Master Drawings

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"Like a musical score": Variability and Multiplicity in Sol LeWitt's 1970s Wall Drawings

VERONICA ROBERTS

I think of them [wall drawings] *like a musical score that can be redone by any or some people. I like the idea that the same work can exist in two or more places at the same time.* Sol LeWitt[1]

Frequently pressed to explain his reliance on the art students and other draftsmen who helped execute his work, Sol LeWitt (1928–2007) often likened his role as an artist to that of a composer and his wall drawings to musical scores.[2] Just as a composer creates music for others to play, LeWitt generated the ideas for his wall drawings, but repeatedly relinquished their execution to others. The analogy illuminates more than merely pragmatic realities: it highlights the fundamental variability of LeWitt's wall drawings. Just as no two performances of a musical composition can ever be the same, no two iterations of the same wall drawing will ever look exactly identical. As LeWitt observed in "Doing Wall Drawings," a short essay that he wrote in 1971, "Each person draws a line differently and each person understands words differently.... Even if the same draftsman followed the same plan twice, there would be two different works of art. No one can do the same thing twice."[3]

LeWitt's embrace of variability and multiplicity was not immediate, however; they became critical elements in his practice only around 1970, two years after he made his first wall drawing at the Paula Cooper Gallery in Soho. During the 1970s, LeWitt increasingly began to take advantage of the collaborative nature of his process by creating instructions that entrusted critical decisions to draftsmen (or drafters, as he later preferred to call them), ushering in a roughly decade-long period in which variability opened his conceptual approach in unexpected and exciting ways.

A close study of the wall drawings LeWitt conceived in the early 1970s for Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax, Canada, and the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, California, demonstrates the growing importance of variability and multiplicity in his work. New discoveries made about the wall drawings at Oberlin and NSCAD in particular deepen and complicate our understanding of this stimulating trajectory. Chosen among innumerable other possible examples because they represent early, pivotal works where LeWitt solicited drafter input, these case studies amplify the significance of variability and multiplicity in LeWitt's practice in ways that previous scholarship on the artist has acknowledged, but never gone on to explore in depth.

Variability is an inevitable component in all of the artist's wall drawings due to the simple fact that different drafters and walls are used for every installation. However, when LeWitt introduced his first wall drawing in October of 1968, variability was a latent aspect of its logic, but not yet

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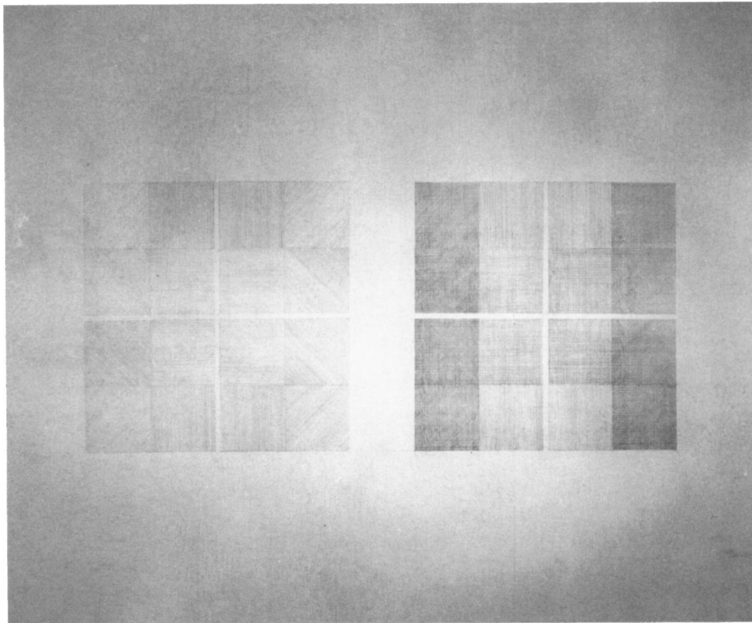

Figure 1

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #1, Drawing Series II 14 (A&B), October 1968

First installation: Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

First drawn by: Sol LeWitt

San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

as crucial as it was to become. Drawn in pencil by the artist himself, the first wall drawing was part of Paula Cooper's inaugural exhibition—a group show held as a benefit to end the Vietnam War, curated by Robert Huot (b. 1935), Ron Wolin, and Lucy Lippard (b. 1937), an art critic and close personal friend of LeWitt's.[4] *Wall Drawing #1* (Fig. 1)[5] consists of two large squares, subdivided into smaller squares, each filled with parallel, straight lines in what LeWitt referred to as the "four absolute directions"—horizontal, vertical, and the two diagonals. The small squares of the left quadrant are each filled with a line in a single direction while those on the right are filled with all two-part combinations in a pattern simple enough for a precocious middle-school student to grasp. Whether drawn by LeWitt or others, the straightforward logic governing the work leaves little room for interpretation. No two versions of *Wall Drawing #1* will ever be exactly identical, but the distinguishing characteristics between them will be subtle: the surface of the wall may range anywhere between smooth to orange peel-like in texture, the dimensions of the supporting wall may fluctuate, and lines may be applied slightly lighter or darker from one time to the next.

Although LeWitt's first wall drawing was modest in size, it was radical in nature. Unlike other works in the show, LeWitt's contribution was not an object to be installed—there was no canvas support, no nails or hammer required to secure the work into place. Moreover, once the ten-day show closed, LeWitt requested that it be painted over. LeWitt later acknowledged the temporary lifespan of his work with characteristic dry humor, "The wall drawing is a permanent installation, until destroyed."[6]

Over time, LeWitt developed a system for how the wall drawings would be exhibited and owned. Unlike a conventional art object that is put into storage when not on view, his wall drawings are made anew for each temporary installation. He also determined that although a wall drawing must be owned by a single collector or institution, multiple iterations of a single wall drawing may be on view simultaneously in different exhibitions.[7] Just as on any given day Gustav Mahler's *Symphony Number 5* may be played in concert houses around the world, the same LeWitt wall drawing is often on view at numerous museums throughout the country.[8] A November 1977 memo from Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) curator Stephanie Barron to her colleagues reveals how unorthodox this arrangement was initially perceived to be:

In November, we received a request from the UCSB Museum to loan the Sol LeWitt wall drawing [i.e., Wall Drawing #295; Fig. 2].[9] *I was unsure of how to proceed with this loan, since, as a conceptual work of art, we do not own a transportable drawing, only the plans and documentation to have this work installed at LACMA. I telephoned Alicia Legg, the curator at MOMA in New York who is preparing a major LeWitt show for February 1977 for advice.*

She said she was writing me at that moment to request the loan of our drawing for this show, the dates of which coincide with the Santa Barbara show.

After consultation with LeWitt, the following was decided: The drawing is a conceptual work of art and by definition can exist in multiple examples. It can be on loan simultaneously to New York and Santa Barbara while still on view in Los Angeles.[10]

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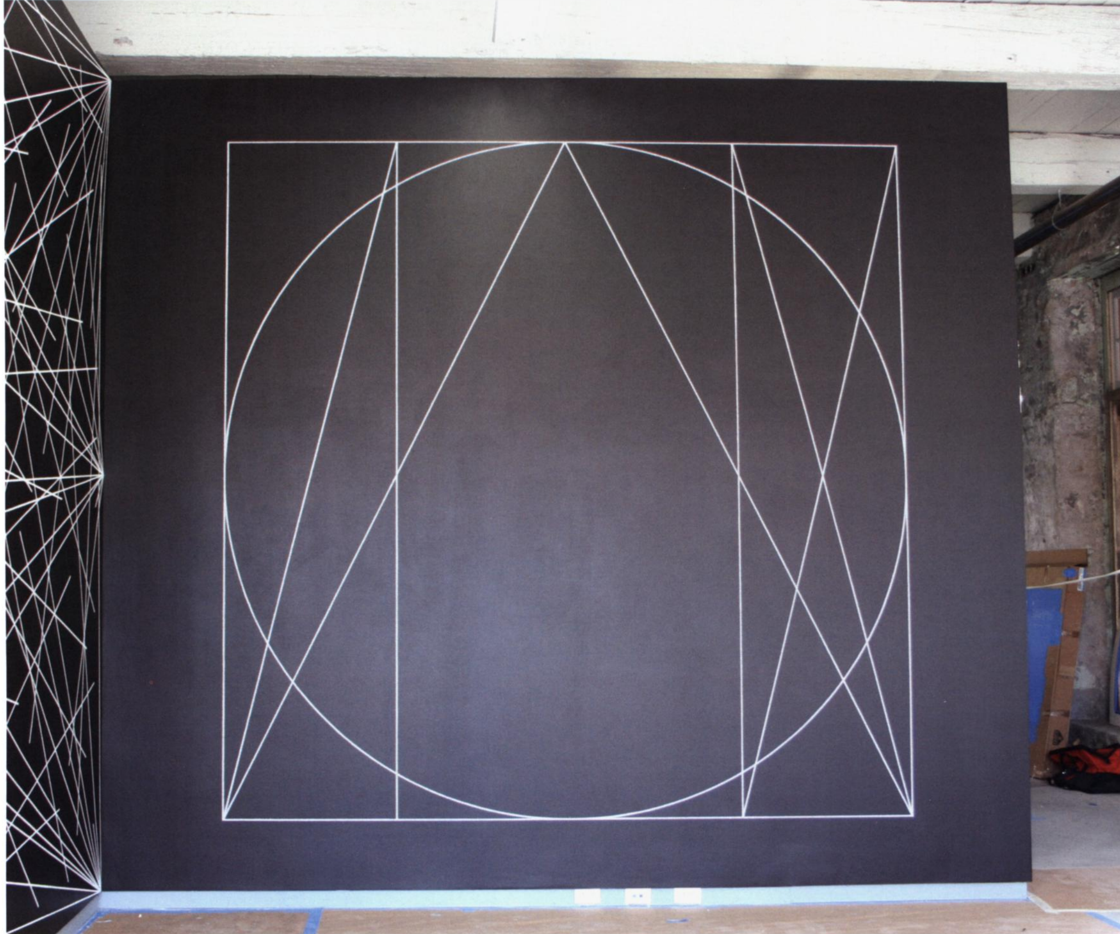

Figure 2

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #295, October 1976

First installation: Claire Cooper Gallery, Los Angeles

First drawn by: Chris D'Arcangelo and Sol LeWitt

Installation view: North Adams, Massachusetts, MASS MoCA

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

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LeWitt's own writings also track his growing penchant for exploring variability and multiplicity. In his influential 1967 essay, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," published in the pages of *Artforum,* LeWitt outlined his conceptual approach to making art:

In conceptual art, the idea or concept is the most important part 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.[11]

In this manifesto-like statement, often cited as a definition for conceptual art, LeWitt offered new ways to think about and understand art—proposing that the concepts behind works of art could be more important than the objects they yielded. In so doing, he repudiated the notion of art as a precious object, whose value is commensurate with the skill of the hand that produced it. By arguing that "the idea becomes the machine that makes the art," he broke from the exalted tradition of form as a carrier of emotional, spiritual, or personal expression. As he explained, "the fewer decisions made in the course of completing the work, the better. This eliminates the arbitrary, the capricious, and the subjective as much as possible."[12]

LeWitt wrote "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" before he made his first wall drawing—an important caveat to keep in mind. Later writings, such as the following passage from a 1971 interview with Sarah Kent, reveal the artist's evolving perspective:

Since I use other people, I want them to contribute. The plan I give them is phrased so that they can use their own ideas as much as possible. I try to make the plan specific enough so that it comes out more or less as I want, but general enough so they have freedom to interpret.

It's as though I were writing a piece of music for somebody to play on the piano—there's plenty of opportunity to improvise within the limits.[13]

While concepts remained of paramount importance throughout his career, in the wall drawings LeWitt conceived in the 1970s, in particular, he moved away from the notion of execution as a "perfunctory affair." Instead, he actively invited drafters to make subjective decisions that, albeit within clearly delimited parameters, shaped the visual appearance of the work. While the 1968 and 1969 wall drawings were like musical recordings, those produced in the 1970s were more like unpredictable live performances. The shift is evident even in the titles LeWitt used. Compare *Wall Drawing #1: Drawing Series II 14 (A&B)* from 1968 to the title of a wall drawing made for the Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Information* in June 1970: *Wall Drawing #48: Within four adjacent squares, each 4' x 4', four draftsmen are employed at $4.00 per hour for four hours a day and for four days to draw straight lines four inches long randomly, using four different colored pencils. Each drafter uses the same color throughout the four-day period, working on a different square each day.*[14] Whereas the earliest wall drawings bear descriptive names, throughout the 1970s, the titles double as instructions for making the work, acknowledging the changing nature of the wall drawing as a space for open exchange. If the title began as a kind of license plate—a utilitarian method of identification—during the 1970s, it began to serve more as an instruction manual.[15] Wall drawings conceived for Oberlin College, NSCAD, and CalArts participate in this key juncture in LeWitt's practice, when the artist began to offer drafters—and art students especially—a chance, as he put it, "to improvise within the limits."

In early 1970, Allen Memorial Art Museum curator Athena Tacha sent invitations to approximately seventy conceptual artists to participate in her exhibition *Art in the Mind.*[16] She was inspired by the forward-thinking exhibitions of conceptual art curated by Seth Siegelaub (b. 1941) and Lucy Lippard.[17] Like many of Seigelaub's and Lippard's early conceptual art exhibitions, *Art in the Mind* was an "exhibition" in quotes only, realized through a catalogue filled with ideas and proposals that were, by and large, deliberately unrealizable—and in many cases, delightfully farfetched. John Baldessari (b. 1931) proposed *Fifteen Musical*

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Projects, including "One hundred people say UMBRELLA" and "Musicians dress like various birds, use assorted bird whistles, sit in trees. An outdoor composition." Artist and Macalester College art professor Don Celender (1931–2005) contributed a letter he sent to General Motors proposing that they "initiate a new line of Pop Art automobiles by stamping out the bodies in the shape of current celebrities—Ralph Nader for the first 100,000, and General Charles de Gaulle for the second 500,000."[18] GM's polite reply also appears in the catalogue, thanking Celender for his interest but pointing out that while both men were over 6 feet tall, "the shortest U.S.-made car is...considerably longer and wider than either of the two men."[19]

A local newspaper dubbed the exhibition, "The Show That Never Was!"[20] In fact, not a single work of art was realized within the walls of the museum itself. Rather, proposals for works were presented as reproductions in the catalogue for the show and were modestly exhibited in a row in an Art Department hallway.[21] Of the sixty or so works "included" in the exhibition, LeWitt's wall drawing was one of the few actually carried out, made by two students in a hallway corridor in the basement of the studio art building, adjacent to, but not within, the museum itself. While the vast majority of conceptual art works presented in *Art in the Mind* adhere to Lawrence Weiner's famous 1968 maxim that "the piece need not be built," LeWitt's instructions for wall drawings never serve merely as hypothetical constructs. "In my work there is a double focus: the idea and the result of the idea are symbiotic and impossible to extract from one another," the artist later commented. "I never thought that if the thing existed only as an idea it was complete. I had the idea that the cycle had to be complete to be a work of art."[22] The libretto, in other words, is not meant to be locked forever in a drawer.

The *Art in the Mind* catalogue reproduces LeWitt's handwritten instructions for *Wall Drawing #35.* The first half of the instructions outline the visual program for the work and stipulate that straight lines be drawn on a wall using a hard pencil, with each line drawn at a right angle to the one preceding it. Although almost ludicrously simple in concept, it is impossible to visualize how this work will appear: where the first line is drawn, the total number of lines drawn, and their direction is left entirely to the drafter's discretion. But if the first half of the instructions open the door to numerous possibilities, the second half of the instructions kicks the door down: "These instructions should be given to at least two draftsmen, each doing the project on a different wall, and not seeing any other result before completing his own."[23] While previous publications have omitted this crucial bit of instructions, two art students did, in fact, execute this work on separate walls outside the studio art rooms (Fig. 3); as Tacha recently relayed to me, the two halves of the wall drawing wound up looking different from each other.[24] Variability and multiplicity are not only inevitable outcomes of this work, but its very premise. The fact that LeWitt specifies that the work be done by *at least* two draftsmen expands the possibilities even further, making it hypothetically possible that the entire student body render the wall drawing simultaneously. In other words, the minimum requirement is a duet, but the song may also be played by a full orchestra.

