

FONDATION

C A B

FIGURES ON A GROUND

Perspectives on Minimal Art

10 June - 12 December 2020

Curated by Eleonore De Sadeleer and Evelyn Simons

Tauba Auerbach, Anna-Maria Bogner, Claudia Comte, Mary Corse, Ann Edholm, Gloria Graham, Carmen Herrera, Sonia Kacem, Ariane Loze, Julia Mangold, Agnes Martin, Mary Obering, Charlotte Posenenske, Jessica Sanders, Anne Truitt, Meg Webster, Marthe Wéry



Exhibition view, courtesy Fondation CAB, Photo: Lola Pertsowsky

For an exhibition on Minimalism, *Figures on a Ground* might seem rather antagonistic in its boldness and abundance. Despite the common thread of reductionism that forms the base principle of minimal art, this exhibition maxes out in an attempt to renegotiate the conditions against which we perceive Minimalism ¹.

¹ A movement that originated in the 1960's in New York, reacting to Abstract Expressionism. Despite the fact that there is no collective manifesto, Minimalism as such was theoreticised through the writings of its most pivotal (male) artists: Robert Morris, Sol Lewitt, Donald Judd, Carl Andre and others. The most important characteristics are: repetition, non-representation; geometric abstraction; body vs. object relationships and in lesser degree, embracing new technologies and mass-produced materials. Notable exhibitions include *Primary Structures* (1966), by curator Kynasto McShine at the Jewish Museum, and art critic Lawrence Alloway's *Systemic Painting* (1966) at Guggenheim NY.

The exhibition challenges rigid juxtapositions such as universality to the personal; the rational to the emotional; calmness to hysteria; reduction versus expansion and so forth, that have been used as vehicles in academic writing and journalism, to describe Minimalism as an art form that negates the external world. Self-referential and non-representative, the widespread use of mass produced, standardised and industrial materials only further stressed this notion of human detachment.

Figures on a Ground presents works by pioneering Minimalist artists alongside contemporary practices that inscribe themselves in, or question the movement. Minimal art is thus approached through themes such as spatial perception, relationships, nature, the sacred, the body and spirituality.

The nearly theatrical presence of the works ², as well as the democratisation of form and interpretation, leaves the surrounding space (hosting both the work and the body of the moving spectator) to be the main concern for Minimalist artists. Figures on a Ground disrupts singular definitions on Minimal art, while staying true to this specific characteristic.

The notion of space and perception is particularly present in the installation of German artist Julia Mangold (b. 1966), which is composed of imposing rectangular volumes in wood, covered with pigments, lacquer and wax. Their appearance is much like industrial-looking metal: opaque and enigmatic, which adds to the enhanced feeling of physical presence. Belgian artist Marthe Wéry (1930 - 2005) experimented extensively with painting and its individual components: most notably she manipulated the carriers, by re-appropriating them as spatial objects, and regrouping her works in unconventional, architectural ways. Anna-Maria Bogner (b. 1984, Austrian) equally triggers increased spatial awareness by using a simple elastic band, distorting the logical flow of the foundation's entrance. This ribbon-like pattern finds an echo in the encompassing and monumental mural of a gradient Zig-Zag motif by Swiss artist Claudia Comte (b. 1983, Swiss), which serves as a backdrop or a scenography for the many works on show.

The intervention echoes a performative and theatrical dimension that references the body, present in several works throughout the exhibition. The standardised Minimal sculpture in cardboard by Charlotte Posenenske (1930 - 1995, German) appears like an anthropomorphic creature, and is to be assembled freely by the « user », following the artist's radical manifesto. Swiss-Tunisian artist Sonia Kacem's (b. 1985) was in residence at Fondation CAB from February to March 2020, and proposes two site-specific interventions made from heavy fabrics stretched over solid fixtures, intersecting art, architecture and scenography. Previous to Kacem, Ariane Loze (b. 1988, Belgian) was in residence in December 2019, and has delved into historical editions of Art Press and L'Art Vivant (more specifically 1972 and 1973), in order to research original interviews from the « founding fathers of Minimalism ». She re-enacts quotes by these artists in a performance which also incorporates the abstracted architecture of Fondation CAB.

The widely followed impression that Minimalism is solely puritan and rational, stands in stark contrast with the remarkable body of work of Agnes Martin (1912 - 2004, American), considered one of Minimalism's pioneering artists. She expressed her reflections on nature, happiness and beauty through the repetitive and therapeutic gesture of drawing contained and fragile lines by hand. Anne Truitt's (1941 - 2004, American) painting meanwhile, is unique thanks to her superposition of thin and infinite layers of nearly translucent paint. She perpetuated a self-proclaimed quest to infuse the simplest form with maximum meaning. In addition, the copper totem scaled to a delicate human size by Meg Webster (b. 1944, American), reminds us of a unison of energies between mankind and raw organic matter.

² Pivotal Minimal artist Robert Morris, for example, collaborated with Yvonne Rainer, a feminist choreographer and filmmaker (and also his partner) to research the charged relationship between the body - still or in a

moving state - and an inanimate object. His participation in her dance works heavily influenced his various Notes on Sculpture.

Despite the generally accepted idea that Minimalism can't be relational, references to nature tend to recur generously. Such is apparent in the work of Gloria Graham (b. 1940, American) and Jessica Sanders (b. 1985, American), encouraging the contemplation of nature, without literally representing it. Graham's work Untitled (1982) marries a spiritual sense of universal wholeness with scientific thinking (revealing molecular structures of crystals and minerals), while Sanders allows for nature's uncontrollability to seep into her beeswax works - casting the material's life cycle in one momentum.

Through the dialogue staged between several generations of female artists, Figures on a Ground, Perspectives on Minimal art, highlights on the one hand, the fact that women, despite their historical obscurification in art history, also participated in, and contributed to Minimalism - one of the main artistic currents of the 20th century.³ On the other hand, their way of approaching Minimalism has, and continues to stimulate and influence contemporary artists who, while adopting an abstract, geometric and non-referential approach, nevertheless develop a complex and intuitive practice.

The exhibition's title refers to Figure-Ground theory, according to which perception naturally divides figures standing in the front, from their background. This is a fundamental process in our visual comprehension of how our environment is spatially organised. Bringing female protagonists from Minimalism to the foreground, a new and crucial balance of art history is proposed.

