

# Donald Judd

## Complete Writings 1959-1975

Gallery Reviews Book Reviews Articles Letters  
to the Editor Reports Statements Complaints



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## Introduction

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Most of the reviews and articles in this book were written for *Arts* magazine between the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1965. I was hired by Hilton Kramer who was the editor until November 1961, three months after a change of ownership. The executive editor, James Mellow, was then the editor until March 1965, when he resigned after another change of ownership. I was fired in the summer of 1961 during the first change because there were to be less reviews and rehired by Mellow in January 1962. At this time the magazine changed its name from *Arts* to *Arts Magazine*.

It may be hard to believe but Hilton Kramer was easy to work for; it's plain if you know him that James Mellow was easy to work for. Francis Kloepfel, the associate editor, was responsible for the grammar and clarity of the reviews. I had the galleys sent to me while there was time to restore Kloepfel's changes, which were always few and careful and which we usually debated. Sometimes he was right. No one ever cut the reviews. *Arts* was a somewhat conservative magazine and I was an exception but I was left alone. Esta Leslie, the assistant editor, assigned the shows to be reviewed and tended to give me what I wanted to write about, partly because she was nice and partly because Sidney Tillim wanted just enough modern art to qualify as a major critic. The third reviewer for most of the time, Vivien Raynor, didn't seem interested in anything. I did miss shows that I would have liked to have written about. I remember some reviewer describing Frank Stella's aluminum paintings as mattresses. Neither editor wanted articles. I wanted to write on Reinhardt's work and had been to his studio for the purpose but Mellow didn't want an article on him. All of the few articles were assigned, except for the one on Kansas City, which Mellow nicely agreed to. The article on Bontecou's work was my idea but it was published after Mellow and I had left the magazine. I imagine that *Local History* and *Specific Objects*, though assigned, were concessions to me. The latter article, incidentally, was published perhaps a year after it was written.

The job with *Arts* provided most of my money until the last year. I wrote criticism as a mercenary and would never have written it otherwise. Since there were no set hours and since I could work

at home it was a good part-time job. It took three or four days to see the shows and perhaps a week or so off and on to write the reviews, which I always put off until the deadline. I can't type, which was a nuisance to everyone. Sigrid Byers, another and later assistant editor, sometimes helped with that. I don't remember the pay and the different reviewing schemes too well. I think I was paid 180 dollars a month for quite a while. The rent for my loft was 100 dollars. The few articles were a great help, especially in the summer. In the letter hiring me Kramer gives the rate at the time: "For a review of 300 words, the rate is six dollars; for 150 words, four dollars; for a one-sentence review, three dollars." The magazine was always poor; I felt that Kramer and Mellow paid as well as they could. Obviously art critics should be paid much more. That's one of things seriously wrong with the activity.

According to an editorial of Kramer's in September 1961 the reviews were to become selective. A list for September 1962 that I still have gives 48 shows assigned and seen. Sixteen were reviewed. Forty-eight seems high and may be because Tillim was not reviewing shows that month. Fifteen reviews a month seems to be the average. Evidently before September 1961 all shows were seen and reviewed. The 1962 list indicates that we still saw everything but chose the better ones to write about. I believe that later we didn't see everything.

D.J., New York, July, 1974

they're both capable. Gourfain's paintings are powerful but in a way somewhat easy to achieve. Lee's are not as strong, though not weak either. Gourfain constructs large all-over paintings of parts resembling short lengths of thick pipe with lips on either end. The pipes are black and are modelled in a commercial way to a central highlight. The interstices are white. The wall of volumes is of course impressive. Sometimes there is a little color or composition. Lee, in some of his paintings, is doing something intrinsically more interesting, though doing it moderately, for example, using several shades of yellow together. A vertical painting is divided into three horizontal parts with three inches of wall in between. The top is largest, the middle next and the bottom smallest. Sets of two concentric squares in yellow are painted on the sections as if there were no cuts. The yellows at the top are close and those at the bottom divergent. The two cuts run through different contrasts and are thus different themselves.

