

Richard Serra, sculpture, forty years : [brochure] the Museum of Modern Art, June 3-September 10, 2007

Author

Serra, Richard, 1939-

Date

2007

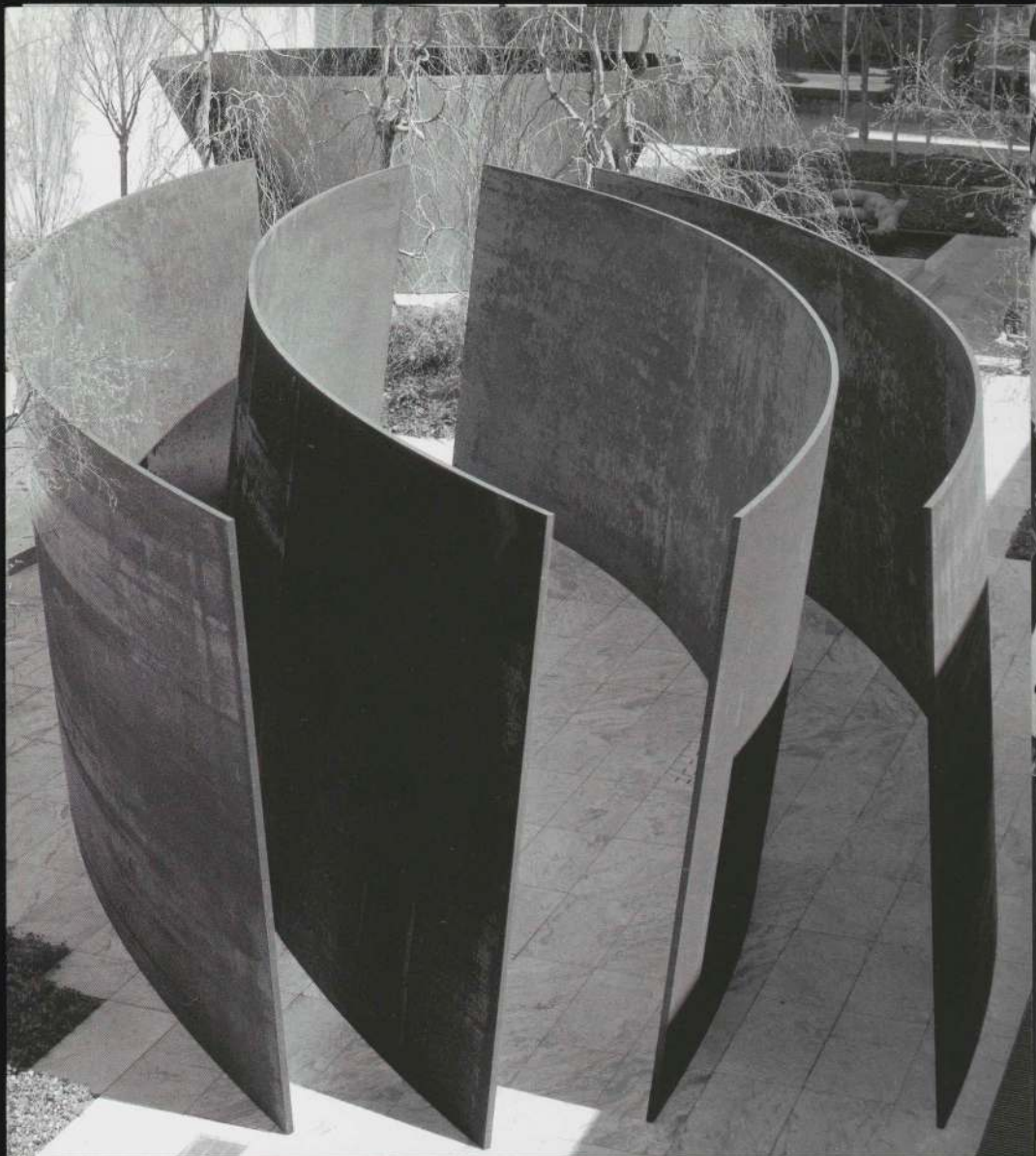
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RICHARD SERRA

SCULPTURE: FORTY YEARS

MoMA The Museum of Modern Art

JUNE 3–SEPTEMBER 10, 2007

RICHARD SERRA SCULPTURE: FORTY YEARS

is a major exhibition of the work of Richard Serra (born in San Francisco, California, in 1939). A forty-year survey of the artist's career, this exhibition includes three recently created sculptures. Work by Serra is installed in galleries on the second and sixth floors and in The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden. Encompassing different stages of Serra's career, this extensive and varied exhibition highlights the extraordinary inventiveness and vision of this influential artist who has radicalized and extended the definition of sculpture.

Serra has long been acclaimed for his innovative work, which emphasizes materiality and establishes a profound engagement of the object with the viewer and the site. In the early 1960s, Serra and other artists of his generation turned to unconventional, industrial materials. *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* begins with Serra's work from this period, when he was experimenting with materials such as rubber, neon, and lead. Over the years, the artist expanded the spatial scope of his work and began to focus primarily on large-scale sculptures that demand to be experienced over time, including site-specific works created for particular architectural, urban, or landscape settings. Serra's more recent work includes monumental sculptures such as *Intersection II*, 1992-93, and *Torqued Ellipse IV*, 1998, both on view in the Sculpture Garden, as well as the three new works created specifically for this exhibition.

SIXTH FLOOR: EARLY WORK 1966-86 *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* begins on the sixth floor of the Museum with a selection of Serra's early sculptures, made in New York in the 1960s. These range from early Post-Minimalist sculptures in rubber and neon to what the artist called Prop Pieces, completed at the end of the 1960s, and, finally, to room installations made of steel.

Serra graduated from Yale University's School of Art and Architecture in 1964, primarily trained as a painter; it was only after two years in Europe that he began to work as a sculptor. While living in New York City in 1966, Serra started experimenting with nontraditional materials, particularly vulcanized rubber, neon, lead, and fiberglass, and began to focus on the physical act of artmaking. He presented these unique materials directly on the wall and floor, making an important break with the traditional definition of sculpture as an object placed on

a pedestal.

Belts, 1966-67 (left), is constructed of discarded rubber that the artist recovered from a warehouse in his neighborhood, a fortuitous find. According to Serra, *Belts* is very much indebted to the work of the painter Jackson Pollock in its "non-compositional all-overallness." "At that point," Serra has said, "I was dealing with color, plane, line in high relief,



1 PHOTOGRAPH: PETER MOORE



these works, Serra was more concerned with a deliberate action than with a particular result: "Those lead casts were made ladleful by ladleful," Serra has said. "It was spoon against the wall, spoon against the wall, a continuous repetition to build up a ton of lead. Those pieces were built incrementally, they sometimes took days to make."

Serra's early, informal work, such as *Belts* and the *Splash Pieces*, was succeeded by a group of lead works created in 1969, known as *Prop Pieces*—precarious works that generate a sense of physical tension. *Verb List*, 1967–68 (below), not on view in this exhibition, is an important text work by Serra that relates to this series. Literally a list, this work was compiled by writing down verbs: "to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to dapple, to crumple, to share, to tear, to chip, to split, to cut, to sever, to drop, to remove, to simplify, to differ, to disarrange, to open, to mix, to splash, to knot, to spill, to droop, to flow,"

i.e., elements of an extended painted space." For the artist, *Belts* was a form of drawing, like Pollock's paintings, although this was an association Serra soon moved away from.

In addition to his use of rubber, in 1969 Serra began to experiment with lead, and created his *Splash Pieces* by throwing spoonfuls of molten lead against a wall in the warehouse space of art dealer Leo Castelli (left). Making

to roll	to curve
to crease	to lift
to fold	to inlay
to store	to impress
to bend	to fire
to shorten	to flood
to twist	to smear
to dapple	to rotate
to crumple	to swirl
to share	to support
to tear	to hook
to chip	to suspend
to split	to spread
to cut	to hang
to sever	to collect
to drop	of tension
to remove	of gravity
to simplify	of entropy
to differ	of nature
to disarrange	of grouping
to open	of layering
to mix	of feeling
to splash	of grasp
to knot	to lighten
to spill	to handle
to droop	to heap
to flow	to gather

