

annetteandquebec

LOOKING AT ART IN TORONTO

JUSTINA M BARNICKE GALLERY

Oct
09

October 8, 2014

Hart House

Nestled in the U of T campus, just off University Circle, is Hart House, a student activity center which contains a gym and the [Justina M. Barnicke Gallery](#), among other facilities.

John G. Hampton, the curator of the current exhibition at Hart House, titled "*Why Can't Minimal*," for some reason decided to illuminate the lighter side of the Sixties art movement known as [Minimalism](#). (Incidentally, when searching for a good Minimalism site I stumbled upon a whole new meaning of the term. Yes, there is, in fact, a *second* type of [Minimalism](#): it's an entirely contemporary social movement which advises people on how to get rid of the excess stuff in their lives in order to make room for the essentials.)

[Carl Andre](#), [Donald Judd](#), Sol LeWitt, Dan Flavin, [Frank Stella](#) (for his minimalist Black Paintings) are a few of the artists associated with Minimalism. Carl Andre, the ultimate American Minimalist sculptor, likes to say "It's all the materials... there are no ideas hidden under those plates. You can lift them up but there is nothing there." No hidden ideas and therefore nothing funny... about zinc plates or a pile of bricks or massive oak cubes.

Rather than actually finding the humour in Minimalism what the curator did was round up some [Conceptual](#) artists who commented on utterly humourless Minimalist standards. The result has a particular off-key, dry wit (verging on absurdity) so close to the heart of the Conceptual artist.

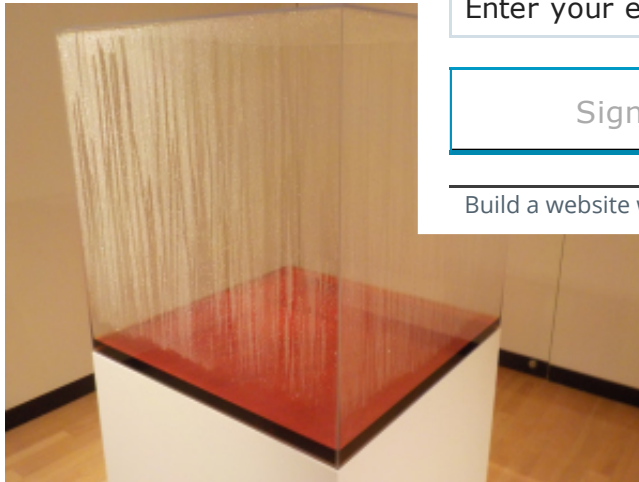
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Some of the works in this show
Untitled (Coke Zero) references
 1962, replacing water with Coca-Cola
 condensation but it has also been
 breaking down into its elemental
 red liquid and below, a suspi

field's
 1 Cube of
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Ken Nicol created *Carl Andre Drawer Piece* and got into the spirit of
 "truth to materials" by typing the Carl Andre quote "If a thing is worth
 doing once, it's worth doing again" on 1611 index cards.

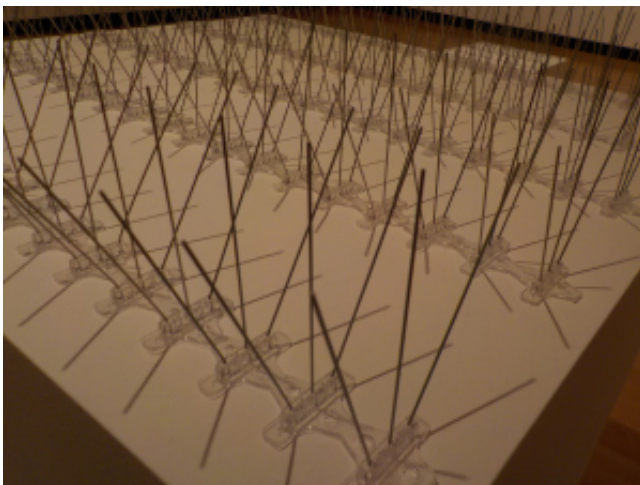


I always associate John Baldessari with Cal Arts and a particular brand
 of flat humour that came out of that school. In his video Baldessari
 "sings" each of Sol LeWitt's 35 "**Sentences on Conceptual Art**" to the
 tune of popular songs. It must have been Christmas when he made this
 video because the tune sounds distinctly like a holiday carol.



There is a certain slyness to John Marriott's various sized cubes surfaced with pigeon-proofing strips. They also achieve a cool elegance in an incidental, i.e. Minimalist, manner.

See below for an installation view and a close up of the pigeon-proofing strips.



University of Toronto Art Center (UTAC)

A few steps from Hart House is UTAC and an exhibition of the photographs of **Allen Ginsberg** (1926-1997) called "*We are Continually Exposed to the Flashbulb of Death.*" This is a fascinating show for anyone with an interest in the **Beat Generation**.

A recording of Allen Ginsberg reading his 1955 poem "*Howl*" can be heard throughout the gallery's rooms.



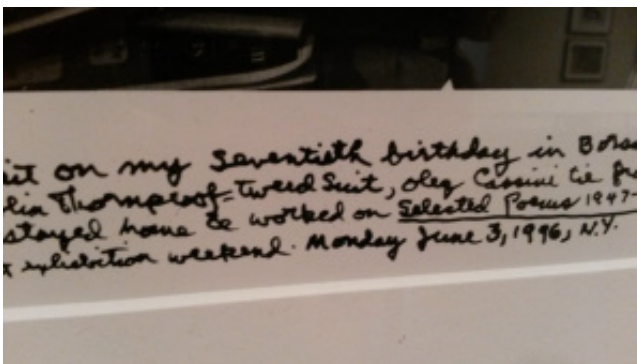
It is, of course, primarily as a poet that Allen Ginsberg is known. These photographs however attest to his skill as a photographer (he was mentored in this ability by Robert Frank) and moreover they document a life profoundly rich in relationships, friendships and experiences.

Below, William Burroughs in 1953:



Gregory Corso, Paul Bowles and Burroughs in 1961.

From Gary Snyder, Peter Orlovsky, Jack Kerouac and Paul Bowles to Kathy Acker, Rene Ricard, and Michael McLure the pictures in this show depict so many of the literary and intellectual luminaries of the past four or five decades. Each picture includes a description, hand-written by Allen Ginsberg, identifying the subject, the date, the place and the circumstances.



An essay by Louis Kaplan in the exhibition catalogue quotes Ginsberg as follows: "The poignancy of the photograph comes from looking back

to a fleeting moment in a floating world.” Captured here in black and white, the humble New York diners and living rooms of the fifties have disappeared forever. This show provides a glimpse of this vanished world and its inhabitants.

Posted in *Conceptual Art, Justina M Barnicke Gallery, Minimalism, Photography, University of Toronto Art Center*

Tagged *Allen Ginsberg, conceptual art, Hart House, Minimalism, UTAC, Why Can't Minimalism*

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