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Artist

Sol LeWitt's Secret

Much has been made of the notion that Sol LeWitt's work is not about the object itself but the ideas behind the object. This is, of course, an almost meaningless statement, since ideas, objects, and the world they belong to have meaning "only because the human urge toward meaning is what makes the world a place at all."¹ We are also encumbered by LeWitt's own pragmatic modesty, making it impossible to gauge the artist's true ambitions.

But let's play the game and pretend there are actually ideas or systems that can somehow hide behind objects, and that these can be distinguished from ideas or systems that can only be found in objects. I like it. Then let's take this notion one step further, and try to imagine there is a correspondingly real state between an idea and its manifestation, a space where latent forms and emergent systems drift, waiting to be summoned by the eye. I imagine this as a larger, extra-dimensional space, somehow isometric to our own. This space, if we grant it exists, is actually a

grand and terrifying prospect, quite far in its implications from the cozy theorizing of late 1970s Conceptual practice, closer by far to the shadow space that T. S. Eliot described in "The Hollow Men": "Between the idea/ And the reality/ Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the Shadow/... Between the conception/ And the creation/ Between the emotion/ And the response/ Falls the Shadow."²

Doesn't that seem like a perfect description of what LeWitt, despite his generosity and his modesty, was doing all along? One of his hopes was "to re-create art, to start from square one."³

What if what we saw of the LeWitt project, with its sly humor and vast appetite for public and private projects, was just a mask for an even more enormous shadow project, this deduction of higher forms, this vast transcendental argument for immanence? I like to imagine that he didn't want us to simply revere the Minimal severity of his early "shape

without form, shade without color, paralyzed force, gesture without motion" (from the same Eliot poem), or later to just dreamily revel in the gorgeous consequences of that same geometry lushly veiled in ecstatic colors seemingly salvaged from Giotto's palette.

I like to imagine that all along LeWitt harbored an even more extraordinary ambition; that implicit in his venture are not only all the LeWitt works that might have ever been but the promise of all possible combinations of line and color, hovering between the super-sensible noumenon, the thing in itself, and the manifold, the field of as yet unsynthesized presentations.

Wouldn't it be a fitting tribute to house a project like that in a magnificent and unending procession of glorious chambers, collectively memorializing and celebrating the premise and promise of all human perception? Wouldn't that be a fine thing?

1. Kenneth Baker, "Keith Sonnier at the Modern," *Artforum* 10, no. 2 (Oct. 1971), p. 80.

2. T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in Eliot, *Poems, 1909-1925* (1925; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1930).

3. Sol LeWitt in Martin Friedman, "Construction Sights," in Gary Garrels, ed., *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 51.