

Bread Tins and Thumbtacks: A Gallery Tour with *The Forever Now* Artist Michael Williams

The artists featured in *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* all draw inspiration from a dizzying array of art-historical styles and processes. Two years ago, in conjunction with the exhibition *Inventing Abstraction, 1910–1925*, MoMA asked contemporary artists to discuss works in the show that they found compelling. We thought it might be fun and enlightening to revisit this approach and invite several artists from *The Forever Now* into the Museum's collection galleries to see which works pique their interest.

To kick things off, we walked through the galleries with the artist Michael Williams. It was fascinating to hear the young, New York-based artist's perspective on a trio of works by iconic artists who also worked in the city. Here's what he had to say:

Donald Judd. *Relief*. 1961

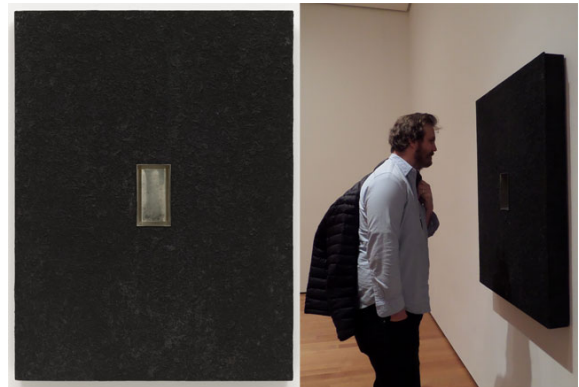
"I was surprised to see that this was something Judd had made. It has some really organic qualities in the texture and the surface. Then there is a found tin pan for baking bread set into the center of it. The tin pan looks sort of like the objects he makes later, but it's a thing that's been used before—it's dirty, and it has context and connotations, and I think that that's interesting.

His later work is so clean. It looks like it's been made by engineers, and has this kind of sci-fi, futuristic quality to it. This thing is more earthy—you can see Judd making weird decisions. I like the idea of him finding this bread tin.

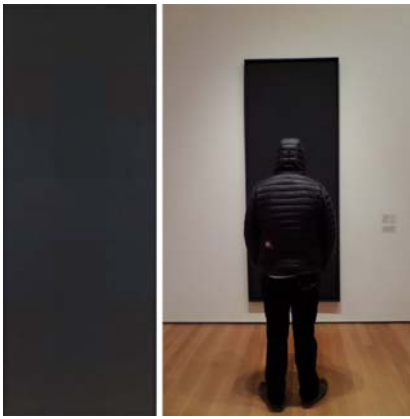
I've always been kind of confused about Judd's interest in the painter John Wesley, but after seeing this it somehow makes more sense.... I wouldn't say this is painterly, really, but the surface of this panel looks almost like bark—it's more natural and has an organic feel to it."

Ad Reinhardt. *Abstract Painting*. 1957

"I saw one of his paintings a few months ago and it just blew me away. I got sucked in. I'd just walked by them for years, but this one induced a half-meditative state in me. It's soothing to the eye, and it slows down the mind. I feel like he has a bit of a relationship with James Turrell in that way.



From left: Donald Judd. *Relief*. 1961. Oil on composition board mounted on wood, with inset tinned steel baking pan, 48 1/8 x 36 1/8 x 4" (122.2 x 91.8 x 10.2 cm); Michael Williams examines *Relief*.



From left: Ad Reinhardt. *Abstract Painting*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 9' x 40" (274.3 x 101.5 cm); Michael Williams examines *Abstract Painting*.

It's like seeing something at night, in the distance.... It's a really calm feeling. And when I think about how Reinhardt was always talking about making 'the last painting,' that visceral experience I have with his paintings baits me into believing him. But I think that's just a trick—it's his trick.

You can just look through the paint. You can look 100 yards into it. There are a couple of smudges on top, and they become an exciting part of that experience. It's like there's a smudge on the window, but you can still see behind it."

Marcel Duchamp. *Fresh Window*. 1920

"This thing that Duchamp made, it's a small copy of a French window, but he's blacked out the windows with squares of leather. He's also instructed that it's his wish that every day someone re-shines the leather. He doesn't want to look in, and he doesn't want to look out.... It's a commitment to not seeing something. Not sure what. But I like the idea of freshening by obscuring.

What really drew me in were the thumbtacks he's used as knobs: that a hundred years later, we still have the same design of thumbtacks. They almost look anachronistic here.

[On the back] you can just see how meticulous he was. Each one of these leather pieces is labeled with a number, maybe in case it needed to be disassembled and put back together. I feel like this thing shouldn't be against the wall. Coming around the back of this makes it a more dynamic artwork."