

Department of Fine Art

Untitled Homage to Judd and Home Depot

MA – Project in Fine Art / Theses

Boutefeu Jonathan

Spring 2015

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Id. Nr.: 161289-3969

Supervisor: Magnús Gestsson

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Fine Art

Iceland Academy of Art

“Maybe because the earth is softly falling apart,
Maybe because there's no new future,
Maybe because the very center is nothing more than a hole,
Maybe because the best political statement is the one printed on t-shirts
Or because the best fiction is the one which is permanent,
The one who's non-stop recorded by the cop's camera worldwide,
I don't know if “being educated” still means something?”¹

¹ Jonathan Boutefeu & After Howl Collective, *After Howl, Trouble Academy* (Rome: Nero Magazine, 2014), 10

Abstract

The motivation interested me, refers to the idea that the space where one's stand at a specific moment, plays an important role in the image that created a specific identity. A space exists through a cultural identity, which connects to the personal identity. Public spaces are an interesting place and a good way to see how one's interact with others and how one's hand many different identities at a same time. Through this interest, I started to create a connection and enclose a clearest reflection of the minimalist work of the artist Donald Judd and the company The Home Depot.

After some research and experiences with Judd and the store (Home Depot), I drives my project in a new direction that includes a reflection on both subjects. The question was: how can I transfigure my interest in the minimalist work of Judd and my aesthetic fascination of Home Depot to create a relation between both subjects and produce a new vision of that self-created collaboration.

To approach and “solve” the research question, a good understanding on both studies is required. I decide to focus my interest in a specific concern of Judd and the company.

There is, in the work of Judd an interesting question of what is design and what is artwork. Through his practice, he broke the boundaries that were applied for a long time between those two “different” fields. Moreover there is, in his work, an unclear inquiry of copyright. His work is diverse and exceeds the mediums of painting and sculpture, which permits other artists, or manufactures, to reference his work. Judd's work finally becomes a tool to allow a new way of seeing the art and inspires a lot of companies to revisit or give the possibility to reproduce objects that have similarities of the artwork of Judd. Formerly, which leads me to the concept of the DIY that is present in the policy of the company The Home Depot.

Contemplating and researching deeply about Judd and Home Depot, my final project was born. I create a work that translate the idea and image of Judd, adding The DIY and the visual aesthetic of Home Depot at a same time.

I select different materials and structures to work with alongside the plywood, materials of a different character such as concrete and fluorescent lights. I play with these deconstructed products by mixing them together as a piece in my own way of the DIY approach.

Referencing Judd is an opportunity to challenge myself with what is to reference and thus redefine art.

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Introduction

Since I started the MA program in Iceland I realized that my focus was based on: what it means to establish my practice in a foreign environment? What is my identity in this new place? What elements can I bring into my personal practice – given this new location? Lastly, what does "identity" mean now, in a world where all the borders are blurred and the sensation of being over connected constantly confronts one every moment.

My first interests in this subject is going further. I was at some point in New York City, which is a tremendous city, full of excitements on every corner of every street. I spent six months, during my studies, in this stunning environment as an exchange student. New York City being an enormous city is of course, for an artist and also for student, a perfect place to expand ones interests. This is when establishing a different identity became a core interest of mine, because NYC is populated by 60 different nationalities and only 44% of the inhabitants of NYC are actually born in NYC.

In my own understand, identity, *identitas* in latin (which means sameness), is the relation each thing bears just to itself. The notion of identity also gives rise to many problems, which include the identity of the indiscernible (in the sens that similarities between certain identities are extremely difficult to distinguish, then what are the means of establishing difference?). There is also a question about change and personal identity that is, when one's identity changes over time, both externally and internally.

It is important to make a distinction of the philosophical concept of identity from the well-known notion of identity in psychology and the social science, which are actually more of the questions that I focused on my research. To be more specific a relation that x and y stand in if and only if they are one and the same thing or identical to each other. Sociologically identity deals with a person's self-conception, social presentation and the characteristic that makes one's unique ; put differently, their gender, cultural heritage or national identity.

This notion of identity is explained by Jacques Lacan in his theory of *The Mirror Stage*:

The function of the mirror stage thus turn out, in my view, to be particular case of the function of the imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality-or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*. [...] This moment at which the mirror stage comes to an end inaugurates, through identification with the imago of one's semblable and the drama of primordial jealousy, the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations. It is this moment decisively tips the

whole of human knowledge [savoir] into being mediated by the other's desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the *I* into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process.²

This is related to the theory of Sigmund Freud and how he developed the theory of the *Unheimlich*. He elaborates on this term after a situation he had on a train. The story is that he stood up from the train bench to call upon the train supervisor. When he stood up, he saw a man, outside from his compartment, who seems apathetic, unpleasant and almost disturbing. This man that he saw without identifying his physical presence, actually was Freud's reflection in the window's door. This example shows the return of the similar, yet the surprise of one's personal reflection.

The space (environment) where one stands in this exhibition at a specific moment, plays an important role into the image that created a specific identity. This space has an inherent ability to define our individual identity. Public spaces are an interesting place and a good way to see how we interact together and how we handle many identities at the same time. It reminds me of Homi Bhabha and his writing "The Commitment to Theory", from *The Location of Culture*. In the text he claims:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People.³

After I started to focus my interests on these reflections during my first month in NYC I decided to go further and apply these questions in a specific aspect of my practice.

