

**title**

***Janus Agri Altar***

**artist**

**Beverly Pepper**



**Location**

Agronomy Building, Courtyard

**Material**

Bronze

**Size**

14 x 6 x 1.5 feet

**Date**

1986

### **About the Work of Art**

The title of this sculpture references the Roman god, Janus, who in mythology was identified with doors, gates, and all beginnings and endings. Our month of January gets its name from Janus, since it closes the old year and begins the new one. Janus was able to look into the past as well as into the future and was usually shown with two faces to illustrate this notion. Beverly Pepper created this sculpture to stand in the Agronomy Courtyard as a monument to how significant agriculture has been in the history of civilizing the world, in Iowa and Iowa State University's history as well as in the future. The sculpture depicts two heroic sized digging spades connected through a common handle. Since these spades are much larger than life, they communicate what an important contribution this simple planting and cultivating tool has made.

The cement ring around the sculpture symbolizes the continuity through the ages, and illustrates the spiritual ties of agriculture. *Janus Agri Altar* asks the viewer to take time to reflect, as a part of humanity and pay homage to the agriculture we all depend.

University Museums - Art on Campus Program  
Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

## About the Artist

Beverly Pepper (American b. 1924) was born in New York City and began her education at the Pratt Institute and the Art Students League of New York. She also studied at the Academe de la Grande Chaumiere, in Paris, under the advisement of Fernand Leger and Andre Lhote. From 1949 to 1960 she focused her art in the area of painting before progressing to the division of monumental outdoor sculpture. Since 1951, she has resided in both New York and Todi, Italy and presented her first solo exhibition in 1952 at the Galleria dello Zodiaco in Rome. Beginning in 1986, Beverly Pepper became the Artist-in-Residence for the American Academy in Rome. Her recognizable sculptures and land art installations can be seen around the world from Barcelona to Phoenix, Arizona.

## Artist Comments

"When Iowa State University asked me to do a work on the site of the Agricultural Building [Agronomy Building], they suggested that the sculpture reflect the agricultural business in some way. Using the iconography of farm tools, *Janus Agri Altar* evolved into what I consider to be a seminal piece.

Today's tools are too sophisticated to engender any visual dialogue in the context of my work. For this reason, I researched antique farm tools common to the area. I focused on a farmer's spade, and taking this simple form to its furthest extreme, the imagery was transformed. One could not identify the sculpture as a farmer's spade without some knowledge of this process.

Janus, one of the principle Roman gods, is typically represented with two bearded heads placed back to back so that he might look at all directions at once. While representations of Janus are usually horizontal, I felt this altar had to be vertical -- as if it was a mirror image created by standing in a still pool of water. An altar is a place where one refreshes the spirit and looks inside oneself. I wanted to create a peaceful symbol. The *Janus Agri Altar* is self-reflective in this sense -- both looking inward and focusing outward."

## About the Art on Campus Collection

Iowa State University is home to one of the largest campus public art programs in the United States. Over 2000 works of public art, including selection by significant regional, national, and international artists, are located across campus in buildings, courtyards, open spaces, and offices. In 1982, the University Museums created the Art on Campus Program that codifies acquisition, education, and care and conservation of the campus public art collection.

The foundations of the contemporary Art on Campus Program began during the Depression in the 1930s when Iowa State College's President Hughes envisioned that, "The arts would enrich and provide substantial intellectual exploration into our college curricula." In 1978, Iowa passed the Iowa Art in State Buildings legislation, which requires .5 percent of new construction or remodeling funds to be used to acquire public art. Since 1978, Iowa State has completed Art in State Building projects, commissioned or acquired public works of art, and involved faculty, students, and staff in the commissioning and acquisition processes.

## Agronomy Building

*Janus Agri Altar*

Art on Campus accession number U86.588

Additional information on public art, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office, 290 Scheman Building, (515) 294-3342, or visit us online at [www.museums.iastate.edu](http://www.museums.iastate.edu)

**This information sheet is intended to be used in addition to viewing the Art on Campus Collection.  
At no time should this sheet be used as a substitute for experiencing the art in person.**

**Art on Campus  
Poetry Collection**

**JANUS**

Not two-faced,  
but two faces.  
alter and icon.

Not just blade,  
but both edges.  
Cutting down  
or cutting up.

East or West.  
North or South.

Nothing cleanly  
simple's simple.

Robert Dana  
Coralville, Iowa

Commissioned in 1992 by University Museums and inspired by *Janus Agri Altar* by Beverly Pepper

**Doubleness**

*Janus Agri Altar*

Doubleness  
of this blade, like the plow,  
symbol of Iowa,  
that tore the prairie, the share that breaks  
the binds: liberates soil's richness,  
opens passages for the breath  
of agriculture; builds barns, silos,  
grain elevators, feedlots, hog confinements;  
the other side of the share  
cuts off buffalo, Native Peoples,  
plows under oceans of prairie lilies,  
the red and gold prairie grasses  
all the creatures that lived  
in there beneficent shadows.  
The wild sacrificed  
to the tame, the unexpected to the usual,  
meandering path of the fox and coyote  
to geometric squares  
of the surveyor. This is the instrument  
for making straight when everyone knows  
the crooked is more beautiful.

Ann Struthers  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Commissioned in 1992 by University Museums and inspired by *Janus Agri Altar* by Beverly Pepper

## Janus Agri Altar

Look forward, back, forward, back.  
Look out. Look up and down again,  
my face, my face, a blade, a plow.

I watch to keep the furrow straight.  
I rip the sod, drain the slough.  
I plant the seed, the pod, the chaff and grain.

For these are prime:  
first hour of the day, the month, the year,  
first rain of spring, frost of fall.

Root hair, root cap, peduncle and peg,  
ground turned under, alter of flower and grass.  
Big stem, blue stem, violet, sweet william,  
I dig the worm. I split the skin.

I see the sea, the dirt, the floor,  
swing open the gates, the heavy doors.  
For in the beginning is the end,  
and the end is smooth, real, polished steel.

For in the beginning is the end  
when all returns to dust, to rust,  
to one more happy meal.

To one more cell, one more leaf and stalk,  
I call look up, look out, look forward, back,  
to celebrate our sumptuous plate,  
to mourn our prairie lost to corn.

**Mary Swander**

Ames, Iowa

Commissioned in 1992 by University Museums and inspired by *Janus Agri Altar* by Beverly Pepper.

Mary Swander was appointed Iowa Poet Laureate in 2009.



## **Thieves**

### *Janus Agri Altar*

This double bronze is also  
double brass when Michael Carey  
and Neil Bowers one winter afternoon rub  
their gloves across its striations, pluck music  
from its hollows.

Tap its sounding boards for gongs, cymbals, kettle drums.  
Their rhythms resound in this Agronomy Quadrant,  
poets making themselves heard, stealing art  
from musicians and sculptors. (Poets are  
the finest thieves in the world. Paris  
pickpockets are amateurs compared  
to the most common poet.)

I have stolen the music from Michael  
and Neal, which they stole from the sculptors,  
Beverly Pepper, which she stole from John Deere,  
and the inventor of the snow plows, the inventor of Roman gods, and a few others.

I have stolen two or three minutes from your left wrist.  
intend to steal more if I can. But I have given you  
something, too. Put your fingertips in your right  
pocket's cave. Even if you can't find it now,  
it's there, waiting for you to recognize it,  
something changeable and unchanging,  
metaphor, music, instrumentation.

### **Ann Struthers**

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Commissioned in 1992 by University Museums and inspired by *Janus Agri Altar* by Beverly Pepper

