



ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ART HISTORY

AMERICAN ARTISTS ENGAGE THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, 1960–1979

SUSANNEH BIEBER



American Artists Engage the Built Environment, 1960–1979

This volume reframes the development of US-American avant-garde art of the long 1960s—from minimal and pop art to land art, conceptual art, site-specific practices, and feminist art—in the context of contemporary architectural discourses.

Susanneh Bieber analyzes the work of seven major artists, Donald Judd, Robert Grosvenor, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Mary Miss, who were closely associated with the formal-aesthetic innovations of the period. While these individual artists came to represent diverse movements, Bieber argues that all of them were attracted to the field of architecture—the work of architects, engineers, preservationists, landscape designers, and urban planners—because they believed these practices more directly shaped the social and material spaces of everyday life. This book's contribution to the field of art history is thus twofold. First, it shows that the avant-garde of the long 1960s did not simply develop according to an internal logic of art but also as part of broader sociocultural discourses about buildings and cities. Second, it exemplifies a methodological synthesis between social art history and poststructural formalism that is foundational to understanding the role of art in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, architecture, urbanism, and environmental humanism.

Susanneh Bieber is Assistant Professor in the School of Performance, Visualization & Fine Arts and the School of Architecture at Texas A&M University.

Routledge Research in Art History

Routledge Research in Art History is our home for the latest scholarship in the field of art history. The series publishes research monographs and edited collections, covering areas including art history, theory, and visual culture. These high-level books focus on art and artists from around the world and from a multitude of time periods. By making these studies available to the worldwide academic community, the series aims to promote quality art history research.

Egon Schiele and the Art of Popular Illustration

Claude Cernuschi

State Construction and Art in East Central Europe, 1918–2018

Edited by Agnieszka Chmielewska, Irena Kossowska, and Marcin Lachowski

Michelangelo's Vatican Pietà and its Afterlives

Lisa Rafanelli

The Virtual Liturgy and Ritual Artifacts in Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Katharine D. Scherff

Whistler and Artistic Exchange between Japan and the West:

After Japonisme in Britain

Ayako Ono

The Pictures Generation at Hallwalls:

Traces of the Body, Gender, and History

Vera Dika

American Artists Engage the Built Environment, 1960–1979

Susanneh Bieber

American Artists Engage the Built Environment, 1960–1979

Susanneh Bieber

Designed cover image: Claes Oldenburg, *Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island: Frankfurter with Tomato and Toothpick*, 1965 © Claes Oldenburg.
Photo © The Israel Museum

First published 2024
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2024 Susanneh Bieber

The right of Susanneh Bieber to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bieber, Susanneh, author.

Title: American artists engage the built environment, 1960–1979 /
Susanneh Bieber.

Description: New York, NY : Routledge, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022060425 (print) | LCCN 2022060426 (ebook) |
ISBN 9781032262680 (hardback) | ISBN 9781032280516 (paperback) |
ISBN 9781003295105 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Art and architecture—United States—History—20th century. |
Avant-garde (Aesthetics)—United States—History—20th century. | Art,
American—20th century. | Architecture and society—United States—History—
20th century.

Classification: LCC N72.A75 B53 2023 (print) | LCC N72.A75 (ebook) |
DDC 709.73/0904—dc23/eng/20230227

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022060425>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022060426>

ISBN: 978-1-032-26268-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-28051-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-29510-5 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003295105

Typeset in Sabon

by Apex CoVantage LLC

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Permissions</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xi</i>
1. Introduction: <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> : Mary Miss	1
2. Constructing a Better World: From the Bauhaus to Postwar America	20
3. Twentieth-Century Engineering: Donald Judd and Robert Grosvenor	36
4. Monuments, Landmarks, and Ruins: Claes Oldenburg and Robert Smithson	94
5. Idea as Model: Lawrence Weiner and Gordon Matta-Clark	154
6. Conclusion	213
<i>Bibliography</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	245

Figures

1.1. Mary Miss, <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> (destroyed), 1978.	2
1.2. Mary Miss, study for underground structure in <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> , 1977.	3
1.3. Mary Miss, <i>Grate</i> , 1966.	8
1.4. Mary Miss, <i>Untitled</i> , 1973.	9
1.5. Bear Pit at Childs Frick's Clayton Estate (today part of the grounds of the Nassau County Museum of Art), showing bear Prinny, c. 1920.	11
1.6. Mary Miss, <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> (destroyed), 1978, showing underground structure.	12
1.7. Mary Miss, <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> (destroyed), 1978, showing eighteen-foot tower.	13
1.8. Mary Miss, study for <i>Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys</i> , c. 1977.	14
2.1. Lyonel Feininger, <i>Gelmeroda III</i> , 1913.	21
2.2. Gertrud Arndt, design for a carpet, <i>Carpet 2</i> , 1924.	22
2.3. Director's office of Walter Gropius at Bauhaus Weimar, with carpet by Gertrud Arndt (1924), wall hanging by Else Mögelin (1923), office lamp by Wilhelm Wagenfeld (1923–24), and hanging lamp by Gerrit Rietveld (1920).	23
2.4. Jackson Pollock and Peter Blake with the model for an Ideal Museum by Peter Blake, 1949.	29
2.5. Peggy Guggenheim at home with Jackson Pollock in front of his <i>Mural</i> (1943), 155 East 61st Street, New York, 1946.	30
3.1. Othmar Ammann and Charles S. Whitney, Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge, New York City, under construction, 1964.	36
3.2. Donald Judd, untitled (DSS 58), 1965.	38
3.3. Installation of Donald Judd's work at the Green Gallery, New York, December 1963.	41
3.4. Donald Judd, untitled (DSS 39), 1963.	42
3.5. Thomas and William Wight, William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art (today known as the Nelson-Atkins Museum), Kansas City, Missouri, 1933.	42
3.6. Postcard featuring drawing of Watkins Mill by Lee Burwell (recto/verso), sent by Donald Judd to Julie Finch, August 26, 1963.	43
3.7. <i>Silos et élévateurs à blé aux États-Unis</i> , from Le Corbusier, <i>Vers une architecture</i> , rev. ed. (Éditions Vincent, Fréal, 1958).	44

3.8. Installation view of <i>Twentieth Century Engineering</i> , Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1964, showing room with bridges.	49
3.9. Photomural of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi Dam (today known as Dez Dam), Iran, 1963, installed in <i>Twentieth Century Engineering</i> , Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1964.	49
3.10. Model of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi Dam (today known as Dez Dam), ca. 1964.	50
3.11. Theodor Heuss Bridge, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1957, schematic drawing.	52
3.12. Turnbuckle and wire system of Donald Judd's untitled (DSS 83), 1965.	55
3.13. Donald Judd, untitled (DSS 53), 1964.	57
3.14. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson (architects) with Severud Associates (structural engineering), Seagram Building, New York City, NY, 1958.	61
3.15. Robert Grosvenor, <i>Transoxiana</i> , 1965, with <i>Topanga</i> in the background, and paintings by Leo Valledor on the walls at the Park Place Gallery, 542 West Broadway, November 1965.	62
3.16. Robert Grosvenor, model for <i>Topanga</i> , 1965.	62
3.17. Robert Grosvenor, <i>Niaruna</i> , 1965.	64
3.18. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, designer Myron Goldsmith, McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope, Kitt Peak, Arizona, 1962.	65
3.19. Section drawing of McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope, ca. 1962.	67
3.20. View of <i>Primary Structures</i> , Jewish Museum, NYC, 1966, showing Robert Grosvenor's <i>Transoxiana</i> , 1965 (destroyed), and Robert Morris's <i>Untitled (2 L's)</i> , 1965 (destroyed ca. 1970).	70
3.21. Robert Grosvenor, <i>Untitled (yellow)</i> , 1966; and Robert Grosvenor, <i>Model for a Large Ceiling Piece</i> , 1966.	72
3.22. Advertisement in <i>Artforum</i> for Robert Grosvenor exhibition at Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, June 7 to July 2, 1966.	73
3.23. Donald Judd, untitled (DSS 84), 1965.	74
3.24. Robert Grosvenor, <i>Tenerife</i> , 1966.	78
3.25. Robert Grosvenor, <i>Untitled</i> , 1972.	82
4.1. National Defense Reserve Fleet, Jones Point, Hudson River, ca. 1968.	97
4.2. Reserve Fleet Marker that commemorates the Hudson River National Defense Reserve Fleet at Jones Point, 1971.	98
4.3. G.W. Peters, <i>New Building for the Immigrant Station, Ellis Island, New York Harbor—Boring & Tilton, Architects</i> , 1898.	100
4.4. Claes Oldenburg, <i>Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island: Frankfurter with Tomato and Toothpick</i> , 1965.	102
4.5. Claes Oldenburg, <i>Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island: Shrimp</i> , 1965.	103
4.6. Claes Oldenburg, <i>Proposed Monument for the Intersection of Canal Street and Broadway, N.Y.C.—Block of Concrete, Inscribed with the Names of War Heroes</i> , 1965.	105
4.7. Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile, Paris, with car traffic and people walking in foreground, 1951.	107
4.8. Claes Oldenburg, <i>Proposed Colossal Monument to Replace the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square—Gearstick in Motion</i> , 1966.	108

