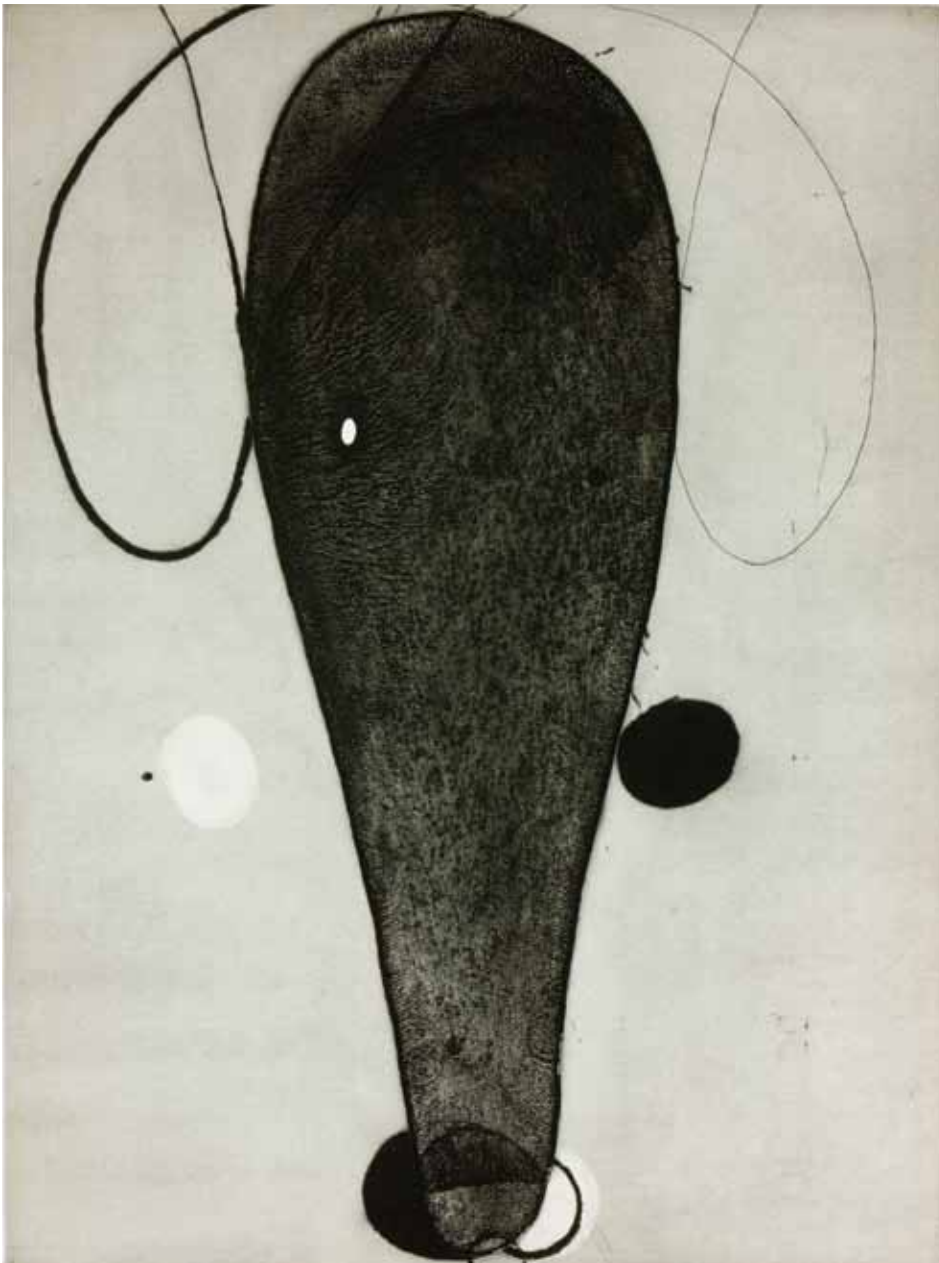


OKTP



MARTIN PURYEAR

07.01.13



**DIALLO, 2013**

Flatbite, Aquatint, Drypoint and softground etching;  
Image: 35"x28"; Edition of 50

**M**artin Puryear is both reticent and courtly. Unlike many artists, he doesn't feel compelled to talk about his art. He is wary of telling you too much, of influencing your perception of his work. He wants you to find your own path to his art. His sculptures and prints are rarely colorful, but they are full of subtle tension. The forms look familiar, but you can't quite identify the shape. Something finished or polished is juxtaposed with a roughhewn material. A massive sculpture at the Getty is utterly open, but when the sky turns white, it looks like a solid lantern. One problem, as the artist recognizes, is that you always want to touch what he makes.

