

By June, 1969 we had taken six artists to Kaiser Steel Corporation (Len Lye, François Dallegret, Philip King, Jules Olitski, Robert Smithson, and Mark di Suvero) without effecting a match. James Monte, who had by this time moved to New York, urged us to invite Richard

Serra to visit Kaiser's Fontana division. On June 10, HG and Serra toured the facility, and the artist was enthusiastic about what he saw. Shortly thereafter, he submitted the following proposal: [1]

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PROPOSAL FOR LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM IN CONJUNCTION WITH KAISER STEEL

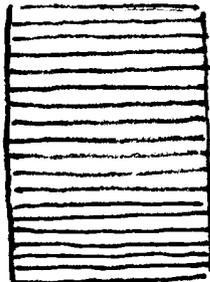
The work will be related to both the physical properties of the site (Kaiser Steel) and the characteristics of the materials and processes concomittant to it. The work falls into three basic categories:

- A. casting in location
- B. overlaying processes
- C. constructions.

A. Casting: The molten metal for casting is to be brought directly from the furnaces by turret car to the yard. Sand casting molds are to be used to control the pouring flow in location.

1. Slabs are to be embedded and supported in place in the molds.
2. Shapes are to be derived from direct pouring.

B. Overlaying Processes: Specific diverse processes are to be superimposed in final states. The juxtaposition is to point to the specific characteristics contained in each step and method of processing. Work will assume a holistic striated form. Stacking will be the control. Example: poured form overlaid by in crops, hot rolled slab, galvanized sheet, cold rolled, discarded gangue, etc.



C. Constructions: Work is to be erected in place. Slabs, hot rolled (ploom), to be used. Principle of work is to rely on physical tension, balance, and gravity. Example: Stonehenge type construction.



We invited Serra to take up residence at Kaiser, and on July 21 he commenced work. After negotiations with Kaiser management and supervisory staff, it was agreed that the artist would work, at certain specified times, in the "skullcracker" yard. (Here various scrap materials are broken down so as to be reprocessed.) To do this Kaiser provided the artist with an H-shaped overhead magnetic crane, an experienced crane operator and several construction assistants. Bill Brinkman, foundry foreman, was assigned to oversee the collaboration; he became an invaluable assistant to the artist. For the next four weeks Serra worked closely with this crew of assistants, often during the night shift, when the crane was available. He usually positioned himself on the ground near the location on which the piece was to be built, signaling directions to the crane operator standing at the controls in an overhead tower.

In his work of the past two years, Serra's primary structural method has been that of propping, leaning and stacking various types of massive materials—lead sheets, rolled lead columns, steel, and giant logs. His basic approach to these methods is empirical, combined with an intuitive understanding of the physical properties of gravity, tension and balance. In all these works, among which *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* and *Sign Board Prop*, both of 1969, are notable examples, the notion of *process* is inherent to the sculpture and as important as the final construction resulting from the accumulation of individual components. The artist best explains his approach at Kaiser in the following statement written after his period of collaboration at the plant:

Skullcracker Stacking Series (name of yard)
 Work at Kaiser Steel (Fontana, California) was erected with an overhead magnetic crane. The structures were not conceived in advance. A hand language was learned. (Collaboration existed between the operator and myself.) Material primarily utilized: crop, the waste product of the hot roll mill. These large chunks of steel cut from the ends of slabs provided a variety of nonfixed relational possibilities.

The scale 15 to 30 feet in height and weighing 100-250 tons was related directly to the potential of the place. The problem: to avoid architectonic structure, i.e. to allow the work to be both dense, loose and balanced without relying on previous forms or given methods.

The series involved the possibilities of constructing with weight, i.e. gravitational balanced weight overhead as support. This series was further abstracted with the resultant lead structures made in New York in the fall.

