

James Barron Art



Beverly Pepper *Octavia*, 2015

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BEVERLY PEPPER

Octavia, 2015
Cor-Ten Steel


136 x 112 x 55 inches

Base: 88 x 103 inches





Base, signed "B.P. 2015"

The image shows a large-scale sculpture made of rusted steel. The sculpture is composed of several parts: a large, flat, rusted metal plate on the left; a central, curved section with a highly textured, corrugated surface that resembles a crust or a rough, layered metal; and a dark, smooth, curved base at the bottom. The background features a clear blue sky and the bare branches of trees, suggesting an outdoor setting. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of brown and orange from the rust, contrasted with the blue of the sky.

The corrugated crust-like surface of *Octavia* was created by dripping melted steel on in layers. This texture is unique to the work.

“When you see shadows of it on the ground, it’s like the phases of the moon, and mom did note that. As those circular forms carve across the grass, it’s as if it’s a moon made of sunlight, as opposed to a moon made of moonlight.”

Jorie Graham

According to Jorie Graham, the executor of the Beverly Pepper Estate, *Octavia* embraces Pepper’s interest in dichotomies: heavy/light, danger/pleasure, male/female, gravitational/anti-gravitational. The work appears to hover precariously over the ground, despite its immense weight and stability. The tension between movement and stillness activates the work and the space around it.

Pepper was also fascinated by sundials and by the phases of the moon; *Octavia* casts large curved shadows, which shift around the piece as the light changes throughout the day.

