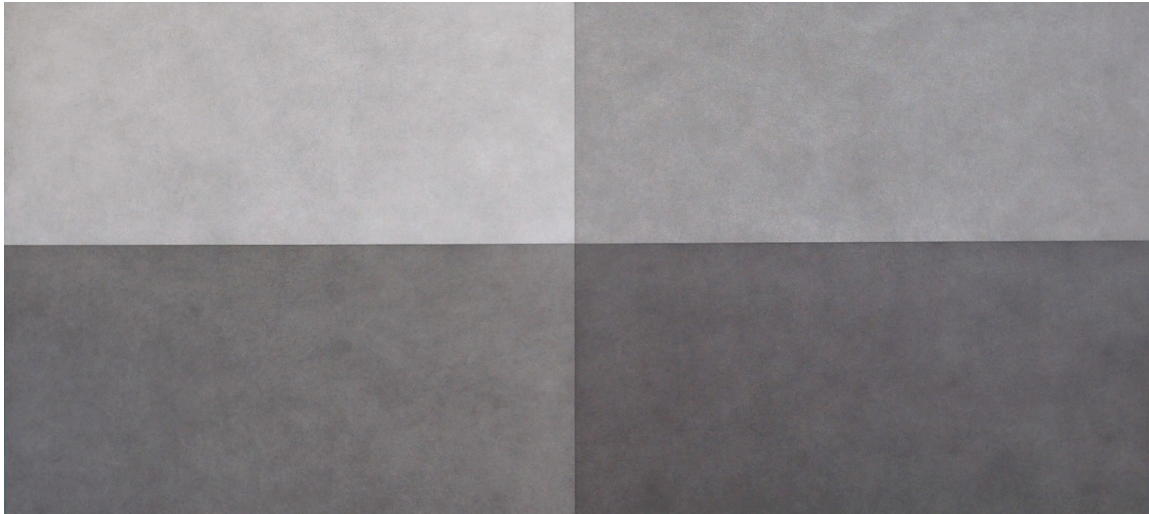


***Decolonizing Sol Lewitt's
Sentences and Paragraphs on Conceptual Art.***

His art was great but his ideas were wrong, and we have the receipts.



Wall Drawing 365

Wall Drawing 365 was first installed in 1984 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, as part of the “Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings 1968-1984” retrospective. I didn’t see it, even though I was standing a few feet away from the blank section of wall where it was to go up, I was too early, didn’t know it would be there, didn’t wait to find out. I didn’t even know back then who Sol LeWitt was. I was visiting Amsterdam with my friend Moyra Davey; we were both photography students at Concordia University in Montreal. We had just walked into the museum and were innocently watching some people drawing colored lines on the museum walls, with no insider knowledge of what was going on. A few minutes later, Moyra took a photo of me sitting in Gerrit Rietveld’s Red-blue ‘Mondrian Chair’, while the museum guard was looking in the other direction.

Sol LeWitt's was a monumental visual artist, his images can be qualified as works of genius without arousing any opposition. Sol LeWitt was also a highly respected art theorist whose statements on conceptual art established him as one of the leading intellectual lights of that movement. Unfortunately, Sol LeWitt's ideas leave much to be desired since they make no sense at all. Sol LeWitt eventually changed his mind. He was able to distinguish between mysticism and reality, unlike Walter Benjamin who went so deep in the rabbit hole that he died there.

In a 1967 issue of Artforum, Sol LeWitt published his legendary "Sentences on Conceptual Art" and "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art". In such statements he was updating Hegel concept of the spirit of the times, the Zeigeist. G.F. Hegel stated in his

Introduction to Aesthetics, that work which does not adhere to the ideas of its time has no value, but then he added that the spirit of the work is more important than its craft. Sol Lewitt was to prove him wrong. Lewitt stated that in conceptual art, the idea was everything while the execution was but perfunctory. Lewitt then changed his mind after seeing perfunctory executions of his own work, but he never corrected what he had published in *Artforum*. Perhaps, it would have been embarrassing.

