Mad. Sq. Art 2016
Martin Puryear
Big Bling

May 16, 2016–April 2, 2017
Madison Square Park
New York

Presented by
Madison Square Park Conservancy
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Mad. Sq. Art

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Artist’s Statement

Although my sculpture *Big Bling* is an industrially produced construction, made in a factory and standing forty feet high, it had its beginnings in my studio as a handmade wooden sculpture just over three feet high, but identical in every respect to its full-size realization.

Apart from the golden element near the top, the sculpture was constructed using standard building materials—laminated curved pine timbers and plywood (pressure-treated to withstand the weather), galvanized steel-bolted connections, and a cladding of chain-link mesh fencing.

Besides the factory that was responsible for the timber construction, the work relied on the assistance of engineers, a crew of riggers with heavy equipment, and a team of model makers to fabricate the golden shackle. (This was digitally enlarged from my carved wooden original, modeled in structural foam, covered in fiberglass, and finally gilded with twenty-two-karat gold leaf.)

Because of its size, the sculpture had never been fully assembled. But one night in early May 2016, shortly after midnight, three flatbed tractor-trailers delivered it to the Park in seven sections. Four long days later the installation was completed.

What for months had been a growing accumulation of wooden parts suddenly was a presence in Madison Square Park.

The public asks:

What does it mean? What does it represent?

And for the artist, the question of meaning becomes:

What does it mean for my sculpture (which I normally make to last as long as possible) to be exhibited for only a few months in the middle of a teeming public space like Madison Square Park, outside the defining protective walls of a museum or art gallery?

Apropos the question of meaning, the poet Archibald MacLeish wrote:

A poem should not mean

But be. 1

And, indeed, this enormous wooden construction was conceived by me as a kind of visual praise poem, an ode, to New York City.

It was my way of saying:

I see you New York, I see how you grow and compartmentalize and stratify, I see how you beckon and promise (and also how you exclude).

And crowning it all like a beacon, I see your wealth, your gilded shackle, the golden ring (the bling), the prize, our pride, maybe even our success.

Martin Puryear

1 Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica,” from *Collected Poems 1917-1952.*
Foreword

This catalogue is published on the occasion of realizing a spectacular sculpture, Martin Puryear’s *Big Bling*, in Madison Square Park. The Conservancy first approached the artist in late 2013 to discuss his willingness to construct a monumental temporary artwork in the Park.

In the studio, Puryear makes sculpture that endures. Building a short-lived work outdoors at a teeming public site that 60,000 people traverse daily—some with knowledge of his work, others with no inclination toward contemporary art—would invigorate the artist. Public art is viewed in the context of full democracy: no admission fees, complete accessibility, open to all. Puryear’s penchant to describe *Big Bling* as a “construction,” but limit any further interpretation, invites viewers to push their impetus and their imagination to think hard about a sculpture that sits so gracefully on the Oval Lawn, and so over poweringly demands understanding. Perhaps the contrast and contradictions embedded in this work—stately and overwhelming, rough-hewn and refined, raw and polished, restrained and liberated, figurative and abstract—are the true subject of *Big Bling*, and the ultimate civic obligation.

Like all of Madison Square Park’s exhibitions, *Big Bling* could not have been realized without the extraordinary support and counsel of Madison Square Park Conservancy’s Board of Trustees, including Board Chair David Berliner. Our Art Committee is a group of indispensable advisors who share their guidance, generosity, and wisdom. We are grateful to John Barry and Christopher Ward of Thornton Tomasetti, who worked closely with the Conservancy and the artist to realize his vision. Jon Lash at Digital Atelier resolutely guided all aspects of the fabrication of *Big Bling*. Michael Narcisco and Dennis Dwyer at Dun-Rite Specialized Carriers brought their expertise to the installation rigging process. The team at Unalam in Unadilla, New York, worked closely with Puryear to build and construct a magnificent sculpture. At Madison Square Park Conservancy, Julia Friedman, Exhibition Manager, and Tom Reidy, Project Manager, are extraordinary colleagues. Keats Myer, Executive Director, has been enthralled with *Big Bling* from the outset. We are thrilled that the sculpture will travel to the Association for Public Art in Philadelphia, opening in May 2017. Matthew Marks and Stephanie Dorsey of Matthew Marks Gallery have been generous supporters of this project, involved since its inception. Thank you to Jeanne Englert at the Puryear studio, Harry Cooper, Curator and Head of Modern Art at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., shares his insight on Puryear’s significance in this volume.

In *Big Bling*, Martin Puryear has pushed a form that has occupied his studio practice for decades into the realm of public art. In doing so, he obliges the individual viewer to engage with and interpret the work. Park visitors have crowded around the sculpture and commented on the raw quality of the materials. They have photographed it and questioned its meaning. *Big Bling* has been received with critical acclaim and serious introspection. If the role of public art is to challenge, energize, inspire, and provoke, then Martin Puryear has realized these objectives. If a goal in the studio is to push an artist’s practice into new territory, then perhaps *Big Bling* has offered this to the venerable Puryear.

