



WALL | CEILING | FLOOR

ANASTASI | JUDD | SANDBACK

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On the occasion of the exhibition
Wall Ceiling Floor

Organized by the
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BIRMINGHAM
MUSEUM^{OF}ART

Michael Straus, Guest Curator

Foreword

The exhibition *Wall Ceiling Floor* provided the Birmingham Museum of Art with a unique opportunity to explore the work of three individualistic and highly original artists, William Anastasi, Donald Judd and Fred Sandback, while simultaneously offering insights into the movements of Minimalism, Conceptualism and Post-Minimalism. The show grew out of our recent acquisition of Sandback's early and important work, *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-Part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)* (pages 26-27 and 44-45). Thus, the exhibition celebrates this new acquisition, showcasing not only Sandback's visionary conception of positive and negative space but also Judd's and Anastasi's contemporaneous, but independent explorations of forms and materials.

In her catalogue essay, Tiffany Bell expands on the rationale for bringing together the works of these three artists. As she notes, all three offer us the opportunity to re-evaluate our understanding of art, the nature of objects, and how we relate to those objects both intellectually and physically. We examine our understanding of art and its making: the necessity of the visible hand and its gesture and line; the very nature

of the creative process; the seemingly simple, contrasting with the complexity of the idea. We come to a realization that prolonged engagement with these prosaic materials amplifies our awareness and perception of the space around us. It is this understanding of the "concept and experience of space" of which Thomas McEvilley writes so eloquently in his catalogue essay, examining these artists' philosophies and attitudes and their works' connections to the world beyond the Museum.

We are grateful to Guest Curator Michael Straus for bringing his knowledge and thoughtful insights both to the conception and organization of the exhibition. We thank the donors for their gifts to our collection, donations that greatly enhance our holdings of contemporary art. Finally, we express sincere appreciation to the City of Birmingham, to the Jefferson County Community Arts Fund through the Cultural Alliance of Greater Birmingham, an initiative of the Jefferson County Commission, and to the Alabama State Council on the Arts for their support of the exhibition.

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GAIL | ANDREWS

R. Hugh Daniel Director, Birmingham Museum of Art

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MICHAEL | STRAUS

Essay 1

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This exhibition brings together three artists – Donald Judd (1928-1994), William Anastasi (b. 1933), and Fred Sandback (1943-2003) – usually associated with three different movements – Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Post-Minimalism. In the 1960s, when these movements evolved in rapid succession, the art within each category was distinguished from the others by differences in material, form, and strategies of presentation. At the time, these differences seemed major, one movement opening the way to new meaning and innovation. Given the multitude of styles, mediums, and approaches available to artists today, however, the differences between the works of these three artists could be described as nuances. With hindsight, it is apparent that these three artists, all principal representatives of the three movements, shared many concerns; there are even overlaps in the use of material and appearance of some of the works. This show offers a dialogue amongst works suggesting interesting points of difference and similarity.

Though he found the term disparaging, Donald Judd is recognized as both a pri-

mary artist and theorist of Minimalism. The oldest of the three artists represented here, he began his career in the late 1940s studying representational painting at the Arts Students League in New York and philosophy at Columbia University. Finding representational modes of rendering unable to convey an objective truth, he began painting abstractly. By the early 1960s, despite admiration for the work of artists such as Barnett Newman and Frank Stella, he abandoned painting altogether as a response to what he saw as the inherent illusionism of the conventional, flat picture plane. Breaking out into three dimensions, Judd developed an art that unambiguously presented objects in real space. Along with fellow Minimalists such as Dan Flavin and Carl Andre, he used industrial material, geometric form, and systematic compositions to make an art that is straightforward and fully present.

Five years younger than Judd, William Anastasi began his career as a Conceptual artist in the 1960s just as that term was being formulated. Before becoming an artist, he had married, had three children, divorced, and had a successful career in the construction business as a brick mason. Leaving all that behind in Philadelphia, Anastasi moved to New York in 1962 and began making art without any formal training. Like the

work of artists such as Lawrence Weiner or Sol LeWitt, the emphasis in his art is less on form and more on evoking an idea. Anastasi's art often involves consideration of the identity of place, material, medium or process. Unlike Judd, who repeatedly used the same materials and forms, Anastasi's work is varied in appearance, material, and content. The most obvious precedent for his work is Marcel Duchamp's use of the "ready-made." Anastasi's use of sound and elements of chance in some of his work is also related to that of the composer John Cage, who became a close friend and chess companion. And there is an element of performance in some of Anastasi's work that bears similarity to work of the American Fluxus artists working in the early 1960s.

Though the youngest of the three, Fred Sandback began his career only a few years later than Judd and Anastasi. Still a student at Yale University, where he studied philosophy and art, he had his first solo exhibitions in Europe in 1968. The following year, introduced to Virginia Dwan by Judd, Sandback presented a solo show at the Dwan Gallery – the same gallery where Anastasi had four important exhibitions in 1966, 1967, and 1970. Post-Minimalism, the movement Sandback is most usually aligned with, loosely groups artists such as Richard Serra and Eva Hesse who were respond-

ing to elements of both Minimalism and Conceptualism. Sandback's work shares certain characteristics of both, yet the form and content of his art is more ephemeral and less didactic than the art of either movement. Sandback, who referred to himself as a "sculptor" (a traditional term that Judd avoided and that could not easily be used to characterize Anastasi), claimed artists such as Auguste René Rodin, Alberto Giacometti, and Constantin Brancusi as his sources of inspiration. Though his work is not obviously related to the earlier Modernist work, his affinity for it suggests a wish to embrace the traditional sculptural language that deals with the play and interaction of mass in space.

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The overriding point of commonality among these three artists is their desire to make works that avoid representation and illusion in favor of focusing on what is real. In some ways, all three artists were responding to Abstract Expressionism, the prevailing art form of the preceding decade which emphasized personal gesture in the act of painting and existentialist angst in works that often took on heroic scale. Abandoning the expressionism of their predecessors, these three artists retained certain interests in form and process. Their work is in a sense more than abstract: it

avoids all pictorial qualities that refer to images or events beyond the physical scope of the art to convey an experience that is immediate and that happens in, or is about, real time and present space. Similarly, all three artists resist the personal. Gesture is not, at least consciously, individualized by the hand of the artist and composition is not merely a matter of personal choice.

