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MEN AT WORK:THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MATERIAL IN THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTIST AND FABRICATOR IN THE 1960S AND 1970S**

In the autumn of 1989, the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles exhibited sculptures of Minimal Art. One of them was Carl Andre's work *Fall* from 1968: twenty-one L-shaped, hot rolled steel plates (2. 54 x 182. 88 x 1493. 52 cm) lying on the floor and leaning against the wall. Another was Donald Judd's Wall from 1974, metal sheets made of galvanized steel which each stand five feet high and 'float' in front of the three existing walls of a room.[1] Both works were on loan from the collector Guiseppe Count Panza di Biumo of Varese, Italy.

A few months later, in the magazine *Art in America*, both artists distanced themselves vehemently from their supposed works calling them forgeries (Carl Andre in *Art in America* 3/90 p. 34, and Judd in 4/90 p. 33).

What had happened? In order to save on the costs of shipping these very large and heavy pieces from Italy to America, Count Panza had had both works refabricated in Los Angeles. He had done so with utmost conviction. In an interview in the July edition of the same magazine, he reacted to the artists' criticism: "It is in the nature of a minimalist, conceptual and environmental art that it is not realized by the artist's hand. The project is the original, its realisation is left to a third party – that is to say, a specialist's workshop."

This dispute between artist and collector raises one of the most crucial questions for the understanding of modern art: how important is knowledge about the significance of the material used in the sculpture of our time?

Since many presentations of modern art already include exhibition copies of the actual works, it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish between a manufactured original and a manufactured copy. Besides, to what extent is a piece of art still genuine after the 'delegation' of labour to an assistant? And finally: what kind of insight does a conservator need to be qualified to work on industrial materials used in art objects?

Serial productions and the assistant's role

At the beginning of the 1960s a rather factual, objective, unemotional art emerged to oppose the strong gestures of Abstract Expressionism. It was untouched by any kind of individual signature, untouched by brush or fingerprint. Only the technical process was supposed to be recognisable, the fact that it was exchangeable and reproducible.

Already in the late fifties, the then graphic designer Andy Warhol manufactured rubber stamps in various sizes up to 12-square centimeters out of soft Artgum erasers, carving out stars, suns, butterflies and flowers. Thus for the first time he realised a professional repetition of images, which were then water-coloured.[2] Later, he took advantage of his background as a graphic designer and improved the method. In his book Popism Warhol stated: "In August 1962, I started doing silkscreens. The rubber-stamp method I'd been using to repeat images seemed too home-made."[3]

His silkscreen method enabled him not only to reproduce everything from photographs, with this kind of objective picture-transmission he also introduced a delegable medium with which any assistant could produce Warhol's art works.

The consequences of this division of labour between artist and assistant can be understood from the next example. When doing research on a relief by Jan J. Schoonhoven entitled *R 75-2*, in order to restore it, I sent a letter to the artist. Only one week later, on 19 July 1991, I received a reply – not from Schoonhoven, but from his assistant Aad in 't Veld – stating the following:
Jan Schoonhoven asked me to answer your letter. Since 1970 it has been me who executed the reliefs by Jan Schoonhoven and also restored them. Thus, I also produced the relief you are talking about.The white paint is latex. Always the same Vinyl Latex or Acryl Latex, mostly Vinyl, Super of Flexa – which is manufactured by AKZO Coatings Holland.

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If you wish, I could restore this relief for you. Jan recommends to paint the whole thing white again, if the owner doesn't mind. Then the object will reflect light again. In Jan's opinion it should be painted over every third year, then it will become even more beautiful. But if anyone objects and would prefer it more dull and more dirty, then that's also fine – this could also look beautiful, although it is not the nature of his work. Often I also find that when restoring a work I want to justice at least to the discoloration of the Stauboder and then I do it. The very, very old reliefs by Jan are left alone, of course. Prepared to help, best regards,

Aad in't Veld

Schoonhoven himself once stated: "I am the architect, the assistant is the engineer."

