

“Make an Object to Be Lost”

Multiples and Minimalism

Liz Kotz

How do we understand the historical project of “the multiple” in relation to Minimalism? How do these two models of artistic practice intersect, and what do they produce? At the outset, we should note that this intersection appears fraught. At the very least, it is under-populated—vastly outnumbered by the burgeoning Pop multiple, the profusion of Neo-Realism, and the myriad box- and kit-type multiples associated with Fluxus. Amidst the many upheavals of the 1960s—artistic, social, technological—and amidst the widespread turn to the common object and everyday object experience as models for sculptural production, what we might call the “minimalist multiple” never took hold with the same fervor. Why might this be so? Why was Minimalism resistant to the multiple?

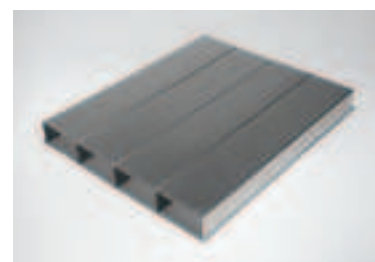
Untitled 1967 [275] is an enigmatic object. Donald Judd’s contribution to the *Ten from Leo Castelli* portfolio [274] was the artist’s first editioned sculpture, and one of only three multiples that he produced in this period (before making several multiple wall-works in the 1980s and early 1990s). *Untitled* 1967 occupies a provocatively peripheral place in Judd’s production. While it is included in the 1996 catalogue raisonnée of Judd’s prints and works in editions,¹ to my knowledge, there is no significant critical discussion of it, or the other multiples, in the increasingly voluminous Judd literature, nor have they been included in the recent Judd retrospectives. Even in the catalogue, the “works in editions” appear in the back of the book with rather minimal notations, and they are not discussed in either of the catalogue essays.

Untitled 1967 consists of a single sheet of folded stainless steel; it was fabricated by Bernstein Brothers, New York, Judd’s fabricator of the period. It is modestly scaled (61 × 51 × 6.4 cm) and low to the ground, and—given the monumental scale of Judd’s sculptures of the period—surprisingly self-effacing. Its size is awkward: too large for a table or shelf, but too small for the floor, like something one might trip over.

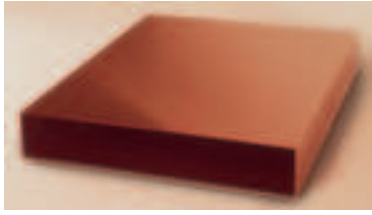
Aside for the two multiples produced in the following years—*Untitled* 1969, published by Edition Bishofberger, Zurich, and *Untitled* 1971 [276], published by Gemini in Los Angeles—I can’t think of other Judd objects of a similar size and scale—except, of course, for the smallish horizon-



274 – VARIOUS ARTISTS
Ten from Leo Castelli, 1968



275 – DONALD JUDD
Untitled, 1967



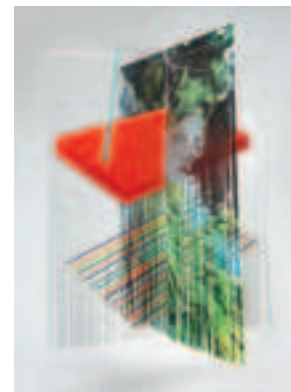
276 — DONALD JUDD
Untitled, 1971

tal metal boxes he made in the mid-1960s, which cantilever out from the wall. Those objects, while not large, assertively hold the space of the wall. But placed on the floor, the Judd multiples do not address themselves to the body or the space of the room in the ways that we expect minimal sculpture to do. They are instead scaled to a domestic sphere, to smaller, relatively intimate rooms, and they elicit an intimate and close examination. Consisting of four metal

sleeves or tunnels open on the bottom—and thus creating and concealing a space below—*Untitled* 1967 invites us to stoop down very low, and even look underneath. With its shiny metal and inviting form, one is tempted to pick it up, to hold it, move it around or perhaps turn it over: to do something with it, though exactly what is unclear. While clearly belonging to a Judd lexicon of shapes and materials, the work doesn't actually look like a Judd sculpture, but instead resembles some of the models or working materials visible in photographs of his studio or workshop. I imagine the idea that viewers might want to pick it up and handle it would make Judd uncomfortable.