- 4.9. Artist's rendering of an elevated Lower Manhattan Expressway, looking east towards Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges, in *Joint Study of Arterial Facilities, New York-New Jersey Metropolitan Area*, 1955. 109
- 4.10. Claes Oldenburg, *Placid Civic Monument*, 1967. 113
- 4.11. Claes Oldenburg, *Proposed Colossal Monument to Replace the Washington Obelisk, Washington D.C.—Scissors in Motion*, 1967. 116
- 4.12. Plans for the Lower Manhattan Expressway, combining tunnel, open-cut, and surface road, 1967. 118
- 4.13. Robert Smithson, *The Bridge Monument Showing Wooden Sidewalks*, photograph shot with an Instamatic 400 camera, from "The Monuments of Passaic," 1967. 120
- 4.14. Robert Smithson, page from "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum*, December 1967. 123
- 4.15. Port Authority Bus Terminal, 41st Street in Manhattan, New York, NY, 1950. 124
- 4.16. Othmar Ammann and Cass Gilbert, George Washington Bridge, 1931. 126
- 4.17. Robert Smithson, *Negative Map Showing Region of the Monuments along the Passaic River*, photostat used for "The Monuments of Passaic," 1967. 129
- 4.18. Robert Smithson, *The Sand-Box Monument (also called The Desert)*, photograph shot with an Instamatic 400, from "The Monuments of Passaic," 1967. 130
- 4.19. Daniel D. Badger and John P. Gaynor, E. V. Haughwout & Company Building, 488–492 Broadway, New York City, NY. Photograph from 1970. 133
- 4.20. Robert Smithson, selected slides from *Hotel Palenque*, 1969/72. 136
- 4.21. Robert Smithson, *Map of the Hotel Palenque*, 1969. 138
- 4.22. The Palace at Palenque, Mexico, dating back to the fifth century CE. 140
- 4.23. Frederick Catherwood, floorplan of the Maya Palace, Palenque, Mexico. Reproduced in John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, volume 2, 1841. 142
- 5.1. Lawrence Weiner, A 36" × 36" REMOVAL TO THE LATHING OR SUPPORT WALL OF PLASTER OR WALL BOARD FROM A WALL, 1968. 155
- 5.2. Lawrence Weiner, cover and sample pages from *Statements*, 1968. 157
- 5.3. Sol LeWitt, "'Ziggurats': Liberating Set-Backs to Architectural Fashion," *Arts Magazine*, November 1966; reprinted in exhibition catalog designed by LeWitt for his 1978 solo show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. 160
- 5.4. Harrison, Ballard & Allen, diagram illustrating the concept of floor area ratio (FAR), in *Plan for Rezoning the City of New York*, 1950. 161
- 5.5. Sol LeWitt, *Serial Project #1 (ABCD)*, 1966. 164
- 5.6. Lawrence Weiner, A SERIES OF STAKES SET IN THE GROUND AT REGULAR INTERVALS TO FORM A RECTANGLE TWINE STRUNG FROM STAKE TO STAKE TO DEMARK A GRID A RECTANGLE REMOVED FROM THIS RECTANGLE, 1968. 167

5.7. Lawrence Weiner, <i>AN AMOUNT OF PAINT POURED DIRECTLY UPON THE FLOOR AND ALLOWED TO DRY</i> , 1968.	168
5.8. Lawrence Weiner, <i>AN AMOUNT OF BLEACH POURED UPON A RUG AND ALLOWED TO BLEACH</i> , 1968, installed in the exhibition <i>January 5–31, 1969</i> .	171
5.9. Lawrence Weiner, <i>A 36" × 36" REMOVAL TO THE LATHING OR SUPPORT WALL OF PLASTER OR WALLBOARD FROM A WALL</i> , 1968.	176
5.10. Lawrence Weiner, <i>ONE QUART EXTERIOR GREEN INDUSTRIAL ENAMEL THROWN ON A BRICK WALL</i> , 1969.	179
5.11. Gordon Matta-Clark, <i>Splitting</i> , 1974.	182
5.12. Gordon Matta-Clark, drawings from sketchbook, 1971.	184
5.13. Gordon Matta-Clark, <i>Splitting</i> in progress, 1974.	185
5.14. Gordon Matta-Clark, <i>Splitting</i> , interior view, 1974.	186
5.15. Gordon Matta-Clark, <i>Splitting</i> , corner cut, 1974.	188
5.16. Gordon Matta-Clark, <i>Splitting: Four Corners</i> , 1974.	189
5.17. Gordon Matta-Clark, drawings from sketchbook, 1971.	190
5.18. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, corner perspective drawing for IIT Alumni Memorial Hall (Navy Building), Chicago, IL, 1945.	190
5.19. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Englewood, NJ, 1929, sheet 36.	193
5.20. Zoning Map, City of Englewood, New Jersey, 1949.	194
5.21. Gordon Matta-Clark, foldout photomontage for 32-page book <i>Splitting</i> , 1974.	197
5.22. Gordon Matta-Clark, photographs for <i>Window Blow-Out</i> , 1976.	201
5.23. Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, Forum, 1974.	202
6.1. Mary Miss, sketchbook page, ca. 1978.	215
6.2. Mary Miss, sketchbook page, ca. 1978.	216

Permissions

Parts of chapters three and four of this book are based on the following publications:

- “‘The Bulk of the Best Visible Things’: Judd’s Review of *Twentieth Century Engineering* at the Museum of Modern Art.” *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2020). doi.org/10.24926/24716839.9742
- “Going Back to Kansas City: The Origins of Judd’s Minimal Art.” *American Art* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 92–111. doi.org/10.1086/703713
- “To Become a Monument: Artworks by Claes Oldenburg and Robert Smithson.” In *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience*, edited by Katrina Gulliver and Heléna Tóth, 59–79. Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014.

Acknowledgments

When I first came to live in the United States, I hitchhiked through the country. On my journey many people generously helped me along the way, giving directions and taking me to their favorite sites. When I was back home, I cut a few sheets of paper into vertical strips, glued them together into a long scroll, and wrote down the names of everyone I had met. I hung the scroll next to my working desk and read a few of the names every morning, remembering the various encounters. Writing this book was far more adventurous than the trip I took years ago, and many more people enriched the journey from the initial ideas to printed book.

First and foremost, I thank the artists. Their work has challenged me to think and rethink what art is and can do. They opened up the world for me and continue to do so. I am immensely grateful to Mary Miss and Robert Grosvenor; and to Claes Oldenburg, and Lawrence Weiner, who have both recently passed. I extend my gratitude to the artists' families, estates, and representatives, including Jackie Grosvenor, Julie Finch, Patti Mucha, Alice Zimmerman, and Jane Crawford, and staff at the Judd Foundation, the Oldenburg & van Bruggen Studio, the Paula Cooper Gallery, the Holt/Smithson Foundation, the Marian Goodman Gallery, the Lawrence Weiner Studio, the Gordon Matta-Clark Estate, and the David Zwirner Gallery. Phoebe Boatwright, MaryJo Marks, Ellie Meyer, Caitlin Murray, Emma Whelan, Andrea Walsh, Robbie McDonald, Lisa Le Feuvre, Wendy Owens, and Jacob Daugherty responded with verve and acuity to my many inquiries.

I am immensely grateful to the guidance of Cécile Whiting, Joshua Shannon, Katherine Smith, Christine Filippone, and Kirsten Swenson. Their exemplary scholarship and commitment to rethinking art history has been deeply inspirational for my own work. This book would not exist without their encouragement and insights. I extend my deep thanks to my professors at the Freie Universität Berlin, to my *Doktorvater* Gregor Stemmrich for his unwavering support and to Werner Busch, who gave me the first inkling that I could be a scholar. They taught me to think critically and work independently. The book has benefited enormously from insightful comments by James Housefield, Christopher Ketcham, Marcelo López-Dinardi, Matthew Levy, Emily Pugh, Robert Slifkin, Marion Thielebein, John Tyson, and Alan Wallach. Numerous interlocutors enriched my thinking and understanding of American art. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Miguel de Baca, Graham Bader, Stephen Caffey, Sophie Cras, Katarzyna Cytlak, Erica DiBenedetto, George Flaherty, David Getsy, Ann Goodyear, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, Hiroko Ikegami, Donna Kacmar, Liz Kim, Antje Krause-Wahl, Rachel Middleman, Kalliopi Minioudaki, Kelly Montana, Bibiana Obler, Cory Pillen, Jennifer Roberts, Dawna Schuld, Julia Sienkewicz, Cherise Smith, Jenni Sorkin, Alex Taylor, Peggy Wang, and Jason Weems.

Sections of this book were published as earlier versions. Editors and readers helped me refine my ideas and prose. I thank the jury for the 2017 Terra Foundation International Essay Prize at *American Art*, including Robin Veder, Erica Hirshler, and the late François Brunet, for their discerning comments on my manuscript “Going Back to Kansas City: The Origins of Judd’s Minimal Art.” A research report on Judd’s turnbuckle boxes was published in *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* (Spring 2020), and sections from the fourth chapter appeared in *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience* (Ashgate 2014). Insights from Emily Burns, Erin Pauwels, Katrina Gulliver, and Heléna Tóth helped me hone these manuscripts and thus my book.

A postdoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum was essential for advancing my project and gave me access to relevant artworks, exhibition files, and archives. I learned an immeasurable amount from the intellectual community there and the cohort of fellows, who inspired me through their collegiality, knowledge, and dedication to archival research. I particularly thank Amelia Goerlitz, Anne Goodyear, Evelyn Hankins, Lisa Kirwin, and Virginia Mecklenburg. A Tyson Scholar Fellowship at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art enabled me to study pertinent works of art and take a research trip to Kansas City. I am grateful to Margi Conrads, Mindy Besaw, and Chad Aligood for their guidance and hospitality.