to scatter	to modulate
to arrange	to distill
to repair	of waves
to discard	of electromagnetic
to pair	of inertia
to distribute	of ionization
to surfeit	of polarization
to complement	of refraction
to enclose	of simultaneity
to surround	of tides
to encircle	of reflection
to hide	of equilibrium
to cover	of symmetry
to wrap	of friction
to dig	to stretch
to tilt	to bounce
to bind	to erase
to weave	to spray
to pin	to systematize
to match	to refer
to laminate	to force
to bond	of mapping
to hinge	of location
to mark	of context
to expand	of time
to dilute	of carbonization
to light	to continue



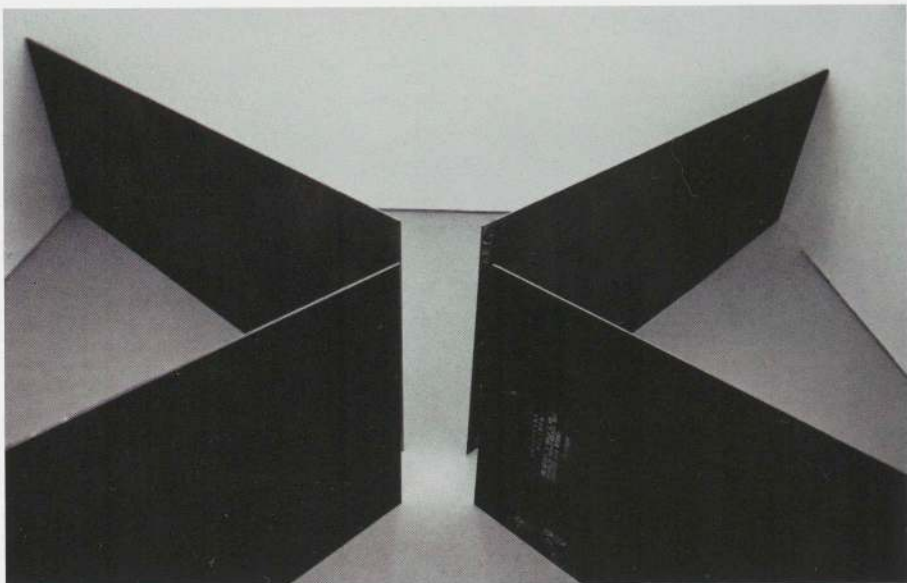
PHOTOGRAPH: PETER MOORE

you just enacted those verbs in relation to a material, and didn't worry about the results? So I started tearing and cutting and folding lead."

The result was the Prop Pieces, focused solely on resolving the mechanics of the proposition *to prop*. **One Ton Prop (House of Cards)**, 1969 (above), made of four lead slabs that together weigh one ton, has an almost weightless quality. "If the pieces are equally balanced," Serra has explained, "the weight is canceled out, you have no thought of tension nor of gravity." This sculpture is the solution to the practical problem of balancing four plates of lead, using nothing more than the objects themselves. "What was satisfying about the piece was that the aesthetic came from the solution of the problem and nothing extraneous was necessary," Serra has said. The impact of the Prop Pieces, some installed against the wall and others freestanding, is created by the contradiction between their seemingly precarious construction, unsupported and entirely dependent on gravity, and the weight of the material.

