WHERE SCULPTURE & DANCE MEET:
MINIMALISM 1961 – 1979

WHERE SCULPTURE & DANCE MEET:
MINIMALISM FROM 1961 TO 1979

Ronald Bladen, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Merce Cunningham, Simone Forti
Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Yvonne Rainer, Andy Warhol

---

September 10 – October 31, 2015

Co-curated by Julie Martin and
Wendy Perron

LORETTA HOWARD GALLERY

525 WEST 26TH ST NEW YORK NY 10001 212.695.0164 LORETTAHOWARD.COM

WHERE SCULPTURE AND DANCE MEET:
MINIMALISM FROM 1961 TO 1979

by Wendy Perron

"Back then [the '60s], making a piece was like brushing away all the sand and debris to reveal one stone."

Simone Forti, *Movement Research Performance Journal #14,* 1997

Like all art movements, minimalism turned away from an existing form toward a new form that seemed more real. In a bid for greater immediacy, both visual art and dance shunned the figurative, the personal, and the narrative in favor of an investigation into the materials of the medium. They felt the urge to clear the air. For visual artists that meant shedding the trappings of European painting, and for dancers it meant expunging the expressionism of modern dance and the daintiness of ballet. The '60s and '70s were a period in which sculpture and dance edged toward each other and, in some cases, actually merged.

The minimalist movement covered a range of ideas and aesthetics. The nomenclature varied depending on who was describing it. Critic Michael Fried called the work "literalist;" Donald Judd called it "three-dimensional work;" Barbara Rose called it "ABC Art;" Robert Morris called it "anti-form" or referred to it as "so-called Minimalism or Object art." But the term I find most fitting was introduced by Philip Glass during a panel at The Walker Art Center in 2011: "essentialist." While discussing the revival of *Dance,* his 1979 collaboration with choreographer Lucinda Childs and visual artist Sol LeWitt, he said,

Ronald Bladen
Cosmic Seed, 1977

Courtesy The Ronald Bladen Estate.

"We were essentialists rather than minimalists. We got to the essence of the work…Sol is about seeing, Lucinda is about moving, and I'm about hearing."

Of course, well before Glass, John Cage was "about hearing." Starting in the '50s, his writings as well as his music urged us to listen to every sound with full attention. His any-sound-can-be-music credo, when extended to dance, meant that everyday movement could be dance.

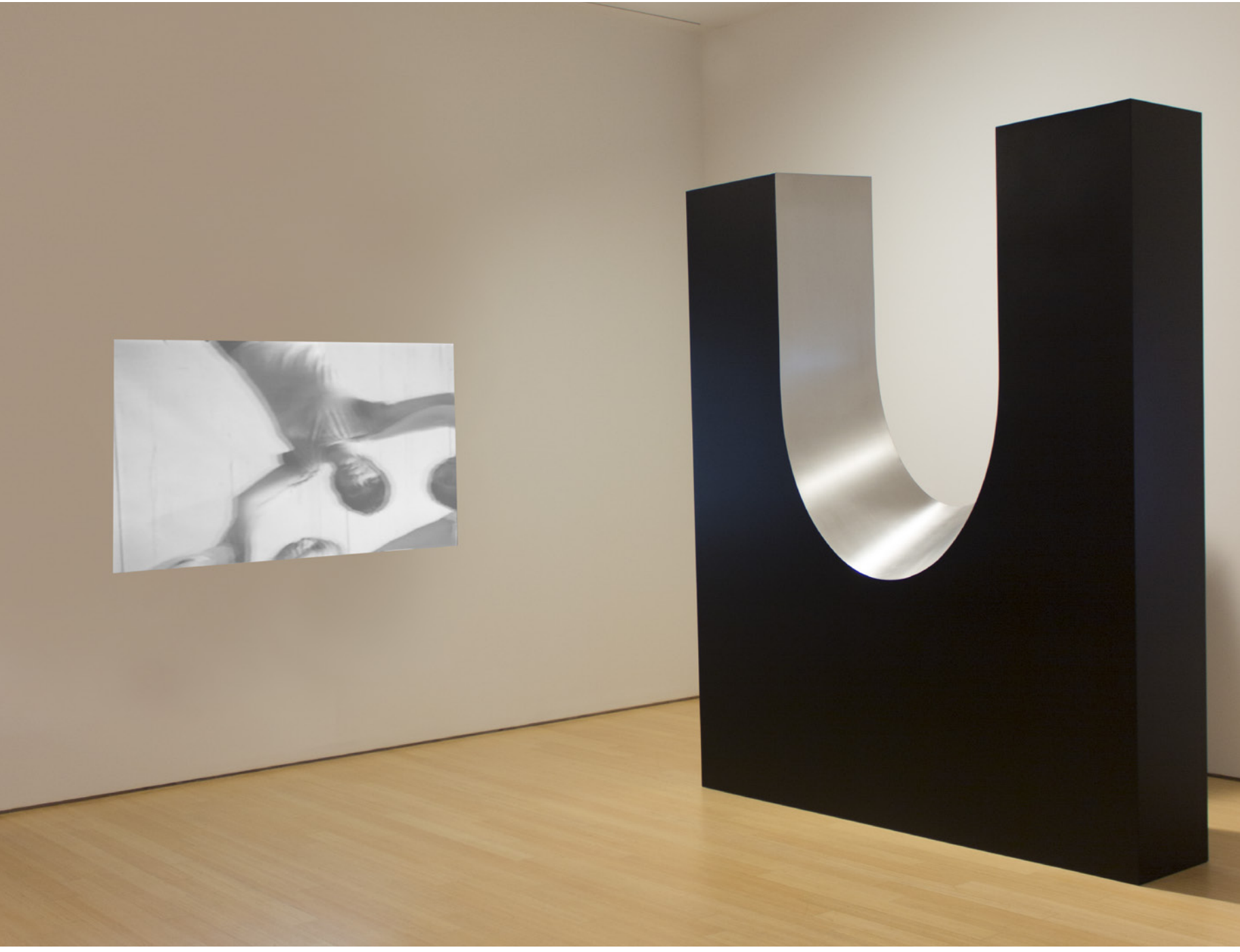
Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham, his partner in life and work, developed their ideas together. Cunningham wrote about the specificity of each movement in his beautiful 1952 essay "The Impermanent Art," collected in *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years* (Aperture, 1997). In it he called for paying attention to the singularity of each movement, rather than, say, analyzing the psychological turmoil of a character in a Martha Graham work. The new way of perceiving art, he wrote, was not to discern metaphor but instead was "primarily concerned with something being exactly what it is in its time and place and not in its having actual or symbolic reference to other things."

Although Cunningham rejected symbolism in his astonishingly inventive choreography, he retained the technical virtuosity expected of professional dancers. However, in 1960 Cage asked Robert Dunn, who had studied experimental music with him at The New School, to teach a class in composition at the Cunningham studio. Dunn gave assignments based on chance methods and encouraged his students to explore the "ordinary." It was the young renegades in Dunn's class—including Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Lucinda Childs—who investigated pedestrian movement. This class famously led to the 1962 formation of Judson Dance Theater, widely recognized as the crucible of postmodern dance.

video still:
Connecticut Rehearsal (1969), choreography by Yvonne Rainer, rehearsal of Continuous Project Altered Daily, American Dance Festival at Connecticut College, 1969. Film by Michael Fajans. Cast: Becky Arnold, Barbara Dilley (Lloyd), Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, and Yvonne Rainer.

Ronald Bladen
Cosmic Seed, 1977

Courtesy The Ronald Bladen Estate.



In 1966 Rainer crystallized the minimalist viewpoint in dance by stating the parallels between what she envisioned for dance and the minimalist idea in visual art. She called her essay "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A."* For instance, just as the visual artists (as personified by Robert Morris, with whom she was living) replaced the role of the artist's hand with factory fabrication, she replaced dancerly phrasing with "energy equality and found movement." While Morris replaced "monumentality" with "human scale," she replaced the "virtuosic movement feat and the fully -extended body" with "human scale."

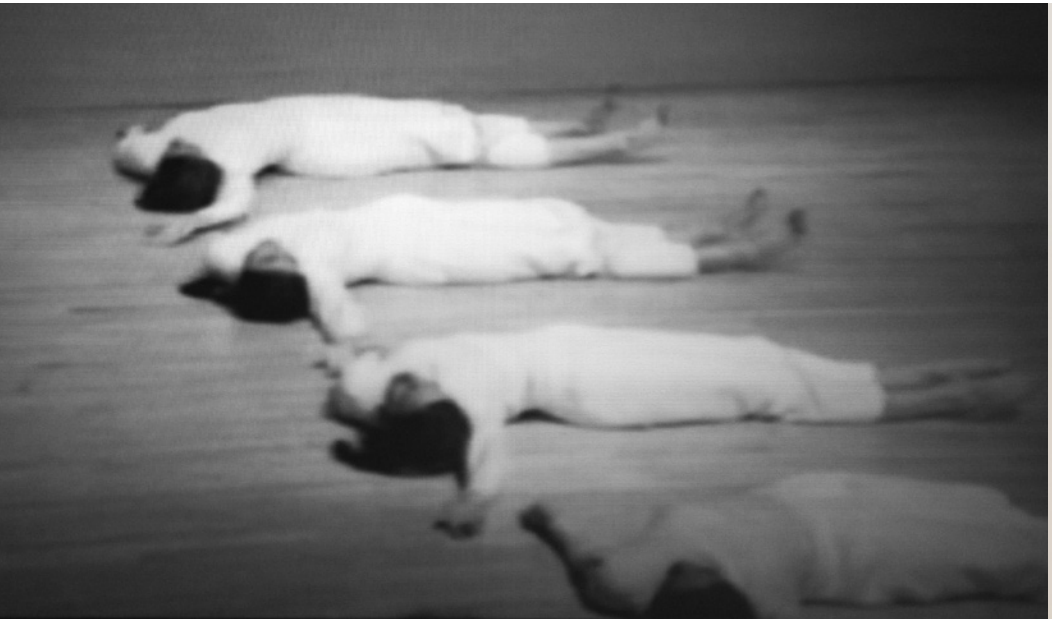
In his 1965 essay "Specific Objects," Judd rejected the illusionism of the rectangular frame of painting and the pedestal of traditional sculpture. Among his proclamations was this statement: "Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface." This idea is in tune with Cage's philosophy that art and life are inextricably connected. Morris had great admiration for Cage, and pieces like his *Corner Beam* (1964) jut into actual space, forcing the viewer to move through the gallery in order to fully experience the sculpture.

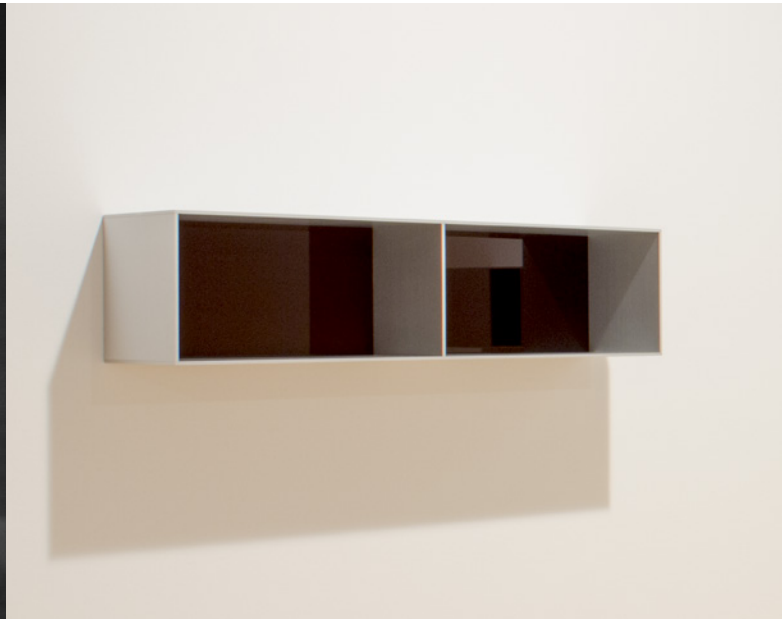
The previous year Susan Sontag's essay "Against Interpretation" excoriated the existing critical approach of "excavating" art—including literature and film as well as visual art and performing arts—to search for "meaning" behind or beneath the surface. Her famous essay was a plea to pay attention instead to the "sensuous surface of art." (As Frank Stella put it, "What you see is what you see.")

■

video still:
Rainforest (1968), choreography by Merce Cunningham. Buffalo Arts Festival, SUNY Buffalo, N.Y, 1968. Film by Pennebakder Hegedus Films. Cast: Carolyn Brown, Merce Cunningham, Barbara Dilley (Lloyd), Sandra Neels, Albert Reid, and Gus Solomons jr.

Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds,* 1964.





video still:
Trisha Brown, *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973), Walker Art Center, 1974. Cast: Carmen Beuchat, Trisha Brown, Sylvia Whitman, and Carol Gooden. Courtesy of Trisha Brown Dance Company.

Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1991) and *Untitled* (1988). Art © Judd Foundation. Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

From 1955 to ’59, Simone Forti and Robert Morris, who were married, were living in the Bay Area. She was studying with Anna Halprin and he was making abstract expressionist paintings while sometimes participating in Halprin’s workshops. This was the period when Halprin was breaking away from the expressionism of modern dance and introducing the idea of task actions. The couple eventually organized their own interdisciplinary gatherings. About those workshops Morris said, “I became interested in how ordinary behavior could become focused as performance.” (See interview with Jeffrey Weiss in *Robert Morris: Object Sculpture: 1960–1965,* Yale University Press.) The couple moved to New York around 1959.

