



Martin Puryear

By John Elderfield, Elizabeth Reede, Richard Powell, Michael Auping

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Over the last 30 years, Martin Puryear has created a body of work that defies categorization, creating sculpture that examines identity, culture and history. Departing from the impersonal and machined aesthetic of Minimalism, Puryear's work combines Modernist abstraction with the traditions of crafts and woodworking, in shapes informed by the natural and by ordinary objects, made with materials such as tar, wood, stone and wire. It is quiet but deliberately associative, encompassing wide-reaching cultural and intellectual experiences and drawing on a huge and varied reserve of images, ideas and information. As a high school and college student, the artist studied ornithology, falconry and archery, and in the 1960s he volunteered with the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, where he schooled himself in the region's indigenous crafts; these are only a few of the influences and methods that have embedded themselves in his work. And the sources of his works are no less varied than the possible and open-ended interpretations: "I think there are a number of levels at which my work can be dealt with and appreciated," Puryear said in a 1978 interview. "It gives me pleasure to feel there's a level that doesn't require knowledge of, or immersion in, the aesthetic of a given time or place."

This volume is published on the occasion of the artist's Fall 2007 exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, which travels from New York to Fort Worth, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. It follows Puryear's development from his first solo show in 1977 to new works that are presented here for the first time and contains essays by John Elderfield, Michael Auping and Elizabeth Reede, and a conversation with the artist by Richard Powell.

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Martin Puryear By John Elderfield, Elizabeth Reede, Richard Powell, Michael Auping Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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Martin Puryear's sculpture has received increasing acclaim in the years since 1989, when he was awarded a MacArthur Foundation grant and the grand prize at the São Paulo Bienal, where he was the sole United States representative. Prepared to accompany a 1991 exhibition of his work at the Art Institute of Chicago, this cleanly designed and generously formatted catalog reflects the powerful simplicity of Puryear's work. Between two informative essays by Robert Starr and Neal Benezra, then curator of 20th-century painting and sculpture at the Art Institute, is a generous plate section reproducing more than 30 of Puryear's major works from 1974 to 1990. His sculpture is both meticulously crafted and completely unbound, evoking the most elemental forms of nature and landscape.

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