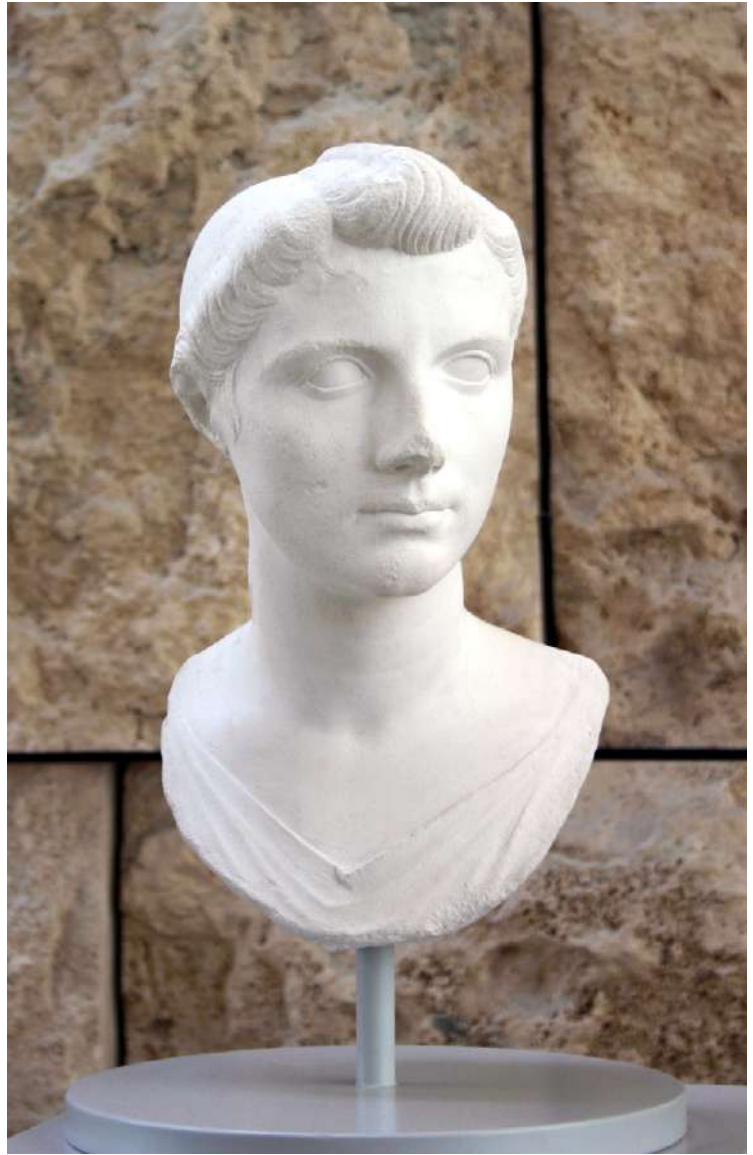


Jorie Graham, photo © Jeannette Montgomery Barron



“Monumental sculpture exists as experiential space. That is, it is neither entirely an external object, nor wholly an internal experience.”

Beverly Pepper



Bust of Octavia Minor at the Ara Pacis museum in Rome

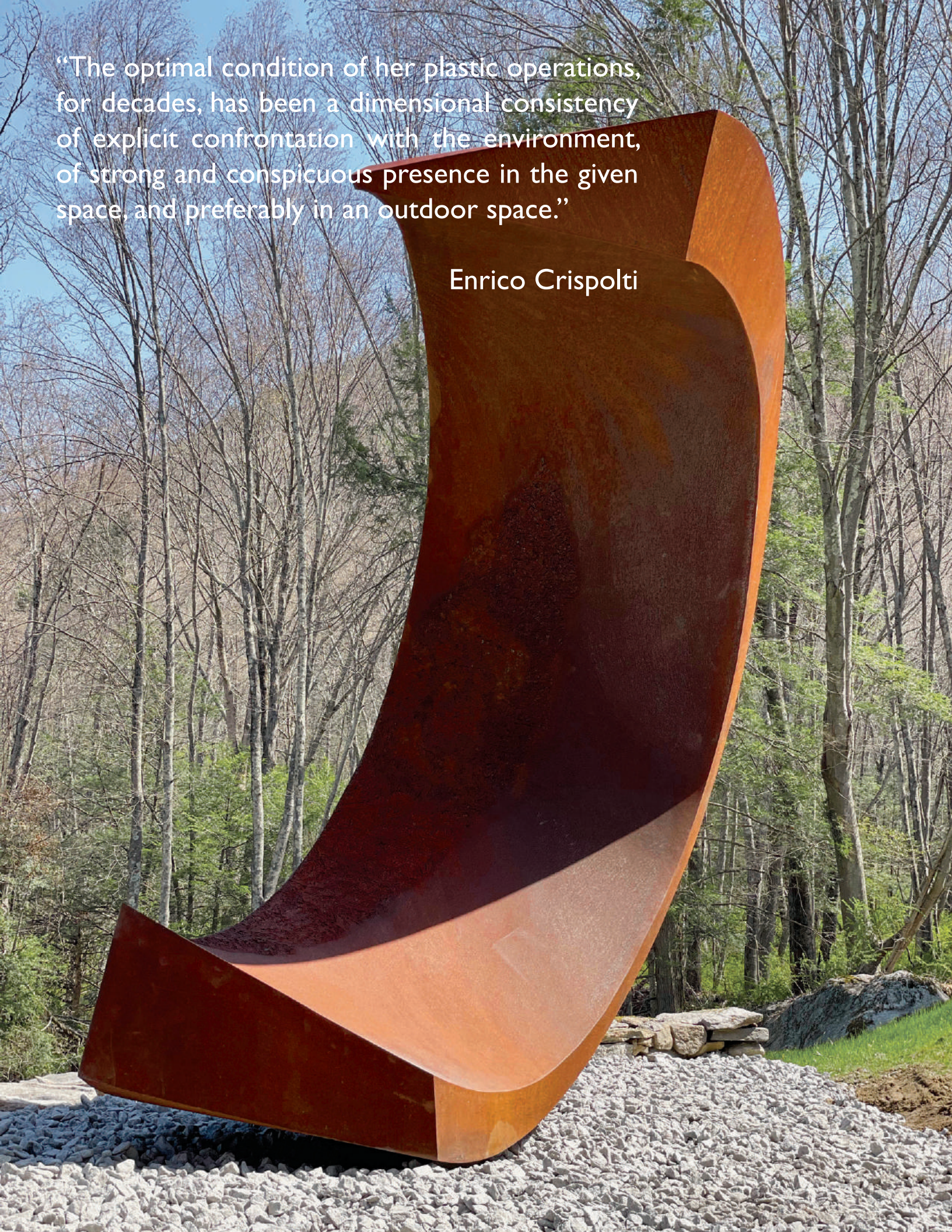
Octavia the Younger (Octavia Minor) was the older sister of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, and the fourth wife of Mark Antony, prior to his marriage to Cleopatra. They were married by senatorial decree as an attempt to ease tensions between Mark Anthony and Octavia's brother Augustus, during the era in which Augustus transformed the constitutional Roman Republic into the autocratic Roman Empire.