Donald Judd, as evidenced by his works in this exhibition, mainly used rectangular box-like forms placed directly on the floor or projecting out from the wall. Traditional sculptural materials such as marble, bronze, or wood were avoided in favor of raw industrial materials such as stainless steel, galvanized iron, and aluminum. Judd's intention was to make forms that are immediately recognizable for what they are without associations to images or other objects. Believing that all existing things are inherently equal, he used non-hierarchical compositions allowing his forms to be ordered by symmetry or geometry rather than relational balances dependent on his intuitive sense. Furthermore, he did not use sculptural pedestals or bases for his objects, preferring to present them as within the same space as the viewer rather than set off in a traditional, sculptural field. To eliminate any sense of ambiguity within his objects,

there are few hidden spaces within them; volumes are defined but left open or enclosed by transparent Plexiglas. Similarly, color, an important aspect of his work, was either integral to his material or specific to the object made; he avoided color that would allude to other things. For Judd, the art derived from the visual tensions that could be set up as contrasts between these various aspects of his objects.

Untitled, from Ten from Leo Castelli (1967) (page 79), for example, is made of a rectangular sheet of stainless steel, folded into four identical channels, and placed directly on the floor. Its lowness to the ground, unusual in sculptural objects, makes one immediately aware of real space (or else you might trip on the work). Meanwhile, the object defines an overall volume – the combined four spaces – without fully enclosing the interior space. The shiny, reflective silver of the metal surface similarly contrasts with the shadowed space within. In *Untitled* (1971), Judd also contrasted the interior and exterior spaces in a stainless steel, open-ended, box-like form, lined on the interior with brown Plexiglas. Here, the interior void is filled by the transparent glow of the colored Plexiglas – an illusion acceptable to Judd because it is a fundamental effect of the material – while the metal surface tends to dissolve somewhat as

it reflects the surrounding light.

When using the wall, rather than the floor, as the support for the art, Judd also breaks with convention to directly engage the viewer. *Extruded Aluminum Piece* (1991) (page 71), for example, projects out from the wall more than conventional reliefs, while *No. 32 (Wall Project)* (1992) (Page 49) is recessed into the wall. Both works resist the area identified with the picture plane or pictorial space. Much like the earlier works, the aluminum piece, with an anodized cobalt blue color, contrasts its overall volume with an open interior. But here, the open space is delineated by a complicated patterning of shape and design, symmetrical and systematic in plan, visible from the side. The Wall Project, perhaps because it is larger in scale, more forcefully interacts with the space of the room. Following the directions outlined by Judd, this work is made of two galvanized iron plates, each measuring 20 by 30 inches and recessed 10 inches deep into the face of the wall. The recesses are centered on imaginary lines dividing the wall into thirds, with the top of each at 65 inches from the floor. The space between the two recesses is thus dependent on the size of the wall within which the work is installed, thus engaging that space directly. This effect is

emphasized by a spatial tension caused by one symmetry overlaid on another, as the eye wants to see the wall divided in half because of the two parts yet it is in fact divided into thirds. This work, like the others, calls for close observation; it engages the viewer as it boldly asserts its presence in real space and time.

Unlike Judd's work, Anastasi's cannot be adequately characterized in formal terms. As the work in this exhibition shows, he has used "found" objects, electric lights, cardboard, construction materials, text, and so on. Nor does he avoid references and images; his titles can refer to music or even Biblical stories; and photography is one of the media he actively employs. And though oblique, there are sometimes autobiographical references deriving from his Catholic background or employment in construction. Despite these many differences, like Judd's work, Anastasi's tends to direct attention to the identity of the object and how we define it. Rather than making something obviously new, however, Anastasi seems to be directing attention to what already is. He asks us to think about things – usually quite familiar things – in different ways.

In some cases, Anastasi's strategies of presentation parallel those of Judd's. *What*

Was Real in the World (1964) (Page 77) is the work of Anastasi's in this exhibition that bears the closest resemblance to Minimalist art. It consists of 112 bricks, purchased locally and stacked in rows that form a rectangular shape placed directly on the floor. Like Judd's work, it is geometric in form, made of construction materials, systematically ordered, and placed in real space without a base or pedestal. Anastasi's title, referring directly to "what is real," together with the fundamental, ordinary nature of the construction material placed in a simple pattern, emphasizes his interest in the work's presence in real space. In Anastasi's case, however, the use of bricks also recalls his past as a young bricklayer in a family of masons; it is perhaps also a metaphor for the necessity of process and labor.

In two other works, *His Brush with Posterity* (1962) (page 61) and *Incision* (1966) (page 51), Anastasi addresses the pictorial conventions of the flat picture plane. While Judd breaks the plane, avoiding pictorial illusion, Anastasi ironically embraces such conventions. In the former, he has simply taken a store-bought stretcher covered with a clear sheet of vinyl, painted it with a single stroke of white, and hung it on the wall. As per Judd, everything is made visible but here it is the conventions of painting itself

that are laid bare; the work is simply frame, surface, and a brushstroke, together with light and shadow. (As the title indicates, Anastasi is also humorously questioning the heroic stance of the Abstract Expressionist gestural mark.) Similarly, in the latter work, simple incised lines forming a rectangle in the wall makes a picture on the wall.

Anastasi has also made works that break the picture plane. *Displaced Site* (1966) (page 81) was originally made using chunks of plaster chiseled from the wall of the loft the artist was living in forty years ago. Here, working with wallboard, the artist cut a 3 x 5 x 3 inch void out of the gallery wall, removed the resulting material, placed it in a cardboard box measuring 3 x 5 x 6 inches, and then inserted the box with the material halfway into the hollowed out hole in the gallery wall, leaving an equal volume projecting out of the wall. Like Judd's *No. 32 (Wall Project)* (page 49), the work physically asserts itself into real space but here a consideration of the architectural material, the wall itself, is brought into play. In *Through* (1966/2007) (page 57), a large scale photograph of what one would see directly through the wall the picture is mounted on—in this case part of Sandback's installation in an adjacent gallery—the picture plane is conceptually disrupted while simultaneously reasserted. As the picture

recedes into its own pictorial space, it brings the actual space behind the wall into present view.

In other works, Anastasi deals more directly with elements of light and shadow. *Jacob's Ladder* (1968) (page 55), for example, is made from the shadows of nails lit from above. Each nail is driven into the wall at the point where a perpendicular shadow from another nail ends. The result is a diagonal line of projecting nails, connected by their shadows. Much different in form but similar in content, *Dead Heat* (1966) (page 67) has lights mounted on the wall that are directed at an upward angle to an identical set of lights on the ceiling. The objects focus attention on themselves quite literally while calling attention to an element of the gallery space usually overlooked or taken for granted by the viewer.

