

Negative Pyramid

Sol LeWitt

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MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is delighted to present *Negative Pyramid* by Sol LeWitt, in collaboration with the Sol LeWitt Estate.

First exhibited in Paris in 1997 at Lucio Amelio's Pièce Unique gallery located in rue Jacques Callot, this is the first time the work returns to Paris since its first presentation.

Repetition, method, and geometry are the cornerstones of LeWitt's practice.

In his 1999 essay *Paragraphs on conceptual art*, LeWitt explains that *"using a simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity to the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means."*

By submitting his practice to a pre-established system, or fundamental idea which would determine the methods according to which the work should be composed, LeWitt was able to adopt an attitude of neutrality towards artistic and linguistic expression: *"the aim of the artist interested in conceptual art is to make his work mentally interesting for the spectator, and for this reason, the artist wishes for this work to become arid on the emotive plan."*

Paradoxically, his most personal gesture became his ability to strip his work from his own subjectivity, giving maximum importance to composition and form.

Made of 209 concrete blocks layered in a horseshoe, regressive sequence, *Negative Pyramid* is part of an architectural body of work that LeWitt began in 1985 in Switzerland, following a residency in Umbria, Italy.

The work directly references ancient Egyptian tombstones: large, stepped structures first built in Mesopotamia, also referenced in the architecture of Le Corbusier and in the 1916 proposals for 'setback' buildings in central Manhattan, about which LeWitt published the article, 'Ziggurats', in 1966. In this case, the negative form of the pyramid is also an echo to the *counter monumental*

tradition of the 1980's and 1990's, which sought to question the occupation of space and the construction of memorial monuments to symbolize absence.

The cement block, a modern, simple construction material, was a fitting unit experiment with modular compositions, to create his 'structures' – referencing the squares in a grid. As an artist who lived and worked in New York, the presence of grid structures were and echo to the modular skyline and checkerboard road layout of Manhattan, a pattern frequently used throughout art history.

This exhibition is presented in parallel to *McArthur Binion – Sol LeWitt* at MASSIMODECARLO Milan from November 26th to January 15th, 2022, which intends to stimulate conversation surrounding the points of crossover and contrast in the work of Sol LeWitt and McArthur Binion, two prominent voices in contemporary art and key figures of twentieth-century modernism.

Side by side their work is elegant and thoughtful, inspiring questions relating to the importance of surface, depth and theory surrounding the nature of art objects themselves.

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Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) was born in Hartford, Connecticut and is widely recognized as a one of the pioneers of Conceptual art and Minimalism in the 1960s. This new aesthetic emerged in contrast to the prevalent ideology and aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism that dominated New York in the 1950s and 1960s. LeWitt is most well known for his distinct visual vocabulary: the work is an extremely rigorous study of geometry, the rules and permutations possible within the most concise visual rule sets. His most well-known bodies of work include the iconic Wall Drawings, minimalist sculptures, and drawings in pencil and ink. LeWitt graduated with a BFA from Syracuse University in 1949 and then served in the United States Army in Korea and Japan during the Korean War (1950-1953), where he designed posters. In 1953, he moved to New York where he studied at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School and began an important relationship, working as a graphic designer at I. M. Pei's architecture studio, greatly influencing his later work.

In 1960, he began working at Museum of Modern Art as a night watchman and there he met an influential group of artists, including Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, Robert Mangold, the future art critic Lucy Lippard, and in the New York scene became close to Eva Hesse, Hannah Darboven, and Robert Smithson. He also was introduced to work by Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Robert Rauschenberg in the landmark show, *16 Americans*. In collaboration with Dan Flavin and Carl Andre, he is credited with proposing the term "conceptual" in a manifesto entitled "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," published in *Artforum* magazine in June 1967.

In the late 60s, he began to create his Wall Drawings. His first work dates back to 1968 shown at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York: a system of parallel lines drawn with a black pencil on a white wall. Drawing directly on the wall allows LeWitt to pursue one of its main goals: to reinforce the flatness of his art and make the work as two-dimensional as possible.

At the end of the 70s, LeWitt moved to Spoleto, Italy, where he studied the works of Giotto, Filippo Lippi, Masaccio, and Beato Angelico. LeWitt's

work underwent a major transformation and he began to experiment with India ink and color ink washes, a nod to the local works from the 14th and 15th century.

Collecting since the 1960s, LeWitt and his wife, Carol, accumulated over 8,000 works that are on long term view at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut.

Sol LeWitt's works have been exhibited widely including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Tate Gallery, London, Kunsthalle Bern, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Geementemuseum, University of Wadsworth, Hartford, Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome as well as Documenta IV, Documenta V, and the Venice Biennale. In 2000, SF MoMA organized a retrospective of his work, which traveled to the MCA Chicago and Whitney Museum, New York. In 2008, Mass MoCA organized a retrospective of 105 Wall Drawings, which will be on view for twenty-five years until 2033.