Brooke Kamin Rapaport
Director and Martin Friedman Senior Curator
Mad. Sq. Art
Introduction

When Martin Puryear first conceived of an outdoor public sculpture for Madison Square Park, he summoned a form that had absorbed him since the mid-1980s: Puryear had already created a number of works—sculptures in white pine, tulip poplar, rattan, wire, and iron; drawings in charcoal and Conté crayon; etchings—that relied on a sinuous abstract shape with a curvilinear spine and a central, organic void. He found this form adaptable for a public art project, but with significant alterations. Typically, Puryear makes sculpture for the ages, with enduring materials; this piece would instead be intentionally temporary, built with laminated plywood and chain-link fence. Previous works had been created in Puryear’s studio; this one would be fabricated industrially. And the title, Big Bling, brought a raffish vernacular to the outdoor sculpture: it allied the artist’s choice of street materials with urban slang. The title reflected the placement of a work of public art in an urban setting that accommodates thousands of people every day. The shape and elements of the sculpture are complex in meaning and association—part animal form, part abstraction, and part searing content.

Puryear’s initial volley for Big Bling—ultimately towering at forty feet on the Park’s central Oval Lawn—was an informal image the size of the palm of his hand, drawn on letterhead. He next drew an angular rendering that indicated the linearity of the structure’s interior and the curvilinear sweep of the outline. This was helpful to engineers and contractors who worked with him to shape his vision into a large-scale computer template for assembly by sections. Puryear’s almost four-foot-tall maquette transformed a two-dimensional idea into a three-dimensional sculpture, but at one-tenth the scale. The birch plywood and maple model wasn’t wrapped in the fine mesh that Puryear typically employs in sections of his sculpture. Rather, the wood assemblage emphasized the architectural fortitude of what Big Bling would become. Using the maquette and artist’s renderings, engineers and fabricators produced a
suitable computer scheme drawn in seven sections for transport and assembly. A golden shackel, the thirteen-foot-high fiberglass object with applied gold leaf, would be installed near the pinnacle of the sculpture. It put the “bling” in Big Bling.

Puryear has said publicly that Big Bling is “a portrait of New York” and “a visual praise poem to the city.” He has regularly described the work as a “construction.” Some artists prefer to ascribe a set narrative, story line, or content to their work. Puryear has adopted a platform that enables the art to lead, sanctioning the legitimacy of the viewer’s interpretation or innate understanding; the sculpture stands, not the spin surrounding it.

With Big Bling as a paradigmatic example, the Parkgoer’s—or more accurately, the viewer’s—perception has taken off. Some have described the sculpture as an elephant or a Trojan horse. Puryear was intrigued during the installation period when a visitor told him that this outside sculpture conjured a homegrown wooden roller coaster he’d read about years before in a children’s story. Many people have studied the architectural geometry of the work and compared it to the recurrent windows in Madison Square Park’s surrounding canyon of skyscrapers. Viewers have looked carefully at Big Bling’s materials and the trenchant symbolism of encasing a structure in chain-link fencing. For those on the inside, it is a privileged perch. For outsiders, a fence is an acute barrier that repels and prohibits access.

Even with the metaphor involved in using street materials such as plywood and chain-link fence, Big Bling wouldn’t realize its power without the shimmering golden shackel near the top. The shackel is brilliant, it lures the eye. An apt juxtaposition is with the Statue of Liberty, a ray of light emanating from its torch. The New York City-born poet Emma Lazarus (1849–1887) wrote of the monument. Liberty Enlightening the World, more than a century ago as a guidepost for immigrants to this country, a symbol of emancipation and enfranchisement. In her 1883 sonnet “The New Colossus,” Lazarus described Lady Liberty’s torch as a golden beacon:

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles, From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips, “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

It will not be lost on scholars of Madison Square Park that the Statue of Liberty’s arm and torch were on view there between 1876 and 1882, in an effort to bring donations for the completion of the 305-foot-tall monument. So while there is camaraderie between a glowing, eternally lit torch and the golden shackel on Puryear’s sculpture, Lady Liberty’s message of welcome is nearer than Puryear’s: a torch fords a path, while a shackel is an object of stricture.

“Shackle” is, as Puryear notes, a verb and a noun. To shackel means to restrain, and a shackel is a U-shaped piece of hardware used in building, rigging, and hoistig. Shackel dimensions can be measured in inches or feet. Puryear often cites his indebtedness as a sculptor to the processes of various trades (boat building, furniture or instrument making) where a shackel would certainly be a standard apparatus. But the shackel as an object of servitude brings the art historian Kellie Jones and presumably many other viewers of Big Bling to wonder: “When I first heard that, that was a shackel . . . I was thinking: Is this really about enslavement? Is this really about bondage? But no, it’s about a piece of hardware . . . it’s ambiguous.”
There is ambiguity in a thirteen-foot-high golden shackle installed near the top of a forty-foot-tall public art project. Puryear’s two-foot-high iron sculpture Shackled (2014) is reminiscent of Big Bling’s form. The title of that work and the fact that from the beginning the artist referred to the gold-leaf form as a “shackle” prompt one to consider its reference as more than a construction tool. A shackle bears the weight of the loaded term with which Ta-Nehisi Coates and other contemporary writers summon the legacy of slavery:

The streets were not my only problem. If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left. Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave up your body now. Fail to comprehend the schools and you gave up your body later. I suffered at the hands of both. 5

Big Bling has especially incisive and even unanticipated meaning today. Puryear’s work may have started with an impetus to foster commentary on inequality in New York and other urban American centers—prohibiting entry, denying admission, precluding the gold ring. While the artist is reluctant to ascribe a symbolic program to the sculpture, it has pushed deep into the conversation about social discrepancies during an angry political season in which issues of race, deportation, and restriction predominate. If Big Bling’s wood structure wrapped in chain-link fence compels this interpretation, the work is also steeped in a continuing American story of disparity.

B.K.R.
Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,
And thing next most diffuse to cloud

Robert Frost,
"Tree at My Window," 1928

A formal sequence exceeds the capacity of any individual
to exhaust its possibilities in one lifetime.

George Kubler,
The Shape of Time, 1962

Puryear’s Pictures:
A Free Association

Martin Puryear’s works often point in two directions
at once, up and down. Of these, it is the latter that is
striking. Plenty of sculptures aspire, but his seem to
press into the ground as much as they reach into the
air. They are planted. The verb summons a double
etymology, for the Latin noun planta means both
“sprout, shoot, or cutting” and “sole of the foot.”
Little can grow that is not grounded.

This is manifested, even illustrated, by Face Down
(2008, fig. 8), a small sculpture in white bronze
depicting what skateboarders call a faceplant. It is an
unusually figurative, unusually funny work for Puryear,
one of those revealing anomalies. The face appears
flattened onto the floor or else cut off by it so that it
continues underneath, completing itself. The result is
a cartoonish image of a figure taking a fall, or burying
its head in the sand, or peering into the earth. Perhaps
the figure is trying to see the world in William Blake’s
grain of sand or to look into Robert Frost’s crater of the
ant. Perhaps it has had its nose to the grindstone too
long. But notice the holes aerating the top of the head
like a chia pet before it sprouts or a lamp perforated
to send out beams. These suggestions point upward,
infusing and inflating the form. The gourdlike cranium
(remember the expression “out of your gourd”),
the cropped neck, and the semicircle of the ear—a
synecdoche for the head itself—all rise and swell away
from the ground. What goes down must come up. If this
head had ideas, they would leak out, seeding the air.

Puryear first conceived this form in 1992–1993 as a precise drawing of
a wooden framework. A few years later he started building it, and at
some point he decided to place a large ampersand made of tar-
covered mesh smack in the middle.
The result was the fifteen-foot-long
wooden Vessel (1997–2002, fig. 9). What kind of vessel is it?
A hot-water bottle with a stopper? A jug with a spout? The wooden beams and the scale of the work recall the framing of a ship, which in turn suggests that the ampersand may be a homuncular rower, bent and coiled, about to pull an absent oar. A figure in a bottle, a slave in a vessel. (The homunculus was often depicted in alchemical texts as a figure gestating inside a glass container.) The semicircles of the ears would make good garlocks. The ears, by the way, were not in the drawing. Puryear added them in the sculpture, no doubt to strengthen the "head" reading of Vessel, to right the balance, to keep the ambiguity afloat.

There is a term for a configuration carefully designed to sustain two mutually exclusive readings: multistable image. Puryear's vessel/head looks something like that most famous of multistable images, the rabbit-duck illusion. Depending on how you see the projecting part of the form as ears or a bill, you will see either a rabbit or a duck, and with a little effort you can toggle between the two. In both Vessel and Face Down, the analogous projection can be read as either the neck of a head or the spout of a jug. Depending on this choice, the image will seem downward- or upward-pointing, introverted or extroverted, perhaps even trapped or liberated. These are multistable meanings.

The only other image of a faceplant that I can recall is in the work of Philip Guston, whose lime-bean heads of the 1970s often engage in close encounters with the ground. In Web (1975; fig. 10), one of them stares facedown and point-blank into a pool of cadmium red paint or blood. Puryear's Face Down is less cartoony and detailed, but despite these differences the connection is striking because the form-class (to borrow George Kubler's term) is so rare, the iconographic tradition so narrow. Perhaps Puryear was thinking of Guston. But influence or borrowing is not my point: what the two artists have in common is not one image in particular but multistable images in general. Like Puryear, Guston is a master of the manifold. Take that thing next to the head in Web, which looks like two paws raised in prayer or a simplification of Brancusi's Kiss. As we know from Guston's other paintings, it can also signify, depending on context, the parted hair of his wife, Musa, or a setting sun. Here we move beyond multistable images with their perceptual tricks to the deeper ground of what Freud called condensation; the packing of multiple identities into a single image thanks to the logic of the unconscious and the economy of the dream work.

And why oh why an ampersand for cargo? An ampersand joins the letters e and t to form the Latin word and (and), it is a symbol of connection and continuation, as its two forward-facing loose ends nicely suggest. And, and, and... The mind of this head/vessel is wandering, perhaps dreaming. It is a "very open-minded head." A second glance reveals a wooden sphere at the foot of the ampersand, which calls to mind the abbreviation etc. (et cetera, "and other such things"), which can also be written &c. As we all know, this is a handy device of (non)closure, itself terminating appropriately in a punctual little dot. The dot in Vessel is easy to miss since it is the color of the surrounding wood. It is there, I imagine, to remind us that time is limited, that free association is not endless. The ampersand-with-dot logogram thus expresses the tension of freedom and constraint, openness and closure, in the image as a whole.

It is time for a confession. I am treating Puryear's sculptures as images or pictures almost without material being, and I am associating them mainly to other pictures. I am not sure why, and I am not happy about it. Maybe it is because so much has been written so well about his materials and methods. Maybe it is because my first experience of Big Bing (2016), the occasion for this brief essay, was of a looming and ephemeral image at night, fenced off in a big clearing in the center of Madison Square Park, and not at all of an object to be encountered as one body to another (although I later explored it up close on a summer day). Or maybe it is just that the ungraspable pictures formed by Puryear's objects will not let go of me.

