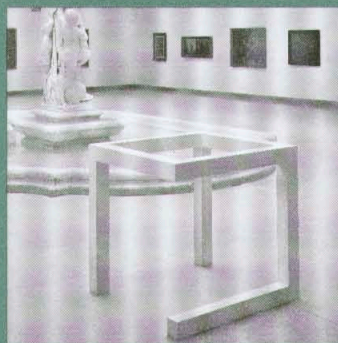
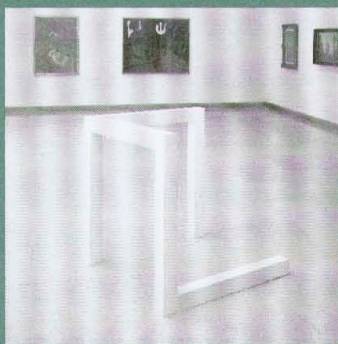


MATRIX 143/SOL LEWITT:



INCOMPLETE OPEN CUBES

January 26 – April 29, 2001
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art
Hartford, Connecticut

INTRODUCTION

The cube is one of the most familiar geometric forms. Boxes of all sizes, crystals, and many kinds of industrially manufactured objects reflect its simple design. It is a form that has become so familiar and utilitarian that we often look past it to focus on what might be in it, or on it, or perhaps we never notice it at all. But in the 1960s, Sol LeWitt began to investigate the form of the cube, which has become an essential element in his artistic language. LeWitt's surprisingly varied use of the cube continues today, but in 1973 he began – quite literally – to take the cube apart. It all started with an idea: if you take an open cube and systematically subtract its parts, how many variations are created? For many months, LeWitt painstakingly worked through this idea, embarking on a demanding perceptual, intellectual, and visual journey.

IF YOU TAKE AN OPEN

The result of this process is a series of multifaceted works of art. Each *Incomplete Open Cube* is simultaneously a beautiful independent work of art and a visual embodiment of LeWitt's artistic process. As a series, they represent LeWitt's exhaustive exploration – which is both logical and playful – of a single theme, yielding surprising and delightful results.

EXPLORE THE MUSEUM

Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes, the full title of the work, is perhaps LeWitt's most expansive serial project. It is fitting, then, that this exhibition expands to fill a variety of different galleries at the Wadsworth Atheneum. You are invited to explore the museum, discovering LeWitt's distinctive structures in conversation with the art and architecture of earlier periods. These juxtapositions serve not only to underscore the radical nature of LeWitt's work, but also initiate dialogues not bound by the conventional categories of art history and the museum. In order to grasp the origins, execution, and scope of the total project, visit the MATRIX gallery (1st floor, Avery building), where both LeWitt's preparatory drawings and the completed series can be seen. Consult the map to locate the 30 large-scale *Incomplete Open Cubes* that have been installed throughout the museum.

CUBE AND
SYSTEM

CONCEPTUAL ART

"In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes the machine that makes the art." Sol LeWitt, 1967

LeWitt, along with a number of other radical artists of his generation, took up the challenge of reinventing art at a moment when its traditional forms appeared to have been exhausted. At the beginning of the 1960s, many artists felt that the creation of art had come to stress the appearance of the final product over its content. LeWitt attempted to redress this imbalance by shifting the focus back to the idea generating the tangible work. His creative process used form as a vehicle – a way to make an idea visible.

Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes represents this radical shift in art making and is an example of how LeWitt created new forms through his conceptualist method. The work breaks with traditional approaches to artistic composition, whereby an artist relies primarily on the expression of his or her subjective judgment or intuition. LeWitt instead began by formulating an objective system or "machine" that, once put into operation, generates the work of art. The result is a work of art created by objective means and based on a single idea: *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*.

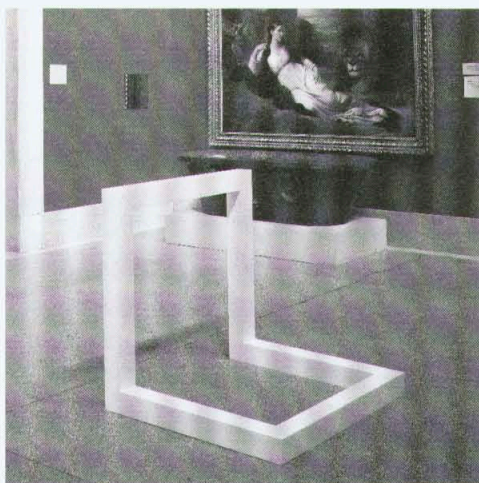
VA
HOW MANY

THEMATICALLY SUBTRACT ITS PARTS



Incomplete Open Cube 7/10, 1974
Painted aluminum
40 x 40 x 40"
Private Collection

Incomplete Open Cube 6/9, 1974
Painted aluminum
40 x 40 x 40"
The LeWitt Collection,
Chester, Connecticut



VARIATIONS ARE CREATED?

