



CLOSE UP ON ART STUDY PAPER

Martin Spector, 2018

**Untitled (DJ 88-45 Menziken)
Donald Judd (American 1928-1994)
Gift of Donna and Cargill McMillan, Jr.
Anodized Aluminum and Plexiglas
1988, Marfa, Texas**

“Usually when someone says a thing is too simple, they’re saying that certain familiar things aren’t there.” Donald Judd, 1965, Artforum

Donald Judd is considered a leading figure of minimal art in the 1960s. He combined the use of highly finished, industrialized materials such as iron, steel, plastic, and Plexiglas – techniques and methods associated with the Bauhaus school- to give his works an impersonal, factory aesthetic. His works include small and large-scale installations of shelves, boxes and series of boxes on the floor, indoors and outdoors, or mounted on the wall. In *Untitled (DJ 88-45 Menziken)*, he gives us the contained space of a divided box made of anodized aluminum and Plexiglas. The reflective surface of the Plexiglas creates a play of light and shadow that establishes evolving patterns, shadows and illusions. Judd’s piece, *Untitled*, suggests the artist does not want to give the viewer any pre-conceived notions.

Minimalism is an extreme form of abstract art developed in the USA in the 1960s and typified artworks composed of simple geometric shapes based on the square and the rectangle. As happens so often in art, new aesthetic aims come into being in apparent reaction to past excesses, in this case, Abstract Expressionism. Abstract Expressionism emphasized spontaneous creation in an effort to show feelings and emotions. Minimalism presents us with artists who are making deliberately inexpressive art in order to achieve a new kind of freedom with the art experience. Minimalists stripped objects down to their elemental forms and presented them in an impersonal manner. We usually think of art as representing an aspect of the real world (a landscape, a person, a can of soup) or

reflecting an experience such as an emotion or feeling. With minimalism, no attempt is made to represent an outside reality. The artist wants the viewer to respond only to what is in front of them. The medium or material from which it is made and the form of the work is the reality. What you see is what you see.

I selected this piece because it is one that seems to be overlooked by most museum visitors as well as Docents. I have asked myself “What is that? Why is it here? What does it have to do with anything else in the museum? Do I put books in it? Tchotchkes?” After researching the artist and the art movement of Minimalism, my questions have been answered. When I was a Senior Buyer for Pottery Barn, two of the categories for which I was responsible were wall units and shelving. I designed shelf units and shelves for our customers that reflected the minimal design aesthetic of Donald Judd. Minimalism has since evolved into a lifestyle represented in many people’s homes.

Born in 1928, Donald Judd studied philosophy and art history at Columbia University and painting at the Art Students League. He had begun his art-making career as a painter in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Abstract Expressionism was still the prevalent force in the New York art world. In 1959, Judd became a critic and art writer. As he abandoned painting for three-dimensional sculpture he wrote the manifesto-like essay “Specific Objects” in 1964. Asserting that painting was “finished,” Judd found a starting point for a new territory in American art and a simultaneous rejection of European artistic values. Judd eventually settled in New York City in 1968 where he began the permanent installation of his work as well as works of his contemporaries. He would continue this process throughout his life in both New York City and Marfa, Texas until his death in 1994. Judd established the Judd Foundation in 1977 and the Chinati Foundation/La Fundacion Chinati in 1986.

For almost four decades, Judd exhibited throughout the United States, Europe and Asia with his work in museum collections worldwide. Major exhibitions of his work include the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1968, 1988); the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1975); Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Enidoven, the Netherlands (1970); and Tate Modern, London (2004).

SOURCES

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The Britannica Encyclopedia of American Art, Simon and Shuster, 1973

Palm Springs Art Museum 75 Years 75 Artworks, 2013

www.theartstory.org