

**Martin
Puryear:
Prints,
1962–
2016**

Martin Puryear: Prints, 1962 – 2016

September 8 – November 18, 2017

The Print Center is honored to share Martin Puryear's glorious printed works. We are delighted by this opportunity, which developed in collaboration with the Association for Public Art (aPA) as part of their bringing Puryear's monumental sculpture, *Big Bling*, for temporary installation in Philadelphia. We are indebted to aPA's Executive Director & Chief Curator Penny Balkin Bach and Associate Director Laura S. Griffith for inviting our participation.

Presentation of a show of this depth and complexity was only possible with the participation of Puryear scholar Ruth Fine as guest curator. We are more than grateful for Ruth's contribution and congratulate her on a beautiful exhibition.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Martin Puryear for sharing his works with us; we are honored by his generosity. At his studio, Jeanne Englert was instrumental in bringing the project to fruition, as was Grace Benjamin from Matthew Marks Gallery.

It is a great privilege to have engaged with two of the country's most outstanding print publishers: Paulson Fontaine Press and Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) as lenders to the exhibition. Thanks especially to Pam Paulson and Bill Goldston respectively. We also thank our colleagues at Dolan/Maxwell Gallery for their loan of work.

We look forward with great anticipation to our latest collaboration with Network for New Music. Thank you to Artistic Director Linda Reichert for allowing Puryear's transcendent work to serve as inspiration for newly commissioned musical compositions by Cynthia Folio, Robert Maggio, Jeffrey Mumford and Roberto Pace.

We also recognize the generous contributions without which our work would not be possible. In addition to the list of donors provided below, we extend our sincerest gratitude to Honorary Council member Guna Mundheim for providing project support and to Brilliant Graphics for their support of this publication.



1. *Big Bling*, 2016, © Martin Puryear, Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, Photo: James Ewing Photography for aPA

Martin Puryear: Prints, 1962-2016

Ruth Fine

Among the qualities that define Martin Puryear (b. Washington, DC, 1941) is a deeply empathetic awareness of the patterns and differences that exist in experiencing life across the globe. His informed curiosity about the diversity of civilization's inhabitants has been essential to the path his art has taken, drawing conceptual and formal nourishment from natural habitats and a variety of shelters, from characteristics that define objects associated with the home such as vessels for foodstuffs, and from a rich array of cultural practices.

Puryear follows in the footsteps of his father, who took pleasure in making household objects for his family's use. Starting in childhood and continuing to the present, he has been a maker of such functional projects as musical instruments, kayaks and furniture, primarily responding to personal needs. Recently, however, he designed a group of benches for Glenstone, a museum in Potomac, MD, that were constructed under the artist's oversight by Michael Hurwitz, a furniture-maker based in Philadelphia. Such objects offer a key to Puryear's poetic sensibility, which reflects that the making of a utilitarian object, like the making of a work of art, both creates and reveals its meaning and role in the world.

Meaning continues to evolve with each work Puryear completes, or returns to, as on occasion he rethinks objects and works on paper after many years. Similarly, his sensitivity and sensibility evolve with each visit to a foreign locale fueled by his keen responses to the unique qualities of each place, such as the timbre of a language or dialect heard for the first time. All of this contributes to the imaginative skills Puryear requires to both envision and structure his work in all of its "multiple dimensions" (to embrace the Art Institute of Chicago curator Mark Pascale's descriptive term for Puryear's artistic enterprise).¹

Best known for its sculpture component, Puryear's art also consists of a vast number of drawings – large, carefully finished sheets made for exhibition or presentation and small studies related both to sculpture and to the array of prints he has made intermittently



