWitt claimed that:

*1. Conceptual arts are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.*<sup>4</sup>

And:

*"What the work of art looks like isn't too important."*<sup>5</sup>

Despite these bold statements, however, LeWitt's professional positioning and strategy were neither mystical nor without regard to final product. One of his "Big Ideas" – that idea and process trumps product in art<sup>6</sup> – was an incremental innovation on a similar notion to which he was exposed by the architect I.M. Pei<sup>7</sup>, for whom he worked in 1955-1956<sup>8</sup>. With similar strategic intent (and despite his assertions that the aesthetics of the end product were not relevant), LeWitt's form and content (line drawings, books, architecture, and three-dimensional form) all hold direct reference to his professional training in graphic design. If there is one framework to which graphic designers can claim and deliver expertise, it is the grid. And, of course, it is the grid (and lexicons of visual elements) that LeWitt elevated in his works. We might therefore be suspect of his further assertions<sup>9</sup> that:

*32. Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.*

*33. It is difficult to bungle a good idea.*

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<sup>1</sup> Ostrow, S. 2003. Sol LeWitt In: *BOMB* 85. Accessed at: <http://bombsite.com/issues/85/articles/2583>

<sup>2</sup> Ostrow, S. 2003. Sol LeWitt In: *BOMB* 85. Accessed at: <http://bombsite.com/issues/85/articles/2583>

<sup>3</sup> *Sol LeWitt*. 1978. Museum of Modern Art.

<sup>4</sup> LeWitt, S. 1969. Sentences on Conceptual Art. In: *Art-Language*

<sup>5</sup> LeWitt, S. 1967. Paragraphs on Conceptual Art. In: *Artforum*

<sup>6</sup> LeWitt, S. 1969. Sentences on Conceptual Art. In: *Art-Language*

<sup>7</sup> Fairbrother, T. 1992. Sol LeWitt's drawings and the art of "logical statement". In: *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>8</sup> *Sol LeWitt*. 1978. Museum of Modern Art

<sup>9</sup> LeWitt, S. 1969. Sentences on Conceptual Art. In: *Art-Language*

Despite the latitude to conceive and express ANY concept/idea, LeWitt nonetheless stuck closely within the lines (=horrible pun) of that which he knew he could execute well; that is, his innovations took place within his existing visual language of line and grid. Strategic and well-advised, yes - but perhaps a little less “mysical” and indifferent to outcome that LeWitt might openly admit.

By innovating an existing idea and staying within his own visual convention/expertise, however, LeWitt achieved sufficient acceptance and respect such that his actual innovations - drawing directly on walls<sup>10</sup> – were recognized and elevated him to a position such that he could co-opt as his own the previously existing (if understated) artistic concepts such as divorcing idea/planning from execution (a notion quite accepted in architecture<sup>11</sup>) and creating multiple renderings of the same work to allow for simultaneous experience (a longstanding hallmark of myth and printed matter<sup>12</sup>). In creating dialogue and community with others doing similar work and aligning himself with the spirit of the times (for example by rallying against the material and commercial constraints of art selling works for \$100 with the stipulation that they could never be re-sold for more than \$100<sup>13</sup>, and be creating immovable/non-resalable wall drawings<sup>14</sup>), LeWitt was able to capture and propel himself forward on the cultural anti-materialist wave of the moment<sup>15</sup>.

Turning our attention to *A square for each day of the Seventies* (1981), we observe a work that is very much LeWitt. Although an explicit set of instructions does not accompany the work, it is not difficult to conceive what such a set of instructions might entail. On seeing this work, for example, it is clear how one might create or issue instructions to create *A square for each day at SOM*. What is interesting and relatively unique about this work, as compared to LeWitt’s previous extensive works with grids<sup>16</sup>, is that it contains a temporally-based external referent (the 1970’s). There is an interesting tension, then, between the notion of time, as well as LeWitt’s assertions<sup>17</sup> that:

*6. If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results.*

*22. The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.*

*29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.*

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<sup>10</sup> *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. 1992. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>11</sup> Fairbrother, T. 1992. Sol LeWitt’s drawings and the art of “logical statement”. In: *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>12</sup> *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>13</sup> Ostrow, S. 2003. Sol LeWitt In: *BOMB* 85. Accessed at: <http://bombsite.com/issues/85/articles/2583>

<sup>14</sup> *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>15</sup> Fairbrother, T. 1992. Sol LeWitt’s drawings and the art of “logical statement”. In: *Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992*. Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

<sup>16</sup> LeWitt had previously published two books of grids: *Grids, using all combinations of Straight, Not-Straight and Broken Lines* (Bruxelles, Pour ecrire la liberte, 1975) and *Color Grids*, New York, Multiples, Inc./Colombes, Generations, 1977. Referenced in: *Sol LeWitt*. 2012 Le Centre Pompidou-Metz. 2012,

<sup>17</sup> LeWitt, S. 1969. Sentences on Conceptual Art. In: *Art-Language*

Time, as we know, will inevitably run its course. And although it is somewhat outside the scope of this paper, there is perhaps fruitful reflection to be had by overlaying LeWitt's instructions (as witnessed by his Paragraphs and Sentences) to the life and leadership inflection points that might occur within a square, or series of squares, for any day(s). Further, in response to LeWitt's remark that:

*"The draftsman and the wall enter a dialogue. The draftsman becomes bored but later through this meaningless activity finds peace or misery. The lines on the wall are the residue of this process. Each line is as important as each other line. All of the lines become one thing. The viewer of the lines can only see the lines on the walls. They are meaningless. This is art."*<sup>18</sup>

And Bernice Rose's response to this comment:

*"Although offered as a deadpan joke, it is nevertheless a significant statement about LeWitt's own feeling about making art – how the art looks to the artist on a day-to-day basis if he doesn't keep the larger issue in mind."*<sup>19</sup>

It might be argued that – with regard to connotations for life and leadership - LeWitt created a scenario in which his ability to literally and figuratively focus on making small, deliberate marks that (each individually insignificant) in the end summed to not only a perceptual but also a reputational, commercial, and intellectually greater whole.

**(Authors note:** If you exclude the quotations, I 'm inside the word count.)

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<sup>18</sup> Rose, B. 1978. Sol LeWill and Drawing. In: *Sol LeWitt*. Museum of Modern Art

<sup>19</sup> Rose, B. 1978. Sol LeWill and Drawing. In: *Sol LeWitt*. Museum of Modern Art