
1. Wall Drawing #411 B: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane, 1984
   India ink wash on wall
   Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

2. Wall Drawing #411 D: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane, 1984
   India ink wash on wall
   Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

3. Wall Drawing #411 E: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane, 2003
   India ink wash on wall
   Dia Art Foundation; Gift of the artist

1–3. Drawn by Hidemi Nomura and Jo Watanabe, May 2003
Sol LeWitt

When Sol LeWitt executed the first of his wall drawings in 1968, he inaugurated a new genre that he would 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. 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.

Despite LeWitt’s definition of the idea as the “machine that makes the work,” he often capitalized on circumstance, and the role of the assisting drafters could be as influential to the piece’s fabrication as the architectural quirks of its site. Sometimes the physical particularities of the drafters, such as their height or arm length, are inevitably transferred into the work, determining its appearance. 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.”

The three variations on *Wall Drawing #411: Isometric figure with progressively darker gradations of gray ink wash on each plane* (1984 and 2003) explore possible geometric shapes within a designated ten-foot-square area of wall. 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.”