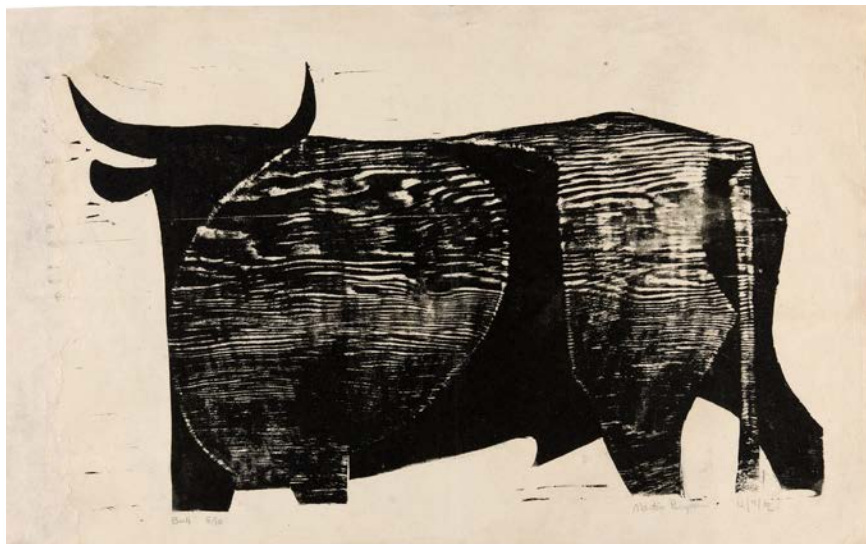
2. *Pavilion in the Trees*, 1993

Photo Alec Rogers © 2017, Courtesy aPA

over the course of his almost six-decade career. The Print Center’s exhibition of Puryear’s woodcuts and etchings (that employ multiple intaglio processes), celebrates the presence in Philadelphia of the artist’s monumental sculpture *Big Bling* (figure 1), which the artist has described as a “response to the dynamics and structure of urban life.”² Originally commissioned in 2016 by the Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York, it is on view in Philadelphia under the auspices of the Association for Public Art (aPA) from June through November, 2017.

Puryear’s work in three-dimensions includes several monumental pieces, most of which are permanent installations in the United States and Europe. Among them is *Pavilion in the Trees*, 1993, (figure 2), commissioned by aPA for Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park, which the artist has referred to as, “a public amenity designed by a sculptor.”³ It is a brilliant example of Puryear’s consolidation of the multiple dimensions his work addresses: utilitarian and aesthetic motives combined.

Puryear’s initial artistic desire as an undergraduate majoring in painting at The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC,



3. *Bull*, 1962

(1959 - 1963), was to be a nature illustrator, inspired especially by illustrations in *National Geographic* magazine and his admiration for images in *Birds of America* by John James Audubon, first published in segments between 1827 and 1838. Among his artistic heroes was Leonard Baskin, for his meticulously rendered wood engravings. With fidelity to nature as one goal of his work as an undergraduate, Puryear focused on improving his skills as a draftsman. It was at this time that he also executed his initial woodcut prints.

Early woodcuts on view in this exhibition, including *Bull*, 1962 (figure 3) and *Dog*, c. 1965, are invested with properties that continue to be important to Puryear's art today: positive and negative shapes, keen observation of detail, concern with the inner and under structure of forms and attention to the materiality and surface nuance characteristic of the material with which he is working, in these cases highlighting the grain of flat slabs of wood, and care in inking and transferring an image to paper.

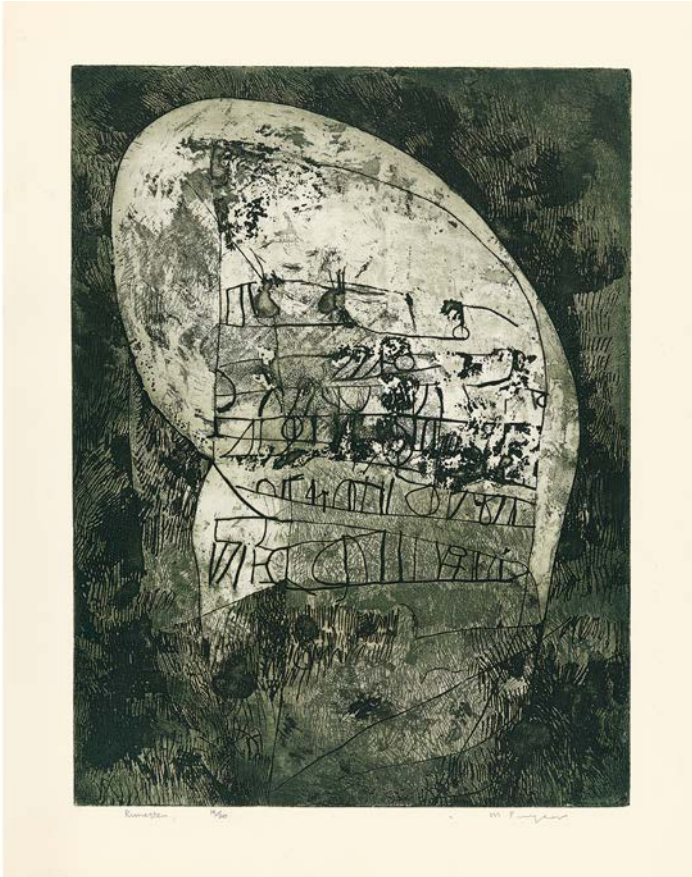
Puryear further pursued the woodcut while in the Peace Corps (1964 - 66). Living among the Mende people in a Sierra Leone village that had no electricity, he had been assigned to teach art, but devoted



