

Oh!!! Donald Judd. A text of Juan Carlos Bracho for the catalogue *The critic distance*. CGAC. Edición Xunta de Galicia. 2008

If we were to stick to a purely formal interpretation of *Untitled*, a piece by Donald Judd dating from 1988, one could simply describe it as a group of four cubic aluminium and perspex structures which, at first sight, might be taken for book shelves, boxes or simple drawers. In fact, one could apply this same observation to the whole of the artist's output, given that, throughout his entire life, Judd's work remained true to a short number of rules: repetition, repetition, repetition.

But, what would prompt us to compare an artwork -which is, after all, what it is- with a simple consumer object? What is it that differentiates and mixes them up? To my way of thinking, it boils down to a question of attitude, to a steadfast, honest and coherent stance; a posture that Donald Judd, the most aesthete and rigorous of all the minimalist artists, maintained right till the very end.

As well as Pop Art, Minimalism also adopted the serial production processes of late-capitalism, divesting art of the symbolic value associated with its making, thus altering the rules of the game forever. Now everything was possible, reproducible and consumable.

Paradoxically, while Warhol achieved one of his greatest dreams, namely the democratization of his legacy and of himself, the passing of time has played against all the minimalist production, bleeding it of all its critical clout and transmogrifying these 'specific objects' into geometrical furniture or props for department store window displays. Did it ever occur to Judd that this could happen?

It is no longer possible for us to see and experience these works as neutral volumes whose cool semblance put them beyond good or evil. When around the corner, and in the museum shop itself, we find them reproduced in hundreds of catalogues that compile the best and most select examples of international design, badges of luxury, refinement and good taste.

But, of course, not everything is mere appearance in art.

After the sudden loss of the presence and authority which these works laid claim to in the early seventies, the conquest of the body and of space became their main achievement. The spectator as subject would thus go from being a model to imitating the body that experiences, while space transmutes from a simple container to the trigger for a thousand and one experiences.

Minimalism no longer spoke metaphorically about anything, not did it countenance any reference to other visual images. In its purported neutrality, this serial, non-relational language of reduced forms was closely related to the program of the modern architecture movement: the absence of ornament, the rationalism of forms, the democratization of space; a vision that defended a timeless and absolute experience of architecture; a perfect state of the form emptied of all content and symbolic value; a utopian proposal that, in its leap into the dark, condensed the whole historical philosophical tradition of the cult of beauty and form that spans from Pythagoras to Plato, including Boullée, Cézanne and Le Corbusier.

It was no longer a question of recognising and interpreting but one of feeling. However, dwelling at the heart of this radicalness is the crux of the minimalist movement. Its whole intention is focused on an experience of the here and now, which calls for the absolute prominence of the senses. And, as we all know, they are the best carriers of ghosts and fantasies.

When contemplating *Untitled*, a less dogmatic and more open work than the first pieces with which Donald Judd and his coevals surprised critics and public alike in the mid-twentieth century, I cannot stop imagining it on retreat in its own personal desert in Jordan; a place where it will resist one thousand and one temptations, as Guillermo Pérez Villalta imagined in his wonderful short story *Judd y la montaña*.

The life of this artist, arguably the most charismatic of the Minimalists, unwittingly reflected an intensely romantic attitude. Judd, fleeing from the increasing banalization of the New York art scene and the new art establishment, would build around himself the clean pure world he longed for. Seduced by the extreme landscape of the desert in Texas, he refurbished some old military hangars in the town of Marfa where he would dedicate himself wholeheartedly to developing his own work, exhibiting the work of his closest colleagues and lending support to a whole new generation of artists. Ironically, this journey meant for him a return to landscape, a genre he had cultivated at the beginning of his career, and to a barren, sterile place which was nevertheless charged with a strong symbolic and metaphoric power.

Beyond all doubt, *Untitled* reveals without the slightest inhibition how Judd was seduced by the form through the cool sensuality contained in the materials. This sensation is further enhanced when physically exploring its edges with our hands; a forbidden action that I would recommend to anyone in front of a work of these characteristics.

In *Untitled*, there is a subtle play between the aluminium and the perspex that lends them a mirror-like quality which not only projects, diffuses, amplifies and inverts the surrounding space, but also our own reflected person. Counterintuitively, the power of this work, much more flexible than it might seem at first sight, given that every change, however small, evinces its infinite development, lies in its economy of forms and materials, and in the simple play of volumes. And it is precisely this coming and going of empty space that enables the entry of all subjectivity.

Through his ascetic vision of beauty and the sublime, Judd invites us to take an expansive interpretation of these two categories intimately bound with the concept of infinity, a territory in which he was perfectly at ease. Looking at *Untitled* transports you and makes you dream, and our body, in communion with the form, is engulfed in a pure experience of scale and measure of itself, and of the space that surrounds it. The physical and mental space.