

Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

File 11 Minimal arts

Minimal poetry p. 127

But a poem doesn't need to rhyme, or contain multiple words. A poem is simply a type of literary art that uses aesthetic or rhythmic properties of a language to mean more than it normally would. With that definition in mind, take a look at my favorite one-word poem, by Aram Saroyan: the word "light", with an extra "gh". The poem became controversial because the NEA paid him \$500 for the poem. Critics berated it for its simplicity, but that only made it more famous and popular. "Lighght". It's fun to type and it's fun to say; because what sound does the "gh" in the word "light" really make? Is this a lighter, fluffier, extended version of "light", or is it a gurgled, choky one?

Minimal art vs abstract expressionism p. 128

So you see a few cubes sitting in an art gallery, and you think to yourself, "This is the greatest hoax that anyone has ever pulled off." You immediately walk away, discouraged by the wide gulf between what you hope for when you walk into a museum, and what they've presented to you. How did we get here? How could these cubes that the artists didn't even make with their own hands be important? This is the case for minimalism.

First off, we're not talking about minimalism as a general sensibility, or the life-changing magic of tidying up. We're talking about the art of a particular moment in time, namely the 1960s, when all of a sudden there was a lot of geometric, abstract art. Some of it was painting, by artists like Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly; but most of it was sculpture by artists like Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Anne Truitt, Robert Morris, Tony Smith, Ronald Bladen and Sol LeWitt.

Art critics called it "ABC art", "object art", "primary structures" and "cool art". But the term "minimalism" prevailed. These artists never called their art "minimalist", by the way, nor did they like the term, or the implication that their work was so reductive that it was minimally art. But minimalism was a rejection of what came before, specifically abstract expressionism, which dominated the art market in the 1950s.

These new artists wanted to remove expression completely, remove emotion, empty the work of idiosyncratic gesture, make it resistant to biographical reading. Their hard-edged, basic shapes and forms avoided illusion, metaphor and overt symbolism. The forms were often repeated, one thing after another, in regular non-hierarchical arrangements, rejecting compositional balancing. No artist hemming and hawing over the canvas here. The objects were impersonal, many of them machine-made, fabricated from new and industrial materials. Sometimes this entailed ready-made units, like Andre's bricks or Flavin's fluorescent tubes.

Minimalist music p. 131

Montagne: On his website, Philip Glass's music from this period is elegantly described as “immersing a listener in a sort of sonic weather that twists, turns, surrounds, develops.” When he sat down to talk about a newly released retrospective of his work, Philip Glass was a bit more plainspoken.

Philip Glass (Composer): This is what people used to call “the needle-stuck-in-the-groove music.”

Montagne: Was that descriptive or a complimentary or...

(Soundbite of laughter)

Mr. Glass: Oh, I think it was meant pejoratively, but the point is, is that the kind of attention that we pay to music is a little bit different with this music. Because things, events happen in the music but rather more slowly than you're used to. So it was like taking a microscope and looking at something very close up, and you'll see things that you never would have seen before. That kind of happens to music when you slow down the rate of change. The music isn't slow, but the rate of change is slow. [...]

Montagne: I just wonder, when critics don't like your music, they can be pretty...

Mr. Glass: Oh, they get very mean. Now, here's the thing, Renee, that you have to remember. Though we were vilified, and I particularly, you know, as the composer, by certain parts of the press, at the same time, we got huge amounts of attention. Without that kind of reaction, I doubt that we would have had the kind of public that we ended up with. People got curious about us, you know. I mean, if it was so bad, how bad -- you know, what was it, you know?

Montagne: So you would want to thank the headline writer in the early '70s who wrote - I'm just reading one of the – "music of Philip Glass called 'sonic torture'".

Mr. Glass: Yes, that's right. That was one of our favorite ones.

Minimal art in the desert p. 131

Marfa is a town in West Texas, on the high plains of the Chihuahuan desert, at the junction of US Highways 90 and 67. It's a 3-hour drive from El Paso, an hour and a half from Big Bend National Park, and an hour to the Mexico border [...]

Tourists sometimes stop here to try to catch the "Marfa mystery lights", an unexplained night phenomenon that has been reported since the town's founding. But we didn't investigate. We were here for a different reason, the same reason that brings about 40,000 tourists a year, and that's this guy: Donald Judd.

In the early 1970s, artist Donald Judd moved to Marfa and purchased the former military buildings you see here, an outpost of Fort Russell, right by the tracks and this still-operating feed mill. There's the quartermaster's house, which Judd adapted for he and his family to live in, and two army hangars, which became spaces for him to live, work and store and display his art. [...]

It's here through the pivoting door, also of Judd's design, that you can experience his work exactly as he wanted you to. Permanent installations in natural light and made to coexist with the materials and architecture of the space. For Judd, these weren't sculptures, but what he called "specific objects", a new kind of three-dimensional art that was neither painting nor sculpture.