4. *MLK Elegi*, 1968

more time and effort to teaching biology, French and English. He had chosen to travel without a camera in order to experience unfamiliar surroundings directly rather than remembering them through the lens of a camera. As a result, he made many drawings in graphite, charcoal, ink with pen and as wash (often combining these materials), to document the encyclopedia of new visual data he was encountering. Puryear's seemingly intuitive descriptive powers created vivid portrayals of friends in the community, segments of thatch-roofed buildings that characterized the village and the profusion of flora and fauna that enriched the lush surroundings, simultaneously responding to and creating organic and architectonic form. Often he would illustrate letters to friends and family back home with detailed drawings.

Given his interest in the utilitarian aspects of visual culture, the artist immediately became fascinated by the object-making practices of the Mende, building upon his earlier efforts in three dimensions. He paid special attention to the properties of various woods and to methods



5. *Rune Stone*, 1966

associated with crafting functional objects, such as weaving and basketry. In his drawings and prints, the artist moved from descriptive representation, owing to a growing understanding and acceptance of Cubism and its engagement with abstraction. This shift had begun toward the end of his time as an undergraduate and likely was further stimulated by what Puryear was learning about contemporary practices by studying issues of *Artnews* he was sent by a friend and other journals to which he had access at the American Cultural Center in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

After his years in the Peace Corps, Puryear went on to study printmaking at The Swedish Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm (1966 - 68). There he focused on intaglio/etching methods, and his images included a few with eccentrically shaped perimeters, foretelling formal elements that would later dominate his three-

dimensional work. Among these is *MLK Elegi*, 1968 (figure 4). Commemorating the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in it one may read both a crucifix shape and the suggestion of a shattered world. Puryear's attitude toward prints accepted from the start their potentially public nature, objects to be seen by others, editions to be shared. This is distinct from his attitude to drawings, which until recently, he mostly held as personal objects meant for the studio alone.

Up to his time in Stockholm, Puryear's prints were woodcuts rooted in issues of shape and carving, whereas the intaglio etchings that followed have a strong linear, inscribed (drawn) component. In transitioning from direct placing of marks on paper, the artist seems to have instinctively recognized the potential of the indirect drawing-for-etching methods he was learning. While different in critical ways from drawing on paper (which employs hatching and wash as well as such manipulative processes as incising and rubbing), creating etching plates for transferring images to paper similarly employs line and tone: inscribing through soft and hard acid-resist grounds, laying fields of rosin to create broad aquatint surfaces, and, as in direct drawing, combining multiple approaches in a single composition. Except for the drypoint method in which lines are drawn immediately into the etching plate with a sharp instrument, acid embeds the marks into the metal (the longer a plate is in acid, the darker the marks). Key also is the importance of touch during the printing process to further create rich surface variation.

Some of Puryear's early Stockholm etchings used drawings he brought from Africa as their starting point. But he soon came to focus on his new Scandinavian environment as well, creating such complex and evocative images as *Rune Stone*, 1966 (figure 5). Referencing densely inscribed raised boulders that function as memorials to the dead, *Rune Stone* employs soft-ground etching, aquatint and open bite, with scraping and burnishing (processes that modify or eradicate etched marks but also create particularized surfaces). Pascale has described the work as Puryear's "most elaborate use of print media up to that moment. . . a full-out treatise on the techniques of engraving, etching and aquatint."

Puryear also pursued sculpture in Stockholm, working independently at night in the Academy's studios while completing his print studies during the day. Fortuitously, he came to know cabinetmaker James Krenov, whose philosophy and work had a profound impact on Puryear's evolving artistic consciousness, as he added joinery and other furniture making techniques to his tool kit. When he returned to the United States, Puryear pursued an MFA degree at Yale University (1969 - 1971), majoring in sculpture, which became the primary focus of his art. He continued always to make drawings in great quantity, however, and also to make an occasional print.