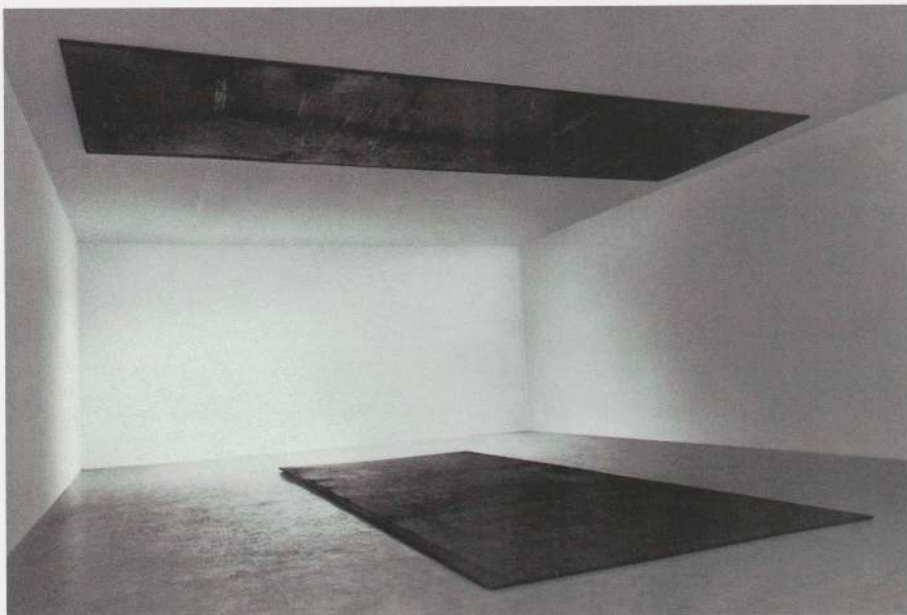
Serra's interest shifted to steel in the early 1970s, influenced, perhaps, by his time spent working in a steel mill. "I started building pieces very early (1968) that had to do with balance and weightlessness," Serra has explained, looking back at the Prop Pieces. "Most of the pieces were closed. What disappointed me was that you couldn't enter into their physical space." He commented, "I consider space to be a material. The articulation of space has come to take precedence over other concerns. I attempt to use sculptural form to make space distinct." Although Serra appreciated the malleability of lead, he was attracted to the weight of steel. **Circuit II**, 1972-86 (above right), composed of four steel plates installed in the four corners of the gallery, sets up a new environment for the viewer, who is forced to move through the spaces created by the work. In **Delineator**, 1974-75 (below right), a large plate of steel is installed on the ceiling and a plate of equal size