In *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony* (1965) (page 59), Anastasi moves beyond the conventions of pictorial representation to address the manner in which sound and the moving image are transmitted. Taking apart a video tape of Leonard Bernstein conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra's performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the work is the result of a kind of performance that in some way mimics

that of a conductor. Anastasi pulls apart and drapes the tape over two nails formerly placed on the wall at the point of his two outstretched arms as he takes the position of the figure in Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man. Though the references are many, like *Displaced Site*, the work takes its form from the actual material qualities of the thing; in this case, the flowing brown ribbons suspended on the nails and piled on the floor. Like Judd then, Anastasi uses real space but he also engages language, through his titles especially, and works with symbol or perhaps the conceptual identity of the things he presents.

Like Judd's, Fred Sandback's art has consistency in form and material and, as his titles make clear, his work is non-referential. Like Anastasi's work though, Sandback's has a conceptual aspect as it seems to conjure shapes and planes that are not actually there. For the most part, he used acrylic yarn positioned within a room in lines of color that delineate space. Often very discreet interventions in the room, Sandback's lines describe volumes or planes in space that transform the viewer's perception of the room. Arguably more abstract than Judd's art, Sandback's is literally non-objective. His works are almost immaterial. Thin colored lines with edges fully exposed and

no objective center, they thoroughly reveal themselves for what they are while activating and transforming space and our perception of it.

In *Orange Day-Glo Corner Piece* (1968/2004), two L-shaped elements of steel wire are mounted horizontally across a corner of a room and connected vertically by elastic cord. Bright orange in color, the lines suggest a rectangular volume. There are similarities to Judd and Anastasi's work. The material itself is not traditionally associated with sculpture; its simplicity and ordinary nature is particularly characteristic of materials Anastasi uses. The architecture—here the existing corner—is integrated within the context of the work. As with Anastasi's *Jacob's Ladder*, the lines cast linear shadows that are essential to the understanding of the work. And like Judd's open boxes, there is some tension between an implied interior and exterior space. But in fact, there is no real interior; the understanding of the shape and its space shifts in contrast to the shadows and whiteness of the wall. Similarly, *Untitled* (1974) (page 53), a single strand of red yarn stretched tight across a corner suggests a horizontal plane parallel to the floor. But again, there is no real plane; perceptions of inside and outside and above and below collide into an understanding of the continuity of space.

On a much larger scale, *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)* 1970/1999 (pages 26-27 and 44-45) takes on an entire gallery room. Two red lines of yarn begin from opposite ends of the room; one runs diagonally from near the top of the wall, close to the corner, towards the floor on the opposite side of the room near the center and the other runs diagonally from near the bottom of the wall, close to the corner, towards the ceiling on the opposite site of the room near the center, ending directly over the endpoint of the first diagonal. Suggesting invisible planes in the space, they alter the viewer's sense of the scale of the room and the direction by which one proceeds through it. Bright red in color, they have a lively presence that belies the simplicity of their form.

The content of the art in *Wall Ceiling Floor* is reinforced by parallels in the three artists' strategies of making the work. Corresponding to their desire to create art that is fully present and objectively real, they made the process of constructing the work evident too. These are not handmade sculptures that manifest the personal touch of the artist or exude the aura of uniqueness but rather objects or situations made from instructions or "recipes," as Anastasi calls them. While Judd generally instructed man-

ufacturers to make highly crafted objects, the work of Anastasi and Sandback has fairly simple instructions that could be carried out easily by either the artist or others. Anastasi generally incorporates a greater degree of chance in the production of his work, and certain works – such as *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony* – are tied to the dimensions of the artist's or installer's own body. But in the case of both Sandback and Anastasi, the simplicity of the plan often contrasts with the complexity of perceiving and considering the results. In the case of all three artists, moreover, the production process resists individualized gesture and incorporates repetition.

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Works constructed to plans or recipes can, and sometimes must, be remade each time they are exhibited. All three artists often made works in editions, for example, so that more than one example of the art work exists. The concept of the multiple questions the art historical tendency to venerate uniqueness in the art object, while also reflecting the artists' interests in serial forms. Furthermore, because the work of each of these artists often relies on a relationship to its surrounding space, many of the works here were fabricated using fresh materials or were installed in dimensions specifically dependent on the size of the space. The construction of these works is

therefore new and each is made for the time and space within which it exists. The art lacks the patina of age; it is specific to both place and time and exists in the present here and now. Its reality is our reality, at least for the time we are there with it.

TIFFANY | BELL

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A photograph of a gallery installation. Two thin, red diagonal lines of acrylic yarn are stretched across a large, empty room with light-colored walls and a polished wooden floor. One line runs from the upper left towards the lower right, and the other runs from the upper right towards the lower left. They intersect near the center of the room. The ceiling is equipped with several track lights, some of which are on. In the background, a doorway leads to another gallery space where some artwork is visible on the wall.

Artist: Fred Sandback

Title: *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-Part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)*

Date: 1970/1999

Medium: Red acrylic yarn



Essay 2

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The exhibition *Wall Ceiling Floor: Works by William Anastasi, Donald Judd, and Fred Sandback* occupied two large galleries at the Birmingham Museum of Art from January to March 2007, where the high-ceilinged spaces of Edward Larrabee Barnes' elegantly-designed, Modernist museum allowed full-play to some two dozen of these artists' works. As the title suggests, the show was in many respects an allegorical reverie on the volumetric space of architecture. The works occupied this volume with the symbolic implication that the show itself was holding the museum up.

The delicacy and yet wholeness of the installation evidence a memorable conception of space and of the condition of being-in-space. Indeed, this show has a unique pointedness in its dealing with the concept and the experience of space. To a degree it responds to being appreciated as an approach to space not only through objects which exist within space, but even more to a theory of space itself. And yet, this exhibition does not come burdened with a philosophical text which it might be seen as illustrating. The work itself – and the installation of it all – is the text.

As regards sheer numbers, there are sixteen of Anastasi's works, four of Judd's and five of Sandback's. But the size and nature of the various works is such that there is still a sense of balance to the whole. Sandback, whose work specializes perhaps more than any other artist's in the definition of space, dominates the overall sense of a room, whereas Judd's work marks the edges from below or from the walls. To a degree it seems right to say that Anastasi's works occupy a middle space, between Sandback's invocation of the bigness of space and Judd's assertion of its smallness, reciprocating back and forth between the principles they stress while creating variations that refer in both directions. Although these artists resist the limiting definition of a particular "school," it would not be entirely wrong to describe this as a show of Minimalist Art: there are no flare-ups of aesthetic flamboyance; there is no appeal to power, massiveness and grandeur. This is surely not Romantic art, so much as art that strips Romanticism down to a structural core.

