

1993 MONDRIAN LECTURE

SOME ASPECTS OF COLOR IN GENERAL AND RED AND BLACK
IN PARTICULAR

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Judd did not start his lecture with color but with space, the effect of space in art and in general. Material, space and color are the main aspects of the visual arts. Everyone knows that materials can be picked up and sold, but no one sees space and color. Virtually nothing is or was said about space in the visual arts. The most important and most developed aspect of contemporary art is unknown. A great deal happened with color; but not with space.

There had only been an interest shown in the spatial aspect in modern art for about thirty years. Most sculpture – with the exception of Giacometti – had been a “stone with complications” up to that time. In the early 1960s Judd started to work with the subject of space and he believed that he developed space as one of the most important aspects of art. Other artists that he mentioned included Oldenburg and Serra.

One of the many destructive assumptions nowadays is that ideas have no fathers. But ideas are thought up by someone. For example, the concept of placing a sculpture on the ground without a plinth was one of Judd’s ideas; it is now very common and no one is aware of this. Another one of his ideas was the concept of the installation, the use of the whole space. Many artists devalue this idea. Once again there is no discussion at all and mediocre works are created. Art historians who are concerned with the past are at least still interested in chronology, those who work with contemporary art are not, and they see art as the subject for their own speculations.

The discussion about color is more extensive than that about space and describes the characteristics of color in infinite detail. Art has a history of color. Every other generation, a new idea of color emerges. However, this is a generation without ideas. Nowadays, both space and color are commonly ignored. Judd blamed academies of art for not passing enough historical awareness and knowledge to their pupils. This produced poor artists; the integrity of art was constantly declining.

In retrospect the expansion of color up to the 1960s was logical and ended with the paintings of Pollack, Newman, Still and Rothko.

The need for color and above all, the significance of that need, destroyed the more figurative art of painting. The role of color became more important than it had been for centuries. Color was an immediate perception, a phenomenon.

Color and architecture started and ended with De Stijl. Before and afterwards, there was decoration. The question was whether architecture should consist of natural hues or should be partly colored. In our current overfull and noisy society it is advisable to avoid color. There is already so much (advertising) color screaming out, and even without that most cities are a mess. The newer they are, the worst they get.

Judd examined the use of color in general in more detail – which he obviously considered appalling – , the use of color by other artists and his own use of color, which was extremely systematic and precise.