DeWitt Godfrey

Siting and Fabrication of Lincoln

All of my work is site-dependent, that is, it is shaped and determined by its context. I didn’t ever set out to make a 150-foot sculpture, but I happened to find a 150-foot site. In my mind, it required a certain kind of work, and a certain kind of scale. I wanted the work to reference the dry-stack stone walls that are so common to this area. I had thought for a long time about doing a long, low piece, so when Nick [the curator] offered me this opportunity, I was able to not only pursue a project I was interested in, but one that I think has circles of context that move outside of the Park. These cylinders, a handful of which were fabricated specifically for this project, but a lot of them are results of previous installations, and for this installation I knew I would need quite a number of cylinders, the most I’ve ever used. There’s 72 cylinders in this piece, about 30,000 pounds’ worth of steel. The oldest elements up there are from installations at Socrates Sculpture Park in 2001, and then from every other installation since, and also over time, since there are interchangeable elements really, it’s a system. It’s a bit like having a set of blocks and you’re given an opportunity to arrange them in some interesting way based on a response to site.

DeWitt Godfrey

The Weathering of the Cor-Ten Steel

Typically in the first few days, there’s some settling as the pieces get accustomed to their position and gravity. They kind of find a final sort of resting place, but the
various levels of oxidation and rust will change. Some of the pieces are very recently fabricated, so they’re now sort of steel blue from the mill, those will eventually acquire the really nice patina that Cor-Ten is known for, this deep burgundy, almost purple sometimes, color. If people look closely, you’ll see that some of the cylinders are very deep in color. Those are ones that have been outdoors, either in installations or in storage for a decade or more. Some that kind of have an intermediate brighter coating of orange will gradually turn darker, but that takes time, so it will sort of weather and take on its own patina. Typically the upper surfaces rust more quickly than the interior ones so you get drips of rust stains. I think the installation as a whole is really fun to sort of take in, but I think if people do some closer looking, there are some quite interesting little moments where there’s been quite a bit of corrosion, or there’s holes, or different colors. There are markings from different installations where I was trying to register one piece from another. You know there’s a lot of buried information in the work.

DeWitt Godfrey
Interest in Natural Geometries
I’ve always been interested in natural geometries. My earliest work was welded steel sculpture that quoted organic, soft geometries, the Fibonacci Series, various kinds of mathematical principles, different kinds of symmetry and asymmetry. In pursuing a project where I was trying to make the thinnest surface possible, I ended up making a sculpture that changed form. I was trying to do one thing and then I created this object that had this very interesting behavior. It took me awhile to realize it, but once I sort of understood that I had made a form or a system that could have more than one manifestation, I decided that was a much more interesting idea than trying to mimic nature. In this case I was using, sort of systems, and actual geometries, that you know, as you said, things are common, right? The soap bubbles, and close packing, and cells. I like about this work because it follows the same rules as those other things do. There are ways which forms can and cannot go together, and my job is to sort of create an interesting system with as rich of behavior as possible. Cylinders of different diameters, stiffnesses, attachment patterns, and then find interesting places to put that system into motion. I’d like to think that the aesthetics of that are somewhat consequential. That is, I didn’t invent circle packing. But this is one of the way that nature builds itself. I am very pleased to have found a way to use that language in an unfamiliar scale and with unfamiliar materials.