Art of Our Time
Selections from the Ulrich Museum of Art
Wichita State University

Patricia McDonnell and Emily Stamey

With contributions by
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and Robert Silberman

Photo-essay by Larry Schwarm

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The minimalist sculptor Richard Serra first drew critical attention in 1968 with the exhibition of *Splashing*, a work he made by flinging molten lead against the wall and floor of the Leo Castelli Warehouse in New York. Beyond the cumulative, three-dimensional form it ultimately took, this piece was about the process of moving lead through space. A year later, he created *One Ton Prop*, a sculpture composed of four rectangular lead plates—weighing a total of one ton—proped against one another to create a sort of open cube. Although static, the work suggests potential danger: What if one of the heavy pieces were to shift out of balance and make the work collapse?

Such physical intensity and attention to space remain hallmarks of Serra’s work. Over the past four decades, he has reaped international acclaim for producing monumental sculptures, most of them wrought from rolls and sheets of Cor-Ten steel, that have a strong impact on the interior and exterior spaces they occupy. Seeing and comprehending these sculptures in their entirety requires viewers to move around them. Employing twists and curves both subtle and extreme, they convey an implied motion and, in turn, activate their surroundings.

Serra has also long been a printmaker, working out on paper many of the same concepts involving mass and space that he explores in his three-dimensional pieces. In 2004 he created a print series, *Arc of the Curve*, in which a nearly rectangular but ever so slightly curved black form occupies each sheet of paper. Tightly fit, these forms seem to strain against the confines of their white backgrounds. Every one of the prints bears a darkly confrontational mood. Printed on two seven-and-a-half-foot-tall sheets of paper that together measure eight feet across, *Double Transversal* is perhaps the most foreboding of them all.

To create this series, Serra worked with Gemini G.E.L. (Graphic Editions Limited) in Los Angeles, a nationally esteemed print workshop and publisher whose staff has frequently collaborated with the artist. In 2003 he asked Gemini G.E.L. to obtain the oversized copper plates that would be used in *Arc of the Curve*, explaining that he wanted to attempt “prints larger and fuller than any previous effort.” The print’s rich texture is the result of rubbings taken of an exterior stucco wall. A customized vertical tank-and-pulley system was built to accommodate the acid bath for the enormous plates that printed the texture. Each plate was etched in acid for four to five days and then coated with more than a pound of ink before its impression was made on paper.

Like Serra’s steel sculptures, *Double Transversal* has an undeniable presence that impels viewers to move backward in order to take in its scale and forward to comprehend its sensuous surface.
About the Contributors

Toby Kamps is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He has organized exhibitions on the work of Vanessa Beecroft, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenburg as well as such themed exhibitions as Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art (2000), Lateral Thinking: The Art of the 1990s (2002), and The Old, Weird America (2008).

Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include Marsden Hartley: American Modern (1997), On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art (2002), and Painting Berlin Stories (2003).

Laura Moriarty is the author of three novels and the recipient of several literary awards. Before becoming a full-time writer, she was a social worker. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Kansas.

Antonya Nelson has written three novels and published six short-story collections. She contributes often to the New Yorker and the New York Times Book Review. Nelson holds the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her award-winning novel, Living to Tell (2000), takes place in her hometown of Wichita, and her forthcoming novel, Bound, is set there as well.

Timothy R. Rodgers is director of the Scottsdale (Arizona) Museum of Contemporary Art. Formerly chief curator at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, he is involved in a range of writing and curatorial projects. His scholarly concentration is on American early modernism.

Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities campus. His chief scholarly interests have been photography, film, and contemporary art. Silberman collaborated with former New York Times photography critic Vicki Goldberg on the companion volume for the 1999 PBS series American Photography: A Century of Images.

Larry Schwarn is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, On Fire: Larry Schwarm, won the Henickman Book Award and Prize.


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