In spite of the interesting philosophical ques-

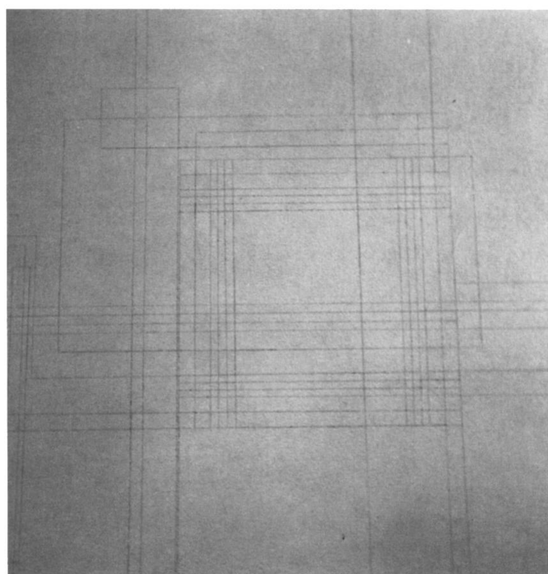

Figure 3

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #35, February 1970 (detail)

First installation: Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio

First drawn by: Unknown

Paris, Private Collection (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

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tions that LeWitt's wall drawing raised about what art can be, and how it can be made, very few of the Oberlin alumni I have interviewed recall the wall drawing or exhibition well. Most of the works were realized solely through the catalogue and the exhibition was overshadowed by dramatic events that year—the nearby Kent State shootings on 4 May 1970 that ended the school year abruptly, and the appearance of two Oberlin coeds on the cover of *Life* magazine's November issue in an article about the college being the first in the nation to integrate male and female students in dormitory housing.[25] While overlooked and incorrectly documented, *Wall Drawing #35* was, in many respects, a forward-thinking art work made for an avant-garde exhibition at a progressive school during a revolutionary time.

In 1970, as Oberlin College made headlines for its liberal-minded policies, NSCAD was on its way to securing a reputation as "the contemporary art world's most improbable intellectual hot spot."[26] Thanks to a triumvirate of progressive art educators—college president Garry Neill Kennedy (b. 1935) and faculty members Gerald Ferguson (1937–2009) and David Askevold (1940–2008)—Halifax became an unlikely hotbed of conceptual art. In 1971, John Baldessari famously proposed that students write *I will not make any more boring art* on the walls of the college's art gallery. Dan Graham (b. 1942) made his first film at NSCAD, Lucy Lippard and Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) lectured there, and scores of other significant contemporary art projects occurred on or near its modest maritime campus.[27]

LeWitt engaged repeatedly with the school's students and faculty over a period of several years: among his most notable projects at NSCAD are a wall drawing he devised for students at the school in 1970 and a suite of ten lithographs he made in 1971 with the school's fledgling Lithography Workshop.[28] If the wall drawings made in 1968 and 1969 initially suggested a straightforward call and response of conceptualization followed by execution, as contemporaneous Oberlin and NSCAD wall drawings reveal, in 1970, the rhythm suddenly shifted to a three-step beat—conceptualization by the artist, interpretation by the drafter(s), and execution by the drafter(s). The important role that this middle phase of interpretation begins to play in LeWitt's work of the 1970s is demonstrated in particularly interesting ways by LeWitt's NSCAD projects. As they also reveal, this middle phase of interpretation is not as loose as free-form jazz, but more akin to a *cadenza*, a passage of music toward the end of a concerto where a soloist plays alone, in a section either improvised or scripted by the composer.

At the invitation of Garry Neill Kennedy, LeWitt first visited the Halifax campus in March 1970, to deliver a talk to Kennedy's "Art Now" class, open to both students and the general public. According to former student Richards Jarden (b. 1947), during the artist's brief visit, he left behind instructions for two wall drawings for students to volunteer to make after his departure.[29] The instructions for *Wall Drawing #32* particularly tempted Jarden, and he quickly invited Professor Gerald (known by everyone as "Gerry" or "Jerry") Ferguson to help, aware of Ferguson's great affinity for conceptual art.[30] In similar fashion to Oberlin's *Wall Drawing #35* (and realized at roughly the same time), *Wall Drawing #32* consists of a set of instructions for two drafters to execute simultaneously in spaces not visible to each other:

In two separate rooms so they are not visible to one another, two drafters draw parallel lines within a 36" x 36" square.
1) Vertical lines from left side to center
2) Horizontal lines from top to center
3) Diagonal right lines from right corner to center
4) Diagonal left lines from left corner to center[31]

Unlike at Oberlin, in the case of the Halifax wall drawing, LeWitt makes clear that the work must be done by two people, and does not leave open the possibility of multiple drafters. The instructions for the Halifax wall drawing are also much more circumscribed—the location and direction of every line is predetermined. However, as Jarden recently recounted to me,

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there was still room for interpretation (or in this case, rooms):

After some discussion, Gerry and I agreed that the instructions specified "two separate rooms" without mentioning that they should both be in the same building, and that it would be appropriate to the instructions that these two locations might be in different places.

So I did my half in an apartment that I was living in at the time, and Gerry did the other half in his apartment in a different part of town.[32]

It seems likely that LeWitt never learned that the wall drawing (of which no photograph exists) was ultimately installed in different neighborhoods, since previous publications cite the first installation as having taken place only in Jarden's home.[33] However, by 1970, LeWitt was devising instructions that deliberately delegated more of the decision-making to drafters. And not surprisingly, some drafters recognized and took advantage of the freedom they were afforded. At this juncture of his career, LeWitt seems to have relished the fact that he often could not anticipate how wall drawings would turn out. When asked by Sarah Kent in her 1971 interview, "Have you any idea what the wall drawings will look like before they're made?" the artist tellingly replied: "I think I do, but then often they're different and that's what I like—when its something I didn't imagine...and couldn't foresee."[34]

In 1971, a year after LeWitt's visit to campus, Professor Jerry Ferguson invited him to make a series of prints at the school's Lithography Workshop, made famous by John Baldessari's contribution later that year, *I Will Make No More Boring Art*. The suite of ten lithographs LeWitt devised for NSCAD put his self-professed interest in unforeseen results to the test. While printmaking, by its nature, separates the act of artistic conceptualization from the execution of art works (done by a master printer), at NSCAD, LeWitt overtly acknowledged this gap and widened it. Instead of providing the workshop with a drawing that it would attempt to replicate faithfully onto stone plates for printing, LeWitt sent Ferguson written instructions to give students at the school—and directed that the students' drawings then be made into prints.[35] The instructions left many decisions open to chance and interpretations. The directives for the first plate were, in fact, virtually identical to those supplied for the Oberlin wall drawing:

Using a black crayon, draw a straight line of any length. From any point on that line draw another line perpendicular to the first. From any point on the second line draw another line perpendicular to that line. Repeat this procedure.[36]

Fittingly, Richards Jarden, the student who helped create one of LeWitt's wall drawings in Halifax the previous year, volunteered to make the drawing for this print. Taking evident delight in the latitude afforded by the instructions, Jarden created a work (Fig. 4)[37] that bore an uncanny resemblance to one of the lithographs from the 1967 *Black Series* by Frank Stella (b. 1936). As Garry Neill Kennedy recounts in his 2012 book, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968–1978*, "When LeWitt was presented with the artist's proofs for his signature, he at first balked at signing these two works. But recognizing the trap he faced..., LeWitt approved the edition."[38]

Kennedy mentions that LeWitt initially harbored misgivings over two prints—the other was one made by student Tim Zuck (b. 1947). For this lithograph, LeWitt's instructions were to "place fifty small dots at random" on the page and "then connect each dot with a straight line."[39] Zuck recently explained to me how he achieved the random placement LeWitt prescribed: "In order to get the 50 dots, I got a bunch of rubber washers and dropped them onto paper. And then I went from left to right, connecting one dot to the next."[40] The resulting image (Fig. 5),[41] as Kennedy aptly describes in his book, resembles "a Wall Street up-and-down boom-and-bust graph."[42] When LeWitt stipulated that each dot be connected, he intended this to mean that every dot be connected to every other dot on the page, not that each dot be connected only to its next-door

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Figure 4

SOL LEWITT

RICHARDS JARDEN (drafter)