This letter very clearly indicates some problems as well as the phenomenon of the delegated production of art works:

— The artist has not fabricated the work, but his assistant.
— The materials used are standardised and available to anybody as long as they are being produced. But beware when the production runs out!
— The assistant offers to 'restore' the work.

Semiotic of material

Still, an everyday object can have a subtle significance. What kind of semiotic value the artist may attribute to it, is illustrated by my experience with Pistoletto.

In 1965 the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, who in the early sixties became famous for his reflecting mirror panels ("the spectator being part of the image"), bought a street lamp of the type hanging over pedestrian crossings. The technology at that time was a club-shaped mercury vapour lamp. The work in which Pistoletto used it was entitled *Lampada a Mercurio*; it obviously took up the notion of reflection, transformed into warm yellow light.

In 1992, when preparing an exhibition, the artist asked me if I could procure such a bulb to replace the original one, as he was afraid that it might break after being in operation for almost twenty-five years. In the meantime, however, the technology had gone out of production for ecological reasons. We did find a similar lamp instead, same shape, same colour temperature, but of a different technology: that of natrium vapour. Of course Pistoletto refused this surrogate, as the technology did not respond to his semiotic of materials.

Minimal artists share an interest in the radical reduction of artistic expression through a particular approach to material and volume. We can see how the material itself becomes more and more important, to the point where it constitutes the artistic statement itself. Another shared philosophy is, as Sol LeWitt put it: "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically."[4]

On the other hand, if we look closer at the work of Carl Andre and Donald Judd, two of the main protagonists of Minimal Art, it may become obvious that art-histo- rical terms such as Minimal Art or Minimal Artist may possibly subsume individual artists – their particular intentions and working methods varying in the extreme.

Certificate and reconstruction

Judd's specific concern about material and any potential reconstruction becomes obvious from the certificate of his work *Untitled* in the Guggenheim Museum, Collection of G. Panza (1970, cold rolled perforated steel, 29,40 x 350,52 x 297,18 cm). Judd wrote:

I hereby grant G.P., his successors and assigns the right to reconstruct the work if it is ever dismantled, destroyed, stolen or lost, provided that this is done by reference to, and in strict and exact compliance with, the document and all of the details and instructions set forth (...). I, or my personal representatives or my estate, am notified in writing of the reconstruction of the work. (...) no more than one such realisation of the work may exist at any time, except that a copy may be made (...) for temporary exhibition purposes, (...) the work is to be (...) destroyed immediately after the exhibition ends (...).

I or my duly authorized representative or my estate shall be notified of any such temporary realization and of all details relating to its later destruction. I further grant G.P. the right to recreate the work, to save the expense and difficulty involved in transporting it over long distances, provided the original work is promptly destroyed by G.P. (...) the document and this certificate (...) shall constitute proof of ownership of the work, and it is not necessary that the work now in existence, or any later recreation of it, be signed. Ownership (...) only to be transferred by the transfer of the document and this certificate and the realized work, if it is then in existence (...), 7/12/75. Hand-written addition: *exception: this piece should only be remade by Bernstein.* (Bernstein was Judd's fabricator on Long Island.)

This text would mean Donald Judd actually gave Count Panza the right to reconstruct this particular work in order to save on shipping expenses, be it with certain provisions. In 1970 Judd obviously still trusted him.

Soon after, when Panza had had a couple of Judd's works refabricated from blueprints the wrong way around, the artist wrote him a letter saying: "The technology and craftsmanship of my work is part of the art. Work made without my supervision is not my work. You cannnot continue to do so!" (D. Judd, 'Una stanza per Panza' in *Kunst Intern* 11/90, part IV).

Throughout the different concepts of original and refabrication we need to keep in mind that the subject matter is first of all to legally protect an object as a genuine piece of art, because as Judd said: "This work is my original and unique creation."

