

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Serra Work Gains Protected Status in Ontario

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Richard Serra's "Shift" is an outdoor sculpture in a field north of Toronto.

A battle that has dragged on for years over the protection of an early outdoor sculpture by Richard Serra in a field north of Toronto has finally been settled, in favor of the sculpture.

The work, "Shift," commissioned by an art collector in 1970, consists of a series of low concrete wall-like structures that zig-zag along the shifting elevations of the field, delineating the shifts to someone walking along them.

The township council for King City, Ontario, near the sculpture, voted 5-2 on Monday night to designate the sculpture a cultural heritage site under Ontario's preservation laws, which would prevent the owner of the land now, Hickory Hill Investments, a developer, from building too near the work or changing it in any way. The company has opposed the heritage designation for several years, arguing that it is "inappropriate and unnecessary" for "a private piece of art on private property," but also pledging to preserve the work, according to The Globe and Mail of Toronto.

A group of citizens, who now call themselves Friends of Shift, urged the city to provide legal protection for the sculpture, which is not accessible to the public but is often visited

by trespassing art lovers. In the summer and early fall, the work is usually obscured by corn that is farmed on the land to within feet of the sculpture.

In a statement, Mr. Serra said that he was “very proud” the work would be protected and added: “It is especially gratifying that it was the result of the initiative of a group of private citizens who care about art.”

Elaine Robertson, a former chairwoman of the township heritage committee for King City and a longtime proponent of protective status, said that the next steps would be pursuing the passage of a law to provide municipal supervision of the site and negotiating with the landowners to see if they would agree to any public visitation of the sculpture.