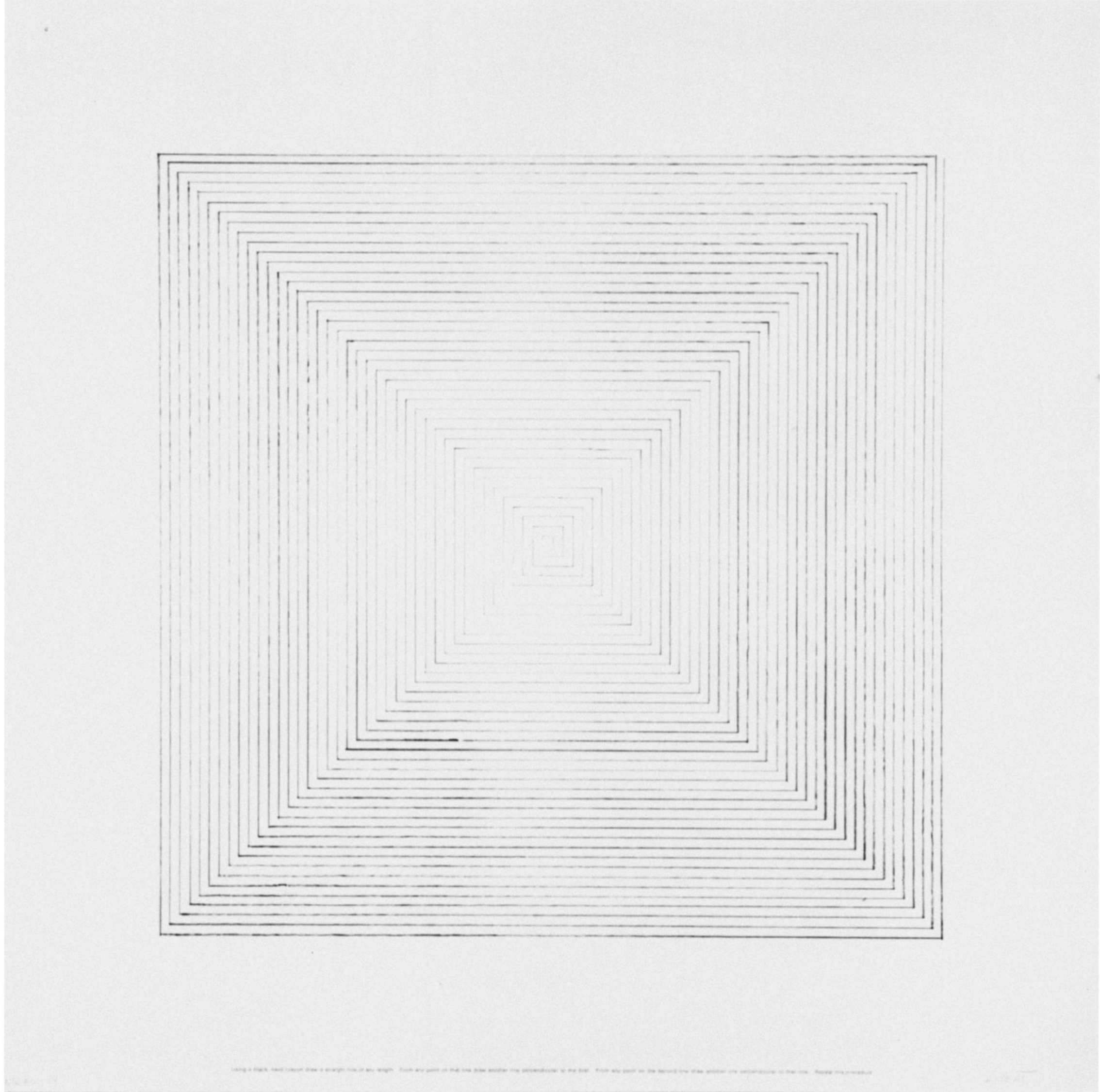
J. WALLACE BRANNEN (master printer)

LITHOGRAPHY WORKSHOP, NSCAD, HALIFAX (printer and publisher)

Plate 3. Using a black, hard crayon draw a straight line of any length. From any point on that line draw another line perpendicular to the first. From any point on the second line draw another line perpendicular to that line. Repeat this procedure. June 1971

Lithograph (edition of 25)

Halifax, NSCAD University Permanent Collection (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)



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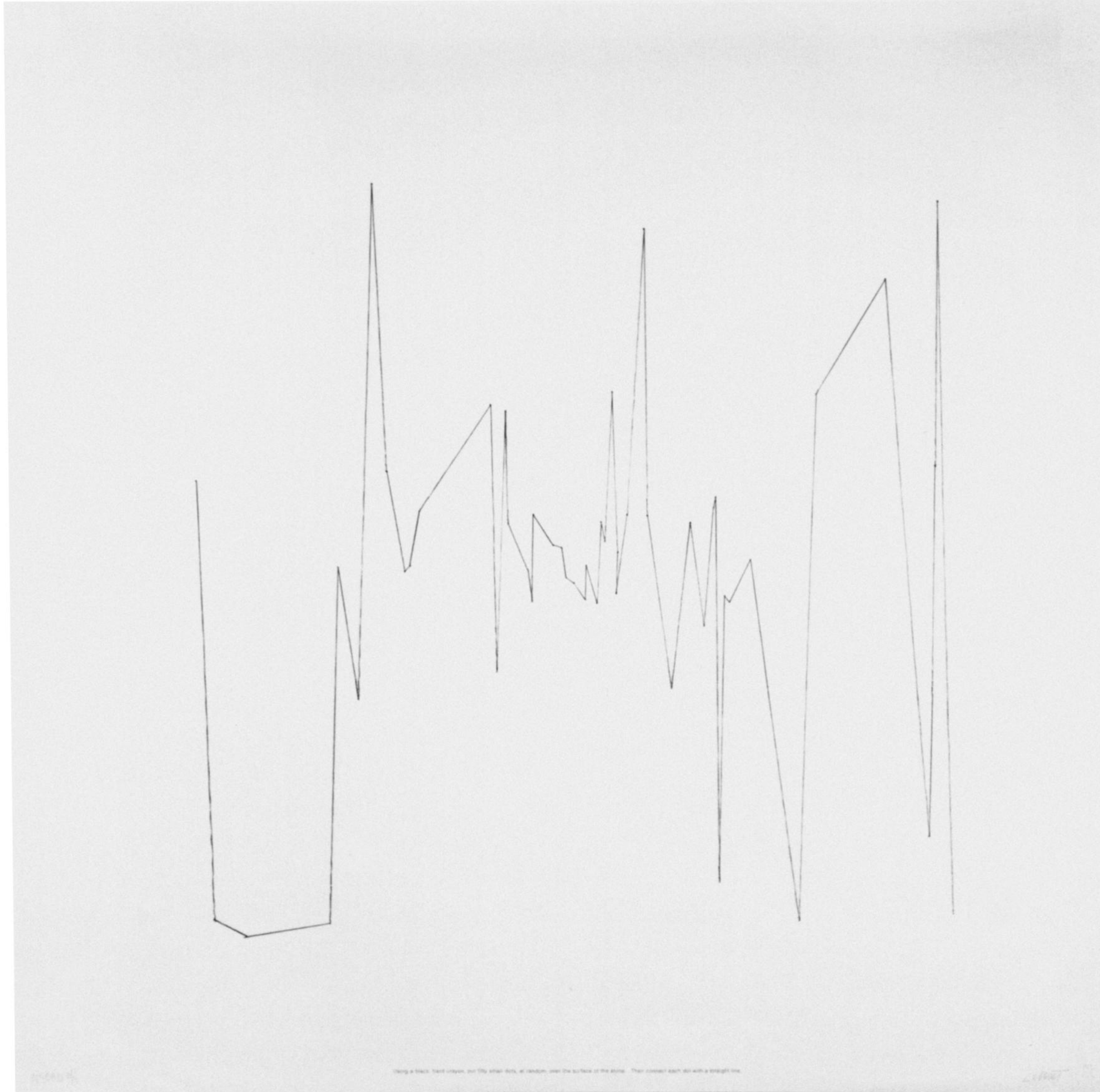

Figure 5

SOL LEWITT

TIM ZUCK (drafter)

J. WALLACE BRANNEN (master printer)

LITHOGRAPHY WORKSHOP, NSCAD, HALIFAX (publisher and printer)

Plate 7. Using a black, hard crayon, put fifty small dots, at random, over the surface of the stone. Then connect each dot with a straight line. June 1971.

