

Teaching Sol LeWitt's *Tower One*



What are the benefits of teaching in the presence of works of art? Each of the liberal arts disciplines has its own pedagogical demands. Natural science classes are best taught in a lab; Art History and Visual Arts courses benefit enormously from exposure to examples of the art being discussed. Teaching an actual artwork makes for a livelier class: the object become more tangible, more *real*. Not merely a projected image on a screen, the artwork is a physical thing that inhabits the space we ourselves exist in. Moreover, works of public art extend lessons learned in the classroom beyond the classroom itself. The presence of art outdoors asserts the importance of cultural endeavor for the university and society as a whole, and moreover embodies the the university's mission as a place of learning, creativity, and aspiration.

The purchase of the Sol LeWitt sculpture that currently stands in front of White Hall, *Tower One*, took three years. The commission took a great deal of work for all involved. And yet the pedagogical value of the sculpture has become apparent time and again since its purchase. The LeWitt is regularly assigned as a paper topic in Art History 102, the department's survey course with a regular enrollment of over 200 students. The Visual Arts faculty report that their classes often entail discussion of the sculpture. I myself enjoyed being able to discuss the work in a 200 level survey as we watched it being built.

(One of the students was so excited about the installation that she signed up for the Art History major that very day).

Earlier this spring, my freshman seminar spent a valuable afternoon learning about LeWitt, a founding figure of Conceptual Art. First, we discussed the artist's essays "Paragraphs" and "Sentences on Conceptual Art" and looked at slides of his work in the classroom. We then proceeded to the Carlos Museum to view the two LeWitt drawings purchased in conjunction with the sculpture commission. We then walked across the Quadrangle and compared the drawings for the sculpture with the actual work. Then we drove over to Freedom Parkway to view another LeWitt from the same series commissioned by the city of Atlanta, *54 Towers*, a work whose concept, materials, and site could not be more different from the Emory sculpture. Some of the students were inspired to write papers about LeWitt, and they could do so based on their own perceptions of these works, rather than from descriptions in art history textbooks. Comparing LeWitt's writings, drawings, and sculptures that afternoon made for one of the finest classes I've taught during my years at Emory.

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