

For Immediate Release
November 2008

**HISTORIC RETROSPECTIVE OF SOL LEWITT WALL DRAWINGS OPENS NOVEMBER 16;
OCCUPIES NEARLY ACRE OF SPECIALLY BUILT WALLS AT MASS MOCA**

FREE PUBLIC EVENTS MARK OPENING WEEKEND

A collaboration among Yale University Art Gallery, MASS MoCA, and Williams College Museum of Art, exhibition spans career of one of most important artists of last half century.



Left: *Wall Drawing 335* (detail), 1980; Collection Tate. Center: *Wall Drawing 340*, 1980; Collection Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

After nearly six months of intensive drafting and painting by a team of some sixty-five artists and art students, *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* is fully installed. The historic exhibition opens to the public at **MASS MoCA** (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art), in North Adams, Massachusetts, on **November 16, 2008**, and will remain on view for twenty-five years. Conceived by the **Yale University Art Gallery**, New Haven, Connecticut, in collaboration with the artist before his death in April 2007, the project has been undertaken by the Gallery, MASS MoCA, and the **Williams College Museum of Art**, Williamstown, Massachusetts. In order to mark this extraordinary exhibition and collaboration, three free public events are planned for the opening weekend (*see attached*).

Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective comprises **105 of LeWitt's large-scale wall drawings**, spanning the artist's career from 1969 to 2007. These occupy nearly an acre of specially built interior walls that have been installed – per LeWitt's own specifications – over three stories of a historic mill building situated at the heart of MASS MoCA's campus. The 27,000-square-foot structure, known as Building #7, has been fully restored for the exhibition by Bruner/Cott & Associates architects, which has closely integrated the building into the museum's main circulation plan through a series of elevated walkways, a

dramatic new vertical lightwell, and new stairways.

The works in the exhibition are on loan from numerous private and public collections worldwide, including the Yale University Art Gallery, to which LeWitt designated the gift of a major representation of his wall drawings, as well as his wall-drawing archive.

Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University

Art Gallery, states, “Watching this

grand installation of Sol LeWitt’s wall

drawings progress over the past six months has been nothing short of thrilling. In addition to providing an enduring exhibition of great beauty, this retrospective will enable visitors to behold for the first time the full trajectory of a major aspect of Sol’s artistic career. Until today, the only way to view multiple LeWitt wall drawings has been to travel far and wide, pursuing them individually in situ or in temporary museum exhibitions. Now, visitors will be able to return to MASS MoCA again and again to experience this visual feast of Sol’s wall drawings in a single location, doing so at their leisure over the next twenty-five years.”

LeWitt—who stressed the idea behind his work over its execution—is widely regarded as one of the leading exponents of Minimalism and Conceptual art, and is known primarily for his deceptively simple geometric structures and architecturally scaled wall drawings. His experiments with the latter commenced in 1968 and were considered radical, in part because this new form of drawing was purposely temporal and often executed not just by LeWitt but also by other artists and students whom he invited to assist him in the installation of his artworks.

Each wall drawing begins as a set of instructions or simple diagram to be followed in executing the work. As the exhibition makes clear, these straightforward instructions yield an astonishing—and stunningly beautiful—variety of work that is at once simple and highly complex, rigorous and sensual. The drawings in the exhibition range from layers of straight lines meticulously drawn in black graphite pencil lead, to rows of delicately rendered wavy lines in colored pencil; from bold black-and-white geometric forms, to bright planes in acrylic paint arranged like the panels of a folding screen; from sensuous drawings created by dozens of layers of transparent washes, to a tangle of vibratory orange lines on a green wall, and much more. Forms may appear to be flat, to recede in space, or to project into the viewer’s space, while others meld to the structure of the wall itself.

MASS MoCA Director Joseph C. Thompson comments, “With this exhibition, Sol LeWitt has left an amazing gift for us all. Great art draws upon previous artists, but also contradicts and contravenes. And the most essential art argues for new ways of seeing, even as it is almost immediately absorbed into the work that surrounds and supersedes it. As I believe will be evident in this landmark exhibition, LeWitt’s wall drawings rise to those highest of standards. We look forward to having this amazing collection of works on long-term view as a sort of proton at the center of our museum around which our program of



Left: *Wall Drawing 821*, 1997; Collection The Art Institute of Chicago.

Right: *Wall Drawing 852* and *Wall Drawing 853*, 1998; Courtesy of the Estate of Sol LeWitt.

changing exhibitions and performances will orbit with even more energy.”

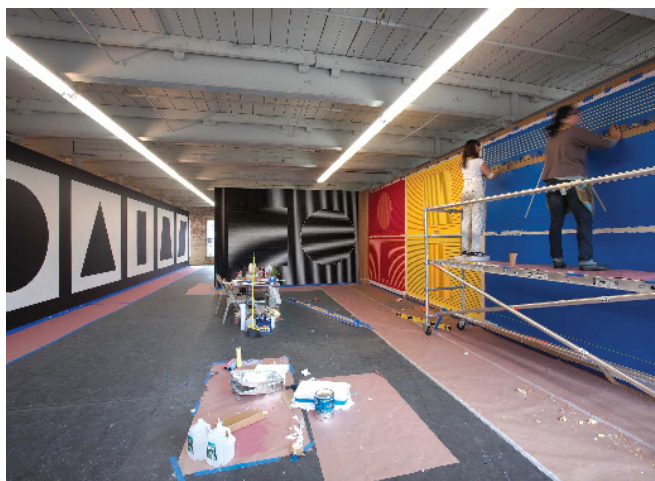
Project History

The impetus for *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* was a 2004 conversation between Reynolds and LeWitt. This evolved and resulted in a commitment by the artist to give a substantial number of his wall drawings and his entire wall-drawing archive to the Yale University Art Gallery, which already owned an extensive array of LeWitt’s art in multiple mediums. Realizing that the Gallery did not have enough space to install and maintain a large number of the artist’s wall drawings at any one time, Reynolds suggested to LeWitt that MASS MoCA, with its historic mill complex, growing audience, and history of realizing ambitious new works of art, might be able to accommodate an extended retrospective of the works.

Reynolds and LeWitt then met with Thompson, who introduced the artist to Building #7. The structure, situated at the center of MASS MoCA’s multi-building complex and featuring large banks of windows that open onto two flanking courtyards, appealed to LeWitt as an ideal site for a multi-floor installation of his work. In addition to the new interior walls, which he designed in consultation with Bruner/Cott & Associates, his specifications for the space included a plan that would leave nearly all of the existing exterior masonry walls and large windows intact, providing direct side lighting and offering beautiful views to surrounding courtyards and the Berkshire Hills beyond. Bruner/Cott integrated the galleries with MASS MoCA’s existing plan by re-activating existing elevated connector-bridges and adding new ones, and by creating a new three-story lightwell. The design thus links the building to MASS MoCA’s signature Building #5 and provides vertical circulation and handicapped access.



Left: *Wall Drawing 901*, 1999; Courtesy of the Estate of Sol LeWitt.
Right: *Wall Drawing 1081* (detail), 2003; Courtesy of the Estate of Sol LeWitt.



Megan Dyer and Elizabeth Christ, professional artist-installers, at work on Sol LeWitt’s *Wall Drawing #340* (1980) at MASS MoCA, summer 2008.
Photo: Kevin Kenefick.

Retrospective Installation and Education Opportunities

“Detailed,” “painstaking,” and “strangely liberating” are terms that have been used to describe the experience of creating Sol LeWitt’s monumental wall drawings. The drawings at MASS MoCA were executed over a six-month period by a team comprising twenty-two of the senior and experienced assistants who worked with the artist over many years; thirty-three student interns from Yale University, Williams College, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and fourteen other colleges and universities; and

thirteen local artists and recent graduates and post-graduates from many of the nation's leading studio-art programs.

MASS MoCA's North Adams location, just five miles from Williams College, offers a unique educational opportunity for Williams's undergraduates and those enrolled in its graduate art-history program at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute to participate in this special exhibition. Like Yale, Williams is among the primary training grounds for professionals in the field of art history, and the LeWitt collaboration, to be accompanied by a variety of educational programs, will offer students many opportunities to study the work of this important artist.

In conjunction with the project, the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) is creating a series of programs and shorter-term companion "teaching exhibitions" in a space at the entrance of Building #7 and at the WCMA. The first of these, *The ABCDs of Sol LeWitt*, opens at WCMA on November 14, 2008. It includes important works from LeWitt's private collection that help elucidate the underlying grammar of the artist's work and ideas.

WCMA Director Lisa Corrin says, "Our goal is to have *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* serve as an extension of the Williams campus – a classroom of sorts for our students and those from other colleges and universities. LeWitt's art offers challenging teaching opportunities for faculty from across academic disciplines. The WCMA staff will help professors craft curricula related to the exhibition. All three of the museums partnering in the retrospective play a major role in the training and support of many of the artworld's future leaders, and this adventurous collaboration will offer a new generation of students unprecedented firsthand exposure to the work of a major artist of our time."

Exhibition Publication

On the occasion of *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, MASS MoCA and Yale University Press are producing *Sol LeWitt: 100 Views*, a hardcover book with 100 new essays. Contributors are drawn from a wide array of expertise and fields of specialization. Authors include critics and scholars Lynne Cooke, Chrissie Iles, Lucy Lippard, Saul Ostrow, Ingrid Sischy, and Robert Storr, and visual and performing artists John Baldessari, Mel Bochner, Lucinda Childs, Chuck Close, Steve Reich, Matthew Ritchie, and Dorothea Rockburne, among many others. The publication, which will include 150 color plates, will be available in March 2009, and may be ordered through jjoseph@massmoca.org.

Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings: A Catalogue Raisonné

In 2010, the Yale University Art Gallery and Yale University Press will co-publish *Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings: A Catalogue Raisonné*. The basic design for this three-volume scholarly resource, a project of the Gallery, was created by the artist during his lifetime. The book will contain descriptive texts, diagrams,



Left: *Wall Drawing 999* (detail), 2001; Collection of Thomas Weisel.
Right: *Wall Drawing 958*, 2000; LeWitt Collection, Chester, Conn.

installation photographs, and more for all of the 1,261 wall drawings that LeWitt realized from 1968 to 2007. A DVD illustrating both the proper uses of materials and drawing techniques to be employed in realizing LeWitt's basic "families" of wall drawings will also be included, providing a helpful guide to their proper future installation, as well as to the drawings' long-term care and conservation.

Conserving the Legacy of Sol LeWitt's Wall Drawings

To additionally preserve the artistic legacy of Sol LeWitt's wall drawings in perpetuity, the Yale University Art Gallery has endowed a position for a drawing conservator through the generosity of Yale alumnus Theodore P. Shen, B.A. 1966, and his wife, Mary Jo Shen. In time, this conservator will oversee the LeWitt wall-drawing archive and other works on paper at Yale and will train new assistants to install the artist's wall-drawing collection at Yale as well as those owned by individuals and public institutions worldwide.

Project Funding

To date, the Yale University Art Gallery and MASS MoCA have raised more than \$10 million in funding for the project from an array of devoted board members and other notable arts patrons who are supportive of Sol LeWitt's work. In December 2007, Williams College announced a \$1.5 million contribution to the project that will fund teaching exhibitions and public programs during the twenty-five years that the LeWitt wall-drawing retrospective is extant.

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Press Information

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