Robert Huot's paintings are most like Ellsworth Kelly's, except that they are much more geometric than organic. Their simplicity, scale and power is not much less than Kelly's. The relationship may not be one of derivation but there is a common context, one which is fairly familiar, though not so much so that there isn't work within it as good as Huot's. A large painting, *Chriss*, has two parallel wide yellow bands, bent at an oblique angle and not extending to the edge, placed on blue. The space between the bands is about the same width, so that the blue there is on the yellow or within it. Most of the forms turn the ground color into an enclosed positive color. One of the best paintings, *Carl pict*, a smaller one, has this to the greatest extent. The apparently positive form is a dull red and the apparently negative ground is a full cobalt blue. The band of red runs near and parallel to the left edge and up on the diagonal of the horizontal rectangle. As always none of the bands extends to the edges. Within that angle there are second and third lines parallel to the diagonal, progressively shorter and also connected to the upright arm. The red pattern seems to knife into the blue. The blue, since it runs between the the diagonal lines, knifes into the red and into itself. That's not bad. None of this is spatial or illusionistic. It's only a matter of color and arrangement.

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## Statement

which appeared in "ABC Art"  
by Barbara Rose

*Art in America*,  
October/November 1965

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One of the important things in any art is its degree of generality and specificity and another is how each of these occurs. The extent and the occurrence have to be credible. I'd like my work to be somewhat more specific than art has been and also specific and general in a different way. This is also probably the intention of a few other artists. Although I admire the work of some of the older artists, I can't altogether believe its generality. Earlier art is less credible. Of course, finally, I only believe my own work. It is necessary to make general statements, but it is impossible and not even desirable to believe most generalizations. No one has the knowledge to form a comprehensive group of reliable generalizations. It is silly to have opinions about many things that you're supposed to have opinions on. About others, where it seems necessary, the necessity and the opinion are mostly guess. Some of my generalizations, like these verbal ones, are about this situation. Other generalizations and much of the specificity are assertions of my own interests and those that have settled in the public domain.

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## Arts Yearbook 8, 1965

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### Specific Objects

Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture. Usually it has been related, closely or distantly, to one or the other. The work is diverse, and much in it that is not in painting and sculpture is also diverse. But there are some things that occur nearly in common.

The new three-dimensional work doesn't constitute a movement, school or style. The common aspects are too general and too little common to define a movement. The differences are greater than the similarities. The similarities are selected from the work; they aren't a movement's

first principles or delimiting rules. Three-dimensionality is not as near being simply a container as painting and sculpture have seemed to be, but it tends to that. But now painting and sculpture are less neutral, less containers, more defined, not undeniable and unavoidable. They are particular forms circumscribed after all, producing fairly definite qualities. Much of the motivation in the new work is to get clear of these forms. The use of three dimensions is an obvious alternative. It opens to anything. Many of the reasons for this use are negative, points against painting and sculpture, and since both are common sources, the negative reasons are those nearest commonage. "The motive to change is always some uneasiness: nothing setting us upon the change of state, or upon any new action, but some uneasiness." The positive reasons are more particular. Another reason for listing the insufficiencies of painting and sculpture first is that both are familiar and their elements and qualities more easily located.

The objections to painting and sculpture are going to sound more intolerant than they are. There are qualifications. The disinterest in painting and sculpture is a disinterest in doing it again, not in it as it is being done by those who developed the last advanced versions. New work always involves objections to the old, but these objections are really relevant only to the new. They are part of it. If the earlier work is first-rate it is complete. New inconsistencies and limitations aren't retroactive; they concern only work that is being developed. Obviously, three-dimensional work will not cleanly succeed painting and sculpture. It's not like a movement; anyway, movements no longer work; also, linear history has unraveled somewhat. The new work exceeds painting in plain power, but power isn't the only consideration, though the difference between it and expression can't be too great either. There are other ways than power and form in which one kind of art can be more or less than another. Finally, a flat and rectangular surface is too handy to give up. Some things can be done only on a flat surface. Lichtenstein's representation of a representation is a good instance. But this work which is neither painting nor sculpture challenges both. It will have to be taken into account by new artists. It will probably change painting and sculpture. The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall. A rectangle is a shape

