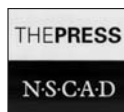


# ARTISTS TALK

1969-1977

Edited by Peggy Gale



**The Press of the  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design**

The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design  
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Andre, Carl, 1935-

*Lever*, 1966

137 firebricks

11.4 x 22.5 x 883.9 cm assembled; brick: 11.4 x 22.5 x 6.4 cm each

Purchased 1969

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 15898.1-137)

Photo: © National Gallery of Canada

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## CARL ANDRE

December, 1969

Carl Andre: The only way I can begin now is to ask people here if they have any questions, comments: things they may have heard about me, things they may have heard me say, or about some of the things that other people have said. Is there anything on your mind? Especially, I would encourage controversy. I find, as William Blake said, "Opposition is true friendship."

I had a show in The Hague this summer, August through September, and the curator of contemporary art—the one who arranged my exhibition in the museum—sent the normal form to the director of the museum, asking for authorization for transportation of the work from The Hague in Holland to Düsseldorf in Germany, where I had a gallery. The director of the museum refused to ship the work because, he said, "This is rubbish, not art." You know, I'm not saying lambaste me, because I'm a very small minority. You know each one of you is one too. Are there any issues bothering anybody? Those are the issues I'd like to talk about most of all.

From the floor: There's one thing Lucy Lippard said about your work—if I got the sense of it right—items that were intended to extend to occupy a volume have an implicit volume over them. In a way, it's saying they were marks that delineated a whole column that existed above any of your pieces. Does this have anything to do with your intentions?

Andre: Well sure, my sculptures are floor pieces. Each one, like any area on the surface of the earth, supports a column of air that weighs—what is it?—

14.7 pounds per square inch. So in a sense, that might represent a column. It's not an idea, it's a sense of something you know, a demarked place. Somehow I think I always thought of it going that way, rather than an idea of a narrowing triangle going to the centre of the earth.

This is what I understand about conceptual art. I'd say Joseph Kosuth certainly thinks of himself as a conceptual artist. His things are "art as idea as idea." Then there's Dan Graham, who is really quite different but also very much into ideas. And then you have Larry Weiner, whom I think is more of a poet, although the pieces that Larry has actually carried out that I've seen, I like. When the pieces are carried out they look quite convincing. But as poems they are also very good. Those are three different aspects of so-called conceptual art. I have nothing to do with conceptual art, I'm not interested in ideas. If I were interested in ideas, I'd be in a field where what we think in is ideas.

I have a question: does anyone know what an idea is? I don't really know what an idea is. One thing for me is that if I can frame something in language, I would never make art out of it. I make art out of things which cannot be framed in any other way. And I don't think the description of something is the same as the thing is itself. An idea, to me, is always something framed in a linguistic structure. And I am interested in linguistic structures as a poet but not as a physical artist.

I like the description "physical art." I think maybe art emerged when man first began to distinguish himself from nature. Art is part of himself, which he returned perhaps as an homage to the nature which he left. Of course, he never left nature. The rise of consciousness, perhaps. Perhaps, in a sense, art has something to do with feedback from man's distinguishing consciousness.

The main thing we believe, that separated us from not only animals but from the stones, is the fact that we are aware that we are not stones, that we are not dogs. And we assume—although we do not know—that dogs do not know that they are dogs and that stones do not know that they are stones. Now that is an assumption, perhaps it's a false assumption. But anyway, somehow I think one of the great functions of art is that man can feed back to his own consciousness through the knowledge that he is not a stone or not a dog—can somehow pay homage to what he is not. For me, art is very very strongly a return of man from consciousness to the physical world.

From the floor: But aren't squares terribly conscious? I mean squares in a numerical array—they don't exist in nature.

Andre: What you're asking is without, you might say, man's conscious, rational manipulation, do we have squares? You have a square in nature because man made a square. Of course you have squares in nature, the faces of crystals very often are the most perfect squares. Galena crystals, for instance, are perfect cubes. Of course you have squares. You have hexagons—crystal structures are one example of that.

William Blake wrote, "Anything that can be imagined is an image of Truth." I've come to believe that more and more and I've come more and more to believe less and less in truth.

Now I've been told there's been some controversy about the relationship of ideas to art. I've told you what I think about it. Does anyone care to say what they think about it?

From the floor: Carl, could you define "idea" again?

Andre: Yes...like I just did.

From the floor: Yes, I don't think it's too difficult to know what an idea is. I mean you have an idea that you're going to have a hamburger instead of fish. And that's an idea.

