

BIG IDEAS

Donut #7

Fletcher Benton (San Francisco, USA)

WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? This sculpture was made by San Francisco-based artist Fletcher Benton. Benton is known for his massive, precisely crafted geometric metal sculptures that combine welded circles, spheres, cylinders, cubes and squares composed and balanced in space. These sculptures are examples of Kinetic Art which explores elements of real or apparent movement. Such twentieth century artists as Calder, Agam, Duchamp and Tinguely were pioneers in this field.



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Benton was born in Jackson, Ohio in 1931 and received his B.F.A from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in 1956. Upon graduation, he moved to the Italian district, North Beach, in San Francisco, California. Benton taught at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, San Francisco Art Institute and, as an associate professor and then professor of art, at California State University in San Jose from the '60s to the '80's.

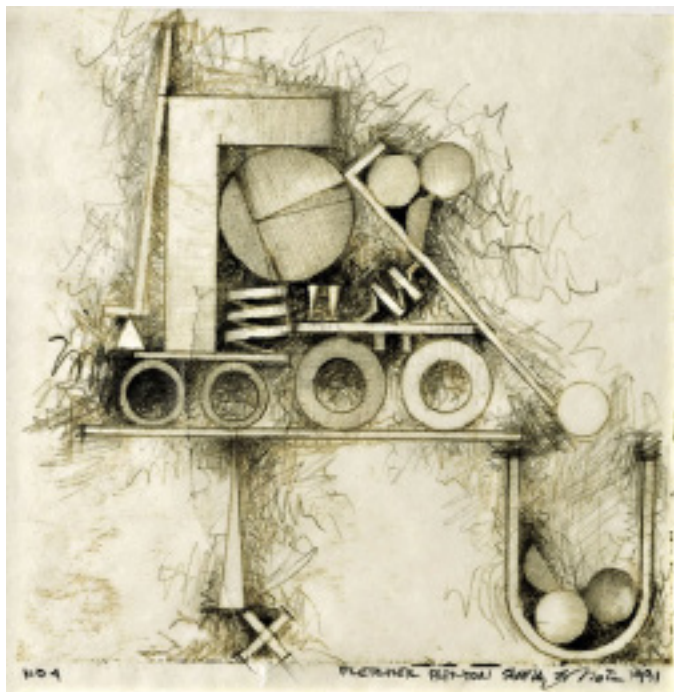
Benton began his career as an abstractionist painter in the 1950s and 1960s. Frustrated with the limitations of paint on canvas, Benton began work on movement with geometric pattern pieces and boxes which he was familiar with from his work in commercial signs. This was at the beginning of the kinetic movement and Benton worked largely in isolation, unaware of other efforts of kinetic artists. The early works were more concerned with change, rather than movement. The pieces were really more like three-dimensional paintings. Fully three-dimensional sculptures designed to be viewed from all angles came later. The movement of the pieces became less prevalent in his later works.

WHAT IDEAS ARE BEING EXPLORED IN THIS SCULPTURE? The “donut” referred to in the title is the round, open holed form, which in the case of Donut #7 holds and stabilizes the other geometric elements. The long, lone, slender vertical line shoots upward balancing the heavy mass below. His choice of a uniform red surface for the sculpture reflects his concern with the unique color, tonality and rich lustre inherent in metals. Donut #7 is made of Corten steel, a group of steel alloys which were developed to obviate the need for painting. It develops a stable, rust-like appearance when exposed to the weather for several years. (Source: Geometric Sculpture in Equilibrium; Fletcher Benton by Peter Selz, Sculpture June 2004, Vol 24 No.5) Donut #7’s industrial and militantly rigid form is both intimidating and commanding. The simplicity of each clustered shape also abstractly reveals forms of nature, geometry and human activity.



Fletcher Benton

Maquette
Dore Street Studio, 1999



Fletcher Benton

Truckin Geo Drawing 4
1991, pencil on tracing paper
18 x 18 inches

HOW WAS THIS SCULPTURE MADE? Fletcher Benton’s workplace is located in the light industrial district of San Francisco. The busy 6,000-square-foot space is 23 feet high and can easily hold the forklift needed to assemble his large sculptures. It is filled with the noise of hammering, cutting, and welding—work performed by Benton’s assistants. It is amidst all this commotion that, working on a small metal table, he makes his steel maquettes. On a lucky day, intuition—Benton calls it his “Magic Man”—comes into play, and he will be able to finish a maquette, a process in which precision is guided by inspiration.