For example in 1982, Puryear completed *Dark Loop*, a woodcut, at Jack Lemon's Landfall Press in Chicago, where the artist was living at the time. But Puryear's post-Stockholm re-engagement with printmaking on a fairly regular basis did not begin until around 1999, when he worked with Los Angeles-based printer/publisher Jacob Samuel to create *Untitled (LA MoCA Portfolio)*. Here the artist explored for the first time the chine collé paper layering technique that he continues to use for his receptive print substrates. As is true for his drawings, Puryear does not seek out exotic papers for his prints. Indeed, the essential elegance of his strokes and fields is heightened by the lack of incident in the rather unremarkable and readily available sheets he chooses.

Around 1999 Puryear also undertook a major book project: *Cane*, by Jean Toomer (1894 - 1967), for which the artist created woodcuts in parallel with a text that has long been heralded as a major achievement of the Harlem Renaissance. Puryear first read *Cane* (published in 1923) when he was teaching at Fisk University (1971 - 1973), living in Nashville and experiencing the Deep South for the first time; his ongoing engagement with the text's focus on critical race issues and the difficulties encountered as a black person living in the United States highlights *Cane's* renewed power and importance for each generation.

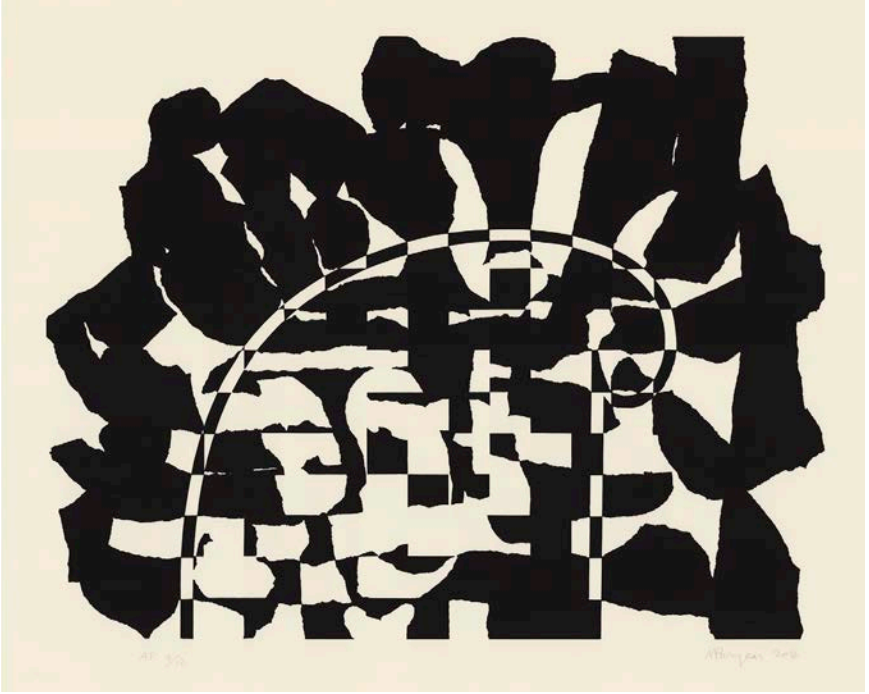
Puryear's *Cane* was published by Andrew Hoyem's Arion Press in San Francisco. It is represented in this exhibition by: 1) unbound proofs of the seven woodcut images inspired by Toomer's female characters; and 2) one of fifty special copies bound in goatskin and housed in a slipcase, designed by the artist, that is composed of four different

wood types symbolizing multiple African American skin colors. This subtle suggestion of race issues is one of many references to his heritage that Puryear has embedded in his works' titles, forms and materials throughout his career, such as *Some Lines for Jim Beckwourth*, 1978, a sculpture referencing a nineteenth-century African American explorer who played an important role in the settlement of the Western United States.

In 2001 Puryear started working with Paulson Bott Press, a print publishing studio established in 1997 by Pam Paulson and Renée Bott in Berkeley, CA (in 2016 the enterprise was renamed Paulson Fontaine Press, when Bott left to pursue projects in public art and Rhea Fontaine, who had been active in the venture for sixteen years, became Paulson's partner). Puryear has since completed approximately two dozen intaglio editions there, including instances of reworking a "finished" matrix to produce variant editions of a given subject, one of printmaking's most exciting possibilities. For example, in 2014, he returned to a plate used for the first print he completed at Paulson Bott Press, *Untitled*, 2001, to create *Untitled (State II)*. Variant editions completed close in time include *Untitled VI (State 1)* (cover image) and *Untitled VI (State II)*, both 2012, in which the overall configuration of an animal-like form bears a striking relationship to the monumental sculpture *Big Bling* that inspired this exhibition.