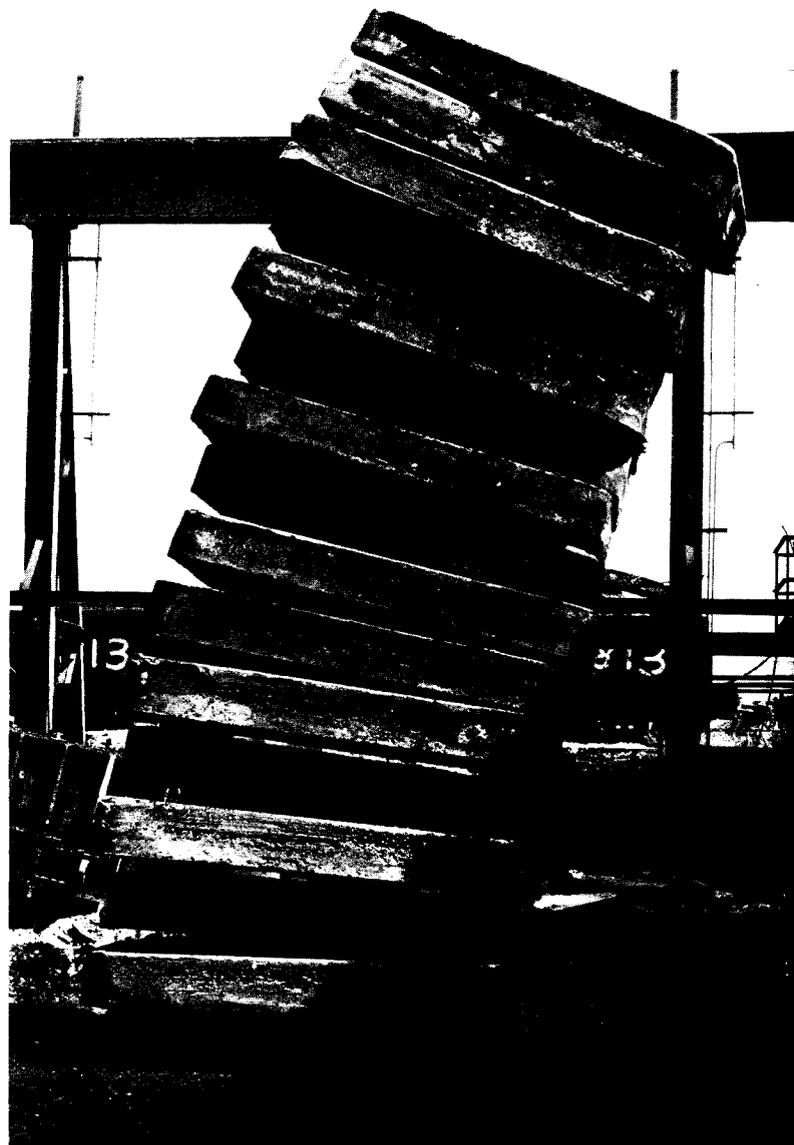
Direct engagement with the materials (crop, plate, slab, billets, stools, etc.) that is, the elements in-

involved, enabled concrete identification with each step in the process. Paradoxically the solutions to the problems of construction (stacking) appear rational, although the process of finding these solutions was not. The apparent potential for disorder for movement endowed the structures with a quality outside of their physical or relational definition. Complete disorientation occurred daily. Work that both tended upward and collapsed downward toward the ground simultaneously was o.k. In all twenty structures were erected in eight weeks—the pieces were put together and taken apart.

Technology is a form of tool making (body extensions). Technology is not art—not invention. It is a simultaneous hope and hoax. It does not concern itself with the undefined, the inexplicable: it deals with the affirmation of its own making. Technology is what we do to the Black Panthers and the Vietnamese under the guise of advancement in a materialistic theology.

It was in the context of this past body of work and with the above stated attitude that Serra directed his efforts at Kaiser. He proceeded by trial and error, and, after establishing a rapport with his crew and experimenting with the equipment, he executed about twelve constructions in a period of two weeks of intense activity. The procedure would be to erect a piece, and, if he considered it successful, to have it recorded photographically when possible. The structure was then dismantled. These were process experiments which would later be evaluated by Serra.

The first piece Serra executed involved piling sixteen “stools”* in a cantilevered stack. Each stool weighs approximately six tons, and the piece as a whole weighed close to one hundred tons. This massive amount of material, compacted into dense rectangular forms and erected on a tilt, produces a powerful sense of precarious balance. [2]



*A stool is a rectangular block of cast iron used in the steel-making process to close off the bottom of the mold into which molten iron is poured.