



A Site of the
**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**

The Conservation of Donald Judd's first concrete work, Untitled, 1971

Donald Judd's first concrete work, *Untitled*, 1971, was the last element added to the Glass House site's historic core. The sculpture completes the composition of "asymmetric sliding rectangles" and "circles" that Johnson described in the first published article about the Glass House, "House at New Canaan, Connecticut," *Architectural Review*, September 1950. Located at the base of the driveway and rounding the corner, Judd's sculpture directs visitors around it and toward the entrance of the Glass House, integral to Johnson's choreographed processional through the site. Conserving this sculpture enables the visitor to better understand the composition of the site as a whole.

One of the artist's early site-specific topographic projects, the sculpture's inside circumference is level, while the outside circumference runs parallel to the sloping ground plane, creating a beveled edge.

In 2009 a felled tree limb caused significant damage to the sculpture's interior beveled edge. The damage compromised the artist's intent and the interpretation of the sculpture. As a result, between July and December 2011, the sculpture was cleaned and repaired. This repair required cleaning the sculpture, analyzing the material composition of the concrete, matching new materials to the existing sculpture, and patching. This repair work also presented an opportunity to fill a large existing area of loss on the southern exterior wall, often referred to as "the large crack."

This project was not a complete analysis of the sculpture or a complete restoration. Rather, it was a light treatment with as minimal intervention as possible, to preserve the sculpture's original material and surface patina. Today, the performance of the repairs is actively monitored. Should the repairs underperform or begin to show signs of failure, the Glass House might consider embarking upon a more extensive, nondestructive structural evaluation, involving an in-depth analysis, such as a moisture infiltration survey and reinforcement mapping and wall assessment, in order to develop a comprehensive treatment plan.

The appearance of the sculpture dramatically changed once cleaned. This is not the result of "over-cleaning."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Missouri in 1928, Donald Judd influenced contemporary art production from the late 1960s and 1970s until his death in 1994. His artwork and writings were considered "minimalist." Judd scoffed at labels such as "minimalist," and was critical of the art market as well as the New York art establishment of museums and galleries. In 1971, he retreated to Marfa, Texas, where he established a permanent residence and realized his singular vision, a private museum, the Chinati Foundation. The Chinati Foundation features a permanent exhibition of artwork carefully displayed in buildings and placed throughout the landscape.

Unlike Philip Johnson, Judd was not well-traveled or exposed to art and culture as a child. His first museum visit was as a teenager, and his first encounter with the American Southwest

was as a young army conscript on his way to Korea via San Francisco. The bare landscape with its expansive and endless horizon strongly impressed him. He sent a telegram to his mother:

DEAR MOM VAN HORN TEXAS. 1260 POPULATION. NICE TOWN BEAUTIFUL
COUNTRY
MOUNTAINS - LOVE DON 1946 DEC 17 PM 5 45

While in the army, Judd was assigned to an engineering unit where he learned to draft and survey land, skills that he would later employ in his artwork. After his military service, he studied at the College of William and Mary in Virginia before transferring to Columbia University. At Columbia, Judd majored in Philosophy (1953) and attended graduate school in Art History, studying with Meyer Schapiro and Rudolf Wittkower. He also attended studio art classes at the Art Students League of New York.

Judd's interest in painting and Cubism slowly and progressively evolved to abstract, geometric works. He referred to his artwork, not as paintings or sculptures, but as "specific objects." The large free-standing concrete sculpture at the Glass House is Judd's first in an oeuvre that culminated in his masterwork, the fifteen free-standing concrete works at the Chinati Foundation. Judd was drawn to concrete for its "inherent unity," which could give the impression of a single, self-contained whole. Its economy and plasticity also attracted the artist to the material. Comprising sand, rock aggregates, and cement, concrete appealed to Judd's love of the natural world and landscape. This was highlighted by concrete's ability to capture the wood grain of the form-work from which a sculpture was shaped.

In later writings, Judd would cite the sculpture at the Glass House as a seminal work with the beveled edge subtly evoking the contrast between the ideal and the real, between the general and the specific. An early collector of work by Donald Judd, Philip Johnson acquired his untitled sculpture directly from the artist in a trade for Frank Stella's *Gur II* (1967), a large painting from Stella's *Protractor* series.