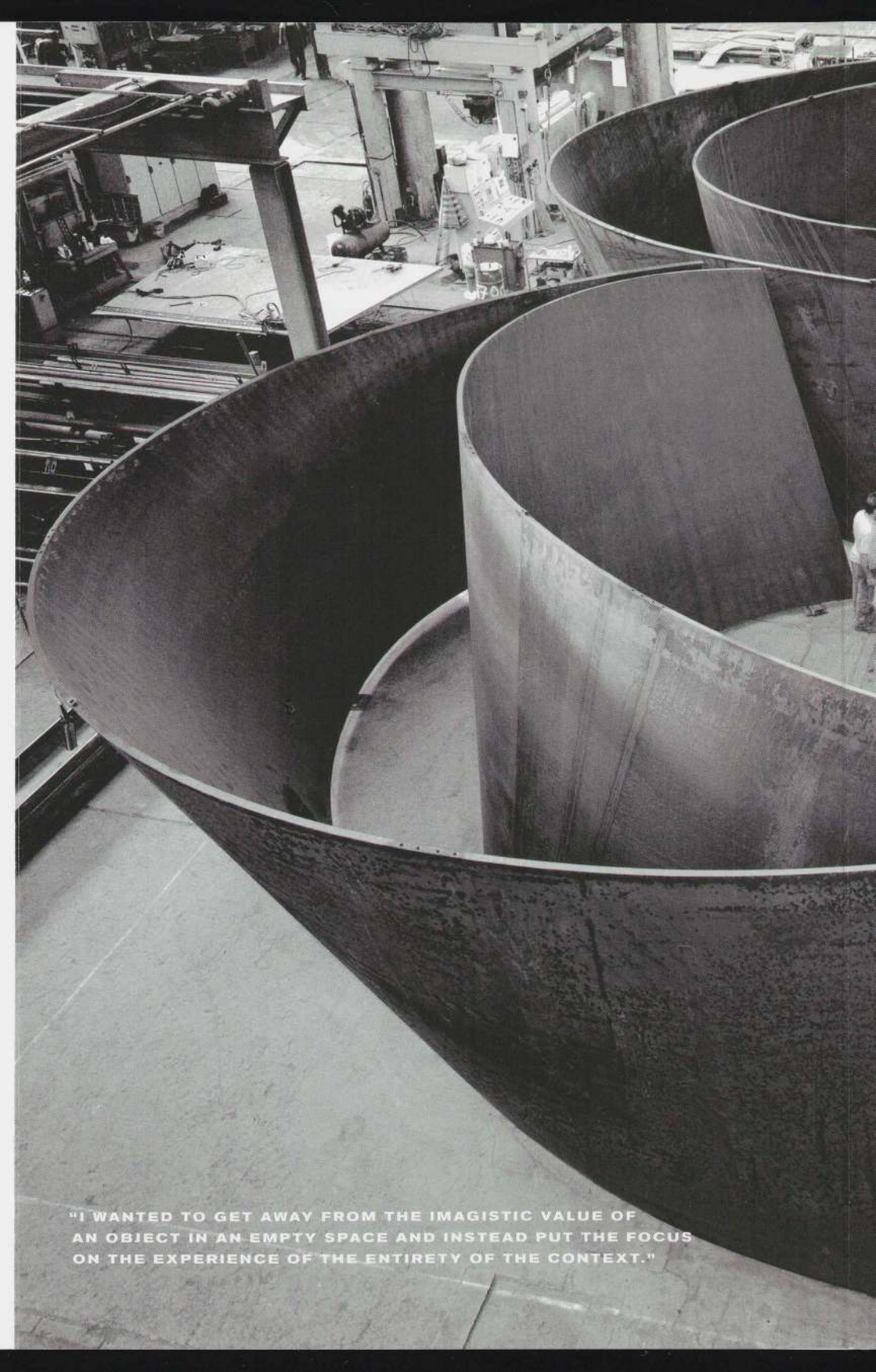
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rests on the floor; a dialogue is established between ceiling and floor, insistently affecting the viewer traveling through the environment. "As you walk towards its center, the piece functions either centrifugally or centripetally; you're forced to acknowledge the space above, below, right, left, north, east, south, west, up, down," Serra has said. For the artist, this experience of space is what the work is about: unlike traditional sculpture, it emphasizes movement and its psychological impact, not contemplation from a distance.

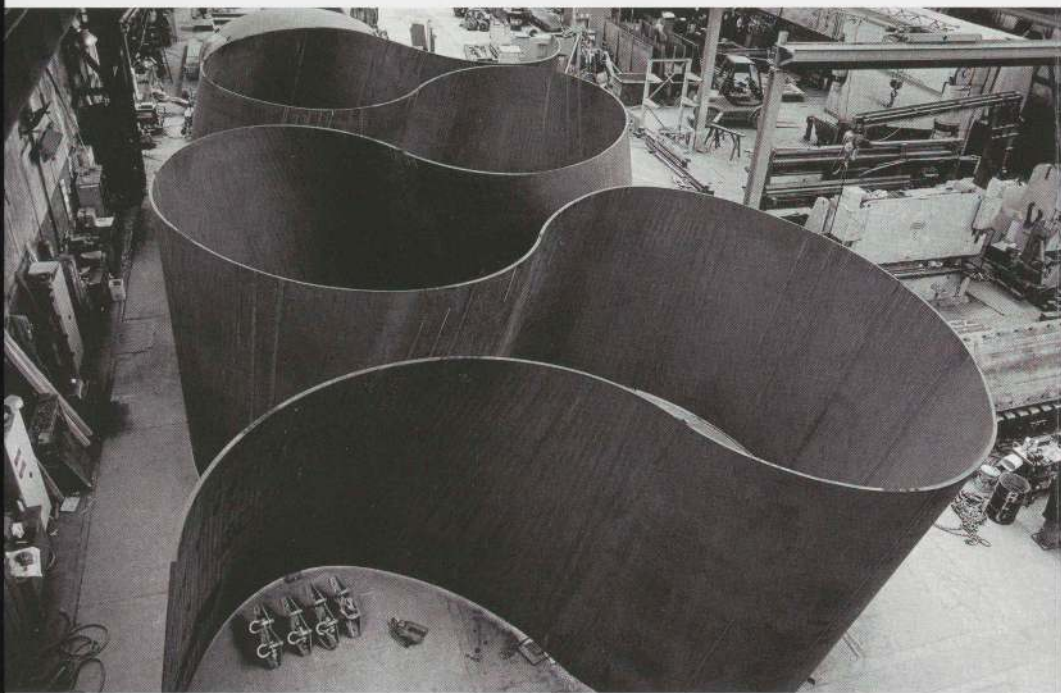
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"I WANTED TO GET AWAY FROM THE IMAGISTIC VALUE OF
AN OBJECT IN AN EMPTY SPACE AND INSTEAD PUT THE FOCUS
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SECOND FLOOR: NEW WORK 2006 Three new sculptures by Serra are on view in the Contemporary Galleries on the second floor of the Museum: *Sequence*, *Band*, and *Torqued Torus Inversion*, all made in 2006. The steel plates that form *Sequence* (overleaf) create connected spirals accessible from two ends: one entrance leads into a finite interior space, the other to a seemingly endless path through the undulating spaces created by the inner and outer steel plates. For Serra, this work engages with memory—with the inevitable inability of the viewer to construct any distinct memory of these almost indistinguishable and ever-changing spaces. With *Sequence*, Serra has expanded the psychological, experiential quality of his earlier work into an essentially abstract spatial experience.

