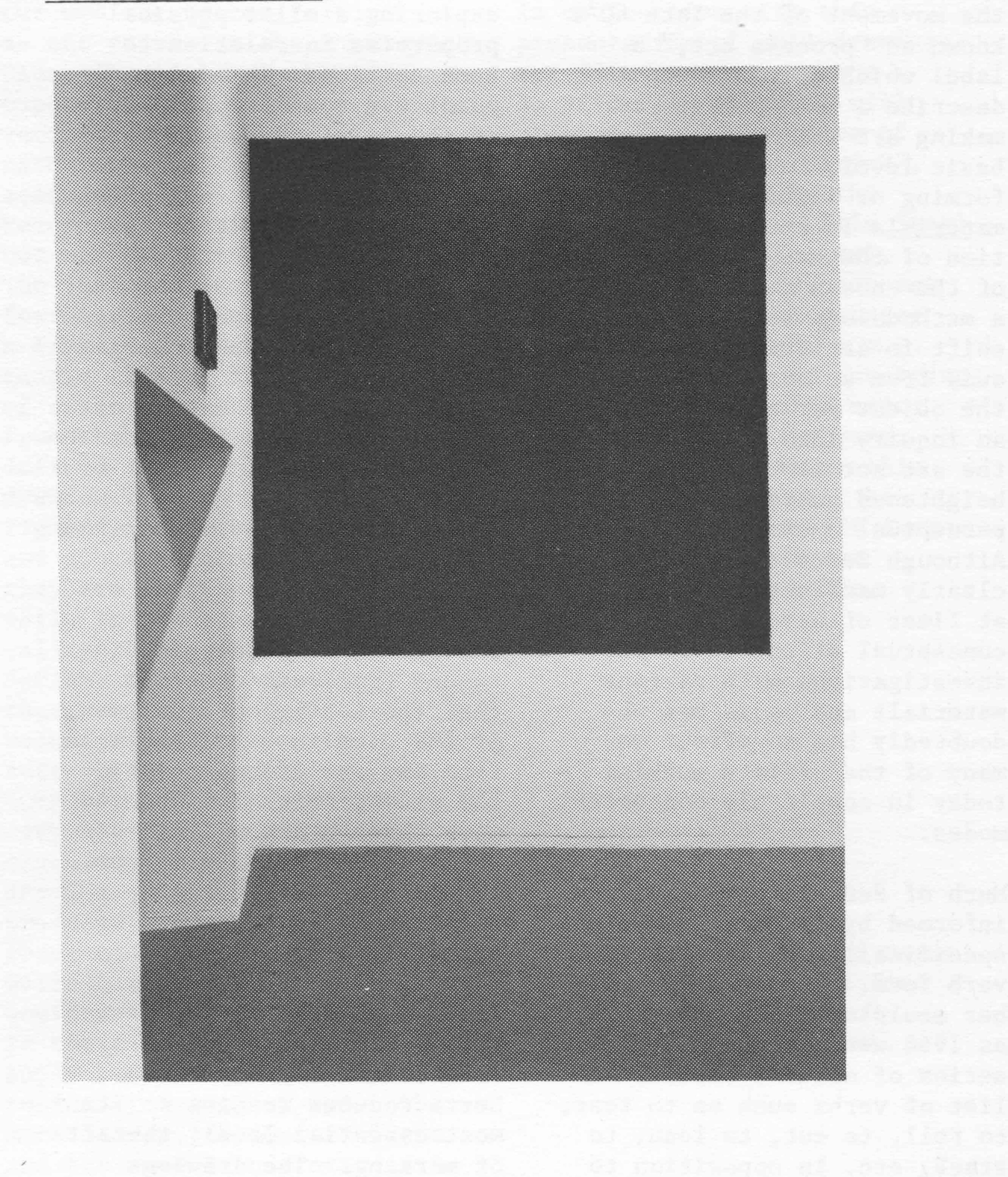
Left Corner Square, 1979



"Drawing is a way for me to carry on an interior monologue with the making as I'm making." While this recent statement by Richard Serra is directed specifically to a question about his drawings, the attitude it expresses is basic to an understanding of all of Serra's work, which has taken the form of film, videotapes and sculpture, as well as drawing. Serra is a seminal participant in the movement of the late 60's known as "process art," a label which attempted to describe a methodology for making art which, on a very basic level, involved the forming or distributing of materials in space as a function of the natural properties of the chosen material. Such a methodology reflected a shift in artistic intention away from an obsession with the object per se and towards an inquiry into the nature of the art act itself and a heightened awareness of basic perceptual operations. Although Serra's works are clearly manifested as objects-at times of heroic scale--the conceptual structure of his investigations with various materials and media has undoubtedly had an effect on many of the artists working today in completely conceptual modes.

Much of Serra's work has been informed by language structure, specifically the transitive verb form. His lead and rubber sculptures begun as early as 1966 were formed from a series of actions based on a list of verbs such as to tear, to roll, to cut, to lean, to stack, etc. In opposition to the notion of art as an illusionistic or metaphoric depiction of reality, these works represent sculpture at its most elemental level; the response of a material to a specific action. Serra's

"prop" pieces, consisting of huge plates of lead arranged upright and supported by the mutual thrust and counterthrust of their own weight, incorporated the active force of gravity as a central part of the work, while establishing an awareness of the specific physical properties of a lead mass. In a related way, Serra's early films presented close-up views of simple actions being performed, exploring similar physical properties in relation to human action. The films also point out specific properties of the filmic process. Frame, 1969, for example, depicts someone measuring the frame of the camera as it changes angles, demonstrating the disparity in perception between what is seen through the camera and what actually exists in front of it and thus the relative nature of size and scale in relation to the filmic image.

In Serra's outdoor works, the viewer becomes the active agent. By placing steel or concrete elements on or in the ground at strategic distances from each other so that the total configuration of the work is undecipherable from any one ground point, the viewer is called upon to move through the work physically in order to fully comprehend its character and relation to the topology of the site.

It is in his drawings, however, that Serra's approach to art is most clearly expressed. Serra reduces drawing to its most essential level; the act of marking. The drawings currently exhibited in MATRIX are made with black oil-based paintstik on unstretched linen. The image each drawing presents is a highly focused representation of its' own making.

Drawing was implied in a number of Serra's early lead and rubber works. Speaking of those works he states, "...the problem was to use diverse elements in juxtaposition: to cut a line to separate and divide the elements. The activity of cutting restructured the field, informing the relationship between parts in a way other than the literal juxtaposition of elements. Line as cut was the method." Line as cut recurs in the drawings. Since the marks on the linen support of the drawings present a continuous field rather than a series of separated internal marks, line becomes a function of the cut-out shape of the work. The implied mass of the different shapes -- in this case a triangle, square and rectangle--create a definition of space that is distinct from the illusionistic space defined in traditional drawing through the use of figure/ground relationships, and other devices. Although they are stapled flat to the wall, there is a tacit physicality to the drawings that defines the space in front of them, so as to suggest a volume distinct from the interior of the gallery. In completing this gestalt, the viewer often finds himself centered in front of the drawing surrounded by this projected space. Speaking about his drawings in general Serra has remarked, "What I continually find to be true is that the concentration I apply to drawing is a way of tuning or honing my eye. The more I draw, the better I see and the more I understand. There's always been a correlation between the strength of the work and the degree to which I'm drawing."

Richard Serra was born in San Francisco in 1939. He California at Berkeley and Santa Barbara (MA 1961). He subsequently moved to the East Coast, attending Yale University (MFA 1964). In 1965 he received a Fullbright Fellowship to study in Italy where he was seen as part of the Arte Povera movement. Serra currently lives in New York City and teaches at Yale University.

In conjunction with this presentation of wall drawings, our film department, the Pacific Film Archive, will present a retrospective of Serra's films (February 27, 7:00 p.m.) including the priemier of his new film Steel Mill, 1978 (Ruhr Valley), along with two afternoon matinees of Serra's videotapes (March 3 and 4, 2:00 p.m.). A future MATRIX unit involving the construction of a major outdoor sculpture by Serra is scheduled for later this Spring. The work will be located across Bancroft Avenue from the Museum between Kroeber and Boalt Halls.

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**All quotes by Richard Serra in the above essay are from Richard Serra (Tubingen: Kunsthalle Tubingen '78).

Works in MATRIX:

Left Corner Square, 1979, paintstik on Belgian linen, 9' 1 1/2" x 9' 1 1/2". Lent by the artist.

Willis Ave., 1974, paintstik on Belgian linen, 9' 5" x 8' 2". Lent by Leo Castelli Gallery, New York City.

Left Corner Horizontal, 1977, paintstik on Belgian linen, 7' 103/4" x 18' 10 1/2". Lent by the artist.

Selected one-person exhibitions: Galleria La Salita, Rome '66; Galerie Ricke, Cologne '68; Galerie Lambert, Milan '69; Leo Castelli Gallery, NYC '70; Joseph Helman Gallery, St. Louis '70; Galerie Ricke, Cologne '70; Ace Gallery, LA '70; University of California, San Diego '70; Pasadena Art Museum, CA '70; Ace Gallery, LA '72; Galerie Ricke, Cologne '73; Castelli Graphics, NYC '73; Ace Gallery, LA '74; The School of Visual Arts, NY '74; Leo Castelli Gallery, NYC '74; Portland Center for the Visual Arts, OR '75; Ace Gallery, LA '76; Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris '77; Galerie m. Bochum, West Germany '77; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam '77.

Selected group exhibitions: Castelli Warehouse, NYC, Nine at Castelli '68; The Museum of Modern Art, NYC, New Media: New Methods '69; Kunsthalle, Bern, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld and the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, When Attitudes Become Form '69; The Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, Antiillusion: Procedures/Materials '69; The Museum of Modern Art, NYC, Information '70; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, LA, Art and Technology '71; Fridericianum, Kassel, Documenta 5 '72; The Baltimore Museum of Art, MD, Fourteen Artists '75; The Museum of Modern Art, NYC, Drawing Now '76; The Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, 200 Years of American Sculpture '76;

P.S.1, Long Island City, NYC, Rooms '76; Kassel, Documenta 6 '77.

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Selected bibliography about Serra:

Leider, Philip. "New York: Richard Serra, Castelii Ware-house," Artforum, vol. 8, no. 6 (Feb. '70) pp. 69-70.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Richard Serra: Sculpture Redrawn,"

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Years: The Dematerialization
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to 1972 (New York: Praeger '73).
Richard Serra Drawings

1971 - 1977 (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum '77).

Krauss, Rosalind. Passages in Modern Sculpture (New York: Praeger '77).

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