

Sol LeWitt

Whitney Museum of American Art/Paula Cooper Gallery,
New York

This massive retrospective at the Whitney, and the two new structures on display at Paula Cooper, remind us that no other American of his generation has developed so radically or extended our concept of art as dramatically as Sol LeWitt. The artist came of age in the 1960s. In that era of conceptual art, he moved quickly from doing beautiful drawings of



Sol LeWitt, *Six Walls*, 2000, 2,592 cinder blocks, 366 x 975 x 975 cm (approx.) overall.

Piero della Francesca's Arezzo frescoes to making the modular cubes and wall drawings which established his reputation. LeWitt's early drawings tend to be spartan, with plain colors drawn, typically, in straight lines. His recent enormous wall drawings employ intense color and a dazzling variety of curvilinear designs. At the back of the Paula Cooper gallery, he constructed a hectagon from ordinary building blocks. You could look into, but not enter, his six intersecting high walls.

Where Richard Serra overpowers the viewer with his steel sculptures, LeWitt, a more democratic political thinker, uses inexpensive materials to create sculptures that are massive, but not at all intimidating. The magnificent high space of the gallery was radically transformed. The Whitney displayed a large selection of his art, but left too little space between the murals and crowded the smaller works together. The installation was unfortunate, for LeWitt's art needs space in which to breathe. Like Andy Warhol, his only real rival, LeWitt understood what most challenging new forms of art were possible after Abstract Expressionism. Warhol made art from non-artistic materials, by borrowing his images from mass culture. LeWitt, a self-effacing personality, discovered how to make large works of art employing assistants who followed his directions. Rejecting the Abstract Expressionist mystique of self-expression, he found that simple means suffice to yield highly satisfying aesthetic experience. Extraordinarily inventive, LeWitt has avoided the trap of a signature-style. How amazing that from his strikingly modest physical materials he produces such varied, reliable visual pleasures.

David Carrier

Lisa Yuskavage

Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

In her earlier work, Lisa Yuskavage's paintings of scantily-clad, doll-like nymphs consistently occupied the narrow sliver of territory that divides traditional figure painting—with its commitment to effects of light, space, color, and human subjectivity—from slick, ironic, postmodern visual cliché. Her six large canvases in this show once again depict women with a concupiscent focus as they expose pendulous breasts while staring out of window, pull on a stocking, or languidly engage in autoerotic stimulation. Yet whereas earlier works, like airbrushed, soft-core pornography, tended to emphasize only the smooth, shiny artificial surface of things—be it the finished canvas or the plastic-like flesh of her pneumatic-looking nudes—these current works express elements of a more human interiority. Occupying libraries and drawing rooms, in which they distractedly inspect their own bodies or gaze off into space, these women are not the pliant, sexually available or voracious confections of Yuskavage's early work. Rather, they are those same women, now more jaded, within the domestic confines of a cloistered marriage (they all wear rings). In one work, a woman whose nudity is barely concealed by her diaphanous camisole reclines on a plush, lime-green couch. To one side a thick bouquet of unnaturally colored and varied flowers testifies to the stifling, preserved nature of the scene. On the other side, a chair upholstered in a flowery print suggests the rococo artificiality of the nude figure and the sumptuous, but oddly cold and unerotic, setting in which she is placed. The flower motif is carried over into other works, such as one of an older woman—nude except for a pink shirt and blue-trimmed stockings—where it decorates chair, rug, and wall. The effect is not one of sweetness and frivolity, but of exhaustion; of playing a role as an object of sexual desire without the drive to pull the seduction off any longer. Indeed, this show suggests a corrective to prevailing interpretations of Yuskavage's art as centrally concerned with the "male gaze" and its associated objectifying depictions of women. What we see here is a much more nuanced representation. Yuskavage displays sexual allure without a hint of titillation. She represents women with the visual clichés of objectification—such as a pom-pom trimmed negligee or unnaturally curvaceous, doll-like anatomy—without depriving them of some sort of interior life. And, while expressing a contemporary self-consciousness about techniques of representation, she makes luscious use of paint in a way that even the great masters would recognize.

Jonathan Gilmore

Lisa Yuskavage, *Northview*, 2000, oil on linen, 178 x 103 cm.

