MINIMALISM & CONCEPTUAL ART

Slide Outline:

Dissatisfaction with the elitism of Abstract Expressionism, with the superficiality of Pop, with gallery control over creative expression—and the search for meaning in the post-Swinging 60s Vietnam War era.

The Minimalists express a need for order through structure:
- honest plain materials (steel, concrete . . .)
- angular lines, simple shapes, clearly-defined masses
- rational, mechanical process that conceals nothing
- tooled surfaces free of lurid decoration, eccentric expression, personal story or marketing agendas

The counter-cultural trends express a need for truth through experimentation with unrestricted art forms:
- honest common, vulnerable materials—worn, cheap, mutable or organic (fiberglass, burlap, clay . . .)
- weathered forms, sagging shapes,
- exposed process that reveals complexity
- textured surfaces that reveal idiosyncrasy and human touch

I. MINIMALIST ART, mid 60s to mid 70s
a reaction against emotionalism and consumerism, and a search for meaning and order through pure form
“art pared down to a minimum” said critic Barbara Rose in 1965.
“What you see is what you see” said American painter Frank Stella in 1966.
Critic Deborah Solomon and others have described this statement as the unofficial statement of the Minimalist movement.

“I view art as something vast. I think highway systems fall down because they are not art. Art today is an art of postage stamps. I love the Secretariat Building of the U.N., placed like a salute. In terms of scale we have less art per square mile, per capita, than any society ever had. We are puny. In an English village there was always the cathedral. There is nothing to look at between Bennington Monument and the George Washington Bridge. We now have stylization. In Hackensack a huge gas tank is all underground. I think of art in a public context and not in terms of mobility of works of art. Art is just there.” [Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Abstract Expressionism and the American Scene: Aspects of a New Art Movement"][ARTCYCLOPEDIA, http://www.artcyclopedia.com/history/minimalism.html]

1. Frank Stella, *More or Less*, 1964
2. Donald Judd, *Untitled: 10 stainless steel boxes*, 1968 (and collection)
6. Donald Judd, *untitled*, 100 works in mill aluminum, 1982-6

II. COUNTER-CULTURE TRENDS, mid 60s through 70s
‘pluralistic’ voices reflect the political upheaval of the Vietnam War era
What’s real / true?
As art became more abstract and removed from people’s lives, this age old philosophical question that was raised in the art world by the intellectual games-playing Marcel Duchamp in the 1920s was played out again in the 60s, & with increasing fervor in the 70s:

A. CONCEPTUAL ART
Duchamp-ian questioning of Truth, Art and Reality in the skeptical ‘post-modern’ era

B. PHOTOREALISM [2D ART]
‘Pictures don’t lie’—a clinical, mechanical exploration of the 2D image as illusion
C. **HYPERREALISM [3D ART]**
   a clinical, mechanical exposure of physical reality
   11*. Duane Hanson *Tourists*, 1970; *plus Janitor*, 1973

D. **BODY ART**
   "Who's to say this isn't art?" - the body as final frontier: the canvas the gallery can't own.
   As an expression of political alienation and a nation in crisis, Body Art rejected art as a limited Fine Art product (a beautiful, gallery-owned object like a painting, sculpture, made from valued materials like marble and bronze) and turned to the body itself as a medium of expression of unmediated experience. By its very nature, Body art is ephemeral (short-lived).
   12. *Vito Acconci* *Biting Piece* [from *Trademarks*], 1970
   14. *Chris Burden* *Shoot*, 1971
   15. *Bruce Nauman* *Studies for Holograms*, 1970

E. **ANTI-FORM ART**
   art as direct 'experience' rather than 'object'
   Anti-Form Art was a development out of the Minimalist emphasis on literalness ('what you see is what you get'), and Minimalist insistence on the direct confrontation between the viewer and objects themselves. Anti-Form Art demanded the personal, and demanded even more engagement with the artwork in that if fore-grounded the process by which artworks come into being. It deliberately used non-'artistic', often 'ready-made' materials and objects (bricks, slag metal,) and a diversity of methods and techniques that could include industrial procedures themselves. It encouraged the viewers to partake in the experience/journey as they physically engage with the art.
   16. *Eva Hesse* *Untitled*, 1970

