



# SOL LEWITT, SPLOTCH #17, 2005

A few years before his death, legendary American artist Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) embarked on a series of sculptures appearing markedly different from his previous works. With their playful titles and otherworldly aspects, the “Spotches” or “Splats,” “Whirls” and “Twirls” seemed dissociated from his severely pared-down visual language.

*Splotch #17* seems to fly in the face of the LeWitt’s iconic, overtly geometric repertoire. “Splotch” is after all a comic strip word, more apt for a bronze by Roy Lichtenstein than a fiberglass by LeWitt. It conjures the sudden burst of an ink pen when it malfunctions and leaves a mark, error, or mar on the page. The ink spot ejection has been much theorized as a symbol of sexuality or creativity starting with Sigmund Freud, if not earlier. Spurts mimicking the random deposits of a pen delighted the surrealists as they had the Japanese ukiyo-e painters, Joan Miró, and so many others, all the while suggesting, as Sol LeWitt tellingly emphasized, that randomness was an effect never willfully achieved.

Organically freeform, *Splotch #17* may appear unrigorous at first. But propelling every LeWitt project is a concept distinctively elaborated. This sculpture resembles a nearly six-foot square mountain range that could be called crystalline, were it not deliberately rounded off and turned into something more like algorithms. Its irregular peaks seem to come from a random yet purposeful personal code that maps the decision reflexively to turn play into work, and work into play.

The team-production of LeWitt’s work is a hallmark of a generous and democratic instinct. This sculpture began with LeWitt drawing an utterly irregular form on a page, departing happily from his usual affiliation with Euclidean geometry. He then must have copied it, filling in the shapes while here retaining his trademark non-color, white, a standard he has applied to works since he began making art. A second working drawing delineated the future sculpture’s height variations, much like a topographical map of a mountain range. These interconnected drawings then were digitalized by LeWitt’s sensitive collaborator, Yoshitsugu Nakama, to create a 3-D computer model that the artist could only have imagined. The model informed the cutting of many sheets of board that were assembled and glued like slices in a loaf of bread, covered with epoxy resin, then intensively sanded, primed, and varnished.

Process is only one aspect of any sculpture. In final form we also sense its aesthetic filiations, its references historically distant and near. Here Bruno Taut and the Glaskette, Lyonel Feininger, M.C. Escher, Giovanni Piranesi, musical frequencies, and computer imaging itself all well up from one whose imagination frequently has been compared to that of J.S. Bach. Closer still are the Parisian artists LeWitt would have studied as a child; the drawings nod to Fernand Léger and Jean Dubuffet. But this would be art history. Instead, let us first examine and enjoy what stands splendidly before us.

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Cornelia Lauf  
Rome, February 2012



# INTERVIEW: YOSHI NAKAMA

*James Barron:* How long did you work as Sol LeWitt's fabricator?

*Yoshi Nakama:* 27 years.

*JB:* Do you see the *Splotches* as a natural evolution in LeWitt's work or was it a dramatic turning point?

*YN:* I think it was natural. As you can see from the progression of the wall drawings or the development in gouache, the *Splotches* are an extension of those ideas in three-dimensional form.

*JB:* Do you agree the *Splotches* are indebted to chance? How much of LeWitt's other structures had the element of chance?

*YN:* The *Splotches* have a controlled chance like many of the wavy, curvy drawings. Unlike the geometrical structures, though, the *Splotches* are the only three-dimensional structures that have organic form.

*JB:* Did LeWitt think about the *Splotches* as references in the world?

*YK:* Sol used subtitles like *Splat*, *Blob*, *Loopy Doopy*, etc. to describe his works, so I believe it was simply just that.

*JB:* Why did LeWitt only make 22 *Splotches*? Were there others planned?

*YN:* He died before he could see the completion of the last *Splotch*. However, I'm sure there were more still forming in his head.

*JB:* Did he ever alter the shape after seeing it as a cardboard mold, before it was cast in fiberglass?

*YN:* Just once, in order to change the height of a peak.

*JB:* Tell us a bit about the computer's role in the work.

*YN:* It may have taken forever to make *Splotches* without the computer. The computer could visualize the prospective piece in all directions before fabrication so that Sol could decide whether he liked it or not far more easily.

*JB:* Looking at the drawing for *Splotch #17*, it is apparent that LeWitt created an irregular shape within a square. Do you feel the *Splotches* are shapes that imply an invisible cube structure?

