Beverly Pepper: Precarious Balance
September 8 - November 6, 2021
We are pleased to present Beverly Pepper: Precarious Balance, an exhibition of remarkable works spanning 1960, the year Pepper began her career as a sculptor, through 2016, which are representative of her later works. Taking a cue from Pepper’s long-standing interest in science, nature, and outdoor sculpture, we have installed many of the works both in the Upper Gallery and in the surrounding landscape.

“I have always been interested in precarious balance, because it is also what life is about.”

Beverly Pepper
Although she began her career as a painter, Pepper turned to sculpture after visiting Angkor Wat in 1960. Inspired by her trip, Pepper produced her earliest sculptural works in both wood and metal. Three works in our exhibition date from this period, and they are striking examples of Pepper’s earliest experiments with chestnut, bronze, steel, and stone. Pepper later used similar materials in her 1980s Messenger works, which are featured prominently Precarious Balance.

"I walked into Angkor Wat a painter and I left a sculptor."

Beverly Pepper

After producing some of her first large-scale steel works in the Italsider factory in Italy in the early 1960s, Pepper was famously invited by US Steel to experiment with Cor-Ten. Pepper produced her first works in Cor-Ten in 1964, and the material quickly became one of her signatures. Beverly Pepper: Precarious Balance includes several late Cor-Ten tabletop works, including Medium Ascension (2008) and Plotina (2014). Our outdoor installation of Pepper’s monumental 2015 Cor-Ten work Octavia continues concurrently with this exhibition. Octavia stands over 11 feet tall and appears to hover precariously over the ground, despite its immense weight and stability. The tension between movement and stillness activates Octavia and the space around it.

Pepper also worked extensively in stainless steel in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and she returned to the material in the 2000s. Works like Torre Pieno nel Vuoto (1968) demonstrate Pepper’s engagement with geometric, angular forms around the time of its creation, while Virgo and Orion (2016) reflect Pepper’s later curved and soaring forms. It is fascinating to see these different formal vocabularies expressed in stainless steel across two distinct stages of her career. Of particular significance is the 1970 work Camposimp, which stretches nearly seventeen feet across. Camposimp reflects the sky above, and views of the surrounding landscape shift as the viewer moves around the work.

“I’ve never been happier than I was when I was in a factory.”

Beverly Pepper
As Jorie Graham, executor of the Beverly Pepper Estate, notes, this is no coincidence. Pepper was deeply invested in the materiality of her work, and her use of stainless steel reflects a lifelong fascination with the intersection between the chthonic gravitational pull of earth and the oppositional spiritual pull of sky. *Camposimp* brings the sky into the earth, as the large polished planes of the work reflect the sky and appear to drive it into the soil from multiple angles. No matter how the viewer is positioned, Pepper makes it difficult to see their own self as reflection, as if to keep the self out of the story. Pepper intended this, once remarking that “the polished mirror surface has two distinct uses: One is to envelop the environment so that in a certain light the sculpture appears to absorb the landscape or the landscape absorbs the sculpture. The essential attempt was to have a continuity between the work and the environment, the environment and the work.”

While Pepper’s stainless steel works bring the sky into the earth, Cor-Ten steel functions in the reverse. Steel is an alloy of iron, which comes from deep in the earth. Pepper’s soaring Cor-Ten forms appear to lift the earth as if against gravity into the sky in ways that often seem to defy the weight of materiality itself. This is further emphasized by their patinas—which alter with every movement of the light and seem to make time’s changes come alive via their variegated, textured surfaces. Nothing stays what it seems for more than an instant—and yet this is happening to among the most durable of materials.
Pepper worked these surfaces through multiple processes of her invention to get her legendary patinas and textures, while polished stainless steel inherently reflects everything around it—so the angles of the planes become urgent.

When Pepper revisited stainless steel in some of her final works, she worked with much of the same formal vocabulary she had produced in Cor-Ten; some works were even fabricated in both materials and at multiple scales. “She was intent on exploring the forms, the gravitational/anti-gravitational, the works in Cor-Ten had given rise to,” her daughter Jorie Graham suggests, “and to sense those formal discoveries up against the exploding surfaces the stainless brings out. It’s as if the painter and sculptor in her were suddenly working at once, testing form against pattern, the made against the raw, as it were, the earth and sky themselves as they appear in reflection, resisting transformation, devoid of will.” Working with both materials produced pieces that are exemplary demonstrations of the dichotomies inherent across Pepper’s work, including earth/sky, gravitational/anti-gravitational, temporal/atemporal, temporal/spatial, material/ethereal, and absorptive/reflective.
"It’s as if the painter and sculptor in her were suddenly working at once, testing form against pattern, the made against the raw, as it were, the earth and sky themselves as they appear in reflection, resisting transformation, devoid of will."

Jorie Graham

Graham recalls that Pepper loved to sit by the window in her home in Umbria and look out at the rolling hills and the sky, trying to feel at once everything from the metal core of the earth and its magnetic pull to the invisible Roman and Greek gods that for her sometimes seemed to populate the cloudy regions and regions above, to put them in conversation. This is reflected in works titled after constellations like Orion and Virgo. While constellations are often named after the gods, they are also the shapes of earthly creatures that humans have projected onto the night sky. This is precisely the sort of dichotomy that fascinated Pepper, who once explained: “I have always been interested in precarious balance, because it is also what life is about.”
BEVERLY PEPPER

_Camposimp_, 1970
stainless steel
18 x 128 x 77 inches
(45.7 x 325.1 x 195.6 cm)
Pepper executed two versions of *Camposimp*; one in stainless steel, and another in Cor-Ten steel, which she exhibited in *Pepper: Sculture in Piazza Margana*. The Cor-Ten version of *Camposimp* was collected by the Italian painter Piero Dorazio. The exhibition also included *Torre Pieno nel Vuoto*. 
BEVERLY PEPPER

Senza Titolo, 1963
bronze
24 1/2 x 11 x 14 inches
(62 x 28 x 35.5 cm)
Senza Titolo was originally in the collection of the noted Italian art critic Giovanni Carandente, who received it as a gift from Beverly Pepper.

As the art director of the 1962 Festival dei Due Mondi (Festival of the Two Worlds) in Spoleto, Italy, Carandente included Pepper in the exhibition Sculture nella città (Sculptures in the City). The exhibition featured over one hundred sculptures by fifty-three artists throughout Spoleto. Carandente invited both Beverly Pepper and David Smith to spend a month working in the Italsider steel factory.

Pepper produced twenty-three sculptures in this time and exhibited the largest three works. Having only recently begun to work in sculpture after a 1960 trip to Angkor Wat, this was Pepper’s first time working in steel and in a factory setting, both of which would become key elements of Pepper’s career.
BEVERLY PEPPER

Memories, 1968
stainless steel
32 1/4 x 12 1/2 x 23 1/5 inches
(81.9 x 31.8 x 58.9 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

*Untitled*, 1981-82

iron with oxidized red-brown patina and wood

47 inches

(119 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Livy, 1981
oil-painted cast iron, steel and stainless steel
85 inches
(215.9 cm)
Left:

Reappearing Messenger, 1982
steel and teak
89 1/4 x 7 1/4 x 5 3/8 inches
(226.7 x 18.4 x 13.7 cm)

Right:

Cryptic Messenger, 1983
mahogany and steel
89 7/8 x 8 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches
(228.3 x 22.2 x 11.4 cm)

Dusk Presence I, 1982
bronze and rosewood
102 inches
(259.1 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

*Merging Presence*, 1982
mahogany and steel
115 x 5 3/8 inches
(292.1 x 13.7 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Ultramarine Blue
oil painted steel
99 inches
(251.5 cm)
**Calm Presence**, 1982
painted bronze and rosewood on steel base
102 inches
(259.1 cm)

**Etruria Presence I**
steel and cast iron
96 x 15 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches
243.9 x 39.4 x 39.4 cm)
“Messengers literally go between a sender and a receiver who are not in the same place. They arrive with news from elsewhere... They tell us that change is possible.”

Beverly Pepper
BEVERLY PEPPER

Plotina, 2014
Cor-Ten steel
17 x 19 x 17 inches
(43.2 x 48.3 x 43.2 cm)
Plotina is titled after Pompeia Plotina, a Roman empress best known for improving the social conditions of Rome, especially for the poor, by supporting education, providing fairer taxation, and encouraging tolerance. She was renowned for her interest in philosophy, including the Epicurean school in Athens, Greece.

Plotina is one of a number of works that Pepper titled after remarkable women in ancient Rome. Many of these women were renowned for their leadership and wide public support, while others were infamous for going against the grain of elite Roman society. Pepper executed these pieces as both tabletop sculptures and as large outdoor works.

