Virginia Overton's 400 Foot Sculpture Comes to Storm King

The sculptor and native of Tennessee creates a new work outdoors over rolling hayfields in the sculpture park in Mountainville, New York.

BY KEVIN CONLEY MAY 2, 2014

It’s the beginning of the growing season, so Virginia Overton’s new installation—four hundred feet of brass tube floating over rolling hills in the 500 acre sculpture park in Mountainville—is at its starkest: a single tube undulating over the landscape, hovering four feet above the earth, thanks to a series of slim, almost invisible supports holding the brass in place. Judging from the simplicity of materials she employs, Overton would be easy to categorize as a minimalist. In one recent New York show, she covered a back wall with fresh cedar boards and filled a tub with water. Here, a single line makes its way across an empty landscape.
But there’s a grand theatricality to Overton’s work that turns minimal gestures into maximum impact. In that installation in New York, the smell of fresh cut cedar—something she knew well from her days as a farm girl in Lebanon, Tennessee—overwhelmed the gallerygoer, creating a sensual impression that is rare, if not unprecedented in a gallery setting. Here too, the effect of the sculpture is disproportionate, changing over the course of the summer as the hay grows to full height and the supports disappear and the brass tube appears to float above the hayfield. The brass line, the waving of the hay in the wind, the sound the wind makes in the hollow of the tube: the simple installation gathers power from the effects of time and natural forces.

Overton likes to make sculptures on the spot—it’s a high-wire act that relies on her ability to size up new surroundings and pull something from what she calls her "elemental inventory" to add to her surroundings. The force of the work can seem at odds with the simplicity of the means, leaving a viewer with a sense of mystery and a feel for the patient workings of the artist’s mind.

Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY.