

LESS IS MORE



Exhibition dates: Friday 3 August to Sunday 4 November 2012

Curator: Sue Cramer

Venue: Heide III Central Galleries



Less is More: Minimal and Post-Minimal Art in Australia installation view

Heide Museum of Modern Art

Photograph: John Brash 2012

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Introduction

Focusing on the Australian context, this exhibition will explore the late modernist movement of Minimal Art, the debates it provoked in the 1960s and 1970s, its broader intersection with Post-Minimal tendencies of Conceptual, Process, and Anti-form Art, and then the re-working of Minimalism by contemporary artists today.

A wide range of works by Australian artists will be presented—painting, sculpture, and video—alongside a few key examples of American artworks by Minimal and Post-Minimal artists from the 1960s drawn from Australian state and national collections.

Minimal art is founded in the principle ‘less is more’, suggesting that an artwork need not be visually complicated to be rewarding for the viewer. As American artist Robert Morris famously said in 1966, “Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience”.

Sometimes referred to as the last of the modernist movements, Minimal art challenged fundamental conceptions of the art object—what it could look like, how it was made and what it could be made from. Emerging first in New York in the late 1950s, Minimalism was initially seen in painting, then more prominently in sculpture in the 1960s. Its stark geometric forms, and its emphasis on the object-in-itself—its shape, scale, extension into space and interaction with the viewer—had a sustained influence on art internationally. Post-Minimalism, its immediate successor, introduced soft, pliable materials, organic forms and new mediums like video and performance into this pared-back vocabulary.

This exhibition brings together Minimal and Post-Minimal works by Australian artists spanning from the 1960s to today. It traces Minimal art’s brief but significant flourish in the abstract art of the sixties generation, through to its reworking by contemporary artists today. As a grounding for this exploration, key examples of American Minimalism are included—structures by Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt—and Post-Minimal works by Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis and Bruce Nauman.

In the 1960s in Australia, Minimalist artists used reduced compositions and shaped canvases to explore the concept of art as object. Some used grids or repeated units in rows or stacks. Others made monochrome paintings with high-gloss surfaces in which the viewer and gallery architecture are reflected. In the 1970s, a new wave of artists ushered in a Post-Minimal approach, some by applying Minimalist structures and principles to time-based and environmental works.

Minimal artworks often comprise modules used singularly or in sequence, are sometimes made by a fabricator following the artist’s instruction, and draw meaning from the relationships they form with space and the viewer. Once radical, such ideas are now widely accepted within contemporary art and inform the work of artists who continue to extend and reconfigure this pivotal movement of twentieth century art.



Less is More: Minimal and post-Minimal Art in Australia
installation view
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Part of the exhibition *Less is More*, focuses on the diversity of Minimal and Post-Minimal art from the 1960s to the 1980s, and how its serial forms and processes fed into the development of Conceptual art. A key figure in the transition between Minimal and Conceptual art was American artist Sol LeWitt, who wrote in 1967 that 'the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work', an attitude shared by the artists whose work is shown here.

Their readymade objects, texts, photographs, videos, and artists' books extend and rework the definition of art. Photographs filed in an index box present art as a permanent document of activities and processes, a video records a sequence of actions by an artist, and objects are juxtaposed with statements or propositions that raise questions about the nature of perception and how we ascribe meaning to things. A painting held up by two strings that extend beyond its frame represents art's interconnectedness with the gallery and by implication its wider context.

Many artists in the 1970s published books or inserted pages within art magazines, valuing the wide distribution of their art over the exclusivity of unique art-objects. This democratisation of art also underpins a contemporary publication of instructions for making Post-Minimal wall-drawings.

Sue Cramer, curator



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An Interview with the Curator, Sue Cramer

Why contextualise Minimal and Post-Minimal art within an Australian context?

Though it began in the 1960s, Minimal art has generated some of the most influential and important ideas used by artists today, and for this reason it has a particular relevance for contemporary audiences. Whilst it emerged first in America, it was interpreted and re-worked by Australian artists of the sixties generation and after a period of being out of favour has been re-engaged with by subsequent generations of Post-Minimal artists in Australia, as elsewhere. Because of this currency and Minimal art's enduring influence, I felt the time was right for a re-assessment of its significance.

What are the characteristics of Minimal and Post Minimal Art?

Founded in the principle 'less is more', Minimal art proposes that an artwork need not be visually complicated to be rewarding for the viewer. As American artist Robert Morris famously said in the 1960s, "Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience". By using simple abstract shapes or modular forms, sometimes repeated in sequence (as rows, stacks, grids and the like) the original Minimal artists like Morris, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, 'minimised' the compositional complexity of their works. They also eradicated allusion to anything beyond the literal, physical presence of their artworks—which were to be experienced as 'objects-in-themselves'. In a historical context, Post-Minimalism was the immediate successor of Minimalism in American art, though the two also existed side by side. Whilst to some extent oppositional to Minimalism, it also arose directly out of it. Post-Minimalist artists introduced soft, pliable materials, indeterminate forms and new mediums like video and performance, and with them reference to the body, into Minimal art's pared-back vocabulary. More generally, the term Post-Minimal describes the work of contemporary artists who re-work and extend Minimalist ideas. Examples of 'old' and 'new' Post-Minimalism in the exhibition include Robert Morris's wall-hanging *Untitled* (1970) made from cut-pieces of industrial felt and Mikala Dwyer's *The Boohoohoos* (2000) made from looped strips of painted styrene plastic.