We only learned this in 2019, when Larry Bloom published his biography¹. For fifty-two years students heard only this terrible misinformation that idea was worthwhile; skill and execution were superfluous. Those students became the next generation of teachers who spread that misinformation. So it went for decades. It is worth asking how such nonsense affected our foundation, production, and judgment of contemporary art. Another question is why no artist, scholar, or curator used common sense built on personal experience to realise Sol LeWitt's statement contradicted every reality check. We kept on believing the idea was supreme while the doing was unimportant.

It is not the idea that is a work of art, it is how you execute the idea, what you do with it. Michelangelo's David is not a work of art because Michelangelo had the idea of doing a statue of David. A song is not a work of art, it is the Ella Fitzgerald's performance that makes of that song a work of art; it was not Edgar Allan Poe's idea of writing a poem about a raven that made *The Raven* a work of art, but the way Poe wrote it. It is not the idea that makes a work of art but the execution.

Lewitt's statement that the idea was dominant while the empirical aspect was unimportant goes all the way back to the 1790s and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant reacted against the empiricists who said that experience was a primary facet of learning. Kant said that learning could not occur without thinking, and such thinking was due to innate knowledge, a synthetic a-priori. So far he was right but there he came up against a wall; in his time there was no science of psychology, no studies of the unconscious inner mind, though several writers including Shakespeare had alluded to such a happenstance. As a result, with the Age of Enlightenment coming after millennia of relies though that found all answers in god, Kant was influenced to believe in the concept of Purity and Spirit for the products of unconscious thinking, this innate knowledge. In Kant's mind, a child's drawing was a Spontaneous Expression born of the Purity of the inner spirit, that needed no empirical experience, no acquired knowledge/ That child's drawing was Art.

As this came down to us three hundred years later, conceptual art was born. An idea was enough, ideas themselves would be art. Until pragmatic experience persuaded Lewitt otherwise, though he never revised his writing since it had been cast in stone in *Artforum* in 1967. The concept, the idea, was not enough, since it could be mistaken; unconscious thought was just as liable to error as consciousness. That ends Kant's statements on the Purity of innate knowledge. Empirical experience, the correction of our errors, is important. Conceptual art was not enough, We need to ask if the concept is relevant,

¹ Larry Bloom, *Sol LeWitt: A Life of Ideas*, Wesleyan University Press, 2019

intelligent, interesting. It is no longer enough if the conceptual artist managed to shock us, or if the artist was well connected, if the recognition of his art depended not on the quality of the work but on the art of sales; not how good your art was but on who you know.

Lewitt's influence was obvious even fifty years later when Lawrence Weiner in conversation with Benjamin Buchloh asserted that art was not about skill². A fascinating thought since the original meaning of art was the highest level of skill. Weiner's assertion was unrealistic; a person's skill needs to be sufficient to communicate their vision. Does that mean Weiner's vision is of a lesser kind? We note that Weiner identifies as a 'non-artist' whose assistants did his work, and Weiner calls his work 'non-art'; simply put, his work is not art. It is nothing more nor less than what it always was; attractive-looking sentences painted on a wall by skilled assistants. Why are the assistants skilled? Imagine if they weren't? What would the client say? Since Lawrence Weiner by his own description is a non-artist, he is obviously not an artist. He could be an interior decorator. Why not? The lettering is e pretty.

Also taking a position against skill, Buchloh argues the slapdash look of Sigmar Polke's drawings, which he admires tremendously, is grounded in a self-conscious avant-garde rejection of virtuosity. Virtuosity is born of a mastery of technique, superior vision, and quick thinking. What is left if we reject these attributes? Buchloh calls for artists to "de-skill", to lose their skill, perhaps in order to bring about the golden age of the simple mind. An idea expressed in a trashy way results in trashy art. It is not the idea that is art, it is the way the skill with which is expressed that creates a work of art

Wikipedia tells us that inspiration, (from the Latin *inspirare*, meaning "to breathe into") refers to an unconscious burst of creativity in a literary, musical, or other artistic endeavour. The concept has origins in both Hellenism and Hebraism. The Greeks believed that inspiration or "enthusiasm" came from the muses, as well as the gods Apollo and Dionysus. Inspiration is prior to consciousness and outside of skill (*ingenium* in Latin). Technique and performance are independent of inspiration, and therefore it is possible for the non-poet to be inspired and for a poet or painter's skill to be insufficient to the inspiration.

Sol LeWitt eventually admitted that there is a dramatic difference between having an idea and making a work of art. We all have ideas but few of us make art. Many have insights they lack the skill to realize. One can play an instrument, paint pictures, dance, yet never be an artist. Not if the work isn't good enough. One needs to acquire skills that expand one's vocabulary to the breadth of one's vision. Look at the art of painting or the art of poetry. They're better than *ordinary* painting or *adequate* poems, which are good but not that good. Garden gnomes and the cement angels found on church steps are sculptures but they're not the art of sculpture. Everyone has ideas. Skills, not so much.

A newborn child has ideas, in the form of basic instincts hard-wired through millions of years of evolution. These instincts inspire the baby who sees something to reach out for

² Benjamin Buchloh interviews Lawrence Weiner: "Art is not about skill. e-flux conversations
<https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/benjamin-buchloh-interviews-lawrence-weiner-art-is-not-about-skill/6188>

it. There is nothing perfunctory about executing that idea; the idea was not self-fulfilling and the execution was not careless, it was vital. The same applies to adults; the process of personal intervention is an integral part of a work of art. Then we are told that artists always had studio assistants who did their work.

In 1617, Sir Dudley Carleton protested to Rubens that paintings offered to him as by the hand of the artist himself were in fact largely the work of his studio. Rubens was quick to replace them with works he could vouch for as being entirely his own — it would not do to acquire a reputation for passing off inferior work as original. In 1652, Peter van Halen, painter and Master of the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp, purchased Brueghel's painting *Cattle Market*, for 204 guilders. On closer examination, Van Halen decided it was not an original but a copy. After three years of lawsuits, van Halen managed to establish that the painting was indeed a studio copy made by Brueghel's assistants and was awarded damages.³

Since our vision is grounded in past knowledge, sophisticated concepts can only proceed from hands-on experience. When an artist hires an assistant to do his homework, all the extraneous learning stays out of the equation.

Moving the goalpost

For five decades students learned from Sol LeWitt that a perfunctory execution was the essence of making art. The words Sol LeWitt used were “conceptual art”, but that was shortened to “art” for the sake of convenience. The resulting perfunctory quality left us wanting, as it did Sol Lewitt, but his famous words had already been printed in *Artforum*.

The academy was unaware that LeWitt had changed his mind. Unwilling to believe a major artist could have said some very silly things, and a major magazine published them without peer review, they moved the goalpost to explain the discrepancy. Even Susan Sontag wrote confused contortions on postmodern artists, possibly in an effort to justify the unjustifiable. Sontag's quote reads: “*People say ‘it's boring’ - as if that were a final standard of appeal, and no work of art had the right to bore us. But most of the interesting art of our time is boring*”⁴. Sontag must have been beating a bug or swatting a fly, since she was quite mistaken about boring, for all her good work otherwise..

³ Lisa Jardine, *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland's Glory*, Harper Collins
<https://www.harpercollins.com/products/going-dutch-lisa-jardine?variant=32129289453602>

⁴ MARIA POPOVA, Susan Sontag on the Creative Purpose of Boredom, *marginalian*
<https://www.themarginalian.org/2012/10/26/susan-sontag-on-boredom/>



Painting credit: Miklos Legrady

If the most interesting art of her time was boring then it was obviously not the most interesting art of her time. Her statement was a sad judgment on whatever art she saw, not a compliment nor a justification of it. We must absolutely insist that art has no right to bore us; art is our highest achievement; boring is not our highest achievement. This must be a final standard. Even Andy Warhol said his movies were more to be talked about than watched, just as Marcel Duchamp said his readymades were more to be discussed, not shown in a gallery. Possibly both knew those items weren't that good, but had potential somewhere. Duchamp and Warhol were art gods, the art world needed art objects, and justifications replaced judgments. This could mean museums now have a valid reason to toss out their found objects, and free up some acquisition space.

What LeWitt had done as an artist was fascinating, but what he wrote and what was done in his name was ridiculous. When you remove the gas, the car stops running; when you remove the sensory non-verbal language from art to make it conceptual, the same thing happens. A prominent video artist, teaching an MFA class, attached a video camera to their car pointing down at the road, and shot an hour of driving on the highway. Their graduate students were then forced to spend an hour watching the road, as an example of the postmodern art variant, the kind that makes us roll our eyes in despair.

And those who know better cannot do anything about it, because those able to change the system, those in a position of authority, got there by supporting the status quo. They silenced the others, they know the game. A Fine Art department head earning upwards of \$125k presents their work as rebelling against the system. Postmodern art rebelled against tradition, which meant we now do boring or meaningless or ugly. Everyone got in step with the new trend. As Walter Benjamin wrote in *Mechanical Reproduction*, "the masses organize and control themselves in their reception". Everyone synchronized their expectations.

Pendulum clocks synchronize when they start out in different steps; eventually the pendulums swing in unison. As they move back and forth, vibrations travel from clock to clock through their common base or suspension. These vibrations interfere with the swings of the pendulums, eventually causing them to synchronize.⁵ The ideological synchrony of art movements is taken for granted in the art community, when we should

⁵ Charles Q. Choi, Why Pendulum Clocks Mysteriously Sync Up, LiveScience 2015
<https://www.livescience.com/51644-why-pendulum-clocks-sync-up.html>

be surprised that at any one time, one art movement dominates the art world at the expense of all others. Most fine arts producers graduate from similar schools and share the same values, which are reflected in their association, their production, and the systems created thereby. Surely a cultural blindness results from such group judgments.

For example, the advent of conceptual art cast shade on media like photography, whose premise consisted of ways of seeing, photography being a visual language and not a verbal intellectual one. Photography lost its status as an art form, and photographers were recast as artists working in a 'lens-based practice'. A postmodern artist's work was there to illustrate their concept. The artist now had assistants to produce an object or image for that purpose. Tom Wolfe satirized this in "Back to Blood". *"The artist... had no hand at all in making them. And if he touched the photographs, it was just to put them in an envelope and FedEx them, although I'm sure he has an assistant to do things like that. No Hands—that's an important concept now. It's not some artist using his so-called skills to deceive people. It's not a sleight of hand. It's no hands at all. That makes it conceptual, of course. That way he turns what a manual artist would use to create...an effect...into something that compels you to think about it in a deeper way."*⁶

What is missed in all this is skilled artists do not deceive the viewer; it is those lacking skills who resort to deception, or marketing, as we call it today. What is also missed is that art is expressed in non-verbal languages. This applies even in literature, where the sonority and cadence, the rhythm, feel, and sense of the writing is what gives it the appellation of art. To say that conceptual art compels the audience to think about the work in a deeper way, is to replace the orchestra with a sheet of paper explaining what the music would sound like if there were musicians playing. That makes it conceptual, of course... in a deeper way.

Painting still exists, if severely diminished. For few now care about visual language when intellectual ideas are the trend. In fact we should be astounded that one form of art would dominate and shade the others, but it makes sense when considering that everyone wants lead the pack, leaving the stuckists behind. We should be grateful it was Sol LeWitt's concept that gained prominence (that the idea is everything and the execution does not matter), rather than Duchamp's idea that art is discredited and we should get rid of it.⁷ Of course Duchamp's statement was influential in weakening the role of actual practice, but the art world did not want to get rid of art, since they would lose their profession and their income.

A linear history

Art movements since the 20th century align with the intellectual influence of science on culture. The Impressionists, consciously or not, were deconstructing the visual language of painting, by differentiating the visual syntax of painterly styles. They made a statement that painting was a language. That it had a grammar operating on a visual bandwidth. Abstract Expressionism explored the emotional effect of masses of shape and color, Pop Art legitimized graphic design. Then Conceptual Art took the bold step, successful or not,

⁶ Tom Wolfe, *Back to Blood*, p352, Little, Brown, and Co. N.Y.

⁷ Joan Bakewell in conversation with Marcel Duchamp, Late Night Line-Up, BBC ARTS, 1968.
<https://youtu.be/Zo3qoyVk0GU>

of eliminating the artist in favor of the idea, by doing away with the artist's skill. Marcel Duchamp took the bold step of hanging a snow shovel on the wall.



Painting credit: Miklos Legrady

A few years later Joseph Kosuth earned an international reputation as a conceptual artist by taking the bold step of hanging a similar looking snow shovel on his own wall, along with a few chairs. Critics were even more astounded, quite rightly! Today no emerging artist would dare take the bold step of buying a copy of that snow shovel and hanging it on their wall. Of course not! They would have an assistant do that for them. Years after Joseph Kosuth's courageous move, critics fell into ever greater fits of astonishment, as well they should, when Lawrence Weiner, at the tender age of 19, started his own international career as a conceptual artist one night, by taking the bold step of blowing up a large firecracker in the California desert. However Sol LeWitt experienced problems when those executing his work did a perfunctory job of it. He found that his work looked better when executed by artists with a dedication and commitment to the work, rather than those who did not care. LeWitt saw that some had a talent for art and others did not.

The philosopher's physical task

Conceptual artist tried to separate the intellectual function from the material. Such a detachment from reality can already be found in 19th century literature, where one poet wrote that he did not have to go out to sea to have a nautical experience. Bring him a rope used to hoist the sails, bring him a piece of sail that had carried the whiff of ocean salt, and he could use his imagination to create an entire story of a sailing ship and the life on it without ever leaving his room. Karl May, 1842-1930, was a German author who wrote such adventure tales including the cowboy story Winnetou. But of course tales born in the imagination of brilliant writers is rare; even then it is limited to what the writer can imagine, there is no discovery. Toronto's Elaine Stewart relates the following story "He made up his concepts of aboriginals which had no basis in reality. I remembered hearing that in Germany they still recreate Indian villages based on his made up concepts. They are still very popular events with thousands attending. Told this version by my ex. When my ex's cousins were visiting from Germany they had some (to me) odd ideas about aboriginal communities. They wanted to be taken to one where they could participate in daily life (a la May)."

Sol LeWitt's original premise was that the idea is enough, and he learned that it was not. Not only is the execution important in obvious ways, it teaches us more about the idea than we knew or were able to think. John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume gave us empiricism, the theory that all knowledge comes primarily from sensory experience. It is one of several views of epistemology, the study of human knowledge. This means that when we eliminate the sensory experience of doing the work, we limit our knowledge to what we already know. That is the paradigm that unravels Sol LeWitt's "Sentences" and "Paragraphs on conceptual art". They were taken as postulates when they were only assumptions to be tested. And when tested, they failed.

Logic and the reality check

Logic is a study of arguments, stating that a valid argument is one that has a specific relation of support between the assumptions and their conclusion. Without logic, descriptions and parameters lose definition; without boundaries we dissolve in the boundless. LeWitt's words in Artforum claim his ideas are beyond a reality check, in the sentence "*a conceptual artist is a mystic who overleaps logic*". This calls for a review of his writing. If LeWitt's words enabled the conceptual mode and his mission statement makes no sense, then the practice and legitimacy of conceptual art needs revision. Even religions no longer count how many angels dance on the head of a pin.

It is surprising that LeWitt's visual art touches the sphere of genius, but his writing lacks common sense. "*If an artist changes his mind through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results*" In fact it's the opposite; it is obviously the decision not to change one's mind that repeats past results. Making art is a consistent method of adaptation. It's an ill omen that no one noticed the obvious or thought this through; respect for authority is the enemy of inquiry.

LeWitt's a brilliant artist, a creative mind so gifted we're surprised his visual complexity is not matched by equally developed analytical powers. And so we learn that creation and comprehension each use a different toolkit.

Carl Jung writes of four mental functions we use to understand the world; sensation, intellect, feeling, and intuition; each with different qualities of equal value to consciousness. Sensation tells us something is out there. Intellect classifies it, tells us what it is. Feelings evaluate its importance to us, and intuition can make rapid hypotheses and guess at the most likely outcome. We each have a dominant function, some more intellectual, others more sensory or feeling, or intuitive. Each of these functions can reach a high level of complexity, so that a dancer can have a complex understanding, or an intellectual can have complex feelings. Jung also notes a person relying only on their dominant function will be rather shallow, while those engaging more functions have a greater depth of personality.

The brain assigns functions to different locations. The visual cortex is located in the occipital lobe at the back of the head; language functions such as Broca's and Wernicke's areas are found on the left and right sides; intellectual thinking resides in the prefrontal

cortex.⁸ Such areas can grow at different rates, and strength in one function can lead to underdevelopment in another, while a weakness in one function can lead to hypertrophy elsewhere. This is obvious with legendary blind musicians Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder.

This suggests Sol LeWitt's admirable visual ability counterweighed a lesser intellectual cognition. Not that LeWitt was less intelligent than the majority, more that his visual function was of a higher development than average, leading us to expect a corresponding brilliance overall. His primary thinking may have been a sensory process in the visual cortex, leaving him with average rather than exceptional intellectual faculties.

Is art mainly the idea?

*"Ideas alone can be works of art"*⁹ Sol LeWitt proposed in his epic "Sentences on Conceptual Art," a primer on the ins and outs of postmodern art making.

Once we define these three terms; ideas, work, and art, etymological conflicts appear. Is an idea a construct, a conscious work? In common parlance, one has an idea, one does not make an idea; they are acquired, found, but are they actually made? When we create an idea to fill a demand, did we consciously build that idea from scratch and if not, where did that idea come from? Archimedes' 'Eureka', translated from the Greek as "I found it".¹⁰ Something I found, not made. It came to my attention, either by my looking for it or as the spontaneous product of unconscious processes. When we discover we did not make what we discovered; the work of searching produced the receptivity for it.

Work is a conscious activity. Art is our highest achievement, so obviously something we find cannot be our highest achievement. Having an idea is not work, often no effort is required other than staying awake. Ideas seemingly come to us as an intuition from the depths of the mind.¹¹ Thinking can be hard work but something that pops into our head is a freebie. "It just popped into my mind" is a familiar expression. That something had to come from somewhere; the unconscious parts of the mind were already familiar in the 1850s.¹²

A writer can set up a work environment where ideas can flow. Ideas can be clarified, embellished, demonstrated, questioned and proven, they can be worked on, but they are never a work of art. Art is our highest accomplishment, while the ideas in our mind are not conscious creations, they are not conscious accomplishments, even when refined and

⁸ Now research reveals an unexpected role for the prefrontal cortex, the area immediately behind the forehead that serves as the control center that mediates our highest cognitive abilities—among them concentration, planning, decision making, insight, judgment and the ability to retrieve memories.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4774859/#:~:text=Now%20research%20reveals%20an%20unexpected,th,e%20ability%20to%20retrieve%20memories>.

⁹ Sol LeWitt, Sentences on Conceptual art <http://www.altx.com/vizarts/conceptual.html>

¹⁰ "Eureka" comes from the Ancient Greek word εὕρηκα heúrēka, meaning "I have found (it)", which is the first person singular perfect indicative active of the verb εὕρισκω heuriskō "I find". It is closely related to heuristic, which refers to experience-based techniques for problem-solving, learning, and discovery. Wiki[edia

¹¹ The unconscious mind (or the unconscious) consists of processes in the mind that occur automatically and are not available to introspection. Although these processes exist beneath the surface of conscious awareness, they are thought to exert an effect on conscious thought processes and behavior.

Westen, Drew (1999). "The Scientific Status of Unconscious Processes: Is Freud Really Dead?". *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 47 (4): 1061–1106.

¹² Altschule, Mark. *Origins of Concepts in Human Behavior*. New York: Wiley, 1977, p.199

perfected; the idea was made in the unconscious depths of the mind, and brought into consciousness, where we discover them.

Art is also a value judgment, so that ideas that remain in our mind, that do not take external form, and that are not shared with others cannot be judged as art because of our capacity for self-deception. We can judge our work to be art but such judgment must find common agreement. An idea must take external form, must encounter and adapt to the reality of matter, must prove that it is realizable, even if in the form of a drawing or a statement that can be understood and judged by others as the highest accomplishment of that form or mode. This author has created certificates declaring one cubic meter of air to be a work of art, but others must judge of that cubic meter of air is better and more accomplished than any other cubic meter of air they have encountered, for art is our highest accomplishment. If that air is not a higher accomplishment than other air, it is nor a work of art but simply common average air.

Sol LeWitt's Wall Drawings 365 did not become a work of art until it went up on the wall, the idea adapting to the material reality of paint and wall. Nor can we ignore the hired artists' skill in executing LeWitt's idea. It can even seem that LeWitt was insulting the artists by ignoring their contribution, which he called perfunctory until he realized how important it was

Taxonomy

LeWitt was also wrong in taxonomy; ideas are not art, they are science. The dictionary says science is a systematic enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions about the universe. These are ideas. We then read that art is a diverse range of human activities in creating. Creating means production in the physical sphere. It's obvious 'the art' of anything means more than just thinking about it; an idea needs to be realized to be effective. Art needs to be made physical to be at a higher standard than a professional product.

Ideas "*need not be made physical*," LeWitt continued. "*A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewer's. There's the possibility that the idea may never reach the viewer, or that the idea may never leave the artist's mind. But all ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.*"¹³

Not so. A work of art is a value judgment. Thinking can be an art, if it is obvious the thinker is exceptional at thinking, but ideas are assumptions until they take form. Art is a product. "*Willing is not enough; we must do*" Johan Wolfgang von Goethe Therefore ideas need to be made to be a product since art is always produced; ideas need to be made physical. Works of art are not a conductor, it is the medium that is the conductor, it conducts the idea, and the medium does not need to be worked to such a high quality that it becomes a work of art. For example a textbook or a road sign can just as easily conduct the idea from the artist's mind to the viewer, without it ever being art. Art occurs only when the

¹³ Sol LeWitt, Sentences on Conceptual art <http://www.altx.com/vizarts/conceptual.html>

idea is conducted in the best form the artist, the concept, and the medium are capable of doing or being. Otherwise is it bad art, which is no art at all.

Art is a qualification. There's bad art, which is a failed attempt, so it's not art. From the postulates above we see that an idea that claims to be art is mistaken. And when the idea is mistaken, it is not science either; it's simply a mistake. If the idea never leaves the artist's mind or never reaches the viewer, then it is a dud. If art is any idea inside an artist's mind, such license would corrupt both art and artist; we would be at the mercy of duds, scammers and charlatans.

*“When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair”*¹⁴ This sentence is a dramatic failure to understand the creative process, assuming all creativity to an intellectual plane where it does not belong. Art is not science. These assumptions were written before LeWitt learned from his mistakes, as documented in Larry Bloom's 2019 biography. Here he assumes consciousness is all that matters in creation, rejecting the non-verbal languages and both conscious and unconscious influences that are the actual domain of art.



Painting credit: Miklos Legrady

This statement reveals that Sol Lewitt, a gifted visual artist, did not at this point understand his own work or art in general, that he made great art without conscious awareness of why he did it, yet hitting the mark with the precision of a sleepwalker who avoids every physical obstacle. His visual artwork was processed by the visual cortex, and he had an efficient and sufficient command of language so that he could send complex instructions to museums across the world, where skilled artists executed his projects. But the brilliant analytic complexity with which he instructed such artists did not extend to an intellectual comprehension of what he was doing or the parameters of his practice. When the execution of anything is a perfunctory affair the results are always perfunctory, and Sol LeWitt finally got it. But his mistaken assumptions must be debunked. For example *“the idea becomes the machine that makes the art”*.¹⁵ A contradiction when the idea is already supposed to be art (which it obviously isn't).

¹⁴ Sol LeWitt, *American conceptual artist and painter*, The Art Story, Museum Art Insight, <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-LeWitt-sol.htm>

¹⁵ Sol LeWitt, *Paragraphs on Conceptual art* <http://emerald.tufts.edu/programs/mma/fah188/sol-LeWitt/paragraphs%20on%20conceptual%20art.htm>

LeWitt also maintained that *“like an architect who creates a blueprint for a building and then turns the project over to a construction crew, an artist should be able to conceive of a work and then either delegate its actual production to others or perhaps even never make it at all.”*¹⁶ An architect who neglects supervision of the project risks San Francisco’s leaning Millennium Tower.

LeWitt again contradicts himself in “Sentences on Conceptual Art”; *“The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.”* Nonsense cured by the next sentence: *“Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.”*

There are many conclusions logic cannot and refuses to reach; the aim of logic is a coherent system to investigate, classify, and evaluate good and bad forms of reasoning.

This study suggest that a conceptual practice is a contradiction, since art is the expression of sensory non-verbal languages, whereas concepts are thoughts detached from the world, concepts being abstract ideas. Conceptual art would fill a need, only if other art forms lacked concepts, yet all art starts with concepts. On the other hand, concepts on their own are not art; they belong to science.

The final question is why did no one deconstruct LeWitt’s Sentences and Paragraphs? The reasons are endless and include Duchamp’s urinal and shovel, as well as all the other snow shovels and bananas. In 2019 Maurizio Cattelan duct-taped a banana to the wall at Basel Miami, titled it “The Comedian”, and sold four copies for \$120k each. Performance artist David Duna grabbed the banana off the wall and ate it. This is not the place to ask if Catellan should have insisted Duna’s stomach be pumped to recover Catellann’s expensive property. Instead we can consider the power of those who can afford to pay \$125,000 for one banana.

The buyers are responsible for pumping oxygen into a banana that says art is a shallow joke. So are the other collectors who invested in snow shovels and gold toilets. Equally responsible are the museums, gallerists, critics, and all the conceptual artists taking their first or last bold steps buying bananas or snow shovels to hang on their wall. This is a formidable power base investing millions into the urinal’s semiotic message that art is to piss on.

DADA rebellion was exciting back in 1917. No one expected that everyone would jump on the bandwagon, which cannot bear all that weight and will inevitably collapse. Duchamp’s DADA strategy was to say art is discredited even though he didn’t mean it, since he remained an artist. Unfortunately he said what he didn’t mean too often, and unable to evade that influence, he eventually believed his own press, lost his motivation, hit an artist’s block and had to quit making art. “One didn’t mean to do it”, he said; “it was like a broken leg”.¹⁷ When will the last banana break the art bandwagon’s back?

¹⁶ Ditto.

¹⁷ Pierre Cabane, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Jasper Johns, An appreciation, p110, Da Capo Press

An overview of Sol Lewitt's work reveals that he was not a conceptual artist. His images are consistently images, they reach the quality of being some of the highest accomplishments of his time, but they are images and occasionally, sculptures. Sol Lewitt is not a conceptual artist, he is a visual artist.