

# WHAT IN THE WORLD???

## A CONCEPTUAL PROJECT

Art and Social Studies  
Grades: Upper Elementary

### BASED ON:

Sol Lewitt  
*Autobiography*  
New York: New York Multiples, Inc., 1980.  
126 pages. No text. All 2 ½ x 2 ½ inch black and white photos

### OBJECTIVES:

- Given a handout on Conceptual Art, students will compare and contrast the characteristics of more conventional art forms to those of conceptual art.
- After a presentation on Sol LeWitt, students will compile a list of the characteristics of his work, including pre-planning, impermanence, grids, and making art in a series or sequence. (Seriality).
- Given the choice of a theme, students will develop a written proposal for a serial work of photographs based on the theme. This lesson will focus on the thematic strands in social studies.
- Using their proposal as a guide, students will photograph people, places or things that relate to their chosen theme. The photographs will be compiled in an artist's book. The book form can vary. (See References)

### CONCEPT/BACKGROUND:

Conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's book *Autobiography* (1980) is a collection of over 1000 photographs of all of the architectural elements, furniture, and every other object in the artist's home. His idea was to catalogue the entire contents of his New York loft space, which resulted in a visual representation of LeWitt's life. The photographs were arranged in a grid formation on each of the 126 pages.

### VOCABULARY:

Conceptual art  
Seriality  
Documentation

### MATERIALS:

Camera, paper  
Glue  
Cardboard  
Other materials as needed for book form

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Hand out *What is Conceptual Art?* Discuss Conceptual Art as a kind of art that primarily uses ideas as the art materials. The finished product is not as important as the original idea. Emphasize to students that Conceptual Art is not easy to understand but is an art form accepted by many art historians and art critics...what do they think about it? How is it different from the kinds of art they are used to seeing?
2. Introduce Sol LeWitt and show examples of his work. Explain his methods of pre-planning, working in a series, using a grid framework, and working in a series or sequence. Have students make a list of the characteristics of his work as they view the examples. Focus on LeWitt's 1980 book *Autobiography*, a series of photographs in which he took pictures of everything in his home. Ask students why they think he called his piece *Autobiography*, and what characteristics of his work do they see exemplified in the piece (i.e. seriality, grids and pre-planning.)
3. Have students (or teacher) choose a theme or "big idea" from among the ten Thematic Strands of Social Studies curriculum standards (or they could work from just one as applicable to their focus of study.)
4. Students will write a proposal for their project, which will be a series of photographs that provide information about the theme. For example, a project could explore a student's identity through photographs of family members, cultural objects, and places specific to his or her life. The proposal will consist of the written idea, a timeline and a design for the book form. (i.e. accordion book, star book, flag book, etc.)
5. Students document their proposed theme with a series of photographs in either digital or film format.
6. Proposal and photos are displayed in artist's books made by the students.

**ASSESSMENT:**

- Based on the answers on their handouts, were students able to discern the differences between conceptual art and more familiar art forms?
- Were students able to identify the use of pre-planning, seriality and grids in LeWitt's *Autobiography*?
- Was the proposal for the project well thought out and stated clearly?
- Were the photographs related to the theme? Was the book well designed and crafted?

**NATIONAL STANDARDS:****VISUAL ARTS**

Standard: 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

Standard: 6: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

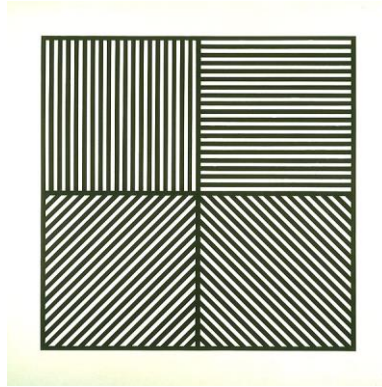
**REFERENCES:****Internet Sites:**

- Information on LeWitt's *Autobiography*: <http://www.zuckerartbooks.com/cgi-bin/zucker/816>
- SFMOMA website on Sol LeWitt: [http://www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/exhib\\_detail/00\\_exhib\\_sol\\_lewitt\\_bio.html](http://www.sfmoma.org/exhibitions/exhib_detail/00_exhib_sol_lewitt_bio.html)
- MyArtSpace blog about Conceptual Art: <http://www.myartspace.com/blog/2007/07/conceptual-question-is-it-art.html>
- Sol Lewitt's obituary from the New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/09/arts/design/09lewitt.html>
- *Static Pamphlet* article about Conceptual Art: [http://www.static-ops.org/articles\\_markandbec.htm](http://www.static-ops.org/articles_markandbec.htm)

- National Council for the Social Studies website explaining the ten thematic strands:  
<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>
- Lesson plans for creating artistic books from the San Diego Museum of Art:  
<http://www.sdmart.org/education-plans.html#book>

**Print Resources:**

- Kalina, Richard. "Means and Ends". Art in America. November, 2000.
- La Plantz, Shereen. Cover to Cover. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2000.



# What is Conceptual Art?

## CONCEPTUAL ART: IDEAS=ART

- Just as many artists use paint, clay or other media, conceptual artists use ideas (or *concepts*) as their creative material.
- Pure craft and skill are less important than the ideas behind a work of conceptual art. The finished product is only a result of the original idea and not the most important aspect of the artwork.
- Conceptual art can be challenging-think of it as a visual riddle!

Sol LeWitt compares conceptual art to the work of an architect, who designs buildings: "An architect doesn't go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He's still an artist."

### *What do YOU think?*

If someone comes up with an idea for an artwork but has others make the piece, who is the artist? The person with the idea or the one who gives the idea its physical form?