What is the story being told in this exhibition?

Works by 34 Australian artists demonstrate how successive generations have worked with and adapted these tendencies. In the sixties, Minimal art was taken up by young abstract artists eager to address what they saw as the latest and most progressive ideas about art. Their varied works —mainly paintings, but some sculptures—are instances of a Minimalist idiom arising from discussions between artists locally, but also from their knowledge of international art. Robert Hunter and Robert Jacks travelled to New York and participated in its art scene—Jacks's *Red Cut Piece (45–90°)* (1969), re-made by him for *Less Is More*, is like the cut paper and felt wall hangings he exhibited there in 1971. Contemporary artists continue to extend and reinvigorate Minimalism. Consider Daniel von Sturmer's *Painted Video (Sequence Four)* (2009)—it is a virtual minimalist painting, white on white; or Giles Ryder's incandescent pink *Mirrorchrome* (2006), a stylish update on the reflective surfaces typical of Minimalism; or Kathy Temin's *White Cube: Fur Garden* (2007) in which the sensuality of synthetic fur softens and transforms the minimalist cube. Classic examples of Minimal and Post-Minimal art by American artists are also presented in the exhibition. They provide an important touchstone, but also in some ways a counterpoint to the Australian works.

Key Art Terms

Conceptual Art

Art in which the concept or idea take precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns.

Installation Art

A three-dimensional artwork in any media, often including the features of the space in which it is shown, which is especially created for a particular gallery, architectural space or outdoor site.

Minimalism

Minimal artists typically made works using serial arrangements of geometric shapes such as the square and the rectangle. Minimal art was mainly three-dimensional and often large-scale and industrially produced. Minimal artists 'minimised' the compositional complexity of their works, eradicated allusion to anything beyond the literal, physical presence of their artworks—which were to be experienced as 'objects-in-themselves'.

Post-Minimalism

Post-Minimalist artists from the 1960s and 1970s introduced soft, pliable materials, indeterminate forms and new mediums like video and performance into Minimal art's pared-back vocabulary. Post-Minimal also describes the work of contemporary artists who re-work and extend minimalist ideas.

Process Art

Art in which the process of its making is not hidden but remains a prominent aspect of the completed work, so that a part or even the whole of its subject is the making of the work.



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Exploring and responding

As you move around the *Less Is More* exhibition space, carefully observe the art works and note the various shapes, materials and colours. Write your words in the chart below.

Shape	Material	Colour

Look at your list. Circle the words that you feel best describe Minimalist art.
Highlight the words that you think are unique to Post-Minimalist art?
Is there any overlap? If so, what might this suggest?

Less Is More Word Search

P M O D E R N I S M W H S L E
E R E D A M Y D A E R P P P M
V S E E G N I T N I A P A X K
I C Y F W H I T E N X H C L W
T U R H A V C C H S S F E A M
C L E D N B R P M T S O P I V
E P L A S O R U L A G P N R K
L T L J X O I I W L E I T E A
F U A V C N G T C L M I C T B
E R G E I H D W I A P Z E A S
R E S M T M Q D L T T Q J M T
Q S U R L Q R I B I E I B H R
E L U D O M S O Y O F P O G A
A H Q O M M J Q F N E W E N C
S S A L G I X E L P P Z D R T

ABSTRACT
ALUMINIUM
FORM
GALLERY
INSTALLATION
LIGHT
MATERIAL
MINIMALISM
MODERNISM
MODULE
OBJECT
PAINTING
PLEXIGLASS
POST
PREFABRICATION
PROCESS
READYMADE
REFLECTIVE
REPETITION
SCULPTURE
SHAPE
SPACE
WHITE



Peter Cripps
Real Objects in the World 1993
medium density fibreboard
185 x 185 x 30 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery,
Melbourne

This work by Peter Cripps is one of a suite of ten octagonal structures that when exhibited together form a spatial installation of which Cripps has written:

The actual space of the exhibition, its scale and the architectural nature of the experience is of great importance here. The octagonal forms are unable to be separated from this context or the physical presence of the viewer...

Titled *Real Objects in the World* (1993), the curator has placed the single octagon in the centre of the gallery room.

Look closely at it *and* the works that surround it and list in the chart below what you see, what it makes you think about, and what you wonder.

See	Think	Wonder

Dan Flavin used standard commercially available fluorescent tubes to create sculptures (or proposals – the term Flavin liked to use). The light tubes, literal manifestations of light, in their industrial ordinariness typify the kinds of materials used by Minimal artists. Flavin’s titles usually make reference to people including other artists who were important to him. Here, *‘monument’ to V. Tatlin* (1966–69) dedicated to the Russian Constructivist artist Vladimir Tatlin embodies the elements of light and space. Made from cool, white fluorescent lights, the structure has the look of a rocket or a skyscraper. The sculpture is also a source of light; the light bounces from the walls and the shadows that play on the surface change as the viewer moves within the space.

Flavin chose to use fluorescent tubes, easily available commercial objects to create his sculptures. Some art critics have suggested that his use of prefabricated readymade units echoes Marcel Duchamp’s ‘readymades’. Duchamp shocked art-going audiences in 1917 when he presented an everyday urinal as an art work which he titled *Fountain*. This began a debate surrounding what art could be.

