



Lawrence Weiner American, b. 1942
*Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance
of a Whole* 1991
anodized aluminum
dimensions vary with installation
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1993

Which Comes First, the Art or the Idea?

Lawrence Weiner, *Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole*
1991

“Without language, there is no art.” —Lawrence Weiner

Conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner began his career as a painter in 1960, but by 1967 he shifted to creating primarily text-based works. He believes that words, rather than images in paintings or sculptures, provide the viewer with a wide range of interpretations that are available to anyone, unlike traditional art objects inside museums. Weiner’s belief in this democratic power of words and the importance of inexpensive public distribution of art has also led him to design and produce many posters.

Many of his texts describe processes that could be associated with artistic practices. *Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole* could refer to brush strokes that make up a painting or clay that is assembled into a sculpture, among other interpretations. To make this piece, Weiner sketched out his idea for the text and sent it to the Walker Art Center’s Design Department. The artist then worked with the designers create to a typeface similar to his sketch. A metal-cutting factory in Iowa fabricated the letters, including the exact spacing of words that Weiner drew in the sketch, and the work was installed on the side of the Walker building by a local sign company. Although Weiner worked closely with the Walker designers during the construction of this artwork, he allows the “owner” of his works to determine the placement, material, and other aesthetic decisions specific to each installation site.



Sol LeWitt American, b. 1928
X with Columns 1996
cinder block, concrete
14 x 26 x 26 ft. (168 x 312 x 312 in.)
Collection Walker Art Center
Partial gift of the artist with funds provided by the
Judy and Kenneth Dayton Garden Fund; materials
provided by Anchor Block Company, 1996

Which Comes First, the Art or the Idea?

Sol LeWitt, *X with Columns* 1996

“What the work of art looks like isn’t too important. It has to look like something, if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have, it must begin with an idea.” —Sol LeWitt, 1967

Well known since 1960s for his sculptures, graphics, and wall drawings, Sol LeWitt has been a major force in the artistic movement known as Conceptualism. Concepts or ideas are the basic materials of LeWitt’s art, which often exist as a set of detailed instructions. In “Conceptual Art,” he explains, “the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.” After the artist develops a concept, a team of artisans fabricate the artwork by following a specified plan. In *X with Columns*, as in a number of his other works, LeWitt uses geometric forms and neutral materials—cinder blocks and concrete. The artist says that he was attracted to this unlikely medium “because it was a totally ‘non-art’ one” with no historical associations. The low-tech masonry process lends itself to the basic geometric shapes he favors.

Which Comes First, the Art or the Idea?



On Kawara American, b. 1932
TODAY series 1989 (detail)
acrylic on canvas
10 1/8 x 105 x 1 7/8 in. overall
Collection Walker Art Center
T. B. Walker Acquisition Fund, 1991

Which Comes First, the Art or the Idea?

On Kawara, *TODAY series* 1989 (detail)

Born in Japan, On Kawara is often associated with Conceptual-ism, a way of working begun in the 1950s by artists in all parts of the world. They sought to make art and life more seamless by producing works in which the idea was of primary importance. Kawara's *TODAY series* is an ongoing succession of conceptual paintings begun in 1966, each of which was created on the date indicated and in the language of the country in which it was painted. Each painting takes the artist between eight and nine hours—a full day's work—to complete. Each object, then, is a literal representation of a day in the artist's life. In this case, five days he spent in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1989.

Kawara strives to place his own activity within the broader context of world events and to suggest the importance of individual threads of activity within the larger fabric of human endeavor. For the paintings, this is accomplished by boxing each along with the front page of that day's newspaper. Kawara's art practice, which has also included sending daily postcards to his friends indicating the time he woke up or the fact that he is still alive, also refers to the "reading of the days"—an ancient Japanese ritual that is practiced in order to predict the arrival of the gods.