Andre: Which one do you wind up with though? I mean you have an idea that you want a hamburger instead of a piece of fish and the man says, "I'm sorry we're out of hamburgers."

Art is what happens. This is a discussion I am totally incompetent to hold, a discussion in philosophy. Is the intention to have a hamburger an idea at all? Who knows whether it is? For a long time, I used to have the same problem when people talked about emotions. I need passion in my life. I really didn't know what people were talking about when they said emotions. Feelings I can understand, in a sense, but feelings are not the same thing. In other words, I could understand this quality of states of being but I couldn't understand emotions until finally I realized what people were saying—that an emotion is the feeling of conflict between two contradictory passions.

Then I understood what they were talking about. But before that I didn't have a clear understanding.

As I have said many times, for me an artist is a person who says he's an artist, and an artwork is what the artist says is an artwork. Although for myself, I am not interested in ideas as the burden of art. I couldn't possibly object to a person who says ideas were the burden of his art because that's what he said. I think the time is over when people can say, "How dare you call that art?" I think there are many kinds of art and depending on our state in the world, we respond differently to art and art stimulates us differently. The important thing about art is how it stimulates us. I think the more you are stimulated by more different kinds of art, the more demanding you're going to become on the level of your stimulation. The key to art is experience of it and proximity to it.

From the floor: Like before you make something, before it actually materializes, isn't that an idea?

Andre: No, it's an intention. It's an order for materials, but I don't think of it as being an idea. If anything it's a desire, that's what it's close to. It comes to me as a desire to have something in the world. And again, to quote Blake, "It is better to murder an infant in the cradle than to nurse an ungratified desire." And in a sense, one thing for instance about Larry Weiner's very beautiful poems is that to me, they amount to ungratified desire. But of course I think Larry, consciously or unconsciously, is being very subtle because he is enmeshing other people in his desires by leaving them open. You know, he says this is my desire, you can either gratify or not gratify it, in a sense.

From the floor: Does he consider it? Are these poems of his desires or ideas or what?

Andre: I don't think he considers them his desires. I just happen to think now that what I had for art—for the specific objects which I brought into the world or caused—were in fact not ideas but desires.

You might say that a creative person is a person who simply has a desire to have something, to add something to the world that's not there yet, and goes about arranging for that to happen. It is a specific desire, not a generalized one. Yes, like the desire for money is not the same as the desire to make

art, because you cannot increase the amount of money that's in circulation even if you desire it. All you can do is to take money from someplace where it already exists. You can't counterfeit it because that's against the law. But when you desire a work of art and make it, you've added to the stock of art in the world. Artists are one of the few people who can do that: add to the stock of things. I don't think you can ever add to the stock of ideas. I think the stock of ideas is essentially in-built by the structure of the brain itself and that the mind is the function of the brain.

I have erotic ideas about art. I mean, I feel about it that way. I would take a Freudian view. By that, I mean the Freudian view of sexuality. I think art has a lot to do with sexuality. Art may be man's sexual expression of the physical universe, and I think that's poignant. Although you see I'm also more of a materialist than a rationalist than, let's say, Joseph Kosuth is. Joseph Kosuth is a neo-Platonist and would agree absolutely with Saint John, "In the Beginning was the Word...." Well, I say the word came very late on. In the beginning was the beginning and before that was some more beginning and after that comes more beginning.

I think a lot of this comes from a figure that I've come absolutely to detest in the history of recent art, Marcel Duchamp—a man who achieved everything and who achieved nothing. I suppose art would not have the shape it has now without Duchamp. But I find that Duchamp did a great deal toward bourgeoisisation of art.

From the floor: What do you mean?

Andre: Duchamp strikes me as just being in the dandy tradition. Also, although I certainly agree that anything can be art, certainly that is not the same thing as saying that everything must be art. These are two entirely different propositions. The Duchamp thing is played both ways. The *Urinal*, signed R. Mutt, is played as an art object which is an art object, and then as the opposite of a legitimate art object. And it vacillates back and forth. Well perhaps that's a nice thing, but I don't know, I find Duchampianism a bore. It's very adolescent. I was very much excited by it when I was a teenager. And to this day, I would probably say that the complicated Readymade, which is certainly no Readymade at all—such as the bicycle wheel on a stool, of which I've seen about fifteen different versions with not all of them of the same power to affect me—is a pretty good piece of sculpture.