Any consideration of Puryear's heads will eventually arrive at his Self (1978; fig. 11). As the first of the headlike, or at least figurative, sculptures in his work, it is what Kubler would call a prime object, the initiator of a sequence.
An oblong, hollow, irregular, darkly stained wooden form, it rises directly from the floor to a snubbed peak a little blunter than a Conehead.7 Guston comes to my mind again, this time for his so-called hoods, the Klan-inspired alter egos that immediately preceded the lima-bean heads. Like Self, the hoods lean and waver, implying movement and sensitivity. Also like Self, which is the height of an average person, the legless hoods stand in for the whole body.

There is more to say about Guston, but free association does not wait: Joan Miró’s Tête (Head) (1940/1974; fig. 12) comes to me next, a strange painting of a brooding, looming, rounded form with a single bloodshot eye. Miró first painted the work in 1940 while in France, lamenting the fall of Barcelona and the triumph of Franco in his native Spain. He returned to overpaint it more than three decades later, at a time of protest, repression, and uncertainty as the Franco regime entered its final months. The hand or paw gesticulating is almost all that remains of the original image, for the rest has been obliterated by the head of the title.

What connects this image to Puryear’s Self is not just the evident similarities of the dark form but the questions it raises. What is inside or underneath the opaque head? Is its imposition an act of self-assertion or self-censorship? And most simply (to return to where we started), is it pointing up or down? Its single black eye floats in a red shape that can be seen as a teardrop (falling) or a flame (rising). And let’s not ignore the hand that has been carefully preserved from the first state. No mere leftover, it becomes an integral part of the new image, an attachment or a handle much like the spout/neck in Puryear’s vessel(head) or the cigarette that often emerges from the nonexistent mouths of Guston’s grounded lima-bean heads, pointing up, releasing a puff of smoke, keeping things light. Or not so light, if we think of the famous dog that Goya painted on the walls of La Quinta del Sordo, who relates to that rising wave or hill much as Miró’s hand relates to the swelling head.

In his 2014–2015 show at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York, Puryear introduced a new prime object into his work, the Phrygian cap, a piece of floppy red headgear with a Roman pedigree that played a major role in the French Revolution and (of particular interest to Puryear) in its antislavery campaigns.8 The cap had a parallel life, less well-known, as the barretina worn by Catalan men into the nineteenth century and then revived in the twentieth as a symbol of the Catalan independence movement. Miró felt deeply connected to his native Barcelona and especially to his family’s country home.
in Mont-roig, and in 1924-1925 he devoted a series of four major paintings to the theme of a Catalan peasant sporting a barretina. Puryear’s sculpture *Phrygian Spirit* (2012–2014; fig. 13), with its elegant curves and its red and black balls connected by a string, seems to pay particular homage to *Head of a Catalan Peasant* at the National Gallery in Washington (1924; fig. 14), in which black and red elements are connected by fine lines. Here is yet another image in which head stands for body, given that it is possible to read the black eyes as hands and the wispy beard as a set of insect legs.

In addition to the radical history of the Phrygian cap, Puryear is interested in what he calls its “up-and-over shape,” its distinctive flop, which he also connects to Hokusai’s wave. The flop took vivid form in one of the most memorable works in the Matthew Marks show, a sculpture in red-painted ceder titled *Big Phrygian* (2010–2014; fig. 15). Which brings us, by way of rhyming title and rhyming form, to *Big Bling* (2016).

The *Big Bling* sequence began with a few sketches in about 2003 that in 2013 were realized in wood as the model for a stone sculpture for a library in Oslo (2013; fig. 16). A small sculpture, *Shackled*, followed in 2014 (fig. 17), and in the same year Puryear made the intricate wood and gold-leaf maquette for *Big Bling*. For all their different materials, these works share a single silhouette: one vertical edge and one sloping edge that meet to define a plane interrupted by an earlike opening. The main difference is at the top, which is cut off at an angle in the first sketches, suggesting the receptive mouth of a vessel, onto which a doughnut-like stopper is then added in the library maquette, a stopper that is then finished in *Shackled* and *Big Bling* by the addition of a shackle whose bit runs through the hole. It is a beautiful, almost biological evolution, and no doubt it will continue.

The *Big Bling* sequence has all the downward pressure we have come to expect in Puryear’s work. This is expressed most clearly in *Shackled*, which bears some resemblance to an antique flatiron thanks to its material (iron) and its heavy, integral base. And if that work depicts a tool, the opening suggests an ergonomic handle.

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9 Martin Puryear, in conversation with Dr. Kent Jones, in *Dreaming Public Art*, a symposium organized by Madison Square Park Conservancy and held at the SVA (School of Visual Arts) Theatre in New York City on May 24, 2014. All subsequent statements by Puryear are from this conversation.

10 That hole derives from a subspecies of drawings of about 2003 featuring three openings in the frontal plane, the ear-shaped one and two circular ones. The upper of these circles would then become the hole of the added stopper. This three-hole version was realized in 2005 in an untitled five-and-a-half-foot-tall sculpture (*John and Martha Gabbart Collection*) in which the frontal plane, defined in wood, is backed by a swelling spherical openwork of rattan and wire.
Yet for all this weight, the rising curve of the “back” suggests an upward movement that is realized in the sheer height of Big Bling itself, which connects it to the old skyscrapers around it. This tension of up and down reaches a climax in the shackle, which is a lifting device (as Puryear is quick to point out) and a means of heavy, historical confinement. The shackle looks as if it could be flipped up, but it would take a giant to do so. As it is, the shackle acts as a terminus to the wave of the back edge, a final flop that places Big Bling with Big Phrygian firmly in the “up-and-over” form-class. It is a story in miniature of rise and fall, victory and defeat, liberty and constraint.