According to the artist, *Band* (above), more than seventy feet long, is intended to be read horizontally as one travels the length of the sculpture. Unlike Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, 1996–2004, one of which is on view in the Sculpture Garden, *Band* has no distinct interior or exterior. Instead, through its undulating curves, the work creates four discrete spaces, differing according to the angle of the steel plates. Serra has said, "I wanted the speed of the skin to configure the volumes as you walk them. Nothing repeats. There is no beginning, no end to the band."

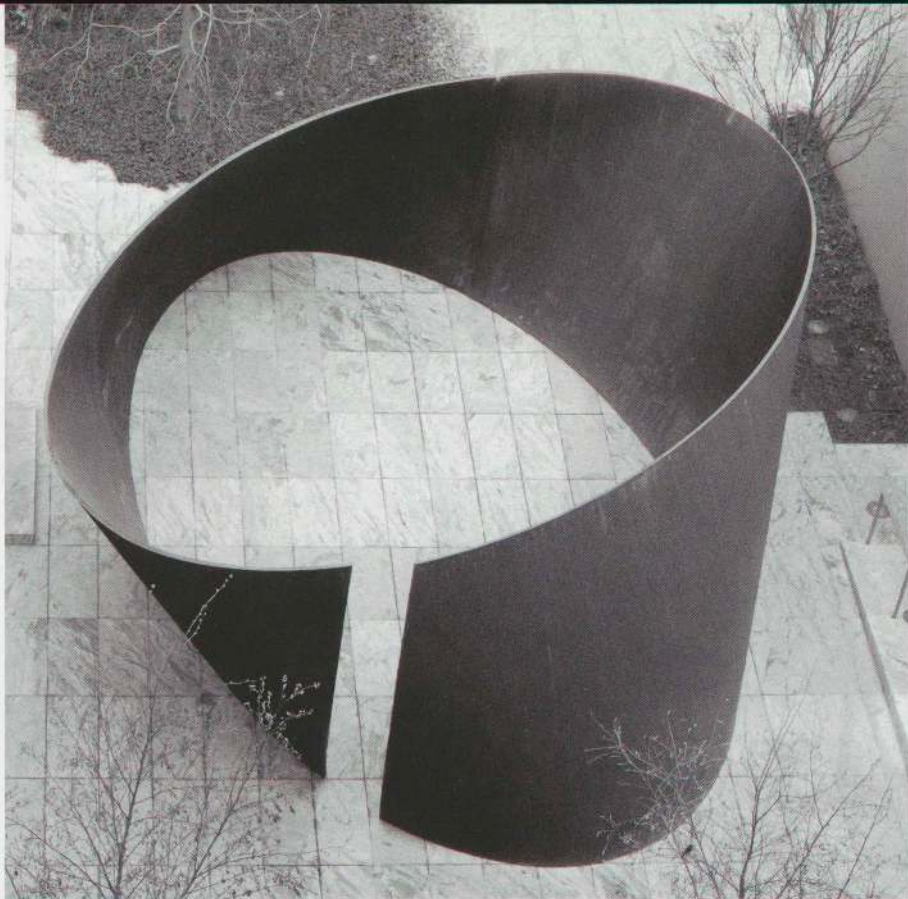
In creating *Torqued Torus Inversion* (right), Serra started with a familiar shape. "It is easy to understand what a torqued torus is if you think about the rim of a bicycle wheel laid on the ground," he has explained. "It is basically a form that curves in two directions: it curves in elevation and it curves horizontally." The work consists of two such shapes, one of them inverted, intended to be experienced successively.



