



COMMISSIONER'S STATEMENT

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Commissioner, United States Pavilion, 58th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*

When the revered American artist Martin Puryear learned that he would represent the United States at La Biennale di Venezia, the 58th International Art Exhibition, his response was that he would do so both as an artist and as a citizen. This position is not a discovery for those who know the artist and his work. Puryear's enduring approach has galvanized his art for more than five decades: issues of allegiance, democracy, liberty, and responsibility have long propelled the artist. Through an independent and original abstract visual language, Puryear leads with his sculpture as it culls and clarifies across cultures, continents, eras, and perspectives. Madison Square Park Conservancy is deeply honored to present his work to an international audience in Venice.

Analyzing cross-cultural currents may be considered vanguard for artists today who look beyond their immediate realm. In Puryear's art, this process is deep-rooted and ever-present, and it marks him as an artist who is as aware as he is influential. He is a maker of objects in a studio at a time when technological innovation has pushed into the work of many. Esteemed by established, mid-career, and emerging artists, Puryear is producing some of the strongest work of his career today. He continues to extend materials, ambitious visual language, and contemporary content through his subtle power of nuance and his exacting method, by which wood, bronze, rattan, iron, tar, mesh, granite, fieldstone, and other materials assume unexpected, even unanticipated, form. Building on these practices, Puryear will realize new monumental work and reinterpret significant ongoing motifs for the United States Pavilion.

Madison Square Park Conservancy first worked with Martin Puryear to produce the monumental outdoor sculpture Big Bling in 2016, as part of its public art commissioning program that brings new site-specific works by distinguished artists into one of New York's most treasured outdoor spaces. Public art at the Park is viewed in the context of full democracy—complete access, open to all, no admission fees. It was this idea of absolute exposure that originally drew Puryear to the site for the creation of Big Bling. A magnificent 40-foot-high sculpture made of laminated plywood and chain-link fencing, with a 13-foot-high golden shackle installed near the pinnacle, Big Bling has become a catalyst for Puryear's exhibition at the Biennale. The Conservancy is gratified to continue a collaboration with the artist in Venice, on this most significant world stage.