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

"If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest."

Sol LeWitt, 1967

The "open cube" that LeWitt began working with in the 1960s is the skeletal structure of the cube: twelve equal linear elements connected at eight corners. The *Incomplete Open Cubes* are all the variations of this form in which the linear elements have been sequentially removed. The fewest number of elements that implies a cube is three; eleven elements are the maximum before the cube is complete. No configuration of elements is repeated in the series. LeWitt first attempted to figure out all the variations on paper. He developed permutational systems where each element was labelled alphabetically and later numerically, but neither approach solved the problem conclusively. He eventually made models for each variation and rotated them to ensure none were repeated. The variety of media in this exhibition, including working drawings, mechanical drawings, an artist's book, 2 5/8-inch painted wood variations, and the 40-inch aluminum variations are different ways of explaining the process and solutions LeWitt identified.

SERIALITY

"...a way of creating art that did not rely on the whim of the moment but on consistently thought out processes that gave results that were interesting and exciting."

Sol LeWitt, 1984

Artists have often worked in series: think of Claude Monet's haystacks, painted at different times of the day and year, or Andy Warhol's varieties of soup cans. LeWitt's use of seriality is different, however, as it is deployed as an internal logic that will produce, once its parameters are set, a precisely incremental series of variations. Each variation has thus been determined objectively, and the series could not have been arrived at solely through an act of subjective imagination.

VARIATION

"When I finally figured it out, I wanted to show it so it explains itself the best way. The book was one way, the three-dimensional structures were another, and the schematic drawings were another." *Sol LeWitt, 2000*

The full title of LeWitt's serial work, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, suggests an analogy to music where "theme and variations" is a classical compositional technique. Similarly, LeWitt's basic theme is stated and then elaborated in myriad ways that are at once surprising and harmonious. The incremental variation from one cube to another is subtle, yet the resulting forms are disparate in character. In the MATRIX gallery, observe all 122 variations grouped together by their number of elements. The progression initially appears logical and sequential, but on closer examination, it becomes clear that no one system determines the placement of the incomplete cubes within each numerical grouping. Moreover, the shifts in scale and media provide another kind of variation, so that the "same" forms appear very different as drawings, photographs, or structures. Although the 122 variations were arrived at objectively, their presentation introduces a number of subjective elements, from the choice of scale, medium, and color to the placement of the works together. Through the conceptual process and the variations it produces, LeWitt has recompllicated the basic form of the cube.

LEWITT AND THE WADSWORTH ATHENEUM

Sol LeWitt has a special relationship to the Wadsworth Atheneum and to Connecticut. He was born in Hartford and continues to live and work in central Connecticut and in Spoleto, Italy. As a child, he attended art classes at the Wadsworth Atheneum. The museum currently has three LeWitt wall drawings on view on the first floor: in the Helen and Harry Gray Court; between the Hartford Courant Room and the rotunda; and off Avery Court. Selected works of art from The LeWitt Collection, which include many by contemporary artists, may currently be seen in the exhibition *SNAP! Photography from the Collections* in the Austin galleries (3rd floor, Wadsworth Building). The quotes in this brochure are taken from the exhibition catalog, *Sol LeWitt: Incomplete Open Cubes*, edited by Nicholas Baume (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art and The MIT Press), 116 pages with 40 color images and 70 black-and-white images; \$22.95. Available in The Museum Shop at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Call (860) 278-2670, ext. 3052.

Text: Dana Engstrom DeLoach, Assistant Curator of Public Programs
with Nicholas Baume, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art

Photographs: John Groo

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Images on the cover:

Top: *Incomplete Open Cube 6/19*, 1974. Painted aluminum, 40 x 40 x 40"
The LeWitt Collection, Chester, Connecticut

Middle: *Incomplete Open Cube 6/18*, 1974. Painted aluminum, 40 x 40 x 40"
The LeWitt Collection, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford

Bottom: *Incomplete Open Cube 8/25*, 1974. Painted aluminum, 40 x 40 x 40"
The LeWitt Collection, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford

RELATED PROGRAMS

Sunday Afternoon Lecture Series

"Art and Ideas: Conversations about Conceptual Art"

2 p.m., The Museum Theater

February 25 — Nicholas Baume

Curator Nicholas Baume discusses the genesis of the LeWitt exhibition and introduces its most important themes.