Untitled 1967 is lovely and strange. It represents an aberration in Judd's work, a path not taken—and the fact that he made only three such multiples suggests that they represent a failed experiment. And they suggest, furthermore, that the historical project of the “multiple”—the production of usually smaller-scale, lower-cost editioned objects that hover between spheres of fine art and everyday objects—represented a problem for him, a stumbling block, one that Judd couldn't make “work” for his own production. In its reproducibility, its use of industrial materials and fabrication methods, and even its claim to occupy a sphere closer to that of everyday consumer objects, the 1960s multiple poses a structural problem for minimal sculpture. On the one hand, it is *too close* to the serial logic of minimal production. Like much minimal sculpture, it eschews the handmade and personal for the fabricated and semi-industrially produced; and it deals with materiality and facticity, not representation or illusion. On the other hand, the 1960s multiple abandons the large scale, institutional site and phenomenological address of minimal sculpture for a domestic scale and handheld and tactile relation with objects. It risks turning Minimalism into a toy, something that one would pick up and play with.

Walter De Maria's rarely exhibited 1961 sculpture *Boxes for Meaningless Work* consists of two open wooden boxes—each 24 × 34 × 46 cm—fixed on a 122 × 10 × 61 cm wooden base; inscribed in pencil on the base is “Boxes for meaningless work. Transfer things from one box to the next box back and forth, back and forth, etc. Be aware that what you are doing is meaningless.”² We recognize the sculpture as a realization of the score “BOXES FOR MEANINGLESS WORK”



277 — JAMES ROSENQUIST
Sketch for Forest Ranger, 1967



278 — ROBERT MORRIS
Untitled, 1967



279 — ANDY WARHOL
Portraits of the Artists, 1967

that De Maria published in *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, the legendary collection of scores, essays, poems and examples of new art that the composer La Monte Young assembled in 1960–61—although the volume [282], designed by Fluxus founder George Maciunas, did not appear until 1963 due to a host of financial and logistical difficulties.³ The short text reads:

BOXES FOR MEANINGLESS WORK

I will have built two small boxes. I put small things in the boxes, A sign explains the boxes to anyone who should approach them. It says “Meaningless work boxes.” Throw all of the things into one box, then throw all of the things into the other. Back and forth, back and forth. Do this for as long as you like. What do you feel? Yourself? The Box? The Things? Remember this doesn’t mean anything.

March, 1960⁴

It is one of three proposed pieces listed under the heading “PROJECT for BOXES” on the page. Contextualized within *An Anthology*, we also recognize it as part of De Maria’s ongoing project “Meaningless Work,” the text of which appears on the preceding page—an enigmatic essay that hovers between manifesto, instructions, literature and artwork. Although part of a series of somewhat similar boxes, and itself constructed of two identical boxes placed side-by-side, *Boxes for Meaningless Work* is by no means a multiple—though I wish to introduce it here to clarify the grounds on which something like a minimalist multiple might operate. For starters, we should note that although De Maria’s sculpture *Boxes for Meaningless Work* isn’t a multiple, his score *is*: both because it is published (in a collection that would inspire the subsequent Fluxus editions and publications), and because it continually enables realization and re-enactment (as its curiously indeterminate mix of verb tenses attests). Scores, by the nature, produce multiplicity.

De Maria’s early production is little exhibited or catalogued, and apparently deliberately withheld from wider public circulation by the notoriously reclusive artist. Yet it represents a hidden history of art practices that we also call Minimalism, which emerged on the West Coast, in close proximity with experimental music and dance. If Frank Stella’s 1958 canvases and 1959 *Black Paintings* mark the emergence of Minimalism in New York, composer La Monte Young’s 1958 composition *Trio for Strings*—consisting of a series of long sustained tones—initiates the minimalist project on the West Coast. That these two Minimalisms emerge independently at more-or-less the same time, amidst two very different artistic milieux, necessarily complicates our understanding of the cultural logics and modes of production that underwrite minimal sculpture.



