

Back to the Present: Minimalist Works from the Museum's Collection,

June 27, 2003-September 7, 2003

In the 1960s and 70s, many artists stripped down their works to austere compositions and spare geometric forms. The new art was ambitious and powerful, at times confrontational. It rested on a paradox: the simpler the object, the more complex the viewer's encounter with it. Purged of any ornamentation or reference, every work in *Back to the Present* asserts its own physical presence in the here and now. Each one prompts the viewer to take note of the most fundamental elements of art – specific choices of material, form, color, order, and scale – while seeing the object (or series of objects) as a unified whole.

This exhibition brings core members of the Minimalist group together with others who have also taken a reductive approach. Among the Minimalists represented here are Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, John McCracken, and Fred Sandback. Beginning in the 1960s, these artists sought an antidote to the heroic, spiritual overtones conferred upon individual style and creative spontaneity by the Abstract Expressionists who preceded them. By contrast, Minimalist works were generally preconceived and made from industrial materials, in order to avoid emotive expression. John McCracken's plank sculpture – a piece of wood coated with fiberglass and resin and then sanded, polished, and waxed to a flawlessly smooth finish – is a clear example. The manual effort that went into its creation is belied by the absence of any trace of the artist's hand, and hence, of his personal feeling or identity. Nothing detracts from the sculpture's physicality: its saturated color, rectangular shape, and pristine surface; and, importantly, its relationship to the wall, the floor, the room, and the viewer's body.

Dan Flavin takes a different approach, using colored fluorescent light to articulate the gallery space, making it almost tangible. Flavin never masks the common, store-bought nature of his materials, leaving cords, bulbs, and outlets exposed. This forthrightness brings the viewer back to the work's physical qualities without contradicting its ethereal impression. Fred Sandback uses even humbler means to create tension between material and the immaterial, employing colored thread and wire to divide negative space into planes and shapes.

The modular structure of Sol LeWitt's *Inverted Six Towers* creates an optical effect that collapses the boundaries between the object and the space around and within it. Composed of cubes arranged in columns and rows, the work allows the viewer to gain a conceptual as well as visual appreciation of the form by breaking it down into its discrete parts. LeWitt's *Four Color Composite* screenprint offers another engaging experience. The artist defines a set of variables according to the color (black, yellow, blue, and red) and type of line (vertical, horizontal, diagonal right, and diagonal left), then lays them out in a sequence that seems to end when every combination is exhausted.

Similarly, in Frank Stella's *Multicolored Squares Portfolio*, the bands of color extending out from each square's center create two levels of experience: the overall aesthetic effect, and the recognition of underlying patterns. The print portfolios of Robert Mangold and Brice Marden also involve a dynamic relationship between the single image and the series as a whole. Mangold's subtly distorted polygons placed within circles disrupt expectations of geometric perfection. In Marden's *Ten Days*

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Portfolio, the individual images are at once independent and loosely related, simultaneously rough and elegant.

Robert Ryman and Richard Tuttle take reduction to extremes. Ryman has restricted himself to all-white compositions since the early 1960s. Contrary to what appears at first to be negation of imagery, he presents a wealth of visual information. The viewer must assess the specific qualities of each particular whiteness: the density of the pigment, how it was applied, the grain and texture of the paper, and so on. The slightest variation becomes meaningful. In Tuttle's *Portland Works*, the images are so lightly drawn that they practically vanish from the page. The artist describes these shapes as the concrete persisting in the face of emptiness – a reference to life and death. Both Agnes Martin and Barnett Newman use reduction and light to embody a vision of spiritual transcendence. Conceptually rigorous and replete with fascinating contradictions, the works in *Back to the Present* offer time and space for focus and contemplation.

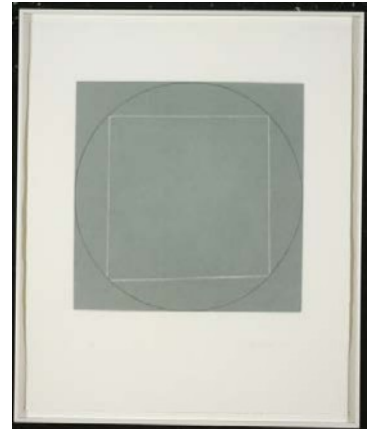
CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.2