March 18 — John Baldessari

Celebrated conceptual artist John Baldessari created a video entitled "Baldessari Sings LeWitt" in 1973 and exhibited in MATRIX in 1977.

March 25 — Steve Reich

Steve Reich is a groundbreaking composer whose work of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates a radical approach to the process of music making.

Tuesday Noontime Gallery Talks

These informal noontime talks, which highlight the themes and individual works of art in the exhibition, take place in the galleries and last approximately 50 minutes. They begin at the Information Desk in The Helen and Harry Gray Court.

February 6

"Strange Harmony of Contrasts: *Incomplete Open Cubes*"

Nicholas Baume, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art

April 24

"The Complete Incomplete Open Cubes"

Dana Engstrom DeLoach, Assistant Curator of Public Programs

Family Program

Saturday, January 27

"Be Square! Or Get Cubed!"

for children ages 8 - 10 with an adult chaperone

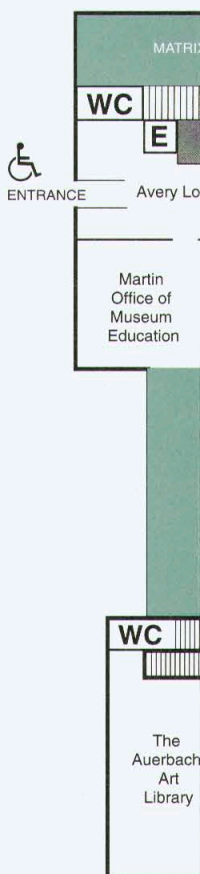
10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Fee (child & adult): \$15 members, \$16 nonmembers





Bring a bag lunch; drinks will be provided.

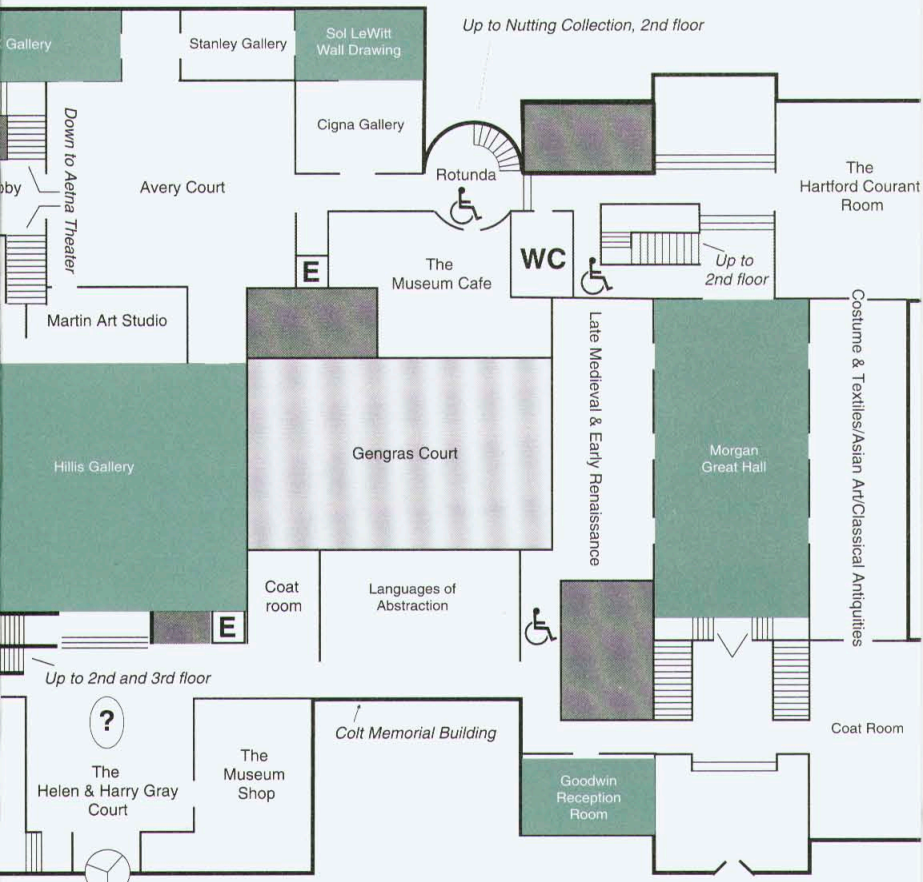
For reservations, call Kendra Dowd at (860) 278-2670, ext. 3052.

Programs subject to change. Please call Dana DeLoach at (860) 278-2670, ext. 3121, for confirmation.



