The editor has written me that he is in favor of avoiding "the notion that the artist is a kind of ape that has to be explained by the civilized critic." This should be good news to both artists and apes. With this assurance I hope to justify his confidence. To continue a baseball metaphor (one artist wanted to hit the ball out of the park, another to stay loose at the plate and hit the ball where it was pitched), I am grateful for the opportunity to strike out for myself.

I will refer to the kind of art in which I am involved as conceptual art. In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.* 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. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive. It is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman. It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to become emotionally dry. There is no reason to suppose however, that the conceptual artist is out to bore the viewer. It is only the expectation of an emotional kick, to which one conditioned to expressionist art is accustomed, that would deter the viewer from perceiving this art.

*In other forms of art the concept may be changed in the process of execution.

Conceptual art is not necessarily logical. The logic of a piece or series of pieces is a device that is used at times only to be ruined. Logic may be used to camouflage the real intent of the artist, to lull the viewer into the belief that he understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation (such as logic vs. illogic).* The ideas need not be complex. Most ideas that are successful are ludicrously simple. Successful ideas generally have the appearance of simplicity because they seem inevitable. In terms of idea the artist is free even to surprise himself. Ideas are discovered by intuition.

* Some ideas are logical in conception and illogical perceptually.

What the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea. It is the process of conception and realization with which the artist is concerned. Once given physical reality by the artist the work is open to the perception of all, including the artist. (I use the word "perception" to mean the apprehension of the sense data, the objective understanding of the idea and simultaneously a subjective interpretation of both.) The work of art can only be perceived after it is completed.

Art that is meant for the sensation of the eye primarily would be called perceptual rather than conceptual. This would include most optical, kinetic, light, and color art.

* Since the functions of conception and perception are contradictory (one pre-, the other post-fact) the artist would mitigate his idea by applying subjective judgment to it. If the artist wishes to explore his idea thoroughly, then arbitrary or chance decisions would be kept to a minimum, while caprice, taste and other whimsies would be eliminated from the making of the art. The work does not necessarily have to be rejected if it does not look well. Sometimes what is initially thought to be awkward will eventually be visually pleasing.

To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. It also obviates the necessity of designing each work in turn. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution.
of the problem. After that the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible. That is the reason for using this method.

When an artist uses a multiple modular method he usually chooses a simple and readily available form. The form itself is of very limited importance; it becomes the grammar for the total work. In fact it is best that the basic unit be deliberately uninteresting so that it may more easily become an intrinsic part of the entire work. Using complex basic forms only disrupts the unity of the whole. Using a simple form repeatedly narrows the field of the work and concentrates the intensity to the arrangement of the form. This arrangement becomes the end while the form becomes the means.

Conceptual art doesn’t really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy or any other mental discipline. The mathematics used by most artists is simple arithmetic or simple number systems. The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and it is not an illustration of any system of philosophy.

It doesn’t really matter if the viewer understands the concepts of the artist by seeing the art. Once out of his hand the artist has no control over the way a viewer will perceive the work. Different people will understand the same thing in a different way.

Recently there has been much written about minimal art, but I have not discovered anyone who admits to doing this kind of thing. There are other art forms around called primary structures, reductive, rejective, cool, and mini-art. No artist I know will own up to any of these either. Therefore I conclude that it is part of a secret language that art critics use when communicating with each other through the medium of art magazines. Mini-art is best because it reminds one of mini-skirts and long-legged girls. It must refer to very small works of art. This is a very good idea. Perhaps “mini-art” shows could be sent around the country in matchboxes. Or maybe the mini-artist is a very small person, say under five feet tall. If so, much good work will be found in the primary schools (primary school primary structures).

If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.

Determining what size a piece should be is difficult. If an idea requires three dimensions then it would seem any size would do. The question would be what size is best. If the thing were made gigantic then the size alone would be impressive and the idea may be lost entirely. Again, if it is too small, it may become inconsequential. The height of the viewer may have some bearing on the work and also the size of the space into which it will be placed. The artist may wish to place objects higher than the eye level of the viewer, or lower. I think the piece must be large enough to give the viewer whatever information he needs to understand the work and placed in such a way that will facilitate this understanding. (Unless the idea is of impediment and requires difficulty of vision or access.)

Space can be thought of as the cubic area occupied by a three dimensional volume. Any volume would occupy space. It is air and cannot be seen. It is the interval between things that can be measured. The intervals and measurements can be important to a work of art. If certain distances are important they will be made obvious in the piece. If space is relatively unimportant it can be regularized and made equal (things placed equal distances apart), to mitigate any interest in interval. Regular space might also become a metric time element, a kind of regular beat or pulse. When the interval is kept regular whatever is irregular gains more importance.