-Kenneth Caldwell

**Q:** Do you draw a lot before you start working on a sculpture?

**Martin Puryear:** It can vary. But typically, I do enough drawing, which in some cases is very little. If it's a complicated piece structurally or engineering-wise, I'll have to do a fair amount of drawing.

**Q:** You don't exhibit a lot of drawings, do you?

**MP:** Almost nothing. I don't think of drawings as things that are for the public. I do keep some drawings. But they're basically work tools. I probably throw away more than I should. I'm pretty results oriented and not so much process oriented.

**Q:** Are very many of your works actually engineered?

**MP:** Anything large that goes outdoors and has a foundation that anchored is submitted to an engineer and vetted. I usually can give the engineer clear enough descriptions either with maquettes or with drawings of what I want to do.

**Q:** The sculptures that I've seen in museum settings show the evidence of the maker. But the larger public pieces are generally fabricated by industrial means that don't offer so much of that kind of evidence. Does that bother you?

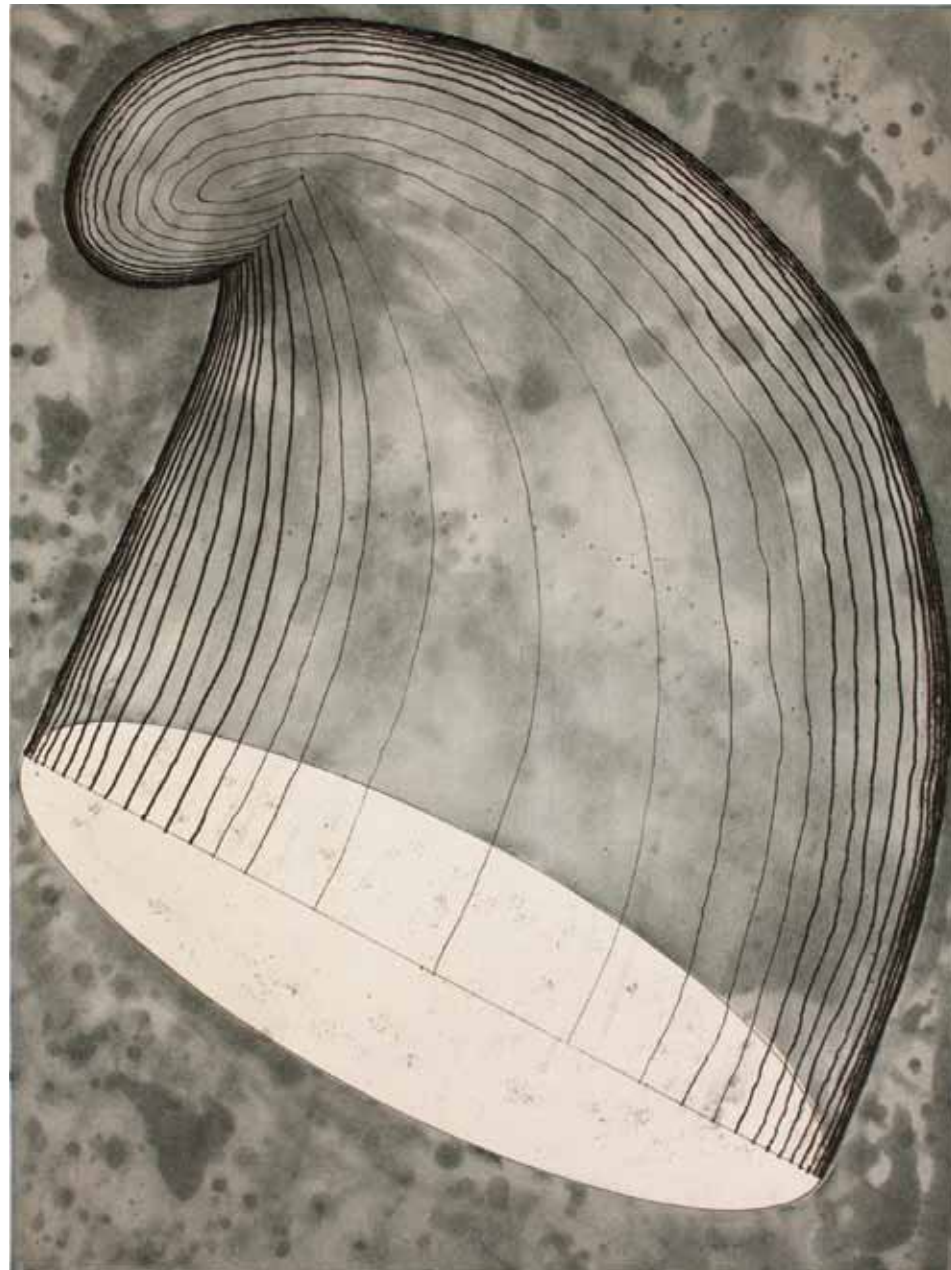
**MP:** That's something I have to come to terms with when I pass the work to a fabricator. And it requires a fair amount of oversight on my part. I know that it's not going to look like it's handmade. Take the sculpture I did for the Getty in Los Angeles. In the studio I made a maquette from wire less than two feet tall with the wire intersections wrapped with ties of even finer wire. The final work stands about 45 feet high, and was fabricated industrially from three inch stainless tube with one inch bronze rod bent red-hot around the intersections exactly like I used the wire ties on the maquette. The three inch tube was welded at each joint for structural integrity, but the wraps replicate the way that I would have done it by my own hand.

