

The Whole Judd

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To speak of “The Whole Judd” is of course an incredible declaration and one that can only be justified as a headline. Nevertheless, I intend to move beyond the stereotype of the “artist of boxes” in order to outline a more complex figure.

Donald Judd was highly productive, and in many different areas. He started out as a painter, moved on to three-dimensional objects, made prints throughout his life, drew prolifically, wrote exhibition reviews and essays, practiced architecture (although he didn’t call himself an architect because he didn’t have a license) and renovated first his own building in New York and subsequently his residence in Marfa, Texas, and finally founded a museum—the Chinati Foundation—also in Marfa. In addition to the completed architectural projects there are a large number of unrealized ones that exist only in the form of sketches and plans. He designed furniture, which he considered part of his architecture. The first pieces were made purely for personal use because nothing suitable was available for purchase in West Texas; later the range of designs was expanded to include tableware, textiles, jewelry, and so on. Finally, Judd also ranched, and in this capacity served as a guardian of the landscape. He purchased large parcels of land not far from Marfa and kept only a small number of cattle because the land had been overgrazed and needed to rest. To respect nature was of the highest order.

By the time he died in February of 1994, at age 65, Judd had created an oeuvre comprising hundreds of paintings, sculptures, prints, as well as sketches for sculptures, architecture, and prints. His written work included approximately 600 exhibition reviews from the early 1960s and about 100 essays published between 1969 and 1993, alongside many unpublished texts. He left behind a considerable personal collection of art and design, an extensive library, as well as an inventory of real estate. In addition to the building on Spring Street in New York—a cast-iron structure from 1870—are two former airplane hangers from World War I that he adapted for his home, a half dozen formerly commercial buildings in Marfa such as a bank, supermarket, and hotel, which he furnished with artwork and furniture—both his own work and his collection of others'. He owned three ranches south of Marfa and also renovated the houses located there. Finally, Judd left behind a museum that is recognized as one of the most significant places for art internationally, as the artworks come to light in a way that is rarely seen elsewhere.

What unites these activities, and do they add up to more than the sum of their parts? Judd was a complex and not easily deciphered figure. Each one of his individual activities provides enough material for extensive study. I will describe his immense output not separated by categories, but under aspects that can serve as illuminating factors in considering his total oeuvre.

In 1948 Judd wrote a text that suggests the beginning of his professional development. He was just 20 years old and had recently started his art studies—first at the Art Students League in New York and then at William and Mary College in Virginia, where he wrote this—largely self-referential—essay. In it, he says:

The painter of pictures during his student years at one of the country's numerous and frequently incompetent art schools is in a bewildering position. In fact, he was in this position even prior to his entrance into art school, when the decision of whether his work indicated sufficient talent and skill to merit basing a career upon it was thrust at him after years of hesitancy. This decision, which only he himself could determine and justify, had to be right, permanently right, for the several years that he would spend in school painting would be entirely disregarded as formal education by any future employer of his in another profession.¹

Judd appears impressed by the achievements of the great masters and the many *isms*, and he fluctuates between hopelessness and excitement. Finally he acknowledges that the life of an art student is satisfying. He continues,

Intent at his work the painter can forget his many serious worries such as the choking patronage of the poets, the lack of a good market, the ignorant ranting of the critics, the American provincialism, and the art propaganda that is ruining his public. These may be important but more vital to the student of painting is an honest, firm interpretation of his subject and despite being tossed back and forth in perpetual controversy he must, with solid years of work, build out of his experience, paintings which will be valid responses to the life around him.²

We see the young artist as serious, thoughtful, and well aware of the consequences of his career choice, but also sense his great joy in the pursuit. In light of the pure act of painting, the other difficulties fade away. He seems particularly aware of

the challenges ahead, namely the responsibility of giving *valid responses to life*. Naturally, these valid responses had yet to be found.

The education in Virginia didn't meet his expectations, and Judd returned to the Art Students League in New York and also enrolled at Columbia University. He entered the philosophy department and took courses in ethics, social philosophy, geology, religious philosophy, history of English literature, and sociology. His first notes were made in relation to Plato's *Republic* and its philosophical principles. During his second semester he studied Aristotle, Descartes, William James' *Essays in Pragmatism*, and Schopenhauer. Later he specialized in the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, attended lectures on the philosophy of science and empiricism, and took courses in ethics, the history of philosophy, and propositional calculus. Finally he studied John Locke's essay *Concerning Human Understanding* and David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.³ In the fall of 1953 Judd received his Bachelor of Science summa cum laude.

Throughout his time as a philosophy student, he continued to pursue his painting—typically structures and figures—and participated in his first exhibitions during these years, and twice received a first prize for drawing and printmaking. Further exhibitions were held in 1952 and 1955, each receiving positive recognition in the press. Judd, however, was not satisfied. He knew he needed to deepen his knowledge and returned to Columbia to study art history. Among other professors, he chose the extraordinary art historians Rudolf Wittkower and Meyer Shapiro, and attended lectures on Baroque painting and sculpture, Renaissance architecture, and Venetian painting, as well as pre-Columbian art, art from the Far East, aesthetics, Impressionism, and Modern and American painting. Although he wanted to complete his Masters with a thesis on Ingres, this never happened, as Wittkower was not particularly interested in the subject. By the time Judd left the university in the summer of 1959 he had a solid knowledge of art history and philosophy that would complement and enrich his experience as a painter.