Lithograph (edition of 25)

Halifax, NSCAD University Permanent Collection (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

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neighbors. Zuck did not realize that these were LeWitt's intentions and followed the instructions as he understood them. LeWitt may have initially hesitated over both Zuck's and Jarden's prints, but he quickly accepted them, recognizing that they had both abided by his directions. In June of 1971—the same month that he signed the NSCAD proofs in New York—LeWitt published a short essay, "Doing Wall Drawings," in which he acknowledged that the "artist must allow various interpretations of his plan. The draftsman perceives the artist's plan, then reorders it to his experience and understanding."[43]

Later that year, LeWitt devised a "fifty points" wall drawing for the Boston School of the Museum of Fine Arts that was very similar to the Zuck NSCAD print. In his instructions, he took advantage of this second chance and made his language more precise, clarifying that every point on the wall be connected to every other point.[44] Nevertheless, LeWitt did not abandon the space he had created for drafter input. His continued commitment to collaboration is unmistakable in the wall drawings he created for an exhibition of his work at CalArts in the spring of 1972.

LeWitt's invitation to have an exhibition at CalArts came about through none other than NSCAD student Tim Zuck. On graduating from NSCAD in June 1971, Zuck decided to pursue an MFA at CalArts in southern California. His decision coincided with a momentous time in the school's history. Founded as the Chouinard Art Institute in 1921, the fall of 1971 was the school's first semester at its current Valencia campus, fulfilling the desire of the late Walt Disney (1901–1966) to move the school from its original location in downtown Los Angeles. As Zuck recently shared with me, he recalls packing up his Jeep with canvas when artist Allan Kaprow (1927–2006) called to informed him that the new campus might not be ready in time for the start of the semester.[45] When Zuck arrived in southern California, the school was ready for class, but one of the first things he noticed was the conspicuous absence of a place for students or faculty to showcase their work. As he recalls, he spoke with dean Paul Brach, who, with cigar in mouth, said, "just find a nice room." Zuck settled on classroom A-402, and thus, in the fall of 1971, the now famous Gallery A-402 was inaugurated, with Zuck as its founding director. Having already forged connections with many New York artists while a student at Halifax, Zuck invited many of them to show in the space.[46]

Although LeWitt's general preference was to generate wall drawing proposals after visiting a space, there were instances where his travel schedule precluded him from doing so. Since he was unable to make it to Los Angeles in advance of (or during) the Gallery A-402 show, he sent Zuck a marked-up floor plan, indicating where each wall drawing was to be made. Along with the plan, he inserted a note to Zuck: "Get as many students to do the work as you want but make sure they take the work seriously."[47] Six students signed up to make the six wall drawings, including several artists who later became famous in their own right, such as Jim Welling (b. 1951) and Matt Mullican (b. 1951).

One of the notable qualities of the exhibition is how wholeheartedly collaborative in nature the wall drawings were—both in terms of LeWitt's engagement with the students, and among the students themselves. *Wall Drawing #123* (Fig. 6),[48] a work LeWitt referred to in shorthand as "Copied Lines," epitomizes the generous spirit of the endeavor. For this work, LeWitt stipulated that wavy vertical lines be drawn on the longest wall of the gallery. On his marked-up floor plan, the work's long, handwritten title explains its premise: "The first draftsman draws a vertical line as long as he or she can reach."[49] Moving from left to right until the wall is filled, the second draftsmen is instructed to copy the first drafter's line (as far as he or she can reach), the third to copy the second, and so on. At the end, LeWitt added, "The draftsmen should be chosen by lot." The wall drawing fused LeWitt's interest in systems with drafter's decision-making, architectural realities, and chance. It also represents a kind of merger between the artist's conceptual planning and the drafter's physical engagement—its serpen-

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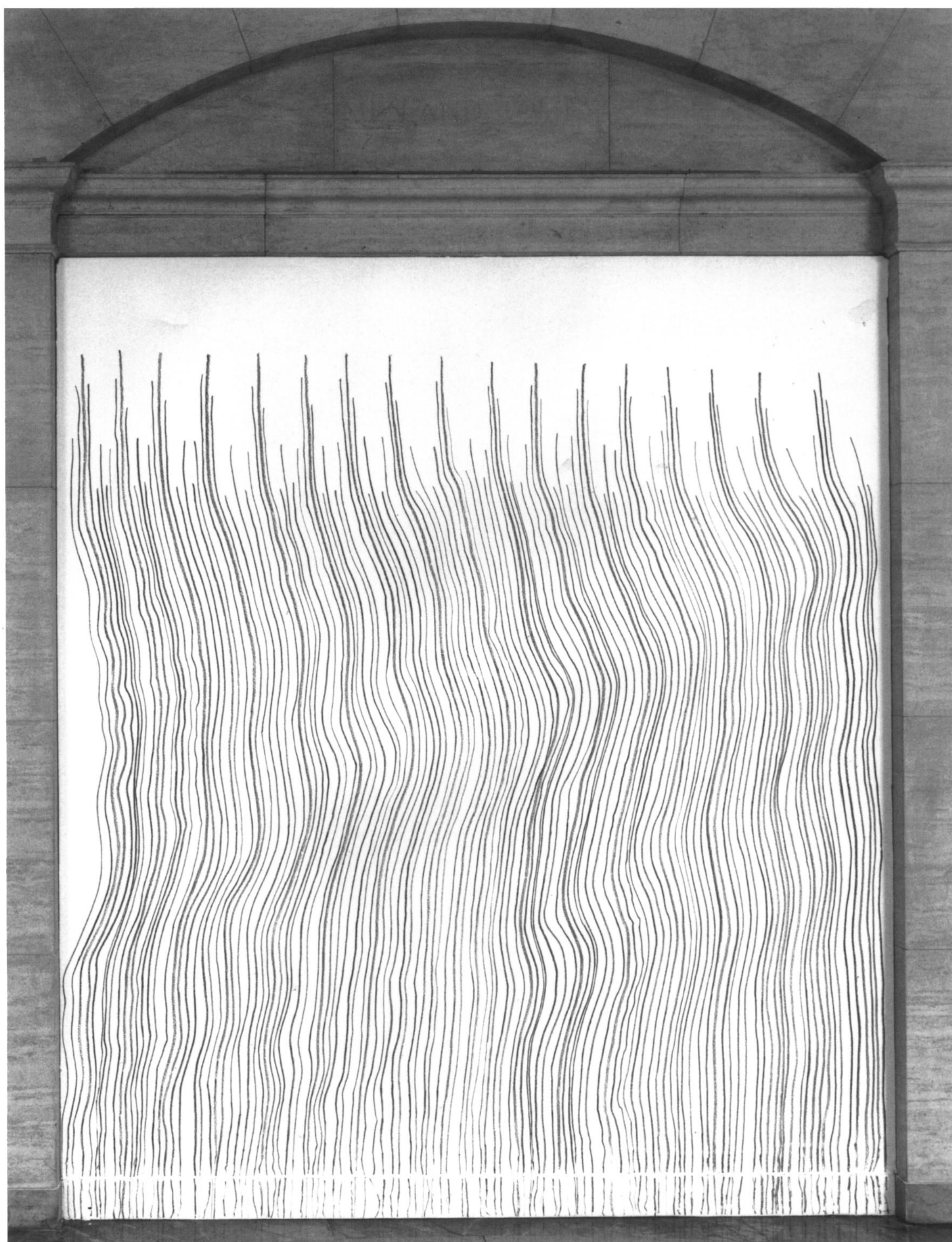

Figure 6

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #123, March 1972

First installation: Gallery A-402, CalArts, Valencia, California

First drawn by: Carol Kaufman, Suzanne Kuffler, Robert Rosenwasser, Judith Stein, and James Welling

Andover, MA, Phillips Academy, Addison Gallery of American Art (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

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tine lines are as much registers of individual bodies as they are registers of thought. It is also, ultimately, a playful work that counters the frequent misperception of conceptual works of art as little more than dry-as-toast cerebral gambits. As LeWitt inserted in his note to Zuck for the show, "the wall drawings should be fun to do."[50] "Copied Lines" encourages the drafters to flout the childhood prohibition of drawing on the wall. By removing LeWitt's hand from the act of making, and by insisting that the artists copy each other, it also subverts the notion of artistic authorship and gleefully violates the cherished Modernist goals of originality and innovation.

Matt Mullican recalls how intrigued he was by the premise of the work he elected to make: *Wall Drawing #127*. Unlike the other group efforts, the wall drawing calls for a lone drafter to draw "one line as long as possible by not taking the pencil off the surface [of the wall.] The line may cross itself."[51] Recognizing that a regular pencil would quickly become dull, Mullican recently explained to me: "I decided to buy a mechanical pencil so that I could keep the lead on the wall."[52] With a chair placed close to the wall so that he could at least sit periodically with his pencil still pressed against the wall, he lasted for a day. As he remembers: "The wall drawing became a shadow of my body—the passages of the line I made near my shoulder and torso were dark, whereas the ones I made higher up and lower down were much lighter."[53] While not one of LeWitt's most complex wall drawings visually, the continuous line wall drawing was a feat of endurance, a virtuosic solo performance by Mullican.

