

The Burlington Magazine
Book Review
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Donald Judd Writings
Judd Foundation and David Zwerner, 2016

Donald Judd belongs to the small group of canonical artists whose writings have acquired a titanic status. You can search for some time before finding a commentator who mentions his art without pondering the significance of one of his sentences at length. This is not surprising, since Judd wrote a fair amount, and had firm opinions about practically everything – from the shape of a chair, to the art of his contemporaries, to the state of world politics. Becoming immersed in his writings gives readers the sensation of learning to look and think as he did. Indeed, the assertiveness of his authorial voice has dominated the terms of his reception, and most of the critical literature about him has limited itself to clarifying his worldview.

This new volume, jointly edited by the artist's son, Flavin Judd, and Caitlin Murray, is therefore something of an event. Any book of writings by the artist would be predestined for an avid reception, but this publication genuinely does exceed expectations. For one, it is well designed. It sports a bold orange cover, no doubt inspired by Judd's preference for RAL2009, which he used in several of his late painted steel works. The book is compact, and has the feel of a squat paperback travel guide – a sort of Baedeker for minimalists. It includes almost all the articles, letters, gallery reviews, reports and statements that have already been published in the four extant collections of Judd's writings, but complements them with additional manuscripts and reams of private notes that the editors have culled from his archives. Collectively, this amounts to well over eight hundred pages, covering everything from his student essays from the late 1950s, through to his memorable reflections on colour penned just a year before he died, in 1993. To cap this, there are more than a hundred and fifty pages of well-chosen illustrations to supplement the texts, plus an exemplary index. Overall, this publication exudes rigour and sympathy for Judd's aesthetic and it unreservedly earns its place on your bookshelf.

The major omission, however, is the interviews, which never have found a place in any of Judd's collected writings. This is unwarranted, since we know that Judd often edited the transcripts meticulously, and, as such, they are just as writerly and considered as his other statements. Hopefully one day the Judd Foundation will correct this oversight by publishing a companion anthology of these invaluable texts.

The important question, though, is whether this publication will shift perceptions of the artist. Up to now, Judd's writings have had the effect of narrowing the terms of the commentary about his work. His artistic tenets – 'space', 'specificity', 'scale', 'symmetry', and so on – have become the principles that art historians have reiterated. But this publication makes available so many additional types of writing by the artist on an expanded range of topics that it has the potential to open up new avenues of enquiry. For instance, it becomes clearer than ever that Judd believed in the power of design. In addition to art, he dedicated considerable thought to furniture, architecture and planning, and recognised that all design was underpinned by philosophical and political principles. In the light of this, maybe we should start to treat Judd as a twentieth-century counterpart to William Morris. Judd's views on

politics and beauty might well have been avowedly different, but both wanted to live daily with the things they had designed. But would you want to live in a world of Judd's making? This volume generously explains the lay of the land. It is now up to us to decide on the length of the stay.

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