

MIT List Center

Michael Heizer

Michael Heizer grew up in the 50s, on these digs in the American southwest. And he carried these interests directly, into his artworks.

MIT professor of Art History, Carolyn Jones.

He became part of a generation that wanted to go into these out backs of the US, to carve things directly into that surface. This was a generation that had come of age during the Apollo moon missions, who had seen the first pictures of the planet earth from space. And they were ambitious as a result of it. Part of this was a desire to direct attention to the earth and part of it was the sheer ambition to make a sculpture that can be seen from that far away.

In the early 70s, Heizer incorporated his fascination with positive and negative space into sculpture, by constructing freestanding geometric pieces like this one. Called Guenette, it's named after the Quebec town, with the 11 slabs of billion year old pink granite were mined. This 1977 work was originally designed for a plaza in New York City. The sharp edges and thick slabs were meant to echo the lines and dimensions of the surrounding architecture.

When Heizer did this piece, he was less interested in the final composition than he was in his relationship to these materials. It came to MIT and was slightly reconfigured. So again, we have evidence that Heizer really wasn't all that obsessed with the composition of these pieces as much as he was by their relationship to the earth.