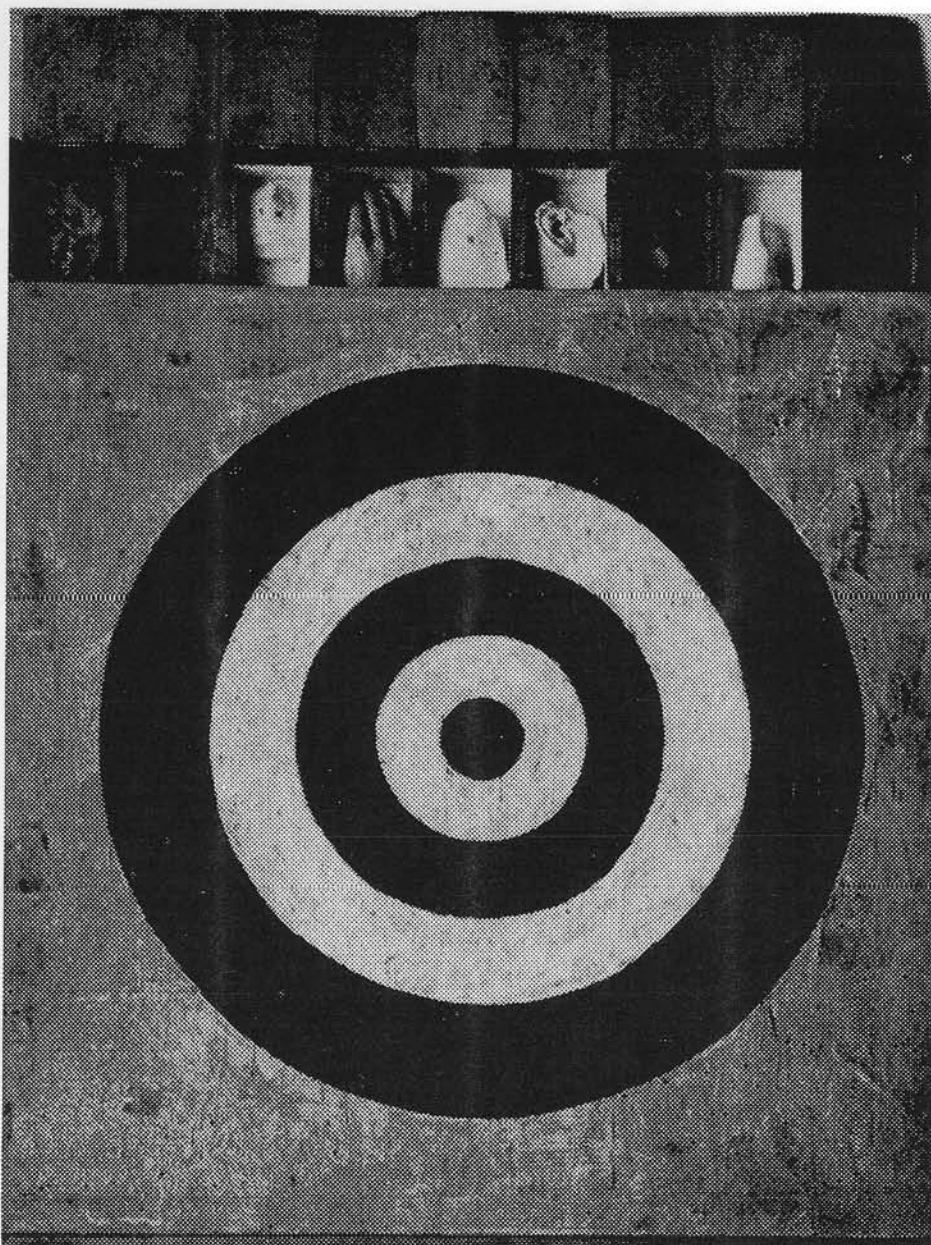
itself; it is obviously the whole shape; it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside of it. In work before 1946 the edges of the rectangle are a boundary, the end of the picture. The composition must react to the edges and the rectangle must be unified, but the shape of the rectangle is not stressed; the parts are more important, and the relationships of color and form occur among them. In the paintings of Pollock, Rothko, Still and Newman, and more recently of Reinhardt and Noland, the rectangle is emphasized. The elements inside the rectangle are broad and simple and correspond closely to the rectangle. The shapes and surface are only those which can occur plausibly within and on a rectangular plane. The parts are few and so subordinate to the unity as not to be parts in an ordinary sense. A painting is nearly an entity, one thing, and not the indefinable sum of a group of entities and references. The one thing overpowers the earlier painting. It also establishes the rectangle as a definite form; it is no longer a fairly neutral limit. A form can be used only in so many ways. The rectangular plane is given a life span. The simplicity required to emphasize the rectangle limits the arrangements possible within it. The sense of singleness also has a duration, but it is only beginning and has a better future outside of painting. Its occurrence in painting now looks like a beginning, in which new forms are often made from earlier schemes and materials.