In the meantime his painting had become more expansive. There were still echoes of landscapes or objects, but amorphous and edgy forms now predominated and appeared to dissolve the figure-ground relationship (fig. 1). One cannot speak of uniformity in the style; instead a sense of exploration and experimentation dominated until 1959.

From then on, things began to accelerate and change. In the summer of 1959, when he was 30, Judd took the position of art critic for *Arts* (later named *Arts Magazine*), and with just a short interruption he continued to write reviews until the spring of 1965. During these five years he wrote more than 600 reviews of almost that many artists. Most of the articles dealt with contemporary or modern art, although there were also texts on African art, Neapolitan painting, the evolution of representations of the Buddha, on French masters of the 18th century, and other historical themes. By visiting so many exhibitions—of contemporary art in galleries and historical art in museums—Judd deepened his knowledge even further and became one of the most informed figures on the scene. His knowledge covered art of the past and present, drawing on his philosophy studies as well as his own experiences as a painter.

Judd had a distinct sensibility for language, appreciating certain words for their tone, or sentences for their rhythm. One of the most remarkable characteristics is how directly he was able to express his thoughts. He never hesitated to state his opinion, and often the reviews began or ended with a clear statement:

“These pictures are much better than those of last year.”⁴

“These paintings are academic in every respect.”⁵

“Almost all of the work in this show looks good, but is only moderately interesting.”⁶

He was generous with praise if he considered an exhibition impressive, or “first-rate” in his own words. An article about Alfred Jensen from 1963 begins with the words: “Now and then a chance occurs for a narrow, subjective, categorical statement: Jensen is great.”⁷ About John Chamberlain he wrote: “The only reason Chamberlain is not the best American sculptor under forty is the incommensurability of ‘the best’ which makes it arbitrary to say so.”⁸

Though tersely phrased, the reviews are precise: “[Frank] Stella’s aluminum painting, dated 1960, is his best [in this show]. The bare lines of the canvas between the bands of aluminum paint follow the indentations in the sides of the canvas. It is something of an object, it is a single thing, not a field with something in it, and it has almost no space.”⁹

If we compile a list of terms that were of high relevance to Judd, it must include the following:

- New
- Advanced
- Realized
- Complex
- Simple
- Independent
- Single
- Un-spacious
- Non-figurative

These key words also describe a new type of painting that has a minimum of visual depth—whose form *is* its content, rather than being a container *for* content. It is a painting free of references to anything but itself. The format of a work is itself the subject of its presentation and not the frame for or measure of an external subject. Judd used the word “single” for this type of congruence, meaning that the representation and format are *one*—that they are not separable.

Many rigorous museum visits, mostly in New York, left Judd impressed by their holdings—especially those of the Frick Collection and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He perceived their collections as particularly remarkable, and especially appreciated the Frick for being situated in a former residence whose courtyard and varied rooms with period furniture gave the paintings an appropriate context—in contrast to the bland settings typically found in museums. The two collections, he



Fig. 1: *Welfare Island* (CH 813), 1956. Judd Foundation.

thought, had been a school for many artists whose knowledge of the art of the past enabled them to develop their own art differently. Judd was well aware that each generation needed to develop its particular expression for its own time, and he recognized that an artist could use only little from the art of the past in his or her own work. Nevertheless, he was certain that artists could benefit from the art of the past by recognizing its *potential*. He acknowledged history as a necessary basis for creating art, which one had to separate from in order to make one’s own mark.

Judd’s reputed rejection of museums is legendary, but it’s almost always misrepresented: He didn’t reject museums—as we now know he actually valued their existence and in particular their collections. However, they would soon lose relevance for Judd, for in his experience, museums presented neither his work nor that of his valued colleagues properly, a belief that later led him to found his own museum. But at the moment—we are in the period of 1962-66—he was still trying to understand what it means for a country’s culture when its showpieces come from elsewhere.

As large portions of the holdings at the Frick, the Metropolitan, or the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City were imported from China, Europe, or South America, Judd saw those collections as excellent art, but irrelevant insofar as they were lacking a relationship to his own time. It seemed absurd to him that art and culture would be shipped from a distance of thousands of miles away and hundreds of years ago to be set down in the Midwest, as the Chinese Collection at the Nelson-Atkins Museum had been; even in Kansas City this art was still art from China. His thoughts on the subject crystallized in the astonishing statement that “Americans must never have had a sense of isolation from which they would gather that if they were going to have any art, they would have to make it.”¹⁰

How did the art critic Judd fare as a painter during these years? In 1959 he was still a conventional abstract artist, but the

following year marked a breakthrough. His paintings now had a slightly modulated, almost uniformly colored surface marked with lines. At first these networks resembled Arp-like curves, which eventually straighten out and become actual incisions into the surface of the work (fig. 2). The surfaces themselves become sandy and rough, with an increasingly regular and monochromatic coloration (fig. 3).

In 1961, the picture plane gets extended inwards with an inserted baking pan (fig. 4), or projected forward with shovel-like edges. In 1962 Judd completed the move from the wall to the floor. His first freestanding object was clearly an extension of his painting, while the second already opened up a host of new possibilities that would become the basis for his subsequent oeuvre.

