

PEDER LUND

RICHARD SERRA - DRAWINGS

Peder Lund February 18 - April 22, 2017

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Direct Confrontation

The celebrated sculptor Richard Serra shows a less familiar aspect of his work.



Compressed Below (2001)
Paintstick on handmade paper
46 x 48 in./ 116.8 x 121.9 cm



Ramble 4-49 (2015)
Litho crayon on paper
35 1/2 x 36 3/4 in./ 90.2 x 93.3 cm

The American Richard Serra is best known for his large-scale, minimalist works in metal. When visiting the Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo, you have probably already seen one of his creations: the monumental, six-metre-high, weathered-steel sculpture, *Shaft*.

Since the opening of the museum it has stood firmly beside the main entrance. By contrast, at the Peder Lund gallery at Tjuvholmen it is drawings that stand in focus. As such they are more experimental and unconventional. Here one finds few traces of colour or figures. In Serra's work, the emphasis is more on phenomena such as weight and strength. During their production, the artist often engages in a physical interaction with both materials and tools.

To mark the exhibition, *NATT & DAG* had a chat with Ruby Paloma, director at Peder Lund – without doubt one of Norway's best galleries, and one that deserves more attention.

Visitors might think of Serra's drawings as less accessible and interactive than his sculptures. What's the fundamental difference between the sculptures and the drawings?

Richard Serra is one of the world's best-known sculptors, but for more than forty years he's also been producing drawings that are no less important. As with his sculptures, one needs to confront the drawings directly and to study his technique and idiom carefully, and from different angles. The fundamental difference lies in the method and the tools he uses. In contrast to his drawings, the sculptures are time-consuming projects. He begins with a mock-up, then does engineering diagrams, before finally preparing a model for the casting process. In other words, it's a long road from idea to sculpture. The drawings, on the other hand, are a more spontaneous form of expression, which, according to the artist, allow him to get something more immediate out of his efforts.

Historically speaking, what kind of formalism and abstraction does Serra represent?

Serra is usually described as a minimalist sculptor, but especially when you look at his drawings, you see broader art-historical references. He can be situated in the field of process art, which developed in the late 1960s and 70s. In the drawings for his early installations from 1971 to 73, Serra

pursued the quest for the origins of perception that Cézanne had initiated a century before. In Serra's words, 'all illusionistic strategies must be avoided'. His early drawings were often pinned straight onto the wall, creating a dialogue with the architecture where they were shown. It was a technique reminiscent of renaissance fresco painting, or of the great Mexican muralists Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros.

Taken as a whole, Serra's drawing practice has helped to change drawing as an art form. His unconventional materials, the monumental formats, and his carefully considered relationship to the architecture of the exhibition space have extended the definition of drawing. Built up from multiple layers of monochromatic wax crayon on canvas or paper, his works address issues such as weight, force, the self-referential nature of pictures, and the viewer's perception of the work, both visual and haptic.

He seems very fond of black in his drawings.

Serra has written that 'To use black is the clearest way of marking against a white field, no matter whether you use lead or charcoal or paintstick. It is also the clearest way of marking without creating associative meanings. You can cover a surface with black without risking metaphorical and other misreadings. A canvas covered with black remains an extension of drawing in that it is an extension of marking. The use of any other color would be the extension of coloration, with its unavoidable allusions to nature.' (Richard Serra, 'Notes on Drawing', 1994). For Serra, black is synonymous with a graphic idiom. He tries to achieve a mechanisation of the graphical approach. He shuns anything that references the process of painting. He often makes the point that black is a property rather than a quality. Black is also heavier and creates greater volume. Instead of reflecting light, black absorbs it, thereby affecting the artificial and natural light in a room.

The actual process of everything from how one holds the crayons to whether one works vertically or horizontally seems to matter to him.

Absolutely! Serra works with the paper spread on the floor. His drawings are physically very demanding. For the circular images, such as *Blanchot* (2009), he pushes a block of crayon wax the size of a brick down onto the paper. He doesn't operate just from his wrist, but pulls the block downwards using his shoulders. In this sense, the drawings effectively capture the body's lines of force. Cardboard curves limit where the crayon wax comes into contact with the paper, giving a measure of control to the perimeter. Variations on this technique produce very different expressive results, such as *Solid #23* (2008), where the technique involves pouring molten crayon wax onto a hard surface, a netting, and pressing the paper down onto it. Even so, Serra deliberately seeks to minimise his own gestures and personality in the drawings, aiming instead at an anonymous idiom that doesn't get in the way of the viewer sensing her own materiality in confrontation with the pictures.

Several of his titles have political overtones. Abstract Slavery in particular caught my interest.

Abstract Slavery isn't really an overtly political title. Serra himself has said that he and two assistants came up with it while working on the drawing, which consists of enormous canvases covered with pigment from small wax crayons. They were trying to make an abstract drawing and the work was taking hours, so they agreed the process was like slavery. Serra then wrote 'abstract slavery' as a way of teasing them. Several titles from the 1970s and 80s are clearly political, but they also have a personal background. Serra has jokingly referred to them as 'bad propaganda'.

For example, the drawing *The United States Government Destroys Art* (1989) was made in reaction to the removal

of Serra's sculpture *Tilted Arc* (1981) by the US government in 1989 following a controversial court case. The government itself had commissioned the work to stand in front of a federal building in New York.

Are there other works by Serra in Scandinavia apart from the one outside the Museum of Contemporary Art here in Oslo?

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk has a site-specific work in its sculpture park. That was made in 1983–86. Malmö Konsthall has a large steel sculpture, which they acquired as part of the Schyl Donation in 1983, and which therefore belongs to the people of Malmö. The Moderna Museet in Stockholm has two fantastic lithographs from 1973.

What kind of plans does the gallery have for 2017?

After Serra we open with Ed Ruscha – a sensational exhibition, which is the result of Peder Lund's friendship over many years with the artist. Ruscha is considered one of the world's most important living artists. *Time* magazine listed him among the 100 most influential people of 2013. We're really looking forward to it! We're also in dialogue with some exciting artists and estates for our autumn programme.

Richard Serra's "Drawings" are on show at Peder Lund from 18 February to 22 April.

The Dark Circle

“Drawings”

Richard Serra

Peder Lund, Oslo, Until 22 April



Calming: Serra's "Blanchot" illuminates black and strong, and quickly generates a sense of Zen.

Photo: ©RICHARD SERRA, COURTESY OF PEDER LUND

Review

Nine representative drawings from three decades of Richard Serra's work.

At the Peder Lund gallery at Tjuvholmen in Oslo, it is as if art is enacted rather than exhibited. The presentation of drawings by the great American Richard Serra (b. 1938) is no exception, a must-see show that confirms the artist's insistence on the material and physical nature of the artwork. Here it is the pliancy, tactility and carrying power of the materials that stand centre stage.

Richard Serra's art occupies the borderlands between minimalism and the experimental, the abstract and the processual. His Splash works of the late 1960s, in which he threw molten lead into the corner where the wall meets the floor, were an exploration of space and the way lead would change its quality as it wedged itself into the room's blind spots.

His many monumental steel sculptures occupy spaces in dramatic fashion, sometimes coiling around the viewer or

looming over her as heavy, curved slabs.

The nine drawings on show at Peder Lund are a representative selection from the past three decades that illustrate this same modernist exploration of object versus image and material autonomy versus representation.

Drawing has always been a parallel activity for Serra. Like his sculptures, these works are process oriented, but with their own probing of manual craft – what it takes to work at and mark paper.

The expansive gestures do not exclude an expressive register of quivering internal nuances.

The solid paper sticks out like a naked, vulnerable crevice in *Weitmar II* (1983), which features a dark triangle in landscape format. Molten crayon has been pressed into the surface of the paper forming a thick, pastose layer. The effect resembles a dense, unbroken expanse of rugged black asphalt. These solid, monumental forms are architectural in the sense that they influence and give manifest form to existing spatial features, the walls and possible openings.

There is a deliberate attempt here to shake off all references, and yet a title like *Blanchot* (2009) is unmistakably literary, a homage to the French writer Maurice Blanchot. Standing in front of this great black disc, one is reminded of Zen. The work shines black and powerful, and there is evidently something philosophical in the murky periphery.

Line Ulekleiv