280 — ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Passport, 1967



281 — WALTER DE MARIA
High Energy Bar and Certificate,
 1966

Thus the early work of De Maria, Robert Morris, Simone Forti and others emerged from the intersection of experimental music and experimental art at the end of the 1950s. Their practices were emphatically durational and bodily, as well as environmental. Informed by the 1950s experiments of composer John Cage, among others, they sought to break out of disciplinary constraints by engaging the productive liminal area between and among disciplines.⁵ In a manner that has little analogue in more classically minimalist sculpture—except for the textually notated “Wall Drawings” of Sol LeWitt—their version of the “minimal object” was generated in relation to a score or notation, used as a prop for performance, or offered as a stage for other forms of interaction. In addition, two different types of repetition are at play here. One is modeled on manufacturing and the mass production of commodities, the other on the musical score and its continual realization and enact-

ment. Yet these two modes are not fully separable. As I have argued elsewhere, “the inherent reproducibility of Minimal sculpture implicitly links it to the iterative structure of the post-Cagean ‘event’.”⁶

In a 1972 oral history interview, DeMaria describes giving up gestural painting to begin “building boxes, building a form of static sculpture” in 1959, apparently inspired by the forms of static music he was then exploring with Young as well as by a larger West Coast cultural context: “possibly under the influence of a kind of Japanese sensibility which existed in California, I started to build very small boxes, very clean, quiet, static, nonrelational sculptures.”⁷ Having completed a couple while still in California, De Maria then began making boxes in earnest upon moving to New York; about one a month in 1961–62, “all of wood, not painted, very simply done,” based on written plans or diagrams and on what he recalls as a “conceptual point of view to design the sculptures completely on paper, to make them incredibly simple.” He exhibited “about fifteen of these plywood boxes” in a two-person show with Robert Whitman on Great Jones Street in January of 1963.

Emerging historically a couple of years before Judd’s turn from painting to three-dimensional work, De Maria’s boxes offer a different type of minimalist object production, one that curiously resembles aspects of Judd’s small-scale multiples, and yet also clarifies their extreme discrepancy by foregrounding precisely the tactile, interactive and procedural dimensions that are foreclosed in Judd’s understanding of sculpture. As the art historian Jane McFadden proposes, “by paring down sculpture to simple minimal forms, De Maria created a stage for other forms of interaction in his work,” often “scoring” simple instructions for the works: “In each instance, the sculptural form is no longer ‘wholly manifest’ but instead exists at the interstice of viewer, object, and actions. The sculptures are *events* configured by the specificity of each encounter.”⁸ As McFadden notes, these works are not truly sculptures, but “intermedia—between sculpture, performance, music,



282 — *An Anthology*, designed
 by George Maciunas, 1963

and beyond.”⁹ Indeed, as McFadden outlines, while superficially sharing a sculptural vocabulary with a number of New York based minimalists, De Maria’s sculptures emerged from a different set of engagements: “For De Maria, these intermedia forms were a means through which to experiment with artistic interaction and engagement for art [...] Working as a

practicing musician throughout the early 1960s, De Maria looked to sound as a model for the experience in art that moved beyond the limits of the object, while still being circumscribed by form.”¹⁰

In response to the interviewer’s question about what concerns motivated his early box production, De Maria described how these pared-down rectilinear forms crystallized a set of almost mystical ideas, or “feelings,” that informed the development of what became “minimal art”:

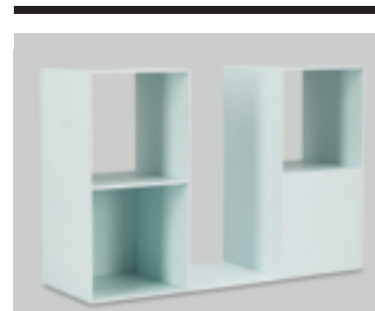
“Well, it’s not only the box ... it was that the box or the rectangle, the absolutely pure geometric form in my mind, you know, had contained ... all the right information about the universe and about oneself and about the time ... and the clean, fully conceptualized rectangles and forms of the unpainted wooden pieces contained all of the feelings that I myself personally would like to possess and at the same time I think contained what was later to become the basic cool, cooler intellectual feelings ... say, more mental attitude of the entire 1960s, of our entire times. So that what was later to be called minimal art was already formulated in ’61 or ’62, although it didn’t come to the public’s attention until after the Primary Structure show of 1966.”¹¹

