

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NY CULTURE | OCTOBER 15, 2011

By LANCE ESPLUND

Richard Serra: 'Junction'/'Cycle'

Gagosian Gallery

555 W. 24th St., (212) 741-1111

Through Nov. 26



Richard Serra's 'Junction'/'Cycle' at the Gagosian Gallery.

A trip to Egypt will forever alter not only your sense of sculpture as it relates to space, but also your sense of art's relationship to the larger world and to nature. The enormous tombs, pillars, Sphinx and pyramids don't occupy space so much as they carve, delineate and activate landscape and sky. In Egypt, art and nature, unified, extend each other to the point that it is nearly impossible to imagine that one could exist without the other.

Walking through and among the snaking 14-foot-tall passageways of Richard Serra's two enormous steel sculptures "Junction" (2011) and "Cycle" (2010), I was reminded of monumental Egyptian art. And it didn't hit me until I was deep within "Cycle"—which triggered memories of exploring caves and Egyptian tombs and of traversing the steep, slim causeway to the king's chamber inside the Great Pyramid at Giza—that the sculptor has traveled to Egypt.

Mr. Serra (b. 1938) has long been a master at twisting and torquing large, flat, leaning steel plates into mazelike journeys, intimate and epic. But with "Junction" and "Cycle" he has surpassed all trappings of his earlier sculpture, in which form and scale can sometimes bully as much as complement their surroundings.

At Gagosian, Mr. Serra's long, sinuous, narrow passageways and towering walls of streaked-burnt-orange steel planes are evocative of natural crevices, fine oiled hardwoods such as burl walnut, and nearly every color of sunset. The artist sculpts not just with steel but with light, air and space, which breathe and swell, moving inhabitants through dark, muscular channels to lighted clearings. The experience is primal, visceral, magically disorienting—an opportunity to challenge your sense of sculpture and space.