One such outdoor work is the monumental 2015 sculpture Octavia, which is installed concurrently with Beverly Pepper: Precarious Balance. Known as a political liaison and peace-keeper between Augustus and Mark Antony, Octavia Minor was one of the most famous and beloved women of ancient Rome.
Miltons Wedge, 1980
iron
26 x 9 x 4 inches
(66 x 22.9 x 10.2 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

*Mahogany Perpetua Plaza*, 1986-89
steel and mahogany
46 x 18 x 18 inches
(116.8 x 45.7 x 45.7 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Paduak Plaza, 1984-87
cast iron and Paduak
17 3/4 x 12 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches
(45.1 x 31.8 x 90.2 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Virgo, 2016
stainless steel
16 7/8 x 21 1/2 x 9 3/8 inches
(42.9 x 54.6 x 23.8 cm)
Orion, 2016
stainless steel
13 1/4 x 14 3/4 x 11 inches
(33.7 x 37.5 x 27.9 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Untitled, 1968
chrome-plated and enameled steel and aluminum
9 1/2 x 6 x 3 1/4 inches
(24.1 x 15.2 x 8.3 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Medium Ascension, 2008
steel
30 3/8 x 28 3/4 x 13 inches
(77.2 x 73 x 33 cm)
Untitled, c. 1960 - 63
steel and wood on stone base
35 x 21 x 11 inches
(88.9 x 53.3 x 27.9 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

_Torre Pieno nel Vuoto_, 1968

stainless steel

Height: 82 5/8 inches / Base: 15 3/4 x 10 1/2 inches

(Height: 210 cm / Base: 40 x 26.7 cm)
Torre Pieno nel Vuoto reproduced in a publication for the exhibition Pepper: Sculture in Piazza Margana. Pepper was invited by the city of Rome to exhibit a dozen sculptures in Piazza Margana from May to June 1971.

“Stainless steel, polished to a mirror finish. The idea is that from whatever angle you view it, the voids seem filled and the solids seem empty.”

Beverly Pepper
A related work, Torre Pieno nel Vuoto II, is in the permanent collection of Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, and is currently on view in “Unveiling American Genius,” an exhibition that re-imagines KIA’s collection to highlight the innovations of American artists.

Torre Pieno nel Vuoto II, created the year after Torre Pieno nel Vuoto, uses a similar but shorter form, with two faces painted in white.

The title of both works roughly translates to “Full Tower in the Void.”
Another related work, *Torre Pieno al Vuoto* (1967, pictured above), was exhibited in *Beverly Pepper: Sculpture in Place*, a major survey of Peppers’ work from the 1960s through 1986. This work features a similar form and polished mirror surface, but the void on the lower portion of the work faces in the opposite direction.

The exhibition was organized by Albright-Knox Art Gallery and traveled to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio; the Brooklyn Museum; and the Center for the Fine Arts, Miami, Florida. An extensive catalog by Rosalind Krauss was published to accompany the exhibition. *Torre Pieno nel Vuoto* was reproduced in the catalog, pictured to the right.
BEVERLY PEPPER

*Untitled*, c. 1960s
chestnut with bronze
14 1/2 x 20 x 14 inches
(36.8 x 50.8 x 35.5 cm)
Longo (tabletop), 2008
steel
10 3/4 x 4 1/2 x 3 inches
(27.3 x 11.4 x 7.6 cm)
Longo is a tabletop-sized variation of Pepper’s monumental 2007 work *Longo Monolith*, which stood outside of her home in Todi, Italy until Pepper passed away in 2020. *James Barron Art* has since placed *Longo Monolith* with the US Consulate in Milan, which plans to install the work outside of a newly-constructed complex designed by SHoP Architects.
Taurus Portal, 1979
iron
24 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 5 inches
(62.2 x 31.8 x 12.7 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Untitled (maquette)
steel, paint, threaded screws
8 x 12 1/4 x 7 1/4 inches
(20.3 x 31.1 x 18.4 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Demeter Fragment (from “Forms of Memory II”), 1999
stone
8 1/2 x 8 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches
(21.6 x 21.6 x 11.4 cm)
BEVERLY PEPPER

Untitled, 1970
chrome-plated and enameled steel and brass
9 1/4 x 2 3/4 x 3 inches
(23.5 x 7 x 7.6 cm)
“These are works which are cloaked in mystery, which bespeak the cycles of nature.”

Phyllis Tuchman

_Pietrasanta Presence, 1980_
cast iron
111 x 16 Inches
(40.6 x 281.9 cm)

Both works:

_Bedford Column, 1990_
cast iron
102 inches
(259 cm)