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ARH 354 Mini Essay Collections

1.

Minimal Art started in the 1960s with many geometrical shapes. The word “Minimalist” was coined by a 1965 essay about the withdrawal from manual effort in aesthetic works. Art critics at the time characterized it as object art, primary structures, and cool art (Hopkins, pg. 138). Minimalist art in reality is the rejection of what came before, specifically abstract expressionism. Minimalist art was concerned with the ongoing social changes happening in the 1960s that focused on shifting the equality of women in America. Similar to Minimalism, the movements in the 1960s departed from the typical norm of values and behaving: Feminists rose in numbers to demand equal rights and opportunities. Minimalist art and the social movements occurring in the 1960s were the denials of past norms and encouragement of new ideas. There is nothing to draw viewers in to interpret different messages, and the artworks are simply there. Art forms for years in the past created illusions of space, whereas in minimalism it is real objects taking up real space. Artists such as Donald Judd and Sol Lewitt used hard shapes and lines to avoid overt metaphors or symbolism that was witnessed in Abstract Expressionism (Green, *The Case for Minimalism*, 0:1:11-0:4:36).

The Women’s Right movement redefined what equality means much like how Judd pushed the boundaries of how art can be perceived. Judd created multicolored objects from items used in factories. He distanced himself from the traditional forms of art like sculptures

to create carefully thought out shaped, proportional, and scaled objects. Judd's *Untitled* (ca. 1968) was the creation of an industrially fabricated hollow box from a combination of stainless steel and amber plexiglass with a metallic motorcycle painted in the hollow (Hopkins, pg. 136). *Untitled* is created as a set of ten stacked boxes leaning against a wall that achieves a physically immersive piece of artwork. Each angle and position the viewer moves, the object will have a different perspective. Judd evolved what it means to look at an object in space, and how different angles can shift an outlook.

The Minimalist Movement demonstrated a critical paradigm describing the elimination of unnecessary subjectivity. Lewitt devoted his work to push systems to their limits. *Incomplete Open Cubes* (ca. 1974) is a series of white, three-dimensional cubes. He went through a tedious planned and ruled process to create each 2-inch, wooden cube. Lewitt proved there are numerous ways of viewing an object with 122 variations of a cube. Women in the 1960s similarly proved that equality can be looked at from different perspectives to give others a better understanding of how marginalization affects others while pushing society's system boundaries.

2.

Robert Rauschenberg altered the word "combine" to describe a new meaning to blurring the lines of art and life. He combined several elements of painting and sculpture in defiance of conventional methods (Folland). Rauschenberg's *Canyon* (ca. 1959) used objects seen in everyday life to be repurposed like cardboard, the cuff of a man's shirt, a pillow, and a metal canister. These items can be found walking through a typical city street, however, he changed

the notion of how we view the objects when it comes to art. A mix of mediums between painting and everyday items in a form of sculpture creates an illusion of reality. The *Canyon* has mixtures of 3D elements that give it the likeness of reality while still using the conventional flatness of paintings in the background of the artwork. Rauschenberg used this technique of combine to close the gap between art and reality.

Gerhard Richter created photo-like paintings as a series of artwork oftentimes drawing from his family or friends. Richter was meticulous with his brushstrokes to display a low-quality resolution as a symbol of faded memories (Hopkins, pg. 127). His photo-paintings are a snapshot of one's faded memory of a family member. *Betty* (ca. 1977) is an oil on wood featuring a young child laying up and looking at the viewer. The faded imagery of her face and sappy eyes causes a sensation of sorrow which forms the question in the viewers' mind if the memory is real. *Betty* is a photo-painting after Richter's daughter ("Betty"). He paints her eyes in the likeness of a Disney Princess to give a sense of innocence as she gazes upon not the viewer, but her dad. Her dad is the seed from which she sows, the creator of her life and art. Richter uses the technique of layering paint and covering it in water to create the out-of-focus effect and blurring the lines of art and life.

Allan Kaprow created the performance artwork, 18 Happenings in 6 parts (ca. 1959), which featured an interactive environment between the art performances and the audience. Kaprow encouraged audience members to participate in his shows blurring the lines of how art and life are considered: should art be purely observation or should it interact with life itself? In the rooms where the performance art occurred, there were references of Kaprow's old paintings and work surrounding the room. In three different rooms, there were be 3 different types of Happenings in each room. A Happening is the art movement in which a ray

of performance, event, and situational art occurs (Hopkins, pg. 104). The different use of mediums like performance art and sculptures blur the understanding of how audiences view art and life. Art is not something that has to hang against a wall, but an interaction between art and a living, breathing thing.

