

# Richard Serra

## *My Curves Are Not Mad*

### Teacher's Introduction

#### About this resource

This classroom resource is designed to connect Art 1 level students with primary source texts that offer opportunities for critical thinking and interdisciplinary connections with works in the Nasher collection. We suggest you invite students to first read the text and then discuss what they read in pairs or small groups before completing the interactive component. **The information on this page is provided to offer teachers a broader context to guide student discussion. The following pages may be printed and given directly to students.**

#### *My Curves Are Not Mad*

Serra's monumental works emphasize concepts fundamental to sculpture: mass and form, material and process, site and context. *My Curves Are Not Mad* is an overwhelming physical presence: each plate is forty-four feet long, fourteen feet tall, and weighs over fifty thousand pounds. Its curves seem to lean precariously and carve out unexpected shifts in volume and depth, making the experience of walking between the plates a bit unsettling. The warm, reddish-brown tone and soft texture of the weathered Cor-Ten steel make the work as visually stunning as it is physically imposing. At such a large scale, the sculpture defines space and transforms its surroundings. A particular irony results from the installation here: the natural forms of the garden are quite orderly in their rectilinear arrangement, while the hard, industrial material of the sculpture curves organically.

Serra's choice of materials is informed by his experience working in a steel mill while studying art at Yale. His determination of scale, one that manipulates the viewer's sense of place and position in the world, points to his interest in the subjective corporeal and visual experience that his sculptures elicit. To him, this is the content of the work; the physical form serves as a tool that activates experience.

#### Additional Resources

Richard Serra Biography <http://www.art21.org/artists/richard-serra>

*Coagula Magazine* Interview <http://www.coagula.com/serra.html>

Extended Art 21 episode: <http://www.art21.org/videos/segment-richard-serra-in-place>

*BOMB Magazine* Interview <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1605/richard-serra>

Charlie Rose Interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEvkIGKd6uE>

#### Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Foundations, Critical Evaluation | §117.52. Art, Level I (c) (1) and (4)

English: Reading Comprehension of Literary Nonfiction | §110.31. English I (b) (6)

English: Vocabulary Development | §110.31. English I (b) (1)

#### Learn More at the Nasher

You can learn more about *My Curves Are Not Mad* and see what's currently on view by visiting the "Art" section of the Nasher website. Discover more resources and lessons in the "Learn" section, or book a guided or self-guided tour in the "Visit" section. [www.nashersculpturecenter.org](http://www.nashersculpturecenter.org)



Richard Serra, *My Curves Are Not Mad*, 1987. Cor-Ten Steel, Overall: 168 x 539 3/8 x 139 in. Each plate: 168 x 539 3/8 x 2 in. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

# Richard Serra, *My Curves Are Not Mad*

## Read

Richard Serra on the qualities of steel as a material for sculpture.

"I started as a painter and I started using rubber and lead and a lot of other things and when I finally picked up a piece of the steel, I realized that the way steel had been used in the Industrial Revolution, the way it had been used for making bridges or silos or whatever, hadn't been used in sculpture. Because the way steel had been used in sculpture was mostly like handmade into painting, they would cut it out and paste it together and it would be very pictorially arranged. I decided to use it in a way that it had been used and intended to be used for its building potential because I'd worked around it as a kid. I've thrown buildings together, there is a building in San Francisco that I stuck all the rivets on."

"I can pick up a piece of steel two inches thick, 8 by 8 plate, no one had done that before. I mean the idea of using the weight of the material no one had done. The idea of using the stasis of the material, the idea of using the flexibility of the material, no one had really investigated the properties of the material. Or how you could use it in ways that were in the building industry. And I just decided to take it on that way. Because I knew about it."

Excerpted from: Mark Simmons. "Richard Serra: The Coagula Interview." *Coagula Contemporary Art Magazine*.



Richard Serra, *My Curves Are Not Mad*, 1987. Cor-Ten Steel, Overall: 168 x 539 3/8 x 139 in. Each plate: 168 x 539 3/8 x 2 in. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

## Watch

Richard Serra, *Place* on PBS Art21:

<http://www.art21.org/videos/segment-richard-serra-in-place>

## Discuss

Look at the image of *My Curves Are Not Mad*. Then close your eyes and imagine walking around and through the sculpture. Describe what you see and how the work makes you feel.

Based on the reading and the video, what did you learn about Richard Serra's work that surprised you? What did you learn about the artist's choice of materials (steel) and his process of installation?

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# Richard Serra, *My Curves Are Not Mad*

to roll	to curve	to scatter	to modulate
to crease	to lift	to arrange	to distill
to fold	to inlay	to repair	of waves
to store	to impress	to discard	of electromagnetic
to bend	to fire	to pair	of inertia
to shorten	to flood	to distribute	of ionization
to twist	to smear	to surfeit	of polarization
to dapple	to rotate	to compliment	of refraction
to crumple	to swirl	to enclose	of tides
to shave	to support	to surround	of reflection
to tear	to hook	to encircle	of equilibrium
to chip	to suspend	to hole	of symmetry
to split	to spread	to cover	of friction
to cut	to hang	to wrap	to stretch
to sever	to collect	to dig	to bounce
to drop	of tension	to tie	to erase
to remove	of gravity	to bind	to spray
to simplify	of entropy	to weave	to systematize
to differ	of nature	to join	to refer
to disarrange	of grouping	to match	to force
to open	of layering	to laminate	of mapping
to mix	of felting	to bond	of location
to splash	to grasp	to hinge	of context
to knot	to tighten	to mark	of time
to spill	to bundle	to expand	of carbonization
to droop	to heap	to dilute	to continue
to flow	to gather	to light	

## Write

Early in his career, Serra made a list of action words related to his physical movements in the studio.

Think about an artwork you've made or a recent project you've completed. Make a list of ten verbs that relate to the making of that work. Use Serra's *Verb List* as a point of reference.

### My Verbs:

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Richard Serra, *Verb List*, 1967-68. Original handwritten version (top) and typewritten version (bottom).

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