

Richard Serra

Richard Serra's Torqued Ellipses elaborate concerns with orientation and movement, destabilizing our experience of space as we attempt to comprehend each sculptural volume. Beguiling and unpredictable, Serra's sculptures are meant to be examined in motion, forcing the viewer to become a wanderer. As a young artist, Serra was strongly affected by contemporary dance, which prompted him, he has said, to consider "ways of relating movement to material and space." It allowed him "to think about sculpture in an open and extended field. . . . I found very important the idea of the body passing through space, and the body's movement not being predicated totally on image or sight or optical awareness, but on physical awareness in relation to space, place, time, movement."

Inspired by the curved shapes of Italian architect Francesco Borromini's church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1646) in Rome, which he had visited in the early 1990s, Serra decided to take an elliptical volume and torque—or twist—it. He experimented with two small wooden ellipses held parallel but angled to each other by a dowel. This led to a template that he cut and rolled in lead. By varying the angles of the ellipses to each other, he gradually assembled some thirty models, then used a computer program to calculate how sheets of steel would need to be bent in order to realize these works at their full scale, a complex technical feat that could only be materialized using a rare steel-bending machine of large proportions, normally intended for the construction of battleships.

Serra's presentation at Dia:Beacon includes examples of all the variants within his typology of torqued sculptures: one is gently twisted; another is dramatically re-formed so that the overhang extends out some five feet; the third, a double ellipse, allows the inner chamber to be separated from the exterior by a disorienting corridor that unpredictably narrows or opens as it weaves its circuitous path; but even more labyrinthine and baroque is the latest in the group, *2000* (2000), a torqued spiral. In tracking the exteriors of the sculptures in their

constricted space at Dia:Beacon—a space, once this former factory building's railway depot, that the artist chose for its snug fit—the viewer is always close to the steel plates, which sets up a tension between bodily awareness and vision. Inside the works, the opposite of what is occurring at one's feet seems to be happening over one's head: the viewer's movements and responses are neither necessarily nor exclusively initiated by looking or seeing. Though the motion of the walls leading into these works is arguably even more difficult to follow visually than are the exterior modulations, only inside the sculpture can one grasp its footprint and upper profile. The upper and lower edges of each sheet form perfect ellipses, which never align but angle one to the other. The result of this operation is in each case a dynamic volume—an empty chapel, reminiscent of Borromini's model—that the viewer can traverse, but never entirely grasp.

Richard Serra

Richard Serra was born in San Francisco in 1939. After graduating from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1961, with a degree in English, he studied art at Yale University until 1964, taking classes with Josef Albers and others. Serra spent two years traveling in Europe before settling in 1966 in New York City, where he continues to live and work. He began to show his work in museums and galleries in New York in 1967, and since then he has exhibited extensively throughout the world, including representation in Documentas 5 (1972), 6 (1977), 7 (1982), and 8 (1987), in Kassel, Germany; the Venice Biennales of 1980, 1984, 2001, and 2013; and multiple editions of the Whitney Biennial, New York. Retrospectives of Serra's work have been organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1998), and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1986 and 2007). He has also created numerous site-specific sculptures in public and private venues in both North America and Europe. In 1997, Serra's first Torqued Ellipses were presented at Dia Center for the Arts, New York.

1. *Torqued Ellipse II*, 1996
Weatherproof steel
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of
Louise and Leonard Riggio

2. *Double Torqued Ellipse*, 1997
Weatherproof steel
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of
Louise and Leonard Riggio

3. *Torqued Ellipse I*, 1996
Weatherproof steel
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of
Louise and Leonard Riggio

4. *2000*, 2000
Weatherproof steel
Dia Art Foundation; Gift of
Louise and Leonard Riggio



west garden