3.

The Modernism art movement began to see a decline in popularity and use in the 1930s. Modernism is based on the rejection of conservative values and realistic depictions of subjects, similar to the Contemporary Art movement in which it rejected traditionality. Artists used different visual mediums from films to sculptures as a way to convey a message about the reality of the world. It emphasizes a break with past forms of representation. Different forms of mediums in the past have been used in conventional and conservative manners until Modernism came to break those boundaries. Film in the 1940s grew to become a form of experimenting with abstract possibilities, but it was not until the Contemporary Art movement that it reached full form.

Bruce Nauman often filmed his confinements in his studio with a series of performances alone. Nauman's use of film as a medium allowed him to obtain a third perspective of how sculptural, conceptual, and bodily interactions work together (Hopkins, pg. 154). In 1941, he developed the film, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*. Nauman can be seen in a black-and-white film as he steps one foot in front of the other around a taped-out square. There is no background music or noise forcing viewers to focus on him

and the clicking of the camera's film. The camera is fixed in one position which also forces audiences to follow Nauman as he walks in a square or treads off-screen and breaks typical film themes by leaving out any form of narration. This new form of medium to display art called more viewers in to witness the rejection of past techniques and welcome a new curious way.

Anthony Caro's sculpture explored Modernism and Contemporary Art themes through the rejection of past norms for sculptures. Caro used bronze as a medium to create *Woman Waking Up* (ca. 1955) after working as a sculptural assistant to Henry Moore, an abstract sculptor. This sculpture avoided the typically idolized body type seen in past art movements. *Woman Waking Up* is not a typical nude artwork as the body shows signs of clear imperfections as her body appears to overflow. It has a rough and pitted surface and was formed by dropping soft clay from a height and developing the suggested body curves then cast into bronze in an edition of 6 (Anthony Caro). The use of bronze signifies the roughness in the woman's body and avoids any overt sexualism. Caro's chosen medium and choice of portrayal go against the artistic norm to persuade a message that goes beyond the rejection of perfection.

4.

As society shifted its economic values to more mass-consumerism and materialistic values, so did artists' work in the 1950s-60s. In the 1950s, mass culture and commercialization became all-the-rage which focused on manipulating the consumers to buy its products. Less patrons were visiting art galleries and started enjoying the cinema, theater,

and television more. As economic values for creative outlets shifted from gallery exhibitions to overt wealth, art followed suit. The Independent Group (IG) focused on eclectic topics that focused on meaningless consumerism like helicopter design, car styling, and advertising (Hopkins, pg. 95-96). Artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein became a new wave of artists that focused on the commercialization of art and how to retarget audiences.

Andy Warhol used low-brow objects from everyday life to relabel them as fine art to the public, and it worked. He used the aesthetics of everyday experiences to rebrand them as luxury artwork. The economic boost in American Pop Art was created by a market of dealers and the popularization of consumerism, not self-generated by artists (Hopkins, pg. 111). Warhol used these values from the new economic boost and created a series, *Campbell Soup Cans* (ca. 1962). Many products that saw popularity in the 1950s were generic and low-quality, so Warhol used the inauthenticity of mainstream culture to give them exactly what they want. Campbell Soup Cans is generic as the name itself with a repeated pattern based on the cheap canned soup. Warhol achieved transformed a generic item into fine art as the art of exhibition was beginning to feel lost.

Sigmar Polke used clever techniques to draw more viewers into exhibition art. He created an acrylic painting titled *Bunnies* (ca. 1966) with the inspiration of Ben-Day Dot patterns to obscure the art's subject as a way to frustrate viewers. Polke referenced the original Playboy Club advertisement that portrayed a purchasable lifestyle and evoked a seduction to non-club members (Klaasmeyer). *Bunnies* featured four women dressed in black lingerie as smudges and imperfections fill the canvas. By obscuring the image of the beautiful women, it emphasizes the materiality of the original message. To the ultimate consumers, a lifestyle that can be purchased also represents an exclusive wealth status. One's inability to

focus on the subjects is a critique of how viewers are obsessed with consumerist and materialistic values, as well as the objectification of women as commodities. However, this frustration and the out-of-focus effect were used as a tactic to draw more viewers into his art exhibits and examine his work.

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