Practical Details

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Exhibition dates: 10 June - 12 December 2020
Opening hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 2 - 6PM
Wednesday - Saturday 10AM - 6PM

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THE SPACE BETWEEN: JULIA MANGOLD'S DRAWINGS AND SCULPTURE

The three largest sculptures of [Julia Mangold's](#) *Drawings and Sculpture* stare, despite being compilations of black, geometric fragments that do not readily read as anthropomorphic. These sculptures made of wood covered in a thick sheen of wax stare not only because they stand at eye level, but their physical masses also emit the weight and form of a standard human when standing beside them. The block forms that comprise their structures protrude and retract strategically, shifting the overall sculptural shapes without giving any sense of being precarious; these staring stacks do not back down. Rather, they hold their own in a room full of people and objects meandering through the same space. - *Erin Langner, Seattle Contributor*



Installation view. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

The idea of objects in space resides at the center of Mangold's new solo show at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#) in Portland, OR (Closing on the 29th). Its deceptively simple title suggests two separate mediums often connected in process but not always to one another's benefit when shown together on a single artist's behalf. Also made of pigmented wax, Mangold's works on paper layer translucent blocks that levitate within their frames, feeling less like drawings than delicate, ephemeral versions of their sculptural counterparts.

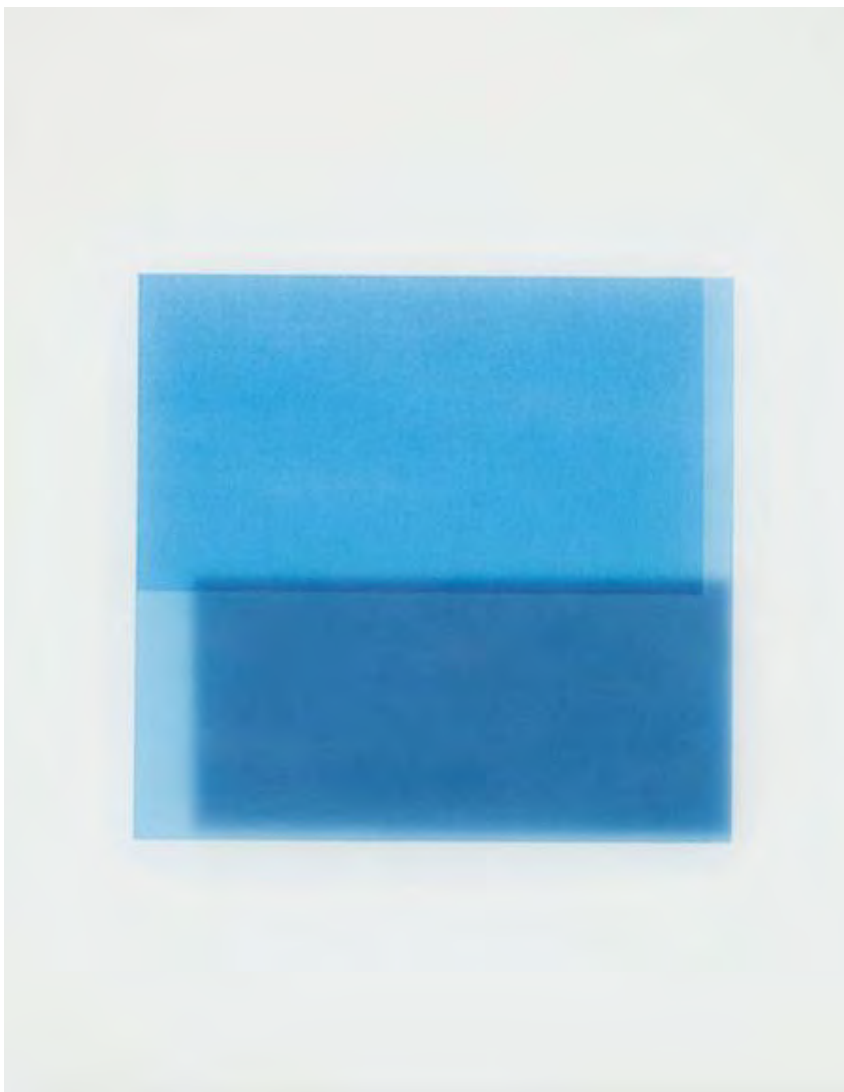


Installation view. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery.



Julia Mangold | *Untitled, 2012 - 023*, 2012, pigment in lacquer and wax on wood.

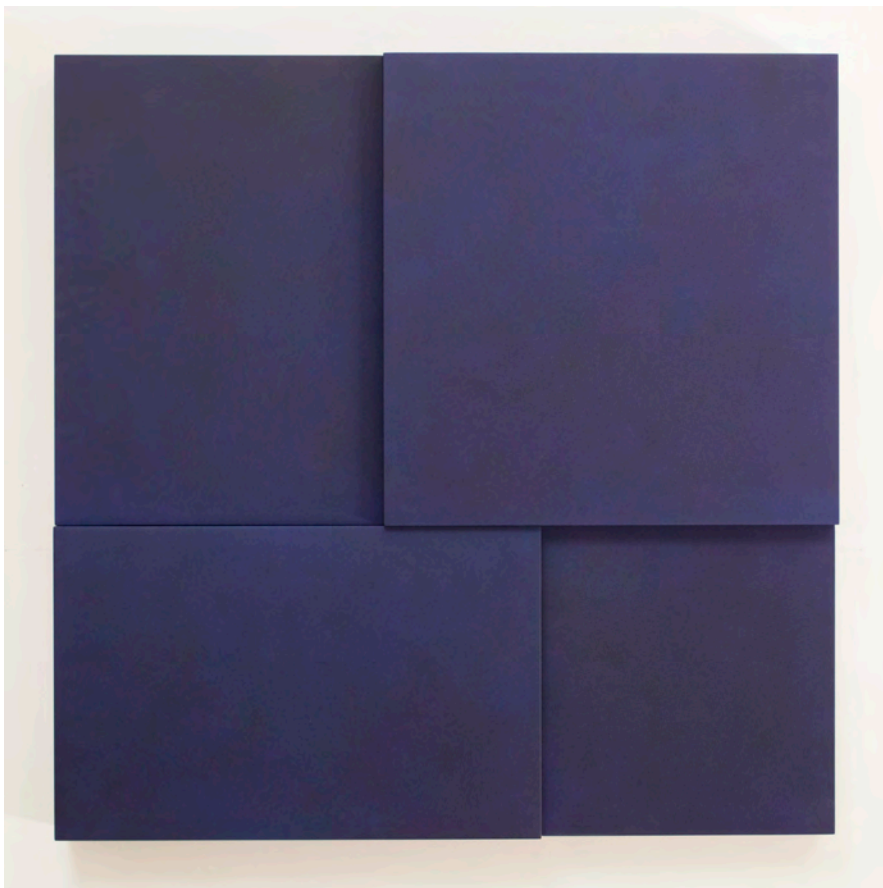
Although most of the artist's works resist color, a vibrant blue takes over the palette of select works; this rupture arrives in the otherwise monochromatic space with ease. Popping into the black and gray field of forms, the blue hues prompt closer examination of lustrous surfaces consistent across *Drawings and Sculpture*, highlighting the consistent role of the wax medium that dominates the works attached to wall, as well as those freestanding on the floor. The wax shell that coats the larger sculptures extends the softness of the works on paper into the three dimensional space, moving Mangold's black towers away from the daunting presence typical of large scale, minimalist works. The resulting dialogue between the walls and freestanding works flows seamlessly, creating an immersive space to ruminate among the artist's aesthetic meditations.



