Ron Rudnicki

Definition of Sculpture

Kenneth Snelson years ago did Tensegrity and he did these things suspended by steel in tubes. And engineers said, “oh that’s not engineering” and artists said, “that’s not art.” And I loved it because he said that’s hardening of the art categories. Not hardening of the arteries but hardening of what you envision as art, and that’s the big thing. It’s that there’s no limit. Sculpture can sit on a wall, it can be freestanding on the floor, it can exist by itself, it can be a whole environment. So if you limit your thinking that art has to be specific, then you are misunderstanding the whole idea of art. When I was working here, I had a student come up. And I was doing some rudimentary guttural work on the bottom pool placing stone cement. And she said, “Oh, you’re a mason.” And I said, “No, I’m a sculptor.” She said “But you’re doing masonry work,” and I said, “Yeah, but it’s a part of the whole picture. I said I also designed planting.” And she said, “Oh, you’re a landscaper.” I said, “No, I’m a sculptor.” You can sculpt anything. It doesn’t have to be a physical thing. It doesn’t have to be clay, it doesn’t have to have an armature. You can sculpt a space. Look at James Turrell. He just works with light. When I did Rain Gates, the idea was to do an environment so that you could not distinguish between the elements. I wanted everything to bleed together. I wanted it to function as a space so you didn’t feel the parameters of a specific object on a pedestal.
Ron Rudnicki  
Working Process
There was the person that wanted to sponsor something. And they said, “I’ll come up with something.” Now I knew I could rely on what I already knew, but I can’t stand doing that. So I was driving the two guys that were working for me crazy. Everyday on the highway, I was like, “What am I going to do? What am I going to do?” And then I finally said, “Phew, I got to let things go, I just have to let it happen.” And I was driving along the way up here and I was staring at the wonderful guardrails of the side of the road, all of a sudden (snaps fingers) an old sculpture and something else hit, and that’s what gave me the idea for that. And then, this is the joyful part for me, and then when I hit the idea, it’s like okay, now I’ve got to sort of like fine tune this stuff. I’ve got to think about what’s going to happen. Now I usually get the visual, then I have to figure out how to make it work, and then the steps go along, but the visual is the ride that I go on. So I get the visual. When I have the visual, then I have to have the pieces. You can’t force it. It’s not like going to an art store to get the stuff I get. If the pieces aren’t there, you can’t force them. So you get the pieces. When you get the pieces, you want to carve them. When you want to carve them, then you want to see them installed. In the middle of installing them, then you want to see everything else fall into place. In the middle of the last possible step, you’re already thinking about the next job.

Ron Rudnicki  
Placing the Last Stone in Rain Gates
The last thing we did on Rain Gates was the bottom stone. That stone is about six tons, and we pushed that from down the hill, up the hill at eight o’clock at night when people were walking their dogs and coming in on bicycles. And we pushed that up with a Bobcat that only weighed a half a ton, and we knew how to finesse the stone and the balances and stuff. And it was like, you don’t give up. You push that last little piece. You put a block. You twist it, you roll it. And we finally got it up, and it was tilted. It’s not good enough. So you have to do that little extra tilt and that’s the like seeding stone at the bottom. So we got it all up, and you’re thinking and you’re working. You’re concentrating on what you’re doing with the visual, but you’re also thinking you’ve got to be safe, because when a stone falls, you’re done. And so we got it up into place, and everything was good, and we were like, “Yes!” So we shut off the machine—no noise. We could go up there and sit down but once we shut off the machine all of a sudden there was like thirty people that were just walking outside going with their dogs and on bicycles and all of a sudden there was this huge applause, and we didn’t even know they were there. (Chuckles) So that was unexpected. I’m not used to working in front of an audience.

Nick Capasso, curator  
Commissioning Rain Gates
Ron Rudnicki’s Rain Gates is a site specific installation that was commissioned expressly for the museum. Before the installation was there, that part of the Sculpture Park was a rocky ravine full of poison ivy that basically served as a barrier between the deCordova Museum School and the parking lot, and the Sculpture
Park. The Director at the time wanted to utilize this very beautiful part of the property, and transform it from an obstacle into an opportunity for access. So Ron Rudnicki was hired to propose an installation that would provide access up into the Sculpture Park, and above and beyond that, what he did was to create an installation that became a merger of nature, sculpture, and landscape architecture where those three different disciplines are almost indistinguishable from each other. He also used a lot of the materials native to the site including the actual bedrock which is jutting out of the ground as well as some of the native stones, some of the native plant material, and to this he added his own stones. The carved stones, plant material that he introduced, and the recirculating fountain system, and it’s all knitted together with a pathway where viewers can walk easily from below to above within a kind of miniature landscape within the larger landscape of the Sculpture Park. The reason it is a site-specific installation is because the art and the site are inextricably melded together. You cannot separate out the artwork from the place.

Nick Capasso, curator

The Sculpture and its Environment

Ron Rudnicki has designed Rain Gates to specifically invite visitors to interact and participate with the artwork. As you approach Rain Gates from the parking area, there is a large almost ceremonial archway. It’s a door to another world. It’s a door into his artwork, into his installation, and visitors are invited by design to pass through this door, and when you pass through the door, you experience a transformation. All of a sudden, you are in the shade and not in the sun. All of a sudden, you are surrounded by vegetation and not hardscape. All of a sudden, you hear the sounds of the fountain. Your experience has been almost instantaneously transformed. Then there is a system of pathways that meander through the site that visitors are by design are encouraged to walk along, and experience the artwork from several very different vantage points: from below, from midway, from above, there’s even a bridge that crosses this miniature river flowing down through the landscape, and there’s no one way to experience the artwork. The full experience of the artwork is done over time from various perspectives and there’s an awful lot to look at: the plants, the stones, the sculpture, the interaction of the sculpture and the stones, the bugs, the frogs, whatever happens to be living in the kind of retention basin at the bottom at any one time.

Mystery Family Tour

You are looking at a sculpture by Ron Rudnicki called Rain Gates. Listen and look carefully to see who might live here. Walk around this piece and experience it from different areas. Sit and enjoy the sight, smells, and sounds of this piece. What sounds do you hear? This piece is site-specific, meaning it was made just for this location at deCordova. Why do you think this piece was put here? How would this piece be different if it were in the parking lot, or in an open field? The artist spends much of his time travelling to parks. He combines nature and art in his work, and considers himself a sculptor and landscape artist. Ron studied this space for a long time and created drawings of what he wanted his sculpture to look like. He used some of the stone that was already in this location. Which stones do you think were
already here? Which stones do you think the artist put here? Many animals live in this area: squirrels, chipmunks, frogs, and birds. Can you see or hear any of these creatures?