Beverly Pepper

Octavia, 2015
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Cor-Ten Steel
136 x 112 x 55 inches
Base: 88 x 103 inches
The corrugated crust-like surface of Octavia was created by dripping melted steel on in layers. This texture is unique to the work.
“When you see shadows of it on the ground, it's like the phases of the moon, and mom did note that. As those circular forms carve across the grass, it’s as if it’s a moon made of sunlight, as opposed to a moon made of moonlight.”

Jorie Graham

According to Jorie Graham, the executor of the Beverly Pepper Estate, *Octavia* embraces Pepper’s interest in dichotomies: heavy/light, danger/pleasure, male/female, gravitational/anti-gravitational. The work appears to hover precariously over the ground, despite its immense weight and stability. The tension between movement and stillness activates the work and the space around it.

Pepper was also fascinated by sundials and by the phases of the moon; *Octavia* casts large curved shadows, which shift around the piece as the light changes throughout the day.

Jorie Graham, photo © Jeannette Montgomery Barron
“Monumental sculpture exists as experiential space. That is, it is neither entirely an external object, nor wholly an internal experience.”

Beverly Pepper
Octavia the Younger (Octavia Minor) was the older sister of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, and the fourth wife of Mark Antony, prior to his marriage to Cleopatra. They were married by senatorial decree as an attempt to ease tensions between Mark Anthony and Octavia’s brother Augustus, during the era in which Augustus transformed the constitutional Roman Republic into the autocratic Roman Empire.

During her four-year marriage to Antony, Octavia won over the Roman Republic, becoming arguably the most famous and beloved woman in Rome at the time. When Antony left Octavia and their children for Cleopatra, Romans rallied around Octavia, who enjoyed wide public support in her next role as a political liaison and peace-keeper between Augustus and Mark Antony.

Following Antony and Cleopatra’s suicides, Octavia spent the rest of her life as a single woman and an important advisor to the new Roman Empire.
“The optimal condition of her plastic operations, for decades, has been a dimensional consistency of explicit confrontation with the environment, of strong and conspicuous presence in the given space, and preferably in an outdoor space.”

Enrico Crispolti
Octavia’s funeral in 11 BC was a lavish public ceremony, with speeches from many of the most powerful politicians in the Roman Empire, including her brother Augustus. Public support for Octavia remained high even in death, and coins were minted with her likeness on them, making her only the second Roman woman to be commemorated on currency.

Augustus had the Gate of Octavia and Porticus Octaviae constructed in her honor, and later had the Roman senate declare Octavia a goddess. In the era of the Roman Empire, a senatorial declaration of divinity was not simply an honorific title; the people believed her to really be elevated into godhood.

“If one were to categorize these structures, one would dub them a type of Archeological Minimalism... According to the artist... she wanted ‘the past to participate in their presentness.’”

Phyllis Tuchman
“The craggy, irregular depressions... are a memory imprint, a transfer of the textures and colors of great natural rock formations of the American landscape that Pepper loves best: the heroic canyons and mesas of Arizona and New Mexico, where she has traveled and worked.”

Barbara Rose
Octavia sits on an 88 x 103” steel base, with a 17” tall post that holds the work upright. The post fits into a 13” slot at the bottom of the work.

The remaining 4” of the post allow Octavia to appear to be floating precariously above the ground, despite the firm base and stability of the piece. The base is then covered by a substrate like gravel once the work has been properly situated.
Just like Louise Nevelson before her, Beverly Pepper dispels those outworn clichés about women’s art, which would limit its range of qualities to intimacy of scale, emotional reserve, and a fragile poetry of self-awareness.

Her work does not fit any of the once accepted stereotypes of female vulnerability or quiescence. On the contrary, it is boldly assertive, experimental, ambitious, and intensely physical in ways indistinguishable from the work of her male counterparts. In fact, her courage and energies are fast becoming legendary; she has stripped away prejudice against women who make large-scale art by brilliantly executing complex and demanding commissions that might have daunted her rivals.

Sam Hunter
Beverly Pepper was an American sculptor known for her monumental works in steel, cast iron, bronze, stainless steel, and stone. Born in Brooklyn, Pepper began to study design, photography, and industrial design at sixteen at the Pratt Institute. Pepper later studied at the Art Students League and Brooklyn College, and left New York in 1949 to study painting in Paris. After a trip to Angkor Wat in 1960, however, Pepper was inspired by the temple ruins to fully pursue sculpture.

Pepper began exhibiting her sculptures in both New York and Rome, and in 1962, she was one of ten artists (including David Smith and Alexander Calder) invited by Giovanni Carandente to fabricate major works in Italsider factories for an outdoor exhibition in Spoleto. Pepper then continued to work in factories in both Italy and the United States, becoming the first American artist to use Cor-Ten steel while working in a U.S. Steel factory.

Splitting her time between New York and Todi, Italy, Pepper continued producing outdoor sculptures, site specific works, and land art throughout her life. Her work has been widely exhibited, is held in numerous collections, and has been the subject of multiple monographs. The Beverly Pepper Sculpture Park opened in Todi in 2019.
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2017  Beverly Pepper: Selected works, 1968-2015, Kayne Griffin Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
     Beverly Pepper: Monumental Sculpture, Marlborough Gallery, New York
     Beverly Pepper, Museo dell’Ara Pacis, Rome, Italy
2010  Beverly Pepper: Metamorphoses, Marlborough Chelsea, New York, New York
2005  Studio Art Center International, Florence, Italy
2004  Beverly Pepper: Una poètica de l’espai, Caja de Ahorros del Mediterrâneo, Majorca, Spain
2001  Beverly Pepper: the Magma Series, Marlborough Chelsea, New York
2000  Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
1999  Beverly Pepper Recent Sculpture: Forms of Memory II, Marlborough Chelsea, New York
1997  Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, New York, United States
1995  Forms of Memory - Recent Sculpture, André Emmerich Gallery, New York
1994  Charles Cowles Gallery, New York
     Nardin Gallery, Somers, New York
1991  Contemporary Sculpture Center, Tokyo, Japan
     The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
1989  Albert and Vera List Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
1988  André Emmerich Gallery, New York
1985  Adams-Middleton Gallery, Dallas, TX
     John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1983  André Emmerich Gallery, New York
     Galerie André Emmerich, Zurich, Switzerland
1979  André Emmerich Gallery, New York
1977  André Emmerich Gallery, New York
1976  San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
1975  André Emmerich Gallery, New York
     Hammarskjold Plaza Sculpture Garden, New York
1973  The Tyler School of Art, Temple University Abroad, Rome, Italy
1969  Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
     Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY
     Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Selected Public and Museum Collections

Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
Barcelona Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona, Spain
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, NE
Florence Museum of Art, Florence, Italy
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Florence, Italy
Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy
Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Instituto Italiano de Cultura, Stockholm, Sweden
Jerusalem Foundation, Jerusalem, Israel
Jewish Museum, New York, NY
Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, United States
Milwaukee Arts Center, Milwaukee, WI
Museu d’Arte Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Museum of Modern Art, Sapporo, Japan
National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.
National Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.
Neo-hodos, Adachi-ku Machizukuri, Tokyo, Japan
Parkersburg Art Museum, Parkersburg, WV
Power Institute of Fine Art, Sydney, Australia
Rochester Art Museum, Rochester, NY
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Weizmann Institute, Rehovath, Israel
Western Washington University Outdoor Museum, Bellingham, WA
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY