

PROJECT 11

Sol LeWitt

1998

Wall Pieces

30 July – 29 November 1998

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

BIOGRAPHY

Sol LeWitt is considered one of the most influential artists of his time. From 1968 to 2007, LeWitt created 1200 wall drawings, reducing his art-making process to a bare vocabulary of lines, curves, geometric shapes and primary colours. These works were distinctive for their method which began with a set of instructions or a simple diagram, executed by people other than the artist at different times and places. LeWitt once wrote, “Ideas can be works of art,” giving greater importance to the idea behind his work rather than its execution.

FACTS

- LeWitt returned to Australia 21 years after his first project, this time with a major exhibition at the MCA.
- Project 11 sat in stark contrast to Project 6, including vast bands of gloss and matt acrylic blacks and undulating wave-like forms painting in bright primary and secondary colours.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, LeWitt extended his exploration with isometric wall drawings in primary colours and began to embrace secondary colours.
- He created his first wall piece in 1997 at Ace Gallery in New York.
- Floor plans were sent via fax to LeWitt’s Connecticut studio and colours were confirmed through the exchange of swatches via post.
- To achieve a perfect finish the gallery walls were prepared with a plaster coating, and painted with one coat of oil-based primer followed by three coats of white latex paint.
- LeWitt’s assistant Sachiko Cho travelled from New York to oversee and manage the install, which took three weeks in total. LeWitt arrived only to see the finished product.
- The black-on-black paintings filled an entire room upstairs at the MCA and played on the textures of gloss and matt.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 1998, twenty-one years after his first visit to Australia to create Project 6, Sol LeWitt undertook a second Kaldor project, this time involving a major exhibition of his work at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. In stark contrast to the 1977 Wall drawings at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Victoria, which had reflected his early interest in pared-back variations on form and colour, LeWitt's new *Wall pieces* for Project 11 incorporated vast bands of gloss and matt acrylic blacks and undulating wave-like forms painted in bright primary and secondary colours.

Over a 40-year career, LeWitt created more than 1200 wall drawings. The first was conceived in 1968 for an exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York, where he drew fine pencil lines in squares onto the wall. This simple idea was revolutionary in its context. Fusing the work with its architectural space, each drawing became impermanent, rendering its value intangible, reframing the way in which art is sold and collected. The early wall drawings, including those made by LeWitt on his first visit to Australia in 1977, were austere variations of lines in black-and-white pencil and chalk. Restrained works of this period using colour were limited to primary red, yellow and blue. In the 1980s and 1990s, LeWitt extended his exploration with isometric wall drawings in primary colours, later including secondary colours in wall-to-wall ink wash compositions of stars and continuous forms that resembled cubist configurations.

LeWitt's experimentation with acrylic marked an important shift in his practice and in 1997 he created the first acrylic *Wall pieces*. Wall-to-wall blocks of primary and secondary colours were painted throughout Ace Gallery in New York. John Kaldor saw the exhibition and, responding to its strength and exuberance, asked LeWitt to reconfigure a selection of the works for Project 11 at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. He also commissioned a new acrylic wall drawing especially for the site, Wall drawing #876, which covered the wall at the entrance inside the MCA's ground-floor gallery, transforming it with vibrant waves of colour. Three continuous panels undulated with glossy orange and blue, red and purple, green and yellow, contained by framing lines in matt black.

Earlier works from John Kaldor's collection were also exhibited to celebrate LeWitt's long history of wall drawing and to provide context for the new black-on-black paintings that filled entire rooms upstairs. Playing on contrasts between the texture of gloss and matt blacks in waves and straight lines, their simple forms, shown in progression, recall the 'straight' and 'not-straight' lines of LeWitt's earlier chalk wall drawings, here transformed into large, sumptuous explorations of texture and sheen.

Kaldor Public Art
Project 11: Sol
LeWitt, *Wall Pieces*,
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Photo: Paul Green



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