

MIT List Visual Arts Center

Harry Bertoia

MEDIUM Sculpture

NATIONALITY American

LIFE DATES San Lorenzo, Italy 1915 - 1978 Barto, Pennsylvania

Born in San Lorenzo, Italy in 1915, Harry Bertoia immigrated to the United States in 1930. He began drawing, painting, and metalwork classes at Cass Technical High School in Detroit, and later attended the Art School of the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts, before receiving a scholarship to Cranbrook Academy. Upon graduation, he held tenure as a professor from 1937 until 1943 in the metalwork department. Interested in design as well as the work of Walter Gropius, Eliel Saarinen, and Carl Milles, Bertoia produced his own abstract jewelry and color monoprints during this period.

In 1943, Bertoia relocated to California, persuaded by his Cranbrook colleague, Charles Eames, to aid in the design and production of Eames's molded plywood chair. He began sculpture in his spare time while working at a naval electronics laboratory. In 1950, Bertoia became a partner of Knoll Associates, Inc., an international furniture design firm. His own *Diamond Chair* series was produced in 1952 along with smaller forged bronze sculptures. In 1960, Bertoia concentrated on sound-sculptures entitled *Sonambient*, of vertical groupings of metal rods mounted on a base.

Bertoia received over fifty large-scale sculptural commissions for many institutions across the United States including the Eero Saarinen General Motors Technical Center in Detroit, Dulles International Airport, and the Civic Center in Philadelphia. In 1953-54, at the request of Josef Albers, he was invited to be the visiting critic in sculpture at Yale University, and in 1957, he received a grant from the Graham Foundation that allowed him to return to Italy for the first time since 1930.

Among his many awards were the Gold Medal given by the Architectural League of New York; the Craftsmanship Award of the American Institute of Architects; the Fine Arts Medal from the Pennsylvania Association of the AIA; the Critics' Award; and an honorary doctorate from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His works have been exhibited at the U.S. Pavilion of the 1958 Brussels World's Fair; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Harry Bertoia died in Barto, Pennsylvania, in 1978.