Legend

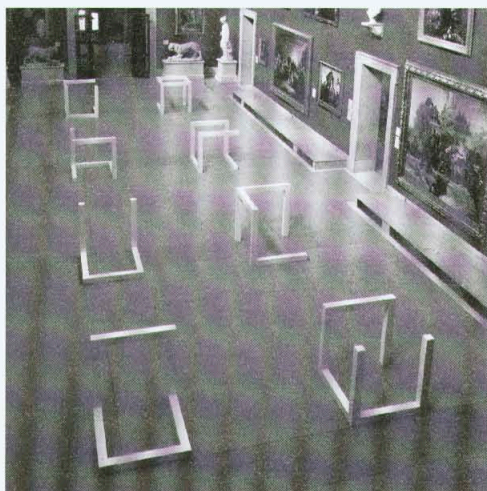
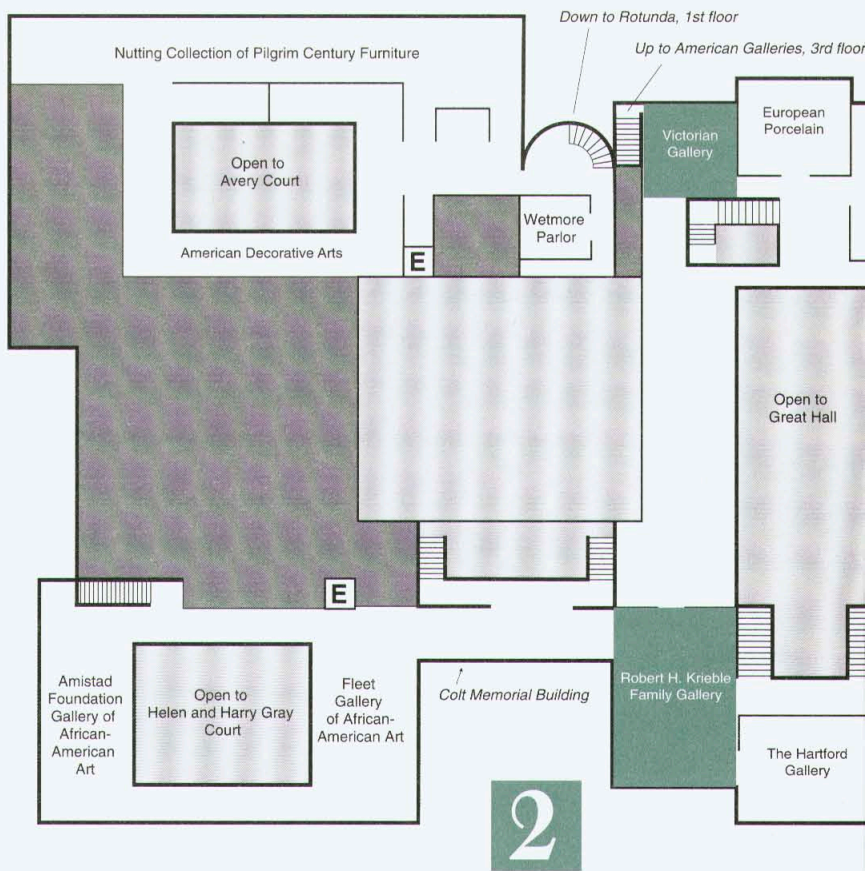
- E** Elevator
- ?** Information
-  Stairs
-  Open space
- WC** Restroom
-  Closed to the public
-  Sol Lewitt Exhibition



MAIN STREET ENTRANCE

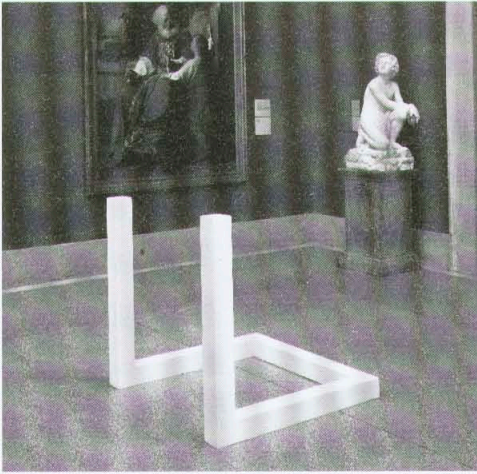
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MORGAN ENTRANCE



Sol LeWitt: Incomplete Open Cubes
 Painted aluminum
 40 x 40 x 40"
 Installation, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum

Kohn
Gallery



Incomplete Open Cube 5/2, 1974
Painted aluminum
40 x 40 x 40"
The LeWitt Collection,
Chester, Connecticut