My initial interest in Donald Judd stemmed from his ability to create autonomous, materially foundational sculpture and permanent installation. Through his work, I created a response to his

2 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 78

3 Homi Bhabha, "The commitment to Theory," in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21

work and his approach to minimalism forms. Moreover, his work also enquires, as does mine, the idea of perception of space or specific material.

I also combined and added the policy of the company *The Home Depot* and its “Do It Yourself” which is the emblem of it.

This research and my final project, developed this year, as a reflection of Judd's work and the company *The Home Depot* which I discovered and was inspired by during my time in NYC. After some research and experience with the store I pushed my project in a new direction that include a reflection on both subjects. My question was how can I transfigure my interest of the minimalist work of Judd and my aesthetic fascination of The Home Depot stores to create a relation between both subjects and how to produce a new relationship to Judd's legacy to the usage of industrial products.

I will describe briefly the main aspects that interest me in the work of Donald Judd and the Judd Foundation, in addition the policy of The Home Depot in the next chapter to illustrate the research I undertook in order to realize my work.

1.Donald Judd and the Judd Foundation

The work of Donald Judd and the Judd Foundation it is now intended to discuss different aspects of his work to strengthen and develop my research concept. The focus will be theoretical to underpin the foundations of the analysis.

1.A. Brief description of the Minimalism and Donald Judd's work

“Minimalism” which has evolved over the last half-century to include a vast number artistic media and artists, such as DanFlavin, Carl Andre. The Minimalism period took place in the early 1960s in New York. The “role” of that period is characterized by the creation of objects, which often blurred the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and were characterized by unitary, geometric forms and industrial materials. This movement was born from the Abstract Expressionism movement and attempted to avoid metaphorical associations, symbolism, and suggestions of spiritual transcendence.⁴

Donald Judd is an influential artists of this era who was not satisfied by traditional painting

4 The Art Story Modern Art Insight. “Minimalism.” Accessed April 28, 2015.
<http://www.theartstory.org/movement-minimalism.htm>

and sculpture (fig.1). This led him to the conception of art built upon the idea of the material as it exists in the commercially, environmentally and industrial. Judd's goal was to create an object that can stand on its own as part of an enlarged of image making and which not allowed something else except his physical presence. His work is mostly placed directly on the floor and as a result, forces the viewer to encounter it according to his own material existence. Judd combined the use of industrialized material, such as steel, iron, concrete, plastic, plywood or plexiglas – techniques and methods which are associated with american industrial fabrication. Judd's work is also a reflection of the consumer and industrial culture, a strategy that related to the reality of the postwar as well as to the subjectifying and standardization nature of identicalness. It is also seen as a part of a general tendency to the democratization of art and the accessibility to more wide range of people.⁵

1.B. Judd Foundation, 101 Spring St and Marfa Texas

Not many people grow up in one of the most influential art surrounding of the 20th century as Rainer Judd. Rainer's father was Donald Judd, sculptor and minimalist. In 1968, he bought a factory in Soho for \$68 000. A 5-story cast-iron building designed by Nicholas Whyte, constructed in 1870, it was the first building that Judd owned. Judd made 101 Spring Street (fig.2) his studio and a permanent installation. Importantly, it was also his family home. When Judd died in 1994, he asked his children to preserve this space. Twenty three million dollars later, Spring Street is almost exactly as Donald Judd left it, and with renovations by Adam Yarinsky. The first of Judd's concepts of “permanent installation” applications were realized in his installation of works throughout 101 Spring Street.⁶ His installation of artworks, museum-quality objects and furniture are placed between the historic nature of this cast-iron building and Judd's interior design interests.

The first floor is the exhibition's space, the second floor the living and dinning room, the third floor Judd's studio, the fourth is a salon and the fifth was his bedroom (fig.3&4). This bedroom is surrounded by the work of his contemporaries ; John Chamberlain, Dan Flavin and other artists he considered close friends and respective of their work.

After he bought his house in Manhattan, Judd, in the early 1970s, acquired property in Marfa, Texas, including ranch lands of Presidio County (fig.5). He gradually acquired a number of buildings in Marfa, converting each to have a specific purpose. He demonstrated sensitivity to the

⁵ The Art Story Modern Art Insight. “Donald Judd.” Accessed April 28, 2015.
<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-judd-donald.htm>

⁶ Above York, LLC. “Judd Foundation” Accessed April 28, 2015
<http://vimeo.com/70874089>

original structures while maximizing light and space, to finally get ownership the entire town. Judd became one of the first artists to transform a part of a town into his own studio and permanent art installation. He procured a defunct air-force base to create a permanent installation on the edge of Marfa. His studio became the Chinati Foundation.

1.C. How Donald Judd turned his work into a reflection of his lifestyle

My first chapter was intended to draw a brief history of Judd and the Judd Foundation along with the Chinati Foundation because I found it important for a better understanding and also to strongly apply the critical approach I will defend: How an artwork can also be used as a way to see his lifestyle.

There is, in the work of Judd an interesting question of what is design and what is artwork. I think that Judd understood pretty well those two concept and tried in a smart way to break the boundaries that were applied for a long time in those two “different” fields. In fact, many of his work was used as a desk, a table, ect. He designed many different types of chairs that were part of the furniture in his house. I would say that Judd as an epicurean wanted to be surrounded by what he thought was both useful and elegant. Every decision, that he made, was, I believe, purely and heedfully to fit the best way into his unique lifestyle in order to stick to this imago that he created around himself. Building an identity through a lifestyle as a white heterosexual male artist living in New York I found quite characteristic to the Minimalism movement. In fact, most of the principal influential artists in that period were men. For example, the Dia Beacon Foundation, which is the main institution for minimal art, presents almost only men artists.

Moreover, I am interested in the fact that he moved and build his conceptual vision in a town like Marfa, Texas. What is the best way to transform everything around yourself than to be the owner of land and set up an identity through a town?

One may believe that there was nothing at Marfa except empty buildings and “desert” as a background. But if you go deeper, it would bring us to the notion of a “state of mind”. In psychology, it would refer to the notion of The psychological state of someone's cognitive processes at a certain time, including the condition or character of a person's thoughts or feelings.⁷

I want to challenge the definition and limits of the psychological “state of mind”. If we separate state and mind, “state” represents the basic definition of a nation or territory considered as an

⁷ The Free Dictionary by Farlex. “State of Mind.” Accessed April 28, 2015
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/psychological+state>

organized political community under one government. “Mind” would be the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think, and to feel within the faculty of consciousness and thought. Now if we reunite these two definitions in this way, we would understand a “state of mind” as a territory is controlled by our process to think, to experience, and to intellectualize.

Judd transformed Marfa from a desert town to a physical representation of his own state of mind. He controlled that territory with his intellect.

1.D. The question of the copyright in Donald Judd's Work

There is an interesting point of the work of Donald Judd. I started to investigate and finally found out that Judd's work does not have any copyright. Any of his work can be used or reproduced by someone else. As we can find in the writing “Specific Object” from Donald Judd:

The new three-dimensional work doesn't constitute a movement, school or style. The common aspects are too general and too little common to define a movement. The differences are greater than the similarities. The similarities are selected from the work ; they aren't a movement's first principles or delimiting rules.⁸.

In that writing we can see that Donald Judd is starting to define his work to a non determinate specific area or art field. His work is diverse and exceeds the mediums of painting and sculpture, which permits other artists, or manufactures, to reference his works. But there are some things that occur in common with my work research.

The Swiss artist, Sylvie Fleury, who combines in her work divergent topics like esotericism and trash, fashion and motorsports, science fiction and art history. By connecting separate spheres she often plays off gender differences against each other : the feminine body counters the masculine geometry of Stacks by Donald Judd. In this work (fig.6), she uses the formal famous artwork from Judd in its exact form and applies a new layer of her vision and artistry to Judd's existing design.⁹

Judd's work finally becomes a tool to permit a new way of seeing the art. This topic of the non copyright in his work leads me to the next point that Judd's work can be reproduced without any

⁸ Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” in *Arts Yearbook* 8, (New York: Publisher Unknown, 1965), 1

⁹ Artdaily.com. “Swiss Artist Sylvie Fleury Presents Wall Piece at Lenbachhaus.” Accessed April 28, 2015.
<http://artdaily.com/news/38106/Swiss-Artist-Sylvie-Fleury-Presents-Wall-Piece-at-Lenbachhaus#.VT9zy2Tlako>

specific background identities, including himself as the artist, becoming a reproduction for the mainstream world.

1.E. The reproduction and commercialization of Judd's work on a massive manufacturing scale

As stated above. The work of Donald Judd attempts to “break” the boundaries between art, design and object. We can find in his work a multitude of art pieces that were also used as a table, a chair, or bed. Visiting the Judd Foundation on 101 Spring street it became evident that his entire work was “design” or intended to function as a massive reflection of the space that surrounds us. Everything inside this massive building is part of his artistic research. In my research about him and the Foundation, I found out, that it is possible to order furniture that uses his design. This furniture were reproduced posthumously, which means that his work is reproduced for customers who are inspired and drawn to the artwork that Judd conceived by his philosophy of self-standing objects and his idea of permanent installation.

Another example that relates more to the mainstream generation is the reproduction of the famous “shelves” of Judd by IKEA. And it is only one element that is taken from Judd's work. Many chairs and tables from IKEA are reflecting the furniture that Judd designed.

I would call that phenomena a re-appropriation of the art field in a consumerism society because with this development it is also leads the consumer away from the knowledge and origin of his work.

IKEA has had a profound effect on our everyday lives. After coming across an “online quiz”¹⁰ this fall that asked to guess whether photos of individual objects were minimalist sculptures by Donald Judd or pieces of cheap modern furniture, I started to wonder about the ongoing interactions between artists and the affordable design powerhouse.

The artist Joe Scanlan does play with IKEA design. Among the various “art commodities” that he has sold through his website “*Things That Fall*” is a DIY coffin (fig.7) you build out of IKEA bookshelves (\$27,50 shipped, some assembly required). It even comes with an anticipated pictorial instructions and also a fake Scandinavian name (KLÄPS).

If IKEA has seemingly digested the forms of Minimalism, what do artists see today when they look at the blue-and-yellow behemoth?

As I described previously, the Minimalist period inspired a lot of worldwide companies, such as IKEA, to revisit the work of past artists, for example the work of Donald Judd, in order to produce

10 Graydon Parrish & Mikhail Simkin “Quiz: Donald Judd, or Cheap Furniture,” Accessed April 28, 2015
http://reverent.org/donald_judd_or_cheap_furniture.html

products that are redefined from the art scene in which they were created.

Instead of talking about IKEA, I will focus my interest and research in the company *The Home Depot*. While IKEA reproduces designs like Judd's, *The Home Depot* allows the individual to create their own reproduction personally with the convenience of the Americanized DIY movement.

2. The Home Depot company

This chapter will introduce the company ; historically and economically. I will also explain the policy and philosophy of The Home Depot to conclude this chapter by how the company influences me in my practice.

The Home Depot describes their history, the company was founded in 1978 by Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank, along with investment banker Ken Langone and merchandising guru Pat Farrah, the founders' vision of one-stop shopping for the do-it-yourselfer came to fruition when they opened the first two Home Depot stores in 1979, in Atlanta, Georgia. The first stores, at around 60,000 square feet each, were cavernous warehouses that dwarfed the competition and stocked 25,000 SKUs (Stock Keeping Unit : store's product and service identification code, often portrayed as a machine-readable bar code that helps the item to be tracked for inventory), more than the average hardware store at that time. Empty boxes piled high on the shelves gave the illusion of even more product. Today, The Home Depot is the world's largest home improvement specialty retailer, with more than 2,200 retail stores in the United States (including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), Canada, and Mexico.

From the start, associates were able to offer the best customer service in the industry, guiding customers through projects such as laying tile, changing a fill valve or handling a power tool. Not only did store associates undergo rigorous product knowledge training, but they also began offering clinics so customers could learn how to do it themselves. The Home Depot revolutionized the home improvement industry by bringing the know-how and the tools to the consumer and by saving them money. According to Bernie and Arthur, the customer has a bill of rights at The Home Depot, and this entitles the customer to the right assortment, quantities and price, along with trained associates on the sales floor who want to take care of customers.¹¹

¹¹ The Home Depot "History," Accessed April 28, 2015
<https://corporate.homedepot.com/ourcompany/history/pages/default.aspx>

2.A. The Home Depot and the policy of the “Do-It-Yourself”

The “do-it-yourself” home improvement concept may not have been born 36 years ago, but few would dispute that it took place with the opening of the first Home Depot store in Atlanta. The bright orange warehouse definitely opened a huge new world to people wanting to do things for themselves, but without a huge background or a deep knowledge.

Here are two points how the company sees itself working that concept :

- Do-It-Yourself (“D-I-Y”) : the customer is typically a homeowner who purchases products to complete his own project and installation. To complement the expertise of its associate, The Home Depot stores offer “how-to” clinics taught by associates.¹²
- Do-It-For-Me (“D-I-F-M”) : the customer is typically a homeowner who purchases materials himself and hires a third party to complete the project or installation. The company arranges for the installation of a variety of its products through qualified independent contractors.¹³

After deep research and contemplation of Donald Judd and the company Home Depot, my ideas were pretty clear. I wanted to create something which would be a work that would translate the idea and image of Judd, the do it yourself movement and the visual aesthetic of Home Depot at the same time. I see a relationship between these things because of the raw industrial materials used by Judd. Because of my exposure to Home Depot, the materials used commonly by Judd became more accessible to me and pushed me to conceive unexplored potential in the forms and nature of those products.

2.B. The visual influence of Home Depot company into my work

Through those past months in NYC, I started to notice that I was relinquishing those art supply stores in preference to Home Depot. I found much more inspiration and material that I needed in this hardware store than an actual art supply store. I think that Home Depot offers wider opportunities for the creative process for me as an artist. When one goes inside the store, it gives you the feeling that everything is possible and that you have everything needed to start your

¹² The Home Depot. “DIY,” AGB HomeDepot PDF, Accessed April 28, 2015. 48

<http://www.americagreatestbrands.com/volume9/assess/ABG%20pdfs/AGB%20HomeDepot.pdf>

¹³ The Home Depot. “DIY,” AGB HomeDepot PDF, 48

<http://www.americagreatestbrands.com/volume9/assess/ABG%20pdfs/AGB%20HomeDepot.pdf>

working process.

I found in Home Depot a specific aesthetic that inspired me and pushed me to transform my work. The way plywood is stored, how the shelves and materials are presented, how everything is settled, finally brought me a “better” viewing and understanding of the impact of the different materials and products that I could access. So I started to explore some different materials and structures which grabbed my attention and decided to investigate new materials like concrete, fluorescent light and plywood.

As a whole, the visual identity of the company was not only user-friendly, it was personally pleasing. Multinational companies use logos that are recognizable by almost everyone, especially for US citizens. The Home Depot was well renowned for its orange-blooded entrepreneurial culture and outstanding customer service. As Blake, Chief Executive Office of The Home Depot, says : “Bernie and I founded the Home Depot with a special vision – to create a company that would keep alive the values that were important to us. Values like respect among all people, excellent customer service and giving back to communities and society”.¹⁴ Orange-blooded visual identity. They even labeled their specific orange color which now has a copyright. It reminds me of the artist Yves Klein and his famous blue color that is classified the International Klein Blue (fig.8).¹⁵ Since then no one could reproduce or imitate his blue. From the story that my semiologist teacher Michel Assenmaeker told me, some scientists even tried to analyze the color to find the composition of it but are still missing some contents to recreate it. The myth would be that Yves Klein would bury himself with the formula of his famous blue to be sure that no one would be able to reproduce it.

There are, I think, similitudes with Judd and Home Depot. The fact that both evolved in a industrial field, by using the characteristic of a manufactured material and in that aesthetic. For example, in Marfa, Texas, one of the studio of Judd is set up in order to show which material Judd was using. The way they show the material is surprisingly similar than the presentation of products by Home Depot ; rows of shelves, sorted out by material and shape, like how is presented the studio of Donald Judd in Marfa.

14 Dr. Ronald L. Hess, Jr., “Improving the Customer Experience at Home Depot,” (class discussion, Williams & Mary Mason School of Business, 2012), 5

15 MoMA, The Collection. “Yves Klein,” Accessed April 28, 2015
http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80103

3. How I reinterpret the ready made in my practice and as a contemporary way to approach it

As the artist Haim Steinbach (fig.9) says: “I suppose the historical definition of the readymade is an object that an artist did not make, that an artist picks, finds, or chooses, and inserts into a context that frame it as art, without doing anything to it. And then that has become much more complicated and layered over the years.”¹⁶

I would add that the concept of the readymade remained the same in result but the approach and the aim shifted and changed year after year. At the beginning, Dada and readymade were set to describe a rebellion of artists against art. The artists who belonged to that period were against the capitalist society that consumed the industrialized era that they were part of.¹⁷

I am seeing the readymade now as a way to expose the evolution of the manufactured objects that involved the society of consumption. I think that when I use a specific object without transforming it, it is to question the visual identity of the object in its intended form.

The way how I am approaching the “readymade” now is by using logo, branding and mainstream visuals, objects that fit a specific aesthetic that connects me to the decades in which I grew up and developed. Images that surround me or objects that interests me.

The way I interpret the “readymade” is to transform the work into a kitsch experience. The difference between my practice and ready made commonly from the 20s is that I am more interested in playful objects that are over manufactured and meaningless, like smiley faces and ying yangs, while Duchamp, a pioneer of the ready made, referenced postwar everyday functional objects like a bicycle wheel, snow shovel or a urinal.

In the next chapter, I will describe and explain the different projects that I developed by applying my research and exploration of new materials, along with works by artists who inspired me.

16 Tom Eccles & Johanna Burton, *Haim Steinbach, Once again the world is flat*. (New York: CCS Hessel Museum, 2012), 71

17 Mara Ambrozic & Angela Vettese, *Art as a Thinking Process* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 202

4. Works

4.A. Concrete/light works (fig.10)

The first untitled work that developed out of my research were concrete sculptures. There are three different types of structures that use a different types of concrete, shape and light fixtures. The process was the same for all of them. I start to build a wood cast or a styrofoam cast in various dimensions and geometrical forms. When my cast is built, I decide where to put the light at which angle. I first make holes in the cast and insert the fluorescent light bulbs. In another variation, I inserted Christmas light. When the light is set up, I prepare my concrete and pour the concrete in the cast. I let it dry and then remove the cast. The last step is to connect the wires (according to the light bulb) and connect the work to electricity.

With this work, there is a reflection of the material, and the temporal nature of the work. Through this work I have drawn a reflection of the minimalist historical background by referencing the material and the shape well known from the work of Donald Judd and Dan Flavin. My interests in this work is not the focus on the relation between my work and the space that surrounds it, but more focus on a specific moment. I would say that I am more concerned with the cultural aspect of a place, for example, the aesthetic of the architecture in nightclubs like (fig.11) Berghain (Berlin), (fig.12) Watergate (Berlin), (fig.13) Fuse (Brussels). I think that those places combine architecture and light systems to draw a specific mood and ambience, for a specific function.

The result of this inspiration leads me to condense hard structures and light effects to a small piece (my work). It then gives the impression that we broke off a part of the space to show a small part of the spirit that we can find in those places.

Using those materials is also connected to the policy of Do-it-yourself from the Home Depot. All the material I am using came from the shop. They, as we know, are sold separately and I play with those products to mix them together to finally create one cohesive piece. I fulfill the do-it-yourself activity from start to finish. I was inspired by the artist Jesse Hlebo (fig.14) who uses only plywood and concrete that he purchases from Home Depot. He builds large walls made of concrete and wood that he finally burns with a flamethrower.

Another point that I address in my work is the idea of the temporality of the piece. In fact, as I described above, I insert the light before pouring the concrete so the light is stuck in the concrete and it becomes impossible to remove the light. Between 6000 and 15.000 hours, the light will fade out and die but the bulb will still be physically present in the work without functioning. The

interactivity of the work would not be applied anymore. The work would be only a trace of what it was before, keeping a specific moment, the life of the light bulb. In the first two versions, I am using christmas lights, which is questioning temporality through visual effect using christmas decorations. The work plays with a visual identity that corresponds to a small period of the year and expends this identity as a statement.

In the writing of Judith A. Howard “Social Psychology of Identities” she refers to Cain, author of *Stigma management and gay identity development*, and says:

Cain (1991) emphasizes the complexities of the sociopolitical environment of sexual identities, analyzing how queer cultures respond to the behavior of passing, of hiding stigmatized sexual identities. Cain notes that in recent years, openness about one's sexuality has come in both professional literatures and subcultural communities to be seen as evidence of healthy gay identity, and thus passing can be seen as problematic. He critiques the failure of such approaches to recognize the constraints of social factors, implying in his analysis that people manage information about their sexual identity, just as they manage information about other identities.¹⁸

Through this quote Judith A. Howard explains that, with the example of gender identity, we manage to inform and affirm other identities. I relate that to my work by the use of temporary christmas identity and the fleeting occasion of the nightclub identity to manipulate and transform the visual identity of the object to a new and ultimately permanent one.

4.B. Home Depot light-box (fig.15)

The Home Depot Light-box work consists of reproducing the visuals of the company The Home Depot. The work is a replica of the famous logo of the company. The logo is printed on a plexiglas sheet (120 cm x 120 cm) using the labeled orange-blooded color well-known from Home Depot. On the logo would be add a flaming lips effect like we can find on the racing cars.

The project refers to the readymade as I am using an original logo from the company that I

¹⁸ Judith A. Howard, “Social Psychology of Identities,” in *Annual Review of Sociology* (California: Annual Reviews, 2000), 377

turn into a reflection of label and visual imagery. The object is a specific image that leads to a self re-interpretation of consumption and merchandising society. My goal with this work is to highlight the idea of decoration and light that is omnipresent here in NYC. I found fascinating the fact that one is able to find, in early August, Christmas decorations everywhere and sometime even on sale. I started to be aware of all the attractions of the town and finally noticed how those lights were made to capture the attention of the people and send subconscious message to them, for example : get two for one, discount, and price list ... Advertisements and company logos basically send subliminal messages to the consumer, through color, text and typography of the ads in order to attract and keep the attention of the consumer.

The aesthetic of the light-box in companies also set the prestige of them. Through their logos, their designs, they affirm an economic and social aspect of their implant in the world. By the quality of their design, they also reference what kind of demographic the company want to reach.

It reminds me of Andy Warhol famous work, Brillo Boxes (fig.16). His work still continues to unsettle the museum visitors through their deadpan replication of the American commercial culture. The Brillo boxes comment on the commercial framework behind the prestigious space of art galleries and art museums, while exiting the mind of the high culture in the mundane disorder of the supermarket stockroom. The background of Warhol as a commercial illustrator leads him to a deeper reflection of the impact of the consumerism brands and logo. The American visual culture through brand, logo, newspaper, found objects, gave Warhol the opportunity to embrace commercial culture as the central source of imagery for his work.¹⁹ Warhol also affirms his practice as a commercial and factory production to support his creativity. Where art becomes business and business becomes replica.

Another aspect that I developed with this work is the culture of the customization in the car industry and the sponsoring of a company in car racing competitions. In fact, Home Depot has its own race car team in the USA. They use the logo as the visual identity during competitions around the country. I am interested in the specific aesthetic that we can find in the culture of car tuning and the different effects added to cars. This culture of car tuning is a modification of the performance or appearance of a vehicle. For actual "tuning" in the sense of automobiles or vehicles, see engine tuning. Most vehicles leave the factory set up for an average driver's expectations and conditions. Tuning, on the other hand, has become a way to personalize the characteristics of a vehicle to the owner's preference. Cars may be altered to provide better fuel economy, produce more power, or to provide better handling. Tuned cars are built for the pleasure of owning and driving. Exterior

19 The warhol. "Aesthetics : Arthur Danto," Accessed April 28, 2015
<http://www.warhol.org/education/resourceslessons/Aesthetics--Arthur-Danto/>

modifications include changing the aerodynamic characteristics of the vehicle via side skirts, front and rear bumpers, spoilers, splitters, air vents and light weight wheels.²⁰

The culture of car tuning is also referring to the Do-it-yourself by the fact that most of the modifications of the car are made by the owner. Those modifications are mostly made in the owner's garage and not in a specific motor shop ... Tuning is created by adding some element piece by piece, much like one would assembled a kit or a shelf from IKEA. Often, body modifications are done mainly to improve a vehicle's appearance, as in the case of non-functioning scoops, wide arches or other aesthetic modification. Aftermarket spoilers or body kits rarely improve a car's performance. The majority, in fact, add weight and increase the drag coefficient of the vehicle, thus reducing its overall performance.

The aesthetic is mostly flamboyant, aggressive and considered as a masculine hobby. It includes mostly a sexist identity (naked women, or topless women ...) and an affirmation of a certain power by adding flame decals on the side of the car.

4.C. Judd video (fig.17)

The work consists of a found footage compilation that is 8 minutes long. The video work includes three samples from three different existing videos. The first sample of the video is a commercial that explains the Judd Foundation located on 101 Spring street (New York City). This sample traces the history and the goal of the foundation. The second video is a part taken from the documentary "American Artist in the 60s" that interviews the artist Donald Judd in his studio on Spring Street. The last part of my work is a tutorial found on Youtube which shows a man who explains how to build shelves inspired by the design of Donald Judd. The entire work is edited as one video and one evolution in the narration.

This work has to be seen as a piece and not as a documentation of my research. I think the video would help the viewer to understand the processing that I develop in my practice by a rewriting of the "history" of Donald Judd. If the viewer is unfamiliar with the artist, they may read my work as reinterpretation of the idea that he was questioning in his work. In addition the part of the tutorial would lead the public to see the present work as DIY and a contemporary readymade. The project is to inform without giving the information. I relate that to the writing from Alfredo Cramerotti *Aesthetic journalism : how to inform without informing* :

If we cannot dissociate the act of reading reality from that of constructing

20 David Vespremi, *Car Hacks & Mods for Dummies*, (New York: Wiley, 2012), 101

it, perhaps it is time to reverse the process, and simply accept the uncertainty of representation as the core element of any representation of the real. It is the same as when we watch a live TV program broadcast from a battlefield, where a journalist is capturing images with his or her mobile-phone camera onboard a moving vehicle: it is quite possible, actually, not to see anything but blurred pixels. One thing that an aesthetic approach to information could provide is the transparency of the failures of the representational system, whether artistic or of the media involved²¹.

In his writing Alfredo Cramerotti explains that the boundaries between the information (documentary) and art video attempt to disappear to give place to a new movement of art that use the documentary and TV program aesthetic ; like the artist Ryan Trecartin (fig.18) who used iPhone cameras in his production. Cramerotti also says : “Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings, each of which causes the work to acquire new vitality in terms of one particular taste, or perspective, or personal performance”²².

I think the Judd video is a perfect juxtaposition and mix of the different points that I use in my research. The video questions copyright in a work, the readymade and the idea of the Do-it-Yourself.

The connection with the other works would be made by the screening of the found footage video of Donald Judd.

21 Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism : How to Inform without Informing*, Bristol, (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 92

22 Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism : How to Inform without Informing*, Bristol, (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 83

Final Chapter

The Graduation Show (fig.19, 20, 21) was held at Gerdasafn and hosted six fine arts MA students and eight design MA students. The curator assigned specific spaces for each student, allowing each individual participating to have control over their own space. Because I was sharing this space that was being planned by other artists, not just the curator, it was important to keep my work clear and stick to my visual intentions and identity. Each visual detail was intentional from the forms used to the electrical cords strung along the floor. My vision was minimalist, but also raw and upfront. There is no magic and everything visible is part of the installation. This references the DIY factor in my process. It is a challenge to show with others when one does not have control or influence on the space as a whole, but by maintaining simplicity and focus, the work not only survives in this dynamic space, it is contrasted by the presence of other artists and other visions.

It is important to me to allow my work to be open to an audience and not overly influenced. I do not want to be defined entirely by theory but rather to shift my focus to create a sensation within my viewers. My process is personal both in my aesthetic references and my hands on/DIY approach to the construction of my forms. While I can guide my viewers, I want them to find their own conclusion. This created a challenge for me as my work was an American reference being shown in Iceland. These references, while familiar, may not be a part of Icelandic culture the way The Home Depot and Donald Judd is to American culture. My final goal and my process was to create an experience between the viewer and the piece rather than creating a fixed statement. The viewers reaction then becomes fundamental in defining the piece. The reaction from an unfamiliar audience is just as significant to me for it is instinctive and honest.

During the final critique, there was a question of where the source of my nostalgia came from, as in a nostalgia for minimalism and minimalist forms. My professors made note of this being the first time during my masters studies that I had made a clear stated reference to a developed art history.

By applying Judd's identity and personality to my own work and my DIY process that was influenced by The Home Depot, I created a new updated identity of Donald Judd.

This led to the discussion of how to classify my work as post-minimalist. I understand the need to define the work, however, my reference to minimalism is just a starting point. I do not see myself, as an artist or my body of work, to be minimalist or post-minimalist. This was the first experiment in a specific interest I developed this year. Next year, it can very well be something else.

I think that the work has to be seen as a transfiguration of an interest I had in a specific moment of my life, both personally and artistically.

Continuing on the note of reference, it was not clear to me beforehand how one can do so in a clever way. Judd's work is cemented in both its theory and definition, but is surprisingly open for a new interpretation by being free of copyright. This challenged me to develop what it means to take, use or reference an established work, artist or genre.

It is difficult to anticipate what direction my work will take. I believe art is an experience of the moment and I, as an artist, am focused on the transfiguration of a specific moment that I have or will experience at a specific time. In the future, I cannot anticipate where I will be, so therefore I cannot anticipate what will be my next center of interest. My interest is not committed to minimalism or any specific movement or genre, but I will continue my ambition to redefine existing work and theory, personally.

Conclusion

The location we are in at a given moment plays a role in forming our identity and self image. A space exists through a cultural identity that informs our personal identity. I am interested in looking into the ways we interact with each other and at the same time handle our multiple identities in public spaces.

I found my interests of Donald stemmed from his ability to create autonomous, materially foundational sculpture and permanent installation. Through his un-copyrighted work I started to create my own work that references his form and that of the minimalist movement. I feel kinship with his work through his enquiries into ideas of identity and perceptions of a particular space and a specific moment.

I have also combined in this research the policy of the company The Home Depot (US equivalent of IKEA/Bauhaus shop) and their statement and emblem: “Do It Yourself”.

My research project, developed this year, is a reflection of Judd's work and the Home Depot approach to interior design. My question was how to transfigure my interest of the minimalist work of Judd and my aesthetic fascination with the Home Depot concept. The objective was to investigate the relationship of the two subjects and establish a new vision through a certain “collaboration” between the two.

In Home Depot I found a distinct aesthetic that pushed me to transform and reconsider certain elements of my work. The way the company stores their plywood, how the shelves and materials are presented, how everything is arranged, how finally you have a “better” viewing and understanding of the impact of the different materials and products. I selected different materials and structures to work with alongside the plywood, materials of a different character such as concrete and fluorescent lights.

I can see definite similarities with Judd and Home Depot. The fact that both are involved with the industrial field, by use of manufactured materials and in the aesthetic approach, I can make a connection between the two.

In Marfa, Texas, one of the studio's of Judd is set up to show the materials he used. The way in which these materials are displayed is surprisingly similar to the presentation of merchandise of Home Depot where rows of shelves are arranged. In my work, I reflect upon the material of choice and their temporal nature. I draw from the historical background of the minimalist movement by consciously referring to the materials and forms well recognized from the works of Donald Judd. In

contrast to this, my interest and focus lies more in the specific moment than in the relationship between the work and the space it is presented in. I am more concerned with the cultural aspects of a place. For example the aesthetic of the architecture in the nightclubs like Berghain (Berlin), Watergate (Berlin), Fuse (Brussels). I think that those places combine architecture and a light system to draw a specific mood and ambience, which visitors come to expect.