In 1961 Yoko Ono, who had attended some of Cage’s classes at The New School, asked composer La Monte Young, a colleague of both Cage and Halprin, to curate a series in her loft on Chambers Street. Young invited both Forti and Morris to participate in that interdisciplinary series. For one performance, Morris created a walled in environment called *Passageway;* for another, Forti showed five works she called “Dance Constructions.” She conceived them in such a way that the object and the task were essential to one another, and this was highly influential later to Judson Dance Theater. *Slant Board* consisted of a ramp with a 45-degree incline to which several knotted ropes were attached. It was the task of three performers to pull themselves across the surface while going under and over the ropes of the other two. The physicality of holding the ropes as their legs grappled with the incline ensured a certain level of difficulty. By creating a perfect interdependence of materials and motion, *Slant Board* attained the “sense of singleness” that Judd had set forth in “Specific Objects”

■

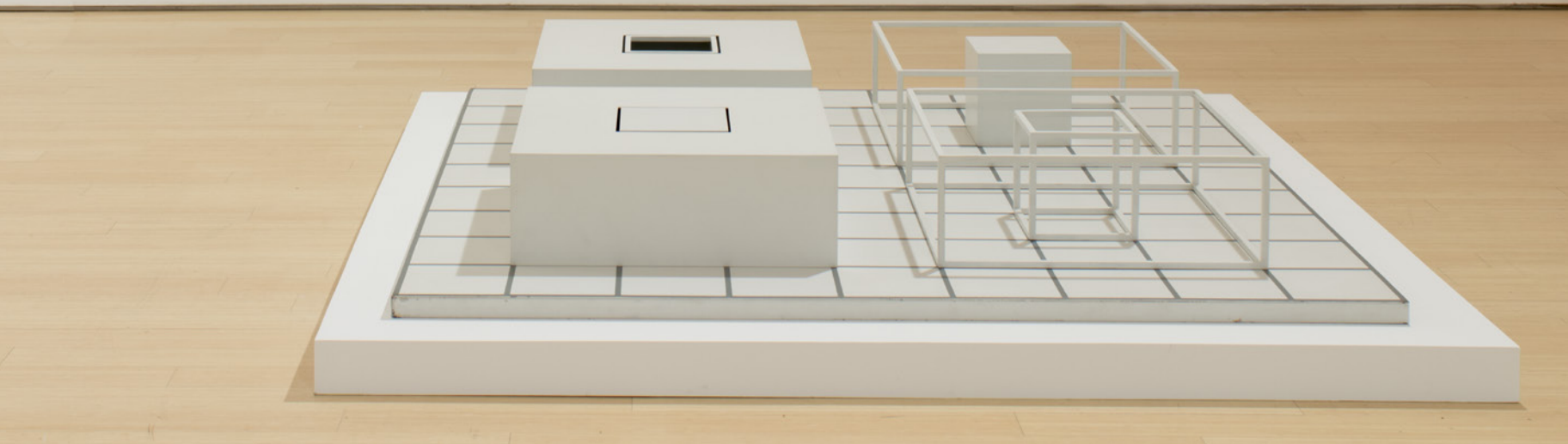
Like the Bauhaus activity in 1920s Germany and Black Mountain College in the '50s, Judson Dance Theater fomented cross-pollination between artists of different disciplines. Dancers, visual artists and composers influenced each other, appropriating ideas and methods. The dancers borrowed from sculptors the idea of objects, both as a presence in the performance space and as a model for the body to simulate. Conversely, some visual artists borrowed what was essential to dance: time.

Morris made several performance pieces at Judson. In explaining to Jeffrey Weiss why he was drawn to the time element, he said, "There is something incomprehensible about time when you try to think about it." As Maurice Berger points out in his book *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960's,* his performances addressed the labor of making art. In *Site* (1964) he wore work gloves and boots as he lifted, handled, and re-positioned large plywood sheets to conceal or reveal Carolee Schneemann posing on a bed as Manet's *Olympia*. The piece created a witty juxtaposition between the art worker (Morris) with the art object (Schneemann). In order to eradicate any "subjectivity," Morris wore a mask of his own face.

By 1969, when Rainer was working on *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* (the title was taken from a title of a Morris work), her attempts to foreground actions partially took the form of physically contending with objects. In the film of a rehearsal, pillows and cardboard boxes were strewn around the rehearsal space. They were used in task activities to either generate or impede the movement of the performers. The dancers' bodies sometimes took on the dead weight of an object. For instance, Douglas Dunn was hoisted by others, and Barbara Dilley was rolled on the floor by Rainer, almost as though Dunn and Dilley were as inanimate as pillows or cartons.

video still:
Dance (1979), choreography by Lucinda Childs, set by Sol LeWitt, musical score by Philip Glass. 2014 film with Lucinda Childs Dance Company produced by Marie-Hélène Rebois, Daphnie-production. Original cast: Lucinda Childs, Graham Conley, Cynthia Hedstrom, Erin Matthiessen, Daniel McCusker, Susan Osberg, Judy Padow, Ande Peck, and Megan Walker.

Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project ABCD 5*, 1968. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.



For Rainer the body as object created a duality. "I love the duality of props, or objects: their usefulness and obstructiveness in relation to the human body," she wrote in her first book, *Yvonne Rainer: Work 1961-73.* She continued, "Also the duality of the body: the body as a moving, thinking, decision- and action-making entity and the body as an inert entity, object-like… the human being can be treated as an object, dealt with as an entity without feeling or desire."

I would guess that, for Rainer, treating the body like an object accomplished three types of denials: It minimized the expressionist excesses of modern dance as exemplified by Graham; it dampened the inevitable narcissism of the performer, and, for women, it avoided what later became known as the "male gaze."

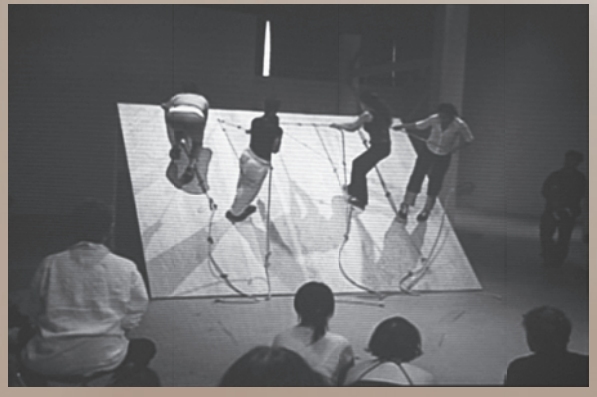
In the case of Trisha Brown, when her dancers became objects, they were art objects. Brown (as well as Rainer, Forti, and Childs) performed much of her early work to silence. When I was touring with her in the '70s, she would respond to questions asking why there was no music with another question: Would you expect to hear music if you were walking around a piece of sculpture?

It's easy to see the sculptural element in Brown's *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973). The four women's bodies lie parallel to each other as, in unison, they raise the right forearm to be perpendicular to the ground. That's Gesture One. Then One is repeated and Gesture Two is added, and so on. Gesture Seven has the women gently pressing the left side of the pelvis upward. As you watch the piece accumulate up to 30 movements, you are counting. As you count, you are seeing the sensuous surface of their bodies. Every new

video still:
Slant Board (1961), choreography by Simone Forti. Yoko Ono's loft, New York, May 1961. 2004 film produced by Julie Martin and Pooh Kaye for ARTPIX at Moca Los Angeles. Cast: Jill Spector, Suzanne Hanson, Marianne M. Kim, and Jennifer S. Holmes.

Robert Morris, *Corner Beam,* 1964.

Courtesy Castelli Gallery.



gesture is essential and every new gesture is legible. Toward the end of the dance, two people approach the dancers and carry them, one at a time, to a new spot in the room. Like a wound-up robot/object, each dancer continues her sequence unfazed.

Once when we were performing in France, Trisha told me, "When I am doing *Group Primary,* I am thinking, 'This is all there is.' " That comment has stayed with me all these years. There is something spiritual about putting your entire being at the service of one gesture at a time.

That attention to a single thing is evident in Judd's three-dimensional objects. Like Brown's gestures, they are supremely simple and do not refer to anything outside themselves. In the case of Judd's *Untitled (*1988) and *Untitled* (1991) from the Menziken series, the viewer becomes interested in each slight change within the one-ness of the overall structure. The mathematical progression in both of their work allows one to view them as a series of decisions. Another feature they share is a paradoxical combination of austerity of framework and sensuality of surface.

Ronald Bladen's large-scale geometric sculptures exemplify the power of arrested gesture. Bladen, who had known Rainer back in California, often attended performances at Judson. He no doubt watched the dancers and other artists explore new ways of using the body. In his 1978 *Cosmic Seed,* two columns stretch upward from its angular U-shaped body. The inverted archway between them forms a negative space that's reminiscent of a gateway, albeit unattainable and beyond the reach of the viewer.

■

The two collaborative works in this exhibit were made by nearly opposite processes. While *Dance* (1979) required close collaboration between Lucinda Childs, Philip Glass, and Sol LeWitt, *Rainforest* was made by Merce Cunningham, Andy Warhol, and David Tudor working independently. (Actually Warhol's *Silver Clouds* had been exhibited three years before.) In both cases, the final product amplified exponentially what one artist could do on his or her own. These two works have acquired a magical presence not often seen in the minimalist world.