Architecture and three-dimensional art are of completely opposite natures. The former is concerned with making an area with a specific function. Architecture, whether it is a work of art or not, must be utilitarian or else fail completely. Art is not utilitarian. When three dimensional art starts to take on some of the characteristics of architecture such as forming utilitarian areas it weakens its function as art. When the viewer is dwarfed by the large size of a piece this domination emphasizes the physical and emotive power of the form at the expense of losing the idea of the piece.
New materials are one of the great afflictions of contemporary art. Some artists confuse new materials with new ideas. There is nothing worse than seeing art that wallows in gaudy baubles. By and large most artists who are attracted to these materials are the ones who lack the stringency of mind that would enable them to use the materials well. It takes a good artist to use new materials and make them into a work of art. The danger is, I think, in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of the work (another kind of expressionism).

Three-dimensional art of any kind is a physical fact. This physicality is its most obvious and expressive content. Conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions. The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its non-emotive intent. Color, surface, texture, and shape only emphasize the physical aspects of the work. Anything that calls attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual artist would want to ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible or to use it in a paradoxical way. (To convert it into an idea.) This kind of art then, should be stated with the most economy of means. Any idea that is better stated in two dimensions should not be in three dimensions. Ideas may also be stated with numbers, photographs, or words or any way the artist chooses, the form being unimportant.

These paragraphs are not intended as categorical imperatives but the ideas stated are as close as possible to my thinking at this time.* These ideas are the result of my work as an artist and are subject to change as my experience changes. I have tried to state them with as much clarity as possible. If the statements I make are unclear it may mean the thinking is unclear. Even while writing these ideas there seemed to be obvious inconsistencies (which I have tried to correct, but others will probably slip by). I do not advocate a conceptual form of art for all artists. I have found that it has worked well for me while other ways have not. It is one way of making art: other ways suit other artists. Nor do I think all conceptual art merits the viewer's attention. Conceptual art is good only when the idea is good.

*I dislike the term "work of art" because I am not in favor of work and the term sounds pretentious, but I don't know what other term to use.


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**Sentences on Conceptual Art**

1. Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.

2. Rational judgments repeat rational judgments.

3. Illogical judgments lead to new experience.

4. Formal Art is essentially rational.

5. Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.

6. If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results.

7. The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His wilfulness may only be ego.

8. When words such as painting and sculpture are used, they connote a whole tradition and imply a consequent acceptance of this tradition, thus placing limitations on the artist who would be reluctant to make art that goes beyond the limitations.
9. The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter are the components. Ideas implement the concept.

10. Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.

11. Ideas do not necessarily proceed in logical order. They may set one off in unexpected directions but an idea must necessarily be completed in the mind before the next one is formed.

12. For each work of art that becomes physical there are many variations that do not.

13. A work of art may be understood as a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewers. But it may never reach the viewer, or it may never leave the artist's mind.

14. The words of one artist to another may induce an ideas chain, if they share the same concept.

15. Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words, (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally.

16. If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature, numbers are not mathematics.

17. All ideas are art if they are concerned with art and fall within the conventions of art.

18. One usually understands the art of the past by applying the conventions of the present thus misunderstanding the art of the past.

19. The conventions of art are altered by works of art.

20. Successful art changes our understanding of the conventions by altering our perceptions.

21. Perception of ideas leads to new ideas.

22. The artist cannot imagine his art, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.

23. The artist may mis-perceive (understand it differently than the artist) a work of art but still be set off in his own chain of thought by that misconstrual.

24. Perception is subjective.

25. The artist may not necessarily understand his own art. His perception is neither better nor worse than that of others.

26. An artist may perceive the art of others better than his own.

27. The concept of a work of art may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.

28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side-effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.

29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.

30. There are many elements involved in a work of art. The most important are the most obvious.

31. If an artist uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the artist's concept involved the material.

32. Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.

33. It is difficult to bungle a good idea.

34. When an artist learns his craft too well he makes slick art.

35. These sentences comment on art, but are not art.

WALL DRAWINGS

I wanted to do a work of art that was as two-dimensional as possible.

It seems more natural to work directly on walls than to make a construction, to work on that, and then put the construction on the wall.

The physical properties of the wall: height, length, color, material, architectural conditions and intrusions, are a necessary part of the wall drawings.

Different kinds of walls make for different kinds of drawings.

Imperfections on the wall surface are occasionally apparent after the drawing is completed. These should be considered a part of the wall drawing.

The best surface to draw on is plaster, the worst is brick, but both have been used.

Most walls have holes, cracks, bumps, grease marks, are not level or square, and have various architectural eccentricities.

The handicap in using walls is that the artist is at the mercy of the architect.

The drawing is done rather lightly, using hard graphite so that the lines become, as much as possible, a part of the wall surface, visually.

Either the entire wall or a portion is used, but the dimensions of the wall and its surface have a considerable effect on the outcome.

When large walls are used the viewer would see the drawings in sections sequentially, and not the wall as a whole.

Different draftsmen produce lines darker or lighter and closer or farther apart. As long as they are consistent there is no preference.

Various combinations of black lines produce different tonalities; combinations of colored lines produce different colors.

The four basic kinds of straight lines used are vertical, horizontal, 45° diagonal left to right, and 45° diagonal right to left.

When color drawings are done, a flat white wall is preferable. The colors are yellow, red, blue, and black, the colors used in printing.