Research [Marcel Duchamp](#) on the internet. What is a readymade? Find examples of Duchamp’s readymades. What do you think Duchamp was trying to achieve with his readymade sculptures? Do you think some of the art works in the *Less Is More* exhibition may have been influenced by Duchamp? Identify how they may be similar and different.¹

Dan Flavin, along with other Minimal artists utilised pre-fabricated objects (or readymades) in their work. The resulting absence of evidence of the artist’s hand contributed to what some writers saw as the impersonal character of the work. Consider Flavin’s *‘monument’ to V. Tatlin* (1966–69), Carl Andre’s *Crucis* (1981), a work consisting of factory made metal plates arranged on the gallery floor, and Donald Judd’s *Untitled* (1969–71) made from aluminium and plexiglass. What are the characteristics of these art works? Do they challenge your ideas about art? Provide reasons for your argument.

¹ <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/guggenheim/education/04.2.html>



Paul Partos
Black Screen 1968-69
synthetic polymer paint on nylon mesh and wood
275 x 105.5 x 30.8 cm
Geelong Gallery, Victoria
Corio 5 Star Whisky Prize 1969

Paul Partos is a Melbourne artist who sometimes made abstract, minimal works displaying the characteristics of both painting and sculpture. In fact he wanted to expand beyond that modernist idea to engage the viewer and space. Between 1968 and 1969, Partos made a series of ten freestanding sculptural screens, or 'large object paintings', constructed from layers of spray-painted nylon mesh stretched across an upright frame. This work is called *Black Screen* (1968-69).

As you move around to view this work, consider how it presents key ideas of Minimalism? (Consider its shape, material, colour, the way it interacts with the gallery space (can you see through it?), and with you as the viewer. Describe how the work is like a painting and then how it is like a sculpture.



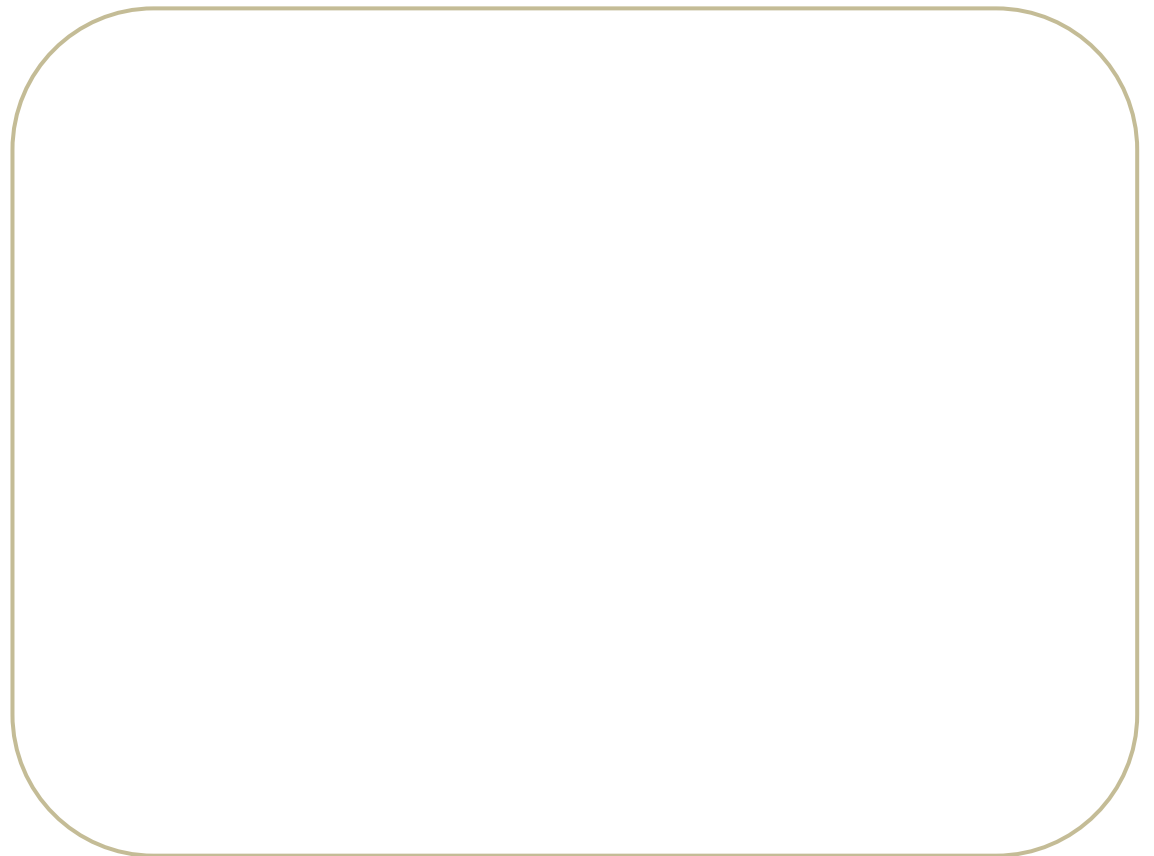
Mel Ramsden
Black Painting 1966
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
on wood
18.2 x 667 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Purchased 1976

Why might Mel Ramsden's painting *Black Painting* (1966) have shocked Melbourne audiences when the work was first exhibited? Consider the art elements and principles contained in this work. What does it demand of the viewer? What do you believe Ramsden's intention is?

