

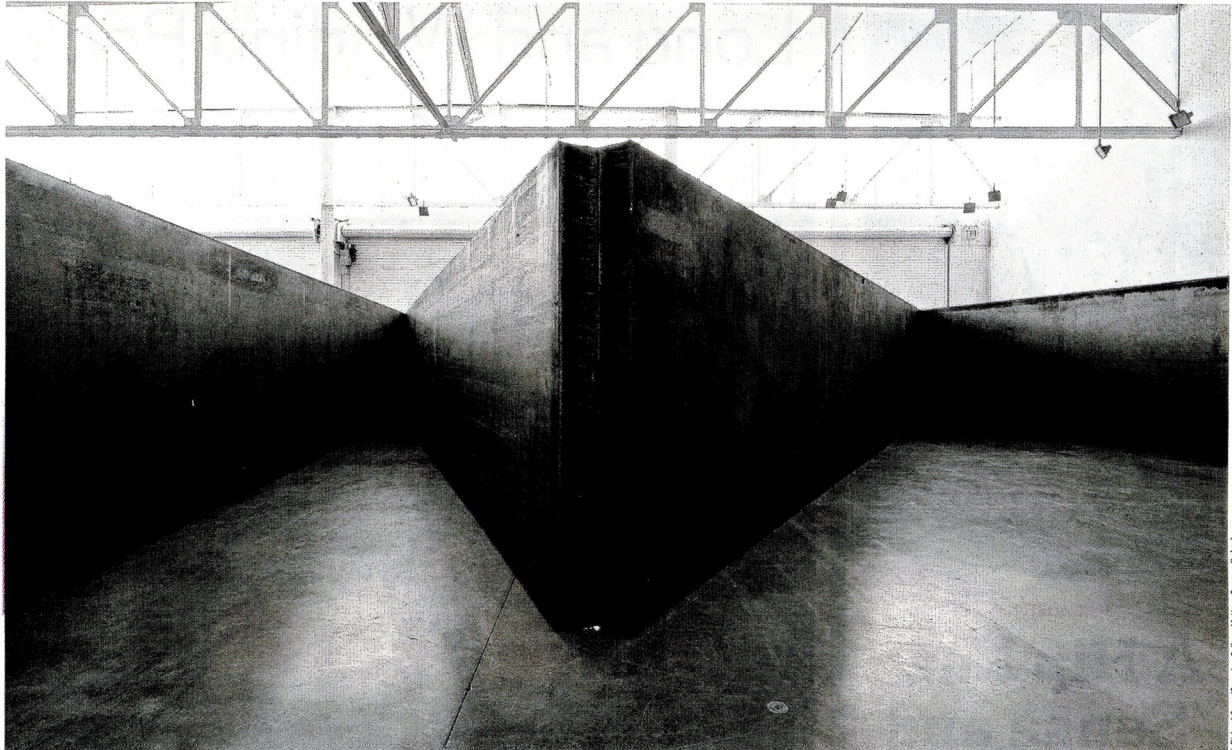
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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ART



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Richard Serra's Stonehenge Period

The artist breaks with his signature sleek curves in a New York gallery show

BY KELLY CROW

MINIMALIST SCULPTOR Richard Serra built an international career forging steel into curvy, gravity-defying forms, but a gallery show of his latest sculptures in New York reveals a few new, sharper angles.

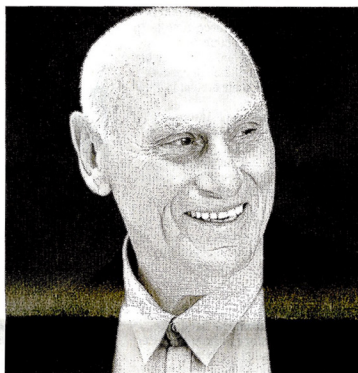
Imagine a room spliced by 40-foot-long steel plates rising 8-feet high and leaning against one another at their tips, like an enormous zigzag or crooked chevron. The effect of walking in and around Mr. Serra's "7 Plates 6 Angles" at Gagosian Gallery is strangely unsettling because it involves stepping into wedges that feel pizza-slice narrow at one turn and vastly wider at the next. "People are never asked to walk into corners," Mr. Serra said, "but I thought I'd ask because it gives such a feeling of compression and release."

At age 74, Mr. Serra has bushy white eyebrows and a shuffling gait. He ranks as one of the elder statesmen of contemporary art, with a lengthy list of museum shows and pieces that have sold for at least \$4

million at auction and for far more privately. The San Francisco-born son of a pipe fitter for ships could easily have kept producing his signature coiling shapes for the rest of his career. A recent visit to the gallery during his show's installation—it opens Saturday—suggests he's energized by the shift.

"I feel so psychologically grounded here in a way that I don't in the weightless curvy spaces," he said, walking, black sketchbook under arm, through another new piece called "Intervals." Mr. Serra's best-known works evoke rusty canyons with clearly marked, meandering paths—but this new installation conjures a graveyard, with thick, chest-high steel slabs of varying lengths arranged with openings between them. Mr. Serra said he experimented with this type of staccato layout seven years ago, but he's expanded the idea and added more variation.

He's also produced a work that appears almost Stonehenge-lumpy, a departure from his traditionally sleek



way of working with steel. "Grief and Reason (For Walter)" comprises four chunky, sarcophagus-shape blocks that sit atop each other, two by two, in what he calls an "ungainly balance." Squatting, he pointed out that the blocks' mismatched edges allow slits of light to cut through.

The tombstone resonance of these

CORNERED IN The artist, at left, has been playing with sharp angles. Above, "7 Plates 6 Angles" (2013), invites viewers to enter narrow wedges.

blocks is also no coincidence: The artwork is named after Walter de Maria, the minimalist sculptor who died in July. Mr. Serra said he has been thinking a lot lately about the beginning of his own career, and Mr. de Maria was the first artist he met in New York, he said. It was 1965, Pop art was king and Andy Warhol held court in his Factory, where Mr. de Maria often played drums for the Velvet Underground. Mr. Serra, who was 27 at the time and only a year out of college, arrived in New York not knowing how to navigate the art scene. Mr. de Maria took Mr. Serra to a local bookstore and coffee shop and encouraged him to make more art and worry less about cultivating any outlandish Pop persona. "Walter was older and exceedingly shy, and yet he knew what he was doing," Mr. Serra said. "He showed me I could keep quiet and do my work and be fine. It was such a relief."

Mr. Serra said he remains proud of the tilted and torqued works that eventually became his hallmark—there's one ribbonlike example in the Gagosian show called "Inside Out"—but he said it feels "baroque" beside his newer experiments. Mr. Serra walked into a vast gallery area where his crew was using a forklift and crane to haul in the work's 16 curving plates and walked around sections that were already standing upright. He looked up and down again at his sketchbook where he had chronicled their varying dimensions and weights.

These days, he said he is thinking less about tonnage and more about the intimate ways people experience his art. People come to him now and say they've done yoga inside his pieces or held weddings within them. He even took a trip to Jordan recently because he was curious about why so many people had compared his rusty pieces to Petra, the famed ancient city carved into the side of a rocky canyon. The shapes and forms he found inside weren't sleek or curvy, he said, but he felt a kinship with the space all the same. "I think I'm in the same game."