

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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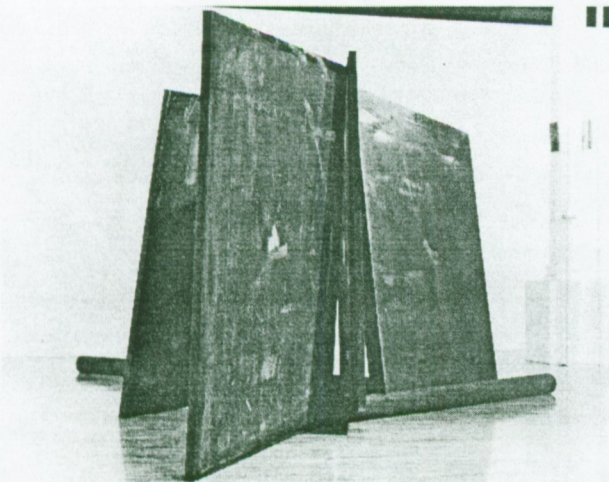
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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

ACQUIRES AND INSTALLS *FIVE PLATES, TWO POLES*,

A MAJOR EARLY SCULPTURE BY RICHARD SERRA



Richard Serra
Five Plates, Two Poles (1971)
National Gallery of Art

■ Washington, D.C.—The National Gallery of Art has acquired *Five Plates, Two Poles* (1971), a major early sculpture by American artist Richard Serra (b.1939). The indoor work will be on public view in the East Building beginning Friday, March 2, 2001. The acquisition was made possible with funds from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

Dating from the early classic period of Serra's career, *Five Plates, Two Poles* is the first sculpture by the artist to enter the Gallery's collection. Serra is considered one of the most important artists of the last half-century. This sculpture is one of seven plate/pole pieces he produced in 1970-1971, a turning point in his career. All but one of the others now belong to public collections. *Five Plates, Two Poles* was acquired from the artist, who was represented by the Gagosian Gallery.

"A sculpture by Richard Serra has long been a high priority and we are proud to add this masterpiece to the National Gallery's collection," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are enormously grateful to The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, which also funded the National Gallery's Sculpture Garden and the acquisition of seven of the twentieth-century sculptures installed there."

The National Gallery is building its collection of art from the 1960s and 1970s with key historical examples of work by leading figures. Jeffrey Weiss, the Gallery's curator of modern and contemporary art, is coordinating that effort.

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THE WORK

Composed of five standing steel plates slotted into two steel poles positioned on the ground, Five Plates, Two Poles measures 23-feet wide and 8-feet high. The plates lean against one another, creating a visually changing relationship as the viewer moves around the piece. Imposing size and massive weight, combined with extremely subtle points of contact among the various plates and poles, produce a complex expressive formal language of measure, balance, and load.

Richard Serra has long been acclaimed for work that poses a radical challenge to the practice of sculpture after mid-century. His career began in the 1960s, in the milieu of Minimal and Process art. From the beginning, he worked primarily with lead and steel, materials with which he had grown familiar through his work in industrial mills. His sculpture was initially devoted to expressing the physical properties of these materials and the ways in which the elements of a given work could be made to support each other over time through principles of gravity and tension. Unlike his earlier lead "prop" pieces, which can be comprehended from a single point of view, the plate/pole pieces appear to change their configuration from different vantages, thereby raising more complex issues of perception. This experience of mutual interaction between the viewer and the work in visual, physical, and conceptual terms continues to absorb Serra in pieces that occupy large indoor and outdoor urban and landscape sites. These works incorporate and ultimately restructure the very organization of the given site.

THE ARTIST

Born in San Francisco on November 2, 1939, Richard Serra studied at Yale University between 1961 and 1964, where he received his B.F.A. and M.F.A. working under Josef Albers. He then spent two years traveling in Europe before settling in New York City, where he continues to live and work. In 1967, he began showing in museums and galleries in New York, and since then has exhibited extensively throughout the world, including a 1986 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In addition, Serra has created a number of site-specific sculptures for public and private sites in both North America and Europe.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For general information, call (202) 737-4215; call the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176; or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. To receive the Gallery's free bimonthly Calendar of Events, call (202) 842-6662 or e-mail calendar@nga.gov.

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