These examples differ from progressive state proofs that are printed as the artist develops an image toward an editioned version, seen in this exhibition by multiple states of *Black Cart*, 2008. But both aspects of Puryear's investigation through states, either as variant editions or as progressive proofs, reveal an approach to printmaking that is invested in discovering and making visible the distinctive vocabularies offered by diverse print processes through an array of adjustments, additions and deletions, both subtle and stark. This highlights the sensitivity with which Puryear handles materials for works in both three- and two-dimensions. Nothing looks or feels mechanical.

In 2016, Puryear completed three prints (one woodcut and two etchings) at Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), the legendary print publishing house founded in Islip, NY, by Tatyana Grosman in 1957, now under the stewardship of Bill Goldston. The woodcut



6. *Métissage/Camouflage*, 2016

Métissage/Camouflage (figure 6) references or reflects back upon two of Puryear's sculptures, *C.F.A.O.*, 2006 - 2007, and the *Phrygian Cap* in its several variations in multiple media, represented at The Print Center by *Phrygian (Cap in the Air)*, 2012. Responding to the artist's ongoing examination of objects, shelters and ritual practices of many cultures over centuries, as well as his exploration of abstraction/representation, interior/exterior, positive/negative, line/shape, materials' particular characteristics and diverse uses of tools, as well as the mystery of two-dimensional reference to three-dimensional form, Puryear's latest woodcut is as lively and provocative as his very first essays in this process. There is no greater evidence that a critical marker of Martin's Puryear's art in all of its multiple dimensions remains his intense curiosity as to what is possible, inspiring both objects and works on paper, as his practice of more than six decades continues to evolve.

1) The single overview of Puryear's works on paper is Mark Pascale's *Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions*, with an essay on Puryear's drawings by the present writer. It is the catalog for an exhibition organized by the Art Institute of Chicago in 2015, which traveled to The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Any references to Pascale are rooted in this book; and his essay on Puryear's prints expands on all information included here. Additionally I thank Martin Puryear for the many conversations we have had over the years that have provided information for this essay. Thanks also to Jeanne Englert, Puryear's studio administrator for her ever-present help when needed. And appreciation to Matthew Marks and his gallery staff for their assistance with this exhibition.

Arion Press publication materials related to Puryear's illustrated version of Jean Toomer's *Cane* have provided information about that project; and in 2014 Paulson Bott Press published *Martin Puryear, Etchings: 2001 - Present*, with an introduction by Pam Paulson, illustrating the 23 prints the artist had completed at the Press at that time.

Among several overviews of Puryear's sculpture, the most recent is the catalog for the 2007 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, which circulated to several other institutions. *Martin Puryear* by John Elderfield has an excellent chronology by Jennifer Field and contributions by Michael Auping, Elizabeth Reede and Richard J. Powell.

2) Email message from artist to author, June 18, 2017.

3) This is included on the audio recording for aPA's "Museum Without Walls" which accompanies the piece, spoken by Puryear's collaborator on the project, Bob Taylor.

Ruth Fine is an independent curator based in Philadelphia. She retired as Curator of Special Projects in Modern Art from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, after an exceptional career. Among many achievements Fine coordinated *The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States* project and organized exhibitions of work by Romare Bearden, Helen Frankenthaler, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, John Marin and Georgia O’Keeffe; contemporary print-publishing workshops Crown Point Press, Gemini G.E.L., and Graphicstudio, U.S.F.; and the collection of Lessing J. Rosenwald. She is currently the consulting curator and lead author of the National Gallery’s multi-volume catalogue raisonné of Mark Rothko’s works on paper. She is also engaged with research on Jasper Johns’ personal archive of proofs for his prints. Fine has contributed essays to many exhibition catalogs including about Tyler Graphics and the Brandywine Workshop.

Recently she curated *Procession: The Art of Norman Lewis* for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (2015) and contributed to the catalog for the *Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions* (2015) exhibition organized by The Art Institute of Chicago, which traveled to the Morgan Library & Museum, New York and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. Fine sits on the Boards of the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Richard Diebenkorn Foundation and the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation;

Fine has been involved with The Print Center since her student days at the University of the Arts. In the early 1970’s she printed in our lithography studio and later served as an Advisory Board member. She stewarded longtime Board member Lessing J. Rosenwald’s print collection, which she accompanied from his home in Abington, PA to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC in 1979.

