

Minimalism

Hello Students!

Lately, we've discussed design and furniture through a historic lens. We've also made notice of how the era of modern design brought about a simpler take on the aesthetics of what was being made. Yet, there is a reason art and design movements often mirror one another. Art, too, was losing ornamentation and changing in content, becoming minimal.

The early 1960s brought about a significant shift in American art, *largely in reaction* to the critical and popular success of the highly personal and expressive painterly gestures of **Abstract Expressionism**. Minimalist artists produced pared-down three-dimensional objects, without much emotion or meaning.



Jackson Pollack, (American, 1912–1956)

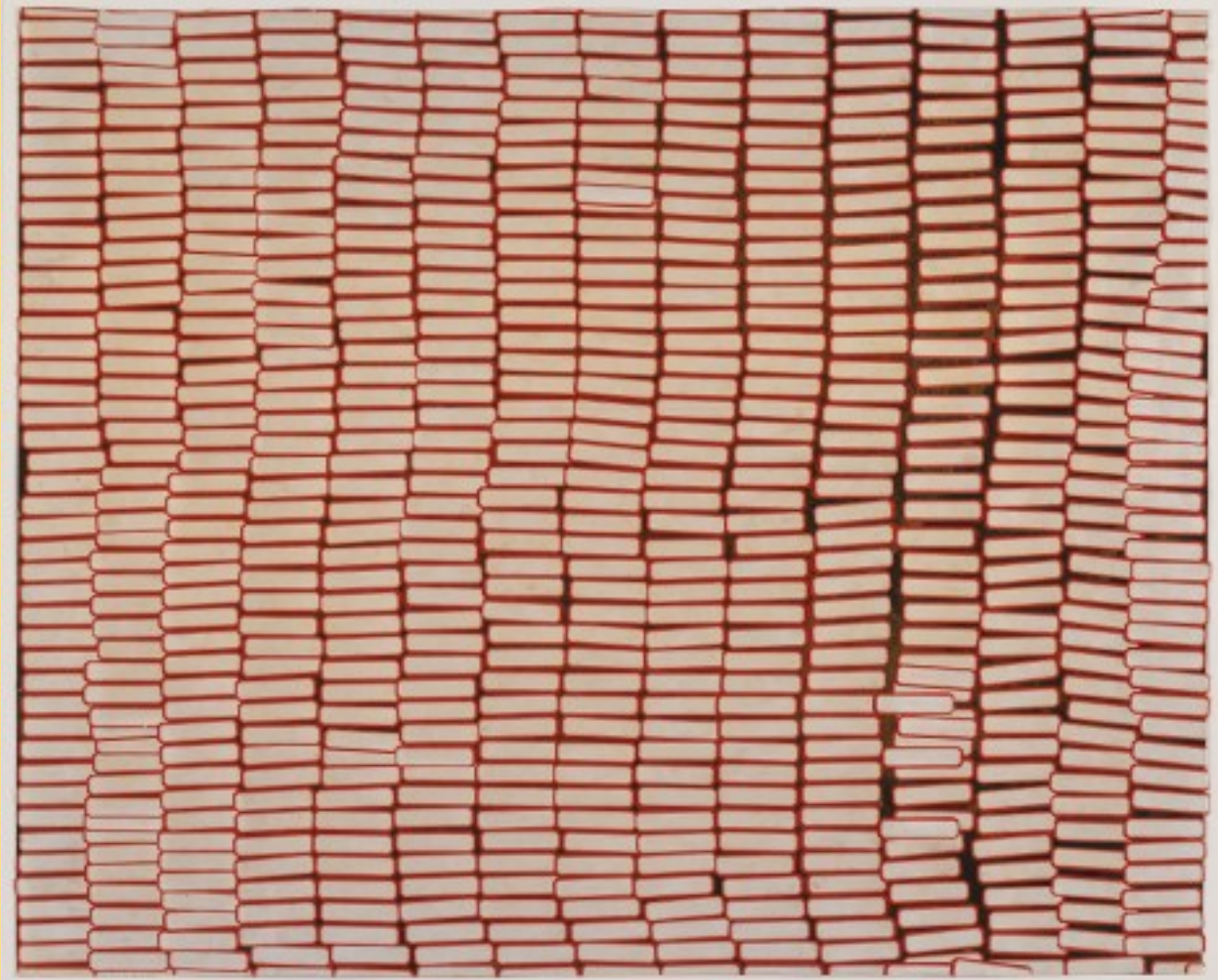
One: Number 31, 1950

1950. Oil and enamel paint on canvas

Abstract Expressionism is a term applied to a movement in American painting that flourished in New York City after World War II, sometimes referred to as the New York School or as *action painting*. It's best known for large-scale paintings that break away from traditional processes, prevalent in the 1950s and full of emotion.

