

ARTSY

11 Female Artists Who Were Pioneering Minimalists

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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It may be Frank Stella who's known for making the first push towards minimalism, with his radical black stripe paintings of the late 1950s—in which he replaced gestural brushwork with systematically rendered bands of black house paint. But by that point Carmen Herrera was already creating compositions in a minimalist style of her own.

As a movement, however, Minimalism was undeniably dominated by men, with even fewer women in its orbit than Abstract Expressionism—the style whose highly personal, dramatic, and angst-ridden ethos was everything that Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Robert Morris sought to upend. It was those two artists, Morris and Judd, who formulated in writing many of the ideas behind what we now know as Minimalism. Though they never named it as such or proclaimed it a movement, they were clear about their intentions. They called for simple, three-dimensional, geometric forms that were stripped of any illusionism, iconography, or personal expression and made using industrial processes and materials like plywood, aluminum, and plastic.

While a growing number of artists were making Minimalist work through the '60s, it wasn't until the 1966 “Primary Structures” exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York that this style was identified as a more widespread American phenomenon. Only three

women were included in that show (and only one of those artists, Anne Truitt, continued working in a minimalist mode). When the Jewish Museum revisited the exhibition in 2014 with “Other Primary Structures,” more women were brought into the fold, as were artists from outside the United States. Below, we take a look at 11 women artists who have made pioneering contributions to the pared-down geometric abstractions of Minimalism over the past 50 years...

Noemi Escandell

B. 1942, CAÑADA DE GÓMEZ, ARGENTINA



Noemi Escandell
Vector, 1966
Henrique Faria | Buenos Aires



Noemi Escandell
Diámetros, 1966
Henrique Faria | Buenos Aires

Escandell’s cool, geometric forms are not just abstractions: they’re politically charged. Coming of age as an artist in the mid-to-late 1960s in Argentina, during the notoriously oppressive and violent dictatorship of Juan Carlos Onganía, Escandell joined the radical, political collective

known as the Grupo de Arte Vanguardia in Rosario, after graduating from university there. Taking a stand against the dictator's fierce censorship, oppression of intellectuals, and mistreatment of rural workers, those artists joined forces with artists and activists in Buenos Aires to stage the now-famous collaborative protest "Tucuman Arde" (Tucuman Is Burning).

Escandell's work—abstract geometric forms on paper or built from wood—was censored. She couldn't publicly exhibit her art from 1968 to 1983, until Argentina became democratic again. For the Jewish Museum's "Other Primary Structures" exhibition, she created a giant painted wood version of her 1967 sketch *Displacement*, an X form stretching from floor to ceiling. The elongated limbs of the X are vaguely suggestive of a human form, but could also symbolize "a canceling out of the hegemonic narrative we've been fed about art history and Minimalism, specifically," as the show's curator, Jens Hoffmann, told *Art in America* in 2014.