



Donald Judd c. 1990

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CHINATI

THE VISION OF DONALD JUDD

Second edition

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Fig. 5
Aerial view of Fort D.A. Russell in foreground, Marfa in background, c. 1920

Fig. 6
Aerial view of the Chinati Foundation, c. 1983

In April 1978 all that was under discussion was a warehouse and a number of sculptures by Judd; by May 1979 the project encompassed several buildings that were planned to display works by Flavin and Chamberlain as well as by Judd. With the support of the Dia Art Foundation, Judd was well on his way toward fleshing out the ideas for his type of museum.

The Dia Art Foundation had been established in May 1974 by Heiner Friedrich and Helen Winkler, joined a year later by Philippa Pellizzi, to provide funding with a "primary emphasis on those works of art which cannot obtain sponsorship or support from commercial and private sources because of their nature or scale."⁴³ A significant part of the foundation's remit was the commissioning of artworks for specific locations, both indoors and outdoors. In the first two years of its existence Dia had enabled two permanent light installations by Dan Flavin (in the courtyard of the Kunstmuseum Basel and in Grand Central Station in New York), initiated plans with James Turrell for the *Roden Crater* and with La Monte Young for his *Dream House*, and realized projects by Walter De Maria in Kassel, New York and Quemado, New Mexico.⁴⁴ Other ambitious plans from those early years included a castle to be illuminated by Dan Flavin (*Dick's Castle* in Garrison, New York) and a museum for Cy Twombly in New York. In the "Marfa Project" Dia's interests were in perfect synch with Judd's; both artist and patron wanted to create something that would record their stature for posterity. They saw themselves continuing the long tradition of patronage of

outstanding works of art. This ambition explains Dia's "almost legendary generosity."⁴⁵

In summer 1979 Dia purchased additional properties in Marfa, so that its holdings now included a large portion of the former Fort D.A. Russell as well. This encompassed eleven U-shaped barracks with smaller buildings—former messhalls and lavatories—and the surrounding land, about thirty-five acres total, as well as another very large building in town, the Ice Plant. In October this was followed by the Locker Plant in downtown Marfa and finally, the following April, by the Arena and the swimming pool, adding an additional 279 acres of land. In total, around forty buildings ranging from tiny to very large had been purchased by the foundation, along with about 340 acres of land. For Judd, with his pronounced feel for architecture, his wide-ranging artistic aspirations, and his aim of bringing art, architecture, and nature into harmony, this provided an outstanding basis to build upon.

"Activity Reports"⁴⁶ written by project staff in Marfa between 1980 and 1985 indicate how and in what order Judd went about tackling this enormous task. The few entries from the year 1979 mention mainly the cleanup efforts that were necessary everywhere: "the bricks of the sheds are being cleaned, and old wiring, pipe and conduit are being removed"; "the wooden windows are removed from the Barracks, and those which are salvageable are being saved"; "area outside buildings is cleaned, debris removed, and the sprinkler systems is [sic] reworked." The only construction measure

⁴³ Stephan Uebachs, *Dia Art Foundation: Installation and Sammlung 1974-1978* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2003), 217.
⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*, 142ff.
⁴⁵ Thomas Klotz, "Die Kunst des Walter De Maria. Ein Essay," cited in Uebachs, *Dia Art Foundation*, 127.
⁴⁶ Activity reports in the Dia Art Foundation Archive, New York, and the Chinati Foundation Archive, Marfa.

Fig. 7
Former Locker Plant, now studio for artists in residence

Fig. 8
Ice Plant



mentioned is the adobe wall at the back of the Wool and Mohair Building that harmonizes its different breadths and creates a narrow courtyard along the back, recessed part of the building.⁴⁶

Beginning in spring 1980, more activities are mentioned. In April Judd began to address his concrete pieces. A year before, the contracts had mentioned several different outdoor works of this kind in different locations; now the plan was for a continuous row of them to adorn the edge of the property like beads on a string. A Midland-Odesa company that had delivered material samples and made models received the contract for the first two works, which were completed in October. Despite their faulty workmanship, Judd approved these works—a decision he later regretted.

In April 1980 he designed the first twenty-five aluminum works. They were initially planned for the Wool and Mohair Building, along with additional works made of metal and plywood. In May he conceptualized the next fifty aluminum works, evidently for the same space or "whatever additional space is necessary."⁴⁷ Plywood models of the aluminum works were built and installed in the Wool and Mohair Building.

By summer 1980 new windows and doors had been designed for the artillery sheds. The garage doors with their small-paned industrial windows were to be replaced with window walls and revolving doors or—preferable for structural reasons—sliding doors. The retained flat roofs were weatherproofed, and the

roofs of the former barracks were replaced. The yard of the Locker Plant was surrounded by an adobe wall.

