

# Sculptor Martin Puryear to Represent United States at Venice Biennale

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by Pat Rogers

Martin Puryear will represent the United States at La Biennale di Venezia 58th International Art Exhibition, announced Madison Square Park Conservancy, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. On view from May 11 through November 24, 2019, Puryear will create new site-specific works for the U.S. Pavilion.

The 2019 U.S. Pavilion is commissioned and curated by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Deputy Director and Martin Friedman Senior Curator of [Madison Square Park Conservancy](#) of New York. The exhibition marks the first time in the history of the [Biennale](#) that the U.S. Pavilion will be organized by an institution whose visual arts program is focused exclusively on public art, according to the non-profit organization.

"Since our first project in 2004, Madison Square Park Conservancy has commissioned over 30 contemporary art installations, fostering dynamic engagement with the public to inspire, provoke, and captivate through resonant examples of contemporary art within one of the most cherished green spaces in New York City," stated Rapaport in the announcement. "We are proud to realize installations that are accessible and open to the broadest possible audience. The expertise and experience we have as an institution dedicated to public art will enhance next year's presentation at the U.S. Pavilion, which provides a critical spotlight on one of the most significant and influential artists working today."

Madison Square Park Conservancy and Puryear previously collaborated on the commission of a public art installation of his monumental sculpture *Big Bling* in New York's Madison Square Park in 2016.



“Big Bling” by Martin Puryear, 2016. Photo by Yasunori Matsui.  
Courtesy Madison Square Park Conservancy.

“Martin Puryear confronts contemporary issues as a maker of objects in the studio,” explained Rapaport. “For more than five decades, Puryear has created a body of work distinguished by a complex visual vocabulary and deeply-considered meaning. His exacting method and subtle power of nuance has influenced generations of artists in the U.S. and internationally.”

Puryear will create an entirely new body of work for the U.S. Pavilion, including new sculpture and a site-specific outdoor installation for the Pavilion’s forecourt. In conjunction with the U.S. Pavilion presentation, Puryear will participate in outreach programs for underserved youth through a collaboration between Studio Institute of Studio in a School Association, Inc. in New York and Istituto Santa Maria Della Pieta in Venice.

## Martin Puryear

Born in 1941 in Washington, D.C., [Martin Puryear](#) is an American sculptor whose work is recognized for the subtlety and power of its form and inherent symbolism. Puryear's work is in the permanent collections of major museums across the U.S. and internationally. He represented the United States at the 1989 Bienal de São Paulo, where he was awarded the festival's Grand Prize, and his work was included in the 1992 Documenta IX.

Recent exhibitions include a solo exhibition at the Museum Voorlinden, The Netherlands (2018); and an exhibition of his drawings, "Martin Puryear: Multiple Dimensions," at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York (2015), that later traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. Puryear was also commissioned to present a major sculptural installation, *Big Bling*, by Madison Square Park Conservancy (2016). The Museum of Modern Art, New York organized a retrospective of Puryear's work in 2007, which traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Puryear earned his B.A. from Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (1963) and his M.F.A. from Yale University (1971) and attended the Swedish Royal Academy of Art (1966-68). He has been the recipient of prestigious awards, including the Skowhegan Medal for Sculpture (1980), a Louis Comfort Tiffany Grant (1982), and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (1989). He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1992) and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Yale University (1994) and the National Medal of Arts (2011).

Puryear lives and works in the Hudson Valley region of New York.

## Brooke Kamin Rapaport

Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Commissioner and Curator of the U.S. Pavilion, is Deputy Director and Martin Friedman Senior Curator at Madison Square Park Conservancy in New York. Since joining the Conservancy in 2013, she has overseen its program of commissioned public sculpture exhibitions by contemporary artists including Diana Al-Hadid, Tony Cragg, Teresita Fernández, Josiah McElheny, Iván Navarro, Giuseppe Penone, Martin Puryear, and Arlene Shechet. In addition, she established the Public Art Consortium, a national initiative of museum, public art program, and sculpture park colleagues, through Madison Square Park Conservancy.

Rapaport has worked as a museum curator, independent curator, and art writer. During a 13-year tenure at the Brooklyn Museum, Rapaport organized numerous exhibitions and wrote corresponding catalogues in her roles as assistant and then associate curator of contemporary art. As part of the Brooklyn Museum's Grand Lobby series of installations, she worked with contemporary artists including Houston Conwill, Leon Golub, and Meg Webster, to realize their projects.

A guest curator at The Jewish Museum in New York, Rapaport organized "Houdini: Art and Magic," an interdisciplinary exhibition on the life and enduring significance to contemporary artists including Matthew Barney, Jane Hammond, Vik Muniz, and Raymond Pettibon of the magician and escape artist Harry Houdini (2010). She also organized the retrospective exhibition "Louise

Nevelson: Constructing a Legend” (2007).

Rapaport has also held positions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Jamaica Arts Center in Queens, New York.

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