Julia Mangold | *Untitled, 2012-0502*, 2012, pigment in wax on paper.



Installation view. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery.



Julia Mangold | *Untitled*, 2012 - 010, 2012, pigment in laquer and wax on wood, 39.5 x 39.5 x 4"

Julia Mangold was born in Munich, Germany and currently resides in Portland, OR. Her work is included in collections throughout the United States and Europe, including the Busch Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Yale University Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Drawings and Sculpture is on view at Elizabeth Leach Gallery through September 29.

[Erin Langner](#) is a writer based in Seattle and is Manager of Adult Public Programs at the Seattle Art Museum (SAM)



Julia Mangold
Skulptur und Zeichnung
Mies Van Der Rohe Haus
July 5 - September 27, 2015



OregonLive.com

Everything Oregon

Heather Watkins and Julia Mangold: Two takes on taking control

Published: Wednesday, August 08, 2012, 11:00 AM Updated: Saturday, August 11, 2012, 12:40 PM



By **John Motley, Special to The Oregonian**



[View full size](#)

Dan Kvitka

"Stone Mystic 25," 2010. ink on paper, 30" x 22" Heather Watkins

This month a pair of exhibitions --

Heather Watkins' "Movement of Objects at Rest" at **PDX Contemporary Art** and

Julia Mangold's new drawings and sculptures at **Elizabeth Leach Gallery** --

are rife with similarities. Watkins and Mangold share a subdued, minimal aesthetic and, more often than not, a monochrome palette. Both investigate form, conceptually linking sculpture with related works on paper. Yet for all these similarities in tone and execution, their processes, influences and ambitions show how very different these two artists are.

At PDX, Watkins' show is dominated by a series of poured ink works on paper. She creates her pieces by dripping ink onto paper, then bends and rotates the paper to allow the ink to flow where it will. The resulting forms are entirely abstract, but, as certain patterns emerge, she develops a consistent vocabulary: sumptuous pools of ink, which fork into thick bands and slinky rivulets. While the repetition of these basic forms foregrounds the artist's command over the materials, it also reveals her

openness to chance, her willingness to permit the ink a voice in the collaboration. In that sense, Watkins' project takes its cues from John Cage's methodical use of chance in creating his artworks, as well as the poured canvases of second-wave Abstract Expressionist painters such as Kenneth Noland, Helen

Frankenthaler and Morris Louis,

To complement her works on paper, Watkins has included a group of small sculptures: rough wooden blocks topped with coiled, painted stretches of rope. While these assemblages are unprepossessing, they translate the flowing ink of her paper works into physical terms, as the rope mimics the ink's winding patterns. More important, they highlight the distinctly different processes behind each body of work. While the ink requires the artist to relinquish some degree of control, the rope provides a physical analog of the liquid flow, which she can shape and fix into a desired position. Taken together, they suggest a resigned understanding of how much influence we can exert over our worlds. Quite simply, there are things we can take into our hands, while others remain beyond our grasp.

Around the corner at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Mangold demonstrates complete control of her materials in a series of minimalist-influenced rectangular sculptures -- severe shapes and flat, lustrous surfaces that radiate monolithic grandeur. At the heart of the exhibition are three totemic sculptures, roughly scaled to the proportions of the human body. Each is made of conjoined rectangular prisms of slightly different sizes. Although the variations in size are minute -- seldom deviating by more than a few inches -- they generate dramatic spatial effects.

For instance, when a group of prisms prop up a slightly larger group of similar shapes in "Untitled 2011-001, " 2011, the sculpture's top half seems heavier and the overall construction precarious. As a foil, "Untitled 2012-016," 2012, is constructed with uniform contours, but nonetheless composed of discreet elements. Though its form does not protrude or recess at any point, the seams of the combined shapes irregularly divide the space, creating a nuanced sense of imbalance.

These spatial experiments continue in Mangold's works on paper, austere compositions made of layers of overlapping rectangles. Where these shapes stack up on the paper, their colors intensify, creating illusory density and depth.

Unlike Watkin's poured ink pieces, Mangold's work traffics in precision and incremental shifts, demonstrating how small changes in spatial relationships drastically change what and how we see. The rigidity of her forms suggests a desire to exert control over her materials and, by extension, her environment. It may not account for chaos quite like Watkins' work, but it's a compelling vision, drawing quiet contemplation from calculated experiments.

-- John Motley

Heather Watkins and Julia Mangold

Heather Watkins:
"Movement of Objects
at Rest"

Where: PDX
Contemporary Art, 925
N.W. Flanders St.,
503-222-0063

Hours: 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
Tuesdays through
Saturdays

Closes: Sept. 1

Admission: free

Website:
pdxcontemporaryart.com

Julia Mangold:
"Drawings and
Sculpture"

Where: Elizabeth Leach
Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth
Ave., 503-224-0521

Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30
p.m. Tuesdays through
Saturdays

Closes: Sept. 29

Admission: free

Website:
elizabethleach.com

WJEEK = WW Pick. Highly recommended.

By RICHARD SPEER. TO BE CONSIDERED FOR LISTINGS, submit show information—including opening and closing dates, gallery address and phone number—at least two weeks in advance to: Visual Arts, WW, 2220 NW Quimby St., Portland, OR 97210. Email: rspeer@wweek.com.

WJEEK Jeffrey Sarmiento: *Constructions*

Jeffrey Sarmiento's virtuosic *Constructions* fills Bullseye's front exhibition space with an ambitious array of pieces spanning a gamut of media. The most jaw-dropping of these is *Beautiful Flaws*, a 9-foot-tall sculpture made of steel, aluminum and glass. Each pane of glass is flawed in some way and would ordinarily have been discarded, but Sarmiento turns trash into the proverbial treasure, essentially elevating the panes on pedestals, hoisting aloft what others would have cast away. It's an artistic statement that verges on the ethical and metaphysical. And it makes you say, "Wow." Through May 3. Bullseye Gallery, 300 NW 13th Ave., 227-0222.

Johannes Girardoni: *Redacted*

Conceptual artist Johannes Girardoni is all about nothing. His digital prints and sculptures explore the theme of absence. In his images of billboards, the advertisements' images and text have been digitally removed. In his sculptures, the hollowed-out voids are every bit as important, if not more so, than the work's actual contours. In both cases, the viewer is left to ruminate on what's not there. Girardoni never disappoints; his shows are invariably challenging and visually rich, so it'll be a treat to see what he's come up with this time. Through May 31. PDX Contemporary Art, 925 NW Flanders St., 222-0063.