The ideas for this book germinated when I was working as a curator. During my stint as assistant curator at Tate Modern in London, I was inspired to think about art within architectural and urban contexts. Iwona Blazwick and Sheena Wagstaff, heads of the curatorial department, implemented groundbreaking programs; Donna De Salvo, Emma Dexter, Susan May, Frances Morris, and Sean Rainbird curated exciting and rich exhibitions that have shaped my scholarship in countless ways. I am grateful to Sophie Clark, Adrian George, and Sophie McKinley, a closely knit team of assistant curators that made for a rich and exuberant experience.

The research for this book took me to numerous archives, libraries, and museums. For their dedicated work, I sincerely thank all the staff members at these institutions, particularly at the Archives of American Art, the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, the Bauhaus Archiv, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the Getty Research Institute, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Jewish Museum, the Judd Foundation Archive, the Kunstbibliothek Berlin, the Musée National d’Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Nelson-Atkins Museum, the Rachofsky Collection, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art, the Sterling C. Evans Library, the Whitney Museum of Art, and the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte.

This publication and my research were generously supported by grants from the Terra Foundation for American Art and Texas A&M University, in particular the Academy for the Visual & Performing Arts, the Institute of Applied Creativity, the Division of Research, and the Departments of Visualization and Architecture.

The community here at Texas A&M University has impacted this book in numerous ways. I am deeply grateful to the deans of my college, my department heads, my mentors, and all of my colleagues for their continuous support of my research and teaching. Special thanks go to Dawn Jourdan, Carol LaFayette, Ergun Akleman, Phil Galanter, and Kevin Glowacki and to my students, who spur me on not only to convey ideas succinctly but to make them relevant for our contemporary times.

This book would not exist without the commitment of Isabella Vitti, Loredana Zed-dita, Venkatesh Sundaram, and the professional staff at Routledge, Taylor & Francis, and Apex. I thank them for transforming my manuscript with skill, acumen, and dedication into its final published form. Dan Trujillo at ARS and Diana Edkins at Art Resource helped with many of the images. I am immensely grateful to Emily Campbell, Tom Frederickson, Sabra Holton, Maki Iisaka, and Somaye Seddighikhavidak for their assistance with clearing copyright, editing, and tracing source material.

My friends and family grounded me along this journey, listening patiently as I recounted my travails and joys, getting me out on my bike, and reminding me that in the midst of all the work to be done, there is nothing more valuable than sitting down for *Kaffee und Kuchen*. I thank Emily, Anne, Greg, Joyce, Marion, Bärbl and James, Ed and Willie, and Beate, Moni, Steffi, Sylvie, and Solveig. I am fortunate to have Hannah and Catharina, my cousins, and my aunts and uncles. Most of all I am grateful for my parents, Helga and Helmut, and their unfailing love and support, and for my partner, Chris, my most trusted companion on this journey.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

1 Introduction

Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys: Mary Miss

At the center of the field there was a square hole, sixteen feet across and seven feet deep. The hole was reached by a path that led through a wooded area and into the open field, where one saw what appeared to be no more than a thin incision in the distance. A ladder protruded from it, marking its location (Figure 1.1).

Approaching the hole, wooden posts and beams became visible around the edge of the pit and led to the realization that it was part of a larger underground structure. Standing at the precipice of the hole, a visitor might debate whether to descend the ladder. What was the purpose of this structure? When was it built? And by whom? Climbing down the ladder, the visitor would lose sight of the landscape above and take in the earthen scent of the freshly incised ground. As they explored the underground structure, it became apparent that the wooden posts and beams formed three concentric aisles around the perimeter of the hole (Figure 1.2). In the outermost aisle, vertical windows yielded a glimpse into dark hallways beyond. Where did these passageways lead?

Like Rosalind Krauss's 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," this book begins with a description of *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, an artwork that Mary Miss constructed on the grounds of the Nassau County Museum of Art on Long Island, New York, in the late 1970s.¹ For Krauss, the work exemplified recent developments in sculpture that incorporated the site and signaled the abandonment of the autonomous character of modern art. Her essay became a touchstone for art historians, critics, and artists who sought for art to play a more significant role in society beyond academia, the museum, and the gallery. While reasserting the continued relevance of Krauss's ideas, Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose, the editors of the 2014 publication *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters between Art and Architecture*, acknowledged that the art historical discourse that followed in Krauss's wake had largely remained within the confines of fine art.² *American Artists Engage the Built Environment, 1960–1979* aims to expand the field of art history by drawing attention to architectural structures and practices that figured in the conception of avant-garde art of the 1960s. Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, for example, was inspired by a defunct bear pit located on the grounds of the Long Island museum. During the early twentieth century, the bear pit was part of a private menagerie built by Childs Frick, the owner of what was then a private estate.³ After Frick's death in 1965, Nassau County acquired the property and transformed it into a museum of fine art that opened its doors to the public four years later.

While *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* has become an established part of the art historical canon, the bear pit has been forgotten. What might we gain from expanding the art historical field to recuperate such a vernacular structure? Does the meaning and impact of Miss's work change when placed in the context of the once-functional bear pit? In

2 Introduction



Figure 1.1 Mary Miss, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (destroyed), 1978. Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

the following pages, I focus on the work of American artists of the long sixties—Donald Judd, Robert Grosvenor, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Miss—arguing that they engaged with visual, material, and conceptual aspects of the built environment to more effectively participate in the construction of a better world. Artists at the time were attracted to the field of architecture—broadly understood to encompass the work of architects, engineers, preservationists, landscape designers, and urban planners—because these practices were thought to directly shape the social and material spaces of everyday life. This book does not focus on what is commonly referred to as “public sculpture,” even though a number of the artists discussed here created artworks for spaces outside the gallery, museum, or private home.⁴ Rather, I am interested in building visual, material, and conceptual equivalences between works of art and architectural discourses to sketch the contours of an intersectional history of form. How do forms create meaning and shape our world as they blur and transcend the boundaries between art, architecture, and the built environment?

The book follows a loose chronological trajectory of canonical American avant-garde art from the early 1960s into the 1970s. The artists I address were all leading participants in the stylistic movements of the day: Judd became a main figure in minimal art, Grosvenor represented the broader scope of the minimal style, Oldenburg was closely associated with pop art, Smithson’s name is synonymous with land art, Weiner was influential in the emergence of conceptual art, Matta-Clark’s work was paradigmatic for site-specific art, and Miss developed her practice within a feminist framework. Critics and historians

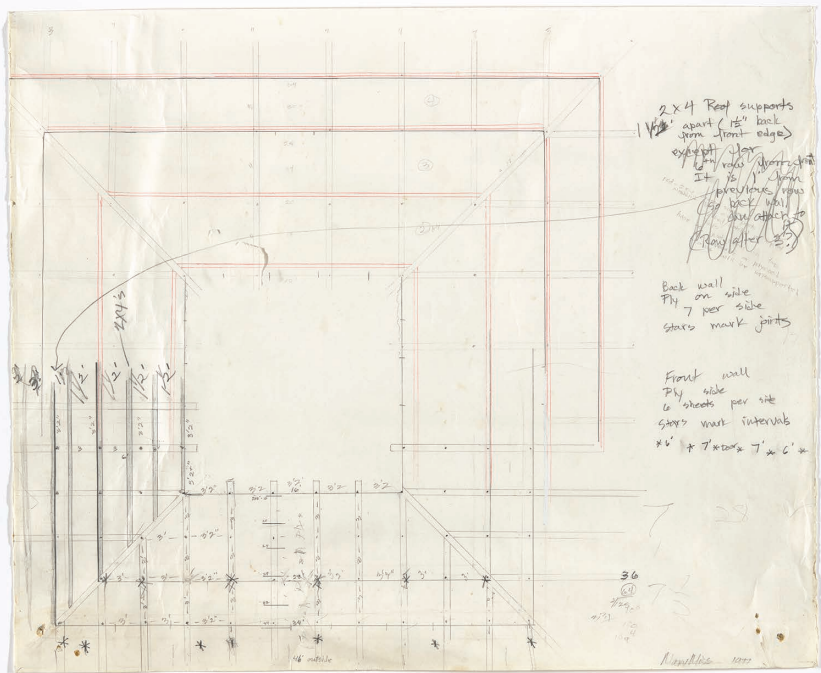


Figure 1.2 Mary Miss, study for underground structure in *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, 1977. Pencil, colored pencil, and correction fluid on paper, 18¼ × 22¼ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Gilbert B. and Lila Silverman Instruction Drawing Collection, Detroit.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

have used these movements to frame the development of avant-garde art during the long sixties; this story was long told as an expansion from narrow formalist to phenomenological and socio-critical concerns that considered viewers' individual positions as well as larger economic and political contexts. While this narrative traced the shift from the autonomous object of modern art to the world beyond the white cube of the gallery, it remained beholden to an internal and self-referential trajectory, whereby one style emerged in reaction to the preceding one. This book reframes the formal-aesthetic avant-garde of the long sixties in relation to buildings, cities, parks, and infrastructures. Previous studies—notably by Joshua Shannon and Cécile Whiting—have analyzed American art of the 1960s in the context of urban centers, namely New York City and Los Angeles, but this book is the first to explore the role architectural discourses played in the stylistic development of sixties avant-garde art and to posit that this engagement with the built environment was both formally and socially motivated.⁵

The long sixties witnessed far-reaching political and social upheavals that registered in the work of artists. The civil rights and Black Power movements, Chicano labor strikes, and the feminist and gay revolutions challenged the structure of a racist, classist, and sexist American society. Urban activists protested large-scale renewal projects that disproportionately destroyed the neighborhoods of lower-class African American and immigrant residents, while grassroots environmental efforts drew attention to the exploitative

4 Introduction

practices of large industries that destroyed natural habitats and ecosystems. At the same time, the US military involvement in Southeast Asia incited a generation of antiwar protestors disenchanted with the government's effort to spread a version of democracy that was frequently self-serving and imperialist. Numerous American artists actively participated in these revolutionary movements of the 1960s by drawing on the power of figurative art to advocate for social, political, and environmental justice. Avant-garde critics all too frequently dismissed these artistic practices for their explicit political agendas and representational subject matter, which—owing to figurative art's association with authoritarian regimes, be it the fascist Nazi government in Germany or Joseph Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union—they saw as propagandist and deterministic.