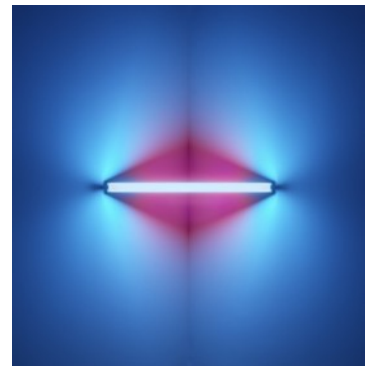


Dan Flavin, American, 1933-1996

Untitled, ca. 1970

Fluorescent light (blue and red)

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.14



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Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.8



Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.5



Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.4



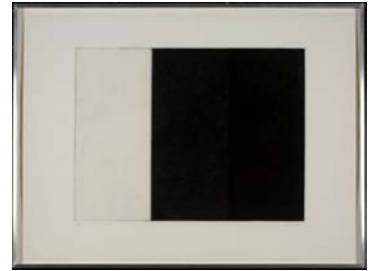
RISD MUSEUM

Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.3



Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.7

Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.6



Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.2



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Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106

Brice Marden, American, b. 1938

Ten Days Portfolio, 1971

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 72.106.1

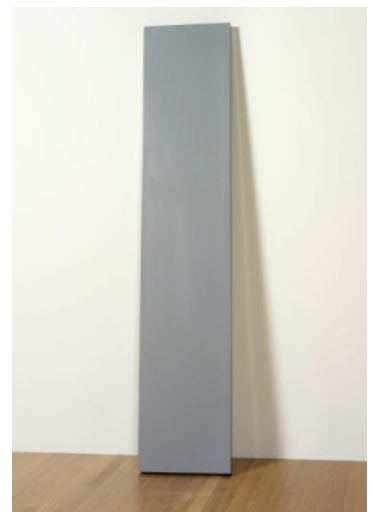


John McCracken, American, 1934 -2011

Untitled (Grey Plank), 1978

Polyester resin and fiberglass on wood

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2000.99



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Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.6



Barnett Newman, American, 1905-1970

Untitled Etching #1, 1969

Etching and aquatint on paper

Museum Membership Fund 69.072

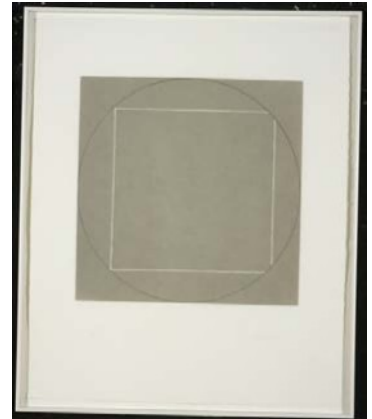


Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.1



RISD MUSEUM

Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.3



Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.4



Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Jeryl Parker

Parasol Press, American

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047

RISD MUSEUM

Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937

Seven Aquatints, 1973

Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.5



Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

Four Color Composite, 1970

Color screenprint on paper

Neuberger Fund and Twentieth-Century Graphics Fund 74.113

Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007

Inverted Six Towers, 1987

White-painted wood

Purchased in honor of Phillip M. Johnston, Director of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1998-2003; accessioned by the 2002-03 Fine Arts Committee; Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2003.24



Donald Judd, American, 1928-1994

Diptych, 1961-1975

Woodcut on paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 77.127B

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Donald Judd, American, 1928-1994
Galerie Heiner Fredrich
Diptych, 1961-1975
Woodcut on paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 77.127

Donald Judd, American, 1928-1994
Diptych, 1961-1975
Woodcut on paper
Mary B. Jackson Fund 77.127A

Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937
Seven Aquatints, 1973
Color aquatint, soft-ground etching on paper
Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 74.047.7



Frank Stella, American, b. 1936
Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972
Color lithograph on paper
Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.2



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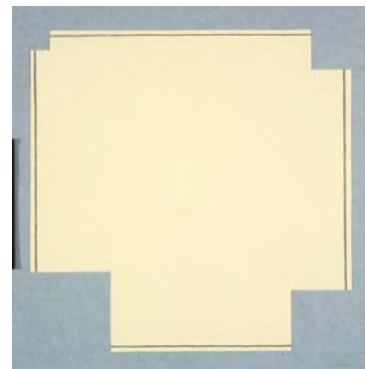
Agnes Martin, American, 1912-2004
Parasol Press, American
Praise, Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.9