The plane is also emphasized and nearly single. It is clearly a plane one or two inches in front of another plane, the wall, and parallel to it. The relationship of the two planes is specific; it is a form. Everything on or slightly in the plane of the painting must be arranged laterally.

Almost all paintings are spatial in one way or another. Yves Klein's blue paintings are the only ones that are unspatial, and there is little that is nearly unspatial, mainly Stella's work. It's possible that not much can be done with both an upright rectangular plane and an absence of space. Anything on a surface has space behind it. Two colors on the same surface almost always lie on different depths. An even color, especially in oil paint, covering all or much of a painting is almost always both flat and infinitely spatial. The space is shallow in all of the work in which the rectangular plane is stressed. Rothko's space is shallow and the soft rectangles are parallel to the plane, but the space is almost traditionally illusionistic. In Reinhardt's paintings, just back from the plane of the canvas, there is

a flat plane and this seems in turn indefinitely deep. Pollock's paint is obviously on the canvas, and the space is mainly that made by any marks on a surface, so that it is not very descriptive and illusionistic. Noland's concentric bands are not as specifically paint-on-a-surface as Pollock's paint, but the bands flatten the literal space more. As flat and unillusionistic as Noland's paintings are, the bands do advance and recede. Even a single circle will warp the surface to it, will have a little space behind it.

Except for a complete and unvaried field of color or marks, anything spaced in a rectangle and on a plane suggests something in and on something else, something in its surround, which suggests an object or figure in its space, in which these are clearer instances of a similar world — that's the main purpose of painting. The recent paintings aren't completely single. There are a few dominant areas, Rothko's rectangles or Noland's circles, and there is the area around them. There is a gap between the main forms, the most



Jasper Johns, *Large Construction* (1955)

