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Postminimalism.

Term used to describe the work of artists who utilized the innovations of [Minimalism](#), but who also critiqued many aspects of Minimalist theory and practice. The term was coined in 1971 by the art critic Robert Pincus-Witten to describe a major current in American art from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s that included artists associated with [Process art](#), [Conceptual art](#), earth art (see [Land art](#)), [Body art](#), and [Performance art](#). Because of Postminimalism's diversity, it is best understood as a period or tendency rather than a style or movement. Pincus-Witten compared Postminimalism to [Post-impressionism](#) in that both are used to describe widely differing styles that developed from a common root (Minimalism and Impressionism, respectively).

Minimalist innovations adopted by Postminimalists include serial composition; the use of industrial materials and professional fabrication; a blurring of the boundary between painting and sculpture; and the use of the artwork to shape the viewer's spatial environment. However, Postminimalists criticized the autonomy, object-centeredness, aggressive spatial presence, exclusion of reference to the body, and implicit masculinity of Minimalist art. Consequently, Postminimalists adopted a de-centered, flexible, open structure in their work; elevated the process of creation over its end result; employed techniques and materials that incorporated contingency and ephemerality; used the artist's body and the natural and built environment as raw materials; and introduced signifiers of femininity into their work.

Although Minimalism was the immediate target of Postminimalism's critique, that critique extended equally to the high modernism of the early 20th century. This modernism was predicated on the Renaissance conception of an artwork as an autonomous object expressing universal truths produced by the unique sensibility and talent of the individual artist. Postminimalism continued the critique of this vision begun by earlier avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism. Minimalism itself had contributed to this critique, but, in the eyes of Postminimalists, Minimalism's critique had not gone far enough and had allowed many assumptions in its own theory and practice to remain unexamined and unchallenged.

Several exhibitions in the late 1960's helped to define and promote the emerging Postminimalist tendency, including *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966; New York, Fischbach Gallery), *Anti-Illusionism: Procedures/Materials* (1969; New York, Whitney) and *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969; Berne, Ksthalle). Lucy Lippard, the curator of *Eccentric Abstraction*, further contributed to the dissemination of Postminimalism with her book, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries* (New York, 1973).

[Eva Hesse](#)'s *Sans II* (1968; New York, Whitney) exemplifies Postminimalism's simultaneous dependence on and distance from Minimalism. The sculpture, a grid of fiberglass boxes mounted on the wall, makes use of serial composition in the form of a rectangular grid, one of the most frequently recurring Minimalist motifs. *Sans II* exhibits features of both painting (its position on

the wall) and sculpture (its three-dimensionality), a common Minimalist technique that allows the object to evade the traditional categories of artistic production. However, *Sans II* deviates from Minimalism in its rough, irregular, translucent surface, which evokes a rich mixture of organic materials such as latex, resin, and skin. By contrast, the industrial materials used by Minimalists, such as metal, Plexiglas, plywood, and commercial paint, project a depersonalized, “objective” quality. Hesse thus reintroduced the body as a subject in Postminimal art, but did so within a Minimalist-derived framework.

Postminimalism’s emphasis on the process by which a work of art is made may be seen in a list of verbs compiled by [Richard Serra](#) in 1967–8 (“to roll, to crease, to fold, to store,” etc.), many of which he used as the basis for sculptures. One such sculpture is *Prop* (1968; Minneapolis, MN, Walker A. Cent.), in which one lead sheet is pinned against the wall several feet above the ground by a second, rolled-up lead sheet. Other process-oriented techniques used by Postminimalist artists include hanging, scattering, flinging, burying, and pouring. The latter technique is demonstrated in [Lynda Benglis](#)’s *Bounce* (1969; priv. col.), which was created by pouring multicolored latex paint onto the floor. The randomness of the resulting “composition” illustrates the use of chance and contingency in Postminimalist art. Both *Prop* and *Bounce* offer further examples of Postminimalist works that are situated between painting and sculpture, as seen in the position of the lead “sculpture” on the wall in *Prop* and the latex “painting” on the floor in *Bounce*.

The Postminimalist use of open, de-centered form is evident in Barry Le Va’s *Bought, Cut, Placed, Folded, Dropped, Thrown (Green, Purple, Blue, Red)* (1966; artist’s col.), in which ball bearings and colored felt squares were scattered across the gallery floor. These objects’ haphazard, fluid arrangement gave the viewer greater flexibility in navigating the work’s spatial environment than the typical Minimalist sculpture, which dominates the surrounding space. The title of Le Va’s work indicates the importance of process in its creation, while its dependence on the space in which it is installed and the role of chance in the arrangement of its elements ensure that it will never appear the same way twice, thereby undermining the notion of a permanent and stable work of art.

Although Minimalist art excluded any explicit figurative references, its rhetoric, materials and spatial presence evoke features conventionally associated with masculinity. Some Postminimalist artists reacted to this implicit gendering by scrutinizing and critiquing the concept and rituals of masculinity, as in [Vito Acconci](#)’s *Seedbed* (1972), a performance in which Acconci masturbated while lying under a Minimalist wooden ramp. The ramp’s concealment of Acconci’s body can be read as symbolizing Minimalism’s simultaneous effacement of gender and its covert masculinity. Other Postminimalists substituted “feminine” forms for the “masculine” ones of Minimalism, as in Hesse’s *Accession II* (1969; Detroit, MI, Inst. A.), which transformed the typical Minimalist box by removing the top and lining the inside with flexible plastic tubes that evoke the female anatomy.

Postminimalism also sought to move art out of the gallery and into the natural and built environment, thereby freeing the artwork from its status as a commodity and expanding the domain of what is conventionally considered appropriate material for a work of art. In [Robert Smithson](#)’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970; Great Salt Lake, Utah), the artist’s manipulation of the

environment reinforced and drew attention to the surreal landscape of the Great Salt Lake, which Smithson described as resembling an alien planet. [Gordon Matta-Clark](#), on the other hand, was known for manipulating the built environment, as in *Day's End* (1975; New York, destr.), which he created by removing a large, almond-shaped section from the western wall of an abandoned warehouse on Manhattan's Hudson River waterfront.

Although Postminimalism is limited to the work of American artists, many of the Postminimalists' foreign contemporaries were exploring similar ideas, including [Giovanni Anselmo](#), [Joseph Beuys](#), [Alighiero Boetti](#), [Daniel Buren](#), [Hanne Darboven](#), [Lucio Fontana](#), [Hans Haacke](#), [Jannis Kounellis](#), [Piero Manzoni](#), [Mario Merz](#), [Blinky Palermo](#), [Pino Pascali](#), [Giuseppe Penone](#), and [Michelangelo Pistoletto](#).

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Doug Singsen

Primary Structures.

Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture was an exhibition held at the Jewish Museum in New York City from April 27 to June 12, 1966. Curated by Kynaston McShine, it was the second major Minimalist group exhibition after the Wadsworth Atheneum's 1964 exhibition, *Black White + Gray*. *Primary Structure*'s opening attracted many celebrities and was the subject of a lavishly illustrated *Life* magazine article, while the exhibition's title gave rise to the use of the term "primary structure" as a description of the reductive geometric sculpture prevalent in the mid-1960s.

The Minimalist artists featured in *Primary Structures* were [Carl André](#), [Larry Bell](#), [Walter De Maria](#), [Dan Flavin](#), Judy Gerowitz (who later changed her name to [Judy Chicago](#)), [Donald Judd](#), [Sol LeWitt](#), [John McCracken](#), [Robert Morris](#), and Anne Truitt. Although the Minimalists received the most attention from critics, they were actually a minority within the exhibition, which included a sizeable contingent of asymmetrical, biomorphic or otherwise irregular or non-reductive works.

The idea for the show was first formulated in 1965 by McShine and Lucy Lippard while both were working at the [Museum of Modern Art](#), New York. The term "structure" was probably provided by LeWitt, a close friend of Lippard's, with "primary" being added later by Lippard and McShine. Originally intended as a tightly focused survey of contemporary Minimalist artists, McShine expanded the exhibition into a broader survey that lacked the cohesion of the original concept.

