

Martin Puryear's first London solo exhibition spans 40 years of the artist's practice and presents over 30 works of sculpture and rarely seen works on paper. Loaded with a poignant sense of cultural history, Puryear's abstract sculptures have a unique aesthetic and are meticulously hand-made, most often from wood. Puryear employs traditional techniques to create his work, which is testimony to his deep respect for skilled craftsmanship. This approach and his inherent sensibility impart a subtlety in his works which touch on issues of identity.

Martin Puryear was born in 1941 in Washington D.C. After completing a BA in 1963, he joined the Peace Corp in Sierra Leone, West Africa for two years. Learning traditional craftsmanship from local carpenters, Puryear began documenting his experience through drawings and woodcut. He continued to refine this printmaking process at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, Stockholm from 1966 to 68, before attending Yale University in 1971, where he received an MFA in Sculpture. The artist's early experimentation with printmaking ultimately informed and influenced the sculptural works for which he is best known.

Installed in the ground floor gallery are Puryear's larger works, such as *Brunhilde*, 1998–2000, *The Load*, 2012, and *Big Phrygian*, 2010–2014. A five-foot tall cedar-wood sculpture painted bright red, *Big Phrygian* recalls the distinctive conical shape of a Phrygian cap worn in antiquity by people of Eastern Europe and Anatolia. In the 16th and 18th centuries, similar caps were worn by French Revolutionaries and have come to symbolise the pursuit of liberty.

On the outdoor terrace, the eight-foot tall bronze work, *Question*, 2013–2014, appears to rise up like a giant twisted liquorice stick before arching over to anchor itself to the floor in a bulbous gourd-shape.

In the first floor gallery, several curvilinear wall sculptures can be seen, among other works. A mixed-media wall sculpture, *Phrygian Spirit*, 2012–2014, made predominantly of Alaskan yellow cedar, defines the internal negative space of a Phrygian cap. Other smaller sculptures, such as *Shackled*, 2014, allude to social history and recall the shackles worn by Africans who were abducted from their own countries and enslaved. Some viewers may relate this particular work to Puryear's monumental outdoor sculpture, *Big Bling*, 2016, a 40-foot-high public art commission recently installed in Madison Square Park, New York, and currently on display in Philadelphia.

In a separate smaller gallery also on the first floor, a selection of Puryear's works on paper is on view, reminding us of the important dialogue between his two- and three-dimensional works.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*