In the 1960's, Australian artists were enthusiastic about the latest and most progressive ideas about art coming out of New York, but they adapted and re worked them in individual ways.

In your opinion, how does the work of the Australian minimalist artists like Partos, Ramsden and Ryder's differ to the New York artists such as Judd, Flavin and LeWitt?

Sketch Mike Parr's wall-mounted, box-like sculpture *Plan for a White Labyrinth* (1991) in space below.



Note the grid structure and the balance between positive and negative space.
Can you see how the labyrinth's winding path suggests a face?



Robert Morris
Untitled 1970
felt
189 x 453.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Felton Bequest 1974

Where Minimalist artworks utilised materials characterised by their rigidity and hardness, Post-Minimalist artworks typically use materials that are softer and more flexible. A good example is Robert Morris' cut-felt work *Untitled* (1970).

Look closely at *Untitled* (1970). How does this particular work embody Post-Minimalist concerns? Consider its shape, material, colour, the physical 'space' it occupies in the gallery, the space you the viewer occupies in relation it.

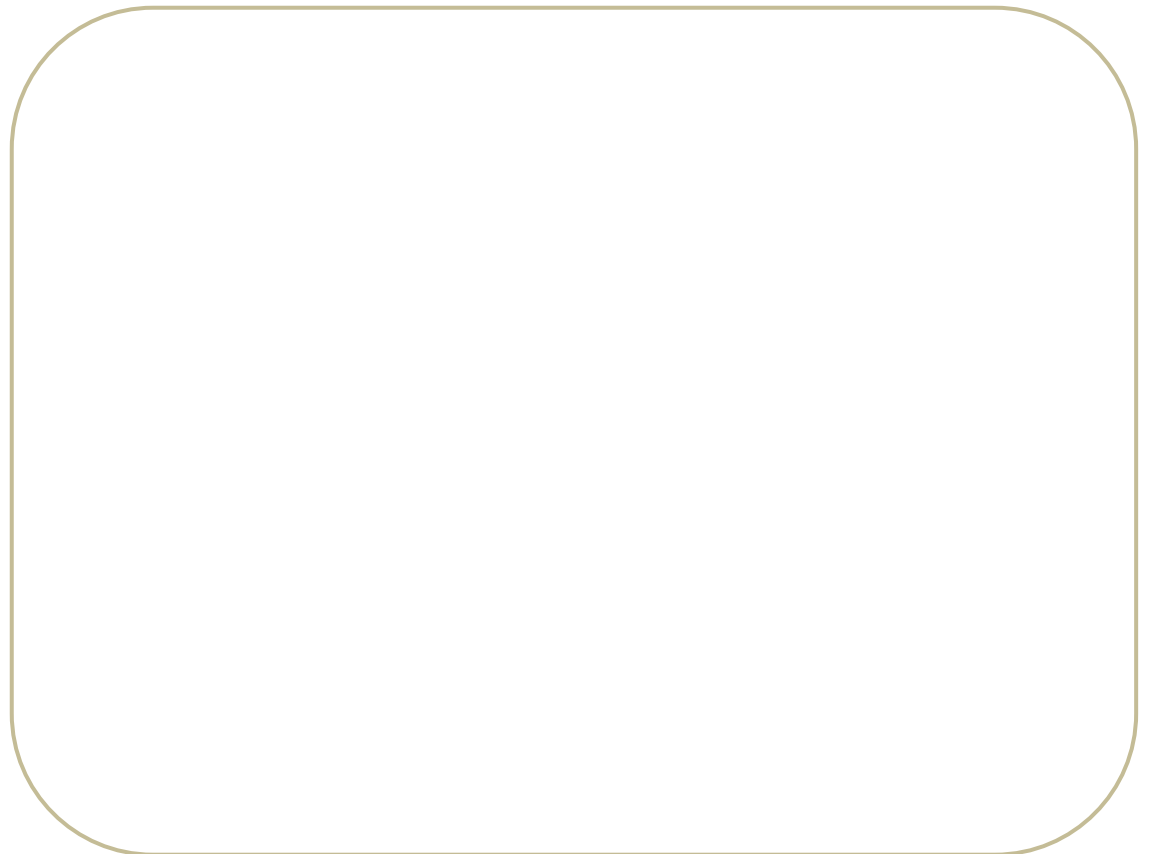
What Post-Minimalist or Contemporary work in the *Less Is More* exhibition do you find most compelling? Provide reasons for your response.

What Post-Minimalist or Contemporary work in the *Less Is More* exhibition do you find most challenging? Provide reasons for your response.

Minimal art is founded in the principle ‘less is more’, suggesting that an artwork need not be visually complicated to be rewarding for the viewer. As American artist Robert Morris famously said in 1966, “Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience”.

In your own words, what does the phrase “less is more” mean to you?

Choose one artwork in this exhibition and sketch it in the space below.



In what ways is the artwork simple to you? In what ways is it complex to you?

Responding to art: Compare and contrast

Minimal artworks are sometimes made by a fabricator following the artist's instruction, and draw meaning from the relationships they form with space and the viewer. One work that is an example of this is American artist Donald Judd's *Untitled* (1969-71). The box-like shape made of hard materials (aluminium and plexiglass) is characteristic of minimalist art. Kathy Temin's *White Cube: Fur Garden* (2007) retains minimalist qualities, but declares its difference through the introduction of other elements typical of a Post-Minimalist style.

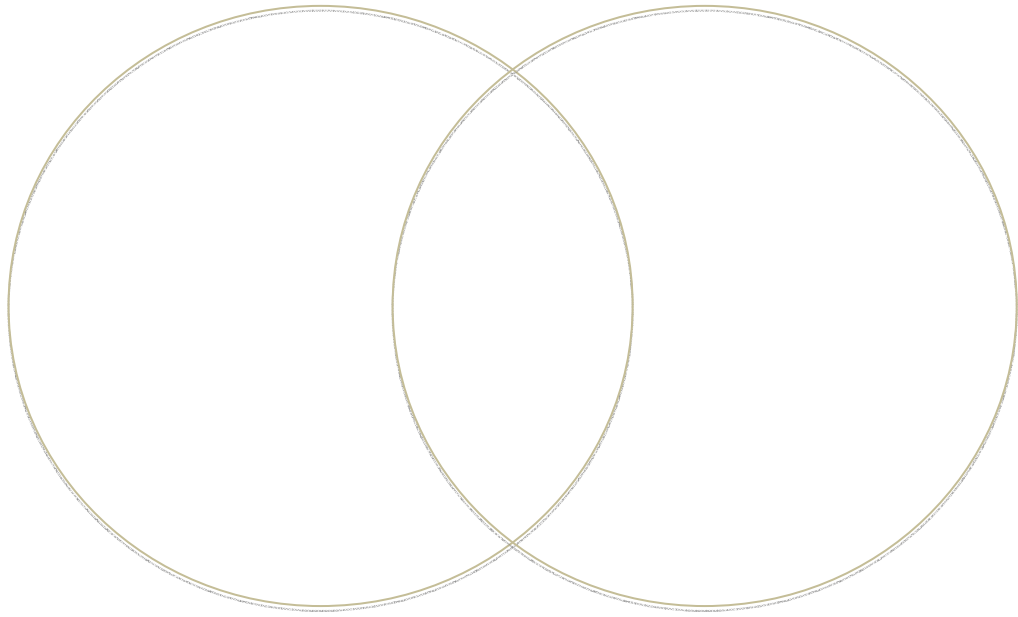
As you move around and look closely at both Judd's and Temin's three-dimensional square structures, use the Venn diagram on the next page to assist you to think about how the works are similar and how they diverge. Note the art elements involved in the composition of each work: line, form, shape, colour, pattern, scale, texture and space.



Donald Judd
Untitled 1969-71
aluminium, transparent synthetic polymer resin
84.3 x 122 x 173 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest 1974



Kathy Temin
White Cube: Fur Garden 2007
synthetic fur, synthetic polymer paint, wood
123 x 123 x 123 cm
Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

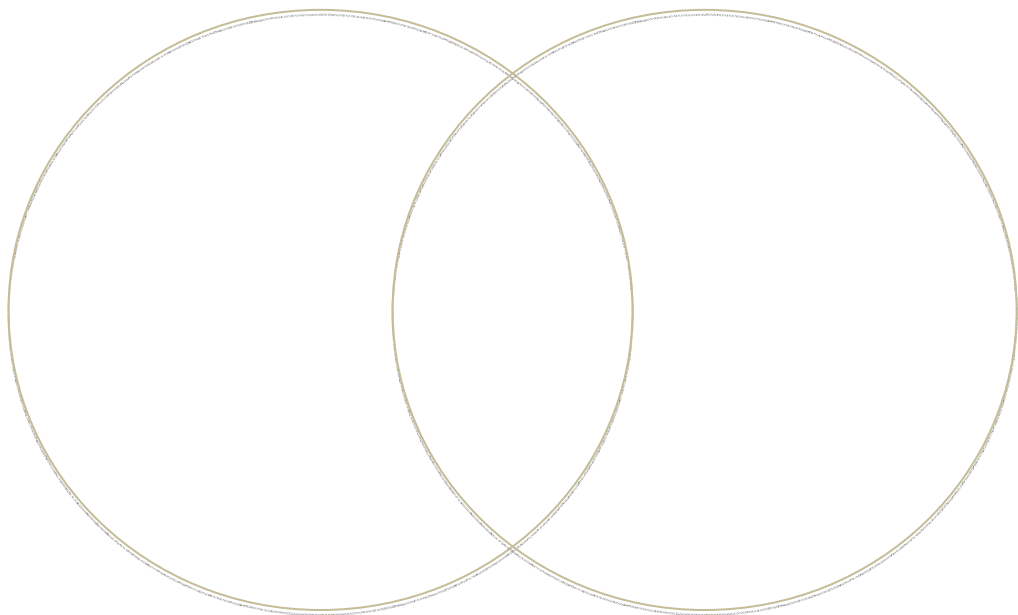


The most interesting characteristic of the cube is that it is relatively uninteresting. Compared to any other three-dimensional form, the cube lacks any aggressive force, implies no motion, and is least emotive. Therefore, it is the best form to use as a basic unit for any more elaborate function, the grammatical device from which the work may proceed.