In this piece, untitled, from 1962, the angle simultaneously encloses space and remains open (fig. 5). The black pipe marks the centers of the two sidewalls, its bend and length determining their overall size and 90-degree opening. It is interesting that the tightly enclosed space inside the pipe crosses the open space of the angle, a horizontal element crossing a vertical one, qualities that will remain central to Judd's work.

Throughout the following year, 1963, the last examples of his painting overlap with the early stages of his three-dimensional objects. In 1964, metal and colored Plexiglas were used

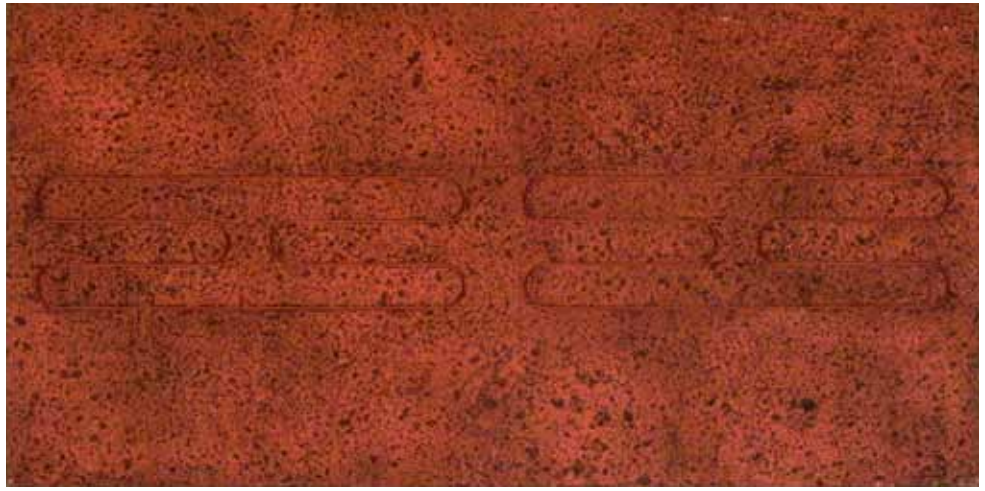


Fig. 3: untitled (DSS 26), 1961, Judd Foundation.



Fig. 2: untitled (DSS 7), 1960, Judd Foundation.

for the first time, marking the end of his hand-made work. From this point on, color is no longer applied to a support, but is inherent *in* the material itself—as is the case with Plexiglas, plywood, anodized aluminum, or all metals. As of 1965, craftsmen and fabricators produced all of Judd's work. His catalogue raisonné already listed twenty works for 1965, which include various freestanding pieces as well as the first stack.

The same year was marked by additional encouraging events:

The first positive reviews were published by Lucy Lippard and Max Kozloff, among others, and a travel grant allowed Judd to leave the country for the first time and go to Sweden. He also joined Leo Castelli Gallery after Dick Bellamy closed the Green Gallery, where Judd had earlier held several exhibitions. And at the invitation of Barnett Newman, he participated in the São Paulo Biennale.

Also in 1965 Judd published his essay "Specific Objects." Often mistakenly referred to as a manifesto, "Specific Objects" actually tried to capture a moment and do justice to the diversity and inventiveness of art at the time. In this essay, Judd explained the transition from flat painting to three-dimensional objects, and described this development in the work of forty-five artists.

In his eyes, painting had reached a point where practically all of its possibilities had been explored. Representation on a flat rectangle had become un-spatial, freeing the picture of all external illusion and allowing it to stand as itself. In this process painting became unexpectedly powerful, as was manifested in the work of the Abstract Expressionists—in particular Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still. At the same time painting had reached a limit that prompted Judd to concisely declare his infamous statement: "it's finished." He saw the very characteristics that had made painting so powerful—such as the congruence of representation and form—reflected in these new objects, and he applied them in his own work.

Three dimensions are notably more powerful than just two, said Judd, because they are *actual* space. "Three dimensions [...] get rid of the problem of illusionism [...] actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface." "[A three-dimensional object] can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted."¹¹



Fig. 4: untitled (DSS 23), 1961, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

And so a wide field of possibilities emerged that signaled a break from precedents and brought the artist a new freedom. This three-dimensional art, which Judd said resembled sculpture more than painting but was actually closer to painting,¹² was put together in a very different way from traditional methods of composition. Judd explained that most

sculpture, all the way up to David Smith, was assembled part-by-part. The part-by-part composition achieved a balance between smaller and larger, and between less important and more important elements, which in turn supported the actual intention to varying degrees. In contrast, the new type of objects eliminated this balancing of parts in favor of a cohesive or unified whole. Judd distinguished the differing approaches of different artists; regarding his own work, he explained that the form of a work is determined a priori and is without a hierarchy among its parts.

“[T]he thing about my work is that it is given,” he explained in a conversation with John Coplans. “Just as you take a stack



Fig. 5: untitled (DSS 33), 1962, Judd Foundation.



