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*Archives of American Art*

## **Celebrating 175: Judd, Donald, 1965-1983**

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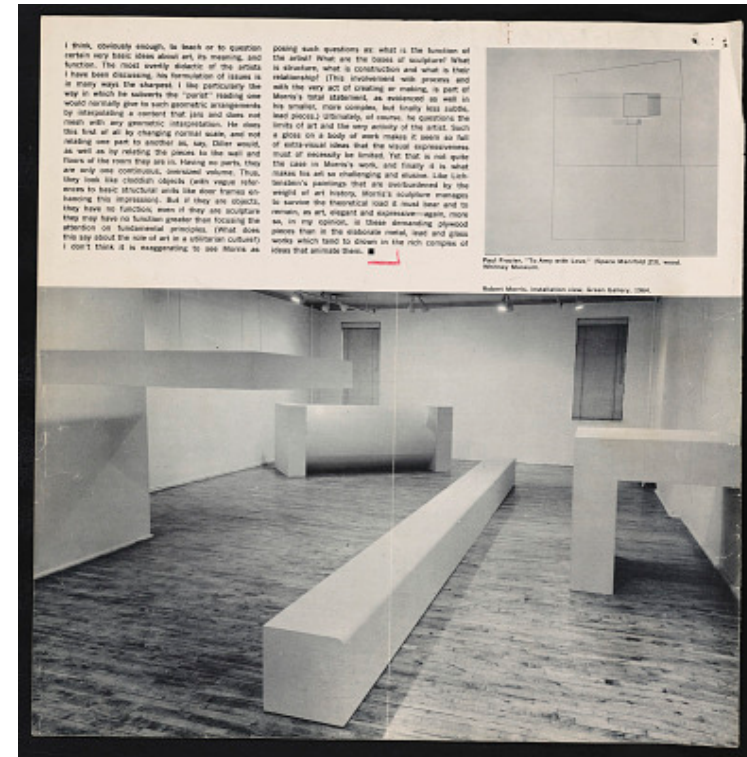
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I think, obviously enough, to teach or to question certain very basic ideas about art, its meaning, and function. The most overtly didactic of the artists I have been discussing, his formulation of issues is in many ways the sharpest. I like particularly the way in which he subverts the "purist" reading one would normally give to such geometric arrangements by interpolating a content that jars and does not mesh with any geometric interpretation. He does this first of all by changing normal scale, and not relating one part to another as, say, Diller would, as well as by relating the pieces to the wall and floors of the room they are in. Having no parts, they are only one continuous, oversized volume. Thus, they look like cloddish objects (with vague references to basic structural units like door frames enhancing this impression). But if they are objects, they have no function; even if they are sculpture they have no function greater than focusing the attention on fundamental principles. (What does this say about the role of art in a utilitarian culture?) I don't think it is exaggerating to see Morris as posing such questions as: what is the function of the artist? What are the bases of sculpture? What is structure, what is construction and what is their relationship? (This involvement with process and with the very act of creating or making, is part of Morris's total statement, as evidenced as well in his smaller, more complex, but finally less subtle, lead pieces.) Ultimately, of course, he questions the limits of art and the very activity of the artist. Such limits of art and the very activity of the artist. Such a gloss on a body of work makes it seem so full of extra-visual ideas that the visual expressiveness must of necessity be limited. Yet that is not quite the case in Morris's work, and finally it is what makes his art so challenging and elusive. Like Lichtenstein's paintings that are overburdened by the weight of art history, Morris's sculpture manages to survive the theoretical load it must bear and to remain, as art, elegant and expressive—again, more so, in my opinion, in these demanding plywood pieces than in the elaborate metal, lead and glass works which tend to drown in the rich complex of ideas that animate them.

[[image]]  
Paul Frazier, "To Amy with Love," (Space Manifold #3), wood.  
Whitney Museum.

[[image]]  
Robert Morris, installation view, Green Gallery, 1964.



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