VANCOUVER BIENNALE EDUCATION

BIG IDEAS

217.5 Arc x 13

Bernar Venet (Paris, France)

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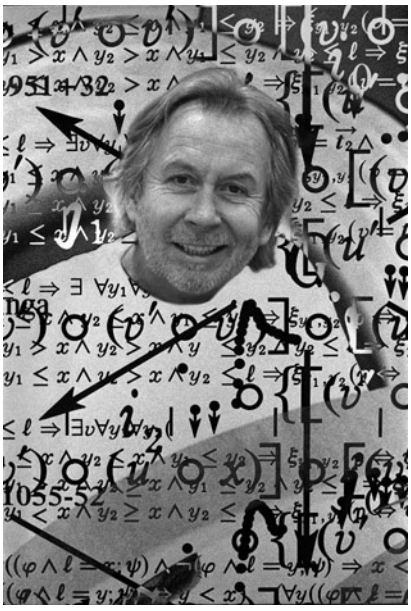
WHO MADE THIS SCULPTURE? Bernar Venet was born in 1941 in Château-Arnoux-Saint-Auban in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, France, the youngest of four boys. His poor health as a young child required many days of rest and recuperation, during which time Venet became very interested in religion, at one point even aspiring to become a missionary. His relationship with a local artist changed Venet's direction, and involved him heavily in drawing and painting. Venet's talent was evident in his drawing at an early age. He learned about the work of successful artists through art books that his mother bought him, and he was particularly attracted to the heroes of the Modern era. At 17, Venet moved to Nice in order to study at the Ville Thiole, the municipal art school.



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After art school, Venet worked as a stage designer before spending time in the military. In 1961 Venet began to seriously create artworks, first monochromatic works in tar, then moving on to sculptural works in the mid-60s. Venet has been constantly evolving and exploring forms of art as diverse as designing opera sets, writing a ballet, film, composing music, poetry and writing art theory. Venet became familiar with the New York based Minimalist and Conceptual artists, including Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, sharing with them the belief that art should not be restricted to traditional conceptions of aesthetic beauty. He chose to view art in objective terms as a type of code and began producing conceptual diagrams based on mathematical principles. In 1967 Venet studied mathematics and physics at Columbia University and went on to teach art theory at the Sorbonne. He has lived both in Paris and New York and has created works in 2D, 3D, and conceptual works using only sound. In the last 40 years, Venet has become one of the world's most celebrated Modern conceptual artists.

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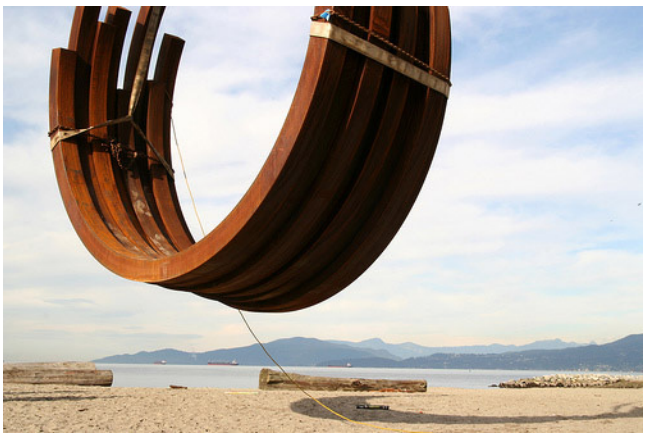
What ideas are being explored in this sculpture?

Venet illustrates the beauty, balance and plasticity of raw steel in his artistically mathematical manipulations of this industrial material. According to Venet, nature, the universe and life are all interconnected and explainable mathematically. Venet's massive work *217.5 Arc X 13* is part of his "arc" series, sculptures all made of CORTEN steel beams; some laying flat, others scattered, spiraled or on their sides. In *217.5 Arc X 13*, displayed here, all of the beams are curved to the same degree and nested. The steel beams are balanced, and rest securely on the bow of the arc. The repeated thirteen curves give the piece a resting, yet a rhythmic feel, that suggests movement. The raw, unpainted surfaces retain the natural color of the CORTEN steel- a rich red-brown rust color reflecting the materials interaction with natural elements, an "authentic" surface that Venet insists on.

***217.5 Arc x 13* is certainly no light weight. A crane was used to haul this 5,500 kg (12,125 lbs)piece from its original site at the bottom of Denman Street to its current location. It measures 353 cm x 447 cm x 300 cm (11.6 ft x 14.7 ft x 9.8 ft).**

For Venet the placement of a large sculpture in a city is akin to affixing his signature there, and he has signed his name on many cities around the world. This sculpture was acquired by the Vancouver Biennale Legacy Foundation in 2007.



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How did the artist come to work with lines?

