



GEMINI G.E.L. ^{AT} JONI MOISANT WEYL

RICHARD SERRA AT GEMINI G.E.L. | FIVE DECADES OF PRINTMAKING

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Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Moisant Weyl is pleased to announce *Richard Serra at Gemini G.E.L.: Five Decades of Printmaking*, an exploration of the relationship between Serra and the Los Angeles-based Gemini G.E.L. workshop, where the artist created the majority of his graphic work. Spanning fifty-two years and over 330 editions – the most prints produced at Gemini by any artist – Serra’s Gemini works pushed the boundaries of printmaking and probed the same questions of mass, weight and form that he investigated in every aspect of his art.

Serra, who died earlier this year at the age of 85, is one of the foremost contemporary artists of our time, perhaps best known for redefining a century of sculpture with his monumental steel installations. Less often appreciated are his historic contributions as a prolific printmaker. Remaining committed to a single palette – black – Serra’s deep exploration of printmaking stemmed from what he called “the invention of form,” and how various techniques on paper might display unique elements in his work. Serra’s exceptional approach to materiality allowed him to understand printmaking in a radically new light; rather than perpetuating the primacy of the image, Serra employed printmaking as a valuable proving ground to interrogate the physical relationship of plate and ink, depth and flatness. Deriving meaning from process, Serra’s editions offered new techniques and approaches that remain singular in the history of printmaking.

Serra began producing prints in the 1970s, and, quickly deeming the traditional medium of lithographic stone “too refined,” Serra began to print primarily from aluminum plates. Serra’s prints are often related to his sculptural works, using the techniques of printmaking to further his formal investigations. “The prints,” Serra once said, “are the result of trying to assess and define what surprises me in a sculpture, what I could not understand before a work was built. They enable me to understand different aspects of perception as well as the structural potential of a given sculpture.”

In the 1980s, in addition to pushing the limits of lithographic scale, Serra began to explore new textural avenues for his work through the medium of silkscreen. Serra was known for pushing his sculpture fabricators to achieve material innovations and unprecedented results; the same is true for his relationship with the Gemini G.E.L. printers. Together, they developed a technical process that combined screenprinting with hand-applied oil stick to create a sculptural, saturated field of black. Works such as *Carnegie*, created with the assistance of master printer Ron McPherson, signaled a new direction in Serra’s prints, turning towards what he called ‘multiple monotypes’ – editions that vary slightly in textural detail but share a common composition and formal impetus. Defying the flatness inherent in traditional printmaking for hundreds of years, this period saw Serra begin to literally move beyond the confines of the page.

The 1990s saw Serra experiment with new methods of etching, creating some of his most overwhelmingly large prints as well as his smallest - the *Videy Afangar* series, catalyzed by Serra’s installation of his *Afangar* project in Iceland and on view in our Project Space. Serra’s etchings, often marked by the smudges left by dirty plates and the strange three-dimensionality of their surfaces, are achieved through severely corroding a plate with etching acid to an extent historically only done as a printing mistake. Serra’s careful use of acid allows the prints to achieve a sort of reverse embossment, lifting his totemic figures off the page like sculptures themselves.



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Afangar also inspired Serra's 'intaglio constructions,' deeply textured print collages that use ink to seal a printed form to paper, elevating the print into high relief. In the intaglio constructions, Serra uses printing ink as an adhesive, a sculptural medium, and a tool of illustration, finding new boundaries for the material where no one else had even thought to look. Based on Serra's direct observations of Icelandic geography, this series is also the artist's only engagement with the landscape genre.

Richard Serra's prints of the late 1990s and continuing into the 2000s begin to prominently display the artist's eye for motion, as he moved towards swirling forms. Recalling the *Splash* pieces, where Serra splattered molten lead on walls, the artist here uses printmaking to capture a moment of motion, printing from plates etched after applying molten oil stick. The curling forms of his *Venice Notebook* and *Junction* series, as well as the first of his *Torqued Ellipse* images and the 2007 *Paths and Edges* series, are deeply gestural and intimately tied to the physicality of their materials.

During this time, Serra also became preoccupied with questions of size and spatial relationships, creating a series of increasingly large prints that evoke the altered perception his sculptures inspire. Some of the most monumental projects ever printed at Gemini, these prints are muralesque, dwarfing the viewer and instilling a sense of bodily awareness as virtue of their very scale. In works like the gargantuan *Double Rift V* and the only slightly smaller *Weights* and *Double Level* series, Serra further explored the optical effects of negative space, finding new qualities in the deep black color of ink through experiments in formal juxtaposition. "Black is a property, not a quality," Serra wrote in his 1998 *Notes on Drawing*. "In terms of weight, black is heavier, creates a larger volume, holds itself in a more compressed field. It is comparable to forging."

Serra's editions at Gemini always pushed material innovation in completely new directions, perhaps most dramatically evident in the exquisitely subtle *Composites* as well as the evolving sand, silica and oil stick mixture that gave editions like *Reversals* and the giant *Casablanca* series their signature grit and texture. Their shiny black surfaces recall asphalt and volcanic rock, dramatically communicating Serra's conception of pure, elemental form perhaps more clearly than any previous projects.

Serra's last project at Gemini was the *Hitchcock* series, which further refined the oil stick mixture and brought the awe of Serra's forms into a more intimate scale, a theme echoed throughout Serra's print oeuvre. Distinct from his massive sculptural installations, Serra's prints can capture the artist's ever-evolving practice on a scale small enough to appreciate in context. *Five Decades of Printmaking* aims to highlight Serra's legacy as a groundbreaking printmaker, and to appreciate the legacy of his extraordinary collaborations with Gemini G.E.L. and master printer Xavier Fumat, who collaborated with Serra for over 25 years. When the Hammer Museum honored Gemini co-founder Sidney Felsen and his wife Joni Weyl in October 2004, it was Serra who made the tribute remarks. Exquisitely expressed, in part he said, "Printmaking is a cult performed by practitioners who suffer from occasional anxiety, who demand guidance and support and patient collaboration, who need a witness to watch the process from the start, a witness who understands how the mark can be transformed and reproduced to evoke the printed image." From his first edition in 1972 to his last in 2024, Gemini G.E.L. has been proud to support and nurture the creation of an iconic body of work and an artistic voice as singular and clear as Richard Serra's.