

■ During the 1970s, LeWitt split his time between New York and Spoleto. And when he went to Italy it was often with his female companion at the time. The first to follow Wheeler and Conrad-Eybesfeld was a young artist (again, much younger than LeWitt).

Karen Gunderson—like Gene Beery, a native of Racine, Wisconsin—had earned a master’s degree at the University of Iowa and was teaching at Ohio State University (OSU), in Columbus, when she met LeWitt. Her classes included intermedia (she was a pioneer scholar in this new field), art history, and sculpture. As she recalled in an interview in 2014, “It was me and forty men at OSU. I got patted on top of my head or on my ass every day.”⁵⁰

Gunderson took a studio in downtown Columbus, where she could

drive in her 1964 Porsche 356C. The studio had no heating, but it gave her a place to do her own work—which at the time involved, among other things, spray painting. “At the time I was painting graffiti paintings of the clouds,” she recalled.

She met LeWitt when he did a structure for OSU’s School of Fine Arts: “I got there when [his assistants] were making the piece, blue lines on a white wall. He was standing there, telling people what to do.” It was just about finished when she said to him, “I think it’s beautiful,” and he said, “Thanks.” Then she said, “Let’s go have a beer.” And he said, “Let’s do it.”

As it turned out, the two members of the crew came with them to a tavern with a pool table on High Street. Teams for pool were chosen, and LeWitt and Gunderson formed one and the crewmembers the other. Gunderson recalled:

Sol and I won — and we bet the other guys. He was good at it. It must have been his instinctive geometry. Then we went up to my place. I had this incredible house on a ravine, built like a New England home. I’m short, so everything fit in it—it was built for short people. Sol stayed with me for a couple of days, and then he went back to New York. I would visit him from time to time. I had just gotten out of a nine-year relationship with a neurophysiologist. He was in Iowa, but he would follow me. And when he came to Ohio he’d make me [into] a basket case, and then he’d leave.

Gunderson decided to leave Columbus for New York, where she rented a loft in Tribeca. She wanted to live alone because she “really wanted to be independent and [was] tired of being taken over by strong men.” She fought sexism from anyone, saying, “I’m an artist, not a model.” LeWitt was what she needed, for the moment: “He was supportive to women.”

Their dating routine was not much different from what others experienced with LeWitt:

I remember the first time he took me to Umberto’s Clam House in Little Italy and told me about the mobster [Joseph Gallo] who had been shot there.

We went to the movies, too, but mostly we went to dinner. I remember having dinner with Phil Glass and other couples that were artists. They always tried to draw Sol out, but he didn’t respond

often. These were never big parties, usually just dinners with four people.

LeWitt took Gunderson to the cities in Europe where he had by then become a hot commodity. In 1973 and 1974 he had shows in Rome, London, Bari, Milan, Brussels, Amsterdam, Turin, Liege, Belgium, and Münster, and he spent time in Spoleto, where he introduced her to his new friends.

But this time it was LeWitt who did the leaving. Gunderson recalled: "A roommate of my college roommate — Michelle Calvez — worked for the French government's tourist bureau and American Express. She was very pretty and had a great accent, a nice figure, and a good sense of humor. I introduced [her] to Sol. They got together." He said to Gunderson, "I saw Michelle." She replied, "Ooh la la." Reflecting on this later, Gunderson said, "How could you be critical? It was the '70s, after all."

LeWitt's romantic French connection, his second in a fairly brief span, was just as short-lived as the first, and he was soon introducing Spoleto to another younger female artist.

As for Gunderson, she went on to have a formidable career as artist and teacher. She stayed in touch with LeWitt for the rest of his life, eventually becoming the first artist to have a show at the synagogue in Chester, Connecticut, that he and the architect Stephen Lloyd designed. And after LeWitt died, she produced an homage to him, *Water Edges #1*, a charcoal wall drawing, in Denmark.

She has many detailed memories of LeWitt, including recollections of what envious male artists said to her while she was dating him — mostly put-downs: "They said, 'He's an old queen.' I replied, 'It was the best sexual experience I'd had in years.' Though this was a slight exaggeration."