We can better understand De Maria’s work in the context of a series of word pieces or scores that were also intended for inclusion in *An Anthology* by the sculptor Robert Morris, at the time a close friend and interlocutor of De Maria—and of Young as well. Due to his increasing frustration with Maciunas, Morris had felt compelled to pull his works from the collection after it had been printed but before it was bound, thus removing them from public circulation. Among these short word pieces—*Blank Form*, *Traveling Sculpture—a means toward a sound record*, *Tomorrow 8 am to 12 pm* (all 1961)—was *Make an object to be lost*:

Make an object to be lost.
Put something inside that makes a noise and give it to a friend with the instructions:
“To be deposited in the street with a toss.”
1961¹²



283 — SOL LEWITT, *Untitled*, 1968



284 — SOL LEWITT
2/2 Two Two-part Pieces Using Opposite Sides Removed, 1968

In the very early 1960s, both Morris and De Maria explored different ways of combining or colliding object- and event-structures in their work. Both made sculptures—sometimes generated by scores—and wrote scores that sometimes proposed actions and interactions for objects. It was Morris of course who mediated or moved between the overtly performative and time-based Minimalism of Young et al, and very different formal concerns of Judd, Stella et al derived from modernist painting.¹³ Morris's far more famous—and concretely realized—work from the same year, *The Box with the Sound of its Own Making*, would become the public structure that would generate, in Morris's account, all the subsequent work. It is the perfect self-reflexive and self-enclosed work, one that incorporates process and the time of making into the finished object: through the time-shifting technology of audio-tape, it conjoins performance and sculpture into one. It pulls all the threads together, into one consolidated sculpture object. *Make an object to be lost* points to other possibilities, of nearly endless dispersion.¹⁴

Discussing his ongoing series of stainless steel *High Energy Bars* (1966–) [281], De Maria insists “I’ll make those all my life.” When Paul Cummings, the interviewer interjects, “It’s an open-ended multiple,” De Maria replies, “That’s right, and I didn’t like the word ‘multiple’.” He then elaborates, “if a person accepted the idea of a multiple that it should be open-ended, because why, if you have mass-produced technology, why should you limit it at fifty or a hundred or two hundred, because the technology is inexpensive to make ... and so I sort of thought if I ever did that probably multiples should be completely continuous” (by which he apparently means not artificially limited in number). In a discussion that unfortunately trails off, Cummings proposes that “the term ‘multiple,’ that whole critical activity that was going on in the late 1960s” perhaps relates to earlier publication models, “going back to the collected anthologies?”¹⁵—thus raising, in passing, the intimate if often unacknowledged link between 1960s multiples and *An Anthology* and other publication projects.



285 — VARIOUS ARTISTS
7 Objects in a Box/69, 1969

What other possibilities might exist for a “minimalist multiple?” How might Minimal art more deeply and openly engage the very logics of reproduction and replication that it must also repress? Such practices, as we would expect, inhabit the outskirts or edges of this artistic practice, where it is contaminated, as it were, by process and concept.

To operate in this field, an object must embrace replication and relatively unbounded dissemination, and also migrate into the world in unpredictable ways. It must both embrace both the seriality of industrial fabrication—with its enforced production of sameness—and the personalized, contingent and ever-mutating structure of the event—with its unstoppable production of difference. Among examples of work operating between object and performance in the late 1960s, we might point to Sol LeWitt’s small permutational sculptures, with their variation and rotation of open and closed box forms, the peculiar kit-like multiples of Richard Artschwager, and the projects assembled in *7 Objects in a Box/69* [285], published by Tanglewood Press—such as Bruce Nauman’s 7” *RECORD* (consisting of “Sound



286 — RICHARD SERRA
Rolled, Encased & Sawed, 1969



287 — STEPHEN KALTENBACH
Fire, 1969

Track From 1st Violin Film; Violin Problem No. 2; Rhythmic Stamping. Jacket silkscreened with photographs of artist from video-tape of Stamping”) or Stephen Kaltenbach’s bronze sidewalk plaque *Fire* [287], which includes the instructions: “The owner may complete this unfinished work by imbedding it in any sidewalk. When the plaque is in place please notify Tanglewood Press of its location with the enclosed post card.”¹⁶

