Sol LeWitt: Irrational Thoughts
Opens September 27, 2023
“Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.”

Sol LeWitt

“To be truly objective one cannot rule anything out. All possibilities include all possibilities without pre-judgement or post-judgement.”

Sol LeWitt
Sol Lewitt

Color Brushstrokes, 1994
gouache on paper
30 x 22 inches (76.2 x 55.9 cm)
SL048
Tangled Bands, 2001

gouache on paper

41 x 40 3/4 inches (104.1 x 103.5 cm)
Horizontal Brushstrokes (More or Less), 2002

gouache on paper

45 x 45 inches (114.3 x 114.3 cm)

SL064
Parallel Curves, 1999

gouache on paper

11 x 11 inches
(28 x 28 cm)

SL133
Wavy Brushstrokes, 1996
gouache on paper
30 x 22 inches (76.2 x 55.9 cm)
SL083
Horizontal Brushstrokes, 2004
gouache on paper
10 x 22 1/2 inches (25.4 x 57.2 cm)
SL134
Fold Drawing, 1971
paper
17 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches (45.1 x 45.1 cm)
SL078
Fold Drawing, 1974
paper
27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (69.9 x 49.5 cm)
Loan / NFS
Fold Drawing, 1973

torn and folded wove paper

11 x 19 1/2 inches (28 x 49.5 cm)

SL100
SOL LEWITT  
R409, 1975  
torn paper  
16 3/4 x 16 5/8 inches (42.6 x 42.2 cm)  
SL127
Signed, bottom right: ‘R409 Sol LeWitt / for Germano / Genoa 1975’

*R409 was previously in collection of Germano Celant (pictured above), the noted art historian, critic, and curator. Celant coined the term “Arte Povera.” Celant wrote hundreds of books, essays, and articles over the course of his career, establishing him as a leading voice in contemporary art. Celant served as the Artistic Director of the Prada Foundation from 1995 to 2014, and then as its Scientific Superintendent until his death in 2020.*
SOL LEWITT

Irregular Form, 1997
tempera on paper
11 1/5 x 11 1/3 inches (28.5 x 28.8 cm)
SL102
“The Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt, who died in [2008], was our Fra Angelico... The ideas in Fra Angelico’s frescos are demanding and unworldly. The ideas in LeWitt’s drawings — in the monumental, abstract annunciations and visitations and sacred conversations at Mass MoCA — are exhilarating and of this moment on earth. So are we talking about Conceptual Art or spiritual art? I’d say both.”

Holland Cotter, The New York Times
SOL LEWITT

R78, 1972
ripped white paper
23 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches (60 x 60 cm)
SL104
“The motion of cutting, tearing, and folding, in LeWitt’s work, serves as an operational technique, a dynamic process of putting thought into practice through a single, rapid act.”

Daniel Creahan
Fold Drawing, 1972
folded paper
24 1/2 x 24 1/2 inches (62.2 x 62.2 cm)
SL094
As LeWitt’s reputation and career grew in the late 1960s, he decided to create a series of works whose versos were inscribed “Not to be sold for more than $100.” He intended for these works to be an accessible counterpoint to his structures and Wall Drawings, which were already selling for thousands of dollars. Known collectively as the R Series, these works consist of simple acts of “drawing” on a sheet of paper.

In his early Wall Drawings, LeWitt amplified basic shapes, lines, and primary colors. The R Series echoes this impulse, taking basic ways of manipulating paper and making them the sole focus of each piece.

*Folded Drawing* and *R78* are both dated October 6, 1972 and were executed in Bern, Switzerland on the day of the opening of his first major museum exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern. They are emblematic of two of the primary modes of creation in LeWitt’s R Series: folding and ripping.
The R Series has been the subject of a recent wave of critical interest, including two publications in 2020.

_Sol LeWitt: Not to Be Sold For More Than $100_, by Veronica Roberts, was published in June 2020 by Radius Books. It includes a forward by the pioneering conceptual art dealer Virginia Dwan, an introduction by Jason Rulnick of Artnet, and an essay by Roberts. Veronica Roberts is currently the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Blanton Museum of Art, and previously served as the Director of Research for the catalogue raisonée of LeWitt Wall Drawings.