During her four-year marriage to Antony, Octavia won over the Roman Republic, becoming arguably the most famous and beloved woman in Rome at the time. When Antony left Octavia and their children for Cleopatra, Romans rallied around Octavia, who enjoyed wide public support in her next role as a political liaison and peace-keeper between Augustus and Mark Antony.

Following Antony and Cleopatra's suicides, Octavia spent the rest of her life as a single woman and an important advisor to the new Roman Empire.

“The optimal condition of her plastic operations, for decades, has been a dimensional consistency of explicit confrontation with the environment, of strong and conspicuous presence in the given space, and preferably in an outdoor space.”

Enrico Crispolti



Octavia's funeral in 11 BC was a lavish public ceremony, with speeches from many of the most powerful politicians in the Roman Empire, including her brother Augustus. Public support for Octavia remained high even in death, and coins were minted with her likeness on them, making her only the second Roman woman to be commemorated on currency.


Augustus had the Gate of Octavia and Porticus Octaviae constructed in her honor, and later had the Roman senate declare Octavia a goddess. In the era of the Roman Empire, a senatorial declaration of divinity was not simply an honorific title; the people believed her to really be elevated into godhood.



Porticus Octaviae in Rome

“If one were to categorize these structures, one would dub them a type of Archeological Minimalism... According to the artist... she wanted ‘the past to participate in their presentness.’”

Phyllis Tuchman

A large, rusted metal sculpture dominates the foreground, its surface showing a complex texture of orange and brown hues. The sculpture is partially obscured by a jagged, irregular opening on the right side. In the background, a park-like setting is visible with several trees, some with sparse green leaves, and a smaller, circular rusted metal sculpture on a grassy area. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

“The craggy, irregular depressions... are a memory imprint, a transfer of the textures and colors of great natural rock formations of the American landscape that Pepper loves best: the heroic canyons and mesas of Arizona and New Mexico, where she has traveled and worked.”

Barbara Rose



Installation Details




Octavia being transported for installation



The work being lowered onto its base

Octavia sits on a 88 x 103" steel base, with a 17" tall post that holds the work upright. The post fits into a 13" slot at the bottom of the work.

The remaining 4" of the post allow *Octavia* appear to be floating precariously above the ground, despite the firm base and stability of the piece. The base is then covered by a substrate like gravel once the work has been properly situated.



Just like Louise Nevelson before her, Beverly Pepper dispels those outworn clichés about women's art, which would limit its range of qualities to intimacy of scale, emotional reserve, and a fragile poetry of self-awareness.

Her work does not fit any of the once accepted stereotypes of female vulnerability or quiescence. On the contrary, it is boldly assertive, experimental, ambitious, and intensely physical in ways indistinguishable from the work of her male counterparts. In fact, her courage and energies are fast becoming legendary; she has stripped away prejudice against women who make large-scale art by brilliantly executing complex and demanding commissions that might have daunted her rivals.

