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Sculpting success

Sculptor Richard Serra is celebrated for his huge steel curves that define space, often an urban space, occasionally to protests that he's chopping up that space. Serra considered his massive work at Storm King, the exurban sculpture park in the Hudson River Valley, to be substantial.

Alan Gibbs didn't. Gibbs, one of New Zealand's most successful businessmen, is a patron of the arts with his own private sculpture park, called The Farm, in a remote part of the country. "I spend a lot of time looking at other sculpture parks," he says near the beginning of the documentary "Seeing the Landscape: Richard Serra's Tuhirangi Contour." To Gibbs, the Storm King piece was "wimpy." He wanted something big.

Alberta Chu's documentary about Serra and Gibbs and the five-year project that resulted in an 857-foot-long steel wall which snakes its way along the rising and falling topography of The Farm, calling attention to it — is a tribute to what can happen when patron and artist initially butt heads but come out with a success larger than either had dreamed of.

The film reports that while humans have sometimes objected to Serra's encroachments on their turf, he's found a completely receptive audience in New Zealand: sheep. The steel wall attracts heat — which means, Gibbs says, that the animals really like rubbing against it.

"Seeing the Landscape: Richard Serra's Tuhirangi Contour" will be shown in the Remis Auditorium of the Museum of Fine Arts on Jan. 29 and 31. 617-369-3306.

Christine Temin's Perspectives column runs on Wednesdays.