Sol LeWitt 1966

For Minimalists' of the 1960s, grids, rows and stacks were typical of their work. Also, many artists used the colour white exclusively. Below is an image of Sol LeWitt's *Cubic Modular Piece No. 3* (1963).

Compare and contrast the artwork *Cubic Modular Piece No. 3* with Elizabeth Gower's *Wax Paper* (1976). Use the Venn diagram below to assist you to think about how the works are similar and how they diverge. Note the art elements involved in the composition of each work: line, form, shape, colour, pattern, scale, texture and space.



In your opinion, what does this close analysis (the two Venn diagram activities) suggest about Post-Minimalists' response to Minimalism?

Both of these artworks are made using white. How does these artists use of white relate to Minimalism? Why do you think this is?

Consider Daniel von Sturmer's *Painted Video (Sequence Four)* (2009). How do contemporary artist like Strummer continue to extend on and reinvigorate Minimalist ideas?

Thinking Cubes

<p>Reverse</p> <p>List 10 things that would not be found in a Minimalist artwork.</p>	<p>BAR</p> <p>Use B.A.R. to improve the design of Sol LeWitt's <i>White Cube</i>.</p> <p>Bigger: Add: Remove:</p>	<p>Ridiculous</p> <p>Try to justify this statement:</p> <p>Everyone could be a Minimalist artist! Just stick a box in a gallery and sign it R. Mutt!</p>	<p>Interpretation</p> <p>What in your view makes 'good art'? Make a list of the qualities of a good art work. Identify the works in <i>Less Is More</i> that best exemplify these qualities for you. Why?</p>
<p>What if?</p> <p>What if Australian artists didn't have access to travel or art magazines and had no idea about what art was being made in America and Europe?</p>	<p>Variations</p> <p>Suggest various materials, shapes and forms that can be used to create a Post-Minimalist artwork.</p>	<p>Same/Different</p> <p>Use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the characteristics of Minimal and Post-Minimal art.</p>	<p>Brick Wall</p> <p>Consider some alternatives to the idea that ...</p> <p>Children are too young to visit art galleries.</p>
<p>Disadvantages</p> <p>List disadvantages of and improvements to an art gallery.</p>	<p>Picture</p> <p>Draw your favourite artwork in the <i>Less is More</i> exhibition.</p>	<p>Questions</p> <p>The answer is HEIDE.</p> <p>Work out five possible questions.</p>	<p>Constructions</p> <p>Construct a Minimalist sculpture from a 'readymade' object – try paddle pop sticks!</p>
<p>Brainstorming</p> <p>Brainstorm methods Heide might use to keep artworks safe from being damaged while on display in the gallery.</p>	<p>Prediction</p> <p>Predict what might be considered art in 2050.</p>	<p>Yellow Hat</p> <p>What was your favourite artwork in the <i>Less Is More</i> exhibition? Explain your response.</p>	<p>Black Hat</p> <p>How might Minimal and Post-Minimal artworks challenge and/or extend our ideas about art?</p>
<p>Alphabet</p> <p>List A to Z words associated with art and art galleries.</p>	<p>Different Uses</p> <p>Think up 5 uses for Dan Flavin's '<i>monument</i>' to <i>V. Tatlin</i> (1966–69)</p>	<p>Invention</p> <p>Invent a new art modern movement!</p>	<p>Alternatives</p> <p>List some of the ways Heide Museum of Modern Art might promote an upcoming exhibition.</p>

Based on Tony Ryan's *Thinker's Keys*



Reflection cube 1:

Think about your Museum visit today and complete these sentences. Then assemble your minimalist cube so you can display your learning.

The most interesting ...

The most confirming ...

The most puzzling ...