In the 60s, he worked on mathematical diagrams and scientific information exclusively. In mathematical diagrams, very often, you have a straight line or you have a curve. In 1976, after stopping for 6 years, Venet started using simple mathematical forms such as angles, arcs, diagonal lines…and realized that the main subject was becoming the line. Then the indeterminate line became a very natural thing to do as a variation – a free, indeterminate line, something which is not mathematical anymore. That is how he came to this new approach which enlarged his field of investigation a great deal. First he started with the canvas, then making an angle or an arc in wood, directly on the wall. The indeterminate lines started to be presented on the wall, like spirals but going on top of each other. Then, very naturally, they started to invade space. It was with steel that Venet could find the best ways to make these new works. In 1984, Venet started working at the Atelier Marioni, a foundry and ironworks in the Vosges region of France. Five years later, he acquired a steel factory in Le Muy in the Var region of France, where he fabricated and installed his work on the surrounding property.

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How does this work connect with this artist's other works? Bernar Venet does not consider himself exclusively as a sculptor. He wants to be an artist with the possibility to express himself in many different fields. He started as a painter, and very early, he did performances. It is the same content just presented in a different way. In the early 1960's, he was doing black tar paintings. Then at the same time, he would make a pile of black charcoal which was also something without composition or specific shape. "If I took a wheelbarrow and I set up a tape recorder, and just go around, recording the sound of it for two hours, it would be a monotone sound thing, very repetitive, and it would be the equivalent of that. I made a book which was totally black... So I was just presenting my work in different ways, just to extend the concept as widely as possible."
Bernar Venet is interested in semiotics, or the theory of how language creates meaning through symbols and signs. He also continues to be interested in mathematics and geometry. Venet considers his art very much participates in the tradition of the great French artist Marcel Duchamp. Just as Duchamp presented everyday objects as art, he presents mathematical and scientific information as art.

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www.bernarvenet.com

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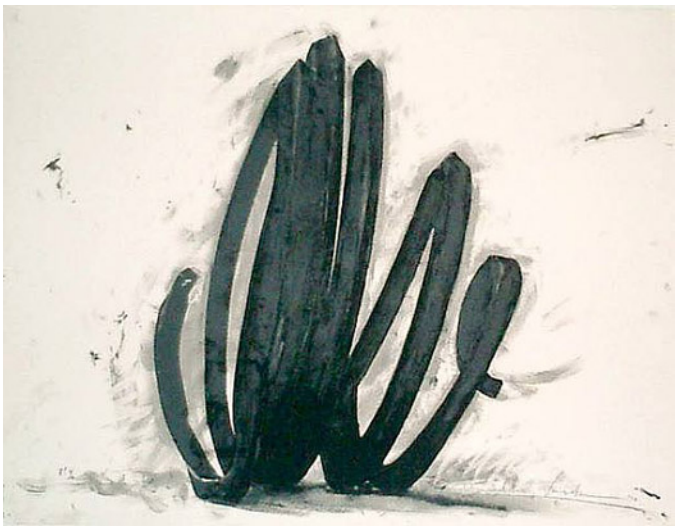

The precise lines, curves and angles that characterize his early graphic works form the basis of the immense steel arcs for which Venet is now best known. The titles of these solid steel sculptures, including that of the present *217.5 Arc x 13*, provide an exact description of the sculpture's mathematically determined composition. Despite their very concrete definition, each arc succeeds in conveying a distinct sense of movement, as if rotating about a fixed central point. They begin and end at different degrees on the imaginary circumference, their gyroscopic motion bringing the near realization of the circle which the sculptor has left incomplete. Every element of Venet's sculptures exists in a state of balance and composure without ever appearing inert. Rolled not sculpted, embossed not inscribed, they are the product of an industrial process which shares with Minimalist and Conceptual sculpture the disavowal of the artist's hand.

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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. Our exhibitions are unique in the world in that we feature sculpture, new media, film, music and dance. We transform the urban landscape into an Open Air Museum, creating unexpected and globally inspired cultural experiences where people live, play, work and transit.

With each exhibition, we demonstrate that great public art is an economic driver by creating magnetic cultural attractions for visitors, and foundational to creating livable, creatively inspired communities where installations become a social bridge for people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, educational levels and financial wherewithal to come together as neighbours to explore, learn, dialogue and imagine.

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The Vancouver Biennale charitable registration number is 85195 4273 RR0001.

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IMAGE CREDITS:

1 *217.5 Arc x 13*; Dan Fairchild
2 Artist portrait; Antoine Poupel, 2003
3 *217.5 Arc x 13*; Dan Fairchild
4 *217.5 Arc x 13* (installation); Dan Fairchild
5 *The Arc Hypothesis*; Venice Biennale 09; image@designboom
6 *Undetermined Line IV*; originalprints.com

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