

# Agronomy Building

**title**

***Janus Agri Altar***

**artist**

**Beverly Pepper**

Location:  
**Agronomy Building Courtyard**

Materials:

**Bronze**

Size:

**14 ft. by 6 ft. by 1.5 ft.**

Date:

**1986**

Made possible by:

**Iowa Art in State**

**Buildings Program\* and**

**Sevde Transfer**



## **About the Sculpture**

The title of this sculpture makes reference to the Roman god, Janus, who in mythology is identified with doors, gates, and all beginnings. (Our month of January gets its name from Janus, since it closes the old year and begins the new one.) Janus, who is able to look into the past as well as into the future, is usually shown with two faces to illustrate this idea. Beverly Pepper created this sculpture to stand in the Agronomy Courtyard at Iowa State, as a monument to how significant agriculture has been in history and will be in the future. The sculpture resembles two huge spades connected with 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, suggests continuity through the ages, and illustrates the religious/spiritual ties of agriculture. *Janus Agri Altar* asks the viewer to take time to reflect, and as a part of humanity, pay homage to the agriculture we all depend on.

**University Museums/Art on Campus Program  
Iowa State University**

**Ames, Iowa**

## Artist's 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."

*Beverly Pepper*

## More About the Artist

Baker, Kenneth. "Interconnections: Beverly Pepper."  
*Art in America*, April 1984:176-9.

Krauss, Rosalind E. *Beverly Pepper: Sculpture in Place*.  
New York: Cross River Press, 1986.

Ratcliff, Carter. "Artist's dialogue: Beverly Pepper."  
*Architectural Digest*, December 1988:27.

Rose, Barbara. "A Monumental Vision." *Vogue*, March 1987: 484-7.

**JANUS AGRI ALTAR**

**U86.588**

Additional information on *Janus Agri Altar*, other Art on Campus information sheets, and Art on Campus maps are available at the University Museums office 290 Scheman Building (2nd Floor) 515/294-3342, or visit us online at <http://www.museums.iastate.edu/>

\*The **Iowa Art in State Buildings Program** was enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa (Chapter 304A, Code 1979. Sections 8-14) to provide for the inclusion of fine arts projects in state building construction projects in cooperation with the Iowa Arts Council. At Iowa State University, the Art in State Buildings Program is administered by University Museums.

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

# 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, 1992**  
**Coralville, Iowa**

**Inspired by *Janus Agri Altar* by Beverly Pepper**  
**located in the Agronomy courtyard**

## Doubleness *Janus Agri-Alter*

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, 1992**  
**Cedar Rapids, Iowa**

## Janus Agri-Alter

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, 1992**  
**Ames, Iowa**

## Thieves *Janus Agri-Alter*

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.  
I 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, 1992**  
**Cedar Rapids, Iowa**

# ***Art on Campus Poetry***

Public Art Poetry has a tradition dating to  
Christian and Charlotte Petersen.

Christian, a Danish-American sculptor,  
was artist-in-residence at Iowa State University  
(then Iowa State College) from 1934-1955, during a time when  
poetry inspired sculpture and incorporated words as sculptural  
elements.

A primary tenet of public art is to have it physically and  
intellectually accessible to the public. Placement within the con-  
text of public spaces accomplishes the first goal,  
however, providing intellectual accessibility  
is the more challenging goal.

Educational programs for public art are imperative.  
One educational component that provides access to  
understanding the Art on Campus Collection is poetry.  
Several years ago, Neal Bowers, a professor of English at Iowa  
State University, was commissioned to create poetic interpreta-  
tions of some of the Art on Campus sculptures.  
He did so, and later he also administered, on behalf of the Uni-  
versity Museums, a program whereby significant Iowa poets were  
invited and commissioned to create their own  
literary interpretations of the Art on Campus Collection. These  
literary interpretations are greatly appreciated, as are the artists  
who created them, for they contribute further  
interpretative avenues, inspirations, thoughts, reflections and an  
understanding into the Art on Campus Collection.

Jo Knudson and Maxine Charity funded the  
Art on Campus Poetry.

## University Museums Art on Campus Program

### What is public art?

This contemporary term represents ancient to contemporary objects, landscapes, and architecture located in places accessible to the public. The Pyramids, the Eiffel Tower, the St. Louis Arch, the Statue of Liberty, and the ISU Campanile are examples of architectural public art. The White House's Rose Garden, New York City's Central Park, ISU's Central Campus, and ISU's new Rieman Gardens are examples of public art as landscape. *Lady Liberty* on the Capitol Dome in Washington DC, the *Umbrella* in Des Moines, and *Left-Sided Angel* at Parks Library are examples of aesthetic objects as public art.

### Public art:

- defines a specific and unique place
- expresses diverse qualities, beliefs and values of various cultures and artists
- is physically and intellectually accessible
- serves as a vehicle for inspiring and understanding change as presented in our contemporary society

### What is Art on Campus?

Iowa State's Art on Campus Collection (public art collection) spans over a century, beginning with the design of Central Campus by Adonijah Welch, Iowa State's first president. Through the years Iowa State has commissioned, purchased, and received gifts of art that form the Art on Campus Collection. The traditional public art program began in the 1930s. At the height of the Depression, ISC President Raymond Hughes envisioned that the "arts would enrich and provide substantial intellectual exploration into our college curricula." Hughes invited Grant Wood to create the Library's agricultural murals that speak to the founding of Iowa and Iowa State College and Model Farm. Hughes then offered Christian Petersen a one-semester sculpture residency to create the fountain and bas reliefs at the Dairy Industry Building. In 1955, 21 years later, Petersen retired having created 12 major sculptures for the campus, including the *Fountain of the Four Seasons*, *The Gentle Doctor*, the *Wedding Ring*, and *Conversations*.

There were lean years for public art at Iowa State and, indeed, the country, from 1955 to 1978. However, following the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts and Art in Public Places programs, public art gained nation-wide momentum. In 1978 Iowa passed the Iowa Art in State Buildings legislation, which today allows for the acquisition of public works of art for the campus. Private and class gifts also continue to be used for public art acquisition.

### What is the Art in State Buildings Program?

The Art in State Buildings legislation requires that one-half of one percent of new construction funds be used to acquire public art. Since 1978, Iowa State has completed more than 27 Art in State Buildings projects, commissioned or acquired more than 135 works of public art, and involved more than 300 faculty, students and staff in the commissioning process. University Museums administers the Art on Campus Program and the Art in State Buildings Program for Iowa State University. Today there are over 200 major works of public art in the University's Art on Campus Collection. These works of public art are located across campus in buildings, courtyards, open spaces, and offices.