Michael Heizer, *Compression Line*, 1968/2016



Michael Heizer, *Compression Line,* 1968/2016.

1 Close Looking and Principles of Design

- What do you see as you approach and walk around the sculpture?
- What do you think the artist was trying to communicate about movement or space?
- What do you wovnder about the choice of material or the way it's placed in the landscape?

*Consider using terms like **line, form, scale, balance,** and **negative space.***

2 Learn More About the Artist:

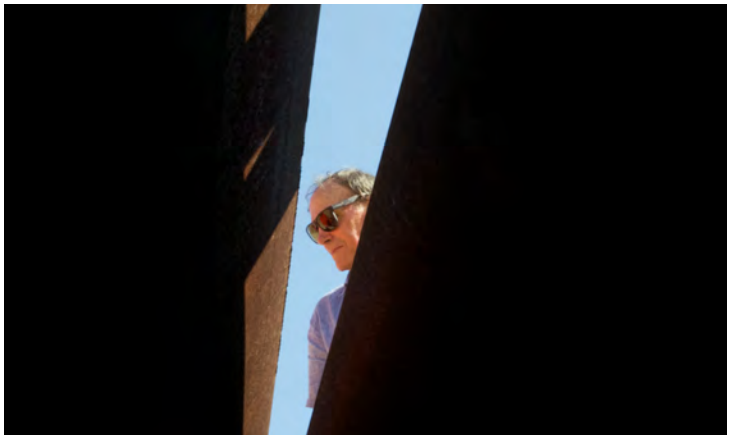
- Michael Heizer was born in 1944 in Berkeley, California. He began his art career in New York City but permanently moved to the Nevada desert after not finding much inspiration in the city.
- His large-scale earthworks marked the start of the 1960s **Land Art movement** in the United States.
- Heizer was deeply influenced by his family—one grandfather and an uncle were mining engineers, another grandfather was a geologist and mineralogist, and his father, Robert Heizer, was a well-known archeologist and anthropologist. Robert Heizer studied how ancient people moved huge stones, and as a teenager, Michael often traveled with him to visit ancient ruins.
- Today, Heizer is known for making very large sculptures, often by digging into the desert floor or using huge stones or steel to build massive structures. One of his biggest works is called *City*, which he worked on for over 50 years (1970–2022). It's located in the desert near Las Vegas, Nevada, and it's 1.25 miles long and 0.25 miles wide—about the same size as the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

About the Artwork:

- *Compression Line* was an idea Michael Heizer had in 1968, but the full sculpture was built in 2016, when Glenstone commissioned Heizer to create it for their campus.
- The first version was built in 1968 at El Mirage Lake in the Mojave Desert. It was initially conceptualized as a 16 ft long, 2 ft wide, 2 ft deep triangular tunnel made of wood. At Glenstone, the tunnel is made out of **weathering steel** and is 75 ft long, 10 ft wide and 10 ft deep. Weathering steel is a "self-protecting" steel that has thick layers of rust which protect the steel from weakening.
- Even though many people link Heizer with the **Earthworks** or **Land Art movement**, he sees his work as different because he often uses steel and heavy machines, not just natural materials like dirt and rock.

Glenstone Connection:

- Heizer started with a large steel **trapezoid** that was 75 ft long, 10 ft deep, 10 ft wide at the bottom, and 3.5 ft wide at the top. Once on the ground, he and his assistant used small **construction loaders** to push soil against both sides of the steel shape. They pressed the soil again and again until the steel bent inward and the two sides touched in the middle, something Heizer described as a "kiss."
- They covered the surrounding land with **red argillite** (a type of red stone) and planted trees nearby to help frame and highlight the sculpture as a complete work of art.



Michael Heizer



Installation at Glenstone, July 13, 2016



Archival image from installation in the desert near Mt Shasta, CA, 1962

3 Reflect

Worldview and Social Impact

- What might the sculpture suggest about humanity's relationship to the land?
- What questions does this artwork raise about construction, change, or the passage of time?
- What connections do you notice between the sculpture and the environment?

This invites discussion of empathy, interpretation, and perception.

Details and Material

Examine a section of the sculpture and landscape closely.

- What textures, colors, or shapes do you notice?
- What evidence can you find that shows how the sculpture was made?
- How does the light, size, or change of angle affect the way the work looks?

*Introduce words like **land art, weathering steel, surface, loader,** and **contrast**.*

Personal Reflection

After moving through the sculpture, reflect:

- I feel... (emotion or reaction)
- I think... (insight or idea sparked)
- I am... (state of being or identity)

Connect art to personal meaning, mindfulness, and self.

Michael Heizer, Compression Line, 1968/2016
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Photo: Jerry Thompson

Accessibility Note: Sculpture accessible from Pavilions Overlook only.