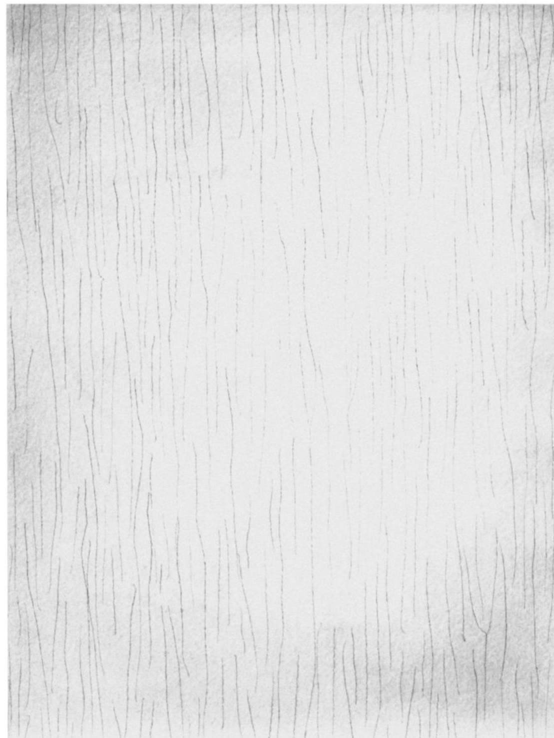

Figure 7

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #46, 1970 (detail)

First installation: Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris

First drawn by: Sol LeWitt

Chester, Connecticut, LeWitt Collection (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

The entire exhibition attests to the appeal that unpredictable outcomes held to LeWitt at this moment in his career. If Oberlin and NSCAD wall drawings tested the waters of collaboration and variability, CalArts celebrated them—in a leap tantamount to going from *sotto voce* to aria. Countless permutations were possible for every wall drawing in the CalArts show. LeWitt alludes to a shift in a letter to Zuck: "They were different from what I have been doing but I'll do more in the future."[54] As a token of his thanks, LeWitt enclosed drawings as gifts for Zuck and each of the students, a practice that he continued throughout his career.[55]

LeWitt's full embrace of variability can in part be traced to his repeated use of "freehand" or "not straight" lines (as he termed them) in the CalArts wall drawings. While the straight lines prevalent in much of his work are made using a ruler or straight edge so that conformity is achieved, the wavy lines are, by definition, handmade creations—as unique as the fingerprint of the person making them. LeWitt first introduced non-straight lines in *Wall Drawing #46* (Fig. 7),[56] a work he made in tribute to his close friend, Eva Hesse (1936–1970), shortly after she passed away on 29 May 1970 at the age of only thirty-four. Covering a nine-by-nine-foot wall at Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris with not-straight vertical lines, the wispy pencil lines invoke the thin ropes and tendril-like cords that wrap around and protrude from the sculptures for which Hesse was best known. LeWitt later explained, "I wanted to do something at the time of her death that would

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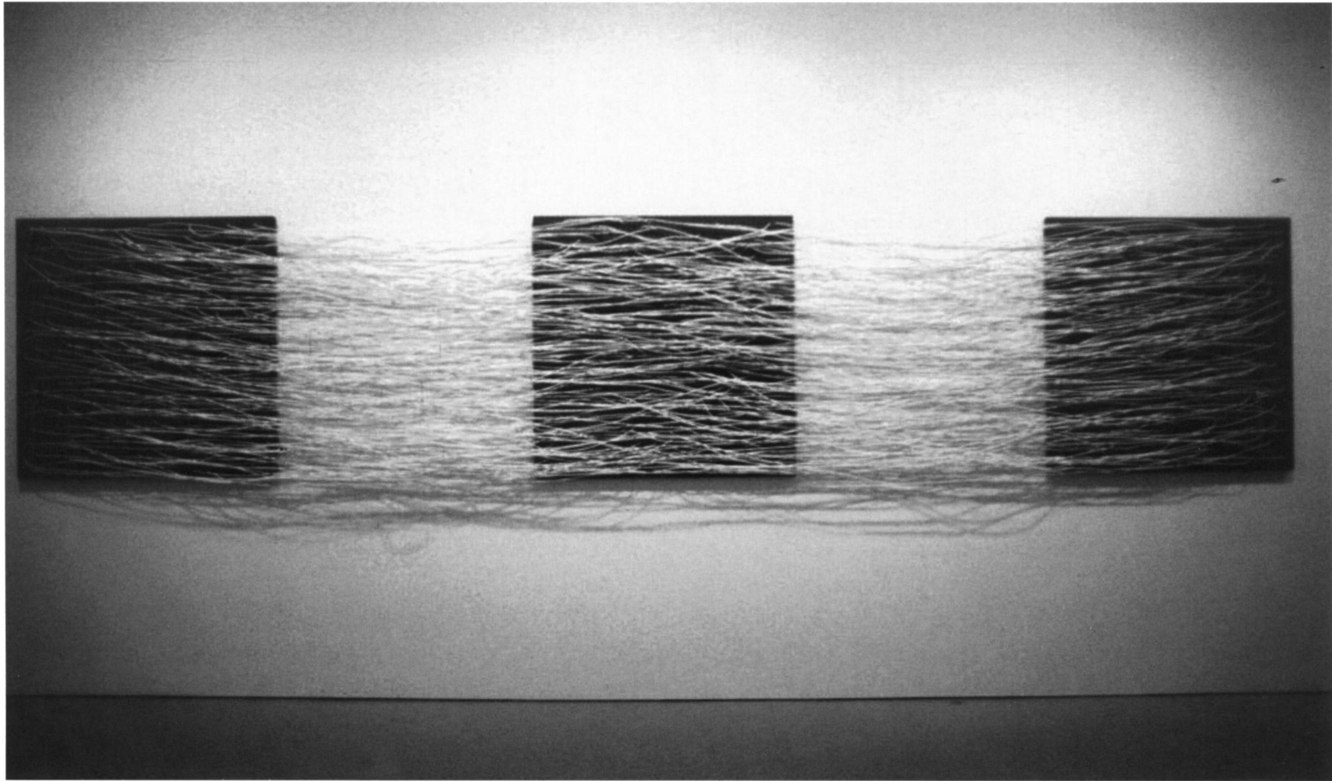

Figure 8

EVA HESSE

Metronomic Irregularity II, 1966

Installation view: Fischbach Gallery, New York, 1966

Location Unknown (after 1971) (© Estate of Eva Hesse)

be a bond between us, in our work. So I took something of hers and mine and they worked together well. You may say it was her influence on me."[57] As the abundance of irregular lines in his show at CalArts demonstrates, the not-straight line was much more than an isolated gesture of admiration or affection; it became a key motif in LeWitt's lexicon, and an ideal one for exploring variability.

Hesse's sculpture also provided a critical model and impetus for LeWitt's interest in variability. In the fall of 1966, she enlisted LeWitt and Mel Bochner (b. 1940) to help install the wall-mounted sculpture *Metronomic Irregularity II* (Fig. 8)[58] for *Eccentric Abstraction*, a group show at the Fischbach Gallery, curated by Lucy Lippard. Composed of 40-inch square boards spaced 40 inches apart, with holes drilled at every intersection of a one-inch grid, Hesse completed the work during installation by interlacing the holes with cotton-covered wire, effectively disrupting the orderly grid of the panels with a tangled web of lines. In this work and in later sculptures, Hesse reassembled or reconfigured the work anew for every installation; in this case, the wire was to be restrung through the holes every time the work was made, imparting the sculpture with new shape and life each time. LeWitt later said of his experience of installing Hesse's *Metronomic Irregularity II*: "It was really a magnificent piece and a...liberation for me in my own work. I think it was one of the very earliest examples of instal-

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lation art....it had a strong and direct and specific effect on me."[59] While Hesse would never claim to have been the first artist who made a work that would be different each time it was reinstalled, she was certainly a pioneering contributor to the emergence of installation art—and the person whose variable contributions most influenced LeWitt's thinking. Hesse's impact on LeWitt's work is manifest both in the countless wall drawings and works on paper covered with wiggly lines, but more importantly, in the very concept of the wall drawing as a flexible form. What seriality—and the example of Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) and Dan Flavin (1933–1996)—was to LeWitt's wall drawings in the late 1960s, variability—and the example of Hesse—was to those made in the 1970s.

