David Collens, Director of Storm King
Liberman’s Sculpting Process
Well I think like many artists they are not creating models. There’s something intuitive in letting the materials really speak to them, and guide them. And I think with Alex, I do remember seeing small models, not identical to the way the sculpture was realized in full scale, but that might be the one clue into how he wanted to develop the sculpture. I think another part of it was going out there and doing the welding with various assistants, with cranes, and welding equipment. And it if wasn’t right, cutting it off and adding something else, or deleting other parts of the sculpture until visually it was correct for him in the scale of it, and the right combination of cylinders, and I-beams, and so forth. And I think he’d work it out on paper to a certain extent as well, but I think with large-scale sculpture in the process that Liberman and many other artists were following it’s getting out there and really doing the sculpture to a certain extent and seeing if the scale works out, otherwise try something else.

David Collens, Director of Storm King
Liberman’s Use of Color and Found Objects
He started buying used oil tanks that were underground. He bought them up at auctions, and various locations, and they were trucked to his Warren, Connecticut studio. The yard was full of different sized tanks, whether they were used oil tanks, water tanks, other types of tanks, various diameters, different lengths, it was very impressive. And these tanks were eventually used and cut, sliced, to create very
large-scale sculpture. He started with smaller sculpture, but once that he saw the tanks, I think that became his signature material. These tanks were usually painted red, or white, or orange, sometimes black, or smaller scale sculptures that were really his choice of colors and I think each sculptor has chosen certain colors for high visibility and recognition. It was a narrow range that he did as many other artists are selecting tighter color range for outdoor sculpture.

Nick Capasso, curator
Liberman’s Remarkable Career
Alexander Liberman was one of the most fascinating figures in both American art and American publishing in the mid 20th century. He was born in Russia to rather bohemian parents, and he was educated in Paris. As an artist, he attended the École des Beaux-Arts, and he had a fairly conservative artistic training. And then he came to New York and got involved in the publishing industry, and he worked for Vogue Magazine as an editorial director. And in 1962, he became the editorial director of all Condé Nast publications internationally. He had the most powerful publications job in the world, and he did that until 1994. He was connected with the school of Paris artists, he was connected with the New York avant-garde, and he was really responsible for integrating the work of these artists with fashion photography in a time when nobody else was doing that. And interestingly enough his work as a photographer was not abstract. His painting was abstract, his sculptures were abstract, but his photographic work, or at least the work he is best known for, is his portraits of 20th-century artists in the school of Paris and the New York school. They’re just great images of these artists. Sometimes at work, sometimes brooding in their studios, but always shown as these potent, creative geniuses.

Nick Capasso, curator
Why Cardinal Points is Important
DeCordova’s first show of outdoor sculpture was in 1966, and it included a lot of really important artists. It was kind of a cutting-edge thing for an American museum to do at the time. There were very few places where artists in this country could exhibit work outdoors in a setting with other artists, in a setting that was dedicated to sculpture, and there are actually three objects in our permanent collection that were included in that 1966 show. So Cardinal Points marks a real milestone in deCordova’s institutional history. The other thing we like so much about Cardinal Points is that it’s a fairly early work by Liberman. It was done in a time when he was making smaller-scale work before he started creating these giant, 30-foot-tall, monumental, abstract sculptures. And a couple of things that distinguish it from the later work is that he is using the oil storage tanks, but he’s really taking them apart, and deconstructing them, and here they’re kind of pulled off into four different segments, which I think has something to do with the title, Cardinal Points. It’s a very energetic sculpture, it really marks the interest of American sculptors in the mid-20th century to find a three-dimensional formal vocabulary that would somehow address, match, compete with, the formal energy and exuberance of Abstract Expressionist painting. So it really is very characteristic of a particular time in American art history.
Mystery Family Tour
You are looking at a sculpture by Alexander Liberman titled Cardinal Points. Look and listen carefully to solve the mystery of what the sculpture is made of. Walk around this sculpture and look at it from all sides. What shapes do you see? Do you think Alexander made the shapes himself or do you think he found them somewhere? Hmm, it’s hard to tell. I heard Alexander found pieces of metal that nobody wanted anymore and used them to make the shapes in this sculpture. What do you think some of the pieces were once used for? Can you see part of a pipe? The artist used junk metal from pipes and tanks. I think some of the pieces look like parts of a car or parts of machinery. What do you think? When Alexander found these scraps of metal they were different colors, but he decided to paint them all black. Why do you think he decided to do that? I think Alexander painted the whole thing black to help us focus on the shapes in the sculpture. How many black sculptures can you find in this Sculpture Park?