



Compression Line

1968/2016

A588 steel

75 feet by 10 feet by 9.5 feet

2286 centimeters by 305 centimeters by 290 centimeters)

© 2018 Michael Heizer

Photo: Jerry Thompson

Michael Heizer (b. 1944, Berkeley, California, USA)

Michael Heizer was heavily influenced by expeditions he went on to South and Central America as a result of growing up with his anthropologist father, and he draws inspiration for his work from the historical tradition of monumental sculptures. Another connection between Heizer's work and his family history can be found in that one of his grandfathers was a mining engineer and the other was the chief geologist for California. After growing up in California and spending the beginning of his career in New York, Heizer spent most of his career in the desert of Nevada, where he still resides today. Heizer is famous for creating sculptures directly into the landscape on a massive scale, helping pioneer the Land Art movement. Though he is commonly associated with the Earthworks movement, he considers his work distinctly different due to its common use of steel and heavy machinery.

Compression Line

To create the Compression Line, heavy machinery was used to remove large amounts of soil from the ground and place a rectangle of steel in its place. The same volume of engineered soil was then backfilled and compressed around the steel until it bowed and met in the middle. Red argillite was then placed on the landscape surrounding it. Similar to Collapse, on view in the Pavilions, there is drainage in and around the piece to prevent flooding. The piece is viewed from behind the glass wall at Heizer Overlook, directly outside of the entrance to the Pavilions.

There are two dates listed for the work because the idea for Compression Line was conceived in 1968 when the artist was making works in the Mojave Desert in California. Heizer then installed Compression Line at Glenstone in 2016 after many years of preparation. Heizer was on-site and involved with the construction of the piece. There is a smaller version of Compression Line, also made of weathering steel and set into the earth, at Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis.

Reflections

A significant theme in the work of Michael Heizer is its longevity. We can assume that the line of trees surrounding Compression Line, 1968/2016 will continue to grow year into the future. How do you think their growth will impact our perception of the artwork five years from today? How about 100 years from now?

In many works by Michael Heizer, including Compression Line, 1968/2016, he employs negative space. What is the effect of experiencing negative space within the context of the land or the landscape? Is the effect noticeably different than the employment of negative space in a painting or photograph? Why do you think this is?

Glenstone