Now, let's *contrast* this with what we understand as Minimalism.

Serial Forms & Repetition



Yayoi Kusama (Japanese, born 1929)
Accumulation of Stamps
1962. Pasted labels and ink on paper

Minimalists adopted the techniques and materials of the factory, and showed us our new 1960s world of industrial, mass-produced beauty.

Notice how Kusama is using little stamps or stickers, to create a piece that is seemingly obsessive and repetitive. This is reflective of the time, as mass-production of goods was very prevalent. She is creating an image without drawing or painting, instead just using the material.

Emotional, Busy	→	Simplified, Less
1950s Abstract Exp.		1960s Minimalism

The Materials

The Minimalists often *stayed away* from traditional art materials, and instead embraced the techniques of manufacturing, commercial materials (think everyday design), and industrial fabrication in order to eliminate the evidence of the artist's hand normally found in, for example, brushstrokes.

- What stops people from using more non-traditional materials? How could you use industrial objects to make art?



Judd wanted his work to suggest an **industrial** production line. In fact, he had his works made in a factory in order to obtain a perfect finish without having to rework the material. The box was one of Judd's favorite forms, because he felt it was neutral and had no **symbolic** meaning.

Symbol (n.): a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

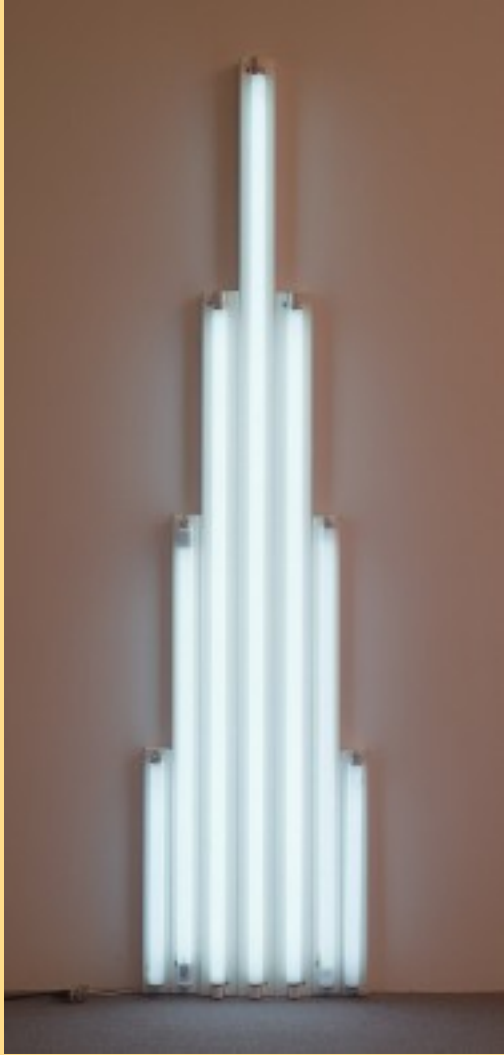
The key here is that minimal works are also minimal in terms of representation. They do *not* seek to represent anything or express emotion, unlike Abstract Expressionism.

Donald Judd, (American, 1928-1994)

Untitled

1967, Lacquer on galvanized iron, Twelve units

Industry (n): economic activity concerned with the processing of raw materials and manufacture of goods in factories.



Dan Flavin (American, 1933–1996)
 "monument" 1 for V. Tatlin
 1964. Fluorescent light and metal fixtures

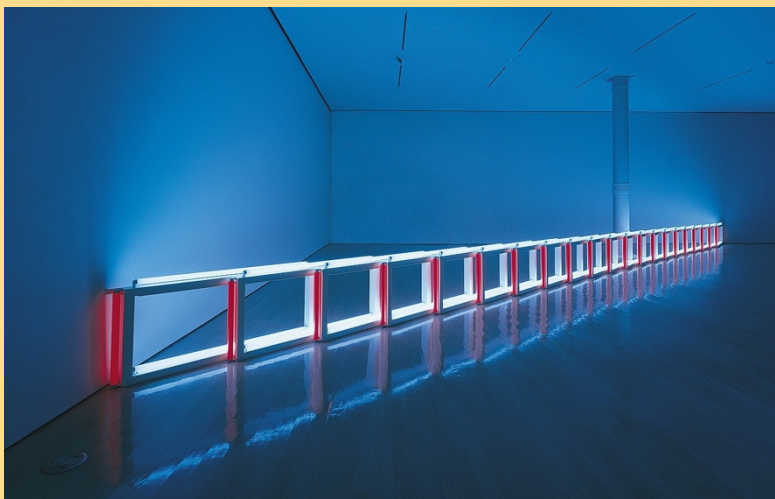
How Many Museums Does It Take to Change...?

