

GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL

PRESS RELEASE

RICHARD SERRA: "TORQUED ELLIPSES AND ROUNDS"

Exhibited at GEMINI G.E.L. AT JONI MOISANT WEYL
November 3 - December 31, 1999

On view from November 3rd at Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Moisant Weyl is a one-person exhibition of 15 new etchings by sculptor Richard Serra. The result of Serra's collaboration with the Los Angeles-based artists' workshop, Gemini G.E.L., the exhibition includes 9 "Rounds" and 6 "Torqued Ellipses", all large and highly-textured prints.

"Drawing has always been a method for me to bring sculpture to definition", says Serra. Although best known as a sculptor, drawing and printmaking is central to his work. It helps him re-examine and codify his sculptures, and allows the viewer an insight into his creative process. In these two bodies of imagery, the artist gives us a view as if seen from above. The artist's massive "Rounds" are sculpted of forged solid steel, and these new richly-textured etchings evoke the sculptures' weight and pot-marked surfaces. The powerful, energetic imagery of the "Torqued Ellipse" etchings relate to his celebrated *Torqued Ellipse* sculptures which were exhibited in the past year at the Dia Center in New York City, MoCA Los Angeles and the Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain.

Serra is an extraordinary printmaker, and these prints, although called "etchings", were created through a complex series of processes, demonstrating the artist's intent on pushing the limits of the medium. To begin, Serra worked the surface of copper printing plates by building up layer upon layer of Paintstik or lithographic crayon. Selected randomly, he would either pour the molten material or rub the solid material onto a plate laid flat on the floor, permitting him to press the material through an aluminum screen, often using his feet. The physical force used to draw the imagery is clearly evident in the finished prints. Many days of chemical processing of the plate followed, deeply biting it to capture the textured surfaces of the artist's drawing. Each plate required between 2 1/2 to 3 hours inking and preparation time prior to putting it through the press. Sheets of thick, handmade paper specifically made for this project required many days of drying time prior to their being presented to the artist for signing. In all, this series of 15 images has taken nearly 2 years to complete, dating from when Serra began his drawings onto plates in the Gemini studios until their publication this Autumn.

From December 3, 1999 through January 8, 2000, a related exhibition of Serra prints since 1981 will be on view at the midtown gallery, Danese (41 East 57th Street). Additional information on this exhibition will be forthcoming.

For additional information, please contact the gallery at 212-219-1446.



RICHARD SERRA 1999

Richard Serra's new group of 15 etchings began in July 1998, when the artist was in Los Angeles dividing his time between the installation of his sculpture pieces at MoCA's Geffen Center and working at Gemini. The collaboration continued over 6 trips to Los Angeles, spanning almost 12 months.

To create the richly textured surface of these new etchings, Serra worked the surface of the copper plate by building up layer upon layer of Paintstik and/or lithographic crayon. Selected randomly by the artist, Serra would either pour the molten material or rub the solid material onto a plate laid flat on the floor of the studio, permitting him to press the material through an aluminum screen, often using his feet. His completed drawings on the copper plate had a very sculptural, textured appearance, with some high points as thick as $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

To process the plate and prepare it for printing, the drawing material needed to be washed from the plate, but prior to doing so, the drawing was carefully photographed using sharp-angled lighting to accentuate the detail; a lacquer block-out then was applied over the entire surface of the plate. The photography produced a high-contrast film positive, which was photographically transferred to a screen and, using this screen, a water-soluble sugar-lift was printed onto the exposed copper plate where the highest points of the imagery had been. Next, another application of blue lacquer block-out was applied, covering the sugar lift. The plate was placed in warm water and the sugar, representing the highest points of Serra's textured drawing, dissolved and lifted off, removing the blue lacquer in that area and exposing bare copper. The other areas of the copper plate, representing the lowest parts of Serra's drawing, were protected from the etching process by the remaining blue lacquer block-out. This technique thereby transferred the detailed information of Serra's textural drawing onto the plate.

The chemical etching of the plate now began, requiring selective etching in certain areas and careful monitoring, all over the course of three or four days. During this time the plate was taken out of the acid bath often, looked at for fidelity to Serra's drawing, and then put back into the bath. When the master printer found that the plate had reached the desired texture and bite, it was removed and made ready for printing. During the initial printing, proofs were presented to the artist who either accepted or continued to refine the imagery, making further additions and deletions to the plate.

When final approval was given, the edition-printing could begin. Each print required between 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 hours inking and preparation time prior to printing, which translated to no more than 3 prints per day. Because Serra did not want any plate "tone", the printers had to over-wipe the plate and then re-apply ink in certain areas. Once completed, the prints were sprayed with an acrylic clear-coating which allows them to be displayed in a frame without the need for a glass or plexiglass.

There are many people to thank on a project of this size. A collaborator is always chosen to work directly with the artist during the initial proofing period. This is based on a rotation of the six Master Printers at Gemini. Matt Jackson worked with Serra as Project Collaborator for the first year before leaving Gemini to attend graduate school. Edition printing of the 15 etchings was completed in January 2000 by Aaron Turner, Jennifer Turner, Xavier Fumat, Richard Kaz, Carmen Schilaci, and Maureen Staley.

James Reid,
Workshop Manager