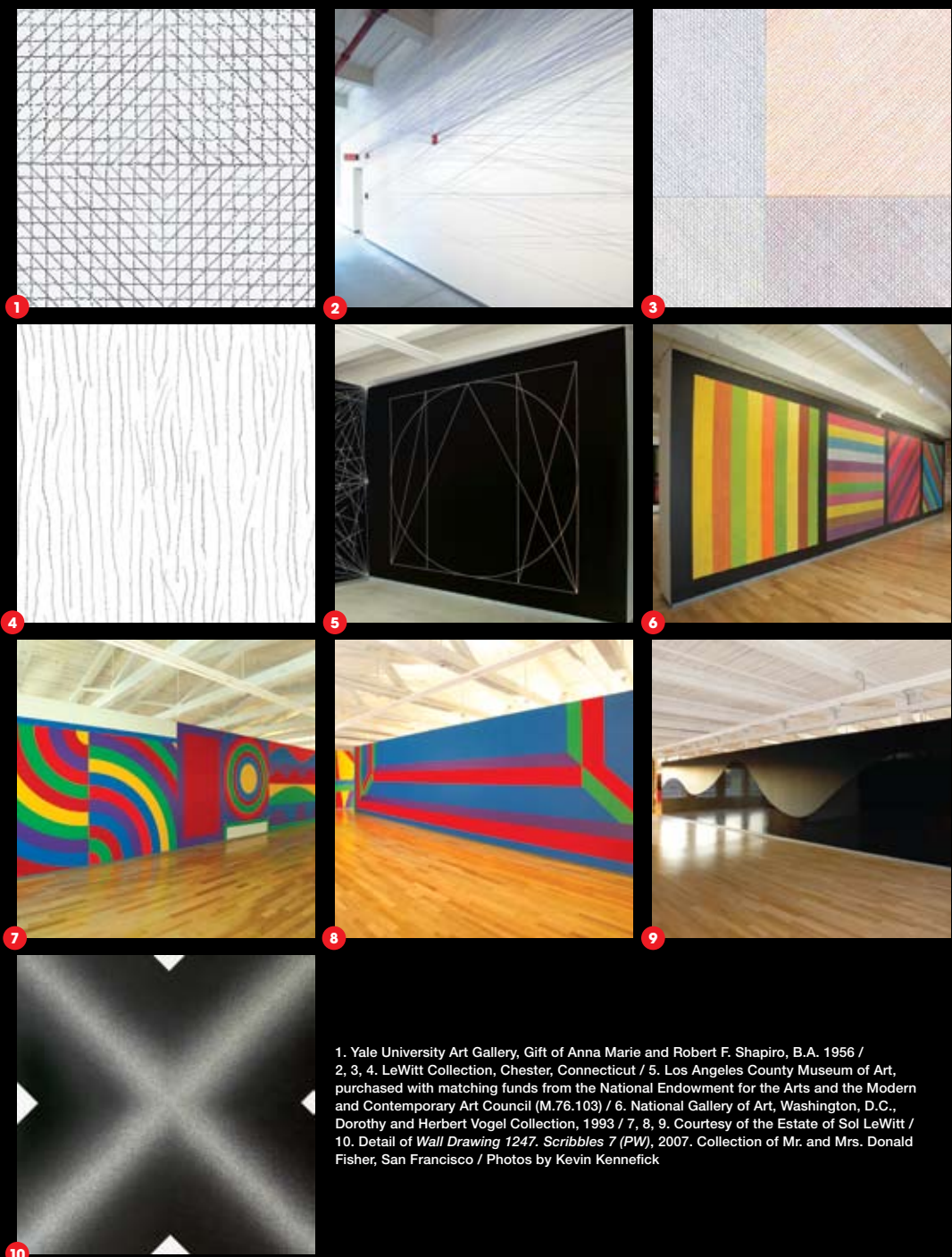


SOL LEWITT A WALL DRAWING RETROSPECTIVE

Gallery Guide



1. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, B.A. 1956 / 2, 3, 4. LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut / 5. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with matching funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Modern and Contemporary Art Council (M.76.103) / 6. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection, 1993 / 7, 8, 9. Courtesy of the Estate of Sol LeWitt / 10. Detail of *Wall Drawing 1247, Scribbles 7 (PW)*, 2007. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Fisher, San Francisco / Photos by Kevin Kennelick

Welcome to *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, a collaboration of the Yale University Art Gallery, the Williams College Museum of Art, and MASS MoCA. On view here are 105 wall drawings, installed on three floors of a 27,000 square foot mill building specially renovated for this show. The work will be on view for an unprecedented 25-year period.

