



## ***That Profile*, Martin Puryear**

### **That Profile**

Martin Puryear  
American, Accord, New York, 1999  
Stainless steel, bronze  
540 x 360 x 136 in.  
99.SI.51

### **Questions for Teaching**

Sculpture is for the most part a three-dimensional representation of a concrete individual or place, or of a more **abstract** concept like human emotion. Throughout history, artists have experimented with different **mediums** for their sculptural compositions, including but not limited to marble, wood, steel, bronze, lead, glass and even found materials in street junkyards. Think about what kind of sculpture best appeals to your personal taste. Is it a big national monument or a small shape carved out of precious stone? Is it **representational**—with some ties to reality—or is it abstract? Discuss your preference and the reasoning behind it with the rest of the class.



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Take a close look at Martin Puryear's sculpture *That Profile*. Describe the sculpture and its immediate environment.

Read information about the Getty Center's architecture described in the Background Information section below or go to [http://www.getty.edu/visit/see\\_do/architecture.html](http://www.getty.edu/visit/see_do/architecture.html). Based on this information, what factors do you think Puryear took into consideration when he was designing this work? Do you think his concept is successful?

Can you guess what material(s) Puryear used to make *That Profile*? If you were making this sculpture from scratch, which material would you use?

Imagine observing *That Profile* at two different times of the day or at two different times of the year. How would daily and seasonal changes at the Getty Center affect your experience of the sculpture?

The sculpture is titled *That Profile*. Why do you think Puryear chose this title for his sculpture? If you were to give your own title to this work of art, what would it be? In answering this question, consider the physical structure, form, and the surrounding environment of this object.

## ***That Profile, Martin Puryear***

### **Background Information**

A marvel of artistry and engineering, Martin Puryear's sculpture rises on six slender legs to a height of forty-five feet above the broad expanse of travertine pavement on the plaza at the Getty Center. Stout strands of silver-patinated bronze bind the joints of the airy network of welded sandblasted stainless steel tubes, two and three inches in diameter. Elegant in its apparent simplicity, the sculpture's complex structure reveals its true character only slowly. The sculpture's meaning likewise resists a fixed identity, suggesting both a delicate fishnet cast against the sky and a human head in profile. From some viewpoints, it appears to be fully round, but its south face is flat, while the north face curves gently through the air.

Puryear's inventive sculpture is one among many artworks that are "**site specific**"—meaning they are particularly designed with the look and feel of the Getty Center architecture and location in mind. In this case the clean, modern design of Richard Meier's architecture inspired Puryear to create an abstract, sculptural shape. Steel and bronze support this giant work of art, which appears light and effervescent against the blue of the sky, due to its skillful design.

### **About the Artist**

Martin Puryear (born 1941, Washington, D.C.)

A desire to "make things rather than representations of them" led Martin Puryear from his early training in painting and drawing to sculpture. A video on the making of his sculpture *That Profile* for the Getty Center vividly details his fascination with the process of making sculpture:

<http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/videoDetails?cat=3&seqid=1722>.

Puryear graduated from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. in 1963. Afterwards he joined the Peace Corps, which sent him to Sierra Leone where West African craftsmen educated him in their traditions.

Acting on a parallel interest in Scandinavian design and woodworking, Puryear later moved to Stockholm, where he attended the Swedish Royal Academy of Art. His return to the United States coincided with significant new developments in sculpture, such as **Minimalism**, which played an important role in his development. Puryear uses craftsmanship to construct forms that often embody contradictions, such as the play of interior and exterior form, or geometry and organic irregularity.

In the mid 1970s Puryear set up a studio in Brooklyn, New York. A fire destroyed it in 1977, and he relocated to Chicago the following year. Still exhibiting his work internationally, he has now moved to rural Accord, New York.