Using those materials is also strongly connected to the policy of Do-it-yourself from The Home Depot. In fact all the material that I use derive directly from the store. I deconstructed with these decomposed products by mixing them together as a piece in my own way. I was inspired in this vein by the artist Jesse Hlebo who uses only plywood and concrete that he purchases at Home Depot. After building large walls made of concrete and wood he burns the structures with a flamethrower or also the female artist Violet Dennison (fig.22) who plays with design and materials to build office chair's structure and adding concrete block over the chair's frame. I was moved by her approach to bringing a delicate and sensual touch in objects that have a strong masculine identity. The roughness of the concrete versus the softness of a chair.

Referencing Judd was an opportunity to challenge myself with what it is to reference and thus redefine art. Judd allows one to re-appropriate his work both legally, due to the lack of copyright, and by the nature of being minimalist form.

I would like to conclude with the words of Bob Nickas from his book “*32 Pictures*” about the artist Robert Grosvenor (fig.23) : “But if only things remains constant for any of us, it's the fact that you never really know where an idea will come from, and how it may lead to the next.”²³.

Jonathan Boutefeu
MA 2nd year
Iceland Academy of Art

23 Bob Nickas, “Essay,” in *32 Pictures*, Robert Grosvenor, (New York: Karma, 2014), 53

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Appendix :



(Fig.1) Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1980



(fig.2) Judd Foundation, 101 Spring St, NYC



(fig.3) The fifth floor, bedroom, Judd Foundation, 101 Spring St, NYC



(fig.4) The fifth floor, bedroom, Judd Foundation, 101 Spring St, NYC



(fig.5) Judd Foundation, Marfa Texas, work by Donald Judd



(fig.6) Sylvie Fleury, *Eternal Wow on Shelf*, 2007



(fig.7) Joe Scanlan, *DIY*, 2008



(fig.8) Yves Klein, *Propositions Monochromes (I'02)*, 1957



(fig.9) Haim Steinbach, *Shelf with Annie figurine*, 1981



(fig.10) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, 2014



(fig.11) Berghain, night club, Berlin, Germany



(fig.12) Watergate, night club, Berlin, Germany



(fig.13) Fuse, night club, Brussels, Belgium



(fig.14) Jesse Hlebo, *Developer (for Creg)*, 2014



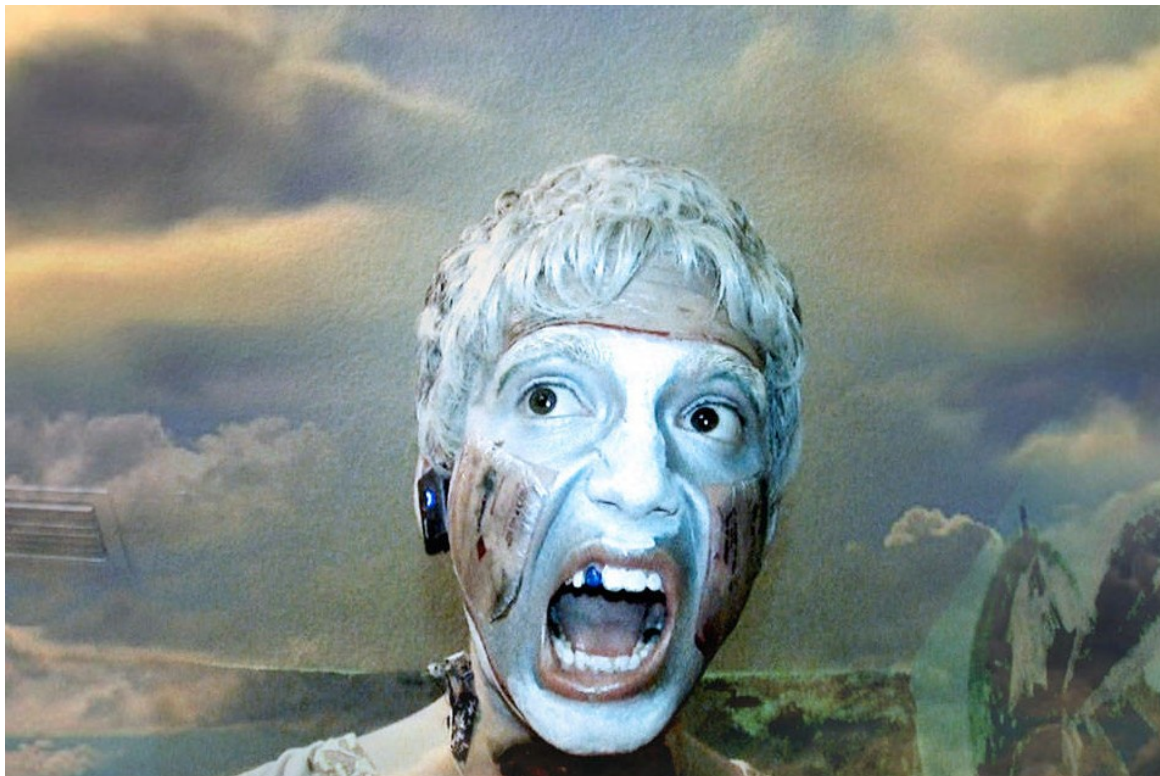
(fig.15) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, 2015



(fig.16) Andy Warhol, *Brillo Boxes*, 1964



(fig.17) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, 2014-2015



(fig.18) Ryan Trecartin, *History, Enhancement (Re'search Wait's)*, 2009-2010



(fig.19) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, Graduation Show, 2015



(fig.20) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, Graduation Show, 2015



(fig.21) Jonathan Boutefeu, *sans titre*, Graduation Show, 2015



(fig.22) Violet Dennison, *Max Height*, 2014



(fig.23) Robert Grosvenor, *Untitled*, 1986-1987