Fig. 6: untitled (DSS 123), 1969, Judd Foundation.

or row of boxes, it's a row. Everybody knows rows, so it's given in advance."¹³ That's also true for a progression, where the spaces are determined by mathematics, so that a progression isn't composed part-by-part but in one shot. He emphasized that these sequences didn't mean anything to him as mathematics, nor had they anything to do "with the nature of the world."¹⁴ And in answer to the question why the boxes of the progressions are below rather than above the horizontal, Judd provides some insight on his thinking about the figurative: if they had been placed above, "it would have turned the top into teeth and made the bar look like a base."¹⁵

Again, here is Judd stating his key concern:

A work needs only to be interesting. Most works finally have *one* quality [author's emphasis] [...] A painting by Newman is finally no simpler than one by Cézanne. In the three-dimensional work the whole thing is made according to complex purposes, and these are not scattered but asserted by *one* form. It isn't necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting.¹⁶

When this text was published, Judd was 37 years old. The period of experimentation can be considered as coming to an end as his art had developed its own individuality and maturity, and many opportunities now seemed to be open. He also stopped reviewing other artists' work. By now Judd had a recognized position as artist as well as critic. Mel Bochner, himself an artist and critic at *Arts Magazine* shortly after Judd, noted that Judd was the subject of endless debates among art-

ists at the time and that nobody could get around him because his writings—as well as his work—impacted them all in one way or another.¹⁷

The essay "Specific Objects" marks the end of a long period of development, and it concludes Judd's theoretical as well as practical education. Even so, this seems to be just the beginning of the actual period of specific objects.

After *Specific Objects* Now everything is about space. A lot was happening simultaneously or in close succession. Judd's artwork increased in scale, became more clear and at the same time more complex. The "stack" is resolved in its final version as a vertical arrangement of ten boxes that project from the wall and are mounted above one another with equal spaces (fig. 6). They span the height of the wall and ideally reach to just below the ceiling. Although the work is mounted on the wall, the wall is more than just a support as it enters a symbiotic relationship with the sculpture. The measurements of the boxes are such that their depth is four times their height, an extreme cantilever that moves beyond the zone of low relief, entering real, physical space. A substantially larger work installed in the East Building of La Mansana simultaneously relates to the wall *and* the floor (fig. 9). Its three rows of squared tubing are made of very thin iron sheets, with openings measuring 50 x 50 cm and a depth of 3 meters, so that the whole work is twice as deep as it is high. Judd continued to work with freestanding floor pieces and developed volumes with open ends in a variety of configurations and with increasing sophistication.

Fig. 7: 101 Spring Street, 4th Floor, New York, Judd Foundation.



Spring Street Judd’s interest in architecture took on a new dimension in 1968, the year he acquired a cast-iron building with unusually large windows in New York’s SoHo district (fig. 8). Built in 1870, it had housed various small manufacturing operations, mostly for textiles. This house became Judd’s first model for integrating art and living. His goal was to combine the two aspects in a way that gave sufficient space to living and working areas, but where art could become a part of daily life. In planning the renovation, his aim was to maintain the inherent character of the building: “the building should be repaired and basically not changed.” The different floors were kept open and the large glass angle—the building’s corner—was not to be interrupted. Another guiding principle was to ensure that all changes would be reversible. This balance of maintaining the historical character and adapting it to contemporary needs was realized with just a few interventions: new floors were laid on three levels, which he would later indicate were “precedents for some small pieces and then for the 100 aluminum pieces at the Chinati Foundation.”¹⁸ On one floor a gap was left between the wooden floor and the wall in order to define the floor as a plane—this was a work space with a standing desk, Aalto furniture, and some sculptures. On the top floor a baseboard of the same wood gave the floor the appearance of a slightly recessed plane. On another level, both the floor and ceiling were replaced with the same wood in order to create two identical, parallel surfaces (fig. 7). There were also some modest additions to the building including new bathrooms and storage rooms, and each level was assigned a specific function: kitchen with living area, studio with library, bedroom, etc.

Above all, however, 101 Spring Street was intended to be a place for art, and the artworks were meant to find a permanent home there. His collection was already comprehensive in 1968 and continued to grow. On the top floor, which was his bedroom, Judd installed early work of his that marked his transition from painting to three-dimensional object; a work by Claes Oldenburg; a box by Lucas Samaras that was placed at the edge of the bed, and, running the entire length of the building, a Dan Flavin light barrier—one of the few works created by Flavin for a specific architectural setting that is still in its original place. On one level below, the fourth floor, are two Flavin icons, one red and one green, as well as a relief by Oldenburg on the long wall, alongside furniture designed by Judd and chairs by Gerrit Rietveld. It took many years for Judd to place and install all the work. The individual levels reflect Judd’s ideas about the integration of art and living, realized in a historical house without pretension or seeming “creative.” On the contrary, the ambience is natural and livable.¹⁹

Political activism A series of documents from 1968 indicate that this was also a politically important period for Judd. His activism at the time was mostly focused on the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. In summer 1968 he and his wife Julie placed an advertisement against the Vietnam War in the *Aspen Times*. Judd remained politically engaged throughout his life, an interest deepened and fortified by his philosophical and historical knowledge. In his later essays, even though the main subject may be art or its related issues, a political angle is particularly present. He was well aware of the relationship between art and politics, particularly art’s dependency on the political

power structure. Because art and the arts in general play only a marginal role in society—being more of an accessory than a true force—Judd favored a unified rather than fragmented concept of art. If better connected, fine art, architecture, literature, etc.—the collective arts—would be strong enough to hold a place alongside that of politics or economics. He felt strongly that this would be *truly* democratic. Art and culture should not be relegated outside of society, but integrated as a natural and relevant element of life.

