



"My art springs from my desire to have things in the world which would otherwise never be there."

SYNOPSIS

During the 1960s and 1970s, Carl Andre produced a number of sculptures which are now counted among the most innovative of his generation. Along with figures such as Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, Eva Hesse and Robert Morris, Andre played a central role in defining the nature of Minimalist Art. His most significant contribution was to distance sculpture from processes of carving, modeling, or constructing, and to make works that simply involved sorting and placing. Before him, few had imagined that sculpture could consist of ordinary, factory-finished raw materials, arranged into straightforward configurations and set directly on the ground. In fact, during the 1960s and 1970s many of his low-lying, segmented works came to redefine for a new generation of artists the very nature of sculpture itself.

KEY IDEAS

- Andre is a sculptor who neither carves into substances, nor models forms. His work involves the positioning of raw materials - such as bricks, blocks, ingots, or plates. He uses no fixatives to hold them in place. Andre has suggested that his procedure for building up a sculpture from small, regularly-shaped units is based on "the principle of masonry construction" - like stacking up bricks to build a wall.
- Andre claims that his sculpture is an exploration of the properties of matter, and for this reason he has called himself a "matterist." Some people have seen his art as "concept based," as though each piece is merely the realization of an idea. But for Andre, this is mistaken: the characteristics of every unit of material he selects, and the arrangement and position of the sculpture in its environment, forms the substance of his art.
- Andre insists on installing all new work in person, and his configurations are always carefully attuned to the scale and proportions of their immediate surroundings. However, once installed, his sculptures can be dismantled and reconstructed in other locations without his direct involvement.
- In 1966, Andre began to describe his work as "sculpture as place," a phrase which alludes both to the fact that his sculptures are produced simply by positioning units on the floor, and to their "place generating" properties. Andre defined "place" as "an area within an environment which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous."

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Childhood

Andre has always credited his early upbringing in Quincy, Massachusetts, as having a formative influence on his art. The son of a marine architect of Swedish descent, he grew up in close proximity to the Quincy naval shipyards, which during the Second World War

expanded rapidly (at their peak of productivity they employed 32,000 workers). He would later claim that one of his strongest childhood memories had been the sight of the "rusting acres of steel plates" which lay beside the yards "under the rain and sun."

In 1951, at the age of 16, Andre was awarded a scholarship to attend Phillips Academy, the prestigious boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts. It was here, under the tutelage of the painters Maud and Patrick Morgan, that he received his only formal art training.

Early Years

After school, Andre briefly attended Kenyon College in Ohio, but soon dropped out. He spent the next few months working in Quincy, and between 1955 and 1956 he completed his military service at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. In 1957 he moved to New York with the intent of devoting more time to writing poetry and making art. Living in Lower Manhattan, his circle of friends included **Hollis Frampton** and the painter **Frank Stella**, both of whom had also attended Phillips Academy. Frampton introduced Andre to the poetry and essays of **Ezra Pound**, and it was through Pound that Andre became increasingly interested in the work of the sculptor **Constantin Brancusi**. Stimulated by the Romanian modernist, Andre began to experiment with found blocks of wood, sawing and carving them into simple geometric shapes.

Andre's approach to art-making was strongly influenced by the example of Frank Stella. At the end of the 1950s Stella was gaining increasing recognition for his *Black Paintings*, a series of works which consisted solely of uniform parallel bands of black enamel paint. Both Frampton and Andre were fascinated by the disciplined, workmanlike manner in which their friend painted: in their mind this was a technique which left little scope for artistry. Andre described Stella's technique as "constructivist" as a means of emphasizing that he built up his work from a combination of "identical, discrete units," and Andre's *Pyramid* sculptures from 1959 might be considered an important early attempt to produce work in a similar fashion.

It was, however, not through sculpture but with words and text that Andre continued to explore the ramifications of a "constructivist" technique. In fact between 1960 and 1964 Andre made few sculptures.

During these years he worked as a freight brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad and had little space or money for producing three-dimensional art. Instead he started to "construct" poems from words or phrases which he judiciously selected from particular texts. He would then write down these fragments, arranging them on the page according to a pre-ordained protocol, such as by word-length, or alphabetically, or following a simple mathematical system. Many of these poems were produced using a typewriter, and since the late 1960s Andre has frequently exhibited the manuscripts of these text-based works alongside his mature sculptures.

Mature Period

Andre was well on his way to 30 before any of his sculptures were exhibited publically, although the relative obscurity he had enjoyed up to that point had afforded him ample time to read and experiment widely. Therefore when opportunities to exhibit did start opening up from 1964 onwards, Andre had already refined a trajectory for his art which would later come to appear impressively coherent. By the mid 1960s he was already well equipped with a startlingly articulate rationale for his work, and it was largely thanks to this that he found himself able to establish his reputation with a level of self-assurance that was breathtaking.

By 1966 Andre had decided that his sculptures would develop no further. He explained to the critic David Bourdon, in *Artforum* in October 1966, that his very early work could be described as "sculpture as form," since it had involved cutting and shaping materials. After that he had progressed to "sculpture as structure" - a stage in which he produced works not by cutting or shaping, but by stacking up identical units. The three sculptures, *Coin*, *Crib*, and *Compound* (all 1965), made from nine-foot Styrofoam beams that Andre exhibited at the de Nagy Gallery in 1965, might be considered examples of the latter: each work exemplified a different building construction technique. Yet from 1966 onwards, Andre explained that he had dispensed with both form and structure, and that by laying units horizontally along the ground his work became solely the manifestation of "place." In 1967 Andre began to make sculptures using quarter-inch metal plates, and "sculpture as place" became synonymous with work which stretched out horizontally

over the plane of the ground.

Since the mid 1960s the underlying premises of Andre's art have remained practically unchanged, inasmuch as the procedure for making the work has not altered. This has meant that Andre's work tends to display a range of distinct characteristics which make it instantly recognizable. For instance, much of his mature sculpture is extremely low-lying, undermining all traditional associations about sculpture's relation to the upright human body. When you stand in front of one of Andre's metal floor-based works, there is no form which "faces" you. Instead you are often permitted to walk over his metal sculptures, and stand in the space where sculptural substance usually resides.

Largely because his work is so low-lying and always presented on the ground, his work can often seem extremely unobtrusive. This is a quality which Andre has also cultivated. He has never been interested in making vast, monumental works which dwarf the viewer. Instead, Andre has often said that he likes to make sculptures which you can be in the same room with, but ignore if you choose to.

However, it would be wrong to imply that there have not been substantial variations in the appearance of his sculpture, and over the years Andre has produced a wide variety of families of works, using many differing materials and configurations. For instance, when he has used thick blocks of cedar, or cubes of granite and limestone, or especially shiny metals, the results can look opulent and grand. Yet on other occasions he has made sculptures from cheap, almost worthless materials, including scavenged objects such as bent, rusty nails, or lengths of plastic tubing. In fact, even sculptures made from the same type of unit can look entirely different depending on how Andre chooses to install them. For example, three plates of copper pushed up against the wall in a shadowy corner of a gallery would look entirely different to thirty-three plates of the same material, laid out into a rectangular formation and set right in the middle of the room. To a casual observer, all Andre's work might look very similar, but Andre wants viewers to slow down and focus on small, subtle differences - and to reflect on these.

In 1969 Andre became closely associated with the New York-based Art Workers' Coalition. The group lobbied the city's major public galleries for increased artists' rights and an end to sexism, racism and oppression

within the art world. It was arguably during this period that Andre's eminence among fellow artists and North American and Western European art institutions was at its highest.

However, in 1985 his artistic reputation was severely damaged by a tragic event in his personal life. His then wife, the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta, fell to her death from their New York apartment window. Andre was arrested for her murder, and, although he was fully acquitted in 1988, he became a hate figure for those who were close to Mendieta. In their eyes he came to personify many of the oppressive, establishment values against which he and the Art Workers' Coalition had campaigned in the late 1960s.

Carl Andre is married to the artist, **Melissa Kretschmer**. They live in New York.

LEGACY

From the late 1960s onwards, Andre's art became an important reference point for many subsequent artists both in North America and in Western Europe - largely because he was seen to have reduced sculpture to its essential state. While Andre himself saw this as the end-point of his art, many sculptors (including **Richard Serra**) took his insights as the starting-point for their own practice, and built up from the principles which Andre had laid down.

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ARTIST QUOTES

"Art is the exclusion of the unnecessary."

"Settle for nothing less than concrete analysis of concrete situations leading to concrete actions."

"My art will reflect not necessarily conscious politics but the unanalyzed politics of my life."

"...art for art's sake is ridiculous. Art is for the sake of one's needs."