



REDUCTIVE MINIMALISM

WOMEN ARTISTS IN DIALOGUE, 1960–2014

Nearly fifty years after its heyday, Minimalism is enjoying a resurgence of critical attention, though much of the focus continues to be on male artists, or on a small number of women sculptors. *Reductive Minimalism: Women Artists in Dialogue, 1960–2014* offers a fresh perspective on the movement and its evolution, bringing together formative works from two generations of women Minimalist painters, to examine and celebrate the dialogue between them.

Minimalism was born in the late 1950s as a reaction to the perceived hubris and theatricality of Abstract Expressionism. But even though its most prominent, mostly male, practitioners favored an aesthetic of simplicity, clean geometry, and essential forms, the hubris remained—in oversized works with grandiose themes. Artists such as Frank Stella, in his tremendous *Black Paintings*, created austere, imposing compositions that overpowered the viewer both in scale and physical aggression. Similarly, the cleanly painted surfaces of Brice Marden's monochromatic paintings from the 1960s revealed little of the artist's hand or his emotive experiences as a painter.

The first generation of women Minimalist painters, however, took a more restrained or reductive approach than their male counterparts, one more intimate in scale, more personal in narrative, and more open-ended in its experimentation with pure surface, color, grid structure, and texture. Whether by instinct or by deliberate strategy, the work was seductive and inviting rather than bombastic or controlling. Dorothea Rockburne's *Fire Engine Red*, for example, used an uneven application of paint to outline the surface support, demystifying the structure of a work that was still imposing in scale. Likewise, Eleanore Mikus covered irregular wood or synthetic surfaces with monochromatic pigmentation, enhancing and drawing attention to beautiful imperfections within a flat and seemingly pristine planar structure.

Many of these women—Agnes Martin and Anne Truitt among them—worked for much of their careers outside the New York art world, and outside the critical discourse that would have offered them support and recognition. Though gender politics was not necessarily the impetus for their work, it played a role in the circumstances of where and how they practiced. But



Above: Anne Truitt, *Sandcastle*, 1963; acrylic on wood, UMMA, Gift of Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, 1984/2.57, ©annetrutt.org / Bridgeman Art Library. Photograph by Charles Edwards.
Opposite: Ann Pibal, *XXMT*, 2013, oil on aluminum, Courtesy of Richard S. Marcus, Los Angeles, CA, Courtesy of the artist, Photograph by Jeffrey Sturges.

In spite of their relative isolation, their work had a profound influence on the next generation of women Minimalist painters working today—including Iranian Shirazeh Houshiary and German Tomma Abts—who have international exposure and who are celebrated in a varied and robust critical environment. It is unlikely that without their predecessors' tenacity these women would be embraced without marginalization or gender classification.

In the gallery, *Reductive Minimalism* traces the conversation between these two generations in an installation of nine pairs of paintings, to reveal the call-and-response of their artistic symbiosis through a series of formal, aesthetic, and narrative themes. In identifying these connections, the exhibition explores a strain of Minimalist practice that is still vital and provocative in contemporary painting; and offers a long-overdue critical context for the original generation of women Minimalist painters, whose work, even today, is alive in its fearlessness, its generosity, and its power to inspire.

Erica Barrish Guest Curator

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