Jordan Rathus: *Fernweh (Farsickness)*

A woman lies on her stomach naked, legs raised provocatively behind her on a fur-blanketed bed. She's in some kind of thatched-roofed resort, presumably in an exotic locale. It's an exaggeration of the sort of place people dream of traveling to so they can dine in the hotel restaurant before having their "local folklore experience." This knowingly cheesy photograph by Jordan Rathus is part of a suite of photos and video installations poking fun at tourism and the travel industry. Witty and nuanced, the show both entertains and implicates the viewer. We snicker at these overblown tableaux, but gosh, wouldn't it be great to stay a week at a Four Seasons spa in Bali? It's all too easy to poke fun at "the ugly American," all too difficult to realize when we need to point the finger at ourselves. May 1-31. Upfor Gallery, 929 NW Flanders St., 227-5111.

Julia Mangold: *Works on Paper*

Viewers familiar with Julia Mangold's rectilinear sculptures will see echoes of those pristine geometries in this exhibition, which concentrates on her works on paper. Implacable rectangles, sometimes overlapping slightly, float amid pools of negative space. Mangold renders the shapes in slate blues and gunmetal tones. Refreshingly simple in their compositions, the works exude quiet serenity. May 1-31. Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 NW 9th Ave., 224-0521.

Margot Voorhies Thompson: *The Theater of Language: Conversations & Metaphors*

Letters and words play a big part in Margot Voorhies Thompson's mixed-media works on paper. In the past, she overlapped words and calligraphy to create dense screens of linguistically incomprehensible but compositionally evocative text. In her new show, she ties words in with architecture, alluding to the similarities between the structure of sentences and the structure of buildings. May 1-31. Laura Russo Gallery, 805 NW 21st Ave., 226-2754.

Oregon Art Beat Exhibition: *Celebrating 15 Years of Creativity on OPB*

At a time when reality TV reigns and viewers are deserting television in droves for the Internet, you have to give props to a TV show devoted to the old-fashioned mission of profiling local and regional artists. That being said, *Oregon Art Beat* is a cringe-inducing show that manages to make even the most inspired artists come across as corny, pabulum-spouting wankers. With its outdated set and production values, *Art Beat* homogenizes artists by reducing their unique practices into pat featurettes, heavy on clueless voice-overs by the show's correspondents and an intrusively saccharine soundtrack heavy on synths and faux-native flute. Now the show is sponsoring an exhibition at Mark Woolley and People's Art of Portland, showcasing work by hundreds of artists subjected to the program's icky formula over the past 15 years. Much of the artwork itself is sublime. Too bad the show's producers can't find a way to translate the creative impulse into anything other than patronizing New-Age drivel. Through June 15. Mark Woolley Gallery @ Pioneer, 700 SW 5th Ave., third floor, Pioneer Place Mall, 998-4152.

WJEEK Sarah Knobel: *Icscapes*

Montana artist Sarah Knobel cobbles together wigs, feathers and other disparate objects, submerges them in colored water, then sticks the whole shebang in the freezer. Once they're frozen solid, she takes the bizarre contraptions out and photographs them as they melt. The resulting prints are whimsical, perversely fascinating and sorta gross. May 2-June 1. Newspace Center for Photography, 1632 SE 10th Ave., 963-1935.

Stephan Soihl: *Motorized and Solar-Powered: Art in Motion*

There's a gee-whiz, "How'd he do that?" quality to Stephan Soihl's kinetic sculptures. Their components—resin, brass, metal, motor oil—are hooked up to hidden motors. The pieces slowly tilt and turn, the motor oil gradually pouring into and out of clear containers. Clunky yet somehow graceful, they're "poetry in motion," drawing upon Soihl's dual backgrounds in art and science. Through May 31. Blackfish Gallery, 420 NW 9th Ave., 234-2634.

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ICESCAPES BY SARAH KNOBEL





CULTUREPHILE: PORTLAND ARTS

Review: Julia Mangold at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Posted by: Lisa Radon on Apr 06, 2010 at 07:00AM



Julia Mangold, *Untitled*, 2009
graphite in wax on MDF, 23.25" x 23.25" x 23.25"
image via: Elizabeth Leach Gallery

Julia Mangold's New Work at Elizabeth Leach Gallery is deeply rewarding. Julia Mangold's sculptures are monumental not in scale but in visual weight. Floor pieces hunkered down in groups of rectilinear volumes and wall pieces, (pairs and trios of staggered vertical slabs emerging from the wall) Mangold's sculptures are precise and authoritative with graphite-rubbed surfaces that seem both impenetrable and deep, betraying no mark of the artist's hand.

Her drawings use the same graphite to a completely different effect: a dark grey rectangle drawn on a sheet of vellum hangs over a black board from which another rectangle of similar size but slightly different location has been cut. Like the sculptures, the drawings are formally strong and poetically minimal, but when shown with their sculptural cousins, the unforgiving grey forms of the drawings become about light, transparency, openness. There is even a tiny sparkle in the graphite where the vellum is attached to the top of the board when the light hits it just so.

Born in Munich, Mangold has had solo shows throughout Europe and at Rhona Hoffman (Chicago, IL), and Jim Kempner Fine Art (New York, NY). This is her first solo exhibition at Elizabeth Leach.

Mangold's show is complimented by a handful of Donald Judd prints hung in the second gallery as if to acknowledge this lineage. But like Mangold's floor sculptures that feel solitary and strong, Mangold's work holds its own against the weight of minimalism's history.

Reduction and Abundance

The Sculptures of Julia Mangold

A vertical sign, a tower in three parts, this is what the visitor sees first. Light is absorbed from the nearby windows. On the wall a wave-like installation in seven segments, with light from the sky above playing on its already dynamic structure with ever changing shadows. A cube on the floor, like a compact piece cut into four parts, and the quiet rhythm of the four segments of a work flush on the wall. Unpretentious, no pedestals, no titles, no allusions. Variations of a composition of parts, synthesis of volume and space, of positive and negative, of deep and shallow, of horizontal and vertical, of floor and wall. Each work has its place in this unusual and rather small space, each plays a part in a harmonious choreography involving the architecture, the light, the other works and the viewer.



O.T. 22.4.02, 2002
Waxed Steel
62,5 x 50 x 54 cm

The abstract elemental forms with their right angles, consisting of an ordinary material, may at first seem dark and hard in their contours, brittle and inaccessible, the canon of the forms conceptual and severe. But Julia Mangold's sculptures love sunlight. It transforms them, the black surfaces appear as paintings, they acquire a sheen, become soft and iridescent with warm colours. Traces of the work process, homogenous with the works on the wall, stronger with those on the floor, are discernible: horizontal lines like landscapes or sky, shades of colour, grey, blue, and from pink to red like the sun in the morning and evening. Flooded with light the sensuousness of the material reveals itself. And space emerges behind the volumes.

