

Darrell Petit



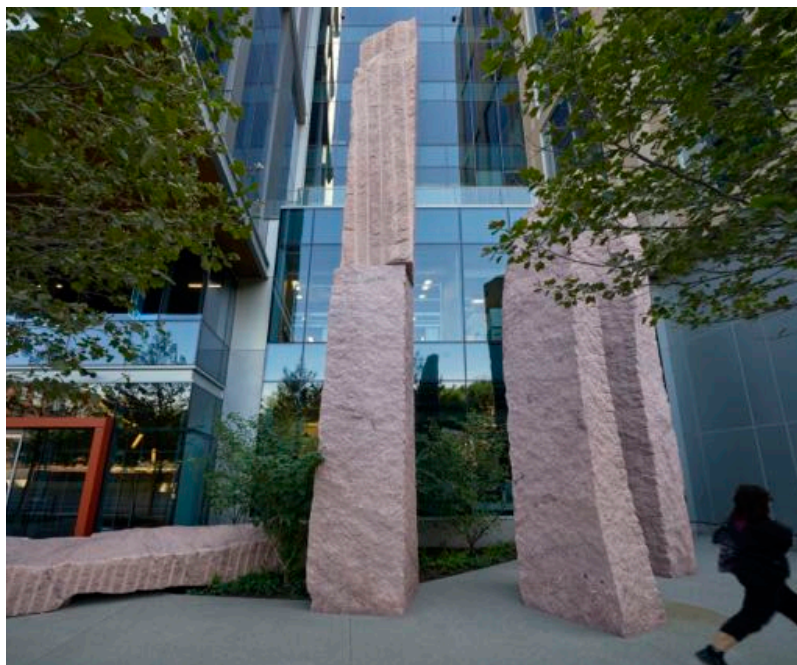
Sculpture

Darrell Petit's sculptures begin with embodied experience

— a powerfully somatic register of scale and surface and movement — that opens out into space for reflection.

In a challenging commission sited between two office blocks, Petit identified the pieces of stone he wanted to work with buried deep inside a huge bench of granite in Connecticut's Stony Creek Quarry. Indeed, standing among the towering stones of the finished piece one gets a strong sense of deep time.

Standing Stones is sited right on the edge of the sidewalk, inviting pedestrians in through the diagonal element that lies closer to the ground (and increasingly ensconced in the local witch hazel which was planted in complement), then entreating them to weave their way through the undulating vertical elements.



Standing Stones, 2016,
50-60 Binney Street, Cambridge, MA
Dimensions: 39' 6" x 45' x 15' 6".
Commissioned by Alexandria Real Estate Equities Inc in collaboration with Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA)

*We knew we wanted the **Standing Stones** to be a piece of art rather than landscape architecture, so we reached out to Darrell Petit. The use of natural granite has unmatched durability and will patinate slowly over time to express its age and relative permanence, a particularly powerful idea in the city where so much is transient. Seeing people now interacting with the finished piece is profoundly satisfying.*

Chris Matthews, Principle Landscape Architect, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates



Kiss, work in progress in the quarry, 2008. 22' x 6'9" x 11'6"



Petit begins his creative process in the quarry,

in contrast to most stone sculptors, who may simply order their material cut to size. A strong grounding in geology, allied to decades of embodied experience and exertion (from working as a quarryman at Connecticut's Stony Creek Quarry to being an artist in residence at the Lundhs larvikite quarries of Norway) has taught Petit to "read" the fissures and seams of the vast igneous beds, identifying potential shapes in the natural morphology of stone.

Working directly in the quarry allows Petit to operate at unusually large scale. After selecting areas for the custom quarrying of stone masses, he creates mockups and drawings, and sometimes even full-scale models using lightweight materials, exploring balance among elements. An enduring interest in relational dynamics has led him to experiment with the amount of surface area at the meeting point between elements, minimizing the ground connection, and varying angles of lean, each contributing to a sense of contingency or precarity. In the process, interstitial space becomes a heightened compositional element, as significant as stone.

Some aspects of the sculptures' surface textures trace characteristics and geological histories of the individual quarry and region. Others — tactile finishes, soft curvatures that are receptive to the hand — are achieved with a flame torch tool. Melting the stone back into its igneous state, as Petit has experienced, is a transformative process for artist and medium alike. Despite the hardness and durability of granite, this process invokes a sense of the material as fundamentally alive.

Petit has worked since 1990 to revitalize the last remaining historic Stony Creek Quarry. Over the intervening decades, it has supplied Stony Creek Granite for projects that include the Statue of Liberty, Columbia University, The Smithsonian Cooper Hewitt Museum, and the floors of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Petit oversees the logistics and management of setting *Event* in place, working closely with engineers, architects, and crane handlers.





Kiss, work in progress in the quarry, 2008. 22' x 6'9" x 11'6"

I start the process by descending into the earth, into geological time and into the raw sublime quarry environment.

Darrell seems to understand the inner nature of each piece of stone and he brings to life the best of that nature. His work is simple, powerful and beautiful. He truly loves stone, as part of nature, as blocks in a quarry, and as sculptures taking form with his hands. It is this true love that emanates from each of his pieces. It is what distinguishes his art.

