

Robert Irwin • *Two Running Violet V Forms*, 1983

Robert Irwin began his career as a painter in the late 1950s in California. In each series of canvases during the 1960s Irwin questioned the fundamental characteristics of his medium: the nature of the painted mark, the quality of light, and the limitations of the canvas itself as a bounded, rectilinear support. This process of inquiry led him to give up painting altogether by 1970. Irwin decided to respond to situations, rather than produce autonomous works of art in the isolation of his studio. This attitude led to several architectural installations in museums and other sites, which provoked viewers into an awareness of their own processes of perception, as well as their expectations of art.

For his contribution to the Stuart Collection, *Two Running Violet V Forms* (his first permanent installation in California) Irwin was drawn to the eucalyptus groves east of the Mandeville Center and adjacent to the Faculty Club. The contradiction inherent in this manmade forest appealed to him; the geometric regularity of the grid of trees is balanced by the infinite variety of light and detail, which the natural setting nevertheless provides. Irwin installed two fence-like structures in V-forms amidst the trees. The "fences" are blue-violet, plastic-coated, small gauge chain-link fencing supported by stainless steel poles, which average twenty-five feet in height. The structure maintains a constant elevation as the hillside terrain drops gently beneath it. Purple flowering ice plant, echoing but not matching the color of the chain link, is planted under the fence.

At no point is the fence an obstacle; rather it acts as a screen reflecting the changes in light throughout the day and the year, the moment and the season. Its gentle introduction of industrialized geometry recalls the unnatural grid, which organized the grove, and suggests a fantastic or uncanny intrusion into the forest. For people who walk the grove's various paths, Irwin's sculpture provides an ever-changing perceptual experience - sometimes dramatic, and sometimes so modest it seems to disappear.

Irwin was the recipient of a prestigious MacArthur Foundation award in 1984. In 1992, he was commissioned to create the Central Gardens at The J. Paul Getty Center in Los Angeles. In 2000 Irwin redefined an old Nabisco factory into the Dia:Beacon Art Center in Beacon, NY. He lives in San Diego.

Folklore: the UCSD students have many legends about this sculpture. Some are even told as truth at freshman orientations or to gullible librarians willing to put them in print:

* The winter before the sculpture was constructed was very stormy and windy. When the students came back after spring break to see the sculpture, they thought it was put up to keep the trees from falling down.

* Another rumor had it that some giraffes escaped from the San Diego zoo. It seems (according to the same rumor) that giraffes really like eucalyptus leaves. The fences were put up to help capture the giraffes so they could be returned to the zoo. Even today, if you ask someone what the fences are, you might get "giraffe catcher" as an answer.

* Or they might tell you it's a volleyball net for giants.