But let’s lighten up: the word bling, together with the gold leaf, suggests luxury goods, including handbags and luggage with their leather straps attached by gold or gold-colored shackles. Puryear speaks about the work and its title as having a “populist” quality, capturing the striving and dynamism of the city, the desire to reach the brass ring, to have tokens of success on our persons. “I hope that it is an ode to New York, a visual praise poem to the city and its energy.” Of course, the virtues of materialism, conspicuous consumption, and so-called upward mobility are debatable, and the sculpture stages the debate. “You can have a conversation,” Puryear remarks. This is the other meaning of “free association,” not the inescapable condition of private dreaming but the democratic right of public assembly.

Big Bling is a figurative as well as a literal scaffolding, a structure upon which meanings can be erected. Its suggestiveness derives from its rich formal and referential pedigree, the way it carries along heads and hoods, tools and vessels, waves and hats, oppression and freedom, deriving from sequences both inside and outside Puryear’s oeuvre. It combines stubborn mulishness with feline potential energy, and also suggests the contained violence of a bull with a ring in its nose. It has the paradoxical stability of a wave, which is a fixed shape that moves through a liquid.

But the final stop in my train of association, for now, is the word congeries, that strangely singular plural for a heterogeneous aggregate that (like this essay) does not quite fall apart or hold together. In its combination of shaped, planed, singular form, which seems like the inevitable product of an evolution, and its teeming plurality of allusion and suggestion, as varied and contingent as our own minds, Big Bling presents a welcome inversion of our national motto: Out of one, many.

Harry Cooper
Curator and Head of Modern Art
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Martin Puryear

WORK IN EXHIBITION

Big Bling, 2016
Pressure-treated laminated timbers, plywood, chain-link fencing, fiberglass, and gold leaf
40 x 10 x 38 feet
Collection of the artist, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1941 in Washington, D.C.
Lives and works in upstate New York

EDUCATION

1963
Bachelor of Arts, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

1968
Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, Stockholm

1971
Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture, Yale University, New Haven

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artist thanks his studio assistants Jeanne Englert, Rob Horton, and Kentaro Takashina,
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2016
Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions, Art Institute of Chicago; Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.

2015
Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York

2014
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

2012
McKee Gallery, New York

2008
Vessel, “I” Space, Rhinebeck, New York

2007
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

2005
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

2004
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

2003
New Work, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

2002
New Work, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, England
Des Moines Art Center
McKee Gallery, New York

2001
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

2000
Miami Art Museum
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

1999
The Cane Project, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York

1997
Fundación "la Caixa", Madrid

1996
Donald Young Gallery, Seattle

1995
McKee Gallery, New York

1993
Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art

1992
Philadelphia Museum of Art

1989
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles

1988
McIntosh/Drysdale Gallery, Washington, D.C.

1987
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

1985
Public and Personal, Chicago Public Library and Cultural Center

1984
Sculpture/Drawings, Carnegie Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh

1983
Grand Lobby Installation, Brooklyn Museum, New York

1982
Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles

1981
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

1980
Ten-Year Survey, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield; University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

1979
Delahunty Gallery, Dallas; and/or Gallery, Seattle

1978
Options 2, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

1977
I-80 Series, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha

1976
Young Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

1975
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

1974
Henri 2 Gallery, Washington, D.C.

1973
Fisk University Gallery, Nashville

1972
Henri 2 Gallery, Washington, D.C.

1971
Gröna Palleten Gallery, Stockholm

1970
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Commissions & Special Projects

2016
Big Bling, Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York

2014
Slavery Memorial, Brown University, Providence

One Handed Stool, New Museum, New York

Bench designs, Glenstone Foundation, Potomac, Maryland

2003
Guardian Stone, TV Asahi, Tokyo

1999
That Profile, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

This Mortal Coil, Festival d’Automne, Paris

1998

1997
Courtyard, New School for Social Research, New York

Everything That Rises, University of Washington, Seattle

1996
Meditation in a Beech Wood, Wanås Foundation, Knislinge, Sweden

1995
North Cove Pylons, Battery Park City, New York

1994
Camera Obscura, Denver Civic Center

Untitled, Oliver Ranch, Geyserville, California

Pavilion in the Trees, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia

1991
Griot New York, Brooklyn Academy of Music

1988
Ampersand, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

1987
Ark, York College, CUNY, Queens

1985
River Road Ring, Chicago O’Hare Transit Line

1983
Knoll for NOAA, Western Regional Center, Seattle

1982
Bodark Arc, Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park, University Park

Sentinel, Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania

1979
Equivalents, Wave Hill, Bronx

1977
Box and Pole, Artpark, Lewiston, New York
Selected Group Exhibitions

2016
Approaching American Abstraction: The Fisher Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Abstracting Nature, Newark Museum

2015
Black Fire, A Constant State of Revolution, Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska, Lincoln
Recent Acquisitions of Prints and Drawings Spanning 500 Years, Portland Art Museum, Oregon
10 Sculptures, Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles
The Ceramic Presence in Modern Art: Selections from the Linda Leonard Schleger Collection and the Yale University Art Gallery, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven
River Crossings, Thomas Cole National Historic Site and Olana State Historic Site, Catskill and Hudson, New York