Sol LeWitt is perhaps best known for separating the act of conceiving a work of art from the act of executing it, an approach to art-making he outlined most concisely in his 1967 statement: “The idea becomes the machine that makes the art.” If you are not familiar with Sol LeWitt’s work and the conceptually based approach to art-making that he and other artists pioneered in the 1960s, you might enjoy knowing how LeWitt came to make his wall drawings, which were first described with concise language and clear diagrams that he and/or others could apply directly to specific walls in any given location.

LeWitt’s sources were as wide-ranging as his interest in art history, music, science, and design: Responding early in his career to the 19th-century experiments of photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who fastened together and then triggered banks of cameras in rapid succession to record discrete sequential representations of animal and human locomotion, LeWitt adopted what his good friend and fellow artist Mel Bochner came to describe as “the serial attitude”. Muybridge’s work was revelatory to LeWitt in many ways, especially in how it enabled motion—the gait of a horse, the flip of a gymnast, the twirl of a dancer—to be perceived in elegant visual passages that dramatically expanded human perception and thought. Some of LeWitt’s earliest paintings and sculptural constructions in the 1960s paid homage to Muybridge, but in 1968 his work took a new direction when he conceived his first wall drawing and executed it at the Paula Cooper Gallery in New

York City. The essential visual grammar LeWitt employed to compose this first wall drawing consisted of four kinds of straight lines—vertical, horizontal, diagonal right to left, and diagonal left to right—which he drew in black pencil in carefully measured sequences within 32 identically sized squares. In each square he chose a combination of two of the four straight lines, thus setting forth all possible ways in which these four lines could be combined into a series of two. Although LeWitt executed this first wall drawing in his own hand, he quickly realized that others could participate in the making of such drawings, just as musicians are guided by composers’ scores to give direction to their individual, ensemble, or orchestral performances.

LeWitt presented his next nine wall drawings in Los Angeles, Düsseldorf, and Rome, entrusting their realization to the hands of others, before returning again to the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1969 to produce *Wall Drawing 11*. This work, the earliest included in this retrospective and located on the first floor of MASS MoCA’s Building #7, was first executed by LeWitt, along with artists Adrian Piper and Jerry Orter. It sets forth the ways in which three of his four kinds of straight lines can be drawn in combination within four equally sized quadrants on a wall.

A year later, in 1970, LeWitt grappled with the broader conceptual inclusion of architecture in his wall drawings, conceiving the instructions for *Wall Drawing 51. All architectural points connected by straight lines*, also installed on the first floor. This work, which LeWitt dictated be drawn with a contractor’s blue chalk snap line, has since been realized in numerous buildings throughout the world, and in each instance the resultant combination and length of lines are discreetly different, depending on the specifics of the architectural circumstances. In some of LeWitt’s early, formative works, he began to add the three primary colors—yellow, blue, and red—greatly increasing the possible permutations of his four kinds of straight lines from what had previously been sequential combinations rendered only in gray graphite pencil. LeWitt’s expanding visual vocabulary is especially clear in *Wall Drawing 85. A wall is divided into four horizontal parts. In the top row are four equal vertical divisions, each with colored lines in a different direction. In the second row, six double combinations; in the third row, four triple combinations; in the bottom row, all four combinations superimposed*.

Shortly thereafter, LeWitt decided that the visual vocabulary guiding his line drawings need not be restricted to combinations of straight lines, or be drawn only within discrete squares and/or

bands of four colors on white walls. He soon set forth a number of new works, each describing and diagramming other ways in which lines could fill a wall, for example *Wall Drawing 46. Vertical lines, not straight, not touching, covering the wall evenly* and *Wall Drawing 86. Ten thousand lines about ten inches (25 cm) long, covering the wall entirely*. These works allowed the assistants who would draw them certain latitudes of judgment and process, and wall drawings such as these are never realized in exactly the same way from one venue to another. Other wall drawings LeWitt created in the 1970s introduced even broader notions of performative freedom and chance to those who were to execute his works, much as composers such as John Cage, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass and choreographers Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, and Trisha Brown were doing at the same time.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, LeWitt continued to develop his visual vocabulary, also broadening the variety of materials used to execute his rapidly growing body of work. Many of the wall drawings he created in this period included a repertory of basic geometric figures and forms. *Wall Drawing 295. Six white geometric figures (outlines) superimposed on a black wall*, for example, is an austere masterpiece that LeWitt created in 1975, and yet this work also resonates visually and historically with Leonardo da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man*. It is essential to keep in mind that LeWitt—in addition to being a pioneering Conceptual and Minimalist artist—held fast a deep respect for the classical antecedents of visual art, architecture, music, dance, and other creative disciplines. He never laid claim to the notion that drawing on walls was a unique creative conception of his own, and he was quick to point out that the first evidence we have of human drawing exists on cave walls, or that the masterful traditions of fresco and mural painting began many centuries ago and continue strongly to this day. Indeed, he once said, “I would like to produce something that I would not be ashamed to show to Giotto.”