INFORMATION GATHERING AND PRE-PLANNING

Following Johnson's death in 2005, Lynda Zycherman, head sculpture conservationist at the Museum of Modern Art, conducted a survey of all of the sculptures in the collection of the Glass House that had been bequeathed to the National Trust for Historic Preservation by Philip Johnson. At that time, she reported that the condition of Judd's sculpture was "Poor," exhibiting "losses, spalling, surface wear at the top edge which exposes aggregate filling, calcareous accretions, color changes, and lichen." Prior to the Glass House's public opening in 2007, it was already evident that the sculpture would require conservation; however, little was known or documented about the piece or its construction.

Often perceived as solid and durable, concrete is actually a sensitive material. If not mixed and poured properly, it can be unsuspectingly fragile. A visual comparison of archival and recent photography reveals that the sculpture's once relatively smooth and somewhat uniform surface has eroded, exposing aggregates within the concrete mixture. A result of natural material wear, this patina is acceptable and requires only cleaning to remove soiling and biological growth.

Of primary concern are the sculpture's dark diagonal lines that rise from the ground up and across the vertical form-work, imprints to the beveled edge that may either be a cold joint or lift line. These lines are visible on both the interior and exterior side walls. Lift lines are noncritical surface imperfections, whereas cold joints are weakened areas, allowing water

penetration. Depending on the time between pours, the extent of water penetration varies. Internal moisture can subject the concrete to uneven expansions and contractions during the region's annual freeze-thaw cycle. Internal moisture may also cause corrosion, if the concrete is reinforced with steel rebar or mesh. Furthermore, exposed rebar may draw moisture into the concrete.

According to Port Draper of the Louis E. Lee Company (the contractor for many of the structures at the Glass House site), the sculpture required two truckloads of concrete. On the day of construction, the first truck arrived on schedule and poured its contents into the wood form-work. The second truck, unfortunately, got lost en route, and its delivery was postponed until the following day. By then, the first pour had already begun to cure. Although the sculpture appears to be a monolithic whole, the two pours may not have fully bonded together.

In addition to the flaws inherent to the material and its construction, the sculpture has suffered minor indignities. From 2005 to 2007, the sculpture's center became overgrown with ferns and vegetation, obstructing the view of the shifting ground plane that is integral to the understanding of the work. The ferns were removed prior to public opening, and the area has been maintained without plantings since.

In 2008, the sculpture sustained minor damage, when a landscaper skimmed the sculpture's exterior surface during scheduled maintenance. Miraculously, this only removed accrued surface dirt, and the surface was not abraded. A light colored line remains from this run-in. The felled tree limb in 2009 also damaged the beveled edge.

To better understand the scope of work that would be required, test pits were dug on both the interior and exterior walls in three locations to examine the sculpture's footing in 2009 and 2010. During the examination, exposed rebar was discovered at two of the six locations. The examination also revealed changes to the footing that were made in the field during construction. While the footing does extend at least three inches from both the interior and exterior walls, it does not maintain its width. Instead, concrete was poured into a trench, resulting in a footing that tapers toward the bottom.

In April 2010, conservator and Judd specialist Francesca Esmay and structural engineer Nancy Hudson of Silman visited the site to assess the sculpture's condition. A visual examination and basic sound test were conducted. It was observed that there were a set of cracks that ran from the interior wall to the exterior wall along the sculpture's top surface. These cracks were relatively well spaced around the entire sculpture, seeming to indicate that the sculpture had settled evenly. The sound test also indicated that the concrete was stable. From these initial tests, the current scope of work was determined.

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ABOUT

Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

Opened to the public in 1986, the Chinati Foundation is a contemporary art museum based upon the ideas of its founder, Donald Judd. The specific intention of Chinati is to preserve and present to the public permanent large-scale installations by a limited number of artists. The emphasis is on works in which art and the surrounding landscape is inextricably linked. The Chinati Foundation sponsors art and education programs, establishing close links to the local community and other cultural institutions and universities in the United States and abroad.

Judd Foundation, New York and Texas

The Judd Foundation was created in 1996 by Donald Judd's last will and testament to maintain and preserve his permanently-installed living and working spaces, libraries and archives in Texas and New York. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting a wider understanding of and appreciation for Judd's artistic legacy by facilitating public access to its resources, and by developing scholarly and educational programs.