Minimalism, Media Spectacle, and the Paradox of Excess: Artistic Representations of Carl Andre's Controversies

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Abstract

Although often celebrated as a pioneer of minimalist art, Carl Andre is equally recognised for the media spectacles surrounding his career. In this paper, I examine the paradox of minimalism at the intersection of cultural excess, focusing on two scandals reimagined in contemporary works: Elisabetta Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* (2017) and Xochitl Gonzalez's *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* (2024). Benassi's work revisits the scandal surrounding Tate Gallery's acquisition of Andre's sculpture *Equivalent VIII* (1966), exemplifying how minimalism can provoke an excess of media scrutiny. Benassi compiles this cultural overreaction into an artist's book, transforming newspaper headlines into a commentary on excess in art criticism. In contrast, Gonzalez's novel engages with the controversy regarding the death of Andre's wife, artist Ana Mendieta, and his subsequent acquittal in her murder trial. Through the fictionalised character Anita de Monte, the novel portrays Mendieta's life, work, and untimely death, exploring how the art world tends to disregard women's voices. While they draw on distinct events, both Gonzalez's novel and Benassi's artist's book centre on pivotal scandals around Andre's life and career. Through a comparative visual and literary analysis, I consider the role of artistic and literary portrayals of these controversies in reshaping contemporary perceptions of the art world. Ultimately, I investigate how these representations reflect and comment upon the paradoxical culture of excess around a representative of minimalism like Carl Andre.

Introduction

"I stop worrying about what happens to a work after it's out of my control" (Tomkins 2011), reads a quote from American artist Carl Andre (1935–2024) in his profile for *The New Yorker*. Often considered to be "a founding father" (Chave 2014, 10) of minimalism, Andre became known for his sculptures made from metal plates, wood structures, or bricks. His work has received praise for the use of raw materials to accentuate the materiality of the art objects (Inaba 1999, 38), as well as for the sculptures' ability to transform (Rorimer 1978, 9), or cut[1] into the space surrounding them (Bourdon 1966, 15). Indeed, Andre considered himself to be "the first post-studio artist" (Tomkins 2011), as he ordered materials to be shipped from the suppliers directly to the exhibition sites, where he assembled his sculptures without any transformation of the materials required.

Andre's ideas ultimately changed public perceptions of art (Rorimer 1978, 9), although not without controversy. One of his most notorious works were the *Equivalents I–VIII*, a series of eight sculptures created between 1965 and 1967 (Inaba 1999, 38), each one consisting of a distinct rectangular arrangement of 120 bricks. In 1972, the Tate Gallery in London purchased *Equivalent VIII*, the last sculpture in the series, for its collection. Despite appearing in two exhibitions in the following years, the sculpture went largely unnoticed until 1976, when a newspaper published an article about the Tate's recent art purchases, including that of Andre's *Equivalent VIII*. This resulted in intense media scrutiny, with hundreds of news stories criticising the museum's use of taxpayer contributions to fund the acquisition (Tomkins 2011). In 2017, Italian artist Elisabetta Benassi revisited the controversy, compiling the newspaper headlines about the *Equivalent VIII* scandal into an artist's book titled *It Starts with the Firing* (2017), to highlight the exaggerated response to the minimalist sculpture.

Less than a decade after the Tate Gallery controversy, in January 1985, Andre married artist Ana Mendieta, who is frequently considered to be "one of the most prolific and certainly the most prominent Cuban-American woman artist of the late twentieth century" (James 2017, 570), and who became known in the 1970s for her "conceptualism, body art, performance, installations and earth art" (Blocker 1999, 10). Eight months after their wedding, in September 1985, Mendieta fell to her death from the thirty-fourth floor apartment she shared with Andre (Chave 2014, 5). While he was charged and tried for the second-degree murder of Mendieta, Andre was ultimately acquitted (Ludel 2024; Chave 2014, 8), due to insufficient evidence. This led to protests at his subsequent art exhibitions by feminist groups (Searle 2024; Chave 2014, 5; Tomkins 2011), most notably the Guerrilla Girls[2] who, in 1995, dubbed him "the O.J.[3] of the art world" (Chave 2014, 5; Swanson 2012; Tomkins 2011).

Following Andre's death in 2024 (Ludel 2024), author Xochitl Gonzalez published the novel *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* (2024), a fictionalised account of the life, work, and death of Ana Mendieta, retold primarily through the perspective of the eponymous character Anita de Monte. Throughout the work, Gonzalez explores the relationship and power dynamics between Andre and Mendieta, representing her murder and the subsequent haunting of Andre's proxy in the novel, minimalist artist Jack Martin.