Childs and Glass had worked together on her solos in Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), a landmark interdisciplinary production that had shards of narrative. In *Dance* it was clear there was to be no hint of story. Childs, Glass and their new collaborator Sol LeWitt (who was one of the first to identify as a conceptual artist) concentrated intensely on their materials: motion, sound, and film. They shared an understanding of how to accumulate force without narrative. As Glass has said, "Story was a distraction so we got rid of it."

Modular repetition was central to the minimalist idea. In Childs' view, repetitive structures were the common ground for Glass, LeWitt and herself. She made maps of the numerical system off doubling she worked out with Glass—a 12-count phrase, then a 24-count phrase, and finally a 48-count phrase—and showed them to LeWitt. "I think it corresponded to his way of thinking," she said during The Walker Art Center's panel. As the visual analog to their counting system, LeWitt chose to make a film—his first—so that the art component extends into time just as the dance and music do. Once the medium of film was part of this collaboration, certain decisions followed from that. As Childs has said about the work made at Judson in the '60s, "Once

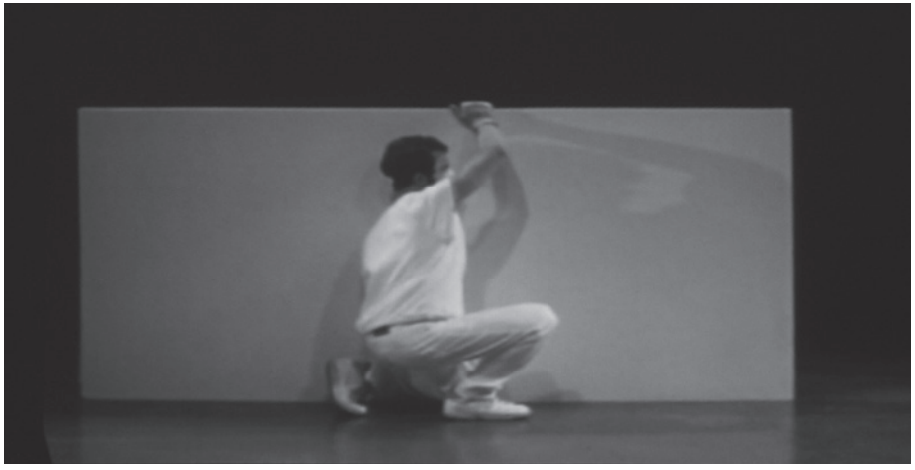
you pick your materials and start to work with them, they sort of dictate their own journey and you just follow it in an intuitive way."

Like his work *Serial Project ABCD 5* (1965), which has a doubling effect between solid structures and open structures, Sol LeWitt's film provided a double for each live performer and delineated a grid on the floor. It was almost as though the dancers—and their film doubles—were propelling themselves inside an open cube.

The making of *Rainforest* exemplified one of Cunningham and Cage's revolutionary ideas: that dance, music and the visual element are created independently rather than in collaboration. In performance the three elements co-exist, and wholeness is created in the eye of the beholder.

Although Cunningham was rarely called a minimalist—his dance vocabulary was virtuosic rather than "ordinary"—in clearly shunning narrative he was in tune with the artists and composers who bore that label. Embracing a democratic, allover use of space, his work favored the human scale rather than the heroics of forerunners like Graham and José Limón.

Warhol's *Silver Clouds* literally leavened *Rainforest* (with helium) and infused the dance with a sense of play, something that Cage always encouraged. The floating pillows provided an unpredictable element as they were pushed or kicked out of the way by dancers traveling in their midst. They even drifted out into the audience where people could bat them back toward the stage or anchor them down. Warhol is not usually considered a minimalist either, but if one takes a broad view, his identical floating objects contain the repetitive aspect of minimalism embraced by Judd and LeWitt.



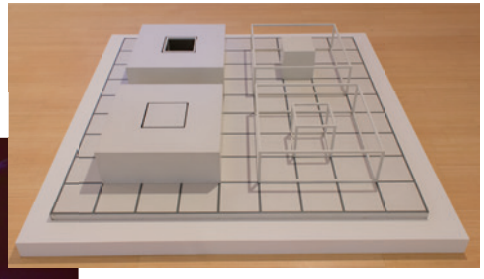
video still:
Site (1964), choreography by Robert Morris. Stage 73, New York, 1964. Cast: Robert Morris, Carolee Schneemann. Reconstruction film, 1993, by Babette Mangolte, unknown cast.