SOL LEWITT

Floating Cube, 1987
gouache on paper
22 3/8 x 22 3/8 inches (57 x 57 cm)
SL122
SOL LEWITT

*Horizontal Brushstrokes*, 1994
gouache on paper
24 x 16 inches (60.9 x 40.6 cm)
SL091
“I strive to create something I would not be ashamed to show Giotto.”

Sol LeWitt
Squiggly Brushstrokes, 1997

gouache on paper

22 1/2 × 29 3/4 inches (57.1 × 75.6 cm)

SL125
James Barron: How long did you work with Sol LeWitt?

Susanna E. Singer: I met Sol in 1975 when I was the secretary at John Weber Gallery and we became friends. Two years later, I became Director. In 1980, I left the gallery to work directly with him (and with Robert Mangold) and worked with him until his death in April 2007. We spoke almost everyday, often several times a day, for almost 30 years.

JB: Did you see him create work?

SES: He worked alone in his studio. I managed everybody else so he could be alone.

JB: Did he want his $100 drawings to be sold for $100 forever?

SES: Yes. The idea was that everybody could afford an original work of art.

JB: I like that; it’s such a sharp contrast to the art market today.

SES: He was not interested in the art market. He lived very frugally until the 1980s and money never mattered to him. Even though Peter Schjeldahl wrote a review titled “Saint Sol,” Sol was not a saint. He was very shy, which contributed to his humility.

JB: I see Sol LeWitts everywhere in Rome, in floor patterns, on walls, lunettes...

SES: I do, too. Italian frescos were extraordinarily influential to his work. He started doing the Wall Drawings with the ink washes after living in Italy.

JB: Take the figures out of Piero della Francesca’s work or Giotto’s, and you have a LeWitt.
SES: That’s right. Andrea Miller-Keller asked Sol, What do you strive for in your art? He said, Something I wouldn’t be embarrassed to show Giotto.

JB: What is it about simplicity that intrigued him?

SES: His whole work was based on specific elements: straight, not straight, broken lines, red, yellow, blue, arcs, circles and grids, like Yellow Circles. He began, as most Minimalist artists, with very constricting rules, developed a complex and beautiful language, and then broke the rules, because he felt if he made the rules, he could break them.

JB: What do you most miss about Sol?

SES: The voice. Both his spoken voice, and in his work, but more what he said and stood for and made, and would have continued to do. I miss also that he was so steadfast – bordering on stubborn – and his wit.
James Barron: How long did you work as Sol LeWitt’s fabricator?

Yoshi Nakama: 27 years.

JB: Do you see the Splotches as a natural evolution in LeWitt’s work or was it a dramatic turning point?

YN: I think it was natural. As you can see from the progression of the Wall Drawings or the development in gouache, the Splotches are an extension of those ideas in three-dimensional form.

JB: Do you agree the Splotches are indebted to chance? How much of LeWitt’s other structures had the element of chance?

YN: The Splotches have a controlled chance like many of the wavy, curvy drawings. Unlike the geometrical structures, though, the Splotches are the only three-dimensional structures that have organic form.

JB: Did LeWitt think about the Splotches as references in the world?

YN: Sol used subtitles like Splat, Blob, Loopy Doopy, etc. to describe his works, so I believe it was simply just that.

JB: Why did LeWitt only make 22 Splotches? Were there others planned?

YN: He died before he could see the completion of the last Splotch. However, I’m sure there were more still forming in his head.

JB: Did he ever alter the shape after seeing it as a cardboard mold, before it was cast in fiberglass?

YN: Just once, in order to change the height of a peak.
JB: Tell us a bit about the computer’s role in the work.

YN: It may have taken forever to make Splotches without the computer. The computer could visualize the prospective piece in all directions before fabrication so that Sol could decide whether he liked it or not far more easily.

JB: Looking at the drawing for Splotch #17, it is apparent that LeWitt created an irregular shape within a square. Do you feel the Splotches are shapes that imply an invisible cube structure?

YN: There are many similarities when you see the drawings of the Open Cubes, the Concrete Blocks, and the Splotches. I believe because LeWitt used the same grid paper for many of his works, including his Splotch drawings, the cube shape is always implied.

JB: What did LeWitt say when he saw the completed works?

YN: He always said, “It looks good.” Never said a negative comment. His ideas were enormous and expandable. I wish that he was still alive so he could make more works. I believe his ideas will continue to grow and develop within the hands of other artists.