As massive and robust as the sculptures may appear from a distance, they become light, almost weightless, and sometimes they indeed float above the ground. Couples holding each other up, pressing close to one another; there is harmony, balance, closeness, oneness in duality. Staggered, placed in juxtaposition, moved to the front, placed in the back, the different sizes of the elements cover one another as if to protect parts of themselves. One is astonished. One thinks at first that the power and beauty of Julia Mangold's sculptures derive from their clarity and austerity or from the use of such ascetic material. But then one discovers the warmth, the painterly, the colourfulness, the emotional aura and the vividness of the surface.



O.T. 29 & 31.8.93, 1993
Waxed Steel
each 12 x 19,5 x 15 cm

How versatile this everyday material is! Steel: alloyed iron produced in a metallurgical plant. Inhabited by what forces? Element of the earth, tough, a hard metal, in contrast to soft bronze, and yet unrefined, transitory, because it changes with humidity or when in contact with acids. What physical strength is required to shape this masculine material! No industrial process here. The piece of raw metal is welded, the seams sanded, polished, the surfaces soaked and finally covered with a thin film of wax. Thus with great care and devotion an object comes into being, an object imbued with soul. It is neither anonymous nor interchangeable because its skin bears the hand of the artist.

The sculptures are never monumental, they always relate to the human body. There are small intimate works, in the workshop lovingly placed on a bed of felt, and then there are erect figures the size of a man. Other objects can be opened and closed: stacked boxes, useful for the storing, collecting and arranging of things. These are Julia Mangold's little boxes or rather precious caskets.

An understanding of space reveals itself in the congenial dialogue of the artist's work with grandiose architecture. In „the home of parliamentary memory“, the Marie-Elisabeth-Lueders-Haus for the German parliament in Berlin by the architect Stephan Braunfels, Julia Mangold's wall installations hang serenely on the silky smooth fair-faced concrete of the library rotunda. „Tempietto“ is what the architect, inspired like the artist by the Renaissance, calls them. In the expanse and transparency of the hall, flooded by natural light from above, the large, homogenous, ceremonially abstract planes seem to provide a private focus for thought and contemplation. In harmony with the architecture Julia Mangold establishes a relationship between interior and exterior, private and public space. Thus one finds outside, carved into a massive pillar at the upper end of the huge flight of steps, another dark pictorial sculpture of the same proportions as those of the installations on the rotunda inside.

When she had just started her course of studies at the Akademie der Bildenden Kuenste in Munich Julia Mangold was invited as part of a group exhibit in Venice to create a work for the cloister of a monastery. In order not to damage the venerable old walls she had stretched paper over them, applied a mixture of graphite pigment and liquid beeswax of her own making to the paper and then polished the surface the way she had usually polished iron. Making a virtue of necessity she turned over the years to works on paper only when work with iron, her true passion, was not possible. It was not until an exhibition in New York came up in 2003 that the artist devoted herself to this fragile medium uninterruptedly for several weeks. Out of it came a wonderful series of works.

The quiet, focussed works on paper are not the classic drawings made for sculptures, they are neither sketches nor preliminary studies, but works in their own right. It is through their shapes and colours, proportion, rhythm, precision and even through their surface that one perceives a relationship with the sculptures. Each of these works consists of a transparent sheet in front of white paper, both sheets have been worked on. As a result a third dimension, congruent and overlapping, has emerged, a space between the diaphanous skin and the body behind it. Pinned to the wall without a frame the transparent sheet would gently waft in the air. The space between the two sheets is alive.



O.T. 23.6.01, 2001
Waxed Steel
100 x 193 x 5,5 cm

Private collection Germany



Drawings Exhibition
Fifth Floor Foundation, NY, 2002



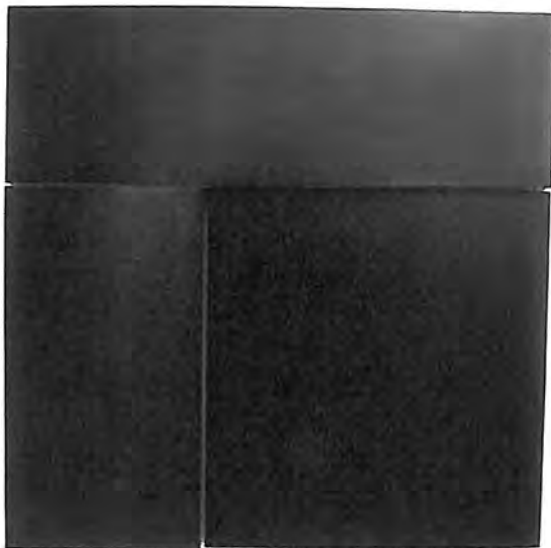
O.T. 15, 17 & 19.6.01, 2000
Waxed Steel
100 x 39 x 25 cm
100 x 55 x 25 cm
100 x 25 x 25 cm

In the precise interplay of the two parts variations appear between horizontal and vertical, black and grey. With a change of perspective, and through overlapping and shifting, the white sheets with their strong lines become three-dimensional as well. One needs to look closely to notice the subtle differences.

At a time of universal distraction and overexposure to images Julia Mangold's uncompromising work is a source of intellectual strength. Her objects are of an almost classical beauty due to their proportions and surface. Massive in their substance they are nevertheless seemingly remote. In their reduction, their purity, their equanimity and their sensuous, emotional aura the sculptures offer an experience of extraordinary perception. They are imbued with dignity and serenity. What Julia Mangold said about the centuries-old belt buckles, which she had chosen as the counterpart to her own triptych in the 2002 London exhibit „Minimal Art - Ancient China“¹ could be the commentary of someone viewing her work: „Repetitive form in variations, movement within static patterns ... These are delicate and simple and rich objects ... - I believe beauty is important“.

Petra Giloy - Hirtz
Translated by Gunhild Muschenheim

¹ MINIMAL ART - ANCIENT CHINA
Six Contemporary Artists Choose Ancient Chinese Works of Art. 2002
Ben Janssens Oriental Art & Gallery N. von Bartha Contemporary Art



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MOSTRA N.227 - 29 NOVEMBRE 2003
TESTO DI MARCO MENEGUZZO

JULIA MANGOLD

VIRTUOSO RELATIONSHIPS

When as children we tried to place two magnets of opposite poles one on top of the other it seemed to be one of the first exercises in magic with material as its object. Those little grey iron bars could not be conquered: they were pushed near for a time, then they began to resist our efforts and, at last, they resolved the fight between us by 'shifting' over the surface until the electric charge no longer placed a barrier to their union. We had obtained something – the sticking of the two bars together – but it wasn't what we had wanted, the perfect superimposition of their forms. All the attempts to sneak up on the material with tricks, cunning, speed, a child's pretend indifference which thinks that material has a mind and a will of its own, only led to one thing. Our Locke-like empiricism, typical of childhood, suggested that after a series of failures we put things off until the material was, as it were, tired or at least less prepared for our attacks. Then, usually at least, we would lose one of the bars...