If Artschwager’s peculiarly fetishy hard-edged sculptures are located in a liminal space between Pop and Minimalism, his late 1960s “blps” stake out an even wider frame—operating as site-based, conceptual and even performative interventions. Like the later punctuation-like glyphs—the *Exclamation Points* (1980) and *Preguntas* (1983)—the blps operate halfway between objects and linguistic signs: they are labels that rearticulate the spaces they are affixed to—in a 1978 interview, Artschwager describes them “as catalytic pieces, as insurgents.”¹⁷ And elsewhere

he recalls that “the first ones evolved from some punctuation pieces which were wanting to inflect objects and spaces the way real (!) punctuation inflects the abstract objects and spaces of written language.”¹⁸

The art historian Susan Tallman describes *Locations* (1969) as “Artschwager’s first real multiples production,” tracing how the portable “sampler pack” emerged from *100 Locations*, Artschwager’s installation of blps at the 1968 Whitney Sculpture Annual: “Blps, which could be two- or three-dimensional, are a sort of generic punctuation, used by Artschwager to designate the possible space of art. . . . From this highly successful site-based project, Artschwager generated a portable version that could be installed anywhere”¹⁹—though one wonders how often the avidly collected edition was actually used in this way. As Tallman describes it, “*Locations* is the personal, portable version of the installation. A small shadow box faced with marbleized formica, and silkscreened with a blp outline, holds a sampler pack—two long flat blps of glass, one clear and one mirrored, a stouter one in formica, and a fuzzy one with rubberized hair, and a fully rounded blp for descending from the ceiling. The box and all the blps can be hung independently, enabling the bearer to accent any space, to recreate it as art, in accordance with his or her own wishes. It is the consumer’s conceptual art.”²⁰

The boxed set format of *Locations* recalls Maciunas’s *Fluxus I* and other kit-type editions. Organized as works that include their own container, they are mini-toolkits for collecting and use. Artschwager describes the set of *blps* as physical, perceptual and even psychological tools in almost animistic terms:

“The blps are a family of marks, gestures, holes and objects of related size and shape—they *are* a set. In a tool kit—socket wrenches for example—each socket has its home within the box.



288 — RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
Locations, 1969



289 — RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER, *Untitled*, 1971

In this state they are only in the company of one another. It's when you take that socket, snap it onto the handle and lock it onto a bolt that you lock the socket into its true context. Like the socket wrenches, the *Location* blp variants have one thing in common besides their similar size and shape which is that they all live in the same box. Now that suggests something that can enable one to 'do,' and it's a sort of state of readiness that could be mental as well as physical. Their character in the box is not their character 'in real life'—that's been strung out, carried by memory rather than eyes-on-which makes them nifty, so to speak. They are waiting to be used. The variants can be periodically unleashed ... and be periodically returned to their kennel. They are portable—but once you put one in place it becomes locked into its context.”²¹

The blp is both label and frame: Elsewhere Artschwager describes it as “an instrument for useless looking”: “it converts the immediate surrounding over to The Useless.”²²

More than twenty years ago, in her celebrated essay “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” Rosalind Krauss addressed the precarious position of art in a post-1980s world of “casino capitalism.” Discussing the controversial refabrication of works by Judd and others, she identifies the underlying contradiction that structures minimal art: on the one hand, its “phenomenological ambitions” and sensuous bodily engagement with a specific here and now, and, on the other, its “participation in a culture of seriality, of multiples without originals—a culture, that is, of commodity production.”²³ In a world where everything—even the most auratic ritual or autographic gesture—is mass-produced, this contradiction belongs to all art.

1 *Donald Judd: Prints and Works in Editions, A Catalogue Raisonné*, eds. Jörg Schellmann and Mariette Josephus Jitta (Munich, New York: Edition Schellmann, 1996).

2 The work and others from the period are illustrated and described in Barbara Haskell, *Blam: The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance 1958–1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), pp.98–99.

3 *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Concept Art, Anti Art, Indeterminacy, Plans of Action, Diagrams, Music, Dance Constructions, Improvisation, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Compositions,*

Mathematics, Essays, Poetry. Ed. La Monte Young (New York: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963). Accounts of *An Anthology* include Jackson Mac Low, “How George Maciunas Met with New York Avant Garde,” in Johan Pijnappel (ed.) “Fluxus Today and Yesterday,” *Art & Design Profile*, no. 28 (1993) pp.37–49, and Henry Flynt, “La Monte Young in New York, 1960–62,” in eds. William Duckworth and Richard Fleming, *Sound and Light: La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1996), pp.44–97.