F. **EARTHWORKS/ LAND ART [ENVIRONMENTAL ART TRENDS]**
   the environment as spiritually healing experience
   Like Body Art, Environmental Art attempted to break free from gallery control of art and artistic expression. In the 70s era of ecological movements, this art removed the creative act from the control of the gallery, required a ‘pilgrimage’ into nature to experience it, and turned to the power of myth and ancient monuments for inspiration. Some artists actually reshaped landscapes (Smithson); others simply recorded the movements of nature (de Maria), while others staged time-specific art in concert with the landscape (Christo). All Environmental art is *ephemeral* (transient) except for photos documenting the event.
   19. *Nancy Holt* *Sun Tunnels*, 1973-6
   20. *Walter de Maria* *Vertical Kilometer, Lightening Field*, 1976

**CONCLUSION:**

*In general, these styles represent reactions against the system and a demand for honesty by:*
- Reacting against previous styles (like Abstract Expressionism) -by insisting on the real world around us
- Demystifying fine art -by stressing ordinary materials and the process by which art is achieved
- Continuing to parody consumer society -by immersing themselves in "stuff"
- Resisting rules for Fine Art -by giving us piles of junk or refusing to give us museum pieces at all
- Subverting the commercial gallery system -by taking art beyond its reach

The late 60s/70s activist atmosphere bred experimentation. The result was many exciting, novel art styles from diverse people raising . These styles were often short-lived, or doomed by their own impermanence or lack of marketability, but they left a vibrant record of American people’s resistance in Vietnam-era America.

**VOCABULARY**

- definition of Minimalist art/artists/works
- formalist approach
- serial imagery
- primary structures
- definition of Conceptual art
- definition of Photo & Hyper Realism art/artists/works
- enhanced photography
- definition of Body art/artists/works
- definition of Anti-Form art/artists/works
- definition of Earthworks, Land Art, Environmental Art/artists/works
8. Minimal and Conceptual Art
Art and Lit. in the American Century, Chapter 8

**More or Less**
Frank Stella
1964
*MINIMALISM*; formalist approach; technically precise

**Untitled (8 Stainless Steel Boxes)**
Donald Judd
1968
powerful forms; serial imagery

**Three Elements**
Ronald Bladen
1965
heroic, monumental forms; Rose: “art pared down to the minimum”

**Untitled**
Robert Morris
1965
Duchampian games-playing spirit; art as idea not execution

**One and Three Chairs**
Joseph Kosuth
1965
*CONCEPTUAL ART*; postmodern skepticism; slippery Age of Information

**Big Self Portrait**
Chuck Close
1968
*PHOTOREALIST ART*; large scale; reductive medium; grid method

**Equivalent VIII (120 firebricks)**
Carl Andre, 1966
anti-expressive/impersonal, interactive; serial sculptures (each 120 bricks)

**Big Self Portrait (Chinati Foundation coll.)**
Donald Judd
1982-6
corporate endorsed authority statements; primary structures

**John**
Chuck Close, 1971
intimate effect; deadpan reportage; ‘exposure’ of camera ‘construction’ of reality
World War II [Vanitas]
Audrey Flack
1976-7
return to technical craftsmanship; human pathos subject matter

Tourists
Duane Hanson
1970
HYPERREALISM; critique of consumerism; return to the human/real/recognizable

‘Biting Piece’ Trademarks series
Vito Acconci
1970
BODY ART; self as canvas; photographic documents of events

Lateral
Vito Acconci
1978
self mutilation; pain, sex, violence

Shoot
Chris Burden
1971
psychological pain of an era

Studies For Hologram
Bruce Nauman
1970
anti-elitist art; art as artist-audience interaction, not art-as-Fine Art investment-product

Untitled (String)
Eva Hesse
1970
ANTI FORM ART; vernacular movement continued; informal medium and method; vulnerability

Stacked Steel Slabs (Skullcracker Series)
Richard Serra
1969
honest materials; manual labor; conscious experience of weight, mass

Spiral Jetty
Robert Smithson
1970
EARTHWORKS; anti-gallery control; Environmental Art trends; ephemeral
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| **Sun Tunnels**  
Nancy Holt  
1973-76  
*astronomically-aligned sculpture; eco-conscious art; land-reclamation; spiritual healing*  
| **Vertical Kilometer:**  
**Lightening Field**  
Walter de Maria  
1970-71  
*UNEXECUTED EARTHWORKS; art removed to Nature*  
| **Earthworks at Johnson Pit 30**  
Robert Morris  
1984  
*eco-conscious art; land-reclamation; spiritual healing*  
| **Running Fence**  
Christo and Jeanne-Claude  
1972-76  
*ENVIRONMENTAL HAPPENINGS; environmental events; community building*  