

Robert Morris

Robert Morris moved to New York City in 1959, where he studied art history and was active in the experimental dance and performance scene of the Judson Dance Theater in Greenwich Village. Drawing on his experience as a choreographer and performer, and the props that he built for these activities, Morris created sculptures and installations that engage viewers in bodily perceptual experiences in real space. Between 1962 and 1964 he made a series of seven simple plywood sculptures that exposed the gallery itself as an environment. *Untitled (Corner Beam)*, for example, was designed to bisect the corner of a door frame, while *Untitled (Corner Piece)* occupied the heretofore unnoticed volume between two joined walls, and *Untitled (Cloud)* filled a rectangular volume between the ceiling and floor.

Six of the seven sculptures were shown for the first time in the artist's landmark solo exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York in December 1964. The seventh work, *Untitled (Wall-Floor Slab)*, was not finished in time for the opening, and was shown just one month later as part of *Shape and Structure: 1965*, an exhibition that opened at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York in January 1965. Characterized by simple geometry and scaled to the body, Morris's "minimal" works are visually indivisible shapes, or gestalts, meant to be perceived by a standing viewer. As he has described in his 1966 essay "Notes on Sculpture, Part I," the "parts are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation." As unified shapes, these plywood sculptures redirect attention to their surroundings and reveal the architecture of the gallery and the viewer's position in relation to it.

A critical success, Morris's Green Gallery show is now perceived as a significant milestone in the emergence of Minimal art. However, during the late 1960s Morris began to develop increasingly unstructured works of cut felt, scattered thread waste, and piled earth. Made of soft materials, these projects shifted attention away from gestalt perception toward the process of making—and to the artist who

manipulated materials more directly. For his first cut-felt works, including *Untitled* (1967), he sliced progressively placed lines into rectangular sheets of the industrial material. He then hung the fabric sheets from nails, letting the felt fall naturally to the floor. From these structured yet apparently amorphous sculptures, Morris moved completely to the ground with *Untitled (Dirt)* (1968), a mass of earth, peat moss, oil, and debris whose materials defied any internal cohesion. First exhibited in the group show *Earth Works* at Dwan Gallery in New York in October 1968, Morris's dirt dump speaks of the anarchic political and social milieu of a year that witnessed massive riots internationally, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, and the newfound tendency of artists working directly on or with the land. That same month Walter De Maria installed the first Earth Room in the gallery of Dia cofounder Heiner Friedrich in Munich—the immediate precedent of Dia's *The New York Earth Room* (1977).

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Robert Morris was born in 1931 in Kansas City, Missouri. A graduate of Reed College, Portland, Oregon, and Hunter College, City University of New York, where he studied art history with Ad Reinhardt and E. C. Goossen, Morris is a pioneering figure of Minimal, Conceptual, Postminimal, and Land art and a theorist of these movements. He has exhibited extensively around the world and has had major one-person shows at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, Tate Gallery, London, Art Institute of Chicago, and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Morris died in Kingston, New York, in 2018.

1. *Untitled (Corner Beam)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

2. *Untitled (Corner Piece)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

3. *Untitled (Wall-Floor Slab)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

4. *Untitled (Floor Beam)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

5. *Untitled (Cloud)*,
1962/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

6. *Untitled (Table)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

7. *Untitled (Boiler)*,
1964/2016
Painted plywood
Dia Art Foundation

8. *Untitled*, 1967/2011
Felt
Collection of the artist,
courtesy Castelli Gallery

9. *Untitled (Dirt)*, 1968/2016
Dirt, grease, peat moss, steel,
copper, aluminum, and felt
Dia Art Foundation