That September important decisions about the utilization of the large buildings were made. The Wool and Mohair Building was now to house works by John Chamberlain, while the two artillery sheds were reserved for Judd's works; the Arena was "designated a Judd work and exhibition space."⁴⁸ The Ice Plant would become a studio for John Chamberlain, who would also design a work for the swimming pool. Thus, by the end of 1980 the major complexes of work by Judd, Flavin, and Chamberlain had already been essentially conceptualized.

In 1981 new windows were installed in the artillery sheds and their roofs were repaired again. Following this, the Wool and Mohair Building was prepared for the Chamberlain installation and models and plans were made for Dan Flavin's illuminations in six of the former barracks, as discussed with him on his visit to Marfa. The Arena was equipped with the first fixtures and furniture. The renovation of the adjacent courtyard began. Over the course of the entire year, cleanup work was carried out in and around the various buildings. This included pulling down several small and medium-sized sheds and stables and painting most of the remaining ones a uniform sand color.

Less was accomplished in the following year. The concrete works suffered from ongoing production problems, making it necessary to rethink the production method; only one work (No. 8) was completed in 1982. In November the first aluminum

⁴⁶ In the same period Judd built the adobe wall around the *Menos de Casas*.
⁴⁷ *Project Letter 1980-84*, May 11, 1980.
⁴⁸ *Activity Report*, September 1980.





Fig. 4
At left, Donald Judd and Claes Oldenburg at the installation of the mock-up for *Monument to the Last Horse*, August 13, 1988.

Fig. 5
Installation of *Monument to the Last Horse* on October 12, 1991 with Donald Judd and Claes Oldenburg.

horizontally inserted nail were given a coat of brown, weather-resistant paint.

Work on the final sculpture began in 1990 and was completed in 1991 by the Lippincott company in North Haven, Connecticut. From June to August it was displayed on the plaza in front of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in New York. On September 10 it was installed at its final location in Marfa and was formally dedicated on October 12, 1991 with Claes Oldenburg and Donald Judd present, as well as cowboy Bill Renfro from Marfa on his horse Old Blaze, and the bagpipe player Joe Brady.

Monument to the Last Horse is located between two former barracks and the gravel road, very near Louie's original grave marker. Here the land rises visibly; the horseshoe crowns a long slope down to the southeast, so that when seen from the road it rises majestically into the sky, touching the horizon with its lower edge. The arc frames the sunrise in the morning and a patch of sky by day—an image of perfect blue that recalls Yves Klein and his complaint about the birds.¹¹ When the sky turns color in the west at sunset, the rounded form stands out black against the glowing background. Both views are entrancing, but the monument can only be fully grasped when viewed from all sides. By putting a twist in the curve of the horseshoe—"to make it more interesting"—Oldenburg gave the intrinsically two-dimensional shape a stronger touch of three dimensionality, offering ever-shifting aspects depending on the point of view and thus creating

the impression of a soft sculpture. Seen from the front, the arc is broad; in the diagonal it pulls together into a loop, and from the side it shrinks to a vertical line—a metamorphosis from a C to a question mark. Meanwhile, the nail develops in the other direction, stretching from a compact button shape to a line. When one walks around the sculpture to view it from the smooth back, one finds oneself at the lowest point of the terrain, from which the work stands out against the sky again, once more stretched to a full curve. As one keeps walking, it narrows once again, forming what may be its most interesting curve, and finally contracting to form a narrow S.

The sculpture is bounded only by the two U-shaped buildings to the side, now housing Dan Flavin's illuminations. Otherwise the terrain is open, dominated by horizontal lines in the background: the horizon, crowned by irregular mountain peaks, and below it the line of Judd's concrete sculptures with their cubic contours, the only outdoor pieces aside from the monument that were created specifically for this location. In the winter the landscape is dominated by the yellow of the dry grass, speckled with the green of trees and bushes in the spring, and sometimes turning completely green in the rainy season—colors that harmonize with the brown of the horseshoe and emphasize its sign-like presence. The sculpture enters into a respectful dialogue with its surroundings; rather than disrupting the view of this extraordinary landscape, it accentuates its unique features. [MS]

11 Yves Klein, n.p.: "Back then, as a teenager in the year 1947, I had a real imaginative daydream in which I signed the sky in a few seconds. On that day I began to have the habit of drawing back and forth across the sky, because they were trying to punch holes in my garments and most beautiful work." Hannah Höch, n.p.: "Yves Klein, 1928–1962" (Catalogue Taschen GmbH, 2001), 8.