Sandback majored in philosophy at Yale and his conceptual focus steadily purified itself by negation, shifting gradually from metaphysics to ontology. Ontology, the science of Being in and by itself rather than of any characteristics or narratives or events

within it, has traditionally been regarded as the highest or most refined level of metaphysics – the level about which there is the least to say. This is what Sandback wanted to embody in physical artworks. “This content,” he once wrote, “because of its nature resists verbal explication.” That was the content he chose in an early and defining act of negation. In terms of then- and previously-existing art, he negated “narrative, pictorial content, material content, [and] signifying content.” In 1967 he began exhibiting works that were constituted simply by lines passing through the exhibition space – at first metal rods or elastic cords, then later acrylic yarn. Lines in space would be stretched from point to point of an architectural interior. The effect was only superficially like drawing. At heart it was more like architecture, or architectural criticism: space was delineated without any element of representation or reference. There was nothing else there but the space – and the lines of stretched yarn were attempts to analyze it, not to prettify it.

Sandback's works are the purest in this show in their abstraction, suggestiveness and elegance. His sculptures can almost be described as slight; all he brings into the exhibition space is a ball of yarn that fits in a pocket. Still, their true scale is larger than

the word slight implies. This is no better evidenced than in Sandback's *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-Part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)*, which is in fact two 1970 sculptures intended by the artist to be installed in relationship to one another (pages 26-27 and 44-45). Occupying a 14' x 60' x 30' gallery volume all to itself, the work is clearly the largest in the show in terms of the space it controls, yet among the smallest in constituent parts: two scarlet-red stretches of yarn, the one descending from a point 4" from the upper corner of one side of the room to a point on the floor 4" from the opposite wall and the other ascending from a point 4" from the lower corner to a point 4" from the edge of the ceiling of that same, opposite wall, which it enters 14' directly above the endpoint of the first diagonal. Double-spanning the entire space, the diagonals both divide and describe it, setting it into a form of contemplative action.

Judd's works in the show are an important complement to Sandback's, expressing themselves in their characteristically mute style but with the counterweight of steel, iron and aluminum making a silent but emphatic statement. And while Sandback's works tend to open up the spaces through which they pass, Judd's anchor them,

either by resting on the floor, as with the two stainless steel forms from 1967 and 1971, both *Untitled* (pages 79 and 63); or being suspended from the wall, as with his 1991 *Extruded Aluminum Piece* (page 71); or being set into the wall, as with his 1992 *No. 32 (Wall Project)* (page 49).

Each of these works bears some relationship to the box form that Judd has characteristically employed – the cubic or rectangular parallelepiped, colloquially, the box. Boxes mean space, its finity, its materiality, but the irrational numbers (such as the square root of 2) hidden in the diagonals that divide the boxes imply a way out of this space, a way to escape from the bonds of materiality. There is finally a hint of the ancient Pythagorean idea that any primary form implies transcendence. Seen this way, Judd was an active explorer of the spatial framework of the room's walls and floors.

For Judd, "fourness" or quaternity is the basic structure of the symmetry which he found to be a type of neutrality. Fourness is traditionally the number and configuration of materiality, the world of perceptual experience, the world signified by the map. Squareness or quaternity is a simple and obvious means to display something, holding nothing back but just showing it all. It also encloses it all and keeps it from

roaming free. The other aspect of the box – its secretiveness – is thus the opposite of display. What is hidden inside that box? And why did someone feel it should be hidden? The box adds no meaning to the thing it either contains or excludes, except that it frames it in the dialectic of outside and inside.

As Judd once said of his work, "It's just there, it doesn't refer to or mean anything." In this sense, Judd's work is like nature, not through imitation of foliate forms but in its quality of simply being there, without explaining itself. Like Judd's work, Sandback's work is not overtly expressive. It holds itself back in a realm of silence and muteness where its implications can only vaguely be felt. Yet his work and Judd's are very different in the paths that they chose to take toward the essence of space. Judd emphasized the floor or the wall, Sandback emphasized the passage from the floor to the wall or the ceiling, or the reverse, like the path that a beam of light might take. In the present show, as noted, the largest statements about space are made by Sandback's several works of stretched yarn. Judd's work lies on the floor, hangs from the wall, or is set into the wall, in forms, series or patterns that, as he says, are symmetrical only because they seek to escape from association and reference. So symmetry is a

way of allowing something to burrow into its own meaning without expressing it in any ordinarily expressive means.

In a 1964 radio interview that also featured Frank Stella, Judd addresses the issue of symmetry with great clarity. At one point Stella says, somewhat challengingly, "Actually, your work is really symmetrical," as if accusing Judd of cleaving to a traditional aesthetic format. Judd replies, "But I don't have any ideas as to symmetry. My things are symmetrical because. . . I wanted to get rid of any compositional effects. . . ."

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This theme develops until Judd states, contrasting European art in general with what he sees as the emerging hegemony of American art, "The qualities of European art so far," he muses, "they're innumerable and complex, but the main way of saying it is that they're linked up with a philosophy – rationalism, rationalistic philosophy." The interviewer asks, "And you mean to say that your work is apart from rationalism?" "Yes," Judd replies, then asserts that his work feels more comfortable with science than with philosophy. Again the conversation develops till Judd states that his work is irrational because "the parts are unrelational." Again the interviewer seeks clarification: "If there's nothing to relate, then you can't be rational about it because it's just there?"

"Yes." So his negation, his relentless stating of the antithesis, becomes a New World nationalism, a belief that America, because its parts are unrelational, gets out of the bind of Old World rationalism.

So far, as I have described it, Wall Ceiling Floor may be considered a Minimalist show. But there is more going on and that is Anastasi's role. Many of his works may seem to be Minimalist. But others clearly qualify as Conceptualist, especially the rule or "recipe" - based ones. In a sense one could describe this show as focusing on the boundary between Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. The two movements arose at more or less the same moment and from closely related emotions and intentions, before being somewhat united by post-Minimalism.