During this same period, LeWitt began to give color a bolder and greater visual presence in his wall drawings. He did so by employing latex

The wall drawings in this retrospective were executed by Beverly Acha, Chip Allen, Aaron Andrews, Emily Arauz, Takeshi Arita, Cameron Arnold, Chris Cobb, Sylvia Birns-Swindlehurst, Alexandra Bouwsma, Matthew Capezzuto, Kim Carino, Jennifer Chain, Sachiko Cho, Elizabeth Christ, Andrew Colbert, Emily Colman, Miriam Foster, Alison Gaby, Corin Godfrey, Alexander Guerrero, Sarah Heinemann, Karl Hendrickson, John Hogan, Gabriel Hurier, Julia Isenberg, Aran Jones, Rebecca Kane, David Kant, Noa Kaplan-Sears, Clinton King, Nicholas Kozak, Sophia LaCava-Bohanan, Robert Liles, Roland Lusk, Samuel McCune, Diana Mellon, Kristina Mooney, Susan Morrow, Nancy Nichols, Hidemi Nomura, Anna Pickens, Tomas Ramberg, Amy Rathbone, Jessica Robinson, Anna Robinson-Sweet, Alexandra Rose, Alexander Schweizer, Myo St. Clair, Wim Starckenburg, Jordan Starr-Bochiccho, Laura Stauggaitis, Nobuto Suga, Michael Benjamin Vedder, Julia Wagner, Jo Watanabe, and Zach Whitehurst.

paints, India inks, Pelican water colors, and, most recently, Lascaux light-fast acrylic paints and washes to further explore color, which he initially had confined in his works to yellow (Y), blue (B), red (R), and gray (G), much as he had first explored lines using only four basic types of lines.

LeWitt began using bold primary colors in his wall drawings during the early 1980s, and commenced experimenting with the ways in which primary colors could be applied to walls—either individually in various densities, or superimposed one atop the other. He also swiftly figured out how he could best communicate such color combinations and effects to his growing legion of assistants: by noting clearly on his diagrams which individual color or color combination was called for within every wall drawing, stating in abbreviated letters how their specific densities and/or hues were to be realized by applying a particular sequence of color applications. For example, an intense single color might be described as RRRR (red, red, red, red), and a mixed hue of color might be described as YBBGG (yellow, blue, blue, gray, gray). Many from this period of experimentation are featured on the second floor; especially beautiful in its wide variety of hues is *Wall Drawing 681C*, also on view—in another rendition—at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Many other wall drawings LeWitt conceived from the late 1980s onward employ brilliant primary colors rendered with acrylic paints. At times LeWitt combined them with the complementary colors of orange, purple, and green, generating even greater complexities of color within exuberant compositions consisting variously of serial bands, arcs, squares, circles, loopy lines, and complex geometric and isometric forms. These works pack tremendous visual punch and open up complex optical spaces, especially when produced on such a grand scale as is seen in this retrospective. *Wall Drawing 915* and *Wall Drawing 1042* on the third floor of Building #7 exemplify this aspect of the artist’s work and reside not far from *Wall Drawing 821* and *Wall Drawing 822*, in which LeWitt chose to distinguish black-on-black wave forms and black-on-black bands with alternating matte and glossy surfaces.

As LeWitt’s wall drawings of the past two decades became increasingly complex with respect to color calculation and application, the craft and hand skills needed to execute them also became increasingly demanding. This required LeWitt’s many assistants to develop not only careful measuring and drafting skills but also preparatory projection, drawing, and refined masking techniques that often preceded subsequent paint-rolling, acrylic wash application, drying, and varnishing procedures. Nonetheless, as the thinking, technical materials, and hand skills needed to realize LeWitt wall drawings evolved over time, the artist’s basic visual vocabulary remained remarkably lean, direct, and concise. All lines, colors, figures, forms, and dimensions needed to execute a particular wall drawing continued to be communicated clearly by LeWitt to those who worked with and for him in his increasingly global practice. He came to conduct something akin to a far-flung visual orchestra, one whose players—both seasoned and young apprentices—were active the world over.