Despite being one of the most significant artists within the minimalist movement, Andre has often succeeded in causing "maximum outrage" (Swanson 2012) through his controversies. Decades later, both Gonzalez's novel and Benassi's artist's book act as contemporary representations of these events, revisiting and retelling the two most significant scandals in Andre's personal life and artistic career. Whereas Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* centres on the exaggerated attention placed on Tate's purchase of *Equivalent VIII*, Gonzalez's *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* critiques the insufficient focus on Ana Mendieta's work, functioning as a reclaiming of her story beyond her victimisation (Gonzalez 2024b). Accordingly, I examine and compare each work employing a multimodal and literary analysis. In doing so, I consider the thematic and narrative resonances between the two works, particularly regarding their portrayals of Andre as a controversial figure. Ultimately, I determine how these retrospective portrayals reflect the paradoxical culture of excess that surrounds a pioneer of minimalism like Carl Andre.

The *Equivalent VIII* Controversy in the Artist's Book

Inspired by the 1976 controversy surrounding the purchase of *Equivalent VIII* by the Tate Gallery in London, Italian artist Elisabetta Benassi created an exhibition titled *It Starts with the Firing*. The exhibition occurred between 7 May and 17 September 2017, at Collezione Maramotti,[4] a private exhibition space in the town of Reggio Emilia, in northern Italy, and it was initially created as a site-specific project. In fact, *It Starts with the Firing* extended beyond the confines of the building, with elements of the exhibition installed across Reggio Emilia, leading viewers towards Collezione Maramotti:

> The exhibition starts outside the town: five sentences are printed on billboards located in the outskirts and on buses driving through the historical centre of Reggio Emilia. They are in English and talk about bricks: *Upon these bricks; Bricks a hot favourite; The bricks pull the crowds;* […] *Art may come and art may go but a brick is a brick for Ever. Bricks are for homes!* (*Collezione Maramotti* 2017)

Indeed, Benassi's billboards and posters featured newspaper headlines from the 1976 British press scrutiny of Andre's minimalist sculpture. These were also present inside the exhibition space, along with Benassi's own brick sculptures that, albeit not necessarily minimalist, were "far more legible than Andre's" (*Elephant* 2017). To accompany the exhibition, Benassi created an artist's book that shared its title, *It Starts with the Firing* (2017), composed of over fifty media headlines from the *Equivalent VIII* scandal.

In the beginning of her artist's book, Benassi explains the incident that instigated the controversy, referencing an article from 15 February 1976, published by the newspaper *The Sunday Times*, reporting on Tate's recent purchases (Benassi 2017, 3). The article in question was titled "The Tate Drops a Costly Brick" (Tomkins 2011; Inaba 1999, 39), a headline that, notably, does not feature in Benassi's artist's book. Instead, the headlines compiled in *It Starts with the Firing* correspond to the criticism and ridicule incited by *The Sunday Times* article, which focused primarily on the aesthetic simplicity of *Equivalent VIII* and the question of whether it could be considered art. Accordingly, while some newspapers expressed this with critical titles such as "They just looked like bricks…" from *The Star* (Benassi 2017, 61), and "What a Load of Rubbish" from *The Daily Mirror* (Benassi 2017, 15), others presented a humoristic perspective with headlines like "Mortar the point" from *The Guardian* (Benassi 2017, 113), a play on the expression "more to the point," likely another reference to the technical simplicity of the sculpture.

Visually, the eight sculptures in the *Equivalents* series were indeed simple, as well as similar to one another, composed of the same number of bricks stacked and arranged in different rectangular shapes (Inaba 1999, 46). Inaba further describes the original installation of the *Equivalents* at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, for which they were initially conceived in 1966:

> Though the name *Equivalents* refers to their organization and number of parts, their position relative to one another was key to the series. Not only was the overall figure essential, but so, too, the immediate space around each of the eight pieces. The dimensions between sculptures were similar to those between sculptures and gallery walls. As a result, Andre's series took on a fieldlike quality rather than one of isolated objects in a room. (1999, 46)

In other words, Andre created the *Equivalents* series specifically for the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, while considering the dimensions of the exhibition room and negative space around the sculptures. As such, the isolated exhibition of *Equivalent VIII* at the Tate Gallery ultimately changed the original function of the work which Andre had installed for a specific site, "stripping away this essential feature" (Inaba 1999, 53). This likely contributed to the public perception of the

sculpture as a "pile of bricks" (Jones 2016), as opposed to a structured artwork. Benassi comments on this perspective through her artist's book, removing the scrutinising titles from the context of the newspaper, thus creating what might be considered as a pile of headlines presented without the bodies of their respective articles.

This idea of the *pile* is mirrored in her 2017 exhibition, where she stacks large printouts of the newspaper headlines over metal racks, highlighting the cultural overreaction to the perceived simplicity and senselessness of Andre's brick sculpture. Moreover, Benassi's choice to use the artist's book form in the creation of *It Starts with the Firing* emphasises its critique of the scandal, as this artform typically employs the elements of book structure in unconventional ways to emphasise its ideas (Drucker 2004, 161). Benassi thus uses the book medium, a conventional literary form, to reproduce the newspapers' headlines without the body of the text, presumably a criticism of the lack of substance in the articles.

Another point of critique often mentioned throughout the scandal was the purchasing price of *Equivalent VIII*, which is often referenced in the headlines Benassi curates, such as "My wall is going cheap" from the *Luton Evening Post* (Benassi 2017, 41). In the introduction of the artist's book, Benassi states that "[a]lthough the [Tate] museum never disclosed the exact price, the piece was acquired for several thousand pounds" (2017, 3), which is speculated to be £2,297[5] (Taylor and Youngs 2024; Jones 2016). *The Burlington Magazine*, an established publication within the art field, likewise commented on the controversy at the time, raising concerns about the "the possibility that [Tate] experts were being made fools of and that public money was being misspent" (*The Burlington Magazine* 1976, 187). Indeed, the *Equivalent VIII* purchased by the Tate in 1972 was not the same sculpture Andre had initially created for the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1966. Instead, Andre recreated the sculpture with ordinary firebricks, having returned the unsold original's sand-lime bricks to the factory from which he had purchased them (Tomkins 2011). This contributed to the idea that the version of *Equivalent VIII* in Tate's collection was, fundamentally, a fake, furthering criticism of Tate's acquisition as a misuse of public funds (*The Burlington Magazine* 1976, 187). Despite this, Benassi's work highlights how newspapers involved in the criticism of *Equivalent VIII*, with the exception of *The Sunday Times* that published the satirical headline "'I'm afraid what you have here is a fake'" (Benassi 2017, 109), rarely focused on the sculpture's material originality in their titles. Instead, *It Starts with the Firing* shows how this controversy centred primarily on Andre's sculpting technique, which involved using unchanged materials to transform the exhibition space,[6] and on the idea that, because anyone could do that, it should not be considered art.

Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* addresses how the intense, years-long scrutiny from the press reflects an excessive criticism of Tate's purchase of Andre's *Equivalent VIII*, which ultimately affected Tate's reputation and its later ability to conduct similarly ambitious purchases (Brinkhof 2024; Tomkins 2011). Benassi achieves this by placing the controversy itself, as opposed to Andre or his sculpture, at the centre of her artist's book, reactivating this cultural overreaction to an otherwise minimal work. Although Carl Andre was "unfazed by the scandal that followed his bricks" (Brinkhof 2024), his career would once again become affected by a scandal involving the death of another artist, Ana Mendieta.

The Legacy of Ana Mendieta in Novel Form

In her novel *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* (2024), Xochitl Gonzalez retells the story of Ana Mendieta's artistic career and untimely death through her fictionalised counterpart, the titular character Anita de Monte. The narrative begins a few hours before Anita's murder on 8 September 1985, as the opening chapter introduces her strained relationship with her husband, minimalist artist Jack Martin, who is the fictionalised representative of Carl Andre. Throughout the novel, which does not follow a chronological timeline, the narrative perspective alternates between that of Anita, Jack, and Raquel Toro, an art history student at Brown University[7] in the late 1990s. While Raquel does not correspond to a specific person in real life, her character is inspired by Gonzalez's own experience at Brown, to which the author attributes her inspiration to write a novel about Mendieta's story (Gonzalez 2024b). In an interview, Gonzalez recounts having learnt about Ana Mendieta by accident, as her work had not been a part of the curriculum during her art history degree:

> I learned all about Carl Andre during my time at Brown, but I never heard anything about the criminal trial. Even though I learned about why Van Gogh cut off his ear or Cézanne's many mental health issues, but I didn't learn about the Ana Mendieta's murder. We just didn't. And that is a different form of erasure because it erases the pass he [Andre] got for most of his adult career. (2024b)

With this, Gonzalez highlights how Andre's work continues to be taught as a part of university curriculums without mention of his involvement in Mendieta's death, and the subsequent murder trial. This erasure is one of the central themes in the novel, in which Anita de Monte's work is virtually absent from art and academic institutions by the 1990s, and her death omitted in discussions surrounding Jack Martin, the fictionalisation of Carl Andre.

Accordingly, the novel culminates in Raquel confronting her thesis advisor about this erasure, during which he states: "[t]he simplest answer is that he [Jack Martin] was found innocent in a court trial and that it wasn't relevant to his art-making nor does it take away from his genius or importance, so why would it be relevant to mention in class?" (Gonzalez 2024a, 321). Indeed, this instance in the novel accurately reflects the sentiment around Andre within the art world, as Mendieta's death generally "goes conspicuously unmentioned" (Chave 2014, 13) in relation to Andre's work. Gonzalez addresses this omission in the novel, by creating an afterlife where Anita's spirit resides and can visit the world of the living only when her work is being seen or discussed.[8]

Accordingly, the restoration of Mendieta's legacy is one of the main objectives of the novel, as Gonzalez describes in an interview: "I wanted to pay homage to Ana Mendieta's story and suffering, and I mean suffering by what happened to her in that moment, but also what happened to her legacy" (2024b). As such, her inclusion of Anita's ghost, which can only be summoned by acknowledging her art, calls attention to the erasure of Mendieta from art history. When discussing Andre's work, the topic of Mendieta's life and work tends to be omitted by art institutions (Searle 2024; Katz 1990, 381), with a "nearly impenetrable 'wall of silence' […] around Andre in the art world" (Chave 2014, 21) protecting his legacy as one of the representatives of minimalism. As such, the novel's representation of this erasure addresses the necessity of acknowledging Andre's alleged role in "the awful fact that Mendieta never got to see through her profoundly promising career" (Chave 2014, 21), to preserve her legacy.

Despite Andre's acquittal, Gonzalez's novel emphatically depicts Mendieta's death not as a suicide or an accident,[9] but as a murder, with a graphic description of Jack Martin beating and throwing Anita from the window of their New York apartment (Gonzalez 2024a, 115). This scene represents several known details from the death of the real Mendieta, including the shouts of "No! No! No!" heard by the building's doorman (Tomkins 2011; Katz 1990, 35), as well as the scratches on Andre's face and body (Taylor and Youngs 2024; Katz 1990, 35) which the novel also includes (Gonzalez 2024a, 115). A later passage depicts Jack in conversation with his lawyer, in which he states: "'She went out the window,' Jack said. 'I didn't murder anybody'" (Gonzalez 2024a, 236). This references the transcript of Andre's call to emergency services, placed twenty minutes (Katz 1990, 13) after Mendieta's death, in which he described what had happened as follows: "My wife is an artist and I'm an artist, and we had a quarrel about the fact that I was more, uh, exposed to the public than she was and she went to the bedroom and I went after her and *she went out of the window.*" (Katz 1990, 11–12, my emphasis).

While only speculative, as there were no witnesses to Mendieta's fall other than Andre, the representation of her death as an intentional murder in the novel thus transforms Gonzalez's work into a form of protest, as it challenges not only the decision to acquit Andre of the crime, but also the continuous omission of Mendieta in discussion related to his work. Indeed, Gonzalez's novel is not the only literary representation of the event. In his non-fiction book *Naked by the Window* (1990), investigative journalist Robert Katz examines the events surrounding Mendieta's death and Andre's trial.

Conducting his own investigation in the process, Katz interviews the judge who had presided over Andre's trial, and acquitted[10] him due to insufficient evidence, who states: "Odd sort of person, Carl. *He probably did it.* Fifteen years was the least he would have to serve, if found guilty. Interesting case. Very close call" (Katz 1990, 370, my emphasis). The judge's belief that Andre "probably did it" is shared by those who, since the end of the trial in 1988, have protested at Andre's subsequent exhibitions (Chave 2014, 5; Katz 1990, 383). This includes the aforementioned Guerrilla Girls, and their poster comparing Andre to O.J. Simpson, as well as the notorious demonstration by the feminist group Women's Action Coalition at the inauguration of the Guggenheim Museum, where a banner famously read "Carl Andre is in the Guggenheim. Where is Ana Mendieta?" (Blocker 1999, 1), a rhetorical question that serves as a reminder of her death.

Similarly, Gonzalez uses the medium of the book to convey her message of protest, through her depiction of the Jack Martin character as a murderer. Despite this, Gonzalez states that this representation functions to return agency to Mendieta, explaining she "was tired of always seeing her [Mendieta] and her artwork framed in victimization" (Gonzalez 2024b). The controversy around Andre's acquittal is often the context through which Mendieta's work is discussed, this paper being no exception, which some have argued to be "however marginally, better than all-out forgetting" (Chave 2014, 17). As such, Mendieta's agency is returned in Gonzalez's novel, as characterised by Anita de Monte as both a spirit who exists through her art, and as a ghost who haunts[11] the man who murdered her.

Ultimately, *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* can function both as a means of remembering Mendieta through the representation of the scandal that followed her death, and Andre's acquittal of her murder. In her monograph *Where Is Ana Mendieta?* (1999), Jane Blocker describes remembrance as "a process, not a task to be completed; it is carried out through constant repetition and renewal. To be satisfied that Mendieta has been sufficiently memorialized is to admit, finally, that she is gone" (1999, 3). Thus, contemporary representations such as *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* become necessary for the preservation of Mendieta's memory, to prevent its overshadowing by Andre's legacy, with which it remains profoundly intertwined.

The ways in which Gonzalez's novel conveys its narrative is undeniably motivated by the scandal surrounding Andre's acquittal, specifically criticising its lack of negative impact in his career. This is not unlike Benassi's artist's book that, albeit without comment on Andre directly, similarly focuses on critiquing the controversy related to Tate's purchase of *Equivalent VIII*. While both works choose to focus on the scandals around Carl Andre, as opposed to on the artist and his work, the extent to which they shed light on the paradox of excess around a minimalist artist requires further analysis.

Comparing the Representation of Scandal

Although the works of Benassi and Gonzalez centre on different controversies surrounding Carl Andre, they present similarities in the ways in which they each depict scandal. Firstly, both portrayals appropriate existing materials and information, recontextualising them in the book format as a retrospective critique about each controversy. Using the medium of the artist's book, Benassi reignites the *Equivalent VIII* controversy, commenting on the disproportionate media scrutiny that erupted from a 1976 newspaper article about Tate's acquisition of the artwork. Through the compilation of several headlines that heavily criticised the museum's purchase, *It Starts with the Firing* thus highlights the excessive attention placed on Andre's minimalist sculpture. Similarly, through her novel, Gonzalez employs the medium of the book to depict the controversy surrounding Andre's acquittal of Ana Mendieta's death, and her erasure from subsequent discourse in relation to Andre's work. Through the fictionalisation of Mendieta's death, *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* incorporates real-life events into its narrative to reconstruct the scandal, acting as a form of both protest and remembrance of Mendieta's legacy in the art world.

Despite this, while both works derive from the book medium, Benassi's artist's book differs from Gonzalez's novel regarding the structure of their respective narratives. Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* constructs a story that is primarily spatial, as it implements the space within the book pages, the accompanying exhibition space, and the space throughout the Italian town of Reggio Emilia into its narrative. This emphasis on the spatial thus references Andre's artistic practice in the creation of *Equivalent VIII*, a sculpture that creates meaning in relation not to what it represents,[12] but to the space that it occupies. Conversely, Gonzalez's novel presents its narrative through a complex temporal framing, switching between not only different characters' perspectives, but also the past and the future. Through its non-chronological structure, the novel emphasises the passage of time as a crucial element of remembrance in relation to Ana Mendieta's legacy.

Throughout the novel, this is exemplified in instances such as Anita's spirit being unable to experience the passage of time in the afterlife (Gonzalez 2024a, 207), unless she is summoned into the real world through her art. As such, the concept of time in the novel comments on the process of remembering Mendieta through time as an act of memorialising her (Blocker 1999, 3). Nevertheless, despite their distinct approaches, both Gonzalez's novel and Benassi's artist's book similarly structure their narratives to reflect the respective subjects of their work: the spatial presence of *Equivalent VIII*, and the temporal continuity of Mendieta's legacy.

Moreover, both Benassi's and Gonzalez's works focus primarily not on Andre himself, but on the cultural reactions surrounding him. Benassi's artist's book centres on the phenomenon of media sensationalism in relation to minimalist art, specifically in relation to the excessive extent to which Andre's work was decontextualised and ridiculed. In this sense, *It Starts with the Firing* shifts its focus from Andre's work to the reaction of the media, transforming the scandal itself into the subject matter of the work. Likewise, Gonzalez's novel depicts the controversy by placing the narrative focus on Mendieta, despite Andre being at the centre of the scandal. As such, *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* functions as a critique of the institutional erasure of Mendieta, and the art world's protective silence around Andre after his acquittal of her murder.

Lastly, both works similarly employ satirical representations of specific elements of each scandal to emphasise their respective critique. In Benassi's artist's book, the decontextualisation of the newspaper headlines, by compiling them without the body of their respective articles, accentuates the absurdity of the controversy, as it mimics the removal of *Equivalent VIII* from the context of its production as a part of a spatial sculpture series. Gonzalez likewise incorporates real-life events into her novel as a means of critique, particularly in relation to the institutional forgetting of Mendieta. Specifically, through the characterisation of Raquel's advisor, a renowned art history academic who refuses to acknowledge Anita de Monte's death as a significant event within the discourse around Jack Martin, Gonzalez satirises the institutions that tend to behave similarly in relation to Andre.

Conclusion

In revisiting Carl Andre's two major controversies, both Elisabetta Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* and Xochitl Gonzalez's *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* use artistic interpretation to examine the scandals that shaped his legacy. Through their distinct uses of the book medium, each work challenges the ways in which history remembers Andre's career as one of the representatives of minimalism. Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing* invokes the controversial purchase of Andre's *Equivalent VIII* sculpture, specifically focusing on the intense scrutiny that emerged from it. By compiling newspaper headlines from the 1976 scandal, this artist's book investigates the reaction from the media directed at Andre's sculpture, commenting on the disproportionate sensationalism around the minimalist artwork. Accompanying the artist's book, the 2017 exhibition also titled *It Starts with the Firing* further addressed the excessive criticism of *Equivalent VIII*, as Benassi's sculptures of brick arrangements, not unlike Andre's minimalist work, were exhibited alongside some of the headlines from the 1976 controversy.

In contrast, Gonzalez's *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* engages with the memorialising of Ana Mendieta, while criticising the tendency within the art world to omit her in discussions around Andre. By presenting a fictionalised retelling of the events surrounding Mendieta's death, the novel challenges the persistent marginalisation of her legacy, exposing the gendered dynamics of recognition within the art world. Through the introduction of the character of Raquel, an art history student who rediscovers Anita de Monte's art years after her murder, Gonzalez establishes the necessity to continuously revisit Ana Mendieta, as she considers "it's more important to ask why do we still let female victims of violence get flattened to just being victims? And what can we do about it?" (Gonzalez 2024b). As such, beyond focusing on the scandal that followed Andre's acquittal of Mendieta's murder, the novel *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* emphasises the legacy of Mendieta, an artist whose work is often overshadowed by her relation to Andre, by her death, and by her victimisation.

Collectively, these contemporary works investigate the paradox of Carl Andre's legacy as "a founding father of Minimalism" (Chave 2014, 10) whose career has been marked by extensive controversy. Andre always attempted to remove personal expression from his sculpture, often expressing his hatred of "being called a conceptual artist, because [his] work is so material", and emphasising there were "no ideas, nothing, zero" (Tomkins 2011) behind his work, a stance which was ultimately one of the primary causes of the *Equivalent VIII* scandal. Additionally, despite art institutions' attempt at separating Andre's work from his personal controversy, the public's perception of his involvement in Mendieta's death inevitably impacted his artistic career, as groups of protesters demonstrated at Andre's exhibitions following his murder trial.

Thus, Benassi and Gonzalez highlight how minimalism's supposed simplicity is complicated by its connection to wider social and ethical questions in Andre's case. These retrospective portrayals also comment on the limitations of remembrance, suggesting that the official narratives around figures like Andre are often incomplete or contested.

Ultimately, by working within the material and narrative affordances of the book, both *It Starts with the Firing* and *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* not only reinterpret Andre's legacy, but also expand our understanding of how art, media, and storytelling can influence cultural memory. Following Andre's death in hospice in January 2024[13] (Ludel 2024), it is important to recognise the enduring relevance of these controversies in the construction of cultural memory within the art world. Thus, Benassi's and Gonzalez's works, and their respective representations of the scandals that shaped the career of Carl Andre, ultimately illustrate the narrative of excess that surrounds his legacy of minimalism. In doing so, these contemporary works accentuate a necessity to shift our collective focus away from the scandals, and towards narratives such as that of Ana Mendieta.

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Notes

[1] In an interview with David Bourdon, Andre explains his use of uncut materials in his sculpture: "Up to a certain time I was cutting into things. Then I realized that the thing I was cutting was the cut. Rather than cut into the material, I now use the material as the cut in space" (Bourdon 1966, 15). This use of raw materials to create negative space within the exhibition site is often considered the defining characteristic of Andre's minimalist work.

[2] Founded in 1985, the Guerrilla Girls are an anonymous activist group of feminist artists from New York (Guerrilla Girls. n.d. "Guerrilla Girls: Reinventing the 'F' Word: Feminism." Accessed April 10, 2025. https://www.guerrillagirls.com/about.).

[3] O.J. Simpson (1947–2024) was a former American football professional player who, controversially, was acquitted in 1995 of murdering his ex-wife, Nicole Brown, and her friend, Ronald Goldman (Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2025. "O.J. Simpson trial." Last modified March 19, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/event/O-J-Simpson-trial.). Andre is occasionally compared to Simpson, due to the similar circumstances surrounding their acquittals of murder, in relation to the deaths of their respective (ex-)wives.

[4] Collezione Maramotti is a contemporary art exhibition space in the town of Reggio Emilia, in Italy. The building is a converted factory, having previously housed the first industrial plant of the Italian fashion brand Max Mara. Collezione Maramotti was inaugurated as an exhibition space in 2007 to display the contemporary art collection of Achille Maramotti (1927–2005), the founder of Max Mara. (*Collezione Maramotti*. 2017. "A place for Contemporary Art." Accessed June 5, 2025. https://www.collezionemaramotti.org/en/history.)

[5] The value of £2,297 at the time of *Equivalent VIII*'s purchase in 1972, adjusted for inflation, corresponds to approximately £27,121.85 as of writing this paper in 2025 (*Bank of England*. 2025. "Inflation calculator." Last updated May 21, 2025. https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator.).

[6] Inaba describes Andre's *Equivalents I–VIII* series as "acting as a set of markers directing visitors through the space, [exceeding] the role of three-dimensional art as an object to be viewed" (1999, 46). This defines the sculptures' function beyond that of the visual, which Andre reinforced by allowing, and sometimes encouraging visitors to step on his sculptures (Tomkins 2011).

[7] Brown University, or Brown, is an Ivy League research university located in Providence, Rhode Island, US. (*Brown University*. n.d. "About." Accessed April 12, 2025. https://www.brown.edu/about.).

[8] Towards the end of the novel, Raquel looks at a photographic work by Anita de Monte. From Anita's narrative perspective as a ghost, this act is what summons her spirit from the afterlife (Gonzalez 2024a, 309).

[9] Andre initially claimed Mendieta had committed suicide (Katz 1990, 11), but later stated that she had accidentally fallen while attempting to close a window in the apartment (Tomkins 2011).

[10] For his trial, Andre forewent the right to a jury (Chave 2014, 8), an unusual choice for a murder charge as "a jury of twelve people is more subject to doubts, and therefore less likely to convict, than a single presiding magistrate" (Tomkins 2011).

[11] Throughout the novel, Anita repeatedly returns to the world of the living to torment Jack in the form of a bat (Gonzalez 2024a, 216). She has this capability since, within the reality of the novel, it is established "that all spirits could visit dreams […], but that only artists and muses could become bats. But only for as long as their art was serving its purpose: being out in the world" (Gonzalez 2024a, 257).

[12] Andre's work, including the *Equivalents* series, focuses on the use of unchanged materials within the exhibition space, as one journalist describes: "Equivalent VIII is the very opposite of conceptual art. Instead of airily escaping the physical nature of art into a world of thought, it dumbly and relentlessly insists on its material reality – and nothing else" (Jones 2016). As such, in addition to bricks, *Equivalent VIII* incorporates space into its medium, not unlike Benassi's *It Starts with the Firing*.

[13] Although Gonzalez most likely wrote the novel before Andre's death, *Anita de Monte Laughs Last* was first published on 5 March 2024, less than two months after his passing.

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