

Sol LeWitt

Sol LeWitt was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1928, and attended Syracuse University. After serving in the Korean War as a graphic artist, he moved in 1953 to New York, where he worked as a draftsman for the architect I. M. Pei. LeWitt had his first solo exhibition in 1965 at the Daniels Gallery, New York, and the following year Dwan Gallery, New York, mounted the first in a series of solo exhibitions. He participated in several significant group exhibitions of Minimalist and Conceptual art during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1966, and *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, in 1969. His renowned text "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" was published in 1967. LeWitt's work was included in Documentas 6 (1977) and 7 (1982) in Kassel, Germany, as well as the 1987 Skulptur Projekte in Münster, Germany, and the 1989 Istanbul Biennial. Major retrospectives of his works were organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1978, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2000. *Drawing Series . . .*, a long-term presentation of LeWitt's early wall drawings, was installed at Dia:Beacon from 2006 to 2017. A retrospective of over one hundred wall drawings from 1969 to 2007 opened at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in 2008 and will remain on view for twenty-five years. LeWitt died in April 2007 in New York City.

Wall Drawing #1085: Drawing Series—Composite, Part I–IV, #1–24, A+B, 1968
Graphite on wall
Dia Art Foundation;
Gift of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy and The Martin Bucksbaum Family Foundation



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When Sol LeWitt executed the first of his wall drawings in 1968, he inaugurated a new genre that he would continue to explore for the next four decades. As with his sculptures and prints, the wall drawings are the result of a set of instructions carried out, in this case, directly on a chosen wall. Those instructions are normally brief and relatively simple—"ten thousand straight and ten thousand not straight lines"—and so their results vary in complexity and scale. The earliest of these works were drawn by LeWitt himself, but the series quickly evolved into a form of visual score, to be interpreted by a qualified assistant or group of assistants in a specific location, in perfect analogy with the tradition of musical composition and interpretation. In fact, LeWitt regarded his works as "musical scores," in which the conceptual program that determines the composition, literally stated in the title, is always self-evident. "All decisions are made beforehand, so execution becomes a perfunctory affair," he stated in his landmark credo, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), adding that "in conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work."

Wall Drawing #1085: Drawing Series—Composite, Part I–IV, #1–24, A+B (1968) is one of the artist's earliest works in this vein. Installed in two symmetrical galleries the drawing principally explores the ideas of seriality and permutation. To make the drawing, a square is subdivided into four squares. Each of these squares is then further quartered and filled in with combinations of graphite lines applied in the following basic directions: vertical, horizontal, diagonal from top left to bottom right, and diagonal from top right to bottom left. The resulting sequence methodically exhausts every variation that may be derived from the given logic and within the formal limits established by the physical parameters of the gallery.

A recurrent form in LeWitt's early drawings, the square—like the cube, from which most of his early sculptures were composed—is for him among the "least emotive" of any possible forms. "A more complex form would be too interesting

in itself and obstruct the meaning of the whole. There is no need to invent new forms," he contended. "The square and cube are efficient and symmetrical."

In their imposing physical guise, LeWitt's works reveal a compelling, luminous beauty that speaks as much to the senses as to the intellect. For even though the preset programs can be readily grasped, what is unexpected is their exhilarating presence. Experienced as a kind of aesthetic excess, this is the sensory equivalent of the works' breathtaking logical consequence, a confrontation of what has been called "the purposelessness of purpose."