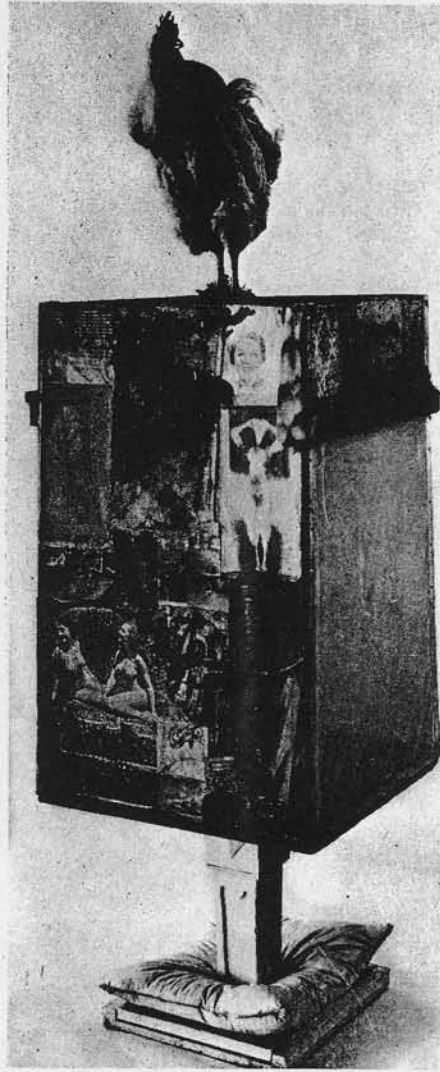
expressive parts, and the rest of the canvas, the plane and the rectangle. The central forms still occur in a wider and indefinite context, although the singleness of the paintings abridges the general and solipsistic quality of earlier work. Fields are also usually not limited, and they give the appearance of sections cut from something indefinitely larger.

Oil paint and canvas aren't as strong as commercial paints and as the colors and surfaces of materials, especially if the materials are used in three dimensions. Oil and canvas are familiar and, like the rectangular plane, have a certain quality and have limits. The quality is especially identified with art.

The new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting. Most sculpture is like the painting which preceded Pollock, Rothko, Still and Newman. The newest thing about it is its broad scale. Its materials are somewhat more emphasized than before. The imagery involves a couple of salient resemblances to other visible things and a number of more oblique references, everything generalized to compatibility. The parts and the space are allusive, descriptive and somewhat naturalistic. Higgins' sculpture is an example, and, dissimilarly, Di Suvero's. Higgins' sculpture mainly suggests machines and truncated bodies. Its combination of plaster and metal is more specific. Di Suvero uses beams as if they were brush strokes, imitating movement, as Kline did. The material never has its own movement. A beam thrusts, a piece of iron follows a gesture; together they form a naturalistic and anthropomorphic image. The space corresponds.

Most sculpture is made part by part, by addition, composed. The main parts remain fairly discrete. They and the small parts are a collection of variations, slight through great. There are hierarchies of clarity and strength and of proximity to one or two main ideas. Wood and metal are the usual materials, either alone or together, and if together it is without much of a contrast. There is seldom any color. The middling contrast and the natural monochrome are general and help to unify the parts.

There is little of any of this in the new three-dimensional work. So far the most obvious difference within this diverse work is between that which is something of an object, a single thing, and that which is open and extended, more or less environmental. There isn't as great a difference in their nature as in their appear-



Robert Rauschenberg, *Odalisk* (1955-58)

ance, though. Oldenburg and others have done both. There are precedents for some of the characteristics of the new work. The parts are usually subordinate and not separate in Arp's sculpture and often in Brancusi's. Duchamp's ready-mades and other Dada objects are also seen at once and not part by part. Cornell's boxes have too many parts to seem at first to be structured. Part-by-part structure can't be too simple or too complicated. It has to seem orderly. The degree of Arp's abstraction, the moderate extent of his reference to the human body, neither imitative nor very oblique, is unlike the imagery of most of the new three-dimensional work. Duchamp's bottle-drying rack is close to some of it. The work of Johns and Rauschenberg and assemblage and low-relief generally, Ortman's reliefs for example, are preliminaries. Johns's few cast objects and a few of

Rauschenberg's works, such as the goat with the tire, are beginnings.