During the last four years of his life, as he became ill with cancer, LeWitt still continued to work daily, almost without interruption, creating new wall drawings at an amazing pace. Among the most beautiful of the more than 1,260 wall drawings LeWitt created between 1968 and 2007 are his late black-and-white scribble drawings. Six of these works have been drawn to conclude his retrospective on the third floor of MASS MoCA’s Building #7. Standing before them, you will sense immediately how these late works are imbued with a transcendent aura of light and luminosity. LeWitt created these last wall drawings by returning to the simple and direct way he made his first wall drawing back in 1968, once again using just graphite pencil lead to render the figures, forms, and passages of light, whose shimmering presence is achieved through carefully measured bands and densities of hand-scribbled lines. These last wall drawings—in which single lines are, as LeWitt instructed, “taken for a random walk” of immense density and complexity—comprise a visual crescendo to one of the greatest bodies of contemporary art created in our time, one specifically conceived by LeWitt so that people other than himself could partake in the realization and enjoyment of his art in perpetuity.

Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective is a collaboration of MASS MoCA, Yale University Art Gallery, and Williams College Museum of Art.

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Third Floor (later LeWitt)

Arcs, waves, bars, bands, and curves move playfully across the brightly colored walls of LeWitt's drawings from the late 1990s to 2007. Painting with highly saturated red, yellow, blue, purple, green, and orange acrylics, as well as glossy and matte varnishes, LeWitt created expansive murals, often commissioned for large public spaces. Juxtaposed with these dynamic, colorful works are luminous graphite *Scribble* drawings which were conceived between 2005 and the artist's death in April 2007. These intense works—made with dense tangles of scribbled lines “taken for a random walk”, as the artist instructed—create a profound sense of space and volume by almost infinitely modulated gradations of light and dark.

While there are many exceptions, in general the exhibition is organized chronologically by floor, with the ground floor devoted to early works, the second floor to LeWitt's mid-career, and the upper story to his late works.

Second Floor (mid-career LeWitt)

From the early 1980s through much of the 1990s LeWitt continued to manipulate lines, grids, geometric forms, and color using first crayon, then India inks and colored ink washes. Applied to the wall with rags, the thin washes produce a texture and patina reminiscent of Italian quattrocento frescoes or medieval walls. The draftsmen used only red, yellow, blue, and gray ink, but often layered these transparent colors, creating myriad jewel-toned hues and a feeling of dimension and light in the drawings. While the formal language and grammar underlining LeWitt's earliest wall drawings recur in these works, new elements emerge including thick bands and isometric shapes which somehow indicate volume without the illusion of depth.

Even clean hands contain oils and acids that will damage these drawings; please don't touch the walls!

First Floor (early LeWitt)

LeWitt's groundbreaking wall drawings from the late 1960s and 1970s were usually executed with lead and colored pencil. The fine marks, soft gradation of hues, and the immensely inventive range of work LeWitt leveraged from the simplest of formal elements (straight, not-straight and broken lines drawn in vertical, horizontal and diagonal directions, and rendered in gray, yellow, red, and blue) give these works both a subtlety and an expansive internal structure that reward close study. These early works established the vocabulary and conceptual systems that LeWitt would use throughout his career.

Project History

Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective has its origins in a conversation Yale University Art Gallery Director Jock Reynolds had with Sol and Carol LeWitt in 2003, focusing on the ways in which LeWitt's wall drawings might be best documented, conserved, and redrawn long into the future. Having earlier worked closely with the artist to present a 25-year retrospective of his wall drawings while directing Phillips Academy's Addison Gallery of American Art, Reynolds knew firsthand how inspiring LeWitt's work had been to the large group of young artists and students who had labored alongside a team of LeWitt's professional assistants. LeWitt had also enjoyed this mid-career presentation of his wall drawings, and, working with Reynolds, became interested in gifting a representative array of his works to a teaching museum and university that might use them to the best educational and artistic advantage. LeWitt was also interested in creating a program and center at Yale that would help maintain his wall drawing archives and sustain—in perpetuity—the technical knowledge and artistic skills necessary for their subsequent production worldwide.

At the same time, the opportunity to participate in another major exhibition venture with Sol LeWitt made Reynolds think of MASS MoCA as a potential partner. Not only had MASS MoCA been founded through the initiative of another teaching museum, the Williams College Museum of Art, but MASS MoCA had also established a reputation of commissioning and fabricating important new works by living artists and presenting myriad contemporary art programs in all media to an enthusiastic and growing audience. Knowing too that MASS MoCA depends on a rotating cadre of interns and students to help it create and sustain its programs, and that the museum had undeveloped buildings still available for use within its historic factory complex, Reynolds suggested the possibility of a cross-institutional partnership to LeWitt, so that the scholarly archive in New Haven might have a living analogue in North Adams. As one of the co-founders of Conceptual art, and someone known for saying “It's difficult to bungle a good idea”, LeWitt embraced the proposal enthusiastically. What followed was simple: A phone call to Joseph Thompson, MASS MoCA's director, produced his immediate enthusiasm, and a visit to the museum was arranged for the LeWitts, including an extensive walking tour of some of its still-vacant mill buildings. In short order, LeWitt settled on the then-unoccupied Building #7 as the structure he felt was ideally sized for