Works in the Exhibition

Bull, 1962

Woodcut on Japanese paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 19 5/8" x 27 1/8"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Dog, c. 1965

Woodcut on wove paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 18" x 23 3/4"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Head, 1965

Woodcut with wash additions on wove *Artnews* wrapper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 21 1/8" x 17 1/8"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Dome, 1966

Soft ground etching and aquatint, with burnishing, on wove paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 15 1/8" x 19 1/8"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Gate, 1966

Soft ground etching, with burnishing, on wove paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 19 1/8" x 15 1/4"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Rune Stone, 1966

Soft ground etching, aquatint and open bite, with scraping and burnishing,
on wove paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 27 7/8" x 22 3/4"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Stonehenge I, 1966

Soft ground etching, aquatint and drypoint, with burnishing, on wove paper
Printed by the artist
Frame size: 15 1/8" x 19 1/8"
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Stonehenge II, 1966

Soft ground etching and aquatint, with burnishing, on wove paper

Printed by the artist

Frame size: 19 1/8" x 15 1/8"

Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Quadroon, 1966-67

Soft ground etching and aquatint, printed from multiple plates with plate tone on wove paper

Printed by the artist

Frame size: 29 3/4" x 29 1/4"

Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

MLK Elegi, 1968

Soft ground etching and aquatint, with burnishing, on wove paper

Printed by the artist

Frame size: 18 1/8" x 18 5/8"

Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Cane, by Jean Toomer with prints by Martin Puryear, 2000

(Text first published 1923)

Leather-bound book with woodcuts, and text set in Times New Roman on cream Japanese paper. Slipcase of African wenge, Swiss pear, American walnut, and sugar maple woods. Accompanying portfolio of seven woodcuts on Japanese Kitakata handmade paper

Volume closed: 11 3/4" x 14 1/8" x 1"

Volume open: 11 3/4" x 28 3/4"

Slipcase dimensions: 13 1/2" x 15" x 1 7/8"

Frame size, each print: 19 1/8" x 20 5/8"

Published by Arion Press, San Francisco

Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Prints from the portfolio:

Karintha

Becky

Carma

Fern

Esther

Avey

Bona

Loop, 2002

Soft ground etching and drypoint, with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Published by Paulson Bott Press
Frame size: 18" x 15"
Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Three Holes, 2002

Soft ground etching, aquatint, spit bite aquatint and drypoint,
with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Published by Paulson Bott Press
Frame size: 36" x 31 1/2"
Private Collection, Courtesy of Dolan/Maxwell Gallery

Working proof 1 for *Black Cart, 2008*

Soft ground etching on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Frame size: 36" x 31 1/2"
Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Working proof 4 for *Black Cart, 2008*

Hard ground and soft ground etching, aquatint and spit bite aquatint,
with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Frame size: 36" x 31 1/2"
Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Working proof 6 for *Black Cart, 2008*

Hard ground and soft ground etching, aquatint and spit bite aquatint,
with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Frame size: 36" x 31 1/2"
Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Black Cart, 2008

Hard ground and soft ground etching, aquatint and spit bite aquatint,
with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper
Printed by Pam Paulson
Published by Paulson Bott Press
Frame size: 36" x 31 1/2"
Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Phrygian (Cap in the Air), 2012

Soft ground etching, aquatint, spit bite aquatint and drypoint,
with chine collé gampi on Somerset paper

Printed by Pam Paulson

Published by Paulson Bott Press

Frame size: 37 1/4" x 30 1/4"

Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Diallo, 2013

Soft ground etching, color flat bite, aquatint and drypoint
on Rives BFK paper

Printed by Pam Paulson

Published by Paulson Bott Press

Frame size: 38" x 31"

Courtesy of Dolan/Maxwell Gallery

Untitled V1 (State 1), 2012

Soft ground etching, drypoint and spit bite aquatint,
with chine collé gampi on Rives BFK paper

Printed by Pam Paulson

Published by Paulson Bott Press

Frame size: 46" x 44"

Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Side (Beijing), 2013

Hard ground etching, aquatint and drypoint on Somerset white paper

Printed by Pam Paulson

Published by Paulson Bott Press

Frame size: 37" x 36 1/4"

Courtesy of Paulson Fontaine Press

Métissage/Camouflage, 2016

Woodcut on Torinoko paper

Printed by Bruce Wankel, Jason Miller, Brian Berry and Steven Fournier

Published by Universal Limited Art Editions

Frame Size: 44" x 52"

Courtesy of Universal Limited Art Editions

THE PRINT CENTER

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