Some European paintings are related to objects, Klein's for instance, and Castellani's, which have unvaried fields of low-relief elements. Arman and a few others work in three dimensions. Dick Smith did some large pieces in London with canvas stretched over cockeyed parallelepiped frames and with the surfaces painted as if the pieces were paintings. Philip King, also in London, seems to be making objects. Some of the work on the West Coast seems to be along this line, that of Larry Bell, Kenneth Price, Tony Delap, Sven Lukin, Bruce Conner, Kienholz of course, and others. Some of the work in New York having some or most of the characteristics is that by George Brecht, Ronald Bladen, John Willenbecher, Ralph Ortiz, Anne Truitt, Paul Harris, Barry McDowell, John Chamberlain, Robert Tanner, Aaron Kuriloff, Robert Morris, Nathan Raisen, Tony Smith, Richard Navin, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Watts, Yoshimura, John Anderson, Harry Soviak, Yayoi Kusama, Frank Stella, Salvatore Scarpitta, Neil Williams, George Segal, Michael Snow, Richard Artschwager, Arakawa, Lucas Samaras, Lee Bontecou, Dan Flavin and Robert Whitman. H.C. Westermann works in Connecticut. Some of these artists do both three-dimensional work and paintings. A small amount of the work of others, Warhol and Rosenquist for instance, is three-dimensional.

The composition and imagery of Chamberlain's work is primarily the same as that of earlier painting, but these are secondary to an appearance of disorder and are at first concealed by the material. The crumpled tin tends to stay that way. It is neutral at first, not artistic, and later seems objective. When the structure and imagery become apparent, there seems to be too much tin and space, more chance and casualness than order. The aspects of neutrality, redundancy and form and imagery could not be coextensive without three dimensions and without the particular material. The color is also both neutral and sensitive and, unlike oil colors, has a wide range. Most color that is integral, other than in painting, has been used in three-dimensional work. Color is never unimportant, as it usually is in sculpture.

Stella's shaped paintings involve several important characteristics of three-dimensional work. The periphery of a piece and the lines inside correspond. The stripes are nowhere near being discrete parts.

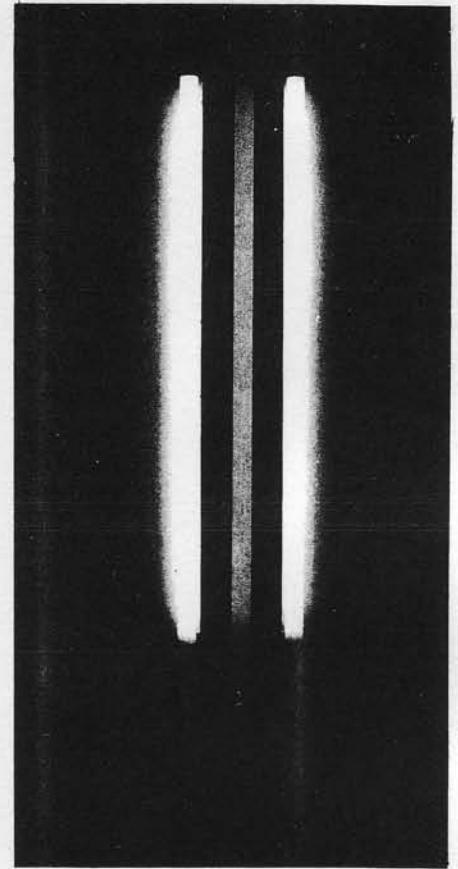
The surface is farther from the wall than usual, though it remains parallel to it. Since the surface is exceptionally unified and involves little or no space, the parallel plane is unusually distinct. The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another. A painting isn't an image. The shapes, the unity, projection, order and color are specific, aggressive and powerful.

Painting and sculpture have become set forms. A fair amount of their meaning isn't credible. The use of three dimensions isn't the use of a given form. There hasn't been enough time and work to see limits. So far, considered most widely, three dimensions are mostly a space to move into. The characteristics of three dimensions are those of only a small amount of work, little compared to painting and sculpture. A few of the more general aspects may persist, such as the work's being like an object or being specific, but other characteristics are bound to develop. Since its range is so wide, three-dimensional work will probably divide into a number of forms. At any rate, it will be larger than painting and much larger than sculpture, which, compared to painting, is fairly particular, much nearer to what is usually called a form, having a certain kind of form. Because the nature of three dimensions isn't set, given beforehand, something credible can be made, almost anything. Of

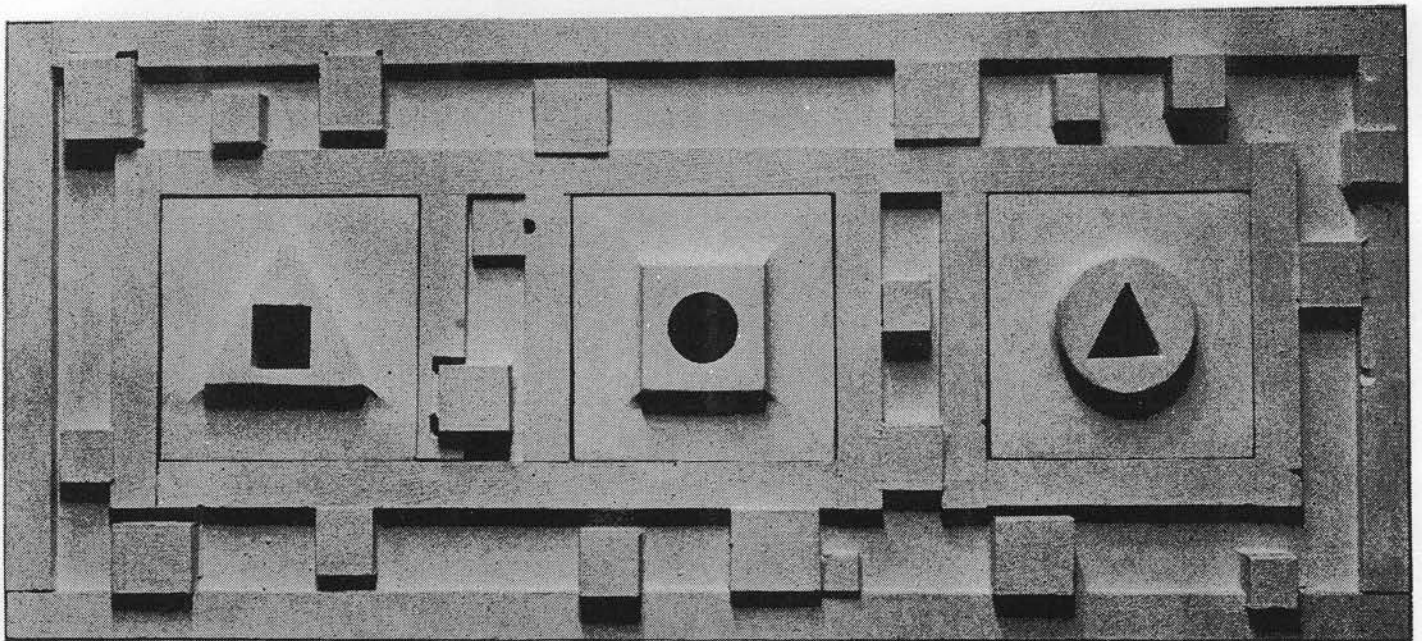
course something can be done within a given form, such as painting, but with some narrowness and less strength and variation. Since sculpture isn't so general a form, it can probably be only what it is now — which means that if it changes a great deal it will be something else; so it is finished.

Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors — which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art. The several limits of painting are no longer present. A work can be as powerful as it can be thought to be. Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted.

A work needs only to be interesting. Most works finally have one quality. In earlier art the complexity was displayed and built the quality. In recent painting the complexity was in the format and the few main shapes, which had been made according to various interests and problems. A painting by Newman is finally no simpler than one by Cézanne. In the three-dimensional work the whole thing is made according to complex purposes, and these are not scattered but asserted



Dan Flavin, *Three Fluorescent Tubes (Red and Gold)* (1963)



George Ortman, *Stages of Life* (1956)