Ornamental Rock

Primary Maker
Zhan Wang ()

Date
1996

Medium
Stainless steel

Dimensions
Without base: 81 1/2 × 32 1/2 × 36 in. (207 × 82.6 × 91.4 cm) Diameter of base: 35 × 20 in. (88.9 × 50.8 cm) 120 lb. (54.4 kg)

Credit Line
Purchase, Gift of Carl Rungius, by exchange

Object number
2000.24a-b

Type
Sculpture

Ornamental rocks, known in Chinese as <i>jia shan shi</i>, are large, mountain-like stones that have traditionally been placed in gardens and courtyards for the contemplation and enjoyment of a small, scholarly elite. To make this sculpture, Zhan Wang placed a pliable sheet of steel over an ornamental rock and hammered it thoroughly, replicating every undulation of the stone’s surface. This produced a “façade” which is open at the back and a mirror-like surface that captures distorted images of the sculpture’s surroundings so that each site in which the sculpture is placed temporarily becomes part of the work itself. Zhan produced a large number of these transformed rocks during the late 1990s. Instead of placing the rocks in their traditional garden setting, Zhan initially hoped to place them throughout Beijing. There the sculptures’ glittering surfaces would have refracted new skyscrapers and other evidence of Beijing’s recent, rapid growth, blending old and new aspects of China’s culture.