

# Sol LeWitt: Beyond the Wall

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The question concerning the origin of the work of art asks about the source of its nature. On the usual view, the work arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other.

*The Origin of the Word Art* Martin Heidegger

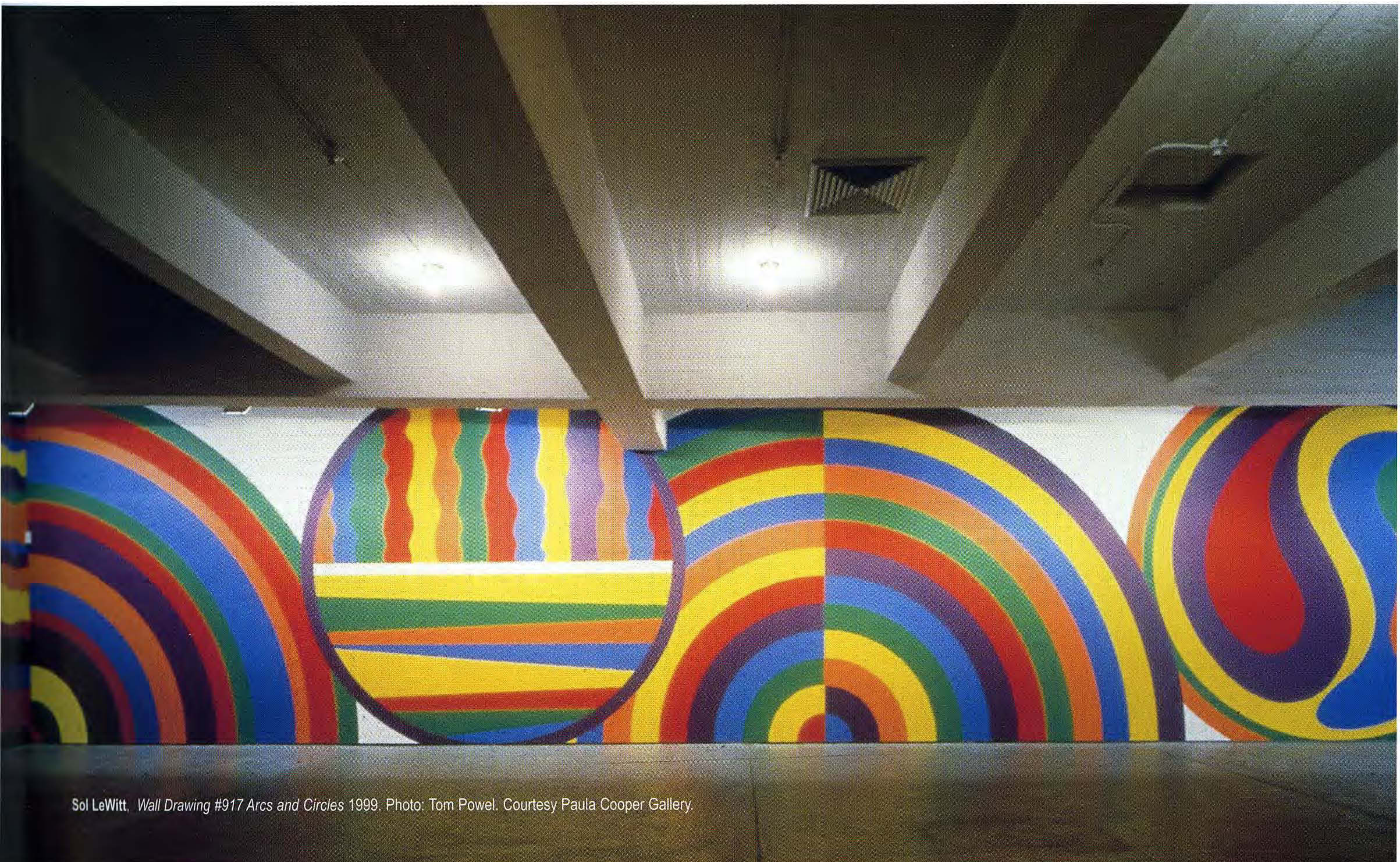
It is always difficult to find a framework vivid enough to incorporate the work of an artist like Sol LeWitt. To see his work now in the context of one art group or another is irrelevant. Posters, tables, gouaches, photo works, wall drawings, concrete block sculptures and serial structures can all serve to define his interests, "I am going all different directions. I do a lot of things simultaneously," he says. Obsessed with the process of developing a concept, he carries out an idea as far as possible, "when I can't think of doing anything more with it then sometimes I do the opposite." In the end he does what he has to do to express the complexity of his ideas.

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While his work, since the publication of "Paragraphs on Conceptual

Art" in Artforum in 1967, is seen as Conceptual and Minimalist, along with the work of artists like Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Frank Stella, it is clear that the artist also wishes to explore thoroughly ideas outside these categorical bounds. And although Sol LeWitt has been pursuing different directions in his structures and wall drawings, he relates his different projects to each other, "What I am thinking about in one media parallels my thinking in other media too." For example, the series *Non-Geometric forms*, softly contoured sculptures in fiberglass, has its immediate precedent in his wall drawings of the past few years in which soft curves, wavy-edged stripes and amoeboid, streamlined forms are incorporated into a coherent vocabulary.

LeWitt readily admits that his interests span beyond the strict confines of Conceptualism, "I don't see myself as part of any particular context or as part of a movement or group that was around 30 years ago, and



Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #917 Arcs and Circles* 1999. Photo: Tom Powel. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.









my thinking has changed since then. I suppose some people think that I have betrayed some ideas and that is actually true. Certain ideological purists might think that the sentences I wrote about conceptual art would be something that I would live by for the rest of my life and for the most part I do, but they are not chiseled in stone and they are not sacrosanct. I don't think of things in an ideological sense. I wanted not to be hemmed in, hobbled by and restricted by ideas I might have had at one time or another. I just wanted to go from one work of art to another and figure out what the next step might be. You change and develop. You go from one thing to another. You cannot make your own prison and live in a small, constricted space. That is not the idea of freedom."

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The overwhelming evidence of LeWitt's own evolution is reflected not only in his retrospective at the Whitney Museum in New York City but also in the simultaneous shows at Paula Cooper Gallery and at PaceWildenstein, "the retrospective goes up to about the summer. And [the work at Paula Cooper and Pace] is all new work," says LeWitt. The retrospective shows "the work that represents better the kind of

thinking I was doing at different times. It is a logical progression of work that goes from the beginning until now. When I show all the steps of representation from different times, of the kind of thinking I was doing at those times, it makes it more believable to people. People think I made a big jump from what I did earlier to what I am doing now, but it is not a big jump it is a gradual process." LeWitt's retrospective presents his wide range of conceptual principles, which expresses his inclusive approach towards art. It makes evident how the increasing visual complexity not only of the structures but also of the drawings and wall drawings is accentuated by his selection of materials and colors. His work continues to honor Lucy Lippard's statement in an essay in 1967, "the attraction of his structures is their beauty."

Some of the most recent sculptural prototypes that LeWitt is developing for a monument in Barcelona remind us of the utopian architecture of Russian Constructivism, or the type of architecture that fills architects dreams. "In a way I think that some of my forms look like architecture," says LeWitt, "That is just what happens. My background, my thinking of the three-dimensional form doesn't come from art, it comes from architecture. I think of Brunelleschi much more than I think of Rodin, or Bernini."

Sol LeWitt quotes are from a conversation with the author at his studio in Chester, CT in November of 2000.