



Hackett, Regina. "Sam Survey Brings Minimalism into the Present." Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 3 Sept. 2003, <https://www.seattlepi.com/entertainment/article/SAM-survey-brings-Minimalism-into-the-present-1123404.php>.

## **SAM survey brings Minimalism into the present**

The impulses that collide across the history of art can be understood in terms of first-grade mathematics: Those who like to add are usually at odds with those who prefer to subtract.

The same forces affect religion. Within Christianity, for instance, there are Catholics adding on and iconoclastic Protestants taking away, with Quakers at the far end of Protestantism, their places of worship reduced to silence and light.

Emerging in the 1960s and still powerful today, Minimalism is the art equivalent of radical Protestantism. Get thee behind me, expressionistic flourishes. Minimalists seek the bare bones of an aesthetic situation, a bride stripped bare by bachelors (Duchamp), the thought rather than the desire, the casting off rather than the congested piling on.

Minimalists dominate the second half of the Seattle Art Museum's "International Abstraction" survey on the fourth floor, curated by Lisa Currin and art historian Marek Wieczorek. Because art is more fun than theology, the pleasure principle is alert, awake and aware even in the most reductive art context. The point of the show is to see how Minimalism mutated yet kept its core to the present day.

Carl Andre used a chain saw to simplify his options. "Tau" from 1971 is a thick, wooden beam standing with another wooden beam resting horizontally on top, making a cross. This is purity of a rugged sort, a backwoods bounty that knocked more polished competitors off their pedestals and sent them packing into the past tense.

Andre's beams became a thicket for Martin Puryear in 1990. Titled, appropriately enough, "Thicket," Puryear created a dense skeleton of wood, all ribs and long bones, suggesting bass harmonies stripped of orchestral cream.

On the wall are five of Robert Rauschenberg's flattened cardboard box sculptures. Rauschenberg is anything but a minimalist, but with his magpie curiosity and open sense of his own possibilities, he felt free to try it out, dominate and move on. His boxes are a joke, really, on Andy Warhol's pristine painted boxes advertising soup. Rauschenberg's version advertises nothing but the ecstasy of ruin. They operate on the same principle as fallen trees in a forest. They play nurse to new possibilities.

The gallery's back wall is a beauty, with three masters of the lean and clean: Ellsworth Kelly (a white diagonal arc cutting through black), Robert Mangold (irregularly shaped orange canvas "corrected" by pencil lines within), and Robert Ryman (white-on-white, in this case a froth of choppy sea).

Richard Tuttle was easy to overlook in the 1960s, but impossible to avoid today. The simplicity of his wrinkled canvases, hemmed and colored in pale, irregular shades, has begun to look classical. This show presents Frank Stella in 1966, at the height of his fame and just before he pushed his clarity into fatal bombast. There are hints of the bombast to come in the sour fluorescent of his color and the grandiose swagger of his tilted form.

Anges Martin is one of the few women to make it early in the movement. Her horizontal gray bands (Untitled No. 2 from 1985) look as if they grew organically, like sand dunes in a desert or barnacles on a pier.

Onward to the present: Jack Daws' "Misdemeanor Sculpture" gives the audience the chance to consider the Seattle Art Museum as a receptacle for illegal drugs, all within the confines of a simple black box.

Mark Calderon's bronze Buddha is all hair, no face, an update of Brancusi. Jeffery Simmons' version of Op Art is a spider's web tuned to vibrate in a purple haze. Denzil Hurley's small black painting sports a ripe, purple nipple, and Lisa Leidgren tells the story of her childhood through phases of the moon.

Banished in the 1960s, narrative has reappeared in Minimalism's latest manifestations. In keeping with the spirit of the movement, the story's always a fragment, a suggestion rather than fact. Fierce forebears might frown on stories of any kind cluttering up the space they cleared, but in art if not religion, freedom is more important than the rules.