For example, one of Anastasi's 1968 works, *Jacob's Ladder* (page 55) consists of a series of nails lit from a directed source above, with each successive nail driven part-way into the wall at the endpoint of the shadow cast by its neighbor. The shadows together seem to become a long straight diagonal line delineating the intermediate space between floor and ceiling. The line isn't really there - except in the way a shadow or reflection is there. The line exists in the shadow realm where, as the ancient poet

Pindar said, life is a dream of a shadow.

Anastasi's work thus has no characteristic space except the blank two-dimensional surface which is also potential space: potentiality is a liminal realm, a realm whose very being is about changing state; in a sense potentiality is beyond the idea of truth, for as Aristotle said, "Nothing is true of that which is changing." Potentiality is a kind of indefinite being whence things come into actual being. It is a way-station between being and nonbeing. In that sense, Anastasi's work, like Judd's, is not so much abstraction as negation. He is the least of the three to have metaphysical aspirations.

Anastasi is thus the least predictable of the three artists. Clearly one could pick a single transcendent image to characterize either Judd's oeuvre (a box) or Sandback's (a straight line in space); but Anastasi's work does not lend itself to a simple iconicity - unless that icon were the question mark. Whereas Sandback and Judd have signature primary shapes, Anastasi is focused on the blank plane itself. The plane may be constituted of spatial light (e.g., *Dead Heat*) (page 67) or be the wall itself (e.g., *Through*) (page 57). Anastasi respects, in a Duchampian-Cageian tradition, the chance elements in nature; this may be seen in some of the works shown here such

as *Beethoven's Fifth* (page 59), *Issue* (page 65), *Sink* (page 75) and *Touch and Flow*. The latter, for example, consists of a small, box-shaped hole punctured high into the surface of the gallery wall and then filled with petroleum jelly, which eventually flows down the wall by dint of changing temperature and gravity.

The rhythmic placements of works in the show allowed one to perceive numerous relationships among the three artists with the net result that each emerges as more complex in his concerns than might otherwise appear. At times, a musical metaphor was suggested: Judd's restrained, often floor-based objects as a basso continuo articulated by the lyrical trills of Sandback's few stretched cords. Or Judd's sculptures as a sounding box and Sandback's lines as the strings of a lyre. There is a deeply Platonic quality to the idea: sometimes Sandback seems to feel that he has located two pressure points of the cosmos and linked them through his line or line-fragment inserted into the vastness of space; but at other times he seems, like Anastasi, to be marking out a random or chancy location.

The exhibition also let one trace how ideas developed within each artist's work, and how their oeuvres engage in dialogue with one another. In 1961, Judd set a steel

bread pan into a deep, painted panel that he hung on a wall, titling it Relief. Towards the end of his life he revisited the relationship of the box to the wall in the 1992 work in this show, *No. 32: Wall Project* (page 49), which involved carving two box-like, horizontal rectangles out of a wall, then inserting galvanized iron plates vertically against the back of the void. The two sunken rectangles are like mini-boxes, yet upended and now, rather than standing on the floor, receding into the wall. The works thus dig into the plane of the wall, violating its integrity as a plane and creating a new directional force perpendicular to it.

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Judd's Wall Project was installed here on one side of a free-standing wall constructed in the middle of one of the museum galleries, while on the other side of the wall Anastasi re-installed his 1966 work, *Displaced Site* (page 81). The "recipe" for it reads: "Construct a corrugated cardboard box. Remove sufficient matter from a wall to house half of the box horizontally. Fill box; insert." The box contains material from one mass which it then coerces into a different mass that, like Judd's work, then invades the perpendicular plane. Taken together, the two "wall invasions," though initially executed a quarter of a century apart, operate as independent foils to one another.

Sandback, too, invades the planes bounding the space by implication. His sculptures at first glance seem limited to the confines of the volume created within the wall, ceiling and floor of the gallery space, but in fact there is an implication that they extend beyond the gallery into the limitless outdoor space. His lines drawn by yarn disappear into the wall to emerge....where? The expansiveness of his vision of space is perhaps best seen in the delicate placement of the yarns comprising *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-Part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)* (pages 26-27 and 44-45) which do not seem to hit a dead-end but instead to pierce through the wall or the floor at points a few inches from the limits of the gallery wall, continuing on in Sandback's, and our, imaginations. Very different in its use of materials, yet similar in its abstract conception of space, is Anastasi's *Dead Heat*: an 8 foot section of the museum's existing ceiling track lights is angled to point at an identical section of track lights mounted on the wall, emphasizing the usually peripheral lights while also creating a diagonal plane of light (page 67).

At the same time as the works in the show point to elementary facts of nature, they also seem to enshrine the adventitious - the detail that you see but fail to notice, much

as one always sees space without usually looking right at it, or the interior lines of architecture. This is clearly true in the way that Sandback's 1974 works *Untitled*, a 4 foot stretch of red acrylic yarn installed at the intersection of two walls (page 53) and *Untitled (Diagonal Corner Construction)*, a 5½ foot stretch of ochre acrylic yarn emphasize the easily ignored corner junction while also creating imaginary planes above, below and within the triangle thus created. So also Anastasi's *Dead Heat* (page 67) draws attention and brings life to the existing, but generally ignored, ceiling fixtures.

40 |

Judd's works are the most studiously mute – especially the little mounds on the floor that look almost like machine gun bunkers from some tiny war. His works, if we understand them with some sympathy, don't make a statement. They don't express anything or anyone. It would be reasonable enough to say that that lack of point is their point. Anastasi's work, on the other hand, acts out some dialectical interplay with logic, ontology and metaphysics, while Sandback seems to reveal the underpinnings of three-dimensional space as a finely tuned lyre. Another way to conceptualize the show: Sandback's work points out the nervous system of the universe. Judd's occu-

pies it. Anastasi's critiques it.

The values "slight" and "mute" are the opposite of the values of the Romantic era, which was arguably the height of intensity in Western art history, intensity of both scale and expressiveness. Romantic art was supposed to exercise its power on the observer – even to take away his or her ego by overwhelming it with aesthetic/dramatic power, as in the tradition of the sublime. But the works in this show endure on their own – without appeals to an observer – in an unchanging state of ontological simplicity which in one sense needs no observer and posits none. Yet at the same time, because the individual viewer's spatial and visual experience of the works changes as he or she moves through the gallery space, the viewer's presence in many ways complements and completes the artworks, thus enlivening the viewer rather than submerging him.

The reductionism in these three oeuvres seems to hold them together. But it is not the old formalist reduction. It is more an ontological reduction. What's the point of the reduction? I am reminded of the artist Eric Orr saying, "I'm interested in the things you can't see but they're there." Orr would have appreciated the dancelike way the 25

pieces are put together in this three-dimensional chessboard with connections between them only dimly implied, not overtly stated.

