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MARTIN PURYEAR

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Martin Puryear returned to Paulson Press in November 2008 to complete a new etching titled *Black Cart*.

The print began as a softground drawing for a sculptural idea Puryear had in 2005. In *Black Cart*, a cloudlike umber spitbite field surrounds the richly rendered central shape and creates a sense of momentum, which is stilled momentarily in the image's upper right corner by the simple hardground drawing of the cart's structure. The densely constructed black cart shape is reminiscent of the found object wagon in Puryear's 2006 sculpture *CFAO*. The cart shape can be viewed as a rickshaw with a domed load or as a billowing covered wagon. This direct association to a tangible object is an exciting new direction in Puryear's work at Paulson Press.

For the past two and a half years the retrospective exhibition *Martin Puryear* has traveled across the nation. Beginning at The Museum of Modern Art, New York in the fall of 2007, the show traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., and finally to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In addition, those of us in the bay area were fortunate to have a concurrent exhibition, *Martin Puryear Prints*, at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. We were happy to invite Karin Breuer, curator for the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Art at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, to join printmakers



Black Cart, 2008

Color aquatint etching with chine collé gampi. 35" x 28"; Edition of 50



Martin Puryear Prints at the de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA

Pam Paulson and Renee Bott to look at this marvelous new image and discuss working with Puryear.

—*Kenneth Caldwell*

Q: Puryear has been away from printmaking for a few years?

Breuer: Sometimes when artists return to printmaking after a long time, there's this period where they have to get used to it again, and they have to find their way within the process. There's a struggle.

Paulson: But when they find their place in it, then they start doing more and more sophisticated things.

Breuer: I see that progression in this new piece.

Bott: Yes, he has the confidence to do more complex things—to bring an idea out for the first time on paper.

Paulson: Martin said, initially, that he really liked coming here to do the prints because it was away from his studio. He can sit and complete a drawing or a print. When he is in his studio drawing, he just runs off and starts building. He is tempted by the actual physical thing.

Q: We don't know him for his two-dimensional format. He started out painting, but most of us don't know that work.

Bott: I think these pieces mirror his thought process for building a piece. He really starts by constructing it in a linear way, and then he wants to capture

a profile of it in a way, and I think that's why he reduces it, usually, to a mass that isn't as dimensional.

Breuer: I think it's interesting that he's able to finally come to a finished, two-dimensional product that he feels captures what he's looking for in his other work.

Paulson: Part of that progression is that he's putting it in a made-up space. Initially the prints didn't have much going on in the background and they were drawings of sculpture in a way. And then the prints started having spit-bites in the background, he activated the background in this way, and that's evolved over the years of printing.

Q: Of course his sculptures have real space to sit in. I noticed that this background is quite animated. Where did that come from?

Paulson: Martin likes to try to make something that he can't quite control, because most of the time he's very controlling with all of his materials. And spitbite is hard to control. But then once he has it, he doesn't necessarily think what's happened is right, and it compels him to do more, to almost obliterate the part that he couldn't control and bring it forward. He makes little challenges for himself. It's a process catalyst, I think, to cause himself a little trouble, so it's not just a straightforward drawing. It takes him somewhere new.

Q: I'm interested in exploring the connection between the sculpture and the prints. What were some of the connections you made, as curator of this print show?

Breuer: The amazing connection, for me, was the relationship between all of the etching line-work and the detail within the interiors of a lot of his sculptures, which isn't so readily apparent when you look at them from a distance. In the prints you might see this as maybe a head shape or an inverted jar shape. You don't see the incredible detail work—the hatch work and line etching that occurs on the interior. The immediate reaction is that it relates to the wire-mesh and tar sculptures.

The prints that he's made here are like more advanced drawings or sculptural forms. They are his ideas about sculpture put on the plates and then developed further. As a curator, I get very excited when an artist returns to printmaking. With Puryear, I think this was an opportunity to go back to something he knew about and loved early in his career, and then it developed as a passionate relationship with the whole medium of printmaking. To him, printmaking is not something he fell into, but a real art form that corresponds to his sculpture-making in a strong way. ✱