Judd was active in the anti-war movement, the War Resisters League, and Citizens for Local Democracy, which encouraged self-initiative and decision-making on the local level. Its founder, Harvey Shapiro, advocated small governing bodies that would represent their respective neighborhoods or communities, a concept that influenced Judd’s thinking. Judd joined the Advisory Board of the Citizens for Local Democracy, alongside Hannah Arendt, Noam Chomsky, and others. “Individuals and the communities they form should have political power” without a hierarchy.²⁰ For this reason, the small communities or neighborhoods needed to represent *themselves* rather than be represented. Although such local community councils were difficult in practice, Judd felt that they were the best way to shape decision-making without letting others think for oneself. “It sounds obvious, but it isn’t so in terms of what happens, that everyone is a citizen, an equal part of a social organization, a political, public entity, an individual in a group that is only a sum of individuals. The citizen, individual, person has interests and rights. He or she’s not or shouldn’t be an economic, military, or institutional entity. I think,” Judd stated,



Fig. 8: 101 Spring Street, New York, Judd Foundation.

“the main confusion of both the right and left is the confusion of politics, public action, with economics. On both sides the individual is turned into an economic being. It’s incredibly stupid that a person’s reason for being should be the production of cars, whether here or in Russia. The people in both places are educated to be useful persons, producers, and not citizens.”²¹

Shortly thereafter Judd voiced his opposition to the expressway planned to connect the Holland Tunnel on the West Side with the bridges across the East River. Effectively cutting across SoHo along Broome Street, it would have demolished the historic neighborhood. The “Artists Against the Expressway,” which also included Lichtenstein, Ryman, Newman, Rauschenberg, and Stella, led an eventually successful opposition.

Despite his political involvement, Judd postulated that art itself should not be misappropriated for political activism. High expectations of art don’t contradict notions of political equality. Nonetheless art can be political in different, less overt ways. Judd stated, “I’ve always thought that my work had political implications, had attitudes that would permit, limit or prohibit some kinds of political behavior and some institutions.”²² This is a key to understanding Judd’s notion of art and politics: his art contains values that shape his political understanding without making these explicit in an illustrative way. Values such as openness, transparency or anti-hierarchy are not alluded to—they are the work *itself*. Let’s remember Judd’s remarks in “Specific Objects,” where he wrote that the new type of art has certain elements that have been more developed and are therefore more powerful. A “stack” consists of ten equal boxes, each of which is both a single unit and a component of the whole.

Together they form something that is larger than the sum of its parts. When the Guggenheim Museum cancelled a Hans Haacke exhibition in 1971 because it was politically controversial, Judd wrote a letter to then-director Tom Messer:

You made a big mistake. You can’t refuse to show one kind of art. Any political statement, either by declaration or incorporation into a context, can be art. You renege on every kind of art when you refuse to show a kind that is political. I’ve always thought that most museums and collectors didn’t understand what they were buying; your statement that exhibitable art should be generalized and symbolic confirms that. I’m interested in making so-called abstract art and I don’t like the idea that it is exhibitable by virtue of its abstractness or unintelligibility.²³

Beginnings in Marfa Shortly after Judd purchased his building in New York, he started looking for an additional residence in the southwest of the United States. This search led him to Marfa, Texas, where he was able to make his first acquisitions—two World War I airplane hangars. He renovated and completed a compound that included these two buildings over the course of several years. With this project Judd further expanded and gave new depth to his idea of unifying art and living, which he first initiated in New York. He installed three large spaces with art, in addition to creating a library and study, as well as separate buildings with kitchen and living space, children’s rooms, bathrooms, etc. “La Mansana”—Spanish for block of houses—also housed a vegetable garden, green house, pergola, and swimming pool. Finally the whole compound was enclosed with an adobe wall. The resulting area resembles a cloister where culinary as well as intellectual tastes can be pursued.



Fig. 9: Mansana de Chinati, East Building, South Room, Judd Foundation.

The two former hangers offered three very large spaces where Judd installed his work—early hand-made sculptures as well as later ones fabricated from metal. The red works still belong to the earlier group of handmade objects, while all others are fabricated by metal specialists (fig. 9). One large room that was occasionally used for dining has furniture by Gustav Stickley. The spaces have their original concrete floors and partially unplastered adobe walls, and are open to the roof. The original windows were kept and the clerestory extended. As was the case in New York, these buildings were basically just cleaned up. A difference, however, is that 101 Spring Street housed a series of works by other artists, while the Marfa residence was an opportunity for Judd to focus on his own work and create exemplary installations of that work. In Marfa at the Mansana, Judd took another step toward clarifying the relationship between objects and space, art and architecture, and his desire to integrate all of those into daily life.



Fig. 10: Bookshelf.

Furniture It turned out that there was no furniture in Marfa that met Judd’s expectations, which led him to design his own. The first pieces included tables, chairs, and a bed for his two children who had to share a room at the time, so at least the bed’s division offered their own areas. This “double bed” was later adapted to a larger version. He also built a desk for his children, with a double shelf and compartments on the sides that was accompanied by matching chairs. Judd used locally available pine of up to 12 feet long and 1.5 inches thick to make very long tables and benches both for indoors and outdoors; additionally he designed the wooden staircase and kitchen shelves, as well as both libraries. Judd’s library contains 13,000 titles, which he organized by countries—such as Russia, Greece, Italy, China, Korea, India, South America, etc.—and within each country by subjects such as history, philosophy, literature, art, and culture. In addition he had sections for botany, zoology, astronomy, physics, art, architecture, and literature.²⁴

Much of the furniture designed for Marfa was also later made from other types of wood, and, with the addition of more designs, this aspect of Judd’s work would occupy a firm place in his oeuvre by the early 1980s. From this point on, he worked with skilled carpenters who could meet his expectations of fine craftsmanship. The furniture designs had variations similar to his sculptures: in the case of the chairs he either halved or oth-



Fig. 11: Desk.

erwise divided the volume below the seat. In one series made of colored plywood, he created ten such variations. In addition to the softer pine he initially used, Judd expanded the palette to include hard wood such as Douglas fir, maple, and walnut, and also colored manufactured plywood available in six colors. Among the nicest and most practical designs are the simply assembled tables and desks made of birch and beech plywood (fig. 11). The notched sheets of wood are slotted together and fastened with just a few screws. They can also be disassembled and shipped flat.

A few pieces of furniture were commissioned or remain unique: a desk with open side shelves; one with drawers instead of open sides; a related filing cabinet with fitted drawers on all four sides and the double-tiered top; a standing writing desk with three shelves at the top and openings on the sides; and a reading table with a slot in the center to hold books. Finally, Judd also designed metal furniture, mostly made of colored enameled aluminum (fig. 10). These pieces are largely based on the forms of the wooden furniture, with the detailing being influenced by the fabrication requirements.

Judd designed about 100 pieces of furniture in total, and considered this work under the category of architecture. Although everything stemmed from his own hand, it was very important for Judd to differentiate between art and architecture, and not to regard his furniture as artworks. Unlike architecture, art was not meant to be functional. A chair had to work as a chair; when it was well done it could almost be art, in that it was a *good* chair. Nonetheless there are parallels to art



Fig. 12: Wintergarden Bench.

and Judd applied certain concepts from his sculpture to the furniture. One example is the crossing of two axes discussed earlier, which also allowed the furniture to be used from different sides. With the exception of the built-in kitchens and libraries, his furniture is meant to be freestanding.

Marfa – Chinati Marfa infused Judd’s life with a new intensity. It offered the possibility of fulfilling his desire to create something large and coherent, and it was in Marfa that he would make the transition from the private to the public sphere. Even before the renovations of his home were completed, he began to develop ideas for larger, publicly accessible, and permanent installations. Judd conceived a place where he and his friends Dan Flavin and John Chamberlain would be able to install their work in buildings specifically renovated for that purpose. The Dia Art Foundation, which had been established in the 1970s by Heiner Friedrich and Helen Winkler, joined later by Philippa de Menil, was interested in such a project and made it financially possible. In 1978-79, Dia purchased a former army base with 30 buildings on 340 acres of land on the outskirts of Marfa (fig. 13), as well as three additional buildings in the center of town. Dia committed to fund the fabrication and acquisition of artworks, and to establish the infrastructure that would ensure the long-term maintenance of the collection, buildings, and land. Judd was the creative and intellectual force behind the project, Dia its support.

What compelled Judd to attempt such a massive undertaking? Fortunately he wrote many texts during the late 1960s that allow us to retrace the evolution of his thinking. Two texts from around 1970 give insight into his increasing alienation from the museum institution. The texts form a pair, as their titles make known: *Complaints part I*, 1969, and *Complaints part II*, 1973. These dates also span the period when Judd purchased his New York building and prepared his second residence in Texas.

Complaints part I laments the increasingly narrowing perspective of art critics (namely Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried), who preferred to cluster artistic expression around movements rather than welcome its diversity. Judd condemned the view of art critics who saw artists simply as members of a larger group or movement rather than as individuals, and he regretted that independent achievements so significant during the early 1960s were overlooked because the critical establishment preferred to recognize just *one* type of art as relevant expression, while ignoring others. Until then, he noted, the atmosphere had been very open, but this openness seemed to be quickly getting lost.

The second complaint concerned the lack of support for artists on one hand, and the commercial and society-driven interests of museums on the other. Because funding came mostly from collectors in their role as museum trustees, their business interests influenced programmatic decisions. While large sums of money were invested in the physical construction of museums, little investment went toward their content. Artists did not receive the recognition that the grand buildings might suggest, said Judd. Although the artists provided the occasion for these projects, and their artwork was the very reason behind the enormous apparatus of curators, conservators, art handlers, insurances, etc., they themselves are never recognized as

experts. How can a truly modern art or a truly living culture develop under such circumstances?

More specifically, Judd considered most exhibitions poorly installed because the works lacked either sufficient space or proper light. Sculptures were often placed in front of paintings, or paintings behind sculptures, so that neither one could really be seen. Referring to a show curated by Henry Geldzahler, he noted that “[t]here was no idea that the paintings and the sculpture were all equal and discrete works of art, that they couldn’t overlap and that they required various kinds of space.”²⁵ He wanted fewer visitors in the exhibitions in order to better focus on the work—and this also meant being able to sit down, or possibly even lie down, and also to eat or drink. Judd further complained that following an exhibition, works were often returned damaged, at times so severely that the work had to be considered destroyed. And nobody took responsibility. All in all, exhibitions were realized too sloppily and too quickly. Longer exhibition periods would be an improvement, but more importantly spaces or museums needed to exist where a number of works by individual artists such as Newman or Reinhardt would be permanently visible and cared-for.

