

## M.LiT Tour by Clayton Hall

**Title:** AMBIGUITY IN MODERN ART AND SCULPTURE

**Description:** Learn how to form complex ideas through ambiguous Modern art

**Location:** Mid to Late 20th and 21st Century Gallerie

**Introduction:** Welcome to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts! My name is Clayton Hall. I am a participant in the VMFA's Museum Leadership in Training program. This evening, I will be taking you on a tour that is all about discovering hidden meanings in artwork. We will be exploring the topic of Ambiguity in Modern art and how we can form ideas to get a better understanding of art.

Ambiguity or uncertainty can come often when viewing Modern art. We seem to have trouble grasping what the artist is trying to accomplish or convey through each work. This confusion can stem from the artist's unique perspective in representing the Elements of Design. What are the Elements of Design? *Audience. Line, Shape, Color, Texture, Form, Space, Value.* Through understanding these elements, we can interpret ideas through each piece being viewed. Follow me and we'll put our brains to the test to crack the codes of some of the most confusing art in our collection.



### **OBJECT 1:**

Lemons (May 16, 1984), 1984

Donald Sultan, American (1951- present day)

Latex paint and Butyl rubber on Vinyl tile over wood

Our first stop is in the mid to Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Gallery. Donald Sultan has become a very popular artist in the last 30 years. He is widely praised, and his art hangs in very affluent museums around the world. He began his career moving to New York City in 1975 after receiving his Masters of Fine Arts degree from the Art Institute of Chicago. He then went on to have his first exhibit 2 years later. Talk about living the dream! ☺

Sultan paints pictures mostly consisting of still lifes of mundane or “everyday” objects such as fruit. He is sometimes compared to Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol, for his use of mundane items. Still lifes are pictures depicting objects placed in any way to create a preferred composition or layout. Sultan's unique style of working has put him at the forefront of Modern art.

In this piece, Donald Sultan is showing us a still life made up of lemons. Using some of the Elements of design, how can we describe the lemons in this piece? *Audience*. The background is another part of this piece to marvel at. The flat, jet black background evokes depth and a sense of space. It also really makes the lemons “POP” off the board. He uses a bunch of unconventional materials to produce this work. These materials include rubber, latex, and vinyl tile. Due to his use of strange materials to produce this particular still life, what can you relate back to the toxic or potentially harmful materials that were used? *Audience*. These elements come together to create clues that we can take and create a finished theory on the idea behind this piece. *What do you think the artist is trying to show that could be related back to the time we are living in today? Audience.*

**Transition:** Let’s move on to another work that is ambiguous, but in a 3- Dimensional form.



**Object 2:**

Splotch #22, 2007

Sol LeWitt, American (1928-2007)

Acrylic on Fiberglass

# 2007.68

Our next stop on this tour is in the 21st Century Gallery. Sol Lewitt is one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century. He was a pioneer in creating the major geometric art that came out of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Artists today still try to mimic his style, and his artwork is loved by onlookers. He happens to be the most exhibited artist in the Modern art galleries at VMFA. Sol LeWitt really didn’t begin creating his beloved finished works until around 1971 due to his constant university attendance, a brief stint fighting for the U.S. in Japan and Korea, and his overall desire to learn new techniques. After that, he was on the fast track to Superstardom!

His main body of work consists of Geometric patterns through painting, drawing, and sculpture. Although his body of work consisted of jagged forms, the work that he produced at the beginning of his career and the end of his life was very fluid in comparison. This enormous collection of work by this artist is very diverse and exciting because of it.

Splotch #22 was the last piece created by Sol LeWitt, before his untimely death in 2007. *Using the Elements of design, what element catches your attention the most and why? Audience. How do think this piece relates to how he was feeling before his death? Audience.* The clues that we

have created can be used now to create an overall meaning behind this piece. *Using what we now know, what do you think LeWitt is trying to say through this artwork? Audience.*

**Transition:** We've got one more piece to observe and analyze, so put on your thinking caps. 😊



**Object 3:**

Meter Boxes, 1983

Donald Judd, American (1928- present day)

Plexiglass and brushed Aluminum

Our last stop is back in the mid to Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Gallery to view and discuss this last piece by a very influential thinker and artist. Donald Judd started his career in an unlikely place. He first received a bachelor's degree from Columbia University in philosophy. After receiving that degree, he worked towards getting his master's in Art History. He also wrote art reviews of some of the great artists including Jackson Pollock and Robert Rauschenberg.

Judd hated the ideas of European and American sculpture always resembling the human form or actually being statues themselves. His body of work consists of mostly sculptures with the exception of some paintings. All of his work deals with geometry and shape, in some form or another. There is a real continuous feeling through every piece of Donald Judd's collection of works.

In this piece, the artist uses many Elements of design to make this piece a knockout. *Which element do you think is most prominent in this piece? Audience.* The sleek, shiny metal elements in the piece evoke a very hard and heavy feeling. The additions of the vibrant, red accents really add that extra jolt of energy that *Meter Boxes* need in order to stand out from its neighboring artworks. He was very smart in adding a counterpart box to his composition because it balances the sculpture. Judd's hatred of things "normal" in European and Early American artwork led him to create this sculpture. *What type of mundane or normal object does this sculpture resemble? Audience. Do you think this piece could relate to modern day society in any way, and if so, explain? Audience.*

**Conclusion:**In the three works we have analyzed this evening you have been able to view the works, point out their elements of design, listen to context clues in the background information and come up with the meanings behind each artwork. The artists we have discussed today are very ambiguous in the thought process behind their famous works, but make it so worthwhile because they give us the chance to think and really analyze their work. We are able to form our

own opinions and conclusions based on the clues they left in their work. For that, we appreciate this art so much more.

Thank you for joining me this evening and I hope you feel more comfortable approaching a Modern piece of art or any artwork. Please take some time to listen to other M.LiT participant's tours before you leave. 😊 Enjoy the rest of your evening at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. 😊