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Rust in Peace: If *Tilted Arc* Had Lived

NOT LONG AFTER THE SAD saga of *Tilted Arc* reached its bitter conclusion--the controversial steel sculpture by Richard Serra was dismantled and carted away from Federal Plaza while Serra and his art-world advocates seethed--the city of Basel, Switzerland, gave the artist an entirely different reception. A private group raised 1 million Swiss francs to buy his *Intersection*, a close cousin to *Tilted Arc*, so that it could permanently sit on the city's Theaterplatz, where it had been part of a temporary exhibit. "For once, the few who have a cultural or political agenda were not speaking for the many," expounded Serra in an interview. "This is the exact opposite of what happened in the case of *Tilted Arc*."

Serra, however, could not be happy about what has happened since. The statue, with its 42-foot-long curved steel walls, has become a favored canvas for the city's graffiti artists. The current inscriptions range from the cryptic tags BPSN, MNC and PLATO to the pedestrian FUCK, executed in a Wu-Tang-like hand. "It's all the names of old posses," explains Serdal Kurtuldu, 21, a Theaterplatz regular. "But this stuff is too easy, just bubble letters, not wildstyle. It's not art."

Serra himself refuses to comment now. "He's not going to talk to you about that," says his wife, Clara, who answered the phone at the Serras' New York apartment. "When you put something out like that in a city, it gets graffitied. Why not write about his art?" The statues, she added, are coated with an anti-graffiti treatment, to facilitate cleaning. Nonetheless, it's been years since *Intersection* was buffed. "We hate it, these graffiti paintings, and from time to time we clean them off," explains Andreas Spillmann of Basel's cultural ministry. "The statue is much better without them."

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