SCULPTURE GARDEN: RELATED CURVES 1992–98 The steel sculptures *Intersection II*, 1992–93, and *Torqued Ellipse IV*, 1998, are examples of the range of Serra's work in the 1990s. With these large-scale works, Serra further developed ideas first explored with *Circuit II*. Here, the sculptural object is almost entirely supplanted by the experience of traveling through spaces created by enormous plates of steel. To make *Intersection II* (cover), one of a series of curved works completed in the 1990s, Serra tilted four identical conical sections in opposite directions—two tilted inward and two tilted outward. The result is three distinct, contiguous spaces within a single sculpture. Despite the weight of the weatherproof steel used for this work, the sculpture presents a certain buoyancy—the four plates evoke the hull of a ship. The size of the plates was carefully determined; they are just low enough to allow for the sky or ceiling above to remain visible, and high enough to make a significant impact on the viewer.

Torqued Ellipse IV (right), makes a bold adjustment to Serra's existing vocabulary, a change largely precipitated by a visit to a church in Rome: "I went to Italy. . . and saw Francesco Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1665–67). The central space is simply a regular ellipse and the walls that surround it are vertical. I walked in and thought: what if I turn this form on itself?" The unique shapes of the works in the *Torqued Ellipse* series are his response to this question. Serra's desire to work with new forms has been largely driven by a desire to construct new experiences: "I wanted to get away from the imagistic value of an object in an empty space and instead put the focus on the experience of the entirety of the context."





The exhibition is organized by Kynaston McShine, Chief Curator at Large, The Museum of Modern Art, and Lynne Cooke, Curator, Dia Art Foundation.

AUDIO GUIDE Listen to Richard Serra speak about his diverse body of work—from his early experiments with a variety of materials to his recent monumental steel sculptures. MoMA Audio is available at the Museum free of charge, courtesy of Bloomberg, and as an enhanced podcast at www.moma.org/audio. Available in English only.

WEB SITE The *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* Web site, www.moma.org/serra, features images of work from the exhibition, complemented by excerpts from an interview with Richard Serra by Kynaston McShine, Chief Curator at Large, audio commentary by the artist, a video walk-through of the exhibition, and a chronology of the artist's career.

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Accommodations generously provided by Millennium Hotels and Resorts.

ILLUSTRATIONS

COVER Intersection II. 1992-93. Weatherproof steel. Four identical conical sections, two: 13' 1½" (4 m) high × 51' 9" (15.7 m) along the chord × 2 ¼" (5.4 cm) thick, two: 13' 1½" (4 m) high × 50' 9" (15.5 m) along the chord × 2 ¼" (5.4 cm) thick. Shown installed in The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, with *Torqued Ellipse IV*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder. Photograph: Ken Goebel