Judd wrote this in 1973, long before founding the Chinati Foundation. But the core ideas for Chinati were already present: it should be a place where the *artists* make decisions about their work and where the artworks are installed so specifically that they need to stay in place exactly as the artist had intended. History served as his model: on trips to Russia, Greece, or Italy, Judd had visited the local churches and temples and got to know the artworks in churches and palaces. There he understood the value of protecting the relationships among architecture, art, and the landscape. He concluded, “The art and architecture of the past that we know is that which remains. The best is that which remains where it was painted, placed or built.”²⁶ To create such a relationship was the core goal for starting a museum in Marfa. As Judd put it, “Somewhere, just

Fig. 13: Aerial view of the Chinati Foundation with Marfa, Texas in the background.



as a platinum iridium meter guarantees the tape measure, a strict measure must exist for the art of this time and place. Otherwise art is only show and monkey business.²²⁷

The Chinati Foundation is surrounded by the sparse landscape of West Texas—a high plateau with wide valleys and mountain ranges that intermittently break the horizon line. The simple and regular character of the former military buildings lends the complex a necessary coherence. Two large artillery sheds and a former gymnasium stand out as the only exceptions. Judd gave each building at Chinati a purpose that would shape its renovation. Besides his own work, he especially wanted to see that of Dan Flavin and John Chamberlain represented in depth.

Dan Flavin lit up a row of six U-shaped former barracks buildings with a work that confirms his mastery. Two parallel, angled corridors were built into each building's connecting wing to house Flavin's light barriers. The barriers were alternately placed in the centers and at the ends of the corridors. The first color pairing of green and pink is initially perceived as light, monochrome fields before the source of the magical image is revealed. The light fixtures were installed back-to-back and slightly spaced apart, so that the view through the barrier is open to the other section of the corridor. Green and pink glow in opposite directions, coloring the sides of the corridors more intensely and the surrounding walls more faintly. The next pair of colors is yellow and blue, which occupy the third and fourth building, and the last two buildings bring all four colors together. In each of them the light projects, with diminishing intensity, far into the space, coloring floor, ceiling, and walls.

A former wool warehouse in the center of Marfa is dedicated to the work of John Chamberlain, and its three interior sections form a particularly apt setting for his work. The twenty-five sculptures, dating from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, show him to be a natural colorist as much as Flavin and Judd, and equally capable of creating both subtle and richly contrasting

color combinations based on an industrial palette, in his case stemming from the automotive industry. Just like a painter, Chamberlain may concentrate in a work on black or on white, or on brilliant contrasts, or slight nuances within a range of colors, and to do so with lacquered metal pieces of various sizes and forms that fit into one another creating volumes and unforeseen interior spaces. Although Chamberlain's work is very different from Judd's, Judd was admittedly influenced by Chamberlain's objects. Both believed that they were in pursuit of the same goal.²⁸ This belief was shared by Dan Flavin, who set off on his own path at the same time as Judd—and both of them a little after Chamberlain.

The Chinati Foundation's collection grew by a number of other additions, most of which were conceived for the site, including: Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's *Monument to the Last Horse*, a work that relates to the history of the site as a former cavalry post; Ilya Kabakov's *School No. 6*, which evokes memories of an abandoned Soviet school in a former barracks building; Carl Andre's poems, which were made using a mechanical typewriter and are installed in display cases of his design; Roni Horn's pair of copper cones, which she placed in an unrenovated building; Ingólfur Arnarsson's drawings and paintings that touch on the limit of what is perceivable; and the final surprise: paintings by John Wesley.

Judd himself created his masterpieces for Chinati: 15 outdoor works in concrete that span a distance of one kilometer along the edge of the property, and 100 works in mill aluminum for the interior of two large former artillery sheds. At Chinati he was also able to realize his most significant architectural projects. Among those, the two artillery sheds stand out: Judd replaced the compartmentalized garage doors with large-paneled windows and covered the flat roofs with vaults, which gave them an appearance of lightness as well as monumentality. The effect of these interventions is particularly noticeable on the inside, where the metal surfaces shimmer fabulously and magi-





cally, reflecting their surroundings in blurred images. At times they appear immaterial to the point of dissolving and at others they are reflective like a mirror. Seeing these works is to see aluminum for the first time. From the exterior, the glass walls allow an uninterrupted view *into* the spaces and also *through* them to the other side, where a visual relationship is established with the works in concrete in the field (fig. 14). From this viewpoint everything is connected: interior and exterior, rectangle and curve, open and closed, light and shadow, built and natural environments.