Sylvia Plimack Mangold, American, b. 1938
Parasol Press, American
Six Inches Four Ways, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.8

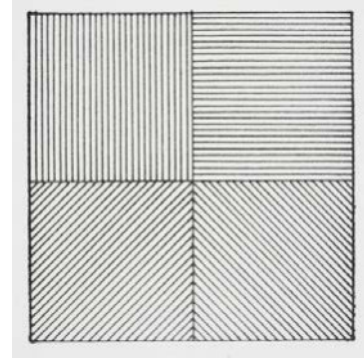


Robert Mangold, American, b. 1937
Parasol Press, American
A Square With Four Squares Cut Away, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.7

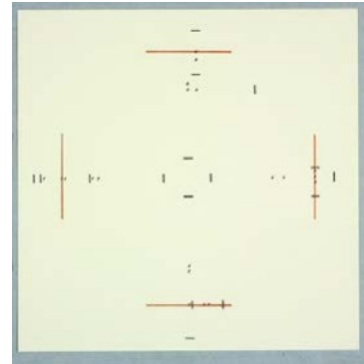


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Sol LeWitt, American, 1928-2007
Parasol Press, American
Lines in Four Directions, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.6



Barry Le Va, American, b. 1941
Parasol Press, American
Installation Floor Plan For Any Space Surrounded by Four Walls, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.5



Daniel Buren, French, b. 1938
Parasol Press, American
1000 Placements, Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.3



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Carl Andre, American, b. 1935
Parasol Press, American
Untitled, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976
Color inked rubber stamp on paper
Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.1



Richard Tuttle, American, b.1941
Portland Works, Group II (Nos. 14, 15, 16), 1976
Watercolor and pencil on airmail writing paper in artist's frames
Helen M. Danfoth Acquisition Fund 2002.8



Frank Stella, American, b. 1936
Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972
Color lithograph on paper
Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.3



Frank Stella, American, b. 1936
Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972
Color lithograph on paper
Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.4



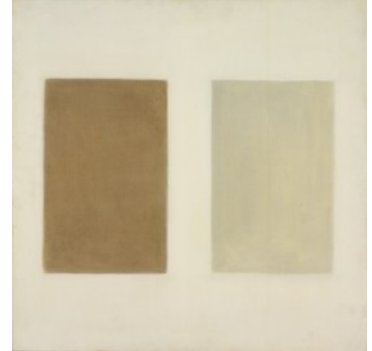
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Agnes Martin, American, 1912-2004

America, 1958-1959

Oil on canvas

Albert Pilavin Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art 72.093

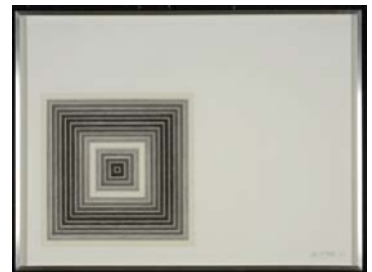


Frank Stella, American, b. 1936

Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972

Color lithograph on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.5



Myron Stedman Stout, American, 1908 - 1987

Parasol Press, American

Untitled, The Rubber Stamp Portfolio, 1976

Inked rubber stamp on paper

Gift of Parasol Press, Ltd. 79.005.11



Frank Stella, American, b. 1936

Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972

Color lithograph on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.6



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Frederick L. Sandback, American, 1943-2003

Three Unit Corner Piece, LLL of A Series of Eight Sculptures, Closed Series, ca. 1968

Spring steel rod and rayon-covered elastic cord dipped in fluorescent paint

Museum Works of Art Fund 68.100



Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.7

Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.6



RISD MUSEUM

Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

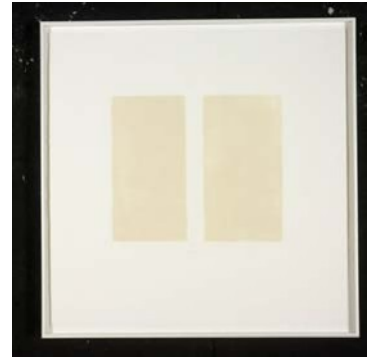
Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.5

Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.4



Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.3

Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.2



Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119



Robert Ryman, American, b. 1930

Seven Aquatints, 1972

Color aquatint on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.119.1



Frank Stella, American, b. 1936

Multicolored Squares Portfolio, Multicolored Squares I, 1972

Color lithograph on paper

Museum Purchase with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 73.111.1