- 1 Belts.** 1966-67. Vulcanized rubber and neon tubing. 6' × 25' × 20" (182.9 cm × 7.6 m × 50.8 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Panza Collection. Photograph: Peter Moore
- 2 Richard Serra throwing lead, Leo Castelli Warehouse, New York, 1969.** Photograph: Gianfranco Gorgoni
- 3 Verb List.** 1967-68.
- 4 One Ton Prop (House of Cards).** 1969. Lead. Four plates, each: 48 × 48 × 1" (121.9 × 121.9 × 2.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Grinstein Family. Photograph: Peter Moore
- 5 Circuit II.** 1972-86. Hot-rolled steel. Four plates, each: 10' × 20' × 1" (3.1 m × 6.1 m × 2.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Enid A. Haupt and S. I. Newhouse, Jr. Funds
- 6 Delineator.** 1974-75. Hot-rolled steel. Two plates, each: 1" × 10' × 26' (2.5 cm × 3.1 m × 7.9 m). Collection the artist. Photograph: Gordon Matta-Clark
- 7 Sequence.** 2006. Weatherproof steel. Overall: 12' 9" × 40' 8" × 65' 2" (3.9 × 12.4 × 19.9 m), plate: 2" (5.1 cm) thick. Collection the artist. Photograph: Lorenz Kienle
- 8 Band.** 2006. Weatherproof steel. Overall: 12' 9" × 36' 5" × 71' 9½" (3.9 × 11.1 × 21.9 m), plate: 2" (5.1 cm) thick. Collection the artist. Photograph: Lorenz Kienle
- 9 Torqued Torus Inversion.** 2006. Weatherproof steel. Two torqued toruses, each overall: 12' 9" × 36' 1" × 26' 6½" (3.9 × 11 × 8.1 m), plate: 2" (5.1 cm) thick. Collection the artist. Photograph: Lorenz Kienle
- 10 Torqued Ellipse IV.** 1998. Weatherproof steel. Overall: 11' 9" × 22' 6" × 35' 7" (3.6 × 6.9 × 10.8 m), plate: 2" (5 cm) thick. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional and promised gift of Leon and Debra Black. Photograph: Ken Goebel

PUBLICATION

Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years

Kynaston McShine and Lynne Cooke. With an interview with Richard Serra by Kynaston McShine and essays by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, John Rajchman, and Lynne Cooke.

The art of Richard Serra is internationally admired for its powerful material qualities and its searching exploration of the relationship between the work, the viewer, and the site. Indeed, since his emergence in the mid-1960s, Serra is widely understood to have radicalized and extended the very definition of sculpture. Simply the most complete view to date of the work of this preeminent figure in the art of our time, *Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years* offers a detailed presentation of his entire career, from his early experiments with materials like rubber, neon, and lead to the environmentally scaled steel works of recent years, including three monumental new sculptures created for the exhibition that this book accompanies. 420 PP.; 381 TRITONE REPRODUCTIONS

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

New York—The Creative Catalyst

Thursday, July 12, 6:00 P.M., Titus 2

Through a series of individual presentations and a moderated discussion, artists and scholars explore the various ways in which New York has been a source of adventure, inspiration, and creativity. Participants include Douglas Crimp, art critic and Professor of Art History and Visual and Cultural Studies, University of Rochester; Peter Eisenman, Founder and Principal, Eisenman Architects, New York; Meredith Monk, artist; and others. Moderated by David Joselit, Professor and Chair, History of Art Department, Yale University.

A Conversation between Lynne Cooke and Richard Serra

Thursday, September 6 at 6:00 P.M., Titus 1

Curator Lynne Cooke and Richard Serra discuss the artist's work and the exhibition.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

WORKS ON VIEW



SIXTH FLOOR: INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL GALLERIES

Delineator 1974-75

Equal-Parallel: Guernica-Bengasi 1986

Circuit II 1972-86

Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure 1969

Chunk 1967

Doors 1966-67

Trough Pieces 1966-67

To Lift 1967

Belts 1966-67

Untitled 1967

Slant Step Folded 1967

Plinths 1967

Remnant 1966-67

Equal (Corner Prop Piece) 1969-70

One Ton Prop (House of Cards) 1969

Prop 1968

Shovel Plate Prop 1969

Floor Pole Prop 1969

Four Plates Edges Up 1969

V+5: To Michael Heizer 1969

5:30 1969



SECOND FLOOR: CONTEMPORARY GALLERIES

Band 2006

Torqued Torus Inversion 2006

Sequence 2006



THE ABBY ALDRICH ROCKEFELLER SCULPTURE GARDEN

Intersection II 1992-93

Torqued Ellipse IV 1998