

SYNOPSIS:

The term "Post-Minimalism" was first used in reference to a range of art practices that emerged in the wake of **Minimalism** in the late 1960s. In a similar manner to the term "Post-Impressionism", it serves to gather together a range of styles that are related, yet which often have very different, even opposing interests. Post-Minimalism refers to tendencies such as Body art, Performance, Process art, Site-Specific art, and aspects of Conceptual art. Some artists associated with this tendency sought to extend the Minimalists' interest in creating art objects that do not have the representational function of traditional sculpture, objects that are abstract, anonymous in appearance, and have a strong material presence. But other Post-Minimalists pursued very different goals: many reacted against the earlier movement's impersonality, trying to invest sculpture once again with emotionally expressive qualities. While the formal and theoretical interests of this period are no longer so influential, many of the themes and strategies of Post-Minimal artists remain very current, making it one of the most enduring styles of the last half-century.

Key Points

- Some Post-Minimal artists were interested in extending Minimalism's interest in anonymity and in emptying artwork of the artist's personal expression. Instead of using industrial materials and impersonal methods of fabrication to achieve this, they used other strategies. They presented material in ways that seemed unprocessed or uncomposed, or the material drooped and sagged, clearly governed more by the character of the material rather than the artist's intentions. To distinguish it from Minimalism's perceived concern with form and composition, this is referred to as "anti-form".
- Some Post-Minimalists shared the Minimalists' interest in abstraction and materiality,

- yet rejected their preoccupation with industrial materials. They also rejected the movement's mood and rhetoric, often perceived as cold, over-intellectual and even authoritarian, responding with sculptures of more expressive qualities, often evoking the body and aspects of sexuality.
- Many Post-Minimal artists admired Minimalism's break with conventional formats of painting and sculpture, wanting to investigate new limits or traditions in the making of art. Some believed that the chosen material should govern the character of the art object. Others believed in a more expanded sense of technique that encompassed the artist's processes, the materials and even the way gravity operates on materials.
 - Some artists also took the cue to get out of the gallery and install art in new environments. This led to a new interest in the relationship between the artwork and its site, called Site-Specificity. Others took artwork into the natural environment in the Land art movement.

BEGINNINGS

New developments in art came fast in the 1960s. No sooner had **Minimalism** emerged onto the public stage than Post-Minimal surfaced. In a 1966 New York exhibition entitled 'Eccentric Abstraction', critic Lucy Lippard curated work by a group of artists, including **Eva Hesse**, **Louise Bourgeois** and **Bruce Nauman**. Containing work with highly personal and sensuous qualities, it seemed to draw on traditions of **Surrealism**, **Dada** and **Expressionism**. The pieces often combined unusual, soft and pliable materials. Some borrowed the modular, repetitive compositions typical of Minimalism, but many also exploited more relaxed and open structures.

Critic and art historian Robert Pincus-Witten, who coined the term 'Post-Minimalism', observed that what Lucy Lippard referred to as 'Eccentric Abstraction' was actually part of emerging reactions against Minimalism. These reactions gained further recognition in 1969 when the **Whitney Museum of American Art** staged the exhibition 'Anti-illusion: Procedures/Materials'. Grounded in **Process art**, the show was concerned with artists' attitudes towards materials and techniques. It highlighted artists extending Minimalism's interest in abstraction and anonymity. The title 'Anti-illusion' drew attention to a widespread preoccupation with emptying sculpture of its last vestiges of representation, and therefore expression. Representation, generally of the human figure, had always been at the heart of sculpture, and ridding it of this tradition proved to be a complex and difficult task.

Another significant Post-Minimalism exhibition was entitled 'When Attitudes Become Form', which surveyed more conceptual trends, was staged in London and Bern in 1969. In the same year, artist **Robert Morris** organized '9 in a Warehouse', a Process art exhibition that included work by **Eva Hesse**, **Bruce Nauman** and **Richard Serra**, as well as a selection of **Arte Povera** artists from Italy. This indicated that, although American in origin, the term Post-Minimalism also adequately described developments elsewhere.

THEMES, CONCEPTS, AND STYLES

Process Art

Exemplified by **Robert Morris's** clumps and random accumulations of soft felt, Process Art emerged in the late 1960s and built the foundation for other Post-Minimal tendencies. Like the 'action paintings' of **Jackson Pollock**, in which the physical act of dripping paint onto the canvas is an integral aspect of the work, Process art produces work in which the act of creation - the process of production - is inseparable from its meaning. Process art focuses on the event and the action. For that reason, often it leads to works in which time, impermanence and site-specificity are important issues.

Works in which **Richard Serra** hurls molten lead at the walls and floor of a gallery are also an example of the ephemeral, spontaneous and shapeless character of much Process art. But **Eva Hesse's** work also demonstrates an aspect of this, sometimes taking the Minimalist cube or grid as a basis for the work, but putting more attention on matter and materials. For instance, Hesse's *Accession II* (1967-69), one of a series, contains a cube of aluminum mesh with an open top. The mesh is intricately woven through with plastic tubing, drawing attention to its soft interior rather than its geometric form. Hesse uses industrial materials and makes them seem organic, like grass or hair, exploring their inherent possibilities. She imbues Minimalist forms with organic warmth and sensuality to create a protective space, while making the process of the work's fabrication clear to the viewer (something which is often more hidden in the highly finished works of the Minimalists.)

Body Art

Using the body as a means of expression was another of the ways Post-Minimal artists sought to escape the saleable, object-character of **Minimalist** artworks. It also gave them an ideal way to imbue their work with human expressiveness, a quality that was lacking from Minimalist art. Body artists were influenced by **Fluxus** and **Dada** performances, theater, and even anti-war demonstrations.

Some artists used their bodies to perform repetitive gestures that highlighted ordinary, seemingly pointless actions typically engaged in without notice or consequence. The nature of the simple, repeated actions often made the viewer aware of the passing of time and the physicality of the body. One artist who explored this mode was **Vito Acconci**. In *Blinks* (1969), he walked down a street trying hard not to blink, and taking a photograph every time he did. **Bruce Nauman** also explored the expressive potential of simple actions in many of the films he made in the late 1960s. The films often documented the artist continually pacing, walking a line or perimeter, or pulling at his own face. In all of these films, there is no final product and no clear purpose for the actions carried out by the artist.

Body art could also be confrontational, aggressive and dangerous. As a result of cynical and pessimistic attitudes sparked by economic troubles, declining faith in government and opposition to the Vietnam War, artists began to adopt an aggressive manner that emphasized fear and the vulnerability of the human condition. For example, in works

after 1970, Acconci brings an autobiographical aspect to his work, often placing himself under stress and discomfort. In doing so, he effectively blurs the boundaries between the private and public self. He implements an element of sadomasochism and violence in many of his Body art performances, he invokes his sexuality; and he conceives of his body as a malleable object. For example, in *Conversions* (1970) Acconci tried several means to alter his sexual identity from male to female, in one instance using a candle flame to remove his chest hair.

In a similar manner to the violent actions performed by Acconci, **Chris Burden** intentionally placed himself in physically threatening scenarios in a series of performances from the early 1970s. In some notorious works, Burden trapped himself in a locker for days without food, arranged to be shot in the arm at close range and had himself nailed to a car. By constructing shocking situations of self-mutilation, his works became about the experience, often specifically about the reality of pain and violence.

Earth Art

A wide-spread awareness of the environment and concern for ecological issues also developed in the 1970s. In this spirit many Post-Minimalists turned to the earth itself as the material and site for art-making. They altered the way a particular site could be experienced, often blurring the boundaries between the location and the artwork itself. Typical of this is work by British artist **Richard Long**: *Line Made by Walking* (1967) takes the form of a line made in the grass, a mark that could easily be overlooked in the landscape, and which will inevitably disappear with time. Long's work throughout the 1970s and 1980s took him around the world and generally involved the simple process of walking and leaving a trail, or rearranging stones into shapes along the way. He would record the work with photographs and maps of territories he had visited.

Work by **Gordon Matta-Clark** in early 1970s, and by **Tony Cragg** in the 1980s, formed a sort of urbanized Earth Art, using refuse and debris as well as condemned buildings as site and medium. Again, the impetus to escape the traditional sculptural object and bring art outside the gallery is typical of Post-Minimalism. This variation of Earth art served to emphasize waste, consumer culture and human impact on the natural environment. In these and many earthworks, change and the passing of time are major themes. **Robert Smithson's** *Spiral Jetty* (1971) is typical in taking the subjects of decay, time and temporality as central components. Earth art draws awareness to instability, time, space, and entropy, and connects the viewer - emotionally and physically - to nature.

Installation Art

In an extension of the Post-Minimalist concern with site, and expansion beyond the traditional art object, Installation art involved the creation of complex indoor environments that engaged the viewer as a sort of actor-participant. **Bruce Nauman's** installation works, which he began to create around 1968, shifted the focus from himself to the direct experience of the viewer. Echoing the mood of some body art, Nauman's installations often encouraged feelings of entrapment, fear, dread, anxiety, and disorientation. For example, his *Double Steel Cage Piece* (1974) required visitors to find their way through narrow passageways and corridors. In a series of pieces based on the tightly constructed corridors, Nauman sometimes incorporated video cameras and

monitors as a type of self-surveillance system. Such psychologically distressing works served as precursors to sculptures Nauman would create in the early 1980s, which were directly influenced by the experiences of political prisoners.

By 1974, Vito Acconci also began to move away from works that focused on his own body and experience. Acconci confronted the viewer in his installation environments, which were often accompanied by recordings of his own voice. In the 1980s, Acconci began constructing perverse house-like environments that disoriented and discomforted viewers as they walked through them, bringing to mind associations of the home, and imprisonment, in works such as *Bad Dream House* (1988).

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

The variety of tendencies that the term Post-Minimalism encompassed endured throughout the 1970s. While declining in the 1980s, as traditional media such as painting made a return, it made an important contribution to the art of that decade laying the foundations for work that addresses identity politics and issues of race, gender and sexuality. And, more recently, with the return to fashion of conceptual modes, artists of the Post-Minimalist generation have also experienced a renaissance.

Seemingly the 1980s sent Post-Minimalism underground, yet it remains alive today. This is largely due to the fact that artists who engage with any of its myriad strands, from aspects of performance to process to installation, must still engage with ideas that were addressed in the 1960s and 1970s.

QUOTATIONS

"If you can manipulate clay and end up with art, you can manipulate yourself in it as well. It has to do with using the body as a tool, an object to manipulate."

-Bruce Nauman

"My life and art have not been separated. They have been together."

-Eva Hesse

"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."

-Sol LeWitt, Paragraphs on Conceptual Art



**Content written by:
Julianne Cordray**

Key Artists:



Vito Acconci

Vito Acconci is an American performance/installation artist who began performing in the late 1960s. More recently, he has shifted his focus to architecture and landscape design, particularly works that merge indoor and outdoor space.



Joseph Beuys

Joseph Beuys was a German multi- and mixed-media artist best known for incorporating ideas of humanism, social philosophy and politics into his art. Beuys practiced everything from installation and performance art to traditional painting and "social sculpture." He was continually motivated by the belief of universal human creativity.



Chris Burden

American performance artist Chris Burden is most known for his 1970s works that placed him in extreme danger, such as being shot in the arm by an assistant or being crucified on the back of a car.



Eva Hesse

Eva Hesse was a major New York artist whose sculpture, assemblage, and installation brought issues of feminism and the body into Minimalism's formal vocabulary. She is heralded as one of the quintessential Post-Minimalist artists.



Sol Lewitt

Sol LeWitt was an American artist commonly associated with the Minimalist and Conceptual movements. He rose to prominence in the 1960s with the likes of Rauschenberg, Johns and Stella, and his work was included in the famous 1966 exhibit Primary Structures at the Jewish Museum. LeWitt's art often employed simple geometric forms and archetypal symbols, and he worked in a variety of media.



Richard Long

Richard Long is a British painter, sculptor, photographer and Land artist. Much of his work is

considered a response to the natural environments he enters, incorporating mixed-media and various non-art elements such as landscape, rock, maps and text. In this respect, Long's work has been classified by some as Environmental art, rather than the dated Land art.



Robert Morris

Robert Morris is an American artist whose early L-beam and column sculptures were key works in Minimalism. His work also includes felt and fabric pieces, Process Art, performance, body art, and earthworks, often with an emphasis on process and theatricality.



Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman is a contemporary American artist concerned with language, process, manipulation, and the registers of irony. His work includes performance, video, installation, neon sculpture, and other materials.



Richard Serra



Robert Smithson

Robert Smithson was an American artist best known for his innovations in Land and Earth Art. Smithson's large-scale projects employed earth and other natural resources to construct works that both manipulated and preserved the natural landscape. His most famous work is Spiral Jetty in Utah, constructed entirely from basalt, earth and salt.

Art Works:



Title: The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths, (Window or Wall Sign)

Artist: Bruce Nauman

Description: This seminal work was created in the studio Nauman established in an abandoned grocery store in San Francisco and modeled after the neon advertisement signs nearby. It acts as an advertisement of a different kind. Its colorful, circular text proclaims the words of the title: "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths." It is characteristic of Nauman's early neon works, and typical of the tone of dry satire in much of his oeuvre. Commenting on high art in the materials of low culture and advertising, it sets up a clash that questions old assumptions about the purpose of art and artists, like are artists just ordinary salesmen? One might say that the piece is Post-Minimalist simply by virtue of standing at the borders of so many different styles and approaches of the period, borrowing from Pop art's interest in advertising, and Conceptual art's interest in language.

Year: 1967

Materials: Neon tubing and clear glass tubing

Collection: Collection of the artist



Title: A Line Made by Walking

Artist: Richard Long

Description: *A Line Made by Walking* is highly characteristic of the conceptual Earth art created by British artist Richard Long. In making a line across the grass by the simple act of walking, Long creates a type of drawing-without-drawing, doing away completely with the conventional tools and using instead his body and nature. Abandoning the traditional art object in this way is typical of Post-Minimalism, as is the way in which Long's line draws attention to the passing of time and the specific, fleeting moment in which the line was made.

Year: 1967

Materials: Photograph and pencil on board

Collection: Tate Modern, United Kingdom



Title: Verb List

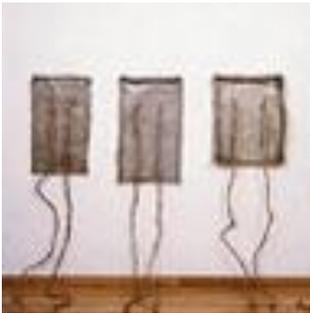
Artist: Richard Serra

Description: Although usually regarded as an artist's statement (akin to a private, reflective diary entry), *Verb List* might also be regarded as the artist's chronological, aesthetic agenda, setting out his subsequent development in sculpture. It also amounts to a catalogue of the creative procedures employed by process artists linked to Post-Minimalism. If the 'to' verbs denote acts already accomplished, and the 'of' verbs are those yet to be done, *Verb List* may also be viewed as a shorthand, visual retrospective of Serra's entire career, compressing past, present and future into a single material object. Like a map, or a theoretical diagram, *Verb List* finally 'stands in' as a visual and conceptual proxy for something more physically tangible, or virtually touchable—sculpture itself. Serra's later, monumental walls in steel ultimately come to embody, in more abstract and open-ended terms, what the artist has chosen to conjure here in the 'mind's eye' of the beholder, indeed by way of strictly linguistic medium.

Year: 1968-69

Materials: ---

Collection:



Title: Untitled

Artist: Eva Hesse

Description: Eva Hesse was one of the artists included in Lucy Lippard's groundbreaking 1966 show 'Eccentric Abstraction'. She was profoundly influenced by the Minimalist Carl Andre, yet her work is characteristic of feminist responses to that earlier movement. This *Untitled* piece uses soft and malleable materials like as cloth, latex and wire mesh. They are unconventional for an artwork of this period, combining the Minimalist industrial, with the somewhat domestic. The effect they create is organic, the two dangling appendages at the center of each square evoking wobbly legs. The bulging, irregular frames of the four squares seem to mock the perfect straight angles of Minimalism, even as they hang on the wall like conventional paintings. Hesse's work is typical of those among her peers who borrowed the anonymous language of Minimalism, but rejected its austere formalism, reintroducing emotionally expressive qualities.

Year: 1970

Materials: Fiberglass, wire mesh, latex, and cloth

Collection: Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA



Title: Spiral Jetty

Artist: Robert Smithson

Description: *Spiral Jetty* is a legendary example of Earth Art and a typical Post-Minimalist rejection of industrial forms and motifs. Its interest in process and time embraces themes relating to entropy, depletion and exhaustion. The northern section of the Great Salt Lake, where Smithson chose to site *Spiral Jetty*, was cut off from fresh water supplies when a nearby causeway was constructed by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1959. This produced a concentration of salt-tolerant bacteria and algae, producing the water's unique red-violet coloration. Smithson particularly liked the combination of colors because it evoked a ruined and polluted, science fiction landscape. By inserting the Jetty into this damaged section and using entirely natural materials native to the area, Smithson called attention to this environmental blight. Nevertheless, he also sought to reference the importance of time in eroding and transforming our environment. The piece's coiling structure was inspired by the growth patterns of crystals. Yet it also resembles a primeval symbol, making the landscape seem ancient, and at the same time futuristic.

Year: 1970

Materials: Water, basalt, salt

Collection: Dia Art Foundation



Title: Trademarks

Artist: Vito Acconci

Description: Vito Acconci's work of the 1960s is typical of the openness and variety of Post-Minimalism, since it seems to obey few borders, having no single identifiable style, using no single medium, and crossing many fields, including Performance and Conceptual art. *Trademarks* is also typical of his engagement with Body art. To create it, he repeatedly bit himself in various places on his body in order to leave an indentation. He used his body as a malleable substance that was altered and manipulated. The bite

marks are uniquely his, uses it to brand as much of his body as possible. The marks are signatures of authorship that have migrated from the conventional artwork on to the artist's own body, hurting himself in the process and suggesting a kind of sexual violence, something private and taboo. The discomfort with authorship is characteristic of the ethos of much art produced in the 1960s.

Year: 1970

Materials: Performance/ Photograph

Collection: SFMoMA