When a drawing is done using only black lines, the same tonality should be maintained throughout the plane in order to maintain the integrity of the wall surface.

An ink drawing on paper accompanies the wall drawing. It is rendered by the artist while the wall drawing is rendered by assistants.

The ink drawing is a plan for but not a reproduction of the wall drawing; the wall drawing is not a reproduction of the ink drawing. Each is equally important.

It is possible to think of the sides of simple three-dimensional objects as walls and draw on them.

The wall drawing is a permanent installation, until destroyed. Once something is done, it cannot be undone.

DOING WALL DRAWINGS

The artist conceives and plans the wall drawing. It is realized by
draftsmen, (the artist can act as his own draftsman), the plan
(written, spoken or a drawing) is interpreted by the draftsman.

There are decisions which the draftsman makes, within the plan,
as part of the plan. Each individual being unique, given the
same instructions would carry them out differently. He would
understand them differently.

The artist must allow various interpretations of his plan.
The draftsman perceives the artist's plan, then reorders it to
his own experience and understanding.

The draftsman's contributions are unforeseen by the artist, even
if he, the artist, is the draftsman. Even if the same draftsman
followed the same plan twice, there would be two different works
of art. No one can do the same thing twice.

The artist and the draftsman become collaborators in making
the art.

Each person draws a line differently and each person
understands words differently.

Neither lines nor words are ideas, they are the means by which
ideas are conveyed.

The wall drawing is the artist's art, as long as the plan is not
violated. If it is, then the draftsman becomes the artist and
the drawing would be his work of art, but art that is a parody
of the original concept.

The draftsman may make errors in following the plan without
compromising the plan. All wall drawings contain errors, they
are part of the work.

The plan exists as an idea but needs to be put into its optimum
form. Ideas of wall drawings alone are contradictions of the
idea of wall drawings.

The explicit plan should accompany the finished wall drawing,
They are of equal importance.


THE SQUARE AND THE CUBE

The best that can be said for either the square or the cube is that
they are relatively uninteresting in themselves. Being basic repre-
sentations of two- and three-dimensional form, they lack the
expressive force of other more interesting forms and shapes. They
are standard and universally recognized, no initiation being
required of the viewer; it is immediately evident that a square is a
square and a cube, a cube. Released from the necessity of being
significant in themselves, they can be better used as grammatical
devices from which the work may proceed. The use of a square or
cube obviates the necessity of inventing other forms and reserves
their use for invention.

Reprinted from Lucy R. Lippard et al., "Homage to the Square,"
Art in America 55, no. 4 (July-August 1967): 54.
[LeWitt's contribution was originally untitled.]
ZIGGURATS

The most common type of office building seen in midtown Manhattan is built in the ziggurat style with multiple set-backs. This design was to conform with the New York Zoning Code of 1916 to 1963. The original purpose of the set-backs was to allow sunlight into the street and free circulation of air. In 1916 this was feasible, but as the buildings became higher the regulations became obsolete. However, since they were in effect during the postwar building boom, the result is a unique group of buildings that give the area a distinctive look.

The zoning code pre-conceived the design of the ziggurats, just as an idea might give any work of art its outer boundaries and remove arbitrary and capricious decisions. In many cases this is a liberating rather than a confining form. The ziggurat buildings conform to the code, yet no two are alike; the slab-type buildings which now are being built seem more uniform.

The zoning code established a design that has much intrinsic value. The ziggurat buildings are heavy looking, stable, inert and earthbound. There is nothing graceful or light-weighted here as in the slab buildings. There is also a logic in the continually smaller set-backs, which allow for intricate geometric patterns. By having to conform to this rather rigid code, aestheticism was avoided, but the code was flexible enough to allow great originality of design. New materials were not necessary. The earlier brick buildings were some of the most successful of the genre, they are particularly opaque and homely. The slab-type buildings on the other hand, established by the rules of taste and aestheticism, require new materials for variety. The ziggurat buildings are most satisfying when seen from a little distance (two or three blocks) so that the massive design is seen. This is difficult in New York, but the ziggurats, when seen from the upper floors of other buildings, are especially impressive. The new zoning code allows slab-type buildings, and also stipulates that a certain amount of plaza space must also be allotted. This will permit more flexibility in site planning and more space on the ground level.

Besides being impressive in design, the ziggurat allowed flexibility to the renting agent who could offer higher floors with less floor space to companies that desired the prestige of height and did not want to share the floor with another organization. This design also made available more terraces and more sunlight.

The ziggurats were mostly built in the fifties as part of the business expansion following World War II. They were built quickly, cheaply, and not very well, reflecting a desire for an immediate return on the investment and a sufficient supply of floor-space.

Now architects do not think very highly of the ziggurat buildings. Since they are no longer forced by the zoning code to provide set-backs, they will probably no longer build them. Ironically, the new Whitney Museum is an upside down ziggurat and is considered high-style, while the office buildings are not thought to be very classy. In view of this obvious suspension of judgment it might be time to take a new look at the ziggurats. Many will be seen to be valuable works of art.