This book does not focus on figurative or politically explicit art but aims to historicize and politicize the innovations of the formal-aesthetic avant-garde of the long sixties. To this end, I draw on the methodological strengths of social art history and poststructural formalism to develop an intersectional history of form. Since the 1970s, social art history, or the New Art History, has become the dominant paradigm for scholars intent on overturning, exploding, and decolonizing the Western art historical canon. Social art historians analyze art objects within historically specific and localized contexts to reveal art's imbrication in hierarchical systems of power. They explore how conceptions of class, race, gender, sexuality, physical ability, or nationality have impacted the formation of the discipline of art history, and they show why certain artworks, objects, and practices were valued while others were marginalized and forgotten. Social art historians, however, tend to give short shrift to formal analyses, to the extent that art history is folded into (cultural) history. In their accounts, artworks often function as documents and are seen as symptomatic of the time and place in which they were made. What, then, does the *art* do in art history? In the 2021 volume *The Present Prospects of Social Art History*, Joshua Shannon suggests that “it is only through the reintroduction of form into the center of the social history of art that our discipline can make its full and proper contribution to history and the humanities.”⁶

Shannon brings into the fold the intellectual contributions of poststructural formalism as developed in the pages of the influential journal *October*, founded by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson in 1976. Rather than writing microhistories to disrupt or sidestep the dominant narrative, the critics who gathered around *October* developed a new brand of formalism that sought to analyze works of art as structural propositions.⁷ Like social art historians, Octoberists rejected the developmental, positivist claims inherent to narratives of modernist art, but they continued to pay close attention to aesthetic innovations, understanding form itself as a means to question and upend the status quo. They ascribed critical, even revolutionary potential to formal innovations in art. Critics such as Krauss, Hal Foster, and Benjamin Buchloh thus positioned avant-garde art in opposition to bourgeois society and its ideologically complicit culture industry. The value of the avant-garde was lodged in its critical negativity. This concept required that advanced art be differentiated from visual and material culture, that art stand apart from architectural practices and the built environment.⁸

An intersectional history of form synthesizes the achievements of social art history and poststructural formalism. It toggles between works of art and objects, structures, and practices that are part of everyday life, paying particular attention to how visual, material, and conceptual forms generate meaning within specific historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. This book is thus rooted in the practice of close looking, analyzing the formal characteristics of the artworks at hand. By following artists' interest in the built environment, the focus of the analysis shifts to the characteristics of buildings,

towers, bridges, monuments, neighborhoods, zoning codes, urban and suburban spaces, and infrastructures; their materials and tectonics as well as their functions, impact, and significance for different segments of the population. I build visual, material, and conceptual equivalences between works of art and the built environment—such as between the underground structure that Miss built as part of *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* and the nearby bear pit that served as an inspiration for her work. In Chapter 3, I compare the geometric sculptures of Judd and Grosvenor with innovative twentieth-century engineering feats such as bridges, highways, dams, and towers. In Chapter 4, I read the nominal monuments by Oldenburg and Smithson in formal equivalence to the making, designating, and preserving of national landmarks. And in Chapter 5, I focus on the art of Weiner and Matta-Clark to produce analogies between their practices and urban and architectural planning. The narrative throughout develops along architectural themes and discourses and compares them to the innovations that defined the trajectory of the avant-garde: minimal, pop, and land art, conceptual and site-specific practices, and feminist art.

The formal equivalences between artworks and the built environment that I pursue are not meant to be deterministic. Rather they provide one reading that historicizes and politicizes the formal-aesthetic avant-garde. Scholars have interpreted the work of these artists within different pertinent sociopolitical contexts, such as the labor movement, the Vietnam War, the fear of nuclear annihilation, and the philosophy of pragmatism.⁹ At times, I trace the artists' knowledge of and interest in specific buildings, engineering feats, monuments, landmarks, infrastructures, and zoning codes through archival research; elsewhere these relationships remain more tenuous. Indeed, artists and critics of the 1960s as well as subsequent historians tended to obfuscate these equivalences—first because of an anxiety around representational modes in advanced modern art and second due to a fear of collapsing art and functional structures. Rather than being beholden to such long-held anxieties, this book delights in the formal play between abstraction and figuration, in uncovering visual ambiguities and material transformations. The multilayered, even witty use of forms is evident in many of the discussed works, and a number of the artists explicitly encouraged and reveled in such slippages.

Writing a book about canonical avant-garde artists, who are—for the most part—white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, and American, may seem to run counter to a radical art historical practice. Scholars who build on the rich legacy of feminist, queer, and decolonial discourses and critical race theory have exposed the mechanisms of power by which many artists were marginalized due to gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical ability, and aesthetic and stylistic preferences.¹⁰ It remains paramount that art historians recuperate the work of marginalized artists, assert the diversity of artistic practices, and thereby upend canonical narratives. Why, then, revisit the work of canonical avant-garde artists? What is it about their work that is still worth learning about today? This book is an effort to rethink the avant-garde trajectory of 1960s art by pulling form out of its one-dimensional association with a narrow modernism, in which styles developed according to a self-referential logic. Instead, I understand forms in art as reverberating with the shapes, materials, and practices of everyday life. This book asks how the forms of sixties avant-garde art gain meaning in relation to the social and material spaces of people's everyday lived experiences. Such an approach emphasizes the generative potential of forms across art, architecture, and the built environment.

American Artists Engage the Built Environment, 1960–1979 opens with Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* even though it is chronologically situated at the end of the

6 Introduction

long sixties. I place it front and center not only because it became an iconic work in the formal-aesthetic narrative of the expanded field but even more so to position my narrative within a decidedly feminist framework. The notion of constructing a better world as conceived by Miss's male colleagues was rooted within heteropatriarchal epistemologies. As a woman artist interested in expanding her sculptural practice into large-scale works that approached the size of architectural structures, Miss had to battle gendered stereotypes. Even more than the fine arts, the disciplines associated with designing buildings, cities, and infrastructures were dominated by white, heterosexual, cisgender men. Within patriarchal, capitalist societies, women were excluded from public and professional life and relegated to the private sphere of the home.

Miss actively participated in the radical feminist art movement that emerged during the mid-twentieth century. Born in New York City in 1944, Miss returned to her hometown after receiving her BA from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1966 and then studying for her MFA at the Rinehart School of Sculpture at the Maryland Institute College of Art through 1968. In 1970 she joined the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee protesting the dismal representation of women artists at that year's Whitney Annual.¹¹ She was also a cofounder of the Heresies Collective, a group of women—among them artists Mary Beth Edelson, Harmony Hammond, Joyce Kozloff, Miriam Schapiro, critic Lucy Lippard, and architect Susanna Torre—who came together in the mid-1970s. They published the first issue of the journal *Heresies* in January 1977, aspiring to expand the role of feminist art into the wider public sphere. In an editorial statement in the first issue, the twenty members of the collective, including Miss, stated:

Heresies is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role.¹²

Left-leaning and social-democratic in its agenda, the Heresies Collective welcomed debate and diversity. Its journal featured polemical and academic essays and poems alongside original and reproduced artworks. Individual issues were devoted to such topics as communication (May 1977), lesbian art (fall 1977), and women's traditional arts (spring 1978). *Heresies* was, as art historian Amy Tobin aptly described it, "an exemplar of the radical political challenge feminism posed to the art world and culture more broadly."¹³

Despite her involvement with the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee and the Heresies Collective, Miss's work has largely been absent from feminist scholarship. Feminist art histories pay particular attention to issues of gender, sexuality, and the body to critique heteropatriarchal structures of subjugation; they look beyond what during the 1960s and 1970s was a predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual movement to consider various overlapping systems of oppression, including race, ethnicity, nationality, geography, and physical ability, alongside more fluid conceptions of sex and gender. Feminist art historians have paid relatively little attention to women artists who broached more decidedly male-dominated topics, media, and disciplines in their work—whether by employing new technologies and industrial materials; engaging with contemporary scientific discourses; or aspiring to shape the built environment on the scale of buildings, monuments, and cities.¹⁴ Recent writings on *Heresies*, for example, have highlighted the journals devoted to "Third World Women" (fall 1979) and "Racism Is the Issue" (summer 1982), while the spring 1981 issue on "Making Room: Women and Architecture"

has received no attention.¹⁵ What is the significance of women getting actively involved in the architectural field and shaping material and social space? Is there more to be learned by examining the intersection of feminist art, architecture, and the built environment?

During the long sixties, second-wave feminism contested the naturalized notion of woman in which the innate character of the female sex was construed as passive rather than active, emotional rather than rational, and associated with nature rather than culture. Feminists convincingly argued that the traditional definition of woman was socially constructed to serve heteropatriarchal structures of power. Feminist theorists distinguished between sex and gender to de-essentialize the definition of woman and thus expand discourses of sex from a biological to a political and cultural framing. Women artists of the long sixties intentionally depicted subject matter associated with the traditional realm of women and used craft media—such as sewing, knitting, and quilting—to insist on the equal value of these works. They also portrayed the female body, reclaiming it from the objectification of the male gaze and asserting women’s own right to erotic pleasure. These strategies have been at the center of feminist art history.¹⁶

Many women artists, however, were interested in using new materials and technologies, working on a larger scale, and seeking public commissions to participate more directly in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society. These efforts often depended on collaborations with industrial companies and frameworks of support that excluded women. In 1967, for example, Maurice Tuchman, the curator of modern and contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum, initiated a major art and technology endeavor that gave artists the opportunity to work with industrial companies and thus create public, large-scale works, but he invited not a single woman to participate. In response, artists formed the Los Angeles Coalition for Women in the Arts, which protested the sexist policies of LACMA’s exhibition and collection program and demanded radical change.¹⁷

The development of Miss’s artistic practice—from sculpture to environmental installations and projects outside the museum—emerged as part of her overall feminist agenda that called for artists’ active participation in society. She and many other women artists, including her colleagues at Heresies, were interested in forging a feminist art that went beyond a symbolic, visual language and more directly and materially engaged the public sphere. Miss was troubled that the formal-aesthetic avant-garde continued to perpetuate a solipsistic trajectory of modernist art, which—even though self-critical—remained self-referential. As Miss stated in a 2007 interview,

I have been trying to forge an alternative practice, one that allows artists to participate in the complex questions raised by working in the public realm. I am interested in how I, as an artist, can help shape the conversations in our culture rather than simply assuming the role of a commentator or critic.¹⁸

Miss created her first outdoor sculptures in 1966, including works such as *Grate*, in which she used short wooden beams to form a square border around a central metal grate (Figure 1.3). Temporarily placed in a public parking lot in Baltimore, the sculpture resembled a quasi-functional minimalist object. This was followed in 1968 by a number of outdoor works in which Miss employed ropes, including *Stakes and Ropes* in Colorado Springs and *Ropes/Shore* for Wards Island in New York City. In 1973 she was commissioned to create a large temporary outdoor project for the Battery Park City landfill at the southern tip of Manhattan, which Lucy Lippard reviewed for *Art in America*. That

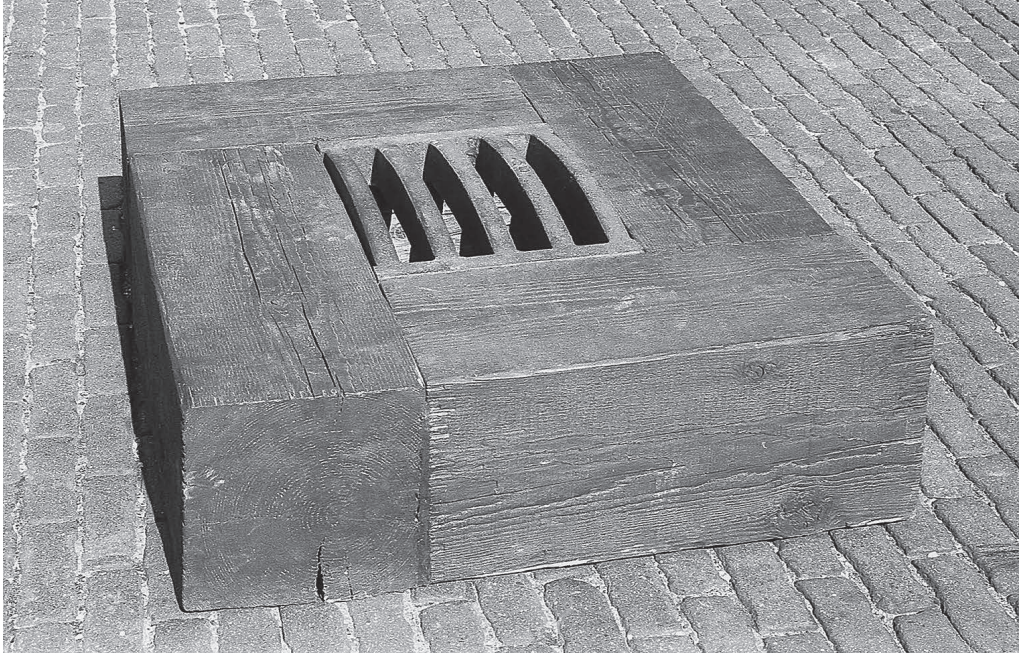


Figure 1.3 Mary Miss, *Grate*, 1966. Wood and cast iron, 4 × 4 × 1.4 ft.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

year she also traveled to Oberlin College in Ohio to create *Untitled*, a seven-foot-square pit, on the grounds of the college's Allen Memorial Art Museum (Figure 1.4).¹⁹ The ideas of these works culminated in *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* of 1978.

In her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Krauss tried to capture and theorize the new developments of avant-garde art:

Over the last ten years rather surprising things have come to be called sculpture: narrow corridors with TV monitors at the ends; large photographs documenting country hikes; mirrors placed at strange angles in ordinary rooms; temporary lines cut into the floor of the desert.²⁰

Highlighting environmental installations and outdoor projects by artists such as Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Robert Smithson, Alice Aycock, Dennis Oppenheim, and Nancy Holt, alongside Miss's *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, Krauss recognized that contemporary sculpture was easily mistaken for architecture or landscape design. She framed these artworks, however, within a formal-aesthetic expansion of modern art rather than within explicitly political or feminist discourses. To this end, Krauss drew on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, which she had referenced as early as 1966 in her discussion of Donald Judd's work in "Allusion and Illusion," her review of the artist's solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery. There she analyzed one of Judd's minimalist horizontal wall pieces, explaining how her expectation of the structural make-up of the work was foiled, as she, the viewer, changed her position vis-à-vis the sculpture. As

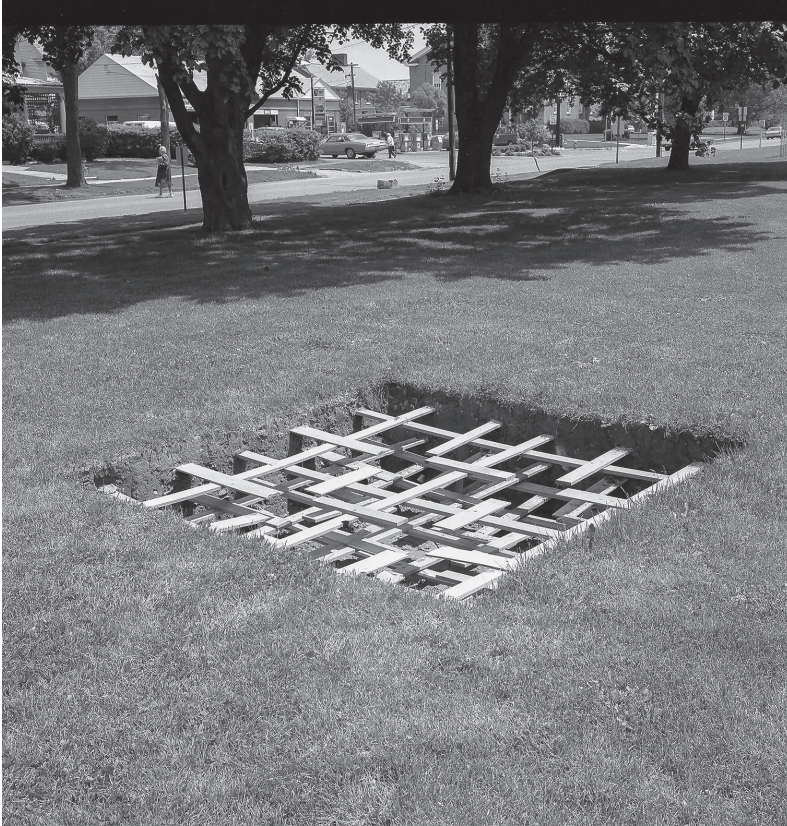


Figure 1.4 Mary Miss, *Untitled*, 1973. Wood, 84 × 84 × 30 in. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

further discussed in Chapter 3, Krauss’s poststructural, phenomenological reading became central to interpretations of minimal art that emphasized the relationship between artwork, viewer, and surrounding space and established minimal art’s central position in the shift from a modern positivist paradigm to a postmodern one.²¹

Krauss emphasized that the forms of a sculptural work changed according to the individual’s point of view and thus challenged preconceived notions of the world. As subsequent critics and art historians—such as Anne Wagner and the contributors to *Retracing the Expanded Field*—have pointed out, perception for Krauss remained abstract and disembodied rather than immersed.²² Phenomenology was a theoretical tool rather than a lived, multisensory experience. Indeed, Krauss described the pit of *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* as having a “large square face,” a two-dimensional geometric form that registered in her mind’s eye as if she were seeing the work from an aerial point of view rather than from her position on the ground (or inside the pit).²³ Even though she explored the spatial expansion of the two-dimensional shape into a three-dimensional environment, one that changed within a spatiotemporal context, her description could just as well have been based on a structural drawing of the work. She did not immerse herself in a

subjective, bodily, or sensory experience; neither did she care where *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* was located or how it was made; nor, for that matter, did she address her own subject position as a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman.

In her 2018 essay “The Skin of the Earth,” art historian Sarah Hamill advanced a feminist phenomenological reading of Miss’s work that accounts for the diversity of individual bodies and the precarity of sexualities.²⁴ Her analysis focuses on Miss’s 1973 *Untitled*, the seven-by-seven-foot hole at Oberlin College, in which the artist obscured the depth of the excavation with three horizontal wooden trellises. (In 1975 these were refabricated in steel for a permanent version of the work.) Hamill compared the sculpture to a camouflaged booby trap, such as those used by the Vietcong during the war in Southeast Asia, thus creating an analogy between *Untitled* and “the architectures and technologies of war, discipline, and state control.”²⁵ Visitors were not able to physically step into the work; nevertheless, they could, perched at the edge of the pit, experience a sense of vulnerability and fear. Drawing on a feminist politics of precarity as theorized by Judith Butler, Hamill observed, “We are lured into the sculpture’s bodily otherness, and made to see its inner workings, as if our skin could be exchanged for another’s.”²⁶ This psychological experience of undoing opens up the possibility of multiple and fluid subjectivities; it upends existing categories and hierarchies of gender and thus makes the phenomenological methodology productive for a decidedly feminist poststructural reading, one that is subjective, contingent, and empathetic.

The analogy between *Untitled* and a camouflaged booby trap transports the abstract, formal characteristics of the work of art from a subjective plurality into a political, collective realm. Similarly, my aim is to understand the formal characteristics of a work of art not only from contingent, precarious positionalities but through a collective framework, thus linking individual subjectivity and public responsibility. To this end, I produce formal equivalences, toggling between avant-garde art of the long sixties and functional, vernacular structures of the built environment. I am just as interested in the sociopolitical meanings of avant-garde art as in the aesthetic and critical potentials of functional, ordinary structures that are part of people’s everyday lives. Ronald Onorato eloquently stated in a 1978 review of Miss’s work that the artist’s constructions “are the vehicle for drawing attention to a given, that is, the environment within which they are built.”²⁷ Miss’s work allows us to see what has often been forgotten in narratives of avant-garde art that all too frequently have positioned aesthetic practices in opposition to, rather than in conversation with, objects and practices of everyday life. Shifting attention to and analyzing the vernacular structures that inspired Miss’s work not only upends the dichotomy between critical avant-gardism and ideologically compromised functional structures but also provides a deeper understanding of how forms across various disciplines generate meanings and impact the world.

As noted, the underground structure of *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* was inspired by a defunct bear pit that Miss encountered when visiting the Nassau County Museum of Art in late 1977 to plan her commission (Figure 1.5). The main feature of the bear pit, constructed during the 1920s, was a sunken arena. The circular cast-concrete enclosure was about five feet deep and twenty feet in diameter. A chain-link fence mounted onto the concrete wall extended the enclosure by about another five feet above grade. The sunken pit had a recessed opening leading to a roofed pen for the bear’s retreat. The animal pit and Miss’s hole resembled each other formally and conceptually in that they are both excavations that embody a hierarchy between above ground and underground, between outside and inside. There are obviously also differences between the two works, not least

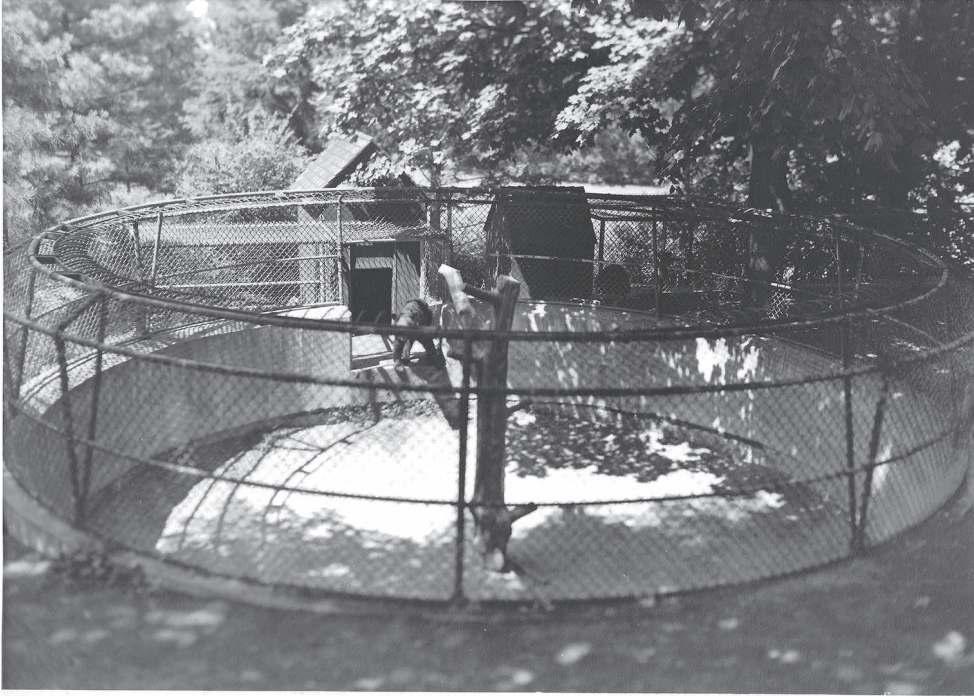


Figure 1.5 Bear Pit at Childs Frick's Clayton Estate (today part of the grounds of the Nassau County Museum of Art), showing bear Prinny, c. 1920.

Source: Courtesy Martha Frick Symington Sanger.

that one was circular and the other was square, or that the former was built with concrete and metal fencing, while the latter was made with wooden posts and beams. I am not proposing that one is a literal replication or representation of the other. Rather, I am interested in considering the two structures as conceptual companions that mirror each other in their structural propositions.²⁸

Childs Frick, a vertebrate paleontologist with an avid interest in zoology and botany, built the bear pit on his 145-acre Long Island property a few years after moving there with his wife and three daughters. His father, Henry Clay Frick, the renowned industrialist who made his fortune in the coke and steel business, had bought the property in Nassau County north of the Long Island town of Roslyn as a gift for Childs in 1919. In contrast to his father's interest in industry and finance, Childs Frick pursued a career in the biological sciences. Born in 1883, he embarked on numerous expeditions, taking him to the western United States, East Africa, Ethiopia, and China. Interested in big-game hunting, he collected diverse specimens on his expeditions, many of which he donated to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where he and other scientists further examined and studied the museum's ever-growing holdings. By the 1920s Frick's interest had turned to mammalian paleontology and fossil collecting, as well as to botany and horticulture. Moving to the Long Island property (christened Clayton Estate) allowed him to pursue these interests. There, he built a private zoo that included the bear pit along with an aviary and dens for reptiles. He devoted time to botanical experimentation,



Figure 1.6 Mary Miss, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (destroyed), 1978, showing underground structure. Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

planting, for example, a pinetum of rare nonnative conifers, ranging from dwarf species to twenty-foot-high trees, to test their adaptability to the local climate.²⁹

Frick's endeavors were rooted in a modern, humanist, Western worldview in which scientific observation and experimentation were central tenets that led to a deeper understanding of the world. His enlightened, scientific practice, however, was premised on a hierarchy between man and nature, whereby humans not only observed but also altered, cultivated, exploited, and subjugated the natural world. The bear pit, in particular, exemplifies the reigning positionality of humans vis-à-vis animals formally and conceptually in that the observing scientist stands in an elevated position while the animal entrapped below is the object of study.

Miss's work, by contrast, entices viewers to descend into the pit, surrendering their superior position. Visitors become the object of observation as they enter the hole to explore the underground structure more closely, walking through the aisles that extend beyond the open pit and glancing through the windows in the outer wall, imagining and intuiting a world beyond human knowledge and epistemes (Figure 1.6). Seeing *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* in equivalence to the locally and historically specific bear pit expands notions of human subjectivity into the more-than-human world. The work embodies the complex entanglement between humans, fauna, and flora and gives us a deeper understanding of how the notion of a responsible seeing that animates both structures have changed. Indeed, Prinky—the bear that lived on the estate—was not simply an object of scientific study but the pet of Childs Frick's youngest daughter, Martha. Prinky frequently escaped her den, making her way beyond the estate's boundaries to a beekeeper's farm in Roslyn.³⁰

In addition to the underground structure, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* included three towers. Located beyond a dirt embankment on the other side of the field, the towers were simple skeleton structures made of wooden poles, beams, and boards (Figure 1.7).³¹ Like



Figure 1.7 Mary Miss, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* (destroyed), 1978, showing eighteen-foot tower. Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, New York.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

the pit, the towers were inspired by a vernacular, once-functional structure: a fire tower built on the grounds during the late nineteenth century.³² At the time, fire towers were a common safety feature of large estates, giving personnel an elevated position for the detection of forest fires. By the mid-1960s, however, fire towers had largely been rendered obsolete by the invention of aircraft and radios that facilitated communication between patrollers and respondents, thus presenting a more effective way for detecting and controlling wildfires. While towers, just like decoys and pits, may be thought of as part of an authoritarian architecture of subjugation that instills fear and anxiety, in the case of the fire tower on the grounds of the Nassau County Museum of Art, the structure was built within an enlightened, scientific ideal of seeing and observing and was concerned with the well-being of humans and their environment. The structure thus conveys a notion of care for the habitats of humans and diverse species, albeit from the perspective of a mostly white, property-owning, upper-class citizenry.