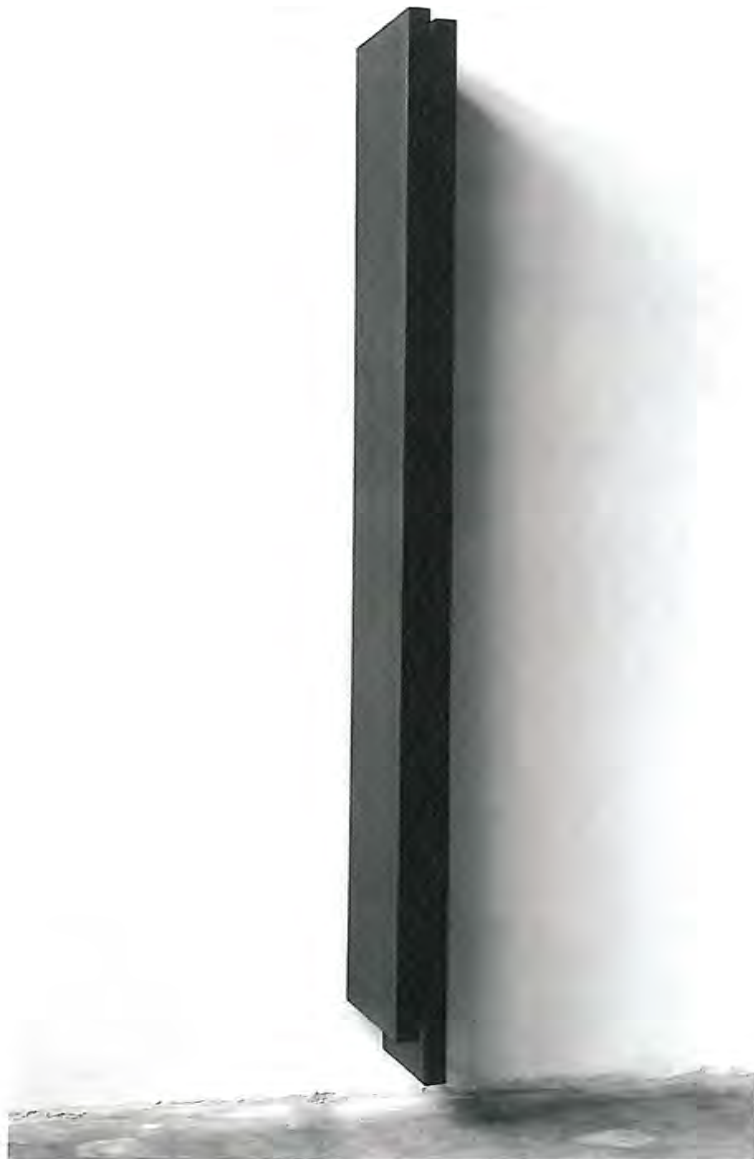
This 'shift' of the surface could perhaps be translated as the French 'décalage'. Electronics has made use of this term: 'shift' is written on one of the most used keys of our computers; 'décalage' is, instead, a more sophisticated term that brings to mind strong linguistic experimentation, both in artistic and literary fields. I believe that when we meditate on the work of Julia Mangold we must keep in mind both meanings: the material, physical one and the evocative,



metaphorical one. It might be objected that that any work of art has these two sides to it, and that's true... but in works such as these, where the immanence of the material seems preponderant, there is the risk of reading the work in a one-way manner, such as that recent art-historical tradition known as Minimalism. It is evident that, at first sight, if we were obliged to use a single adjective about Mangold's work we would probably mention Minimalism in order to strip away other possible misunderstandings about her it. But it is just as obvious that we are only dealing with a first observation, a starting point, on which to build the hermeneutic structure of the work, one that must make distinctions as well as links. And so there is no other choice than to start from this assumed common starting point in order to discover the singularity of an output which, as so often happens, in the face of strong formal similarities with other work, has basic differences in its planning, its processes and, above all, in the way of thinking that led to this particular result.

I spoke of immanence of material. Of course, when we see works that do not supply us with some narrative foothold and that concede nothing to 'history', we immediately think of something indescribable, something that cannot be stated: the works are there and they are dumb in their indifference. Material *is*, it does not become: this is Minimalism's typical lesson about material, even when it has been given a form - a cube, a rhomb, a square... this too, minimal. But in some way Mangold's works are different. very They live through relationships, they are relationships. The elements used are only two or three at most, but they





are the minimum number necessary to establish a relationship within the elements themselves. No single one of them can be taken individually, in isolation, for this would be something which would have no sense: only the relationship between the elements makes them live. At this point the meaning of the work goes in another direction, different from strict Minimalism. The question is not one of materials, but of the relationship between the elements.

Once this fundamental concept has been established everything becomes easier: if the heart of the problem is the relationship between things then we can understand, for instance, how it is that these works belong more to a 'constructive' (and historically Constructivist) view of art than to one that is basically contemplative, a view of art that strictly Minimalist works belong to. So once we have left this notion behind, however we find in it something that is familiar, interpretation becomes more open and the work is more autonomous. Everything finds its voice: material, the way it is used, the space between the elements and that surrounds the elements, the relationship between the volumes, the sense of balance and the impression of weight... and, for example, the accuracy with which the artist finishes the edges of her steel blocks, the soldering of the box-like elements that almost becomes a painterly ingredient with the hot flame used in place of a paintbrush: all this underlines a strong interest in human action, in a visible and constant human presence that goes hand in hand with ideas of construction and balance, the soul of these works. The construction is by now manifest: the two or three elements set up a

dialogue to such an extent that we might even speak of rhythm. The question of balance is more complex as it involves various subjects: the artist's action is obviously basic (which, it should be pointed out, should not be the case with Minimalism) to this search for equilibrium between the parts. But material and its form also have a hardly less subordinate role. In a certain sense they are self-regulated and position themselves, in a 'virtuoso' manner, in one place or another. This balance of which I spoke is, then, not simply geometric, visual, formal equilibrium but rather a balance between subject and object. There is established, that is, a balanced relationship between artist and material that goes far beyond the simple relationships within the elements of a 'composition'.