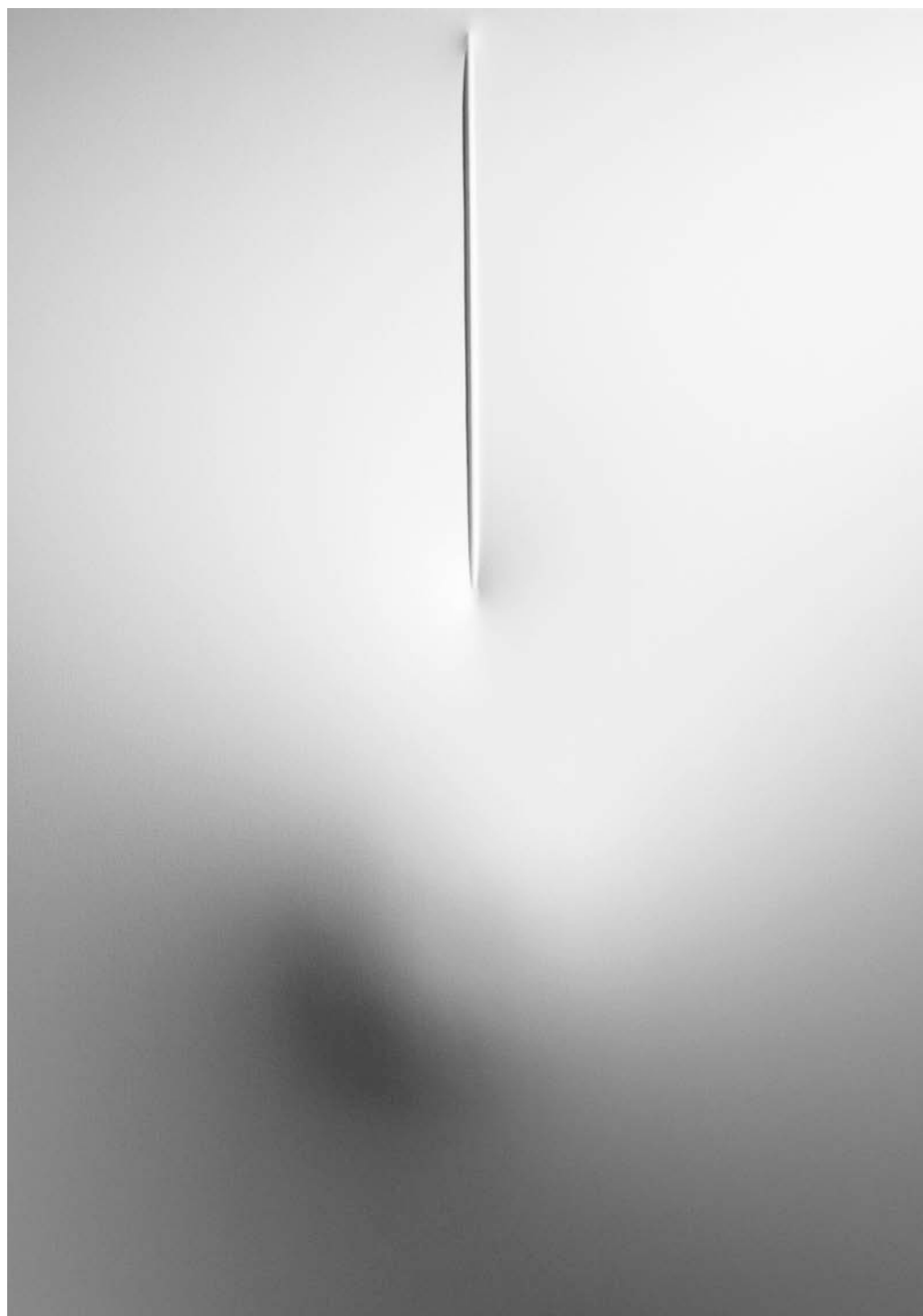
*YN:* There are many similarities when you see the drawings of the *Open Cubes*, the *Concrete Blocks* and the *Splotches*. I believe because LeWitt used the same grid paper for many of his works, including his *Splotch* drawings, the cube shape is always implied.

*JB:* What did LeWitt say when he saw the completed works?

*YN:* He always said, "It looks good." Never said a negative comment. His ideas were enormous and expandable. I wish that he was still alive so he could make more works. I believe his ideas will continue to grow and develop within the hands of other artists.

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James D. Barron  
Rome, February 2012



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*Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.*

Sol LeWitt

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