The three vertical structures that Miss built resembled a fire tower, but she modified some details. She did not provide ladders for visitors to climb so they could survey the grounds. Further, at the center of each platform was a large hole, rendering the structures even less useful (Figure 1.8). Still, the towers functioned as a viewing device, one in which the visitor remained on the ground rather than taking an elevated, superior position in relation to the natural world. We might think of the three towers as framing devices that draw attention to that which was previously invisible or neglected. Like the underground structure, the towers challenge us to see beyond our own subject positions and practice a responsible, public seeing. As its title suggests, *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* conveyed the continuously shifting relationship between centers and margins.

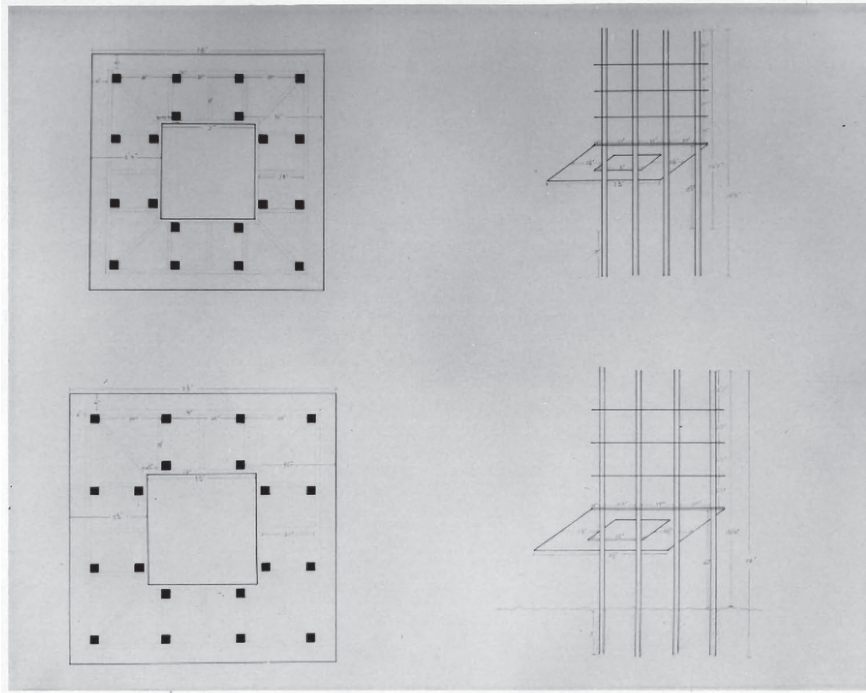


Figure 1.8 Mary Miss, study for *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, c. 1977. Pencil on paper, 5½ × 5½ in. Collection of Mary Miss.

Source: © Mary Miss Studio. Photograph Mary Miss Studio.

From a distance, the three towers of *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* all looked the same, but approaching the individual structures, one realized that each was of a different size. The tower closest to the dirt embankment was eighteen feet tall; the second one, across the clearing, measured fifteen feet in height; and the third tower in the far distance was even shorter: twelve feet. The different sizes of the three towers were imperceptible when seen from the embankment because they reinforced the perspectival diminution of objects. The differences of the towers' heights only came into focus when visitors walked across the field and experienced each tower in relation to their own bodies and came to realize that perception was intimately bound to their place within the whole.³³ Analyzing *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* in relation to structures that inspired the work allows us to contemplate the visual, material, and conceptual forms of avant-garde art within specific historical and social contexts, and also to see our own positionality as imbricated within existing frameworks that we aim to transcend.

Miss's committed feminist practice did not shy away from actively shaping material and social environments. She pursued an interventionist, materialist practice concerned with effecting the everyday built environment. Since the late 1970s Miss has collaborated with architects, landscape designers, planners, engineers, and developers to design and realize more permanent public parks, reclamation projects, and functional environments. While *Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys* exemplified sculptural practices that expanded from the autonomous object into the architectural field, her later works were criticized for

playing into the capitalist superstructure.³⁴ Rather than drawing clear lines between the utopian-critical avant-garde and functional structures imbricated within capitalist ideologies, this book develops an intersectional history of form that easily shifts back and forth between these disciplinary framings. The aim is to develop a deep history of form that understands form—imagined, rendered, built—as capable of changing existing social, economic, and aesthetic values. My contention is that materially built forms, no less than drawn, photographed, painted, and sculpted forms, have the capacity to reshape existing realities. This book, in short, explores the work of artists who engaged with the forms, structures, and practices of the built environment, which they understood to directly impact the social and material spaces of everyday life, in order to show that art itself constitutes an act of building and world-making.

Before turning to the artists who came to define the canonical avant-garde of the long sixties, I look back to the early twentieth century. Chapter 2 traces the relationship between art, architecture, and the built environment as it played out in the decades leading up to the 1960s to understand the reasons for the severing of art and architectural discourses. I focus on the Bauhaus, which set out to merge aesthetic and architectural practices as part of a utopian vision to create an egalitarian society. The failure to realize this better world—and the all-too-easy subsumption of art, architecture, and building in the service of the hierarchical structures of capitalism, racism, and sexism—propelled a theoretical, critical distancing of avant-garde art from the material, social, and political practice of building. Postwar theorists and critics stressed the importance of art's autonomy, which evolved into a self-referential, formal-aesthetic trajectory of modern art. Many American artists, however, remained interested in engaging with the material and social spaces of everyday life. This book shows that artists who were central to the development of the canonical avant-garde during the long sixties engaged with the built environment on formal-aesthetic and sociopolitical grounds.

Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Judd and Grosvenor from the mid-1960s, showing that both took inspiration from engineering structures such as bridges, towers, and dams that were part of the everyday built environment. In addition to examining how their work referenced visual, material, and technological characteristics of twentieth-century engineering, I argue that both artists drew on the social and cultural significance of engineering that played a central role in the conception of the United States as a modern, progressive nation. Analyzing works such as Judd's floor box of 1965 (DSS 58) made with stainless steel and red fluorescent plexiglass, and Grosvenor's *Transoxiana* (1965), a thirty-two-foot-long sculpture cantilevered from the ceiling, I trace the works' visual, material, and technical characteristics to specific architectural structures featured in the exhibition *Twentieth Century Engineering* on view at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1964. Showcasing photographs of some of the most exciting contemporary engineering feats, the exhibition captured the techno-optimism of the early 1960s. At once innovative and functional, the featured structures were thought to have a genuine benefit to the population at large. Engineers developed new materials and techniques that resulted in innovative structures that raised individual living standards and advanced the nation economically and socially. Like Arthur Drexler, the curator of *Twentieth Century Engineering*, Judd and Grosvenor (and many other artists whose work would be canonized as minimal art) were intrigued by the promise that scientific and technological innovations would advance American civilization. However, the one-sided, overtly positive view of engineering conveyed in the MoMA exhibition paid little heed to the devastating impact of large-scale construction. Ambitious engineering projects

benefited a particular segment of the population—mostly those already privileged and in power—rather than all.

Oldenburg and Smithson, the artist discussed in Chapter 4, expanded their views from the technologically advanced and efficient masterpieces of engineering to the dilapidated, forgotten, and outdated structures they encountered. Rather than emphasizing the functionality and newness of buildings, they paid attention to the processes of time and history and the concomitant changes of materialities, forms, and meanings. Taking impetus from the practices of historic preservation, they envisioned monuments, landmarks, and ruins that opened up the functionalist conception of the built environment to other styles, narratives, and values. Preservationists at the time focused on saving and restoring the finest examples of Western architectural styles, in particular examples of the decorative nineteenth-century beaux-arts style that architectural modernism despised. They also considered the sociohistorical meanings of buildings. Under these expanded premises, a structure like the then-dilapidating Ellis Island Immigration Station, which was considered a minor example of the beaux-arts style but had played a significant role in the history of American immigration, was seen as monument worthy. But who had the right to decide which styles and which histories were to be preserved and remembered, while others were destroyed and forgotten? Oldenburg and Smithson designated existing structures, buildings, and objects as monuments to endow them with new value and public meaning. However, they were not interested in pristine restoration and material preservation but (like many other artists, respectively associated with pop and earth art) in complicating and broadening the meanings inscribed within the forms of everyday life. In particular, Oldenburg and Smithson revealed the destructive aspects of urban and suburban modernization, considering the experiences of a more diverse public, including those marginalized by Western, technocratic conceptions of progress.

Chapter 5 explores the work of Weiner and Matta-Clark in the context of architectural planning, whereby concepts rendered in the form of zoning laws, building codes, architectural and urban plans, and models provide a guide for material realizations. Both artists worked at the juncture of immaterial ideas and material realizations, paying attention not just to objects, houses, neighborhoods, monuments, and infrastructures but to the ideas that guided the material realization of these built forms. The logic of New York City's zoning resolution, in particular, served as a point of reference for conceptual artists. This regulatory framework was guided by democratic principles in which the private and public, individual creativity, aesthetic predilections, and communal responsibilities were closely intertwined—and ideally balanced. Artist Sol LeWitt wrote an essay in which he considered how the city's zoning resolution directly impacted the visual and material shapes of the built environment. Focusing on Weiner's early linguistic statements and Matta-Clark's building cuts, I show that their work was rooted in democratic strategies intent on giving individuals a stake in the shaping of their environment. Both artists asked the public to take responsibility for the making and meaning of a work of art and thus consider how visual, material, and conceptual forms had the capacity to (re)shape the world. Such a politics of freedom, however, was prone to perpetuate existing master narratives of progress, relying on social conventions and aesthetic trends that continued to discriminate along racial, national, gendered, and socioeconomic lines. By reinserting their work, which was respectively associated with conceptual and site-specific art, within local, national, as well as transnational frameworks, this chapter conveys the

predicaments of American democracy, of balancing individual freedom and public responsibility, in the precarious project of building a more just and sustainable world.

