

Bringing Sculpture Up the Stairs: Reflections on Freedom in Form at LUMA *by Sabina Szczepanik*

The big question for the Richard Hunt Retrospective *Freedom in Form* seemed to be, how does one bring public sculpture into a museum? Even in theory, the idea is anything but simple. Sitting, practically, right in the center of Chicago's downtown, LUMA served as a temporary home for a significant collection of Hunt's work, within the city to which the sculptor gifted so much of his creativity. Holding such a sizable legacy, both physically and figuratively, it was important that a display of Hunt's work was impactful in a way that underscored his artistic mission.

Watching the events of the exhibition unfold from behind the front desk felt like having a front-seat opportunity for observation. It started with the preparation of the galleries whose walls changed colors and were filled with didactic text. Then the pieces were brought in, and the lights were angled in ways that illuminated their metallic forms. Finally, the people showed up in great numbers, showcasing the influence and appreciation that Hunt's work had garnered over the years. It was these elements which, in my understanding, so adequately reflected the sculptor's message.

Firstly, place and context are so crucial to comprehending a work in situ. Nevertheless, this aspect is eliminated in a museum setting, putting pieces like Hunt's sculptures at risk of disconnection from their original environment. This did not at all seem the case with *Freedom in Form*. Inside the galleries, you couldn't hear even the soft hum of Michigan Avenue traffic, contrasting the usual urban bustle one would be entrenched in when admiring Hunt's work out in Chicago. However, despite the contrast this created, the opportunity to reflect on the context of creation remained intact thanks to the various media, from written to visual, grounding the exhibition.

Form was a priority for Hunt, as evidenced by the organic, flowing shapes that he created out of metal. Under the gallery lights, they stood united by their originality. Moving in a loose chronological fashion, the viewers were introduced to the way in which Hunt's creation grew with him, bending to his creative genius. Even the shadows formed by the pieces intersected in ways which put visitors in direct contact with the magnificent forms.

The facets that truly enlivened the show, however, were the visitors. Checking in guests at the front desk, I was met with so many people who had been impacted by Hunt in ways both big and small. Truly, this is what made the exhibition so effective and relevant: community connection. Furthermore, it proved to be a testament to the universal language of art and its enduring impact on the lives it enriches. Still resonating in Chicago and beyond, Hunt's message obviously continues to be refracted through so many perspectives, retaining its pertinent quality.

So the question remains, how does one bring public sculpture into a museum? The simple answer: you figure out how to bring it up the stairs, and then you wait for the community to follow it up those same steps.