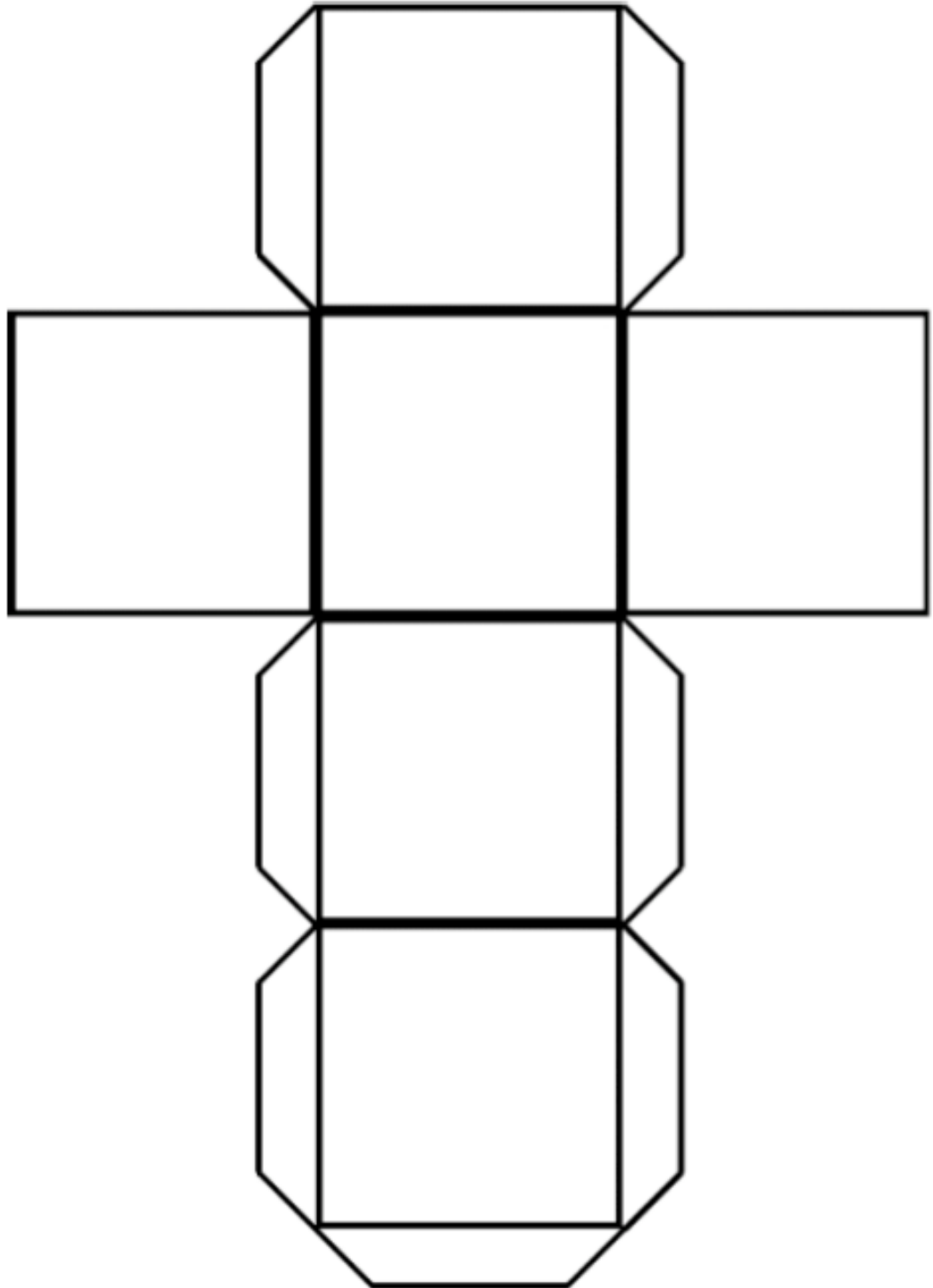
The most thought provoking ...

The most uninteresting ...

The most mind boggling ...

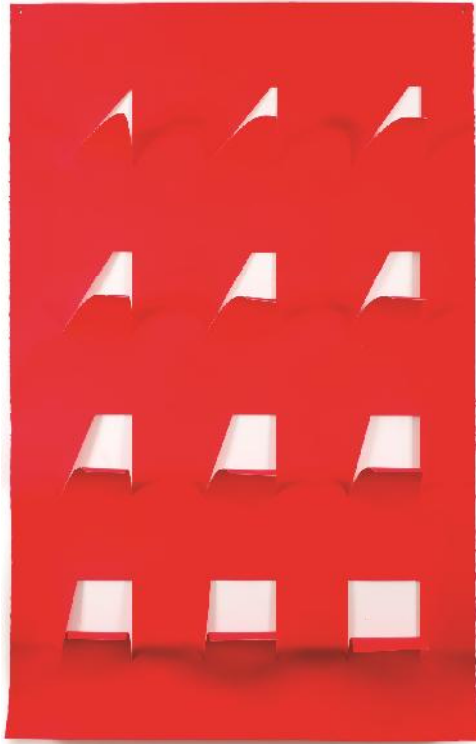
Reflection cube 2:

Draw the most important things that you have learnt. Then cut out and assemble your minimalist cube.





Creating and making: How might mathematics to inspire an artwork?



Robert Jacks
Red Cut Piece (45–90°) 1969
synthetic polymer paint on paper
182 x 122 x 18 cm (irreg.)
Courtesy of the artist and Blockprojects, Melbourne

By cutting directly into the material, Jacks made shapes that appear both as negative spaces through which the gallery wall could be seen and as protruding three-dimensional forms. This work comprises of twelve cuts, each 'cut' moves mathematically from a 45° to 90° angle.

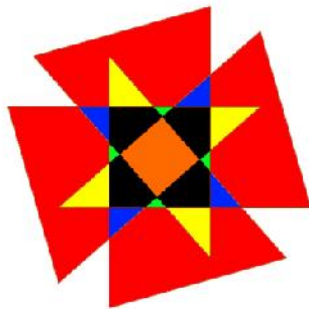


Moving into Conceptual art Kerrie Poliness *Black O Wall Drawing 4* (1997) relates to Sol LeWitt's two-dimensional works drawn directly on the wall. LeWitt wrote sets of mathematical instructions consisting of possible combinations of a square. It was LeWitt's intention that other people could execute the wall drawings. Like LeWitt's work, Poliness' wall drawing in *Less is More* was executed directly onto the wall in Heide III according to her written instructions and will exist for the duration of the exhibition. It will then be removed and cease to exist, giving the work in its physical form an ephemeral quality. This means, unlike traditional art, Conceptual art needn't be permanent.

How might mathematics inspire an artwork? What materials and techniques might you use to give the work an ephemeral quality? Artist's who work in this conceptual way (with the intention of making, exhibiting, then destroying the artwork) always document the process. This way it can be remade as required. So please don't forget to document your process!

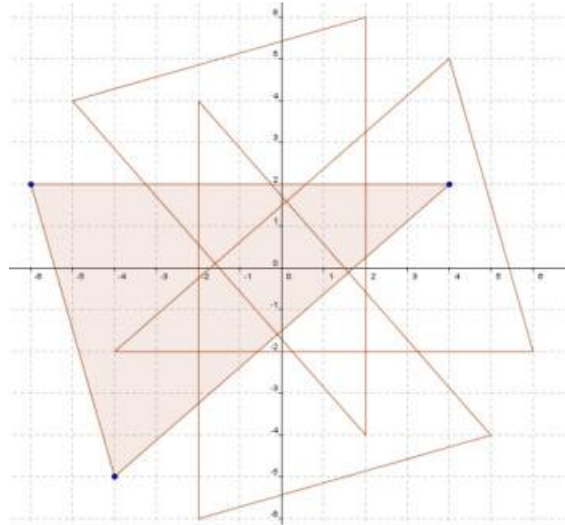
Try the following²:

Take a look at the image below. How do you think it was created?
Do you notice any symmetry in the image?



Does the image help you to imagine how the image was made?
Describe how you think it was made.

²Adapted from <http://nrich.maths.org/>



This diagram shows how the image was created.

We started with a triangle (shaded) and then used the coordinate grid to help us to rotate it through multiples of 90° around the point $(0,0)$.

Create some images of your own by rotating a shape through multiples of 90° . You might like to start with a triangle as we did, or to use other shapes.

How can you use a coordinate grid to help you to rotate each point around $(0,0)$?
What is the relationship between the coordinates of the points as they rotate through multiples of 90° ?

Creating and making: Readymade artworks

Choose an everyday, easily obtained object (or readymade) that exhibits some element or principle of design – such as line, form, texture, etc. Collect one or more (a series) of that object.

Consider:

- What is physically interesting about your object? (Identify any principles or elements of design within your object.)
- What is its original purpose?
- What is it made of?
- What words do you usually associate with your object?
- How might you arrange the objects to form a *new* object (a Minimalist or Post-Minimalist sculpture)?
- Consider how you might enhance aspects of its original design: line, shape, space, texture, colour...
- Consider principles of Minimalism/Post-Minimalism: repetition, reduction, emphasis of stacks, grids, material, interaction with space/viewer...
- What title might you give this work?
- How would you display this work?
- Do you consider your sculptural piece art? Why/Why not?

Remember! Artists working in the minimal tradition would ask, what is the least number of elements they could put into an art piece and still have it be a compelling artwork?

Photograph it!

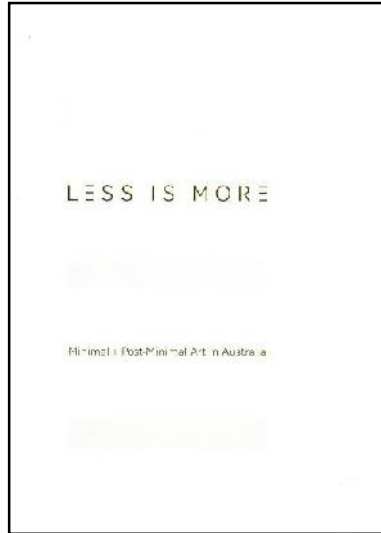
Title it

Artist name:

Title (year):

Materials:

Further reading about Minimalism



Cramer, S., (2012) *Less is More: Minimal and Post Minimal Art in Australia*, Heide Museum of Modern Art Exhibition Catalogue.

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Foster, H. (1986). *The Crux of Minimalism. Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art*. H. Singerman. New York, Abbeville Press, pp. 162-83.

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Heide Education

Heide's range of education programs can significantly enhance and support students learning. Heide offers a unique environment which creates inspirational opportunities for students. Heide's exhibitions, architecture and landscape provide a rich learning experience that goes beyond the classroom.

A visit to Heide:

- provides a stimulating environment which helps to put learning into context, promotes an understanding and appreciation of our rich, cultural heritage
- encourages motivation, by stirring curiosity and developing an intrinsic fascination for art that can only be satisfied by first-hand experience
- supports students to make cross-curricular links between different subject areas
- greatly benefits students who learn best through kinaesthetic activities
- nurtures creativity and enables social learning
- provides learning through experience and interaction which encourages students to build on prior expectations and beliefs to create new realities
- is a cultural experience that all pupils should enjoy as part of their education

Looking at original works of art with a suitably trained educator also encourages the development of the following skills:

- **literacy:** by encouraging discussion and extending vocabulary
- **observation:** by focussing concentration on detail
- **critical thinking:** by demanding questions and informed conclusions
- **reflection:** by considering rationales behind thinking processes

All education programming and resources at Heide align with the VELS curriculum frameworks and VCE Study Designs. Further information about curriculum links is available at heide.com.au/education/school-visits/curriculum-links/

Educator Forums

Heide offers inspiring professional development programs for teachers of all year levels, with lectures, guided tours and workshops. Programs are designed to meet the VIT Standards of Professional Practice and Principles for Effective Professional Learning.



Bookings

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