



INTERVIEW: SUSANNA E. SINGER

James Barron: How long did you work with Sol LeWitt?

Susanna E. Singer: I met Sol in 1975 when I was the secretary at John Weber Gallery and we became friends. Two years later, I became Director. In 1980, I left the gallery to work directly with him (and with Robert Mangold) and worked with him until his death in April 2007. We spoke almost everyday, often several times a day, for almost 30 years.

JB: Did you see him create work?

SES: He worked alone in his studio. I managed everybody else so he could be alone.

JB: Did he want his \$100 drawings to be sold for \$100 forever?

SES: Yes. The idea was that everybody could afford an original work of art.

JB: I like that; it's such a sharp contrast to the art market today.

SES: He was not interested in the art market. He lived very frugally until the 1980s and money never mattered to him. Even though Peter Schjeldahl wrote a review titled "Saint Sol," Sol was not a saint. He was very shy, which contributed to his humility.

JB: I see Sol LeWitts everywhere in Rome, in floor patterns, on walls, lunettes...

SES: I do, too. Italian frescos were extraordinarily influential to his work. He started doing the Wall Drawings with the ink washes after living in Italy.

JB: Take the figures out of Piero della Francesca's work or Giotto's, and you have a LeWitt.

SES: That's right. Andrea Miller-Keller asked Sol, What do you strive for in your art? He said, Something I wouldn't be embarrassed to show Giotto.

JB: What is it about simplicity that intrigued him?

SES: His whole work was based on specific elements: straight, not straight, broken lines, red, yellow, blue, arcs, circles and grids, like *Yellow Circles*. He began, as most Minimalist artists, with very constricting rules, developed a complex and beautiful language, and then broke the rules, because he felt if he made the rules, he could break them.

JB: What do you most miss about Sol?

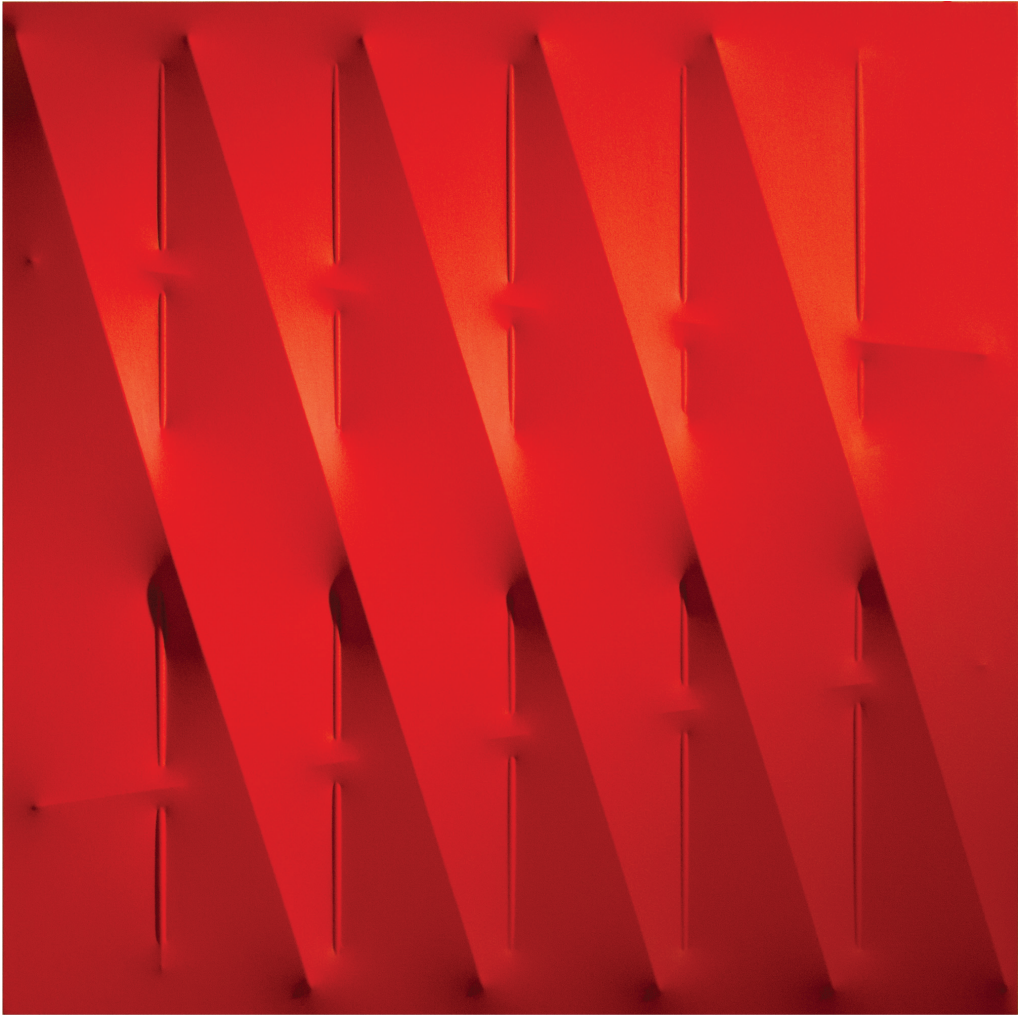
SES: The voice. Both his spoken voice, and in his work, but more what he said and stood for and made, and would have continued to do. I miss also that he was so steadfast – bordering on stubborn – and his wit.

James D. Barron
Rome, February 2014

SOL LEWITT'S ABSTRACTION

I can only agree with Rosalind Krauss that Sol LeWitt's work must be understood, not through its "formal-operational" appearance but through, as the artist himself indicated, "the idea, which is always unstated." But neither Krauss nor anyone else has ever named the central idea that is implicit in LeWitt's oeuvre. I suspect that's in part because the name of that idea may not "sound" right for the "look" of the art. I would therefore like to propose that we reach back to one of LeWitt's great precursors who did try to name the subject of art. Barnett Newman stated it baldly: "The subject matter of creation is chaos." How to reach back to the day of creation when all was void and without form? LeWitt and others of his generation lacked Newman's faith (and that of his friends Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb) in the "large shape" bearing "the impact of the unequivocal." On the contrary, it was the equivocal, the paradoxical, the "unstated," that promised to lead "beyond the visible and the known world...in a true act of discovery," as Newman put it. Unlike the drama queens of Abstract Expressionism, LeWitt intended his art to be "emotionally dry," and rather than confronting the viewer with a grand statement, with a feeling of the sublime, thought "to lull the viewer into the belief that he understands the work." Yet for all that, something essential was to be maintained from the older artists' project, namely the aim away from subjectivity toward what Newman called "abstract intellectual content"—synonymous, paradoxically, with the chaos that underpins all local effects of order. Not reduction but profusion. "For each work of art that becomes physical there are many variations that do not," as LeWitt says. Likewise, string theory suggests that there must be 10^{500} universes aside from this one. "The silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me," wrote Blaise Pascal. Today, it might be the noise of their dense concentration that unsettles. LeWitt offers a glimpse of the manifold that we can tolerate, even enjoy.

Barry Schwabsky
New York, February 2014



SOL LEWITT 1966 / 1975

AND OTHER WORKS

“Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple.” - Sol LeWitt

“Sol LeWitt’s Abstraction” by Barry Schwabsky
Interview: Susanna E. Singer

THE ARMORY SHOW – MODERN
5 / 9 MARCH 2014

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