Martin Puryear was born in May 23, 1941 in Washington, DC, to a sculptor and a painter. Growing up in a household filled with art, he was exposed to various art forms from a young age. His parents, both artists, encouraged his creativity and instilled in him a love for the art world.

During his childhood, Puryear attended Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he was introduced to the Museum of Natural History. He was particularly fascinated by the exhibits of falconry and ornithology, which sparked his interest in the natural world.

As a young adult, Puryear pursued his passion for art by attending the Rhode Island School of Design. During his time there, he studied under David Pye, a British craftsman, architect, and industrial designer, who impressed him with his ability to create complex objects with minimal materials.

Throughout his career, Puryear has been inspired by the works of Minimalist artists, including Donald Judd and Robert Morris. His sculptures often involve the use of simple, geometric forms and are constructed using humble materials such as wood, metal, and stone.

Puryear’s work is characterized by its simplicity and elegance, as well as its ability to convey a sense of meditative calm. He often incorporates elements from his own cultural heritage, such as the Yurt, a traditional Central Asian dwelling, into his sculptures.

In 1990, Puryear was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President George H.W. Bush, recognizing his significant contributions to the arts.

Timeline

1941 Martin Puryear is born on May 23 in Washington, DC.
1964 Completes first major outdoor sculpture-commission for Airports for Art:

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between Minimalism and Post-Minimalism?

2. What did Puryear take from Minimalism and what did he reject?

3. What did Puryear mean when he said, “It looks as if it could be multiples? … you can’t change it, you can’t pass on it, yes or no, after it’s done. I could never do that.”

4. In what way did Puryear take advantage of the impersonal absence of the human hand and they might have been created by erosion, like a natural formation? 

5. What did Puryear mean when he said, “The shape has a harmony reminiscent of European landscape.” 

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