In addition to the Minimalists, there were a number of other artists in the exhibition who worked in a reductive geometric style, most notably [Ronald Bladen](#) and Robert Grosvenor (b 1937), whose works were exhibited in the same room as those by Judd and Morris. Unlike Judd's and Morris's sculptures, which were utterly deadpan and anti-expressive, Bladen's and Grosvenor's sculptures were highly dramatic and retained a degree of expressiveness. Grosvenor's *Transoxiana* (1965; New York, Park Place Gallery), for instance, was a huge black metal V suspended from the ceiling that floated a few feet above the museum floor. Morris's *Untitled (2 L Beams)* (1965; New York, Whitney), by contrast, was composed of two nondescript, gray, L-shaped boxes.

McShine attempted to provide an organizing principle for the diverse collection of works included in the exhibition by dividing the artists into two tendencies, which he presented as deriving from the work of [Anthony Caro](#) and [Tony Smith](#). Caro, who stood for the continuation of the modernist tradition, was represented by *Titan* (1964; New York, priv. col.), which was located in the museum's courtyard and consisted of black metal plates arranged in a precariously balanced, asymmetrical composition. Smith represented the reductive geometric tendency that included Minimalism, in which all traces of composition and the artist's subjectivity were eliminated. His *Free Ride* (1962; New York, MOMA), located just inside the lobby's floor-to-ceiling windows, consisted of three long rectangular boxes connected at 90° angles.

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Popular culture and American art.

Popular culture, including both pre-industrial craft and folk art and industrialized mass culture, has had a major impact on the course of American art. Prior to the mid-19th century, the scarcity of professionally trained artists meant that many individuals freely crossed the line between folk and “high” art. The early 19th-century sculptor [William Rush](#), for instance, was trained as a carpenter and began his career carving ships’ figureheads but went on to become a co-founder of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the leading sculptor in Philadelphia, working in a style that blended the artisanal tradition with Baroque and Neo-classical influences.

Folk art continued to be produced into the 20th century, most famously in the work of [Grandma Moses](#), but as America underwent rapid industrialization in the first decades of the 20th century, mass culture replaced folk art and the craft tradition as the focus of artists’ attention.

One of the first movements to respond to popular culture in the 20th century was the [Ashcan School](#), which was dedicated to recording the burgeoning urban environment of the early 20th century. The Ashcan school’s subjects included scenes of popular entertainment, such as [George Bellows](#)’s *Stag at Sharkey’s* (1917; Cleveland, OH, Mus. A.), which depicts a boxing match in a New York City athletic club. Many of the Ashcan school artists began their careers as newspaper illustrators, which influenced their depiction of urban scenes, as did the work of newspaper cartoonists such as Richard Outcault (1863–1928) and [George Luks](#).

[Stuart Davis](#), an American Cubist, frequently depicted subjects drawn from advertising and popular culture, as in his series of paintings based on cigarette advertisements, including *Lucky Strike* (1921; New York, MOMA), and paintings inspired by jazz music, such as *Swing Landscape* (1938; Bloomington, IN U. A. Mus.).

In the 1940s and early 1950s, popular culture declined in importance as [Abstract Expressionism](#), the dominant movement of the period, rejected mass culture in favor of archetypes drawn from “primitive” cultures and ancient mythology. In the late 1950s, popular culture reemerged in the Neo-Dada art of [Robert Rauschenberg](#) and [Jasper Johns](#), as seen in Rauschenberg’s *Coca-Cola Plan* (1958; Los Angeles, CA, Mus. Contemp. A.), one of his “combine” sculptures, which includes three actual Coca-Cola bottles.

As the post-World War II economic boom continued into the 1960's, fueling a rapid expansion of advertising, entertainment and consumer products, Pop artists made these subjects the focus of their work. While at times [Pop art](#) seemed to simply hold up an uncritical mirror to mass culture, as in [Andy Warhol](#)'s many portraits of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, it could also take an ironic attitude towards popular culture, as in [Roy Lichtenstein](#)'s *Whaam!* (1963; London, Tate), a painted reproduction of a comic book panel, or reveal the conflicts and anxieties simmering beneath the surface of mass consciousness, as in James Rosenquist's *F-111* (1964–5; New York, MOMA), which juxtaposes a jet fighter and a nuclear bomb with an automobile tire, light bulbs and other consumer products.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, popular culture again receded as a major subject for American artists as practices derived from conceptual art dominated artistic production. Popular culture returned to importance in the late 1970s in the work of artists such as [Jeff Koons](#), [Barbara Kruger](#), [Richard Prince](#) and [Cindy Sherman](#), who combined conceptual practices with subjects drawn from popular culture. These artists appropriated images from the mass media in order to critique their ideological content, as in Prince's *Untitled (Cowboys)* (1980), an enlarged reproduction of an advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes, which explores the role of photography in manipulating the mythic status of the cowboy for corporate profit.