At the Chinati Foundation every installation occupies its own building or buildings, which meet the respective needs of the artworks. Together they are embedded in the landscape. The landscape is the unifying and also domineering element—rarely does one feel so at the mercy of nature as here. Its sparseness and openness—one can see up to 80 miles at times—was instrumental in Judd’s decision to move here. Here nature remains undisturbed in a way that is rarely found nowadays. His interests also included the “nature” above us; he joined the board of the nearby McDonald Observatory, one of the finest research observatories in the world, and keenly followed their scientific observations. “We are living in a very short time and a very small space in a very big situation. Basically,” he summarized, “we are living in a little point and everything is infinite in all directions.”²⁹ In this giant context one creates one’s own context, which for Judd meant making art in relation to nature. His art needed to deal with something comprehensible, something he knew and was able to trace empirically, and thus real. He called this a “local order,” as series and sequences are ordered. These local orders were to bring a degree of clarity among uncertainty and chaos. To express this more clearly, he wanted to establish a balance between having *too much* and *too little* order, so that the order itself would not be perceived as the thing that mattered. It was more interesting to show the possibilities of an order to reveal its diversity and abundance. One hundred works in mill aluminum only show 100 possibilities, but these 100 possibilities illustrate the *potential* that *exists*. They all have the same exterior dimensions while their interiors vary with single or double horizontal, vertical or diagonal planes. The different manifestations emerge only with the light. The boxes change appearance as the sun and the angle of light move: what was just light is now in shadow, what was dark becomes illuminated. By spending a period of time in the sheds one will notice that it is nature that brings about all of these shifting appearances, and that these changes become noticeable or perceivable through the interplay of light and material.

Space is created by an artist or an architect; one doesn’t find it packaged off the shelf, Judd emphasized. To create space was his chief concern, which he had pursued since giving up painting in the early 1960s. To create space had always been the concern of architecture. Judd “turned” sculpture from the exterior to the interior, which means that the interest is no longer only on the exterior surface, but in its interior. To create real space, he had to first define it and then occupy it. In this process he freed sculpture from its traditional emphasis on the figurative and symbolic. In Judd’s work space and its properties themselves are the subject, and therefore—to speak in his words—powerful.

An artist lives in his own time and wants to find valid answers—Judd’s interests were focused on everything this implied. “It is *my* existence,” he said, “*my* work, *my* thoughts and feelings.” It was important for him to emphasize that he only spoke for himself and not for others. His work had to have a personal association in order to be believable for himself and others. This connection with self identifies his work and the time when it was made. It cannot be repeated. Judd was aware of the special moment he lived in and recognized the many outstanding artistic achievements that originated during his Here and Now. The desire to capture these achievements was a decisive reason for founding the Chinati Foundation, a place where a portion of contemporary art would be maintained in an authentic and unaltered way. He never wanted a museum just for himself, but one that would allow a dialogue among artists in a natural context of real life. In this way the artworks would not be torn from their social and timely context, as he saw in most museums.

Donald Judd left behind a body of work that is incomparable in its scope and depth. He began working rather traditionally on a small format only to advance radically on a large scale. Early on his texts gave his paintings focus, as the painting lent clarity to his writings. Around 1962 his interests had achieved such clarity that they would form the foundation for the rest of his life. These fundamental interests are expressed in his writings as much as his art, his architecture, literary interests, historical knowledge, his kitchens, or clothing. Everything carries his mark, is unmistakably Judd. Even such an enormous oeuvre maintains unity, or wholeness. Nonetheless, as Richard Shiff pointed out, “Judd’s case remains complex because he rejected the traditional forms of integration and totalization founded on hierarchical systems and compositional harmonies of subordinate parts, yet he still accepted wholeness as a reality, or at least an ethical aim.” Judd was a skeptic who trusted his feelings and perceptions. He also believed in the abilities of the individual: “Art need only point in the direction of a better world; it needn’t achieve the ultimate. A few local successes, by whomever could do it, would be enough.”³⁰

Translated from German to English by Steffen Boddeker.

NOTES

- 1 Reprinted in Thomas Kellein, *Donald Judd Early Work 1955–1968* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Koenig, 2002), 50.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 4 *Donald Judd: Complete Writing 1959–1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975, reprinted 2005), 112.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 131.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 85.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 183.
- 13 *Don Judd*: Pasadena Art Museum, 1971, 39.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 16 *Complete Writings 1959–1975*, 185–7.
- 17 see Mel Bochner in: *The Writings of Donald Judd* (Marfa, Texas: The Chinati Foundation, 2009), 23.
- 18 *Donald Judd Architektur* (Münster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1989), 18–19.
- 19 see ills. in: Marianne Stockebrand, *Chinati: The Vision of Donald Judd* (Marfa, Texas: The Chinati Foundation, and New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 16–17.
- 20 Donald Judd, “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” in: *Arforum*, September 1970, 36–37.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1975–1986* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1987), 208.
- 24 Judd’s library can be accessed online at <http://library.juddfoundation.org/JUDDlibbrowse/CompleteWritings1975-1986>, 209.
- 25 *The Chinati Foundation/La Fundación Chinati* (Marfa, Texas: The Chinati Foundation, 1987), n.p.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 William Agee, “Judd and Chamberlain: A Working Dialogue, ‘A Kind of Sympathy,’” in: *It’s All in the Fit: The Work of John Chamberlain* (Marfa, Texas: The Chinati Foundation), 215.
- 29 Jochen Poetter (ed.), *Donald Judd* (Baden-Baden: Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1989), 92.
- 30 Richard Shiff, “Fast Thinking,” in: *Donald Judd: Late Work* (New York: PaceWildenstein, 2000), 6.