what was agreed should be a wide-ranging and comprehensive retrospective of his wall drawings. LeWitt liked the location of Building #7 (as did Thompson, who pointed out that, once developed and properly interconnected to existing galleries, the building could become the heart of a new museum circulation loop). LeWitt also embraced the building's rough-hewn masonry walls and its large paned windows that yielded beautiful side lighting, and afforded generous views to the surrounding industrial courtyards and the Berkshire hills beyond.

Simeon Bruner and Henry Moss, partners in Bruner/Cott & Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who were the chief architects of MASS MoCA's overall renovation effort and ardent admirers of LeWitt's work, immediately volunteered to build a scale model of Building #7 for the artist to study. Leslie Gould, Simeon's wife and a LeWitt fan, offered to underwrite the firm's architectural services to MASS MoCA. Jo Watanabe and Susanna Singer, two of LeWitt's senior assistants, helped LeWitt as he conceived the preliminary layout for the 27,000-square-foot interior, suggesting through scale renderings and a tentative checklist how a complex array of interior walls and wall drawings could be located and sequenced throughout the old mill building's three floors.

Called upon to view LeWitt's completed installation model in Watanabe's studio in 2004, the organizers were thrilled with its elegance and beauty. There was instantaneous agreement that the project was a show-stopper and architecturally feasible. Sol and Carol LeWitt were informed that Yale, MASS MoCA, and the architects were going to prepare more detailed designs for budgeting and the organization of a fundraising campaign, and that MASS MoCA and Yale had agreed to co-produce the retrospective. The LeWitts endorsed the suggestion that the retrospective be on view for 25 years, and that it be assisted by a corps of professional LeWitt assistants who would in turn train apprentice artists and student interns (to be recruited from Yale, Williams, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and many other American colleges). Seasoned LeWitt assistants Johnny Sansotta, Tomas Ramberg, and John Hogan were tapped to organize and lead the talented crew of what would become a team of 62 artists and students to execute LeWitt's wall drawings from April through September 2008.

On another front, Robert Doran and Allan Fulkerson, then chairmen, respectively, of Yale University Art Gallery and MASS MoCA, visited North Adams together to view LeWitt's installation model and tour

Building #7. They loved what they saw, and, with their wives Happy and Judy, quickly made the initial financial commitments to kick off the fund-raising campaign. They were joined by a large number of equally enthusiastic trustees, individuals, and foundations who respected LeWitt's art and the idea of preserving his drawings and techniques. What can only be described as an outpouring of collective beneficence soon provided more than \$10 million for the complete renovation and endowment of the LeWitt project, the funding of the exhibition's substantial labor and material costs, a future multi-volume catalogue raisonné of LeWitt's wall drawings to be co-published by the Yale University Art Gallery and Yale University Press, and the creation and endowment of a LeWitt wall drawing conservator and archives center at the Yale University Art Gallery.

Fortuitously, Lisa Corrin's arrival in 2005 as director of the Williams College Museum of Art prompted yet another layer of artistic and educational engagement with the project, as Corrin and her staff proposed an energetic program of changing exhibitions and educational initiatives that would draw upon the LeWitt materials, and that would be staged at venues on the Williams campus, MASS MoCA, and other appropriate locations, bringing generations of current and future students into sustained engagement with the art of Sol LeWitt and his time. This involvement led Williams College President and MASS MoCA trustee Morty Schapiro, and the Williams College board, to commit meaningful resources from the College in support of the LeWitt project at MASS MoCA, completing the institutional triad that is now responsible for the project.

The renovation of Building #7 was begun in Spring 2007, deftly carried out by Waterman Construction Company. Although seriously ill at the time, Sol LeWitt lived long enough to know that his wall drawing retrospective was funded fully and well under way.

LeWitt was famously generous—especially to younger artists—and would no doubt have been deeply appreciative of the legion of hard-working artists, assistants, and donors who brought this retrospective into being. The organizers of this remarkable exhibition share that deep appreciation, extending special recognition and thanks to LeWitt's wife, Carol, and daughters Eva and Sofia, who have provided the warmest and kindest support imaginable. Please delight and linger in this vast visual display of Sol LeWitt's inspired artistry, one we hope you will visit often and enjoy for many years to come.