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Mudd Club.

American nightclub and gallery space. The Mudd Club opened in October 1978 at 77 White Street in downtown Manhattan, where it quickly became a focal point of the downtown artistic and musical avant-garde until its demise in 1983. The club's greatest contribution was the cross-breeding it promoted among the diverse artistic movements then circulating in New York, including Neo-Pop art, graffiti art, hip-hop, New Wave music, No Wave music and performance art.

The club was founded by countercultural entrepreneur Steve Maas, singer Anya Philips, filmmaker Amos Poe and curator Diego Cortez. Poe was the co-director of two documentaries about punk rock, *Night Lunch* (1975) and *The Blank Generation* (1976), while Cortez went on to help organize two major group exhibitions of the contemporary downtown scene, *The Times Square Show* (1980) and *New York/New Wave* (1981).

By the late 1970s, older alternative art spaces like The Kitchen and Artists Space were becoming increasingly successful and less accessible to emerging artists. The Mudd Club's fourth floor gallery, which was curated by Keith Haring, filled the need for a space where young artists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, Haring himself and many others, could make their début.

The Mudd Club was one of the first downtown venues to showcase [Graffiti](#) art and hip-hop. In 1981 the club hosted *Beyond Words: Graffiti-Based, -Rooted and -Inspired Work*, an exhibition curated by Fab 5 Freddy and Futura 2000, two leading graffiti artists. The same year, Afrika Bambaataa, one of the inventors of hip-hop, played a series of shows at the club.

The Mudd Club was also a mainstay of the New Wave and No Wave music scenes. New Wave was the artsy, intellectual side of punk rock, and included such musicians as Patti Smith, Talking Heads, Television and Richard Hell and the Voidoids. No Wave, on the other hand, was created by combining the primitive musical skills and aggressive sonic attack of punk rock with the avant-garde experimentation of free jazz, Minimalist music and performance art. A number of downtown artists, writers and filmmakers with limited or no musical training became No Wave musicians, including Arto Lindsay, Lydia Lunch, Adele Bertei, Basquiat, Vincent Gallo and Jim Jarmusch.

The Mudd Club's musical program also had a lighter side, exemplified by the club's retro-1950s house band, the B-52's, who initiated a series of costumed theme parties, including a Hawaiian party, a monster party, a pajama party, a 1960s revival party, a soul party, a rock 'n' roll funeral and a Joan Crawford Mother's Day party.

The Mudd Club was seen by many as the downtown counterpart and rival to Studio 54. Whereas Studio 54 epitomized the hedonistic culture of disco, the Mudd Club represented the gritty street style of punk rock. The difference between the two was symbolized by the metal chain guarding the entrance to the Mudd Club, a playful appropriation of Studio 54's iconic velvet rope. The clubs' differences were also reflected in their drugs of choice: cocaine at Studio 54, heroin at the Mudd Club.

The creative energy of the Mudd Club was fueled by the mixture of the famous, the infamous, and the unknown who rubbed shoulders there, which, in addition to those listed above, included Eric Bogosian, William Burroughs, John Cale, Francesco Clemente, Gregory Corso, Jayne County, Gennaro, Allen Ginsberg, Debbie Harry, Billy Idol, Mick Jagger, Rick James, John Lurie, Madonna, Gracie Mansion, Malcolm McLaren, Matt Mullican, Klaus Nomi, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Johnny Rotten, Sur Rodney (Sur), Hunter S. Thompson, Johnny Thunders, Chi Chi Valenti, Sid Vicious and Andy Warhol.

The club's success spawned a series of imitators, including Club 57, Danceteria, Area, the Palladium, the Pyramid Club and the Peppermint Lounge.

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