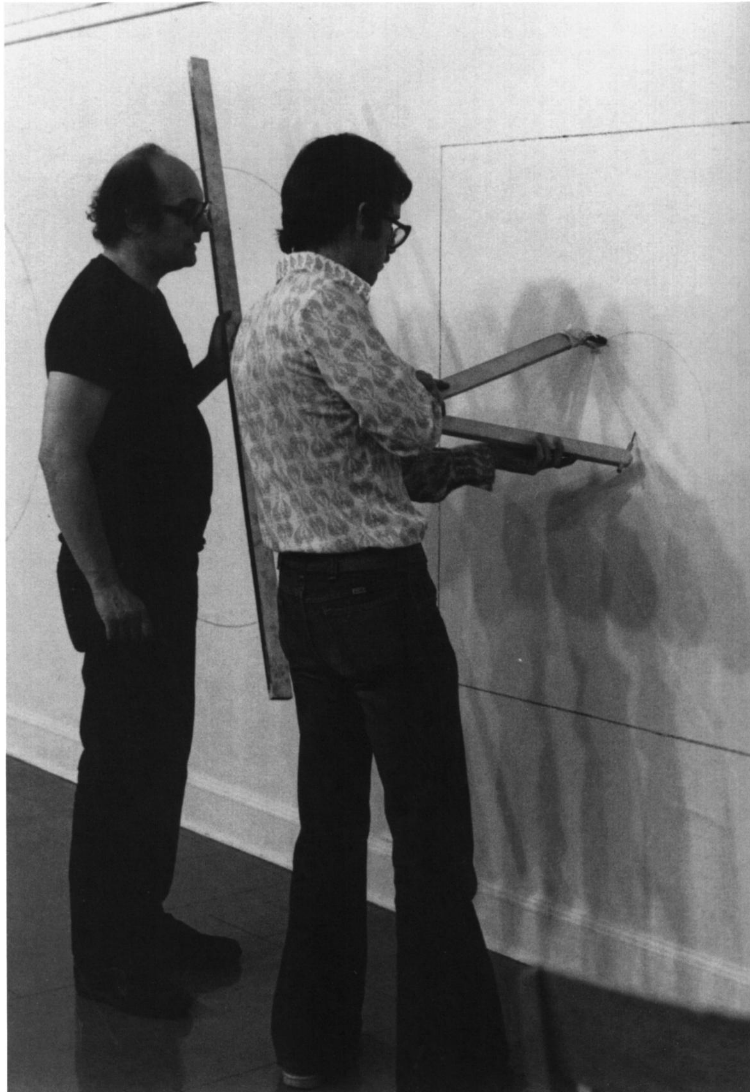

Figure 9

Sol LeWitt working with student Tim Hennigan on *Wall Drawing #293* at the University of Colorado, Boulder, 1976

However, for LeWitt, unlike Hesse, collaboration with other artists and drafters was an essential part of his practice: a composer requires musicians. In his 1971 tract, "Doing Wall Drawings," LeWitt unequivocally asserts, "The artist and the draftsman become collaborators in making the art."[60] As this statement attests, LeWitt perceived his drafters (typically art students) as vital players in making his art, rather than as technicians attempting to fulfill rote tasks with robotic or machine-like accuracy. LeWitt employed so many art students and artists over the course of his five-decade career that he became effectively a one-person WPA program of the post-war era (Fig. 9).[61] What appealed to him about these collaborations, however, was not the direct interaction with students or overseeing them. He much preferred playing the role of composer to conductor. In fact, LeWitt was rather shy and, when present for installations, would rarely evaluate or criticize the way drafters carried out his directives. What he relished was precisely *not* knowing how a work would be translated onto the wall. LeWitt's comments about wall drawings made in 1971 at the Guggenheim Museum and recorded in the catalogue for his 1978 Museum of Modern Art exhibition underscore this point:

The draftsmen and women were given the widest lati-

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tude in doing these drawings. In every case the results differed when the same drawing was done by another person, even though the same plan was followed. In that way the artist and those doing the drawings became collaborators, and the result was better than either could achieve alone.[62]

LeWitt's interest in variability persisted throughout his career, but after the 1970s, it abated as new preoccupations assumed greater importance. Variability played a negligible role in the colorful ink wash and acrylic wall drawings he produced in the last three decades of his career (e.g., Fig. 10).[63] Now and again, LeWitt would conceive a wall drawing with more open instructions, but they were infrequent encore performances. The analogies between LeWitt's art and music, however, never ceased to resonate. And they resonated in ways beyond those he himself articulated. The wide variety of wall drawings LeWitt attained using his deliberately limited repertoire of lines and geometric shapes has striking parallels with music. Rob Storr captured this essential aspect of LeWitt's art, equating the artist's reductive grammar to how "using a limited number of notes, you can end up with Jimi Hendrix or Beethoven."[64] Although the limitations and systems LeWitt imposed on himself and others

Figure 10

SOL LEWITT

Wall Drawing #684A, June 1999

First installation: Galerie Franck Schulte, Berlin

First drawn by: Fransje Killaars and Roy Villevoye

Estate of Sol LeWitt (© 2012 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York)

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were crucial to his working method, his wall drawings are just as much about openness, flexibility, surprise, and the generosity of possibility. Working in concert with drafters, the music they produced together was, as LeWitt declared, "better than either could achieve alone."

Veronica Roberts is Director of Research for the Sol LeWitt Wall Drawing *catalogue raisonné, to be published digitally by Artifex Press.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE:
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NOTES

1. See Andrea Miller-Keller, "Excerpts from a Correspondence, 1981–1983," in Susanna Singer, ed., *Sol LeWitt: Wall Drawings, 1968 to 1984*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, 1984; reprinted in Adachiara Zevi, ed., *Sol LeWitt: Critical Texts,* Rome, 1994, p. 109.
2. The importance of classical music in LeWitt's practice and life is the subject of a forthcoming essay by Charles Haxthausen, Robert Sterling Clark Professor of Art History at Williams College, Williamstown, MA. The essay will be published in conjunction with an exhibition that Haxthausen is curating this autumn for the Williams College Museum of Art, aptly entitled *Sol LeWitt: The Well-Tempered Grid*, inspired by Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.
3. See Sol LeWitt, "Doing Wall Drawings," *Art Now,* 3, no. 2, 1971; reprinted in Gary Garrels, ed., *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective*, exh. cat., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000, p. 376.
4. The exhibition, *Benefit for the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam* (22–31 October 1968), also included work by Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Mangold, and Robert Ryman, among others. Lippard, LeWitt, Flavin, Mangold, and Ryman all worked at the Museum of Modern Art at different, overlapping periods in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Flavin, Mangold, and Ryman were guards, LeWitt was a night watchman, and Lippard worked as a page in the museum's library). Many of them forged meaningful relationships from their shared time there.
5. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), The Doris and Donald Fisher Collection. Black pencil on wall; see Susan Cross and Denise Markonish, eds., *Sol LeWitt: 100 Views*, exh. cat., North Adams, MA, MASS MoCA, 2008–33, p. 99.
6. See Sol LeWitt, "Wall Drawings," *Arts Magazine*, 44, no. 6, April 1970, p. 45.
7. This attitude differs considerably from those held by many of LeWitt's peers. Fred Sandback (1943–2003), for example, permitted his sculptures made of strands of acrylic yarn to be re-sited for temporary exhibitions; like LeWitt, Sandback embraced variability in his work, often even changing the placement and orientation of his fuzzy yarn lines every few days over the course of an exhibition. But unlike LeWitt, Sandback firmly believed that his work should exist in only one place at a time. If a museum agrees to lend a Sandback sculpture to an outside exhibition, this means, effectively, that the museum agrees not to exhibit this work for the duration of that show. By contrast, when individuals or institutions lend a LeWitt wall drawing to an exhibition, they may keep their version of the work on view.
8. For example, *Wall Drawing #46*, 1970 (see Fig. 7), a personal favorite of LeWitt's, is currently on view at MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, and at Dia:Beacon, Beacon, NY.
9. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), inv. no. M.76.103. White chalk on black wall; 304.8 x 335.28 cm; see Earl A. Powell III *et al.*, *The Robert O. Anderson Building*, Los Angeles, 1986, no. 58, repr.
10. Stephanie Barron to "All Concerned," internal memorandum, dated 30 November 1977, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, about LeWitt *Wall Drawing #295*, inv. no. M.76.103. White crayon on black wall; see North Adams 2008–33, p. 159; and *www.massmoca.org/lewitt/walldrawing.php?id=295* (accessed 1 May 2012).
11. See Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, 5, no. 10, 1967; reprinted in Zevi 1994, p. 78.
12. See ibid.
13. Sarah Kent, "Sol LeWitt," *Modern Painters*, July–August 2007, p. 69, based on an interview on 26 April 1971.

