

Sandra Bridie
in retrospect: after sol, 1987
(Installation in Progress, 1995)



August 14 - 25 1995

Interview with Sandra Bridie by Peter Lambropoulos

August 1995

PL - Sandie, the first thing we should start with is perhaps, what significance has Sol LeWitt for you?

SB - This is a work from 1987, and I suppose I spent about one and a half years doing works which, kind of rested on the back of what Sol LeWitt had done, I just took a ride with him and imitated him, not really appropriated - but imitated him. After that the works travelled along the same route as him but were not so literally modelled on his projects. These were geometric abstract works and I really enjoyed doing them. I would like to have spent a lifetime doing them except that intellectually they didn't take me where I wanted to go. As far as the actual execution of artwork went, they were satisfying because they were decorative and repetitive and comforting.

So do you see that Sol LeWitt acted like a template really, and you just filled in the lines with whatever you chose to do?

And as a very literal template, because in this work I was really just colouring in the outlines or the main thrust of each design.

One of the first things you said in this interview was that it was imitating as opposed to appropriating, so do you see a similarity then in what Sherrie Levine was doing when she started appropriating people like Edward Weston's photographs of his sons calling them "After Edward Weston", in a way.

Yes, it is similar; it's a similar project that artists have done through the centuries. A lot of the works in provincial galleries are works done "after" the masters, sometimes even by known modernist artists like Matisse, Cezanne, etc. So there's a tradition of imitation of the masters, and assimilating their style.

Which has never been a problem has it?

No, no. But it seems as if you couldn't be too literal about it during the modernist era. That's where art schools are still pretty stuck; the aspect of the identity of the artist is still stuck in the modernist kind of rhetoric, I think.

Oh absolutely, the artist as authority and intellectual and everything. Its kind of knocks them back a peg or two doesn't it, I look at this stuff, and although the work is all based on Sol LeWitt, who I might add I don't know terribly well, but I get a real feeling that this isn't his work anymore, it is definitely yours.

The reason why I think this piece is successful is that the gesture - my gesture is so simple and there's a kind of bravado in me thinking I have the right to do this work. The work is this; its inscribing onto a book of photocopies made from an actual book of 195 combinations and permutations on the arc, circle and grid by Sol LeWitt which I borrowed from the VCA library in 1987. I photocopied each page, tracing in red the arcs and circles and grids which emanated from the corners or periphery of each page. I then reassembled the work back into its original book form and put it into a case, which I made for it with its new title on the outside. I've always kept the work in its original book form; so it's really nice to display it, spread it out. It's quite mesmerizing and optical. I've never really enjoyed it as a large piece, you know, I'd only ever executed the work and never seen it. I'd never known that there is fluidity in the whole work, the fact that the arcs become these intricate arabesques, or become larger circles etc.

Because I actually try and find where one pattern starts and finishes and then the next pattern begins and finishes.

But you don't really want to find the pattern repeating itself either, even though it seems necessary to make sense of it, you don't want it to become laboriously repetitious. The thing that I think is important about my work here is that I've used a lot of this kind of work from this era with my fictional artists. I've done some collaborations with my sister Jane, with her analysing the maths in it - detailing where I've made errors and so forth. But in all of that work I've back-dated it, so it seems like it might have been done closer to the time that Sol LeWitt was working like that, the '60s and '70s. So within the framework that I was setting up in those works the fictional artist was working in the style of, rather than appropriating Sol. For this, installation it's important that I'm claiming the work in real time, 1987, I think, and claiming myself author. But it's pretty strange that the thing that I claim authorship for is something that's in imitation of someone. So it's a kind of backwards-forwards step, or a very tentative gesture toward reclaiming my own signature.

It's quite interesting because in your space you invite people to produce works as either fictional artists or actual artists, and you've chosen this time to keep yourself as an actual artist, you're claiming yourself as one. That's a bit of a step for you isn't it, who normally likes to create fictitious personas and characters that you exhibit under?

Mmm, well for the last eight years that's all I've been doing, and I knew within the program that I've set myself for the Fictional and Actual Artists Space, I had set aside seven weeks free to do what I like in. I knew that I would come to some sort of identity crisis, which I did last week in actually having to do my own work; I was trying to work out ways to hide behind the work. And so, after a lot of bashing my head against the wall and pacing this room, I figured that I don't actually want to do fictional artists at the moment - at least not only fictional artists. Maybe it would be good to incorporate them amongst other kinds of work that I do, but it seems like too much

of a backwards step to only do fiction. Perhaps setting up this place was setting up a space where I could claim my right to authorship but also my right to fictionalise; to the liberty that that sets up as well.

Well it's quite interesting, because in the written tradition when we write a piece of fiction, well that's it, isn't it, I mean you create everything.

Yes, well it's legitimate in literature.

So do you see it as not legitimate in the visual arts?

I was thinking that I didn't want to make fictional art anymore, and then the conversation I had with myself was "Well if I don't allow myself to do fictional art, it's as if I'm saying fiction isn't legitimate either". And I think that it really is, I enjoy fiction, and I enjoy the fact that I've been assimilating literature, the techniques and devices that are natural in literature but not natural in visual art, I think that there's nothing wrong with that. So to completely denounce the idea of fictional art, I don't want to do, but I want it to be amongst the choices of approaches to work that I use.

To take a step aside now, you've been in this studio for what, six months, seven months, and I've just noticed that the floors is a grid.

Yes, and a pretty ugly grid.

And it's a pretty hideous grid, I'm just wondering, do you think your environment actually influences the way that you put the work up? Because you've actually pulled the book apart and laid it out in a grid form and the squares actually fit within the grid of the lino.

Well Amanda next door was saying that a few people downstairs here have been using that motif as well, so yeah it could be. You know I do look at the ground a lot. I don't analyse it, I just gaze, so maybe that comes into it. I was thinking also, this is the first time I've presented anything - even though they're just small pieces joined up together - that actually takes up a bit of space.

Oh well, but when someone just comes in cold they envisage it as one huge piece. I didn't think of it as singular pieces, I saw it as one whole. When Sol LeWitt made this work it was based on mathematical equations, do you know - were they made on computer?

I don't know. The work that he did was called "Arcs, Circles and Grids", and I called mine, "Sandra Bridie, Red Arcs, Circles and Grids". LeWitt's was published as a book in 1972. I don't know anything about the history of computers, but I imagine he got other

people to assist in the execution of the printed work, under his instructions, and they would have been mechanically produced, if not produced on computer.

Because there's a very strong feel of technology running through this even right down to your appropriations, your imitations I should say, which are photocopied. So I was wondering where you stand on electronic, computer generated, photocopy art, do you see that as an essential practice - an essential part of your work practice?

Well, my relationship with technology is pretty rudimentary, photocopies are about as far as I go, and using my word processor, which is about as simple a use of the computer as possible. I like the fact that using the photocopy for this particular work adds an extra grain to the surface, an extra variant to the texture of the whole piece, and when I use photocopiers I just reproduce images. I use it like a printing press to make my books, and that's it, I don't really manipulate images on it. I'm not interested in manipulating materials either, I'm not interested in manipulating paint, I'd rather paint a wall than paint a picture. So my relationship with technology is not very sophisticated.

When I first walked in I couldn't quite tell if the Red Circles, Arcs and Grids were actually computer generated, but you explained that in fact they were hand done.

Yeah, and in the more complex ones, it was like fighting through a maze of hatchings, and quite confusing, I think there's a few mistakes, and a few bleeps in the photocopies. I think I took the wrong road about once or twice in the whole thing, which isn't bad considering how dense the lines - the webs, get. So it was an exercise in negotiation, as well I suppose.

Do you see perhaps, that the little mistakes actually add to the work?

Oh yeah, and as I was putting it out I was thinking that I possibly should leave one out, and then I found that I had lost one anyway, but also Sol LeWitt did that too, he had experts correct his work, and that's why I was happy to use my sister Jane who's an engineer, to analyse my work and say how I had got it wrong. I was terrible at maths; I got two percent in fifth form. So it was like I was playing at being a mathematician, trying to do it as well as I could within my understanding of it, but not being a genius and not having a theoretical strategy, I just made up very simple logic rules. But Sol LeWitt allowed himself to be wrong too, and that's what makes his work interesting, I think, there are small errors, which break up the pedantry of it, that obsession with accuracy.

Were these painted Sandra, or?

Texta, two or three textas. That's why there are different shades of red on the photocopies.

Its interesting that you brought up the gradations in red, because I was looking at these and seeing the gradations in black as well. As the patterns become more intense and more complex the blacks become denser.

In the process, you start with a very simple arc, which is easy to trace, and then it becomes more complex, and then you get relief as a new motif is introduced, and you gradually build up and acclimatize your looking, to find which direction the arc will go etc. So it's quite a progressive sort of exercise.

Why return to this work, why return to 1987?

I haven't got this really worked out, but I think I'm playing with very vague notions of space, and temporal space in work, and certainty in work. Thinking that its legitimate to show retrospective work, to show unformed potential work, to show work that's just been put aside, left at a certain stage, and to have resolved current work as well. So that all these certainties and uncertainties and projections into the future and retrospective things can be fine. It will be interesting to see the work I select to exhibit for these ideas. A lot of my work has been collating from past work, and making comments through that rather than inventing new work. In the Fictional and Actual Artists Space I will invite other people to utilize these same possibilities that I set up for myself; to curate, to collate and to show potential ideas and past work. What do you think of this work, what did you think when you came in and saw it?

I was very surprised, I had no expectations, I just strolled in to have a look, was quite taken aback by the meditative quality to it, and I could imagine a kind of sheltered workshop, with rows of little people colouring in, in exactitude, and meditating over each line, very slow and laborious, and I was more taken aback by the complexity of some of the works.

I used to say I do "passive painting"; the passivity of this process is incredibly comforting. There are passages I've read by people like Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco and they talk about the comfort and pleasure of just transcribing, copying. It is something that is another world, which puts you in another state like the slow repetition of laps when you're swimming, or I imagine with meditation. You can have ideas while you are sitting executing this type of work and travel with those ideas.

That's interesting, when you mentioned all that, something that had been running through my head was 'Conceptual Painting By Numbers', which I really think this is.

Yes. Well I used to give instructions to my friends to do work, and they would to draw things and colour them in in the colours that I had given them, but they would do it wrong too.

Purposefully?

Well, no, there's just a problem with language. To write instructions you need to be schooled in how to write them, it's hard to be perfectly clear. But then as well, these people are my peers; they didn't want to obey me.

Well that's interesting; I think we spoke about this at the pub the other day. And it was that inherently, there are some people who follow instructions to the "T", and then there are other people who don't like to follow at all. Was that your encounter with your peers, that some did it "properly", as you envisaged it would turn out, and then others just didn't and did whatever they felt like?

Yes it was, and its interesting that it was my partner at the time who was the one who was the most "disobedient", would not be told what to do.

Perhaps that was his way of lashing out!

I think so; I think that said quite a lot, that I might have been a bit bossy. And so he completely subverted them, and turned them into something that, I think, I have in fact taken on - some of his disobedience to minimalism. Turning these discreet abstract images into an excuse to write a trite narrative. To deny its object-ness.

The other thing I also get from these is the veiling effect of the layers. Ultimately there is a veil when the original book is printed, with the dot screen that prints the book, and then you get the veil of the photocopy and then the veil that you put on top, so its actually quite complicated. I often feel that the original is so far recessed that it almost doesn't exist in a way. Were they conscious things that you were working with?

No, not at the time, at the time I just did the piece and I think that I've utilized a lot off the techniques of this in further work. But yes, I like to reproduce the image. I'm not interested in the original; I'm more interested in the meanings that attach themselves to work once its in publication, framed by the page. I think it has a different order of authority, which can be played with. They become historicized once inside a book or journal, to be put amongst other books on a shelf.

I often find that I get disappointed with the original after I've seen the reproductions, that the repros are slightly better sometimes.

Well I'm one of those terrible people who go to the catalogue first at an exhibition, and often don't even look at the work on the walls. I need to see the work in reproduction and in context of the text. I don't often take things in as the original.

So the text is very important for you in your work practice? Even right down to the Fictional and Actual Artists Space, I mean the transcribing of the interviews, the writing of catalogues. It seems that inherently, the text is what is important.

But usually I attach text to the work too, so this is kind of ground-breaking for me, because there's no explanation of how to look at it, how to interpret it, and maybe be disdainful toward it, because usually there's a kind of parody or disclaimer in my text that dilutes the value, or really quantifies exactly what value the work has.

The text does?

Yes, the accompanying statement.

Well, it gives you perimeters within which to look. Coming in here, you're really pretty much left on your own. If you're not very well versed in Sol LeWitt, I don't think you'd ever really know, except from the title.