2014
Anderson Collection at Stanford University, California
Represent: 200 Years in African-American Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art

2013
Legacy: The Emily Fisher Landau Collection, Asheville Art Museum, North Carolina
Multiplicity: Contemporary Prints from the Smithsonian Art Museum, Akron Art Museum, Ohio

2012
African American Art Since 1950: Perspectives from the David C. Driskell Center, David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park

2010
A Force of Change: African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey
Line, Letter and Form, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
Sculpture, Mckee Gallery, New York

2009
The Sculptor's Hand, Tasende Gallery, La Jolla, California
A Matter of Form, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
The Endless Renaissance, Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

2008
Origins, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York
Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture Part II, John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
Art for Yale: Collecting for a New Century, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

2007
Early Signs: Celimins, Puryear, Youngblood, Mckee Gallery, New York
Estampes, Galerie Lelong, Paris

2006
Selections from the Collection of Edward R. Broida, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

2005
Sculpture: An Intuitive View, Mckee Gallery, New York
Africa in America, Seattle Art Museum

2004
Contemporary Art and Furniture Design in Dialogue, Senior & Shopmaker Gallery, New York

2003
Love/Hate: From Magritte to Cattelan: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Villa Manin di Passariano, Codroipo, Italy
Gyroscope, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.
Art by MacArthur Fellows, Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati

2002
Breathless, Neuherger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, Purchase
New Prints: Jake Berthot, Vija Celmins, Martin Puryear, Mckee Gallery, New York
110 Years: The Permanent Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Gifts in Honor of the 125th Anniversary of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art
In the Spirit of Martin: The Living Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit; Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach; Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art; Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Alabama

Drawings, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

To Be Looked At: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Material Differences: Contemporary Viewpoints, Museum for African Art, New York

According with Nadelman: Contemporary Affinities, June Kelly Gallery, New York

New to the Modern: Recent Acquisitions from the Department of Drawings, The Museum of Modern Art, New York


Yale University School of Art Alumni Choice Exhibition, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven

New Land Marks: Public Art, Community, and the Meaning of Place, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

Celebrating Modern Art: Highlights of the Anderson Collection, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

NEW Works, McKee Gallery, New York

Strength and Diversity: A Celebration of African American Artists, Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge


Weaving the World: Contemporary Art of Linear Construction, Yokohama Museum of Art

Face to Face: Art in the Public, Marlborough Chelsea, New York

Essence of the Orb, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York

Narratives of African American Art of the 20th Century: The David C. Driskell Collection, Art Gallery of the University of Maryland, College Park


Forma Linea, American Academy in Rome

American Stories: Amidst Displacement and Transformation, Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo

Envisioning the Contemporary: Selections from the Permanent Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Selections from the Permanent Collection: Identity/Identidad, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, La Jolla, California

Masterworks of Modern Sculpture: The Nasher Collection, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Abstraction in the Twentieth Century: Total Risk, Freedom, Discipline, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Wanás 1996, Wanás Foundation, Knislinge, Sweden

Art in Chicago, 1945–1995, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

FareT Tachikawa: City and Art Today, National Technical Museum, Prague

The Material Imagination, Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York

New Works on Paper: Sari LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Martin Puryear, Richard Serra, Donald Young Gallery, Seattle

Western Artists/African Art, Museum for African Art, New York

Visions of America: Landscape as Metaphor in the Late Twentieth Century, Denver Art Museum

Putting Things Together: Recent Sculpture from the Anderson Collection, Art Museum of Santa Cruz County, California

Visual Arts Encounter: African Americans and Europe, Salle Clemenceau, Palais du Luxembourg, Paris

Yale Collects Yale, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven


Drawing the Line Against AIDS, 45th Venice Biennale, Peggy Guggenheim Collection


Donald Young Gallery, Seattle

Documenta IX, Kassel, Germany

Devil on the Stairs: Looking Back at the Eighties, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Newport Harbor Art Museum, California

Reprise: The Vera G. List Collection, David Winton Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown University, Providence

Small Scale Sculpture, Sewell Art Gallery, Rice University, Houston

Black USA, Museum Overholland, Amsterdam
Selected Artists from the First 20 Years, Max Protetch Gallery, New York

The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s, New Museum, New York

Objects of Potential: Five American Sculptors from the Anderson Collection, Wiegand Gallery, College of Notre Dame, Belmont, California

Art in Place: 15 Years of Acquisitions, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Traditions and Transformation: Contemporary Afro-American Sculpture, Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York


Introspective: Contemporary American Art by Americans and Brazilians of African Descent, California Afro-American Museum, Los Angeles

New Sculpture: Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Martin Puryear, Susana Solano, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Prints by Sculptors, Landsail Press, New York

From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c. 1940-1988, 1988 Sydney Biennale

Private Works for Public Spaces: Drawings, Maquettes and Documentation for Unrealized Public Artworks, R.C. Erof Gallery, New York

Spectrum: Mary Beth Edelson, Martin Puryear, Italo Scanga, Robert Stackhouse, Caracara Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

The World of Art Today, Milwaukee Art Museum

Innovations in Sculpture, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

SKULPTUR: Material + Abstraktion; 2 x 5 Positionen, Aargauer Kunsthalle, Arbau, Switzerland; Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland; Swiss Institute & City Gallery, Department of Cultural Affairs, New York

Sculpture Inside Outside, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

Structure to Resemblance: Work by Eight American Sculptors, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo

Fifty Years of Collecting: An Anniversary Selection of Sculpture of the Modern Era, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York


After Nature, Germans Van Eck Gallery, New York

Sculpture on Stetson: 1986, Two Illinois Center, Chicago

Natural Forms and Forces: Abstract Images in American Sculpture, Hayden Gallery, List Visual Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge

Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Installations and Sculpture: Inaugural Exhibition, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Personal References, Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri

Chicago Sculpture International/MILE 4, State Street Mall, Chicago

Sculpture Overview 1985, Evanston Art Center, Illinois

Basically Wood, Thomas Segal Gallery, Boston

Choosing: An Exhibit of Changing Perspectives in Modern Art and Art Criticism by Black Americans 1925-1985, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago; Chicago State University; Portsmouth Museum, Virginia; Howard University, Washington, D.C.

The Artist as Social Designer: Aspects of Public Urban Art Today, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Black Creativity, Generations in Transition: 80 Years of Black American Expression, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

Anniottanta, Invitational, Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna, Bologna


Artist and Architects: Challenges in Collaboration, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art

Inaugural Exhibition, Tyler Gallery, Temple University, Philadelphia


American Sculpture, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Collaborating: The Power of the Artist and Architect Co-Designing Parks, Plazas, Public Places from New York to Seattle, McNichols/Drysdale Gallery, Houston


Transformation of the Minimal Style, Sculpture Center, Long Island City, New York
1983

Five Artists/NOAA Collaboration, Seattle Art Museum Pavilion Invitational Exhibition, Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York

Beyond the Monument, Documentation of Public Art Projects and Proposals, Hayden Corridor Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge

Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Afro-American Abstraction, organized by the American Museum Association; MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Oakland Museum, California; Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Memphis; The Art Center, South Bend, Indiana; Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio; Bellevue Art Museum, Washington; Laguna Gloria Museum, Austin, Texas

Works in Wood, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles

Invitational Exhibition, David Winton Bell Gallery, List Art Center, Brown University, Providence

Form and Function, Proposals for Public Art for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia

The 74th American Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago

American Abstraction Now, Richmond Institute of Contemporary Art of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

Mayor Byrne's Mile of Sculpture, International Art Exposition, Chicago

1981

The New Spiritualism: Transcendent Images in Painting and Sculpture, Oscarson Hood Gallery, New York; Jørgensen Gallery, University of Connecticut, Storrs; Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, Burlington


City Sculpture, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center

Instruction Drawings, Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Artists' Parks and Gardens, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Sculptural Density, Visual Arts Museum, School of Visual Arts, New York

1980

The Black Circle, A. Montgomery Ward Gallery, University of Illinois at Chicago

Chicago, Chicago, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati

Afro-American Abstraction, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York; Everson Gallery, Syracuse, New York

1979

Art and Architecture, Space and Structure, Protetch-McIntosh Gallery, Washington, D.C.


Custom and Culture, organized by Creative Time, U.S. Customs House, New York

Wave Hill: The Artist's View, Wave Hill, Bronx


The Material Dominant, Pennsylvania State University Museum of Art, University Park

The Program in the Visual Arts, Artpark, Lewiston, New York

National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.

New Talent at Maryland, Art Gallery of the University of Maryland, College Park

Prints and Paintings by Black Artists, Union South Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Group Exhibition, Lunn Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Annual Exhibition, Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, Stockholm

Group Show, U.S.L.S. Gallery, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Annual Exhibition, Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, Stockholm

Stockholm Biennial Exhibition, Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm

Annual Exhibition, Baltimore Museum of Art

Puryear, Raymond, Termini, Adams-Morgan Gallery, Washington, D.C.
Acknowledgments

For their continued commitment to the Mad. Sq. Art program, Madison Square Park Conservancy thanks Aline Brazil, John Barry, Manhattan Borough Parks Commissioner William Castro, Claudine Eriksson, Alison Hendrie, John Hunt, Anna Jardine, Jonathan Kuhn, Jennifer Lantzas, Paula Scher, Christopher Ward, Marisa Wayne, and the Board of Trustees of Madison Square Park Conservancy.

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Director and Martin Friedman Senior Curator
Mad. Sq. Art

Julia Friedman
Exhibition Manager

Tom Reidy
Project Manager

Support


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Association for Public Art, Philadelphia, will present Big Bling beginning in May 2017.
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Madison Square Park Conservancy is the not-for-profit organization whose mission is to protect, nurture, and enhance Madison Square Park, a dynamic seven-acre public green space, creating an environment that fosters moments of inspiration. The Conservancy is committed to engaging the community through its beautiful gardens, inviting amenities, and world-class programming. Madison Square Park Conservancy is licensed by the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to manage Madison Square Park and is responsible for raising 98% of the funds necessary to operate the Park, including the brilliant horticulture, park maintenance, sanitation, security, and free cultural programs for Park visitors of all ages.

For more Information
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New York, New York 10010
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Photography & Figure Credits

All works are by Martin Puryear unless otherwise indicated.

