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## Europe's Largest Public Artwork Will Rise Above a Highway in Belgium, 35 Years After France Rejected It

Bernar Venet's monumental sculpture spans two sides of a busy highway.

Sarah Cascone (<https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25>), July 25, 2019



Bernar Venet, *Arc Majeur*. Photo ©Bernar Venet.

It's been 35 years, but the French artist [Bernar Venet](http://www.artnet.com/artists/bernar-venet/) (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/bernar-venet/>) is finally going to realize his vision for a monumental sculpture that appears to span across a busy highway. The 250-ton steel sculpture, which will be the largest public artwork in Europe, is due to be unveiled officially in in October. Originally conceived for a site in France back in 1984, the work has now found a home in Belgium.

Titled *Arc Majeur*, Venet's sculpture takes the form of a sweeping, circular arch springing from the earth on either side of a highway linking Brussels to Luxembourg. The massive steel pieces have been installed on either side of the road, measuring just over 90 feet tall on one side of the road and soaring to nearly 200 feet on the opposite side. (The larger part of the artwork is made of up three equally long sections.) It gives drivers the sense that they are driving through the curved semi-circle.

The 78-year-old artist first proposed the piece for the French town of Auxerre after he was commissioned by the President François Mitterrand, and France's former culture minister Jack Lang, as part of their efforts to beautify the country's highways.

Venet is something of an expert on sculpture that gets the green light from highway planners. He unveiled a 55-foot-tall work on a roundabout in the German city of Bonn in 2016. Called *Arc '89*, it commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's reunification. But *Arc Majeur* was cancelled after it met with opposition from local politicians. He had a second chance in the mid-2000s, but scuttled the project himself when French highway officials insisted he paint the piece red.

"After more than three decades, this time it's for real," Venet told *The Art Newspaper* (<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/belgian-motorway-sculpture-by-bernar-venet-to-become-largest-public-work-of-art-in-europe>).

"There are higher monuments in the world, but no bigger sculpture made by an artist," a spokesman for Venet added. "The Statue of Liberty without its pedestal is smaller and the Corcovado [Rio's *Christ the Redeemer* statue] is half the size."

The €2.5 million (\$2.79 million) project is installed near Lavaux-Sainte-Anne in Belgium along the E411 highway between Namur and Luxembourg. Much of the funding came from the John Cockerill Foundation, established by a Belgian mechanical engineering conglomerate, which also produced the sculpture in company workshops.