

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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## **BERND AND HILLA BECHER: IN DIALOGUE WITH CARL ANDRE AND SOL LEWITT**

534 W 21st Street  
March 31 – May 5, 2018

NEW YORK – Paula Cooper Gallery is pleased to announce *Bernd and Hilla Becher: In Dialogue with Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt*, an exhibition organized in collaboration with Max Becher and Antonio Homem. The Bechers' well-known and greatly influential photographic work is presented alongside sculpture by Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, exploring the artists' friendship and creative dialogue. The presentation, which also will include photographs by Matthias Schaller documenting the space where the artists lived and worked, will be on view at 534 West 21st Street from March 31st through May 5th, 2018.

During their almost fifty-year partnership beginning in 1959, Bernd and Hilla Becher pursued a project of systematically photographing industrial structures. Documenting once ubiquitous edifices such as cooling towers, gas tanks, blast furnaces and grain elevators—first in post-War Germany and, later, across Europe and the United States—the Bechers organized their images in *typologies*, in an effort to render comparable the unique details of each structure and the intricate relationship between form and function. To produce the most effective contrast, the objects were photographed impartially, under rigorous and uniform constraints, “isolated from their context and freed from all association.”<sup>1</sup> Adhering to direct vantages, soft gray light, frontal and three-quarter perspectives, and large-format cameras, the Bechers aimed to eliminate subjectivity and romanticization, referring to the objects as “anonymous structures.” The economy and clarity of their methodology is apparent in Matthias Schaller's photographs of their studio home, “The Mill,” in Düsseldorf, Germany. An abundance of books, papers and photographic tools, with scant objects of distraction, form a kind of *portrait-without-the-sitter*.

The Bechers' emphasis on objectivity and seriality finds an echo in the work of contemporary conceptual and minimal artists, with whom their work was frequently exhibited. In the late 1960s through gallerist, Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, the Bechers were introduced to Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre. In the November 1972 edition of *Artforum*, Andre published an essay on the Bechers' work, launching their visibility in the American and international arts community. In the text, Andre's straightforward explication of their project reveals a shared preference for neutral, systematic practices and a rejection of subjective narratives. Similarly, Andre's work draws attention to the material and spatial specificity of his sculptural objects, while rejecting traditional notions of artistic expression and metaphor. In the series of works titled *Hollow Square*, Andre arranges precut timbers of western red cedar in quadrilateral perimeters of varying size. This rational ordering system, “anonymous” and uninflected by subjective decisions, draws the viewer's attention instead to the specificities of matter (which Andre considered his “palette”) and the relationships between element and whole.

In the 1960s, working through his own rejection of subjectivity and the sentimentality of Expressionism, LeWitt turned to geometry, devising basic sets of rules that, when executed, would design the artwork themselves. “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art,” as the artist explained in 1967. Framed white cubes act as neutral modules for his iconic series of *open structures*, which are then

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<sup>1</sup> Bernd and Hilla Becher quoted in, Liliane Touraine, “Bernd and Hilla Becher: The Function doesn't make the Form,” *Artefactum*, April/May 1989, p.9.

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programmatically altered or combined to form the final works. The aluminium works on view by LeWitt come out of his 1974 major project, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, such that each structure is an open cube, where between one and nine of the cube's twelve limbs are removed. The titles of the *Incomplete Open Cubes* exhibited reveal where in the schematic progression the frame lays.

Bernd Becher (b.1931, Siegen, Germany; d.2007) studied painting and lithography at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart (1953–1956) and typography at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (1957–1961). Hilla Becher (b.1934, Potsdam, Germany; d.2015) studied graphic and printing techniques at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where she met Bernd Becher. Since their first collaboration in 1959, the artists have exhibited extensively in prominent international group exhibitions at Barbican Art Gallery, London (2014); Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2014, 2004); The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2005); UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2004); and Documenta XI, VII, VI, V, Kassel, (2002, 1982, 1977, 1972), among many others. Important one-person shows include those at Photographic Collection/SK Stiftung Kultur, Cologne (2006, 2010, 2013); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2008); Nationalgalerie Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2005); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2004); K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf (2003); and XLIV Venice Biennale (1990), for which they were awarded the Golden Lion. The Bechers have been the recipients of other prestigious honors, including the 1985 Cultural Award from the German Society for Photography (DGPh), the 2002 Erasmus Prize, and the 2004 Hasselblad Award. The Bechers' work is held in prominent public collections around the world, including Tate Gallery, London; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Getty Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg. The artists have published over a dozen catalogues of their work since their first, the seminal monograph entitled *Anonymous Sculptures: A Typology of Technical Construction*, (1970), which outlined their lasting artistic project.

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