The show's purposeful freedom from a philosophical text may be contrarian to current curatorial tastes – but so are the oeuvres of these three great individualistic artists. In each case there has been a long-held intractability. Now they're brought up out of the framework of Modernism, Late Modernism, and post-Modernism, expressing the muteness of nature (It doesn't explain itself! It just is.) One could say that nature's refusal to explain itself is itself a message, and that this show is formed around that message. The experience of *Wall Ceiling Floor* is thus a negative print of what a show is allegedly "supposed" to be. Not aestheticized, it is not even trying. Yet there is not a boring moment. Every scrap of it sizzles with an electrical energy that comes from conscious immersion in the realm of negation.

42

THOMAS | MCEVILLE



Artist: Fred Sandback

Title: *Untitled (The First of Sixteen Two-Part Variations of Two Diagonal Lines)*

Date: 1970/1999

Medium: Red acrylic yarn



46 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Reading a Line on a Wall*

Date: 1967

Medium: Adhesive letters

READING A LINE ON A WALL

48

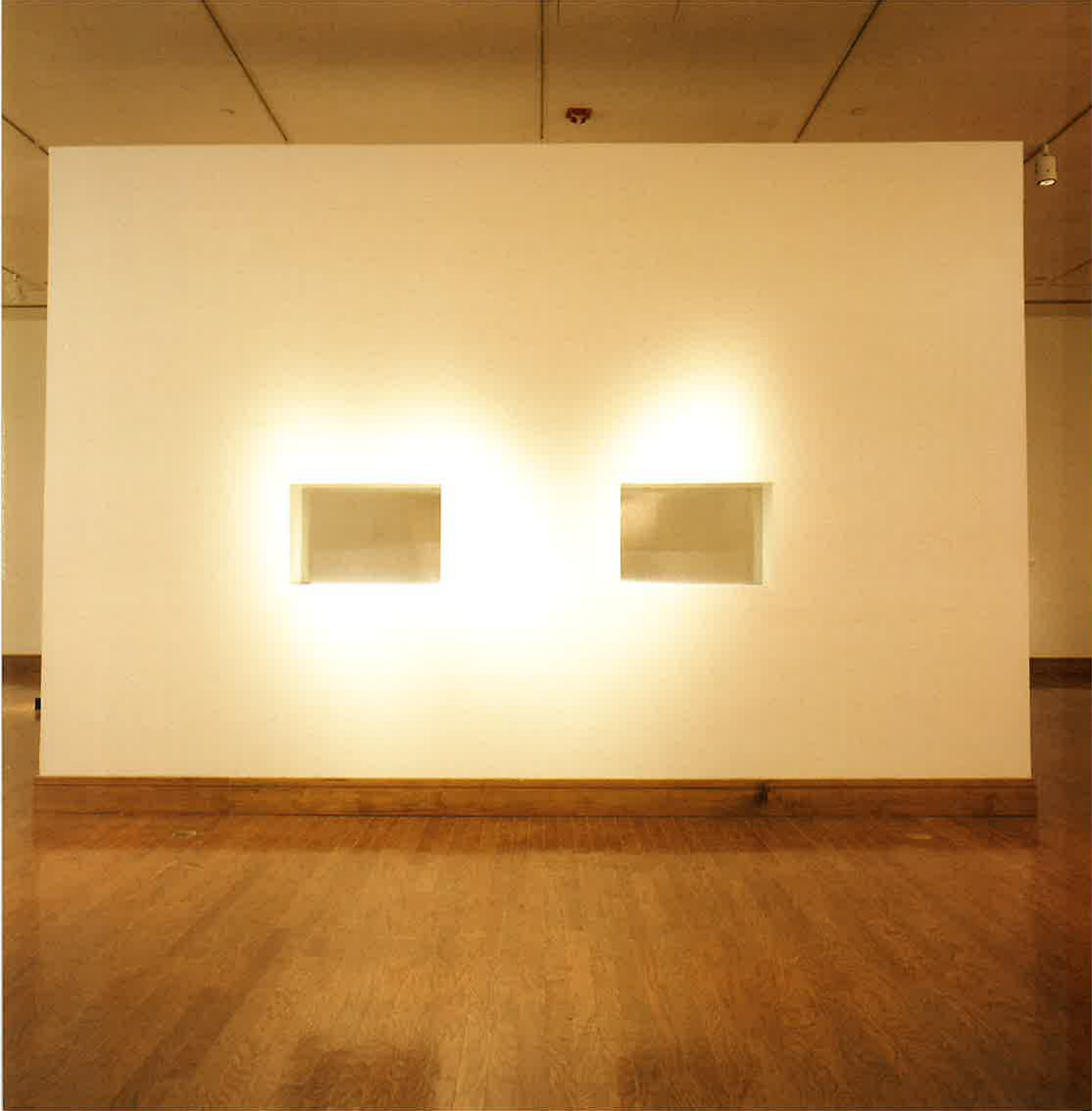


Artist: Donald Judd

Title: *No. 32 (Wall Project)*

Date: 1992

Medium: Galvanized iron plates



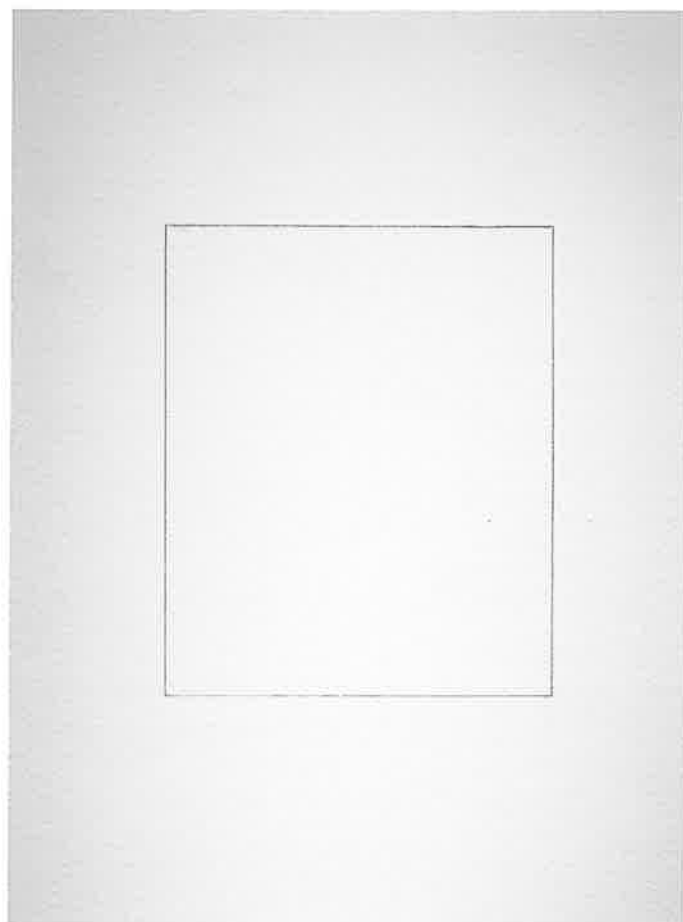
50 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Incision*