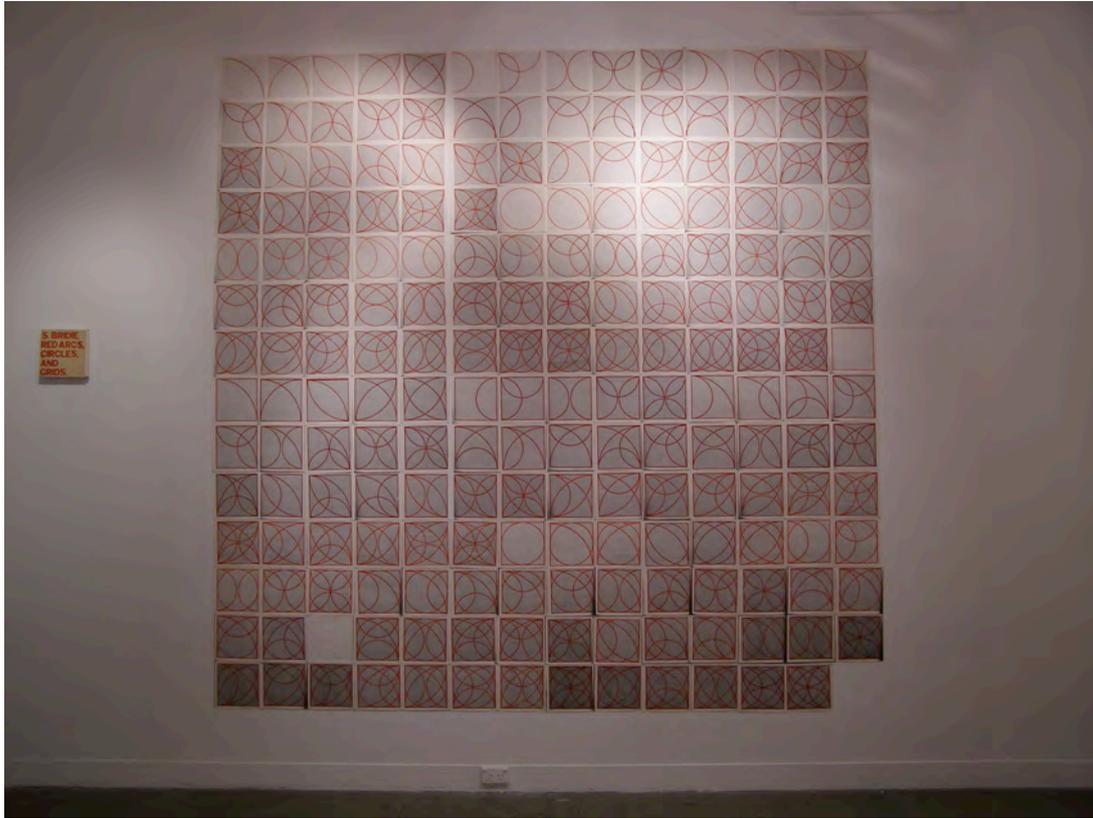
Yes, but the thing about that is that in the fictional works, there's the veil of the reproduction, and the veil of the fictional identity, and probably other veils as well. So this is like one less veil, but still... It's as much "it" as I'm ready to do at the moment.

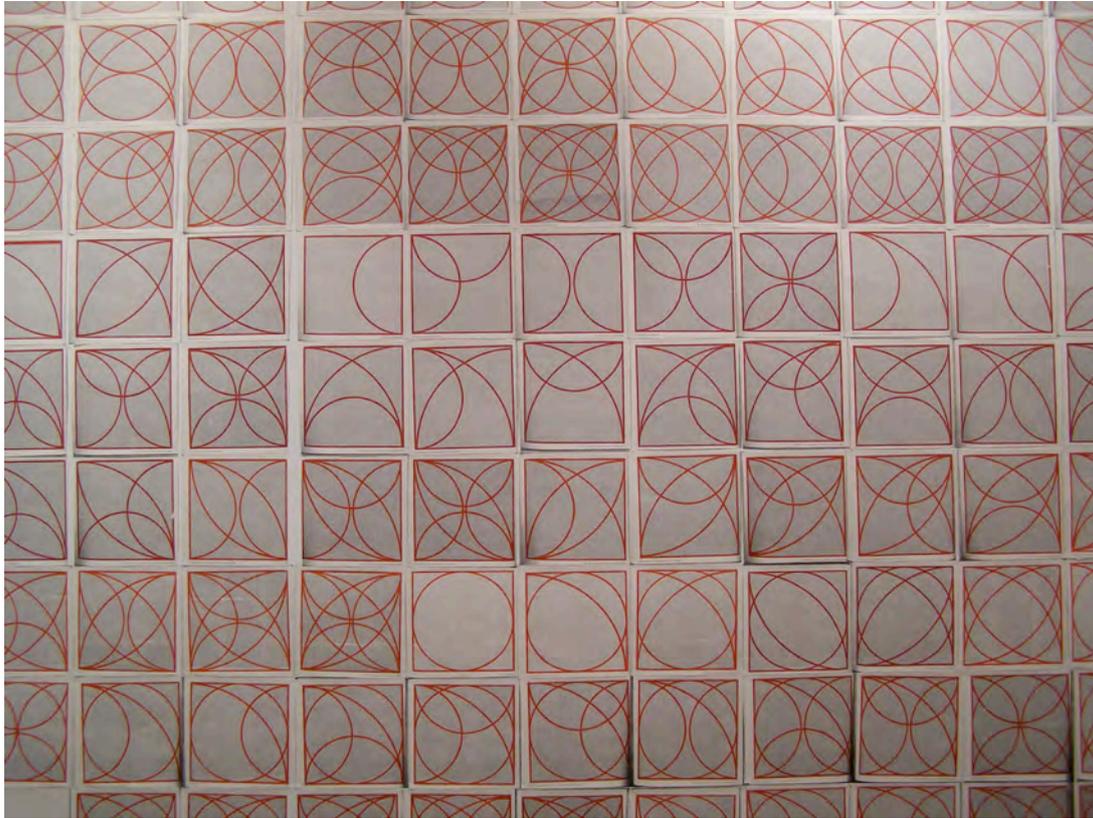
Is there any reason why the work ends up half on the wall, half on the floor?

Well, its very big, and I'm not too good on ladders, but also I'm going to take some snaps of this and then move the whole work around in different configurations around the space which is why the second half of the works title is "INSTALLATION IN PROGRESS". I can use it as building blocks, because I've never really played with installation at all. So what I will be doing in the next fortnight will be performing a fundamental exercise for anyone who does formal work. I've never learnt how to install work, so it could be quite a good learning experience to just play with it and move the sheets of paper around the walls. But, as you said, the first installation of it is half on the wall and half on the floor. I've never used the floor.

It gives the viewer a relationship to the work. They have to stand over it, but they can't get terribly close. I think we can finish there.

Thank-you Sandra.







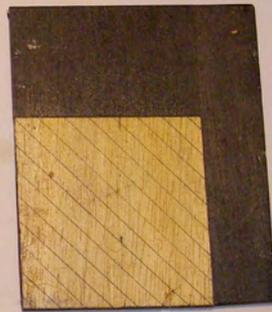
SOL LE VITZ COLLABORATION PROJECTS:
PROJECT NO. 4: LINES.

You will receive a box containing four sheets of 'Ingres' paper.
In the medium of your choice draw:

- 1) lines, not short, not straight, crossing and touching.
- 2) lines, not long, not straight, not touching.
- 3) alternate parallel lines: straight,
not straight,
broken.
- 4) alternate horizontal parallel lines of random length: straight,
not straight,
broken.

sign, title, and date each sheet of paper.

Please return this completed project to me in August.





GEOMETRICAL PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE CONSTRUCTIONS

The following problems are taken from the works of the ancient geometers, and are arranged in the order in which they are treated in the Elements of Euclid. The solutions are given in the margin of each page, and are intended to illustrate the principles of geometry, and to show the manner in which the ancients proceeded in the solution of these problems.

PROBLEM I. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of infinite length, in a given point on that line.

PROBLEM II. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line.

PROBLEM III. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line.

PROBLEM IV. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM V. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM VI. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM VII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM VIII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM IX. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM X. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XI. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XIII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XIV. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XV. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XVI. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XVII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XVIII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XIX. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XX. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXI. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXIII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXIV. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXV. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXVI. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXVII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXVIII. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXIX. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point not on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

PROBLEM XXX. To draw a straight line perpendicular to a given straight line of finite length, in a given point on that line, and to draw a straight line parallel to it.

