

Richard Serra: Drawings
Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo June
 20 – September 26, 2020

*It comes out of the relationship that I have with matter—that matter will inform itself, that the logic of matter will inform whatever you do, and the variability of matter will transform whatever you do.*¹

—Richard Serra, 2012

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present an exhibition of *Orient* drawings by one of America’s most prominent artists, Richard Serra, opening at the gallery’s Tokyo location on June 20, 2020. This series of new drawings, all from 2018, titularly recognize the place in which they were produced: Orient, New York, on the Northern tip of Long Island. Characterized by the artist’s longstanding concerns with weight and process, these works avoid the trappings of metaphor and connotation, reveling instead in the physical qualities of the drawings’ material.

For over five decades, Richard Serra’s sculptures and drawings have reflected a studied interest in exertion set within the parameters of time. While heralded for his monumental, site-specific sculptures, Serra has been pushing the thresholds of drawings, beginning from his work in black impasto since 1971. Key to both of these explorations is his sustained engagement with gravity and weight. As famed Japanese art critic Minemura Toshiaki writes in regards to two of the works Serra produced in Tokyo in 1970, featured in the catalogue published on the occasion of this exhibition, the artist was interested in “the logic of half visible, half invisible [as] a kind of metaphysics”. Serra’s rolled-steel sculptures highlight the viewer’s sensorial relationship activated as they move alongside and around the work, their optical position operatively shifting the hulking metal in real time. In Serra’s drawings, the artist himself is tasked with engaging with the accentuated physical properties of materials, resulting in direct and intimate surfaces.



In 1970, Serra was invited to participate in *Between Man and Matter*, better known today as the 10th Tokyo Biennale, famously producing his first outdoor sculpture *To Encircle Base Plate (Hexagram)* on the occasion of the exhibition. This initial visit to Japan strongly impacted Serra, who has subsequently noted in an interview with Hal Foster the austere Japanese garden’s influence on his exploration of time within a perceptual field, in both his landscape and sculptural work. Speaking at a 2001 Belknap Lecture at Princeton, also included in this exhibition’s catalogue, Serra recapitulates this pivotal moment: “Kyoto defined my way of seeing. The perceptual space of the Zen garden reveals the landscape as a total field, its organization based on the assumption of a moving viewer. The focus is never on the isolated sculptural object but on the syncretistic complexity of the whole.”



Serra’s ongoing use of black ink similarly carries connotations of the material’s rich and long tradition in Japan. In Serra’s drawings, the exclusive use of this color speaks to his interest in the absolute reduction of light and weightiness of his forms. A seminal retrospective of the artist’s works on paper, *Richard Serra: Drawings and Prints*, was held at the National Museum of Art in Osaka in 1994, highlighting the artist’s impressive range of production on two-

dimensional surfaces. This same year Serra was awarded one of Japan's preeminent honors, the Praemium Imperiale. And while Serra has frequently exhibited in Japan throughout his prolific career, this is the artist's first exhibition in nearly two decades in the country responsible for greatly influencing his approach to art making. In the West, the artist's drawings have continually received critical acclaim following the watershed 2011–12 drawing retrospective, organized by the Menil Collection, Houston, which traveled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Major retrospective exhibitions for Serra's drawings have also been held at the Kunsthaus Bregenz (2008) and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2017).

For this exhibition at Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo, the artist will showcase ten of his new *Orient* drawings. The *Orient* drawings are produced through a dynamic interplay between the artist's exertion and the materials he employs. A dense, black mixture made-up of variations of the pigment—from impasto, to etching ink, and silica—is spread across a flat surface onto which a robust paper is then pressed. Using only a steel implement and the physical weight of his body, Serra moves the tincture, creating unique applications. In avoiding all decision regarding the eventual surface of his work, the artist adjusts this black mass through its gestural, yet blind, manipulation. The leaden texture of the imprints results from the eventual pulling of the paper away from its bed of black substance, concluding in rich viscous irregularities.



The diverse effects of Serra's drawings have resulted from an acute exploration of varied techniques throughout his two-dimensional works. By the 1970s, Serra had produced his first human scaled drawings, taking on configurations similar to those explored through heavier materials in his architectural sculptures. Other drawings from this time insist on the concrete tension between horizontal and vertical configurations. These latest works, to which the *Orient* drawings belong, articulate the intertwining of physical gesture and medial heaviness as a ripe arena to reach questions of space and time.

On the occasion of this presentation, Fergus McCaffrey has published a bilingual comprehensive catalogue of Richard Serra's *Orient* drawings. The publication features an original essay by foremost Mono-Ha scholar Minemura Toshiaki as well as the artist's 2001 Belknap Lecture in the Humanities at Princeton University. The gallery has also produced two short films to accompany the exhibition, chronicling Serra's drawing practice and illustrating his time in Japan.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018 with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman. The gallery's 2019–2020 program featured solo exhibitions by Ari Marcopoulos, Jasper Johns, Martha Jungwirth, and Richard Serra, among others.

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Note to Visitors

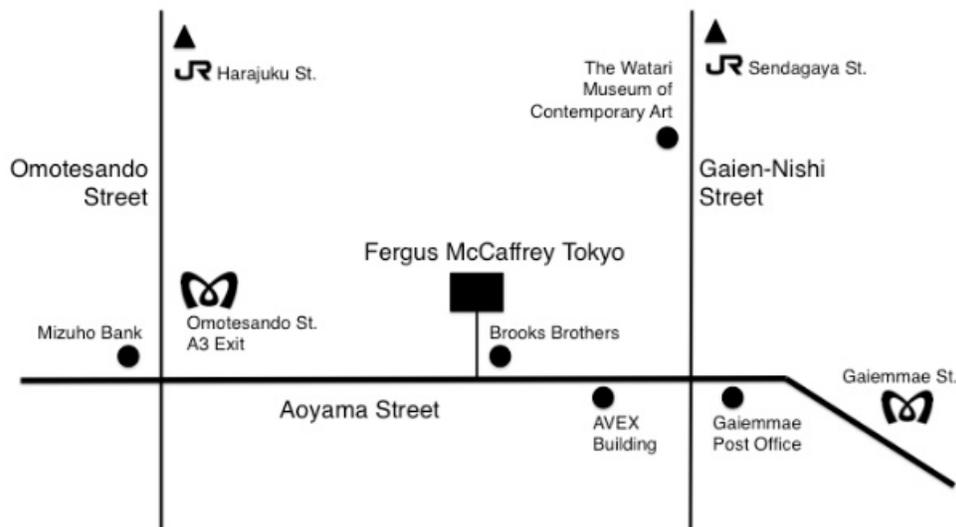
In compliance with the government's health guidelines regarding social distancing, and to promote and protect the safety and well-being of our staff, artists, and community, visitors are asked to wear masks and sanitize hands before entering the gallery, contact-less temperature will be taken upon entrance, and a capacity of four visitors will be allowed at one time. We request that you please refrain from visiting the gallery if you have symptoms such as a fever or cough.

Images:

1. Richard Serra, *Orient #12*, 2018. Etching ink and silica on handmade paper, 48 1/4 x 40 inches (122.6 x 101.6 cm) © 2020 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Photograph by Rob McKeever
2. Richard Serra installing *To Encircle Base Plate (Hexagram)* at the 10th Tokyo Biennale, *Between Man and Matter*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1970; Photograph by Anzai Shigeo © ANZAI; courtesy of ZEIT-FOTO
3. Richard Serra, *Orient #3*, 2018. Etching ink and silica on handmade paper, 40 1/2 x 40 inches (102.9 x 101.6 cm) © 2020 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Photograph by Rob McKeever

Map:

(Omotesando station A3 exit)



¹ Richard Serra, interview by Brad Epley, The Menil Collection, February 27, 2012