



Contour 290

2004

Weatherproof Steel

15 feet, 6 inches by 223 feet, 2 inches by 2 inches
(5 meters by 68 meters by 5 centimeters)

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Photo: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art.com

Richard Serra (b. 1938, San Francisco, CA, USA)

In his early life, Richard Serra spent time in shipyards where his father worked as a pipefitter during World War II. Serra also worked in a steel mill to earn money for college. After completing a BA in English Literature at the University of California at Berkeley and a BFA and MFA in painting at Yale, Serra spent a year in Paris and a year in Florence on a Fulbright Scholarship. Serra abandoned painting in 1966 to begin making sculpture, working with steel. In 1968 and 1969, Serra began working with structural engineers and outside of the gallery setting. Serra began working in the landscape in the 1970s and has developed steel art structures both in the US and abroad. Serra also works in film, releasing his first studio film, *Hand Catching Lead*, in 1968.

Contour 290 (2004)

For this site-specific commission, the artist made several visits to the property during Glenstone's initial design and construction phase to determine the best site for this unique sculpture. The full piece consists of 6 steel panels, each weighing 55,000 pounds, or 27.5 tons, for a total weight of 165 tons. To counter the movement generated by the natural freeze/thaw cycle of the earth, Contour 290 is fastened below-ground to a concrete footer.

The work's sinuous leaning line forms a ribbon that follows the contour of the land at the work's location in the meadow. While standing in one place, it looks flat. As you move, the view shifts and viewers realize that the shape of the sculpture changes. The name Contour 290 comes from the contour line drawn on the topographical plan used during the planning and construction of Glenstone; this notational device was what the artist chose to use to define the shape of the sculpture. Contour lines show the change in elevation relative to the distance from sea level. Contour 290 is 290 feet above sea-level, as indicated by the line on the plan. On either side of the sculpture are stands of trees, reinforcing the impression that the work is winding its way through a continuous, preexisting landscape. By following the topographic line of the land, the work celebrates a specific spot, the volume of land, and cuts through the landscape.

Reflections

What is the relationship between public sculpture and the land or space it occupies?

Considering the elements of Contour 290 (2004) that specifically reference the land it rests on, do you think you could move this artwork somewhere else and maintain the artist's original vision?