

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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SOL LeWITT PRINTS 1970-1995

January 25 - May 7, 1996

The first New York retrospective in nearly twenty years of the printed work of American artist Sol LeWitt (b. 1928) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on January 25, 1996. **SOL LeWITT PRINTS 1970-1995** reveals the evolution of the artist's conceptual systems through his consistent engagement with the print mediums over a twenty-five-year period. The exhibition features more than 200 prints, ranging from his austere early screenprints to the baroque undulating woodcuts of 1995. It is organized by Wendy Weitman, Associate Curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. In honor of the exhibition, the artist has created two original works of art being published by the Museum: a large-format exhibition brochure designed by LeWitt and a centerfold insert appearing in the Winter 1996 issue of *MoMA*, the Museum members' magazine.

A pioneer of Conceptual art, LeWitt has said of his work that "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art." His work is about ideas and the systemic rendering of form to convey those ideas. Typically, LeWitt's ideas are manifested through series of related images, ranging from lines and their locations to geometric figures to sensual curving brushstrokes. The versatility of the print mediums -- which facilitate the repetition of images, the altering of color, and the addition of new layers of information -- gives LeWitt the freedom to explore and expand on the serial imagery that expresses his conceptual systems. His prints are characterized by a tension between the perceptual beauty of the images and the rigorous ideas behind them.

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Underlying the artist's theoretical concerns is a rejection of the traditional assumptions about the uniqueness and exclusivity of a work of art. In his wall drawings, LeWitt often uses draftsmen to execute the works based on his instructions and diagrams. The collaborative nature of printmaking, in which artists work in tandem with printers, mimics LeWitt's wall drawing method and originally contributed to the artist's immediate and precocious response to the printmaking mediums.

The artist's first prints were published in 1970, and by 1971 he had completed three major projects, each in a different medium and at a different workshop. *Bands of Color in Four Directions & All Combinations* (1971) includes sixteen etchings made from only two plates. The two plates, each with bands of parallel lines, were rotated and layered to create the sixteen possible permutations of LeWitt's signature red, yellow, blue, and black palette in horizontal, vertical, and diagonal bands. Although new to the medium, LeWitt quickly determined how to transform the complex printmaking process itself into another component of his system.

Lengthy written descriptions often accompanied his early wall drawings as the verbal equivalent to his visually engrossing ideas and concepts. As LeWitt became more immersed in the possibilities inherent in the printmaking process, he began to bring the words into the compositions themselves. Words and image became interdependent; in an intricate 1975 series entitled *The Location of Lines*, words described the position of the lines and the lines demarcated the placement of the words.

The prints of later years focus on tone, surface, and the illusory nature of imagery. By the 1980s, LeWitt had moved away from his rigorous

systemic series toward a more subjective approach, a turning point marked by the series of isometric renderings entitled *Forms Derived from a Cube* (1982). In this elaborate set of etchings he chose to depict only twenty-four of the almost limitless permutations of forms found within a cube and used different shades of shimmering gray aquatint to indicate each plane.

The prints of the last ten years are composed of sumptuous surfaces, layered colors, and a softening of the geometric forms that shaped LeWitt's earlier works. "It is a testament to LeWitt's vigorous mind and artistic integrity that he has allowed his work to evolve from tightly conceived and often austere to open-ended and luxuriant," commented Ms. Weitman.

LeWitt's most recent public commission for mural-sized wall drawings will be completed in March 1996 in the lobby of 685 Third Avenue, a project sponsored by Leucadia National Corporation.

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