

## Information Sheet on

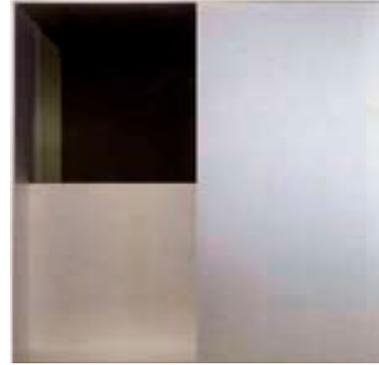
Donald Judd

American, 1928–1994

*Untitled* 1989

Clear anodized aluminum with black  
over yellow Plexiglas, 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 19 5/8 in.

Museum purchase in part with the Alvin Whitley Fund,  
with additional funds from  
Ann and Frederick Erck, 2001.8



## Subject Matter

Judd's *Untitled* of 1989 at the McNay is a wall-mounted square box built from half-inch milled aluminum sheets held together by screws; the depth of the box is almost precisely half of the height and width of it. The back of the box is made of black over yellow Plexiglas, a surface that reflects the viewer through the open front upper quadrant. This reflection adds a sense of depth, making the object appear to be a cube.

Judd refused to call his work sculpture. This work is one of many “specific objects,” a term coined by Judd to describe works that challenged the traditional categories of painting and sculpture by exploring the ideas of structure, seriality, and material. He had explicit requirements for how his works should be installed in a space; the McNay's work is hung as he specified, not as other works in the space might normally be hung. Whether an object is mounted on the wall or placed directly on the floor, a Judd work defines both an interior space and the exterior space surrounding it.

## About the Artist

Born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, in his grandparents' house, Donald Clarence Judd lived in Omaha, Nebraska; Kansas City, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa; and Dallas, Texas, before he reached the age of 14. He would later think that the summers spent with grandparents were his only constancy. At the age of ten, he had his first private art lesson in Omaha, and at 12 in Dallas, he was recognized for designing a poster for World War II bonds. He graduated from high school in Westwood, New Jersey, enlisted in the US Army in 1946, and served in Korea. On route to boot camp, he passed through West Texas, which would have a life-long effect on Judd and his works. Graduating *cum laude* from Columbia University with a bachelor's in philosophy, Judd participated in various art projects and taught art to underprivileged children in New York City, at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. His first solo exhibition was in 1957 at the Panoras Gallery, New York. He returned to Columbia University to work on a master's degree in art history.

Judd's critical writings and art reviews of the early 1960s precipitated a new consciousness in art that went beyond Abstract Expressionism and predicted a different kind of self-contained, three-dimensional simplified form (see comments on “specific objects” above). In 1963, Judd began to make and exhibit abstract wall reliefs in painted wood and metal. Shortly thereafter he fabricated blocky, unitary forms, often in modular, repetitive series. At times, he left the industrial materials completely unadorned; in other instances, he contrasted the stark structures with colored surfaces achieved through industrial processes.

Judd's works after 1965 were nearly always made to specification by industrial fabricators, using materials without traditional fine arts associations: aluminum, cold rolled steel, Plexiglas, stainless steel, galvanized iron, brass, and concrete. In his best known article of 1965, “Specific Objects,” Judd wrote, “The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall... Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors...” When criticized for hiring fabricators, Judd responded, “Whether one makes it oneself or not, it's all a case of technique that makes the thing visible, so that I don't see in the long run why one technique is any more essentially art than another technique.”

Donald Judd

American, 1928–1994

*Untitled* 1989

Clear anodized aluminum with black over yellow Plexiglas,  
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 x 19 5/8 in.

Museum purchase in part with the Alvin Whitley Fund,  
with additional funds from Ann and Frederick Erck, 2001.8

### About the Artist continued

Asked if he was a sculptor, Judd replied: “No, [sculpture] means carving to me. . . . I never had a word; I don’t know.” Judd became known as a major proponent of Minimalism, a label that he strongly rejected. He described his work as “the simple expression of complex thought.” Simple ratios, such as 1:2 and 1:2:4, dominate late works like the McNay’s. The quality of these proportions stabilizes his objects.

Often disappointed with the way his art was installed in museums and galleries, Judd decided to find permanent locations for installing his work. In 1976, the Dia Art Foundation funded his purchase of an expanse of land and buildings including a former US Army base in Marfa, Texas. Marfa became his home, with a studio and library, and the former Army base a personal exhibition space. The former Army base, where his work and that of other contemporary artists is permanently installed, is called the Chinati Foundation [pronounced Chin-AH-tee] after the surrounding mountain range. Since his death from cancer in 1994, the Judd Foundation, set up by his children, continues his work in the Marfa area. He believed that “specific works” should live where they were created.

### Quote from the Artist

*...a simple box is really a complicated thing.*  
1965, Sweden

### Strategies for Tours

**Primary Grades (5–8 years)** What shapes, lines, and colors do you see? Look at all sides of the work and into the open part. What does it make you think of?

**Intermediate (9–12 years)** Is this a painting or a sculpture? How do you think the artist put this together? [Talk about the use of *Untitled* for works of art.] What would your dad or grandmother say about this work? Do you know someone who might like this work? [Discuss preferences for simple uncomplicated designs compared to ornate works of sculpture and furniture.]

**Middle School and High School (13–18 years)** [Use questions above as appropriate. Define minimalism and space as Judd thought it applied to his work.] Did Judd achieve what he wanted to, in terms of space? How does Judd’s quote [see above] apply to this work of art?

**Adults** Look carefully at all aspects of this work: inside, outside, sides, front, how it is made. [Ask group to turn around so they can no longer see it.] What did you see? [Allow everyone to mention something. Then turn back around and look together. Use quote above.] How does Judd’s quote apply to this box? [Discuss Judd’s life and career as an artist. Explain Minimalism. Tell the group about Chinati Foundation in Marfa.]

### Sources Worth Consulting

Serota, Nicholas, ed. *Donald Judd*. London: Tate Publishing, 2004.

*Donald Judd, 50 x 100 x 50; 100 x 100 x 50*. New York: Pace Wildenstein 2002.

*Donald Judd, Late Work*. New York: Pace Wildenstein, 2000.

Judd, Donald. “Specific Objects.” In *Contemporary Sculpture*, Arts Yearbook 8, 1965.

Prepared by Rosemary Smith

Date Spring 2005

theMcNay