Super slabs and steely nerves: gallery makes room for heavy metal show

Giant of modern art Serra unveiled new works for his first London show in 16 years

Mark Brown
Arts correspondent

Gagosian Gallery

It is probably one of the most technically difficult exhibitions conceived in London for years, monumental slabs of steel weighing more than 200 tonnes that will be set in motion by earth-moving equipment. But the artist, Richard Serra, has already been knocked down and rebuilt to accommodate the piece.

Yesterday Richard Serra, one of the true giants of modern art, unveiled new works for his first show in London in 16 years made up of vast planks of free-standing, self-supporting steel.

One of the works, Open Ended, looks like the hull of a ship and is a labyrinth and needs to be walked through—a thrilling experience for some visitors yesterday and it, of course, a disorienting one for others.

Serra, who has been overseeing the installation of the Gagosian gallery in north London, admitted it had not been entirely smooth. "Open ended was in a completely different place because they moved it on two occasions. The works are huge and there was a lot of damage. I was really pleased with three days."

He praised the young people "walking into the room" who traded it up.

The 68-year-old San Francisco-born artist looks at this show as his "last opportunity" and to mark a hugely popular retrospective of his work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York last year.

"Anyone who has been to the Gagosian in Bilbao will have walked through the enormous trestles of the pieces. This is the same but they are indoors and not in the street."

The other works, including one named Fernando Pessoa (after the Portuguese poet), which is an enormous rectangular slab, and T4, London, two tonnes of sandblasted steel. On the wall in the fourth gallery hang four works—a rectangle, a square and a round glass panel on a wobble feature. "I'm not a welded steel sculptor. I've never welded in my life and I wouldn't know how to deal with it. If I were an artist, I'd sell," Serra said yesterday.

The other works were unveiled yesterday. One named Fernando Pessoa (after the Portuguese poet), which is an enormous rectangular slab, and T4, London, two tonnes of sandblasted steel. On the wall in the fourth gallery hang four works—a rectangle, a square and a round glass panel on a wobble feature. "I'm not a welded steel sculptor. I've never welded in my life and I wouldn't know how to deal with it. If I were an artist, I'd sell," Serra said yesterday.

Tomaso Grassi said "I'm always happy with the Gagosian Gallery. I think it's a great place to visit, and I'm particularly pleased with the new works by Richard Serra."

"Richard Serra's sculptures, as at the Gagosian gallery (Oxford Street, London) until December 20. A concurrent exhibition of his drawings is at the Gagosian gallery (Central Street) until November 20.

"I'm not a welded steel sculptor. I've never welded in my life and I wouldn't know how to deal with it. If I were an artist, I'd sell," Serra said yesterday.