Nothing exists but atoms and empty space, everything else is opinion.
—Descartes

ANCIENT MONSTERS are conglomerations of body parts from different animals grafted together to produce consistent and recognizable images—signs that represent ideas and concepts without reference. The head of a lion is attached to the body of a goat, which is attached to the legs of a chicken with the tail of a lizard. Faced with an unknown, we make something identifiable with pieces of what we find already comfortable and familiar, thereby making the unknown recognizable. Or so we think. In fact, the creatures we make are not products of knowledge, instead, they arise within the culture due to our lack of information. The size of monsters is in direct disproportion to what we know.

For many, Don, knowledge was a moral imperative. You had to learn about the world and if you failed to do so, it was your own damn fault. He insisted on having his feet on the ground, having everything on verifiable facts, and learning as much information as possible. For him, either art could work with knowledge or it could remain ignorant, closing down pathways of thought, in which case it is supported by the oppressive structures of society, as ignorance always does.

The subjects in Don’s library of 3,000 volumes have an exceedingly wide range, from art history, archaeology, and astronomy to Zula culture. This is evident in his writings and notes that span geography and time as irrelevant categories. In the forthcoming volume Donald Judd: Writings (to be published this November), we have arranged his texts chronologically, as any other system would involve imposing a false order on something naturally arrived at. Don considered the divisions between fields of knowledge artificial, and to properly understand anything you had to read across categories and borders. The divisions in knowledge and in life were part of a society that controlled individuals, and it was the job of the individual to fight the prevailing culture in some personal manner. For Don, that meant creating his own culture in contradiction to the one in which he grew up. The Block in Marfa, Texas, and 101 Spring Street, New York, bear no resemblance to the zoning of suburban homes that Don occupied growing up in the Midwest—there are, in fact, against such structures. For Don, art was an ethical act, and always one of rebellion. Acts of individuals should be specific and wrong, just as the acts of large entities, corporations, and governments are predictably vague, broad, and mediocre.

In this exclusive excerpt of Donald Judd: Writings, it becomes clear that Don’s writing is the thinking between the acts of his art. The acts are the process, the abandonment of categories and stories so that the art and spaces can become fact, without myths or monsters.
4 FEBRUARY 1966

I want to illustrate and object to the steady decline of art and to the decadence of
architecture and in doing so defend the integrity of both. This discussion is about
the circumstances of the two activities, from the inside as to art and from the
outside as to architecture. These circumstances certainly include politics. Ordinary
politics are important because most of the long-standing, low-living attitudes of
everyone, including artists, are particularly social conventions. The most determin-
ing in general is the least considered. The great changes in the society, or not so
great, or meaningless, affect everyone and yet are almost irrelevant to achievement.
An immense slump in the artfield also affects the best people, and most, since they
think. It can even destroy them, yet it isn’t momentous in comparison to their
achievement. Modernism is more important than the Russian Revolution. I can’t
write for long without referring to a context, social or historical. These should
never be forgotten, as they often are.
7 DECEMBER 1986
I mind a little, but that's all, being unkind to those who deserve it; I'll probably not be sufficiently unkind, due to kindness, but also since the growing libel laws infringe on public discussion. Lawsuits are a domestic habit for the rich, and life and death for those who are not so. The libel laws became more and more a promotion of silence for crooked activities, a category comprising much of the use of art, especially by seemingly ambitious and serious private foundations. In order to write freely I'm going to say what I want and then if this is published ask a lawyer to delete the dangerous part, leaving spaces which can later be filled. A later printing can fill them. Primarily I'm writing for the same reasons as I make art: from uneasiness at not doing it, because I like to write, and because I want something to read, as Barnett Newman said he painted so as to have something to look at.
At least someone doesn't know what will happen, what their life will be, and later they do, for good and bad. This history is at least theirs, even if disappointing and disagreeable, so that it's a double blow if it's falsified. You at least deserve possession of your history; a true account is all you have of the past.
Art should be new.
Art should be made with the widest knowledge possible.
Art should concern what you really know.
Art should create all received information aesthetic or otherwise.
Visual art should be visual.
There should be no hierarchy: no frame, no pedestal.
There should be no movement: why should a static object imitate movement?
There should be no division of "form" and "content," and so on "pure form."
There should be no division of thought and feeling.
There should be no reference to the appearance of the world either natural or
unnatural, on the grounds that art exists equally and because art cannot reflect
appearances anyway.
Art is empirical and only grand in its small, clear existence.
Art is made in a condition of chance, way beyond what most people expect.
Paintings should be as flat as possible.
These dimensional work should be as three-dimensional as possible.
Michelangelo is wrong about painting. All work should seem to be the size it is,
not larger or smaller, not small, as a fragment, implying large, not large, mon-
umental, glorifying something necessarily smaller.
12 JULY 1987 101 SPRING STREET

Everyone wants to rate art and architecture as a matter of taste, when I want to consider it as a matter of knowledge.

4 APRIL 1989 EICHHOLZEN

Everything has been said before, so it doesn’t hurt to say it again.

24 APRIL 1989 EICHHOLZEN

Back to, why write? To dissociate my work from the bulk attitudes; for the record. Few understand it now and there is no reason to believe any more will understand it later, while the same falsifications will continue. I’m skeptical of the accumulated judgment and the long and superior view. Are the art historians going to improve? How thoughtful is de Tolnay about Michelangelo? Most of art history is also by now, which is only repetition, not accumulation, even if small and dull, as in some of science.
4 AUGUST 1968

A vast bureaucracy has been built on the assumption that artists are willing to work for nothing and lend art to exhibitions for nothing. It is amazing and unknown. Who works for nothing? This scene is very natural to everyone but it is recent, mainly since World War II. The origin is in the exhibitions in commercial galleries, a very different manner from those in museums, even if the latter follow the former. The artists struggle to make their work and this includes struggling financially. They construct a milieu that does not. They are the only source of art, which is the only reason for the bureaucratic structure. They’re a combatant in the superstructure of an aircraft carrier. Not only are the artists the single force, they are not supported, not in any way, including money; they provide work for nothing. And then for this their work is treated carelessly and their intentions are falsified and they are patronized. The bureaucrats, whose existence the artists justify, think they are doing them a favor: the animal should thank the butcher for the cut. The current of sales is held in front, the animal eats water in between, and the bureaucracy cancels the shit behind. And for this public service, if the animal gets a bite of the carrot, it is taxed by another bureaucracy several miles away, which defines it as goods material as commercial. Think what Mannoni provided. What did Italia do for him?

All performers are paid. If their performance is recorded they receive royalties, even dead. Some orchestra conductors, entrepreneurs in the used music business, secondhand musicians identified by secondhand societies, even get rich. Writers have royalties and copyrights. The least TV wriggles pays everyone concerned forever. Essentially artists work for nothing and if something is sold it is gone forever, subject to any treatment. In the United States if you are poor for thirty years and make money for five, you pay the same taxes as the subject who made money for thirty-five years. Artists receive nothing for public service; the institutions are subsidized.

I’m not arguing for support from the government, which, as I wrote quite a while ago, is too dangerous to be involved in the arts. In this case, do not also support the speculators. On TV lately a representative from Texas named [Dick] Armey was successful in getting the money the National Endowment for the Arts spent on an exhibition of the photographs of Edward Steichen, on the grounds that they shouldn’t have been shown. Armey said, more or less, if you want money from the United States government, you have to accept its interference. The answer to that is keep the money, and also let us keep our money. I remember that Barnett Newman was against grants from the government.

At that time it seemed reasonable to me that the central government, as the society should provide some support for art. The first fallacy of that is that the government is not the society; it’s a substitute society. The second is that its purpose are always primary and always against the integrity of any activity it subsidizes. The third fallacy is that it is not competent to judge art, that it is not competent at all. Its only claim to respectability was the efficiency of the Post Office. It takes a week at least to get a letter from New York to West Texas. And more from Europe—it takes so long to open everything. The great, efficient United States Post Office has been supplanted by numerous private delivery services. Is any other United States service better? Is the military, which has impoverished the country, any better?(!)

Donald Judd's Writings will be published in November by Judd Foundation and David Zwirner Books.

Visit us online at www.juddfoundation.com and visit Bekker at Donald Judd at Guggenheim, Writings 1959-1975 (summer 2015).