Date: 1966

Medium: Incised wallboard



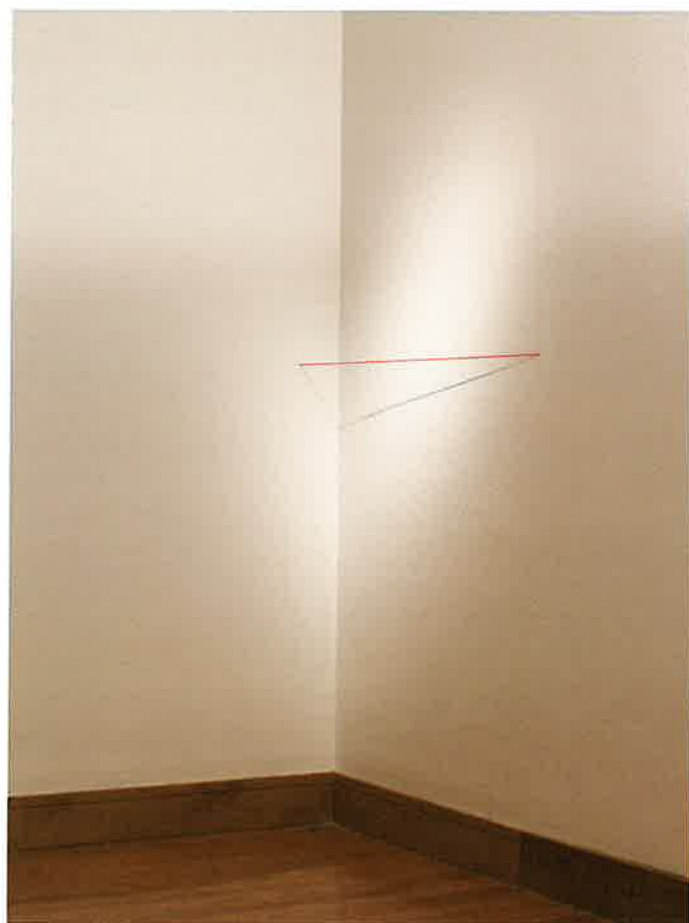
52 |

Artist: Fred Sandback

Title: *Untitled*

Date: 1974

Medium: Red acrylic yarn



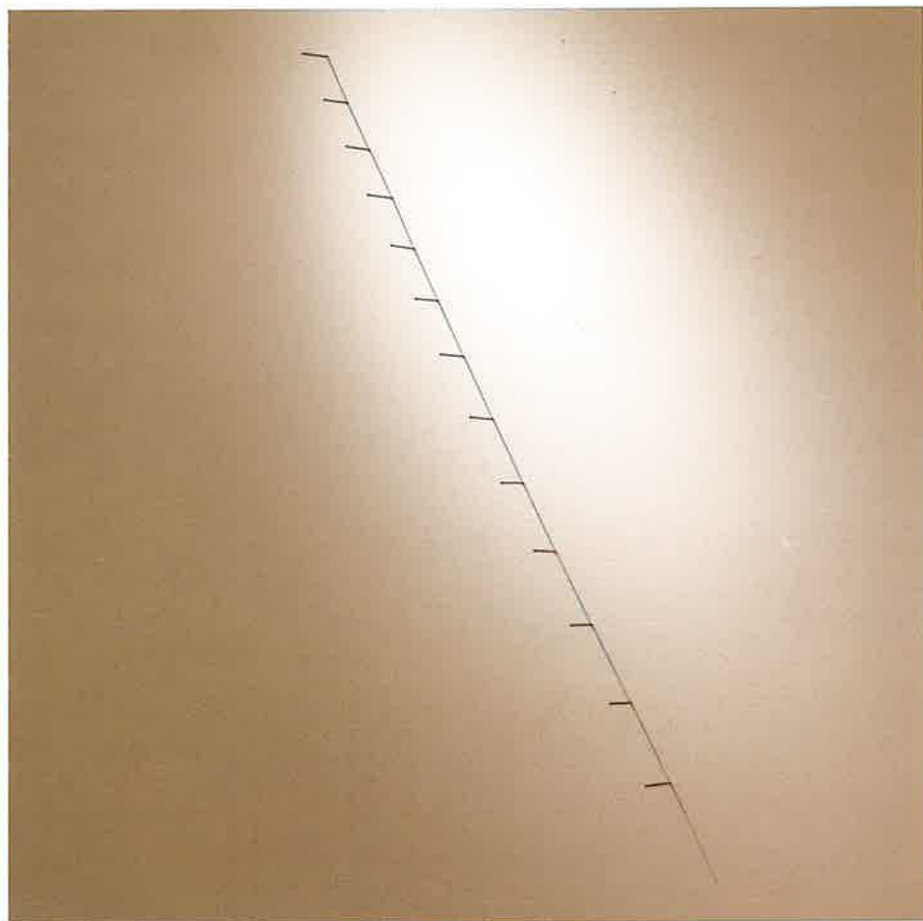
54 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Jacob's Ladder*