**Q:** You studied printmaking initially? How long did you do that before you ended up making sculpture?

**MP:** After my undergraduate art studies and two years in the Peace Corps (teaching in West Africa), I was admitted to the printmaking school of the Swedish Art Academy in Stockholm. I was also making sculpture during that time. I had access to the sculpture studio after the print shop was closed for the day. During those two years in Sweden, my work went from being figurative to being pretty much abstract. I was learning about wood construction and the assembly of pieces made from wooden parts.

**Q:** Did you stay away from printmaking for several years and focus almost exclusively on sculpture?

**MP:** Not by conscious design, but just because I got involved in making sculpture.



To make prints, you need access to a facility, except for woodcuts, which I made from time to time in the studio. I got more interested in the third dimension. It's a departure when I get presented with an opportunity to work in this two-dimensional area. What does it mean to make a two-dimensional thing when I'm so involved in actually constructing things in space? That's the question that always comes to mind when I come to Paulson Bott Press, and that I try to answer in the work. In my head, I am trying to make some kind of visual equivalent, not that I can present them in the third dimension. But with certain aspects, I'm enjoying playing with them and turning them into something.

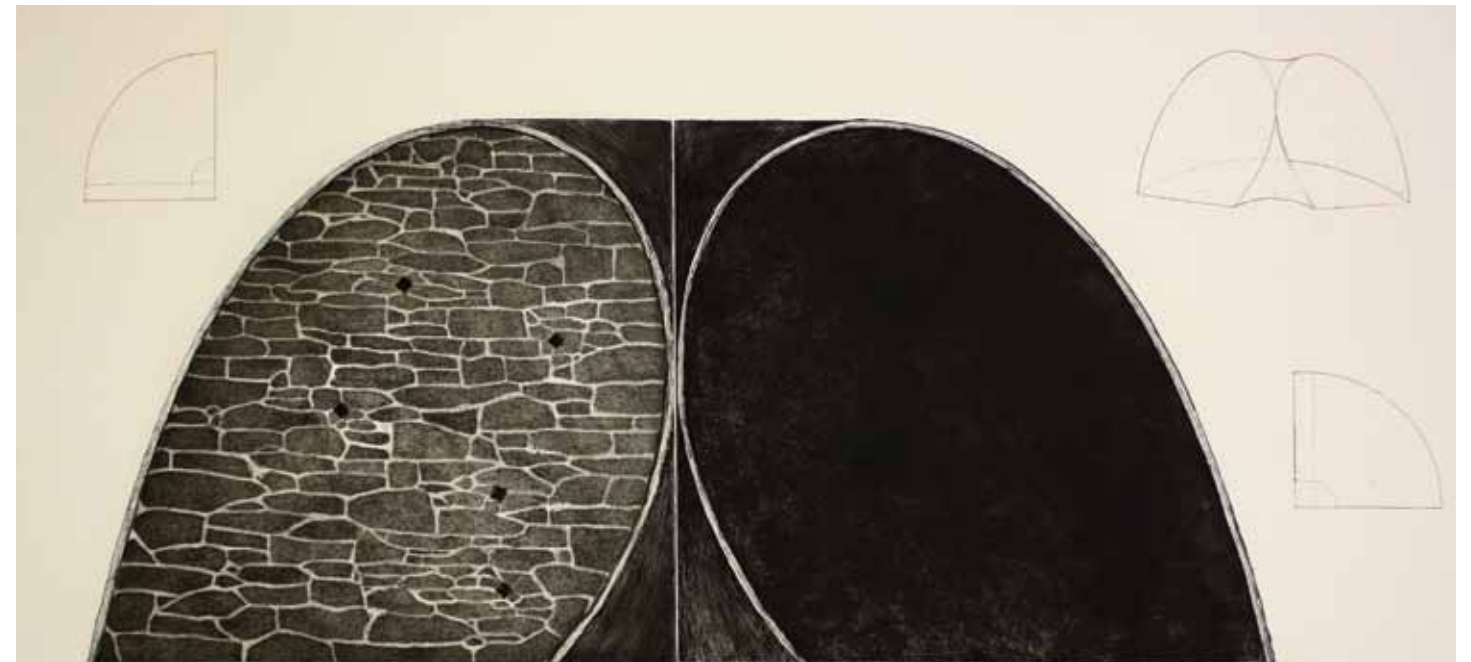
#### **PHRYGIAN, 2012**

Softground, spitbite, aquatint and drypoint etching; Image 35"x28"; Edition of 50

**Q:** Do you feel that that magic spatial quality, which I think is so integral to the sculptures, can be seen in the prints?

**MP:** Sometimes. Sometimes, it's very, very planar. What ends up on the plate doesn't necessarily suggest depth, volume, or space.

**Q:** Are you surprised with the result?



**MP:** I'm almost always surprised, because I don't start with a preconceived notion of what it's going to do—there's always a process of discovery with every single print.

**Q:** Can you just tell me a little about what you're experimenting with in these prints?

**MP:** It's so early that I'm reluctant to try. Perhaps I can describe Lean To. Let me show you images of the maquette for the sculpture. This maquette represents the volume that will be enclosed. I'm not sure what the material is. But let's assume that it's steel. This is a steel shell that you could enter into. This would be open. And that's represented in the print by the dark black part. And this would be a stone wall filling the other end of that tunnel. It would be a blind tunnel that would go around a curve. We are in the process of rendering this shell form in fiberglass just to see what it would be like as an ultimate skin, because it's basically a skin that has one end plugged up.

**Q:** What will be in the masonry wall?

**MP:** It has five little diamond-shaped openings in the masonry that you can peer into. But you can't go from one side to the other through the wall. You can just look through. So it'll have some similarities to my piece at Oliver Ranch in Sonoma County. It's like a secret space from one side, a secret space from the other side.

**Q:** You'll perceive the light of five diamond openings from the dark side?

**MP:** Yes, but it depends on the sun.

**Q:** Could you talk about other prints?

**MP:** Well, these prints, Untitled VI (State 1), and Untitled VI (State 2) explore an idea that I already have in several pieces. They are not monumental pieces, but they're big. Some of them are six feet. It's an idea of a certain shape. For Phrygian, we started the original plate for the image years ago. I decided that it is one I wanted to pick up again and take to completion. We are doing different tests with different degrees of value for the infill.

**Q:** Are there some projects you just put aside?

**MP:** Not a lot. Most things I like to finish by the time I leave. I like to have them ready to print. The next time I see them, I'm just signing them. So this is unusual in that it's one that I didn't finish. ✖

#### **LEAN TO, 2012**

Softground, spitbite aquatint, drypoint, and hardground etching with chine colle gampi; Image: 24"x39.5"; Edition of 50





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**UNTITLED VI (STATE 1), 2012**

Softground, drypoint and spitbite etching;  
Image: 43"x41"; Edition of 40



**UNTITLED VI (STATE 2), 2012**

Softground, drypoint and spitbite etching;  
Image: 43"x41"; Edition of 40



DESIGN: MICHAEL OSBORNE DESIGN