Benton loves precisely made models and has placed his own in a sparsely appointed, meticulously arranged room above his work space. Also housed there is a fine collection of World War II American, British, German, and

Japanese fighter and bomber aircraft, made to a 1:48 scale by an ex-U.S. Marine and a German biochemist, turned model makers. Among the models is a Junkers 87, known as the Stuka B, which was the German warplane that bombed Guernica during the Spanish Civil War: “My homage to Picasso,” Benton says. He has also commissioned models of famous sailing ships such as the Cutty Sark, the Constitution, and the H.M.S. Victory, all crafted to scale with consummate skill. An elaborate electric railroad travels around close to the ceiling of one room, to the delight of the artist and his visitors. One senses the grown-up boy’s delight in his model planes, trains, and ships. His living room, in the penthouse of the building, is furnished with vintage Bauhaus furniture by Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer, as well as recent work by the noted Oakland craftsman Gary Bennett.



Fletcher Benton

Folded Square Alphabet U
2004, painted steel
12 x 12 x 12 inches

**DONUT #7 WEIGHS 2,500 KG (5,500 LB.)
AND ITS DIMENSION IS 850 CM/28 FT. (H) X
366 CM/12 FT. (W) X 550 CM/18 FT. (D)**

HOW DOES THIS WORK CONNECT WITH THIS ARTIST’S OTHER WORKS? In 2000 Benton began his “Donut” series, finding “inherent rightness” in works such as *Tilted Donut with Zig and Balls* (2003), in which balance appears to defy gravity. Having worked with circular forms for decades, he now achieved a remarkable illusion. As the viewer moves and different aspects of donut, poles, semicircle, balls, and zigzags come to the fore, the sculpture appears to change so strikingly as to be almost a different work from each perspective. The balls and zig, being smaller elements, lend import to the large circular form, informing the work with monumental presence. *Donut with 3 Balls* (2001), captured by the eminent photographer of sculpture David Finn on Benton’s property in the Napa wine country, illustrates how placing this geometric steel structure into the rolling hills and vineyards makes for an eloquent contrast between nature and man-made artifact.

Fletcher Benton is represented in major museum collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, San Francisco Museum of Art, Stanford Museum of Art and the Denver Museum of Art.

In 2008, Fletcher Benton was a recipient of the International Sculpture Center’s Lifetime Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award. To learn more about the artist, visit his website and view the video under the media menu bar.

TO LEARN MORE:
www.fletcherbenton.com/

Education Material—Albright Knox Gallery:
www.albrightknox.org/education/Benton_Fletcher_lessons.html

WHO PUT THIS SCULPTURE ON DISPLAY IN VANCOUVER? This sculpture is part of Vancouver Biennale 2009-2011 Exhibition. The Vancouver Biennale is a non-profit charitable organization that celebrates art in public space. Each exhibition transforms the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, work, play and transit. The Biennale features internationally renowned and emerging Contemporary artists that represent a diversity of cultural perspectives and artistic disciplines including sculpture, new media, performance works and film. The objective is to use great art as a catalyst to transformative learning and social action.

The Vancouver Biennale also creates supporting public programs, events and publications including the award-winning BIG IDEAS Education program, the International Artist Residency Program inspired by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream", the CineFest LIVE documentary film festival and the Tour de Biennale and BIKennale arts & culture cycling events.

TO LEARN MORE you can search the terms **BIENNALE**, **PUBLIC ART** or **OUTDOOR SCULPTURE PARKS** on-line. Also Visit the Vancouver Biennale website at www.vancouverbiennale.com

IMAGE CREDITS:

- 1 Artist portrait; Artist studio
- 2 *Donut #7*; Dan Fairchild
- 3 *Maquette*, Dore Street Studio, 1999; Artist studio
- 4 *Truckin Geo Drawing 4*, 1991; Artist studio
- 5 *Folded Square Alphabet U*, 2004; Artist studio

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