

# PHOTOGRAPHY & CONTEMPORARY COLLECTIONS

Sol LeWitt

***A sphere lit from the top, four sides, and all their combinations***

2004

Twenty-eight pigment ink jet prints

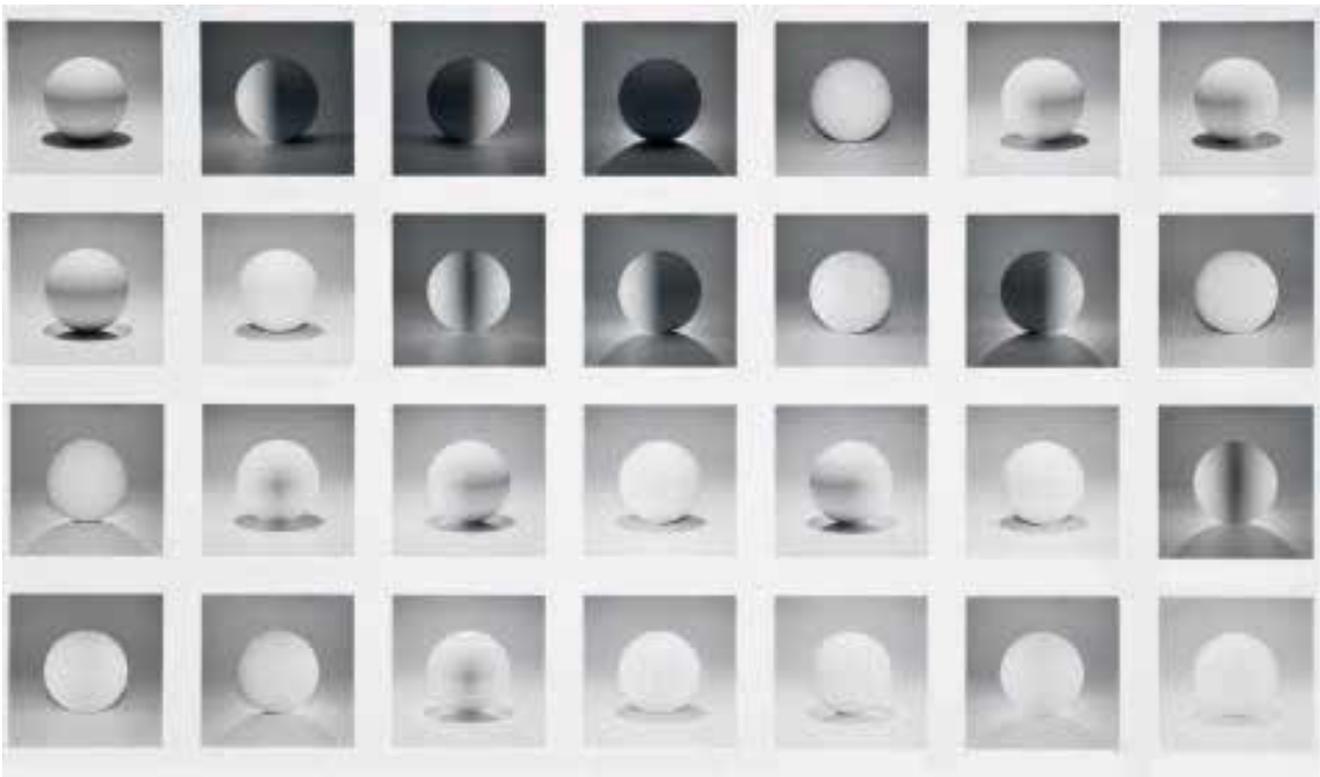
Each 18 × 18 in. (45.7 × 45.7 cm)

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Sol LeWitt established a reputation for his minimalist sculptures, paintings, and other artworks that were rigorous and precise in conception and execution. In contrast to the emotive handwork and sometimes accidental gestures of the abstract expressionists and earlier generations of artists, LeWitt's conceptual work was systematic and precisely planned. In his influential notes titled "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" published in the summer 1967 issue of *Artforum* he proposed, "When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."

In many ways LeWitt's sculptures, paintings, drawings, and photographs are predetermined by his clearly defined, often mathematical formulation, and can long exist as an idea awaiting execution. LeWitt's earlier use of photography was mainly as just another highly mechanical image-making tool, especially in his production of books such as the 1980 *Autobiography*, in which he created a photographic catalogue of every object in his living and work space in New York City. This series of twenty-eight images showing the systematic variations of light on a sphere has the characteristic conceptual distance we expect from Sol LeWitt. As was his custom with his paintings



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and drawings, the pictures were not created directly by LeWitt but by an assistant—in this case Jeremy Ziemann—who followed LeWitt's specific instructions. Yet the shifting images have a softness, and even visual humor, that transcends mere mathematical formulation and systematic execution. There is a kind of magic in the way the sphere seems stable in one frame but precariously balanced on the round edge of its shadow in another. In some images the shadow almost appears as a void, making the sphere appear to float in an ambiguous space.

At its most basic, LeWitt's work can be compared to the traditional assignment for beginning photography classes to photograph an egg under all possible lighting conditions. Just as the beginning photography student learns from this exercise that a white egg can appear as all shades of gray, even black against a bright white background, viewers of LeWitt's spheres are made aware that the core subject of photography is light, and the play of light and shadow.