4 *An Anthology*, unpaginated, punctuation as in original.

5 As Branden Joseph proposes,

“for a certain group of artists (which would include Tony Conrad, La Monte Young, Morris, Walter De Maria, Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer, but not Frank Stella or Donald Judd), the very notion of being ‘advanced’ meant not only that the status of the work (which might be an object or a process or both) was already in question but that the work had to take up that question and keep it in question. Not eradicating but continually problematizing medium or disciplinary specificity was, in other words, a primary condition of being ‘advanced’ after Cage. This is different from Judd’s positioning of a ‘specific object’ in the formal

space between (but no longer part of) painting and sculpture. For a more radical group of minimalists, whether coming from music or visual art, a work could not be advanced, could not be ‘new,’ unless it took up the question posed by Cagean ‘theater.’” Joseph, “The Tower and the Line: Towards a Genealogy of Minimalism,” *Grey Room* 27 (Spring 2007), p.53.

6 Liz Kotz, “Language Between Performance and Photography,” in *October* 111 (Winter 2005), p.14.

7 “Oral history interview with Walter De Maria, 1972 Oct. 4,” Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/>

- interviews/oral-history-interview-walter-de-maria-12362
- 8 Jane McFadden, "Toward Site," *Grey Room 27* (Spring 2007), p. 46.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 11 "Oral history interview with Walter De Maria."
- 12 Accounts of the suppressed Morris pieces can be found in Barbara Haskell, *op. cit.*; Henry Flynt, *op. cit.*; Robert Morris, "Letters to John Cage," *October*, vol. 81 (Summer, 1997), pp. 70–79; and Jane McFadden, *op. cit.*.
- 13 As Branden Joseph notes, Michael Fried's 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood* paradoxically "succeeded in linking Morris's theatricality to Donald Judd's derivation from modernist painting—a move that effectively severed Morris's work from its actual genealogy in John Cage's challenge to modernism." Joseph, "The Tower and the Line," p. 59.
- 14 In a 1968 interview, Morris poses *The Box with the Sound of its Own Making* as the work that resolved the perceived split between the process of making and the end result: "I mean this completely split the process and the object. And yet put them back together at the same time. So in some way I think this was the work that allowed me to then go ahead." "Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 1968 March 10": www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-robert-morris-13065
- 15 "Oral history interview with Walter De Maria."
- 16 In the catalogue to the exhibition *7 Objects/69/90*, curators Phyllis Blau and Eric Vieland ask Rosa Esman, the director of Tanglewood Press, "Did people ever return it" (the mounting confirmation slip)? Esman replies: "Never, never, never, never." *7 Objects/69/90* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Gallery, 1990), p. 56.
- 17 "Oral History interview with Richard Artschwager, 1978 Mar. 3–18," Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute: www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-richard-artschwager-12093
- 18 Richard Artschwager Interview" (1990), Brook Alexander Editions, www.baeditions.com/richard-artschwager-artwork/richard-artschwager-interview-locations.htm
- 19 Susan Tallman, "Richard Artschwager: Multiples and their Uses," *Arts Magazine* (June 1988), p. 11.
- 20 Susan Tallman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- 21 "Richard Artschwager Interview" (1990), Brook Alexander Editions. As Tallman notes, soon after *Locations*, Artschwager produced the edition *Untitled*, a small wooden chest of drawers, each filled with one of Artschwager's "signature materials: wood, glass, mirror, formica, rubberized hair." Like *Location*, it is participatory, but its structure is also self-reflexive and archival, an inventory of tools: "one has to pry, to open up the sealed and intimate space of the drawer, to take a chance on discovery—but all that is revealed are the artist's materials."
- 22 Richard Artschwager, "Artist's statement," in *Art & Design*, vol. 8 (May/June 1993), p. 80.
- 23 Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," in *October 102* (Autumn, 1990), p. 8. As she notes, "For Minimalism almost from the very beginning located itself, as one of its radical acts, within the technology of industrial production. That objects were fabricated from plans meant that these plans came to have a conceptual status within Minimalism, allowing for the possibility of replication of a given work that could cross the boundaries of what had always been considered the reproducibility of the aesthetic original."