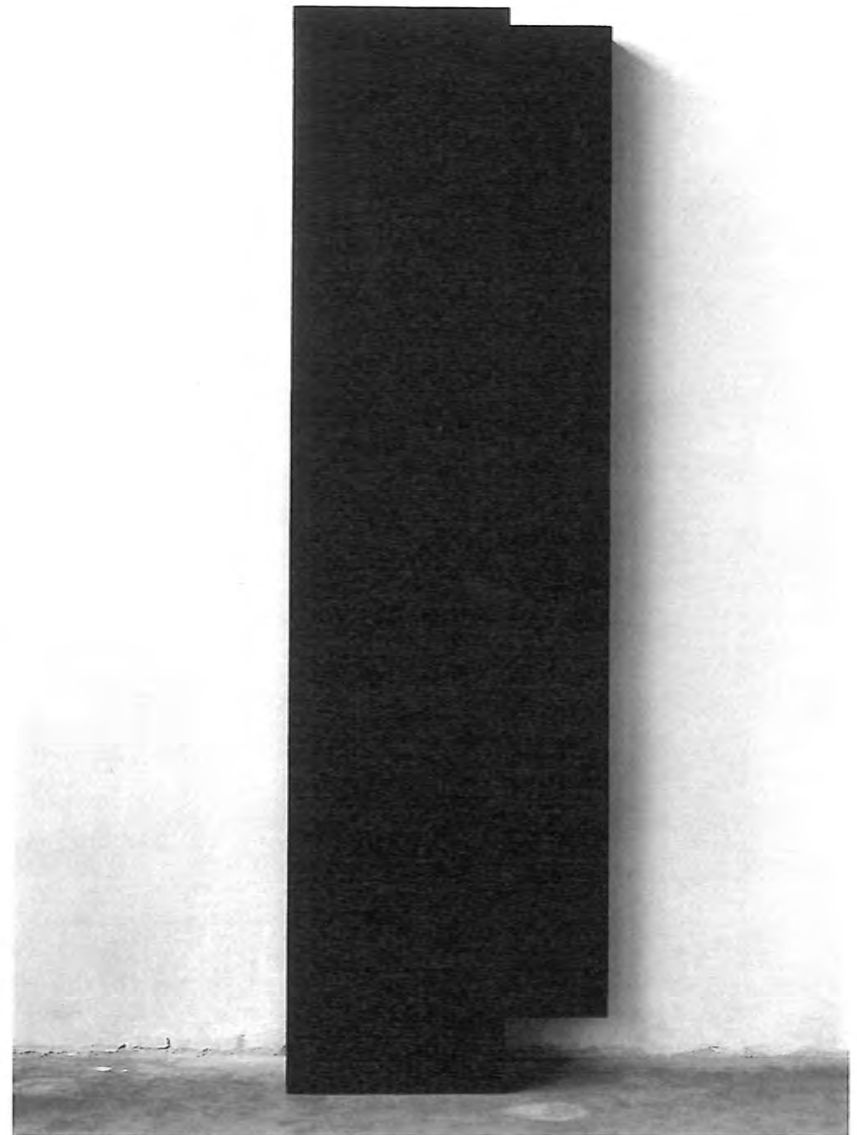
A non-formalist composition, then, because it is necessary, and not decorative because it is inevitable: the work is the outcome of a meeting and, as a result of this, we must also be careful not to equivocate about the term 'constructive' after what has been said about Minimalism. Constructive, construction, and constructing are apparently rational and controlled attitudes, it is true, but there is a threshold beyond which – suddenly and completely – they change and become a kind of mystic territory, an ascetic 'barefooted' situation – according to Emily Dickinson's amazing image – that is no longer under control but is, simply, animated. Animated, given an *anima* or soul, just as is the artist, this kind of artist, who sees material and answers to it and organizes it...

And finally a consideration rather than a conclusion: the only one that



Introduces a psychological and individual element in a body of work that is otherwise epic. What demon led Julia Mangold - the daughter of a photographer and therefore used to images, to objects, to the confusion of reality - so far away from that interpretation of the world?

Marco Meneguzzo - November 2003



JULIA MANGOLD



GALERIE FAHNEMANN BERLIN

Almost everything today is beautiful. The last two decades have blessed us with a boom in aestheticizing which has subjected every real phenomenon of our world, from the car to the toothbrush, to an enhancement in appearance. Even individuals subject themselves to comprehensive styling of body, soul and behaviour. This kind of over-staging was bound, inevitably, to end in a devaluation of the beautiful. Ultimately, it is only possible to bear the cacophony of beautiful decorations by means of a well-directed desensitization; "an-aesthetics"¹ as a strategy of survival. Meanwhile art, the classical subject of aesthetic considerations, has distanced itself from beauty, the concept even appears to have disappeared completely from its discourse. The fact that it is introduced as a viewing category here in connection with sculptures by the Munich artist Julia Mangold is justified by the fact that it describes something fundamental to them. For in the objective sense, beauty lies precisely in those ideas represented by the "simultaneously definite and clear form" of objects - ideas which impart a state of cognition to the viewer.²

And what is the nature of this cognition? At first, Mangold's works appear hermetic. They are determined by a strict, clear formality and bear no titles which point to other content, by contrast to the names - related to word puns, mythology, mathematics or the periodic system of elements - given to works by Carl André, who is often cited in connection with Julia Mangold. In his case, the considerable extent to which the content implicated by the titles is echoed by a metaphorically loaded form is indicated by a quotation from the artist referring to his metal floor pieces: "I don't think of them as being flat at all. I think in a sense, that each piece supports a column of air that extends to the top of the atmosphere. They're zones."³

There is no intention to imply that by contrast to André's sculptures those by Mangold extend themselves in pure form. Far more, they convey metaphorical qualities of their own, whose recognition presupposes a physical experience of her sculptures in space. Any form of verbalisation would be a restriction of each viewer's potential for perception. One precondition for unrestricted aesthetic potential regarding the viewer's experience of her works is their lack of pedestal, which - in the tradition of Rodin - guarantees a unity between the viewing area and the artwork. This facilitates an unrestricted aesthetic experience of the material in the artwork. And this is indeed a materiality which emerges in an awareness of the space surrounding it, taking on a direct relation to the existing architectonic volumes. Within these, it creates new places and spaces, which influence the existing architectonic space in their turn. Mangold's sculptures give the viewer an awareness of his and her physical movement within this space. They make clear to him/her that the space has six sides. The co-existence of viewer and work in the same space described here automatically implies a second important aspect for the perception of her works: that of time. For her sculptures also change with each alteration of the viewer's location, just as they undergo metamorphoses at different times of day under correspondingly different light conditions.

It is possible to experience this in an exemplary way when viewing the new

works conceived for Berlin. The two- to nine-piece wall and ground works in different formats, all true to human scale, display a rich content of perception and sensation, which - in its entirety - results in a space-art concept which has only been produced previously by two extremely different epochs: American minimal art and the Italian Trecento and Quattrocento.

Of course, Mangold's relations to the art of the Renaissance, by contrast to her links with minimal art, must be understood as analogous rather than genealogical. This is all the more true since Julia Mangold does not even produce drawings as designs for her sculptures, as she sees work on paper as a different activity, with different problems and conditions, at most suited to an approximation towards spatial language⁴, whilst the Renaissance was particularly interested in the depiction of space. After a first flicker of this interest could be registered towards the end of the 13th century, it arrived at a new climax from 1430 onwards -developing from Florence - in frescos by Piero, Domenico Veneziano or Ucello, and also in mid-century reliefs by Donatello. It is the simplified spaces of Masaccio or Maso da Banco, with their considerable perspective effect and the metallic, almost transcendental shine of the surfaces which appear to speak a common language, characterized by external simplicity and the greatest possible clarity. It is also obvious that in this kind of painting, from Mategna's Christ to Andrea del Castagno's Last Supper, forms imply weight, mass and volumes. Narrow, tall forms, for example, always appear lighter than flat, broad ones, whilst a square has a more massive effect than a triangle. This observation is not intended to indicate more than the parallelism of interests already mentioned. As it is historically determined, Mangold's relation to minimal art is of a completely different nature.

In April 1969, Robert Morris published the fourth part of his Notes on Sculpture. In this work he sketched out the changes in three-dimensional art in the following way: "away from specific forms to processes of order, methods of production and finally to perceptual relevance."⁵ In other words: sculpture is determined by the materials, the process of production and the space which it takes up. The fact that this leads to a reading of the work oriented on perception lies in the logic of this attitude, which prefers the objective characteristics of specific materials and spatial relations -whose character is determined by surfaces and volumes - to the subjective artistic signature. At around the same time, the history of welded steel sculpture received a new and decisive impetus: Richard Serra began to investigate the possibilities of this technique for abstraction. His primary interest was in the use of steel as a material for building, which - with respect to construction and aesthetics - is linked to names such as Gustav Eiffel or Mies van der Rohe.


Anti-subjectivism is also characteristic of Julia Mangold's welded steel sculptures. It is not by chance that her panels and blocks recall the works of minimal art. This is an art historical heritage which may be found in the precise, reduced forms and their existence within space. A great respect for the material employed - simple construction steel - links her to artists such as Serra. But

ultimately, it is the production process, the way of treating the surfaces and the character of the edges and joints which result, which betray a fundamentally different attitude: Julia Mangold is a sculptor, which the minimalists were not initially, since they constructed objects from pre-manufactured elements or had their designs constructed by others. The minimalists' concept of art is based on the specific insight that not processing materials is also a meaningful artistic method. Their works are therefore relatively easy to reconstruct, which does indeed occur if a lost original, or one firmly installed at a specific location is required for an exhibition. Julia Mangold's works cannot be reconstructed. It is true that they are not defined by their process of construction, but this is still a direct prerequisite for the relevant structure of the surface, which results from repeated, careful treating of the welded raw materials. After cleaning, this is at first polished; the welded joints on the edges are smoothed down and polished up. After this, the whole of the surface is treated with acid and finally covered over with a thin layer of wax. Despite such intense processing, the patinated surfaces of the sculptures, protected from corrosion by the scarcely noticeable layer of wax, never conceal the original, almost archaic character of the iron alloy, whose delicate play of colour tones almost appears to breathe. Every scratch, every fingerprint disturbs the impression of light elegance which diametrically opposes the material and its actual weight.

In order to prevent misunderstandings, it must be said that this is not a matter of illusionist strategies, even though some of her works, like the 9-part wall relief, alter so extensively when viewed from different perspectives that the surfaces appear to oscillate. Far more, in the dialogue between material and space, the abstraction in Julia Mangold's sculptures attains a new dimension which demonstrates unusual spiritual and emotional qualities. This kind of art demands a new attitude on our part. On the one hand, in viewing her work it is possible to ascertain the effects of specific distances with their own light conditions in an entirely concrete way, whilst on the other hand it is impossible to overlook the transcendental qualities of her surfaces.

Susanne Prinz

- 1) The concept originated from: Wolfgang Iser, *Ästhetisches Denken*, Stuttgart 1990
- 2) Arthur Schopenhauer, *Metaphysik des Schönen*, 1820 (edition Piper, Munich 1985, p. 102)
- 3) Carl André, cited according to Julia Bernhard, Carl André, „Sculptor?“ Die (Re-) Positionierung des Minimalismus im Museum, in: *Texte zur Kunst*, No. 23, p. 115
- 4) Of course, ultimately the sensitive paper works are also concerned with space, but this occurs in an indirect way through the play of light on their surfaces, they are characterized primarily by their treatment of light.
- 5) *Artforum*, vol. 7, No. 8, April 1969, p. 54



2 Juin 2001 (detail)
Graphite on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
42 x 30 cm

FOR JULIA MANGOLD

A passing viewer first encountering Julia Mangold's graphite works will perhaps only note dark, almost black, letter-sized rectangles. Mangold's stark, strictly linear pencil drawings on white paper are at the opposite spectrum from narrative illustration. The viewer, accustomed to colorful representations, might initially overlook the unique qualities to be discovered in her sensitive drawings. The inherent true power and simple beauty of these subtle geometric works on paper reveal themselves to the extent one actively seeks them out and approaches the drawings without preconceptions. Thus the viewer is called upon to open up to the experience of a visual aesthetic communication with both the intellect and the senses. As the great German poet J.W. Von Goethe noted, "One only sees what one knows."

The intimate format of these drawings suggests that they were created at a table, like a letter, written and formulated in privacy and serenity. Accordingly, these works reward viewing from a close distance, or better yet, through a succession of visual explorations. Only up close will the viewer realize that each drawing consists of two sheets of paper placed on top of each other, forming an inseparable unit. Both sheets, the translucent one on top and the white carton underneath, are for Mangold surfaces of equal importance, containing drawings on both levels and forming, as noted, the basis for her artistic intentions.

When, for example, a line on the matte translucent paper intersects a corresponding line on the bristol board underneath, the line on the upper paper appears notably more precise and even more black than the line below, given its actual spatial distance.


Close examination of the overlapping graphite-saturated rectangles offers another rewarding visual experience. Where the monochrome graphite fields overlap, their metallic darkness is raised to a material, almost tangible blackness tempting to be touched. Apart from these fields, areas of a soft gray in varying dimensions appear as optical fragments of the graphite rectangles, luring the eye and assuming, each for itself, distinct geometric positions on either the top or bottom sheet.

At this point, finally, it becomes obvious that one is not confronted with a two-dimensional drawing. Julia Mangold's works on paper are clearly three-dimensional. The spatiality she evokes is real because the space between the two mutually contingent parts is real. These works must ultimately be considered sculptural drawings, a body of work that exists parallel to and apart from her sculptural work.

With the theory and factuality of these subtle graphite drawings thus explored and rationally conceived, the viewer is entirely on his own in his further discoveries. The more so as the quality of art is not a matter of taste but a question of consciousness and the power of perception. The viewer is forced to react through his individual consciousness and sensibility; the



O.T. 31.7.01
3-part floorpiece, waxed steel
17 3/4 x 23 5/8 x 27 1/2 inches
45 x 60 x 70 cm



1 Juin 2001 (detail)
Graphite on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
42 x 30 cm

drawings of Julia Mangold are art for the pure senses, reduced to fundamentals but rich in visual energy. They are works of discreet aesthetic beauty and elemental geometric clarity.

To close with French poet and aphorist Paul Valery: "What could be more mysterious than clarity?"

Frank Badur