



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Archives of American Art*

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

Extracted on Apr-20-2024 09:28:50

**The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.**

The Smithsonian Institution (the "Smithsonian") provides the content on this website ([transcription.si.edu](https://transcription.si.edu)), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence ("SI Websites") in support of its mission for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the [following terms](#).

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the Archives of American Art as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the Archives of American Art website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact Archives of American Art or [transcribe@si.edu](mailto:transcribe@si.edu)

For more information on this project and related material, contact the Archives of American Art. [See this project](#) and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.

and humor. The chemical inventions and optical toys came together in film and film camera; as a medium, film united with other forms of entertainment. It was for a brief time an extension of vaudeville, being incorporated into it as one of the varieties or spectacles. Early methods were simple; the authors were usually anonymous as were the players - when they were called for. In the first ten years it was an industry of individuals and small businesses.

After that cinema expanded significantly into big business. Film is a product of bourgeois modernism and the machinery of capitalist enterprise. Film and the institution of the cinema are the results of, as well as instruments of, progress. In fact, one might recall the thoughts of the eloquent but conservative French critic André Bazin, who saw the film as an esthetic advance over older art forms, capable of fulfilling our psychological cravings for greater and greater realism, and doing so automatically, without the intervention of man's hand. This was progress, so he seemed to think. But if it was progress, film in its beginnings had no relationship to the discontinuity present in the work of the artistic avant-garde.

In the 1950s Arnold Toynbee first used the term postmodern and dated its start in the last quarter of the 19th century.<sup>10</sup> Others speak of the postmodern period, as I myself do, as beginning in the late 1960s. These dates and their relationships to the origins of film and the recent avant-garde are significant. Does postmodernism originate at the same time as the invention of film as a popular entertainment form and a means of mechanical reproduction, or has post-modernism begun very recently amidst avant-garde activity in the 1960s, spelling the end of both modernisms?

The 1960s: Pop art and happenings; post-painterly abstraction and Minimal art, followed by the various manifestations which fall under the rubric of what Robert Pincus-Witten first called post-Minimalism—including process, conceptual and performance art. In film in the late '50s there were various calls for and claims to new cinemas in Europe and the U.S. At the time the development of lightweight cinema-vérité equipment seemed to make a number of those new cinemas possible. In 1959 Jonas Mekas called for a new generation of filmmakers, which in 1960 he referred to as the New American Cinema. A continuation of this was the underground film in the early 60s, including Warhol; Jack Smith, author of the infamous *Flaming Creatures*, 1964, of Supreme Court notoriety; and related to Smith's works, the sensuous *Chumlyum*, 1964, made by Ron Rice, whose premature death in Mexico made him something of a heroic cult figure. This was followed in the mid and late '60s with tendencies in the avant-garde that were somewhat analogous to Minimalism in sculpture, and that mixed with other concerns that are suggested in the prescriptions, rhetoric and descriptions of Clement Greenberg about modernist painting.

The underground—specifically that of Warhol and Smith and some Rice—the decadence which Parker Tyler wrote against, had a crude primitive simplicity about it: washed out and underexposed images, long awkward takes, and a self-conscious naiveté on the part of the players and in terms of how the camera was used. They were quite different from the films of Brakhage, who was also at that time categorized and shown in the underground. Like the primitive film, the viewing conditions for these works were often extremely crude. But they were also underground for economic reasons or because of content considered



pornographic or salacious and the possible object of legal scrutiny and attack, of which Flaming Creatures is the best known example.

[[image]]

Stan Brakhage, Anticipation of the Night, 1958].

An early Warhol, Eat or Sleep, next to a poetic study by Brakhage, such as Anticipation of the Night, of 1958, or Cat's Cradle, of 1959, had to look simple, primitive, and unnecessarily discursive. When Brakhage used splice marks, scratches, over- and under- exposures-plays revealing film's materials-they were gestures, metaphors about physical or metaphysical seeing and vision. In Warhol the end-roll dots and flashes, the imperfect exposures, the static, cramped frame were simple statements about what would be left in. No metaphors. The film is what is and what it represents and nothing more. It shows without revealing. It re-embraces the broad premise, espoused by the very first cameramen, that anything on film is bound to engage: Of course they were talking about a half minute or one or two minutes, while Warhol is provoking and exaggerating through his use of extended time and his removed, distanced role, his fixation or fetishization of thing or event-a refinement, an act of sophistication brought to bear on the naive, primitive film event - into an object on film. As Mekas pointed out, nothing else like Warhol's work was going on at that time, 1963-64: not in Godard's, not in anyone's in Europe, nor in the U.S. Some were outraged by Warhol's films, some tried to simply dismiss them as inconsequential; others were influenced by this direct, undramatic, nonnarrative work with a lack, often times, even of spectacle. Was it decadence, or was it a recycling to the beginnings, a kind of revolution which was about, as are all revolutions, a purification?

Perhaps Clement Greenberg's name has been referred to too much in too many contexts, but it is useful in construction connections with this recent film. In his "Modernist Painting" of 1960, he spoke of the modernist sense of self-criticism in all areas and fields. He interpreted that sense in painting to mean an emphasis on paint and canvas rather than on representation or imitation, foregrounding the painting itself—line, color, flatness, etc.—as subject which expresses that self-consciousness about the medium. At the same time he described the irreducible elements of the medium of painting: paint and flatness, he said. This kind of reductivism causes many problems, the primary one being: where does one go



## Smithsonian Institution

*Archives of American Art*

The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!

The Transcription Center: <https://transcription.si.edu>

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter>

On Twitter: [@TranscribeSI](https://twitter.com/TranscribeSI)

Connect with the Smithsonian

Smithsonian Institution: [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian>

On Twitter: [@smithsonian](https://twitter.com/smithsonian)