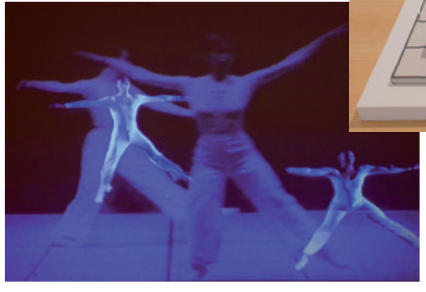
David Tudor's electronic sound score, which he called "sonic architecture," wove sounds like buzzing, droning, scraping, and chirping into a blanket of sound that emanated from speakers around the theater.

The glory of *Rainforest* is that all three elements together create a new and strange world, both primitive and futuristic.. When it was first performed in 1968, some people walked out. But over time it has elicited rapturous reactions, most recently when it was remounted by the Stephen Petronio Company last spring at the Joyce Theater.

These collaborations suggest that concentrating on the essential nature of seeing, hearing, or moving does not happen only in isolation. When these actions are brought together by visionary artists, they can produce transcendent results.

■





from left to right
video still:
Rainforest (1968), choreography by Merce Cunningham. Buffalo Arts Festival, SUNY Buffalo, N.Y, 1968. Film by Pennebakder Hegedus Films. Cast: Carolyn Brown, Merce Cunningham, Barbara Dilley (Lloyd), Sandra Neels, Albert Reid, and Gus Solomons jr.

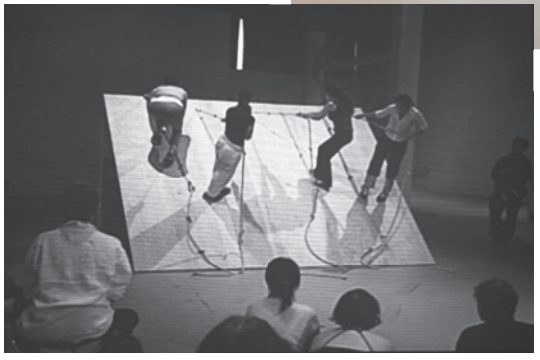
Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds,* 1964. Copyright 2015, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

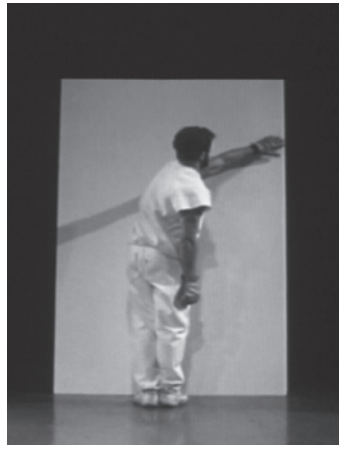
video still:
Dance (1979), choreography by Lucinda Childs, set by Sol LeWitt, musical score by Philip Glass. 2014 film with Lucinda Childs Dance Company produced by Marie-Hélène Rebois, Daphnie-production. Original cast: Lucinda Childs, Graham Conley, Cynthia Hedstrom, Erin Matthiessen, Daniel McCusker, Susan Osberg, Judy Padow, Ande Peck, and Megan Walker.

Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project ABCD 5*, 1968. Copyright 2015, Estate of Sol LeWitt / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1991) Art © Judd Foundation. Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

video still:
Trisha Brown, *Group Primary* Accumulation, 1973, Walker Art Center. Courtesy of Trisha Brown Dance Company.





video still:
Robert Morris, *Corner Beam,* 1964. Copyright 2015 Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Castelli Gallery.

Slant Board (1961), choreography by Simone Forti. Yoko Ono's loft, New York, May 1961.

video still:
Site (1964), choreography by Robert Morris. Stage 73, New York, 1964. Cast: Robert Morris, Carolee Schneemann. Reconstruction film, 1993, by Babette Mangolte, unknown cast.

Robert Morris, *Site,* 1964. Copyright 2015 Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Castelli Gallery.

video still:
Connecticut Rehearsal (1969), choreography by Yvonne Rainer. Connecticut College, 1969. Film by Michael Fajans. Cast: Becky Arnold, Barbara Dilley (Lloyd), Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, and Yvonne Rainer.

Ronald Bladen
Cosmic Seed, 1977
Copyright 2015 VAGA, New York
Courtesy The Ronald Bladen Estate.

This catalogue published on the
occasion of the exhibition

WHERE SCULPTURE & DANCE MEET:
MINIMALISM FROM 1961 TO 1979

September 10 – October 31, 2015

Loretta Howard Gallery
525 West 26th Street
New York NY 10001
212.695.0164
www.lorettahoward.com

ISBN: 978-0-9968314-0-6

Works photographed by John Small.