Cesar Pelli, Architect (1926-2019)



The creative process begins with the quarry formation itself. I am identifying seams and beds in the natural formation of the quarry; areas that I see as potential shapes... All stone is alive in my mind, but I'm looking for something that looks back at me.

Darrell Petit



Kiss, 2008, at Storm King Art Center, 2010.
Now in a private collection, North Salem, N.Y.



Sumo in the moonlight, Stony Creek Quarry, 9' x 12'6" x 10'

Event installed in front of the neoclassical granite-clad Lyman Allyn Museum of Art, prior to its sensitive reworking for the dynamic urban context of Boston's One Dalton.

The interdependence of forms — between human and nature, stone volumes and their gravitational choreography — is an enduring concern for the artist, and one with which *Kiss* resonates strongly. Two stone surfaces touch lightly, yet their masses seem compelled by an elemental call-and-response: at twenty-five tons each, the physical tension between the two granite forms becomes almost palpable as viewers take in the enormous balancing forces at play. The sculpture represents a significant evolution in Petit's signature 'Interdependence' series. Elements stand more vertical, each expressing autonomous character within their connection, leading to a more open and inviting interior space than seen in prior work.

Kiss was originally selected for and shown as part of Storm King Art Center's 50th anniversary exhibition *5+5: New Perspectives* (2010). Petit worked closely with then-director and chief curator David Collens and president John Stern to select a site with which the sculpture would be in dialogue. Together, they chose a plateau area within a field of tall native grasses, setting the sculpture in conversation with surrounding works by Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mark Di Suvero, and Alexander Calder. *Kiss* was also oriented to consider how viewers might approach the work on foot and by vehicle across Storm King's rolling hills. Asking durable questions through elemental materials and at monumental scale, Petit's sculptures feel equally grounded in urban centers and expansive landscapes.





Kiss, 2008, at Storm King Art Center, 2010.
Now in a private collection, North Salem, N.Y.

The interdependence of forms — between human and nature, stone volumes and their gravitational choreography — is an enduring concern for the artist, and one with which *Kiss* resonates strongly. Two stone surfaces touch lightly, yet their masses seem compelled by an elemental call-and-response: at twenty-five tons each, the physical tension between the two granite forms becomes almost palpable as viewers take in the enormous balancing forces at play. The sculpture represents a significant evolution in Petit's signature 'Interdependence' series. Elements stand more vertical, each expressing autonomous character within their connection, leading to a more open and inviting interior space than seen in prior work.

Kiss was originally selected for and shown as part of Storm King Art Center's 50th anniversary exhibition *5+5: New Perspectives* (2010). Petit worked closely with then-director and chief curator David Collens and president John Stern to select a site with which the sculpture would be in dialogue. Together, they chose a plateau area within a field of tall native grasses, setting the sculpture in conversation with surrounding works by Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mark Di Suvero, and Alexander Calder. *Kiss* was also oriented to consider how viewers might approach the work on foot and by vehicle across Storm King's rolling hills. Asking durable questions through elemental materials and at monumental scale, Petit's sculptures feel equally grounded in urban centers and expansive landscapes.



Event, 2010-2019, 15' 5" x 10' 11" x 9' 6"
One Dalton, Boston.

Commissioned by Carpenter and Company, Inc in collaboration with landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA)

Petit's sculpture at the residential entrance to One Dalton, Boston, is a meeting place. **An encounter with nature, with warm, enduring stone**

is set in dialogue with the dynamic urban landscap. The sculpture enfolds residents of the building's sleek modernist heights; greets pedestrians as they make their way along the adjacent 1970s Brutalist facade of the Christian Science Center; catches the eye of commuters approaching by car. The work's momentum is derived, too, from moments of movement and meeting; a tall element of Stony Creek granite leans lightly into another, resting with only its narrowest side to the ground. A low, horizontal plane of Barre Grey granite offers a grounding embrace, its gradual incline and length leading viewers around the piece, taking in its shifting shadows, spaces, surface textures. *Event* does not merely occupy the space between architectural inscriptions: it activates and transforms it.

Event has become an iconic form in the project... Although it was conceived to serve the residential entry, the sculpture is visible from every direction. It catches the eye from near and far, changing with light, season, and aspect.

Laura Solano, Partner, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA)



Sculpture in progress at Stony Creek Quarry, 17'6" x 11' x 8'

Born in Montreal, Canada, Darrell Petit is based in Western Massachusetts.

His work has been exhibited and installed internationally, including at:

Storm King Art Center, New Windsor, New York

Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, New York

Riverside Park, New York City

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

The Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Connecticut

Lincoln Financial Sculpture Collection, Hartford, Connecticut

The Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Fort Wayne, Indiana

The Egyptian Ministry of Culture, Aswan, Egypt

Chubu Museum and Cultural Center, Kurayoshi, Japan

Lundhs Symposium Norge, Larvik, Norway

www.darrellpetit.com

Curated and written by Amy Halliday
Design and photography by Sean Kernan