In the conclusion, I return to the work of Mary Miss, which guided the overarching narrative of the book. By way of summarizing the main findings and methodological approach, I highlight the possibilities of working and thinking across art, architecture, and the built environment to upend the dichotomies not only between fine art and functional structures but also between nature and culture, and do so from a feminist, intersectional positionality.

Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44; reprinted in Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 276–290.
2. Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose, eds., *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters between Art and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
3. Mary Miss and R. J. Onorato, *Mary Miss: Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, exh. cat. (Roslyn, NY: Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, 1978). For Miss's interest in vernacular structure, see also Alvin Boyarsky, Joseph Giovannini, and Mary Miss, *Mary Miss: Projects, 1966–1987* (London: Architectural Association, 1987), 9–35; Mary Miss, "Interview with Anne Barclay Morgan," *Artpapers* 18, no. 4 (July 1994): 20–25; and Mary Miss, "On a Redefinition of Public Sculpture," *Perspecta* 21 (1984): 52–70.
4. For discussions of public sculpture in 1960s New York and beyond, see Michele H. Bogart, *The Politics of Urban Beauty: New York and Its Art Commission* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Michele H. Bogart, *Sculpture in Gotham: Art and Urban Renewal in New York City* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018); Casey N. Blake, ed., *The Arts of Democracy: Art, Public Culture, and the State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Harriet F. Senie, ed., *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, Controversy* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Amanda Douberley, "The Corporate Model: Sculpture, Architecture, and the American City, 1946–1975," PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2015; and Christopher M. Ketcham, "Minimal Art and Body Politics in New York City, 1961–1975," PhD dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018.
5. Cécile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); and Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Postmodern City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). See also Katherine Smith, *The Accidental Possibilities of the City: Claes Oldenburg's Urbanism in Postwar America* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021).
6. Joshua Shannon, "The Role of Form in the Social History of Art," in *The Present Prospects of Social Art History*, eds. Anthony E. Grudin and Robert Slifkin (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 159. See also Robert Slifkin, "Object Art History," in *The Present Prospects*, 175–187; and Kristina Jökaldá, "What has become of the New Art History?," *Journal of Art Historiography* 9 (December 2013): 1–7.
7. Anna Lovatt, "Rosalind Krauss: The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths, 1985," in *The Books that Shaped Art History: From Gombrich and Greenberg to Alpers and Krauss*, eds. Richard Shone and John-Paul Stonard (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 191–201; and Stephen Moonie, *Art Criticism and Modernism in the United States* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022), 59–104.
8. Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105–143; Hal Foster, *The Art-Architecture Complex* (London: Verso, 2011); and Mark Crinson and Richard J. Williams, *The Architecture of Art History: A Historiography* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2018), 113–129. On the difference between social art history and poststructural formalism, see Joshua Shannon and Jason Weems, "A Conversation Missed: Toward a Historical Understanding of the Americanist/Modernist Divide," in *A Companion to American Art*, eds. John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill,

18 Introduction

- and Jason D. LaFountain (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 17–33; and Jennifer L. Roberts, “Response: Setting the Roundtable, or, Prospects for Dialogue,” in *Companion to American Art*, 34–48.
9. Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Robert Slifkin, *The New Monuments and the End of Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); and David Raskin, *Donald Judd* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). See also Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012); and David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).
 10. See for example the many recent efforts to decolonize art history, as in Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, “Decolonizing Art History,” *Art History* 43, no. 1 (February 2020): 8–66; or Charlene Villaseñor Black and Tim Barringer, “Decolonizing Art and Empire,” *Art Bulletin*, 104, no. 1 (March 2022): 6–20.
 11. Oral history interview with Mary Miss, July 18 and 20, 2016. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Conducted by Annette Leddy at the home and studio of Mary Miss in New York City, New York.
 12. The Collective, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 1 (January 1977), n.p.
 13. Amy Tobin, “Heresies’ Heresies: Collaboration and Dispute in a Feminist Publication on Art and Politics,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 30, no. 3 (2019): 280.
 14. Volumes on women artists in the context of new media art and science include Judy Malloy, ed., *Women, Art, and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), and Christine Filippone, *Science, Technology, and Utopias: Women Artists and Cold War America* (Oxon UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2017). Feminist scholarship in architectural history forms a distinct body of literature, including Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality & Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997); Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998); and Torsten Lange and Lucía C. Pérez-Moreno, eds., “Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism,” *Architectural Histories* 8, no. 1 (December 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.563>.
 15. See papers by Crystal am Nelson and Sadia Shirazi presented as part of the 2022 College Art Association session “Heresies’ and other Mythologies,” chaired by Abbe Schriber and Montana Marie Ray.
 16. Examples of feminist art histories include Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, eds., *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, exh. cat., Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Helena Reckitt, ed., *The Art of Feminism: Images that Shaped the Fight for Equality, 1857–2017* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2018); and Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism: Women, Art, and Sex in the 1960s* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).
 17. Ruth E. Iskin, “Feminism, Exhibitions and Museums in Los Angeles, Then and Now,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 37, no. 1 (2016): 14–15; Donna Conwell, “Protesting Art and Technology,” in *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945–1980*, eds. Rebecca Peabody et al. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute and J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 219; and Susannah Bieber, “Technology, Engineering, and Feminism: The Hidden Depths of Judy Chicago’s Minimal Art,” *Art Journal* 80, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 106–123.
 18. Zoë Ryan and Mary Miss, “A Conversation with Mary Miss,” in *Log 9* (Winter/Spring 2007): 111–112. See also Mary Miss cited in Avis Berman, “A Decade of Progress, But Could a Female Chardin Make a Living,” *ARTNews* (October 1980): 77.
 19. Mary Miss in conversation with Alvin Boyarksy, *Mary Miss: Projects*, 69–72; Laurie Anderson, “Mary Miss,” *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 65.
 20. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 276.
 21. See also Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 35–69.
 22. Anne M. Wagner, “Splitting and Doubling: Gordon Matta-Clark and the Body of Sculpture,” *Grey Room* 14 (Winter 2004): 32; Papapetros and Rose, *Retracing the Expanded Field*, vii–xvii.
 23. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” 277. See also Krauss’s discussion of grids as aesthetic objects, in Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64. For contemporary phenomenological readings of Miss’s work, see Lucy R. Lippard, “Mary Miss: An

- Extremely Clear Situation,” *Art in America* 62, no. 2 (March–April 1974): 76–77; reprinted in Lucy R. Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 210–213; Ronald J. Onorato, “Illusive Spaces: The Art of Mary Miss,” *Artforum* 17, no. 4 (December 1978): 28–33. See also Laurie Anderson, “Mary Miss,” *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 65; and Lawrence Alloway, “Mary Miss,” *The Nation*, October 14, 1978, 389.
24. Sarah Hamill, “‘The Skin of the Earth’: Mary Miss’s *Untitled* 1973/75 and the Politics of Pre-*carity*,” *Oxford Art Journal* 41, no. 2 (August 2018): 271–291. For a feminist reading of Miss’s work within land art, see Kim Timken, “Women, Land Art and the Social (1978–83),” PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2020, 24–74.
 25. Hamill, “The Skin of the Earth,” 277.
 26. Hamill, “The Skin of the Earth,” 290.
 27. Onorato, “Illusive Spaces,” 28.
 28. On the abstractness of Miss’s work, see Hal Foster, “Mary Miss,” *Artforum* (Summer 1980): 84.
 29. Martha Frick Symington Sanger, *The Henry Clay Frick Houses: Architecture, Interior, Landscapes in the Golden Era* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2001), 225; Martha Frick Symington Sanger, *Henry Clay Frick: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 418, 464; and “History,” Nassau County Museum of Art website; <https://nassaumuseum.org/history/> [accessed April 17, 2022].
 30. Sanger, *The Henry Clay Frick Houses*, 260.
 31. In Miss’s conception of the work, visitors coming from the main building of the Nassau County Museum of Art would encounter the towers first and then the underground structure. But Krauss’s sole focus on the latter has upended this sequence.
 32. The poet William Cullen Bryant, a nature lover and passionate gardener, owned the property before Henry Clay Frick bought it. See Sanger, *The Henry Clay Frick Houses*, 219–221.
 33. Miss and Onorato, *Mary Miss: Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys*, 14–19. For the importance of public participation and sensory experience in Miss’s work, see respectively Eleanor Heartney, “Beyond Boundaries,” in *Mary Miss*, eds. Mary Miss and Daniel M. Abramson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 9–13; and Joseph Giovannini, “Thick Space,” in *Mary Miss*, 15–31.
 34. Rosalyn Deutsche, “Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City,” *October* 47 (Winter 1988), 3–52, reprinted in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, ed. Rosalyn Deutsche (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 79–93.