The material is the matter

With Carl Andre, the situation is different: he never made a blueprint, nor does he have his pieces fabricated from sketches. He chooses plain metal of a certain size and quantity and then decides on the specific configuration at the final location.

His pieces are never too large not to be installed by himself. One day in February 1996, during a conversation we had, I asked him if he saw himself as a conceptual – or minimal – artist. He put his strong square hands on the table and answered in utter suprise: "Just look at my hands – I am a sculptor!" And so it is: what matters is the material. For Andre, working with materials is before anything else a physical approach. For four years, Andre used to work on the railroad as a freight brakeman. In an interview with Jeanne Siegel for *Art International*, November 1970, he talked about the influence of this experience on his work: "So I was continually shifting cars around and making new strings of material. And of course there are the steel rails going on for miles, and ties, and just all the industrial material – coke, iron, ore, scrap metals; all the materials going through there are raw materials that I was tremendously interested in too."

The traces of time in industrially manufactured art works

Quite revealing is Andre's approach when a work of his is damaged. If part of it is broken or lost, he does not exchange single plates but claims the entire piece back to configurate it into a new work of art. To protect his work as a genuine original, his certificate is an important part of it. Regrettably, Carl Andre refuses to have his certificates published.

Andre's pieces all have biographical characteristics, he always tries to connect his works to everyday history. In a conversation with Piet de Jonge, in August 1997, he explained: "My large metal floor pieces very much benefit from pedestrian traffic flowing over them. Rarely used railroad tracks become dull and rusty, heavily used railroad tracks keep silvery bright in all weathers."

There are numerous incidents which prove Carl Andre to have an almost romantic relationship with materials. In a way, Donald Judd was also quite open to the beauty of patina. In an interview with Donna Williams, Peter Ballentine (Judd's studio supervisor) explained: "The artist's intention was not necessarily to have the pieces in a pristine state of high polish at all times. In fact, though streaking and fingerprints are considered unacceptable, an overall, evenly tarnished surface for these works was not to be considered undesirable."[5]

Conclusion

Some of the concepts discussed here obviously contain the will to establish the permanent New; they represent a constant longing to escape history – which can never be fulfilled. The notion of industrially manufactured perfection as a representation of inaccessibility and objectivity will always be in contradiction with the biographical life span of the material at hand.

None of those involved – artist, collector and dealer – wants to give up the auratic qualities of the original, even though the criteria of authorship have become invalid through the division of labour. The claim of originality seems to have been given up, the artist's work being produced by his own assistant or some manufacturer of his choice, but only in appearances.

What, then, is the difference between a manufactured original and an identically produced copy? The answer is this: the concept of originality has not at all faded, but surprisingly widened – any light bulb can be declared art, as long as the artist declares it! As for the material, the sole difference is the history of the object. One can always produce a second object, yet it will not bear the traces of time.

Since we do not want to make the same mistakes as those conservators who every fifteen years issue new directions for supposedly final goals of conservation for architecture and other historic monuments, there are no final answers to the questions asked. Conservators – together with art historians and natural scientists – will continually have to balance their understanding of the unavoidable traces of history even within more recent works of art, and the artist's claim for the pristine condition and originality of his art. Like Carl Andre said in my last conversation with him: "When handling art we must always remember five important things: gloves, gloves, gloves, gloves and gloves!"

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1 Susan Hapgood, 'Remaking Art History', in: Art in America, July 1990.
2 Marco Livingstone, 'Do it yourself: Notes to Warhol's Techniques', in: Andy Warhol – Retrospective, catalogue 1989-1990, Cologne-New York.
3 Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism – The Warhol Sixties, 1980, p. 22.
4 Sol LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', in: Art-Language, no. 1, May 1969, p. 11.
5 R. Lowinger and D. Williams, 'Quiet Collaboration...', in: From Marble to Chocolate – The Conservation of Modern Sculpture, Tate Gallery, London, 1995.

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