Date: 1968

Medium: Six penny nails



56

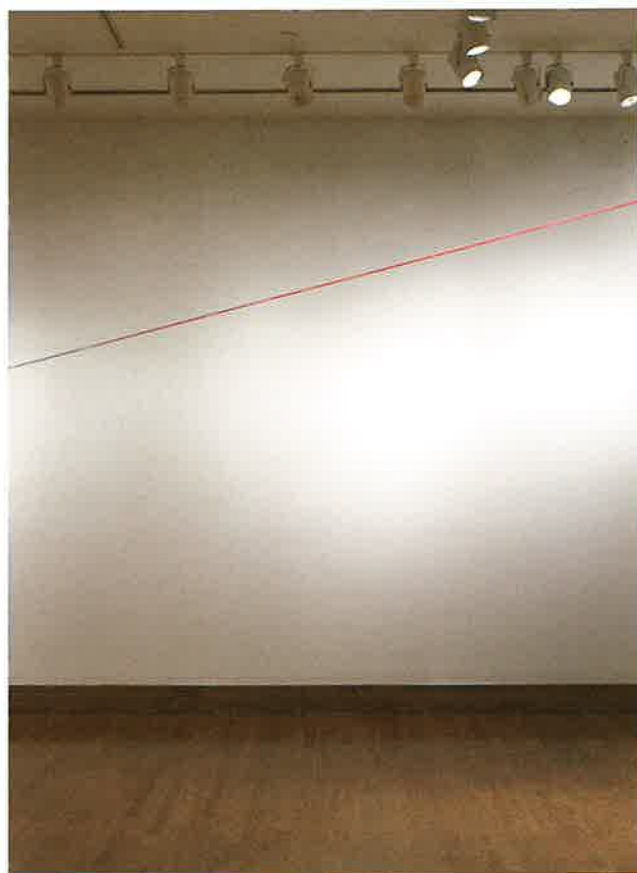


Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Through*

Date: 1966

Medium: Digital print



58



Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Beethoven's Fifth Symphony*

Date: 1965

Medium: Video-taped performance of Beethoven's Symphony in C Minor,
op. 67, nails



60 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *His Brush with Posterity*

Date: 1962

Medium: Acrylic on vinyl, wood frame



62 |

Artist: Donald Judd

Title: *Untitled*

Date: 1971

Medium: Stainless steel and brown Plexiglas



64 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Issue*

Date: 1966

Medium: Wallboard



66 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Dead Heat*

Date: 1966

Medium: Track lights



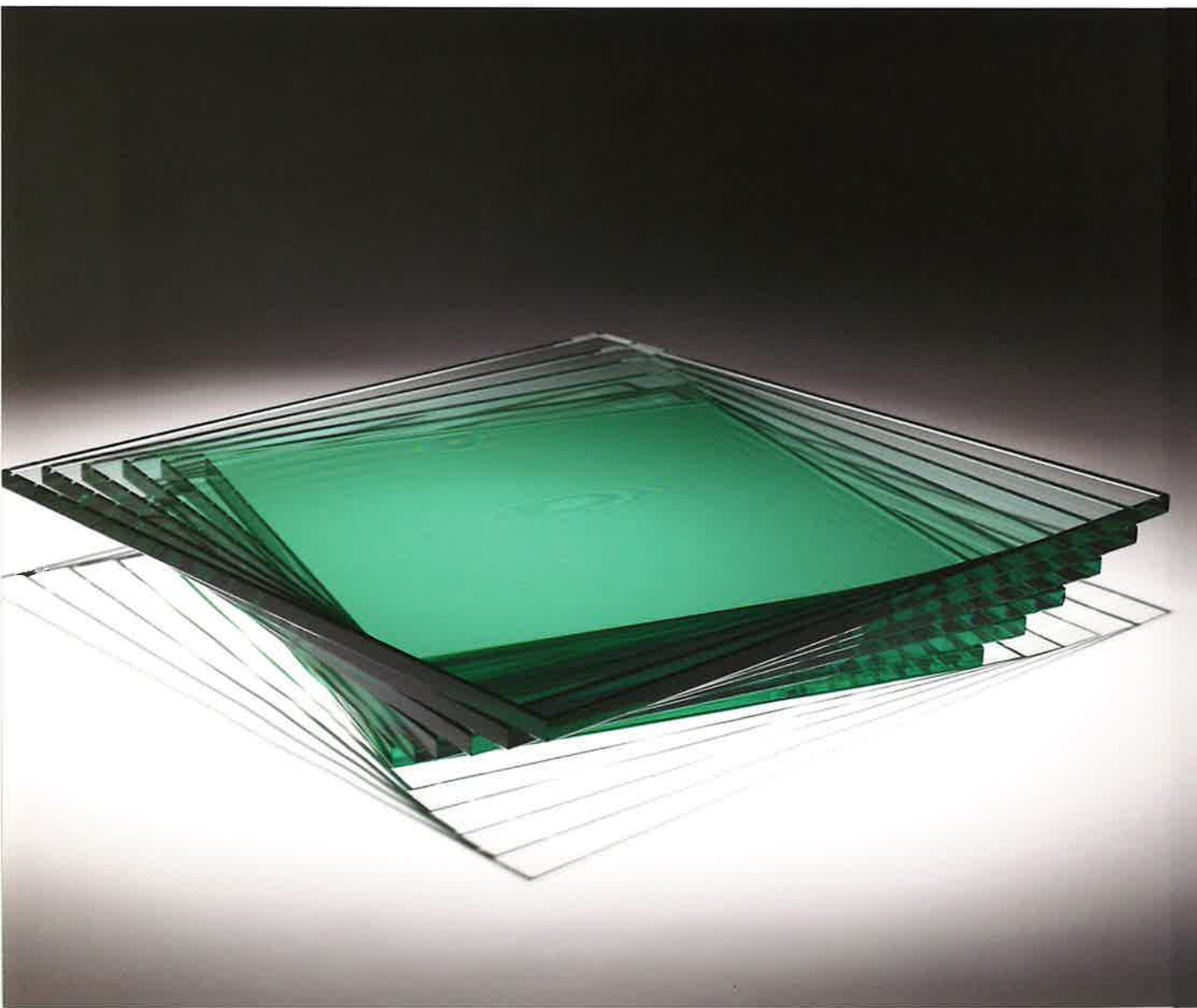
68 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *The Shelf Well*

Date: 1967

Medium: Tempered glass



70 |

Artist: Donald Judd

Title: *Extruded Aluminum Piece*

Date: 1991

Medium: Extruded aluminum, anodized in cobalt blue



72 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *whowasit youwasit propped (formerly, Untitled)*

Date: 1965

Medium: Pine beam



74 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Sink*

Date: 1963

Medium: Hot-rolled steel plate



76 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *What Was Real in the World*

Date: 1964

Medium: Concrete bricks



78 |

Artist: Donald Judd

Title: *Untitled (Ten from Leo Castelli)*

Date: 1967

Medium: Folded stainless steel



80 |

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *Displaced Site*

Date: 1966

Medium: Corrugated cardboard, wallboard



82

Artist: William Anastasi

Title: *...and the bush was not consumed*

Date: 1964

Medium: Chain and scaffold



