

MIT List Center

Tony Smith

Sculptor Tony Smith trained as an architect in Chicago in the late 1930s and later apprenticed with renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. During Smith's studies, he developed an interest in mathematical and modular constructions. But the way his monumental geometric forms turn in on themselves in unexpected contortions speaks of other influences. MIT professor of Art History, Caroline Jones.

Smith wrote about driving on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike in the late 50s and seeing the giant oil derricks and the smooth asphalt of the highway rolling out in front of him, and he felt neither architecture nor art had yet captured this kind of experience. So his sculptures tend to sprawl, they tend to reach, we can walk under them if we want, if we don't feel threatened by their mass. And they take this modular approach from his architectural training and turn it into these twisted torqued forms, that nonetheless hold on to a geometry of the cube in its various combinations.

Smith named the sculpture For Marjorie, after his friend Marjorie Iseman; the sister of artist, Helen Frankenthaler, a noted abstract expressionist painter. Installed on MIT's West Campus lawn in 1977, it was commissioned for New House Dormitory as part of the MIT Percent-for-Art. The bright red of the sculpture may be a nod to the fire hydrants, Smith's family produced at their ironworks business.