

Press release

Donald Judd

4 September—4 November 2023
Curated by Flavin Judd

Thaddaeus Ropac
Seoul Fort Hill
2F, 122-1, Dokseodang-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul



Donald Judd, untitled, 1989.
Green anodized aluminum and clear plexiglass. 15.2 x 68.6 x 61 cm (6 x 27 x 24 in).
Photo: Chunho An

Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul presents the first solo exhibition of Donald Judd's work to take place in South Korea for nearly ten years. Curated by Flavin Judd, the artistic director of Judd Foundation, the exhibition spans more than three decades of the American artist's work, from the beginning of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s. Featuring his foundational early paintings alongside a selection of his three-dimensional works, the exhibition also highlights a group of twenty woodcut prints

conceptualised by Judd while in Korea in 1991, which are presented in Korea for the first time.

Donald Judd played an important role in shaping the artistic landscape of the second half of the 20th century, establishing a new three-dimensional visual language and laying the groundwork for a renewed understanding of the art object. Distancing himself from narrative and symbolism, he endeavoured to render visible the formal properties of the works

themselves through the three aspects he considered the pillars of visual art: material, space and colour. The earliest works in the exhibition, two paintings from 1960, exemplify this approach to artmaking and were a generative force in the creation of his later three-dimensional works: 'the origin of my work does lie in painting,' the artist affirmed in a 1987 interview.

After commencing as a traditional painter, Judd turned away from representation, realising that the most 'real' art he could make is not that which depicts what is not present, but that which emphasises what is. In the paintings on view, line and field both extend across the height and breadth of the canvas to embrace it: a way, for Judd, of acknowledging the form and spatial presence of the support as an essential element of the work. Believing that illusionism in painting undermined the objecthood of the artwork, Judd sought in his paintings to create a balance between the pictorial plane and the support, whereby the two form a coherent whole. Created shortly before Judd abandoned the canvas to work directly in 'real space' in 1962, these paintings represent the culmination of the artist's two-dimensional practice.



Donald Judd, untitled, 1960.
Oil on canvas. 102.2 x 91 cm (40 1/4 x 36 in).
Photo: Chunho An



Donald Judd, untitled, 1985.
Painted aluminum. 30 x 150 x 30 cm (11 3/4 x 59 1/4 x 11 3/4 in).
Photo: Chunho An

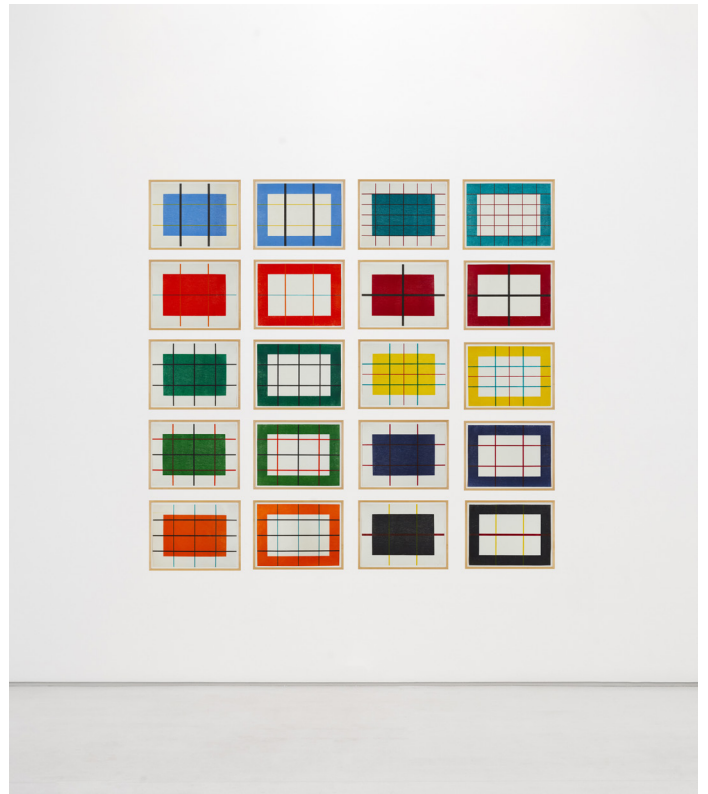
'Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.' Works that occupy such space, Judd continued in his 1964 essay 'Specific Objects', 'are not diluted by an inherited format.' For Judd, the transition to working in three dimensions liberated him from the pictorial conventions that working on canvas tied him to. It also allowed him to explore empty space, which takes a different form in each of the wall works and floor works on view. In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Michael Govan, director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, relates this exploration to the intentional, even provocative, use of emptiness in Korean art and architecture: a tradition that likely influenced Judd's own theory of space. The three-dimensional works on view at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul embody these principles across several of the materials for which Judd is best known: aluminium, plexiglass and plywood.

