



SEPTEMBER 14, 2017

The Big Bling has renewed interest in sculptor Martin Puryear's drawings



Visitors to the Print Center look at works by Martin Puryear, the artist who brought "Big Bling" to Fairmount Park this spring. Puryear's prints will be on exhibit through Nov. 16. (Peter Crimmins/WHYY)



BY PETER CRIMMINS

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A visitor to the Print Center on narrow Latimer Street in Center City Philadelphia might see images on the walls that seem familiar — a curvy, elephant-like shape, or a tubular hat with a bent point.

The artist Martin Puryear is best known for his sculpture. He has a piece in the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and last June he installed a large-scale, temporary outdoor sculpture along the Schuylkill River.

Now, he has his first gallery exhibition in Philadelphia in 25 years.

"Martin Puryear: Prints 1962 - 2016" shows that he often reworks the same shape over and over again on paper, and in three-dimensional pieces. "Phrygian Cap in the Air" is reminiscent of the PMA's "Old Mole." A horse carriage is repeated with variations across a wall.

Puryear was a printmaker in college in the 1960s, later focusing on sculpture. He never completely turned his back on working with paper. The pieces taking over all three gallery spaces in the Print Center range from those early woodcut prints to a large abstract made in 2016, "Metissage/Camouflage," using the French word for a mixed-race person in the title. Puryear does not often offer explanation for his work, but sometimes his titles can give viewers a foothold.

"He gives us more in the work than is immediately on the surface," said Print Center Executive Director Elizabeth Spungen. "If you spend time with them, forms, shapes, ideas continue to arise."

The Print Center was invited to exhibit the show by the Association for Public Art, which brought his "Big Bling" to Philadelphia, to accompanying the sculpture. The works on paper are not working drawings toward any final sculpture, but artworks in themselves.

"Walking around one of his pieces in 3D you get a series of different silhouettes. A lot of work on paper is silhouetted in a similar way," said Spungen. "You can see them played out across a wall, rather than as you walk around."

"Martin Puryear: Prints 1962 - 2016" will be on view until November.

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