The colors and lengths of the fluorescent tubes Flavin used for this piece were determined by what was commercially available at the time.

Fluorescent lights, like all lights, have a lifespan, and eventually burn out.

When a museum acquires a work by Flavin, it receives an artist's certificate indicating specifications for replacement tubes, which it purchases when necessary, to extend the life of the work.

- **Consider:** Are these pieces sculptures? Why or why not?



Dan Flavin

An artificial barrier of blue, red and blue fluorescent light (to Flavin Starbuck Judd)

1968. Blue and red fluorescent light

Flavin's fluorescent light bulbs broke, it could be replaced with another store-bought bulb. Donald Judd

had his objects manufactured by skilled craftspeople.

- How are their approaches similar? How are they different?

Constructing Space



Robert Smithson, (American, 1938-1973)

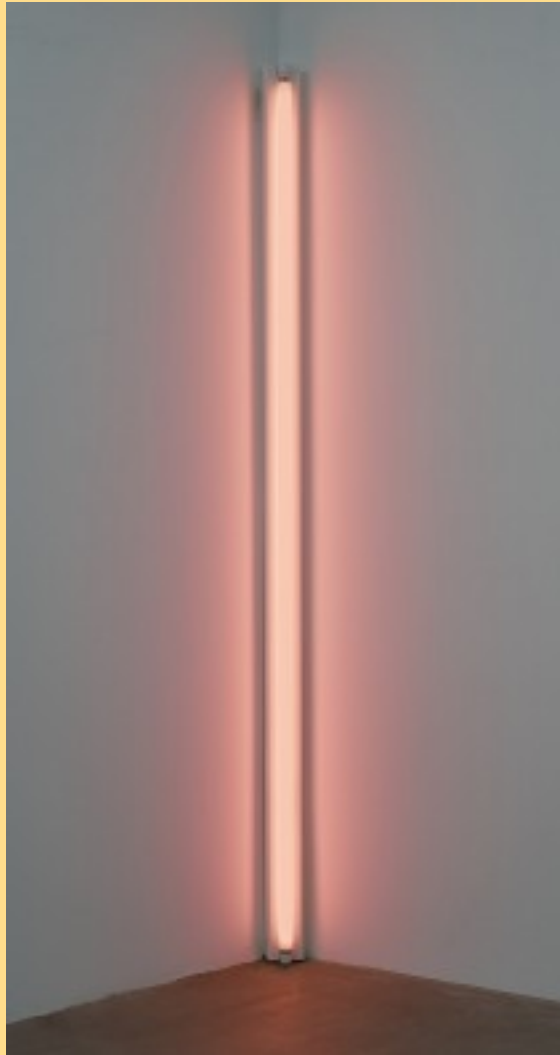
Corner Mirror with Coral

1969. Mirrors and coral

Smithson acknowledged that viewers experience artworks with their bodies, not just with their sense of sight, and that their perceptions shift as they move through space. The reflections in Smithson's mirrors change in direct relationship to the position of the viewer, so no two people experience it in precisely the same way.

It sits directly on the floor of the museum rather than on a pedestal. This was a huge break from tradition, instigated by Minimalist artists. In opposition to traditional museum display, the works *become part of the viewer's space* rather than taking on a separate or elevated status.

- Think about the last time you visited a museum or gallery. Was a work more interesting when it was on the ground or taking up space, rather than hung on the wall?



Dan Flavin

pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)
1963. Fluorescent light and metal fixture

As its title suggests, *pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)* was made to be installed in a corner. When a viewer looks at the work for a long time in proximity, the light creates the effect of a cylinder much wider than the tube itself.

Note: Flavin did not consider his works to be **sculptures**, because they consist not only of the physical object (the fluorescent tube) but also of the *space* illuminated by the light. When the light shining from the tube touches people or objects, it illuminates and colors these as well.

Sculpture (n.): A three-dimensional work of art made by a variety of means, including carving wood, chiseling stone, casting or welding metal, molding clay or wax, or assembling materials.

- Do Flavin's pieces make you re-consider what a sculpture is?

Your Task

Explore Minimalism for yourself! Try to use non-traditional art materials to make art that is simple, repetitive or even industrial in nature. This can be something that is taking up space, or even something that uses mass-produced, everyday goods.



A. Thomas, 2020

My personal piece, *Woodsy* (2019-20), was made using pieces of mulch and corkboard. I considered this to be somewhat Minimalist because I did it out of curiosity, and kept repetition as a theme. Moreover, mulch is something that is easily accessible and normally used for landscaping, making it an atypical art material. The pieces of mulch are assembled together in the same direction in each quadrant, though each quadrant holds a different direction.