Fig. 1
Big Bling, 2016
Installation view in Madison Square Park, New York
Pressure-treated laminated timbers, plywood, chain-link fencing, fiberglass, and gold leaf
40 x 10 x 38 feet
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Photo
Yasunori Matsui

Fig. 2
Big Bling, 2016
Installation view in Madison Square Park, New York

Photo
Hunter Canning

Fig. 3
Big Bling, 2016
Installation view in Madison Square Park, New York

Photo
Rashmi Gill

Fig. 4
Maquette for Big Bling, 2014
Birch plywood, maple, and 22-karat gold leaf
40 1/4 x 9 3/8 x 40 inches (maquette);
40 x 10 x 38 feet (projected size)
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Photo
Jamie Stukenberg, Professional Graphics

Fig. 5
Maquette for Big Bling (detail), 2014

Photo
Jamie Stukenberg, Professional Graphics

Fig. 6
Shoehorn, 2014
Iron
27 1/2 x 30 5/8 x 8 3/8 inches
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 7
Maquette for Big Bling (detail), 2014

Photo
Jamie Stukenberg, Professional Graphics

Fig. 8
Face Down, 2008
White bronze
14 x 28 x 11 inches
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Photo
Jamie Stukenberg, Professional Graphics

Fig. 9
Veckel, 1997-2002
Eastern white pine, mesh, and tar
84 x 181 1/2 x 68 inches
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Niam McEvoy and Leslie Berrman in memory of Nan Tucker McEvoy, gift of Lucy S. Rhamm, and museum purchase through the Lucilla L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 10
Philip Guston American (1913–1980)
Web, 1975
Oil on canvas
67 x 97 inches

Fig. 11
Self, 1978
Stained and painted red cedar and mahogany
69 x 48 x 25 inches
Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 12
Joan Miró
Spanish (1893–1983)
748 (Head), 1940–March 1, 1974
Acrylic on canvas
25 3/5 x 19 7/10 inches
Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona © Successive Miró / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris 2016
Fig. 13
Phyrllan Spitek, 2013–2014
Alaskan yellow cedar, holly, ebony, leather, string, and milk paint
58 3/8 x 74 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches
John and Martha Gabbert
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 14
Jean Héloïse
Spanish (1893–1983)
Head of a Catalan Peasant, 1924
Oil and crayon on canvas
Overall: 57 1/2 x 44 15/16 inches, Framed: 69 1/8 x 56 1/2 x 4 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Gift of the Collectors Committee 1981.31
© Successió Héloïse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris 2016

Fig. 15
Big Bling, 2016
Installation in progress
in Madison Square Park, New York
Photo
Yasunori Matsui

Fig. 16
Mannequins for Deichman
Library, Oslo, 2013
American tulip poplar
23 1/2 x 14 3/4 x 28 7/8 inches
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 17
Shackled, 2014
Iron
27 1/2 x 30 5/8 x 8 3/8 inches
Collection of the artist
© Martin Puryear, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

Fig. 18
Big Bling, 2016
Installation view in Madison Square Park, New York
Photo
Rashmi Gill

Fig. 19
Fabrication of Big Bling, 2016
Photo
Yasunori Matsui

Fig. 20
Big Bling, 2016
Installation in progress
in Madison Square Park, New York
Photo
Yasunori Matsui
### Previous Mad. Sq. Art. Exhibitions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Exhibition/Artist(s)</th>
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| 2015 | Teresita Fernández *Fata Morgana*  
Paula Hayes *Gazing Globes* |
| 2014 | Tony Cragg *Walks of Life*  
Rachel Feinstein *Folly*  
Iván Navarro *This Land Is Your Land* |
| 2013 | Giuseppe Penone *Ideas of Stone (Idee di pietra)*  
Orly Genger *Red, Yellow and Blue*  
Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder *Topsy-Turvy: A Camera Obscura Installation* |
| 2012 | Leo Villareal *BUCKYBALL*  
Charles Long *Pet Sounds* |
| 2011 | Jacco Olivier *Stumble, Hide, Rabbit Hole, Bird, Deer, Home*  
Alison Saar *Fealian and Fallow*  
Jaume Plensa *Echo*  
Kota Ezawa *City of Nature* |
| 2010 | Jim Campbell *Scattered Light*  
Antony Gormley *Event Horizon*  
Ernie Gehr *Surveillance* |
| 2009 | Shannon Plumb *The Park*  
Jessica Stockholder *Flooded Chambers Maid*  
Mel Kendrick *Markers*  
Bill Seime *Madison Square Trancers, with Performances by the Vigilant Groundsman* |
Richard Deacon *Assembly*  
Tadashi Kawamata *Tree Huts*  
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer *Pulse Park*  
|
| 2007 | Bill Fontana *Panoramic Echoes*  
Roxy Paine *Conjoined, Defunct, Erratic*  
William Wegman *Around the Park* |
| 2006 | Ursula von Rydingsvard *Bowl with Fins, Czarz z Babelkami*  
Danski *Crepek, Ted’s Desert Reigns* |
| 2005 | Jene Highstein *Eleven Works*  
Sol LeWitt *Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers* |
| 2004 | Mark di Suvero *Aesop’s Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond* |
| 2003 | Wim Delvoye *Gothic* |
| 2002 | Dan Graham *Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve*  
Mark Dion *Urban Wildlife Observation Unit*  
Gabriel *+ Scullion Voyager* |
| 2001 | Navin Rawanchakul *I ♥ Taxi*  
Teresita Fernández *Bamboo Cinema*  
Tobias Rehberger *Tsutsumi N.Y.* |
| 2000 | Tony Oursler *The Influence Machine* |

From 2000 to 2003, exhibitions were presented by the Public Art Fund on behalf of the Campaign for the New Madison Square Park,