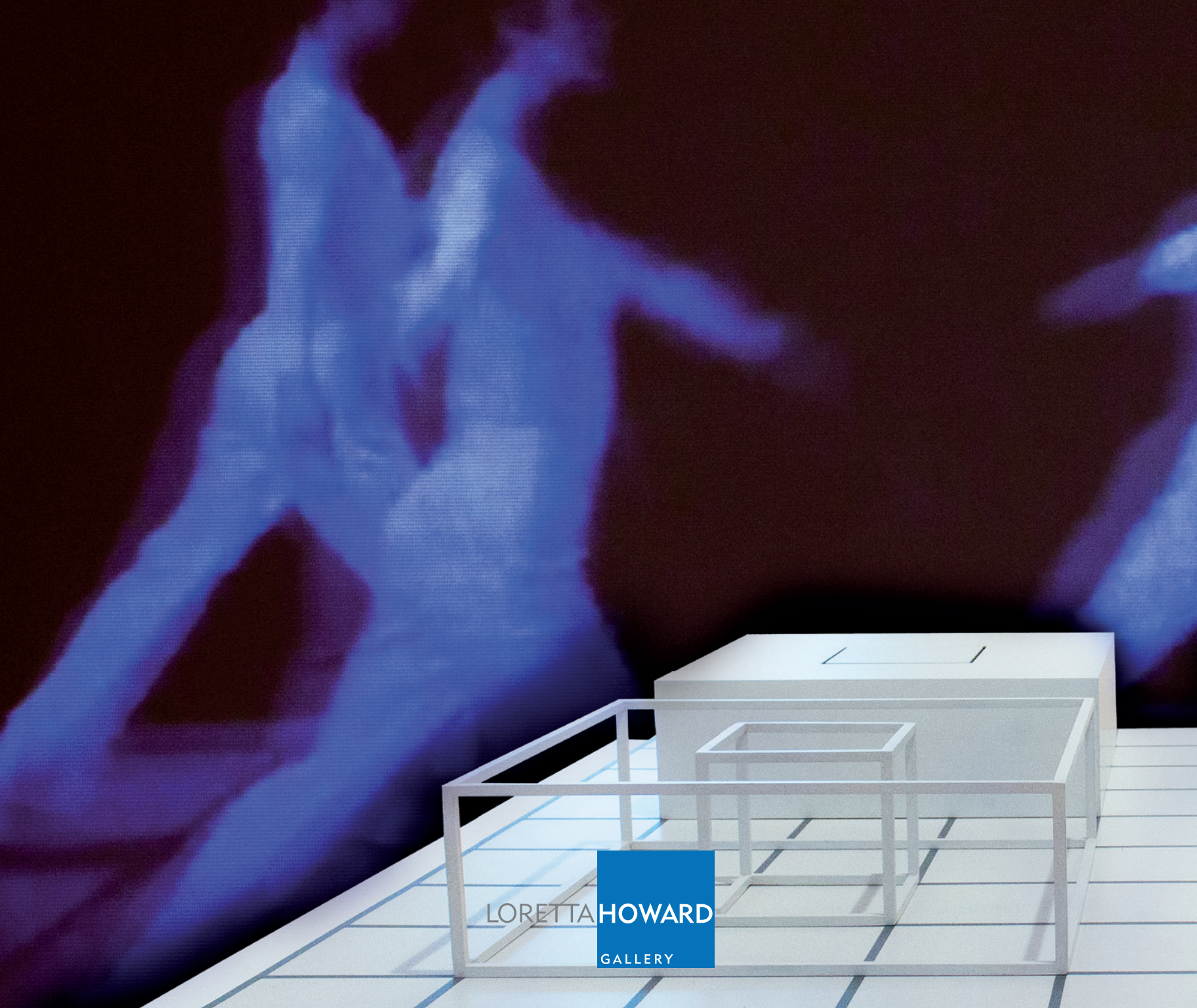
Design: HHA design

Wendy Perron, former editor in chief of Dance Magazine, *danced with Trisha Brown in the mid-'70s. Known as an authority on Judson Dance Theater, she has lectured across the country and now teaches a graduate seminar at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her book,* Through the Eyes of a Dancer, *was published by Wesleyan University Press in 2013, and she continues to write commentary on her website at wendyperron.com.*

Cover: video still:
Dance (1979), choreography by Lucinda Childs, set by Sol LeWitt, musical score by Philip Glass. 2014 film with Lucinda Childs Dance Company produced by Marie-Hélène Rebois, Daphnie-production. Original cast: Lucinda Childs, Graham Conley, Cynthia Hedstrom, Erin Matthiessen, Daniel McCusker, Susan Osberg, Judy Padow, Ande Peck, and Megan Walker.

Thanks to

Barbara Castelli
Paula Cooper
Chris D'Amelio
Flavin Judd
Rainer Judd
Keny Marshall
Yvonne Rainer
Susan Rosenberg
The Andy Warhol Museum


LORETTA HOWARD
GALLERY