

MINIMAL ART

BODIES IN SPACE

12 FEBRUARY TO 24 APRIL 2022

The Bucerius Kunst Forum presents in its exhibition *Minimal Art* outstanding works by the pioneers of this art movement in the 1960s in the USA alongside German and contemporary positions. In line with the aims of Minimal Art, the show explores individual variations in how viewers perceive object-like works in space. This approach revisits the idea of democratising art by creating artworks that can be experienced and understood equally well by everyone, without prior knowledge. Seventeen iconic works thus form the focal point here, by Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Imi Knoebel, Charlotte Posenenske, Gerold Miller, Frank Gerritz and Jeppe Hein, each of the expansive objects given space to unfold its full effect. The paradigmatic selection conveys both the essential characteristics of Minimal Art and the signature features distinguishing the oeuvre of each artist. The works are on loan from German museums as well as private collections such as the Christoph Seibt Collection Contemporary Art, Hamburg.

Originating in the 1960s as a counter-movement to American Abstract Expressionism, Minimal Art involved a rebellion against any form of subjectivity, symbolism or illusionism in art. Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris revolutionised art through their reduced formal language, the use of novel, industrially manufactured materials, and exacting surface aesthetics. Most of them started out as painters and gradually expanded their work into three-dimensional space. Key concerns of their art were form, material, volume, surface, colour, and the relationship of the object to the surrounding space and the viewer. Devoid of any references or allusions, the works could be apprehended in full by everyone, without in-depth knowledge of art. A new kind of Minimalism also emerged in Germany, represented by Imi Knoebel and Charlotte Posenenske.

The interplay between object, space and viewer as well as the idea of democratising art were the curatorial guidelines applied to selecting the artworks on view. The show begins with *45 Degree Swipe* by Carl Andre from 1969, which consists of seven steel plates laid end to end on the floor to form an elongated rectangle. Confronted with a work of art lying on the floor rather than hung on a wall or elevated on a pedestal, visitors may feel initial confusion as to whether they are meant to tread on it or not. They therefore have to interact directly with the work, choosing whether to walk along it, around it or over it. The relationship of the work to the exhibition space is already apparent from its title, which indicates that it is to be laid out in a corner of the room to create 45-degree segments between the work and the walls.

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This individual, physical experience of each work on view continues throughout the exhibition, for example with Dan Flavin's *Untitled (to Barnett Newman) four* from 1971, in which coloured light emitted by four fluorescent tubes changes the appearance of both the space and the viewer's own body. The room serves as a projection surface for the work, in which the light from red and blue tubes is directed towards the wall but may also illuminate viewers as they approach the fluorescent object.

The famous work *Untitled (Stacks)* by Donald Judd, from 1991, likewise draws its fascination from light effects and reflections across its Plexiglas surfaces. Ten identical cantilevered boxes with stainless steel sides and amber Plexiglas tops and bottoms are arranged one above the other. This allows the panels to reflect one another while filling the spaces in between with an orange glow. The open space becomes one with the individual elements, forming a cohesive unit. Donald Judd broke with the conventions of European art history by opposing illusionistic space within the artwork and instead redefining the space around it.

The exhibition closes with the contemporary work *Changing Neon Sculpture* by the Danish artist Jeppe Hein from 2006. The form of the object recalls Sol LeWitt's work *Cube-Cube*, also on display in the exhibition, while the use of fluorescent tubes calls to mind Dan Flavin. Unlike the works by those artists, however, *Changing Neon Sculpture* changes its appearance second by second as the neon tubes light up in varying constellations. As soon as a viewer approaches, however, the appearance of the work freezes, turning the visitor into an acting subject. The exhibition thus ends as it began: with an irritating moment in which the artwork is at the centre of the subjective experience.

A catalogue will be published with Hirmer Verlag to accompany the exhibition, featuring essays by selected experts and descriptions of the artworks on display. Prof. Dr. Tobias Vogt, Director of the Institute of Art and Visual Culture at the University of Oldenburg, addresses the democratic urge already conveyed by the titles of the works, and Tatjana Schäfer, curator at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, compares and contrasts Minimal Art with the minimalist lifestyle (approx. 130 pages with colour illustrations of the exhibited works, 29,90 EUR at the exhibition).

The exhibition is made possible by

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