

PHONG H. BUI AND SOL LEWITT

JULY 17 – OCTOBER 4, 2025



**Phong H. Bui** (b. 1964), *Symphony #6 (for Richard Serra)*, 2024-25

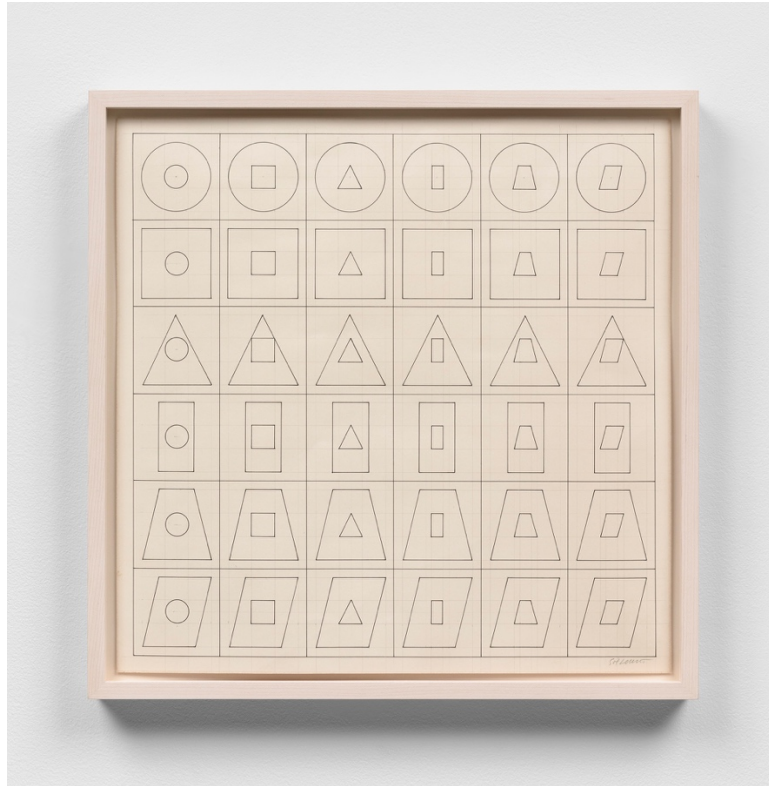
Portraits: pencil on paper. Meditation Paintings: gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper.

14 7/8 x 11 1/4 inches, each sheet; 50 1/2 x 105 1/2 inches, overall.

NEW YORK – Craig Starr Gallery is pleased to announce **Phong H. Bui and Sol LeWitt**, on view from July 17 through October 4, 2025. The show brings together a selection of Bui's recent meditation works and portrait drawings alongside sculpture, drawings, and photographs by LeWitt. Although their art could be described in antithetical terms—Bui's work associated with ritual and the body, LeWitt's linked to conceptual art and the mind—this exhibition explores their shared concern with process and the values of community and democracy.

Both artists propose a conception of drawing as the realization of a plan within which irregularity and imperfection can take place. In *Three-Part Drawing Using Three Colors in Each Part*, LeWitt preselected the direction, layering, and color of the lines to create a drawing filled with understated variations. In *Geometric Figures within Geometric Figures*, LeWitt chose and ordered six geometric figures (circle, square, triangle, rectangle, trapezoid, and parallelogram), and methodically presented all possible combinations of each figure within one another. Bui's works are similarly conditioned by the physical and conceptual parameters of his meditation practices. His paintings and drawings are constrained by the preselected type of pencil or paint and his

standard paper sizes; they are also limited by the specific durations and rules of his process. As art historian Charles Duncan explains, “Each portrait drawing is completed through a controlled ritual that is afforded eight to twelve hours; abstract pencil drawings take between five-and-a-half and twenty-two hours. His meditation paintings are conceived and executed methodically as a group of up to twenty works in which colored pigments are applied simultaneously and in order, ascending step-by-step to completion.”<sup>1</sup> The tension between idea and execution underscores both artists’ aspiration to engage the rational and the irrational, the calculated and the personal, as complementary halves of the creative process.



**Sol LeWitt** (1928-2007), *Geometric Figures Within Geometric Figures*, 1976

Ink on paper, 15 7/8 x 15 7/8 inches

Both artists use networks to highlight their commitment to values of community and democracy. Bui arranges his meditation paintings and portrait drawings as grids, referring to them as symphonies which aim to capture how “each [part] exercises his or her inner freedom through the uniqueness of their instruments... Even though there are differences among the sounds, each is treated as equally important. Hence our concept of equality is also being celebrated.”<sup>2</sup> Bui’s ideals resonate with the pre-set plans and modular arrangements LeWitt used to create his works. As

<sup>1</sup> Charles Duncan, “Democratic Visages: Portrait Drawings and Meditation Paintings of Phong Bui,” in *Phong H. Bui: Symphonies and Meditations* (New York: Craig Starr Gallery, 2025), n.p.

<sup>2</sup> Bui quoted in Charles Duncan, “Democratic Visages,” n.p.

LeWitt wrote, “The grid equalizes the spacing and makes all of the pieces and spaces between of equal importance.”<sup>3</sup> “The ink drawing is a plan for but not a reproduction of the wall drawing; the wall drawing is not a reproduction of the ink drawing. Each is equally important.”<sup>4</sup> The systems used by both artists speak to their shared desire to grant equal value to every aspect of their artworks, avoiding making any element or material intrinsically superior to another, and creating an equality of vision.

This exhibition is accompanied by the online publication of an essay by Alexander Nagel, the Craig Hugh Smyth Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. His publications include *Anachronic Renaissance* (2010), *Medieval Modern* (2012), *Amerasia* (2023), and *The Scales of European Painting* (forthcoming).

### **About Craig Starr Gallery**

Craig Starr Gallery is located at 5 East 73rd Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 11am-5:30pm, and by appointment. For general information please visit the gallery’s website at [www.craigstarr.com](http://www.craigstarr.com).

### **About Phong H. Bui**

Phong H. Bui (b. Huế, Vietnam; lives and works in Brooklyn) is an artist, writer, independent curator, and former curatorial advisor at MoMA PS1 (2007-10). He is also the Publisher, Artistic Director of the monthly journal the Brooklyn Rail, River Rail, Rail Curatorial Projects, and Rail Editions. Bui was the host and producer of one of the earliest podcasts *Off the Rail* on Art International Radio (2010-15). He has served as a board trustee of the *Miami Rail* (2012-17), the International Association of Art Critics (from 2007-20), Anthology Film Archives (2015-2021), and to the present the *Third Rail*, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, Studio in a School, Second Shift Studio Space of St. Paul, Monira Foundation, Center for Fiction, and the Lynn Foundation. He is also an advisory board member of Fountain House, Denniston Hill, Sky High Farm, Art Omi Pavilions at Chatham, among several other committees. He has taught at Yale, Columbia University and University of Pennsylvania, as senior critic for their Master of Fine Art programs, and taught graduate seminars in the School of Visual Arts MFA in writing and criticism, and MFA in photography, video, and related media.

Bui has received numerous awards, including the Compassion Award from Consolatio (2015), Artist Fellowship (2025), American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts (2021), an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the Arts (2020), the Jetté Award

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<sup>3</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Serial Project No.1 (ABCD),” in *Sol LeWitt* (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1978), p. 171. Reprinted from *Aspen Magazine*, n. 5-6, 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Wall Drawings,” in *Sol LeWitt*, p. 169. Reprinted from *Arts Magazine*, New York, April 1970.

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for Leadership in the Arts from the Colby College Museum of Art (2019), the Lunder Fellowship from the Lunder Institute for American Art (2019), the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation Prize in Fine Art Journalism (2017), the Esther Montanez Leadership Award from Fountain House (2016), the Art in General Visionary Honoree (2014), the Annual Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2003), the Eric Isenburger Annual Prize for Installation from the National Academy Museum (2003), the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship (1995), the Arcadia Traveling Fellowship (1998), the Hohenberg Traveling Fellowship (1987), among others.