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14. The instructions for *Wall Drawing #48* are printed in Kynaston L. McShine, ed., *Information*, exh. cat., New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970. Over time, LeWitt adjusted the hourly wage paid to drafters from $4.00 to $44.00 to compensate for inflation. My thanks to Susanna Singer for bringing this to my attention.

15. Later in LeWitt's career, the titles reverted back to descriptions; for example, *Wall Drawing #849: Irregular blobs of color*, 1998.

16. See Athena Tacha, ed., *Art in the Mind,* exh. cat., Oberlin, Allen Memorial Art Museum, 1970.

17. Tacha met Siegelaub through Lucy Lippard, who guest lectured at the college. Athena Tacha, phone conversation with author (11 February 2012).

18. See Louise Bruner, *The Blade*, 7 May 1972, p. 1.

19. See ibid.

20. See ibid.

21. Tacha, e-mail message to author (10 February 2012).

22. See Andrew Wilson, "Sol LeWitt Interviewed," *Art Monthly*, March 1993; reprinted in Zevi 1994, p. 60.

23. LeWitt's full instructions, labeled "Proposal for Oberlin College exhibition" are as follows: "On a wall, preferably white and made of plaster, and using a hard pencil (6H or harder), draw any number of straight lines. Each line should be at a right angle to the last line drawn. These instructions should be given to at least two draftsmen, each doing the project on a different wall, and not seeing any other result before completing his own." Signed by Sol LeWitt and dated 16 February 1970. See Oberlin 1970, unpaginated.

24. Tacha, phone conversation with author (11 February 2012).

25. Oberlin College has a long history of progressive policies. In 1841, it was the first college in the United States to graduate women. It was also the first college to have a policy prohibiting racial discrimination against African Americans. The fact that the college is well-known for its music conservancy is a fitting coincidence.

26. See Kenneth Baker, "Notes from NSCAD," *Canadian Art*, Winter 1985, p. 41.

27. Other artists who made significant works at the college or participated in its conferences or publications include Vito Acconci, Carl Andre, Jan Dibbets, Douglas Huebler, Lucy Lippard, Lee Lozano, Gerhard Richter, Robert Ryman, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Michael Snow, and Joyce Weiland. For a detailed history of the school during its heyday, see Garry Neill Kennedy's invaluable new book, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968–1978*, Cambridge, MA, 2012.

28. In addition to the wall drawing discussed at length in this essay, *Wall Drawing #33* was executed by student Tim Zuck in the home of NSCAD president Garry Neill Kennedy in the spring of 1970. Two additional wall drawings were also drawn on campus in 1972 and are not included in this essay because they are less relevant to the topic.

29. Richards Jarden, e-mail message to author (September 2011).

30. Gerald Ferguson was widely admired as an educator. As an artist, he contributed work to MoMA's 1970 *Information* show and was the subject of a recent solo show at Canada Gallery in New York (7 January–12 February 2012), curated by his former student, Luke Murphy.

31. Ferguson saved the original instructions for the wall drawing: "In two separate rooms, so that they are not visible to one another, two draftsmen draw: II [notation for parallel] straight lines 1/8" apart within a 36" square using the same kind and hardness of pencil. 1) Vertical lines from left side to center; 2) Horizontal lines from top to center; 3) Diagonal left lines from left corner to center; 4) Diagonal right lines from right corner to center." Below the instructions is a diagram showing that the diagonal lines are intended to go from top corners to center, rather than bottom corners to center. The language alone suggests two possible ways of drawing this work but the diagram makes clear that there is one set way to fulfill the instructions. The original instructions also differ slightly from what has been published previously. Part of that is due to the way LeWitt retroactively standardized some of his language over time. The original dimensions of the square, however, have long been published incorrectly as 60 inches square. My thanks to the Ferguson family and Luke Murphy for sharing a copy of the original instructions with me.

32. Ibid.

33. In Singer 1984, p. 165, *Wall Drawing #32* is incorrectly cited as having been first installed solely in the home of Richard (*sic*) Jarden. My thanks to Richards Jarden for bringing the unusual circumstances of this wall drawing to my attention.

34. See Kent 2007, p. 69.

35. LeWitt to Ferguson, 6 February 1971, Tim Zuck Papers, E.P. Taylor Research Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario.

36. Ibid.

37. Lithograph; 711 x 711 mm; see Kennedy 2012, p. xix, pl. I.8.

38. See ibid., p. 46.

39. LeWitt to Ferguson, 6 February 1971, Zuck Papers.

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40. Tim Zuck, phone conversation with author (27 February 2012).

41. Lithograph; 711 x 711 mm; see Kennedy 2012, p. xix, pl. I.9.

42. See ibid., p. 46.

43. See LeWitt 1971; reprinted in San Francisco 2000, p. 376.

44. In his interview of 26 April 1971 with Sarah Kent, LeWitt hints at lessons learned perhaps in part from his NSCAD lithographs: "If I don't make the instructions specific enough, sometimes they do things that just totally destroy my aesthetic, but usually it works out pretty well."

45. Tim Zuck, phone conversation with author (27 February 2012).

46. LeWitt's exhibition at CalArts was called *Sol LeWitt* and was on view at Gallery A-402 for less than a month (8–24 March 1972).

47. LeWitt to Zuck, 24 February 1972, Zuck Papers.

48. Black pencil on wall; see North Adams 2008–33, p. 34. INSTALLATION PHOTO: Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA.

49. LeWitt to Zuck, 24 February 1972, Zuck Papers.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid. Interestingly, in a letter dated 1 May 1972 from Zuck to LeWitt after the installation was complete, Zuck informed LeWitt that the group decided that if Mullican worked on the continuous line wall drawing, he could not participate in making any of the other wall drawings: "This decision I disagreed with, but the majority of the draftsmen thought this was the way it should be done." Zuck Papers.

52. Matt Mullican, interview by author at the artist's New York studio (24 January 2011).

53. Ibid.

54. LeWitt to Zuck, 12 May 1972, Zuck Papers.

55. I first met LeWitt when I worked at the Whitney Museum of American Art and coordinated his 2000 retrospective, organized by Gary Garrels of SFMOMA. After the show opened in New York, LeWitt asked me to give him a list of names for every person who helped with it—at his insistence, including interns. He subsequently made an orange and blue *Loopy Doopy* woodcut in an edition size of sixty-five, inscribing them individually for each recipient. I later learned that he made a print for staff involved in his 1978 MoMA retrospective and numerous other major shows as well.

56. Black pencil on wall; 2.74 x 2.74 m; see North Adams 2008–33, p. 135. PHOTO: André Morain, courtesy of Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris.

57. See Andrea Miller-Keller, "Excerpts from a Correspondence, 1981–1983;" reprinted in Zevi 1994, p. 109.

58. Graphite, paint, papier-caché (?), Masonite, wood, and cotton-covered wire; 122 x 610 cm (three panels of 122 x 122 cm each). PHOTO: Rudolph Burckhardt, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth.

59. See Michael Kimmelman, "Eva Hesse and the Lure of 'Absurd Opposites,'" *New York Times*, 10 May 1992.

60. See LeWitt 1971; reprinted in San Francisco 2000, p. 376.

61. PHOTO: courtesy of the University of Colorado Art Museum.

62. See Alicia Legg, ed., *Sol LeWitt*, exh. cat., New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1978, p. 110.

63. *Wall Drawing #684A* (Squares bordered and divided horizontally and vertically into four equal squares, each with bands in one of four directions), Estate of Sol LeWitt. Color ink wash on wall; see *www.massmoca.org/lewitt/walldrawing.php?id=684A* (accessed 1 May 2012). PHOTO: courtesy of the Estate of Sol LeWitt.

64. *Sol LeWitt: Wall Drawings,* DVD, directed by Edgar B. Howard and Tom Piper, New York: Checkerboard Films, 2010.

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