The paintings and three-dimensional works in the exhibition will be accompanied by a group of twenty woodcut prints. Across Judd's prints, his bold palette acquires what art historian Rudi Fuchs describes as 'a resplendent precise expression and radiance.'¹ This set of prints represents Judd's most extensive use of colour across his printmaking practice. The artist plays on reversals of filled and empty space through a rigorous geometric logic of grids and rectangles, the rigidity of which is tempered by the handmade *hanji* paper they are printed on: a paper made from the inner bark of the mulberry plant native to Korea's rocky mountainsides, which he selected for the prints when he travelled to South Korea in 1991. Judd had first experimented with

printmaking four decades earlier in 1951, while still a student at the Art Students League, New York. After his transition to three-dimensional works in the early 1960s, his prints were the only works he continued making in a two-dimensional format, placing them at the very centre of his artmaking.

Retracing more than three decades of the artist's career, Flavin Judd's curation provides an insight into the great breadth of Donald Judd's practice, encouraging the visitor to view his works across formats and mediums in light of one another. Bringing together these works, the exhibition distils the sense of the solid, the spatial and the real that is present in them all, and which is at the heart of the artist's practice. As the curator puts it: 'The semiotic system of culture is temporary and arbitrary [...]. Don was interested in the solid world, in the earth of gardens, in the galaxies, and made art that brought you back to that world, back to where you are because that's what you really have.'

The exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul will be accompanied by a catalogue designed by Flavin Judd, with texts by Michael Govan, Jinsang Yoo and Flavin Judd, as well as extracts from Donald Judd's own writings.



Donald Judd, untitled, 1992-1993/2020.

Set of twenty woodcuts in cadmium red, cadmium yellow, cadmium orange, ultramarine blue, cerulean blue, cobalt blue, permanent green, viridian green, black, and alizarin crimson on handmade Korean paper.

Each: 60 x 80 cm (23 1/2 x 31 1/2 in).

Photo: Timothy Doyon

1. Fuchs, R. H., 'Master Judd,' in *Donald Judd: Prints and Works in Editions*, Munich/New York: Edition Schellmann, 1996, p. 14.



Donald Judd, 1993. © Laura Wilson

About the artist

Donald Judd was born in 1928 in Excelsior Springs, Missouri. He studied philosophy and art history at Columbia University and painting at the Art Students League, New York. From 1959 to 1965, he worked as an art critic while pursuing his own painting, and, from 1962 onwards, his three-dimensional practice. In 1968, the first major museum exhibition of his works in three dimensions was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the same year Judd purchased 101 Spring Street, a five-storey cast iron-framed building in New York where he developed his idea of the permanent installation, his belief that the placement of a work of art was as critical to its understanding as the work itself. The building became a platform for his art and that of others, with Judd's works permanently exhibited alongside those of his contemporaries.

In 1971, Judd first visited Marfa, Texas where he eventually established studios, living quarters and a ranch, now part of Judd Foundation. In Marfa, Judd's work increased in scale and complexity as he started making room-sized installations. In 1986, he transformed this into the Chinati Foundation, a landmark of contemporary art and a key expression of his aesthetic where his work could be permanently exhibited alongside fellow artists including Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Richard Long, and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov. Judd's work has been exhibited throughout the United

States, Europe, and Asia, and is in museum collections worldwide, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; and Leeum Museum of Art, Seoul. In 1987, his work was exhibited in a retrospective organised by the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, which travelled to the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona; and Castello di Rivoli, Turin. In 1988, the Whitney Museum of American Art exhibited a retrospective of his work. In 2000, *Donald Judd: Colorist* was organised by the Sprengel Museum, Hanover and travelled to Kunsthau Bregenz, Switzerland and Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice. In 2004 a survey exhibition was organised by Tate Modern, London, which travelled to the K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf and Kunstmuseum Basel. A major retrospective of his work opened at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2020.

Judd Foundation maintains and preserves the artist's permanently installed living and working spaces, libraries, and archives in New York and Marfa, Texas. The Foundation promotes a wider understanding of Judd's artistic legacy by providing access to these spaces and resources and by developing scholarly and educational programmes.

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