

McArthur Binion - Sol LeWitt

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MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to announce the exhibition *McArthur Binion - Sol LeWitt* in collaboration with the Sol LeWitt Estate.

In 1973 McArthur Binion moved from Chicago to the heart of the minimalist art scene, New York. In the same year his work was exhibited at Artists Space in a show curated by Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre. Inspired by this encounter, *McArthur Binion - Sol LeWitt* allows their parallel practices to be seen in direct dialogue for the first time. Shown within the gallery spaces of Casa Corbellini Wassermann, the artists' works share a strongly linear visual language. The formal investigation of the grid, geometry, and a preoccupation with surface offer points of comparison, however it is in the importance they place on the depths beneath a work's surface that the two diverge.

Since the 1970s Binion has challenged minimalism by applying the movement's formulaic techniques to material that is deeply personal. The works in the exhibition, the latest in longstanding collaboration with the gallery that began in 2017, are from Binion's ongoing 'DNA' series. The series uses personal documents or photographs repeated in a grid format as the first surface layer of the work, which the artist refers to as the work's 'under-conscious', on top of which geometric shapes are layered using crayon and hard-pressed oil stick. While *Altar* (2020) uses pages from the address book he kept when living in New York in the 1970s, *healing:work* (2020) features a photograph of his childhood home. Using supposedly unique objects, sometimes even his birth certificate, in an infinitely repeatable grid format is beautifully oxymoronic.

The integral role of the 'under-conscious' in his work broadens the typically reserved subject matter of abstract painting. Binion's autobiographical references position his work, and the role of abstract art in general, in a wider discussion of the African American experience within art. Pertinently, the most recent works in the exhibition share their title, *Modern: Ancient: Brown*, with Binion's foundation which supports and empowers black, indigenous and artists of color. Binion's works are self-referential: at one level they are a perfect formal study in the

minimalist grid, but their below-the-surface depths reveal references buried within.

Avoiding depth entirely, LeWitt created works that were 'as two-dimensional as possible'. Rallying against illusionism in painting, in 1968 LeWitt sort to abandon the confines of the traditional painting surface by drawing directly on the wall. The first wall drawing was lightly traced using straight graphite lines and sparked decades' long development of the practice; straight lines became curved, and graphite gave way to primary color and ink washes. The elegant crayon-drawn linear forms of *Wall Drawing #387* (1981) relate to this first drawing, however its method of making illustrates how the wall drawings developed over time. Although each wall drawing is always adapted to its site, *Wall Drawing #387* took it a step further: it is created from a set selection of linear symbols, but their number and placement is chosen at random during the making process.

The work *Wall Drawing #589 A* (1989) exhibits the importance of color in LeWitt's later practice. Following his move to Spoleto in 1980, LeWitt regularly visited the frescos nearby by Early Renaissance masters Filippo Lippi, Giotto and Piero della Francesca. Painted before the proliferation of linear perspective, LeWitt admired the truth in the flatness of the frescos' forms and began to use colored India Ink to create his wall drawings; the ink penetrated the fabric of the wall, replicating the technique, and appearance, of fresco. Although it did 'seem more natural to work directly on walls', LeWitt admitted there were still constraints as 'the artist is at the mercy of the architect'. *Wall Drawing #589* is the product of his determination to free painting from boundaries. While the first wall drawings began by covering only a portion of the wall, *Wall Drawing #589* radiates across the entire wall, defying architecture by ignoring doorways and windows.

Architecture, with its focus on form, has played an integral role in the art of both LeWitt and Binion. While the *binion/saarinen* works (2018) directly reference the architect Eiel Saarinen, the designer of Cranbrook Academy of Art and Museum where Binion spent formative years studying beneath its modular, modernist buildings, LeWitt '[thought] more about architecture than sculpture' when conceiving his three-dimensional works. Two works display in particular the influence of architecture on the artists: Binion's *Altar* (2020) with its curved arch shape, synonymous with church architecture, was made as an altarpiece for the Renaissance Chapel at the Museo Novecento in Florence and LeWitt's *Horizontal Progression* (1991). *Horizontal Progression* is part of a series the artist began in 1985 that used the everyday material of concrete blocks which, like the squares in a grid, could be developed through modular construction to create his 'structures'. The stepped profile of the work directly references Ziggurat buildings: large stepped structures first built in Mesopotamia, referenced in the architecture of Le Corbusier and in the 1916 proposals for 'setback' buildings in central Manhattan, about which LeWitt published an article, 'Ziggurats', in 1966. As artists who both lived and worked in New York, the presence of grid structures in their work also echoes the modular skyline and checkerboard road layout of Manhattan, a regular reference throughout art history.

The exhibition *McArthur Binion - Sol LeWitt* 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.

MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris, will present a parallel exhibition of Sol LeWitt's *Negative Pyramid* (1997) from November 30th to December 12th 2021.

McArthur Binion (b. 1946, Macon, Georgia) lives and works in Chicago, Illinois. Binion's works have been prominently included in the 57th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, *VIVA ARTE VIVA*, curated by Christine Macel.

Recent solo exhibitions of his work have been organized at MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Paris (2021); Museo Novecento, Florence (2020); MASSIMODECARLO, London (2019); the Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills (2018); the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston (2012). Binion's work is featured in several public and private collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; Cranbrook Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills; Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Kemper Museum of Art, Kansas City; Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans; Strauss Family Collection, Santa Fe; Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo.

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. 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.