Sam Hunter

Beverly Pepper

1922 - 2020



Photo © Jeannette Montgomery Barron, 2016

Beverly Pepper was an American sculptor known for her monumental works in steel, cast iron, bronze, stainless steel, and stone. Born in Brooklyn, Pepper began to study design, photography, and industrial design at sixteen at the Pratt Institute. Pepper later studied at the Art Students League and Brooklyn College, and left New York in 1949 to study painting in Paris. After a trip to Angkor Wat in 1960, however, Pepper was inspired by the temple ruins to fully pursue sculpture.

Pepper began exhibiting her sculptures in both New York and Rome, and in 1962, she was one of ten artists (including David Smith and Alexander Calder) invited by Giovanni Carandente to fabricate major works in Italsider factories for an outdoor exhibition in Spoleto. Pepper then continued to work in factories in both Italy and the United States, becoming the first American artist to use Cor-Ten steel while working in a U.S. Steel factory.

Splitting her time between New York and Todi, Italy, Pepper continued producing outdoor sculptures, site specific works, and land art throughout her life. Her work has been widely exhibited, is held in numerous collections, and has been the subject of multiple monographs. The Beverly Pepper Sculpture Park opened in Todi in 2019.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2017 *Beverly Pepper: Selected works, 1968-2015*, Kayne Griffin Corcoran Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2015 *Beverly Pepper: New Tabletop Sculptures*, Marlborough Gallery, New York
Beverly Pepper: Monumental Sculpture, Marlborough Gallery, New York
- 2014 *Beverly Pepper: Curvae in Curvae II*, Marlborough Fine Art Gallery, London, UK
Beverly Pepper, Museo dell'Ara Pacis, Rome, Italy
- 2010 *Beverly Pepper: Metamorphoses*, Marlborough Chelsea, New York, New York
- 2008 *Beverly Pepper: Explorations in Stone*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, New York
- 2005 Studio Art Center International, Florence, Italy
- 2004 *Beverly Pepper: Una poètica de l'espai*, Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo, Majorca, Spain
- 2003 *Beverly Pepper: Markers 1980-2002*, Marlborough Gallery, New York
- 2001 *Beverly Pepper: the Magma Series*, Marlborough Chelsea, New York
- 2000 Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ
- 1999 *Beverly Pepper Recent Sculpture: Forms of Memory II*, Marlborough Chelsea, New York
- 1997 Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, New York, United States
- 1995 *Forms of Memory - Recent Sculpture*, André Emmerich Gallery, New York
- 1994 Charles Cowles Gallery, New York
Nardin Gallery, Somers, New York
- 1991 Contemporary Sculpture Center, Tokyo, Japan
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York
- 1989 Albert and Vera List Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA
- 1988 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
- 1985 Adams-Middleton Gallery, Dallas, TX
John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1983 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
Galerie André Emmerich, Zurich, Switzerland
- 1979 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
- 1977 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
- 1976 San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1975 André Emmerich Gallery, New York
Hammarckjold Plaza Sculpture Garden, New York
- 1973 The Tyler School of Art, Temple University Abroad, Rome, Italy
- 1969 Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

Selected Public and Museum Collections

Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
Barcelona Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona, Spain
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, NE
Florence Museum of Art, Florence, Italy
Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Florence, Italy
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy
Hirschorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Istituto Italiano de Cultura, Stockholm, Sweden
Jerusalem Foundation, Jerusalem, Israel
Jewish Museum, New York, NY
Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, United States
Milwaukee Arts Center, Milwaukee, WI
Museu d'Arte Contemporari de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
Museum of Modern Art, Sapporo, Japan
National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.
National Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.
Neo-hodos, Adachi-ku Machizukuri, Tokyo, Japan
Parkersburg Art Museum, Parkersburg, WV
Power Institute of Fine Art, Sydney, Australia
Rochester Art Museum, Rochester, NY
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Weizmann Institute, Rehovath, Israel
Western Washington University Outdoor Museum, Bellingham, WA
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY