

Martin Puryear

Official U.S. Exhibition, 20th São Paulo Bienal

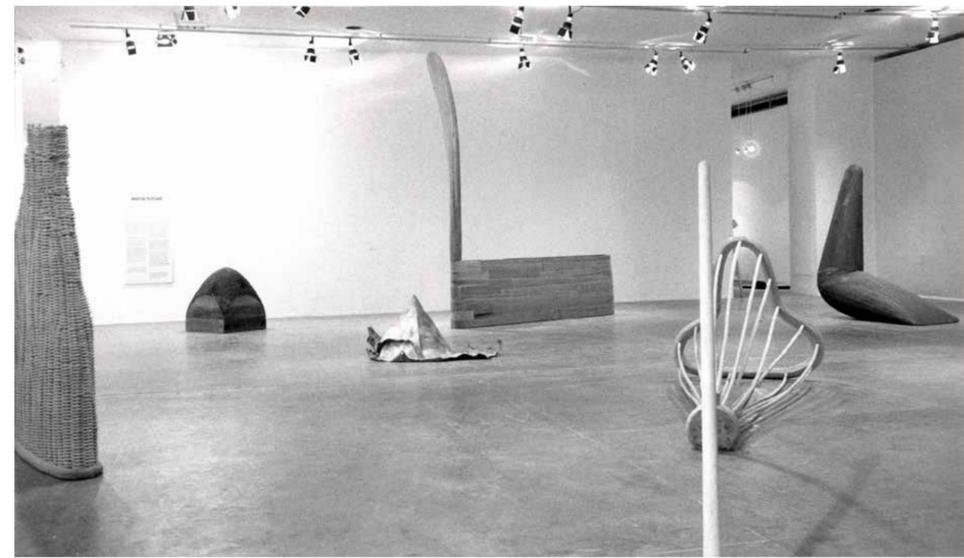
São Paulo, Brazil, 1989

In 1988, Walker was contracted by curator Kellie Jones to design the official United States exhibition at the 20th São Paulo Bienal. The project started with a trip to São Paulo with Jones and the artist to meet with the Bienal team and lobby for the specific location of the installation. After learning of frequent power failures at the Bienal site, Walker was instrumental in choosing an area adjacent to the windows.

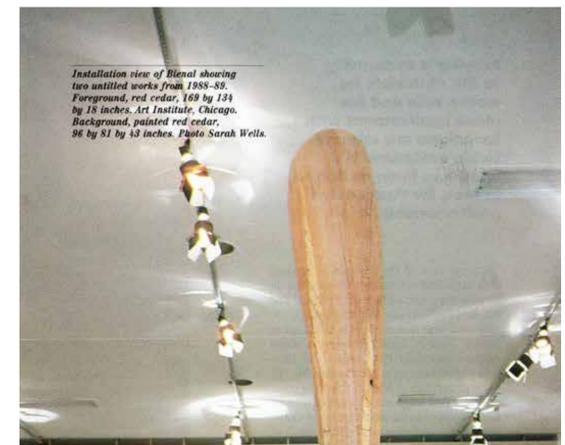
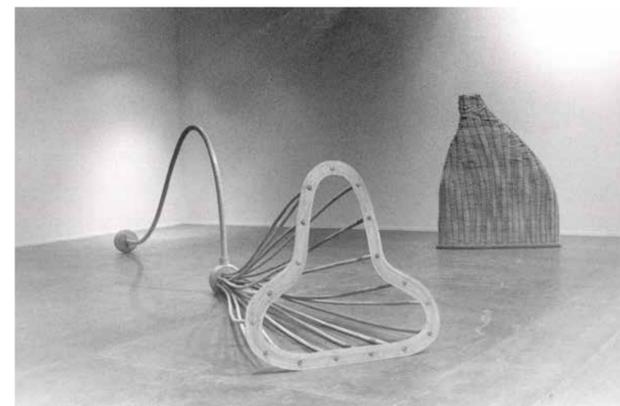
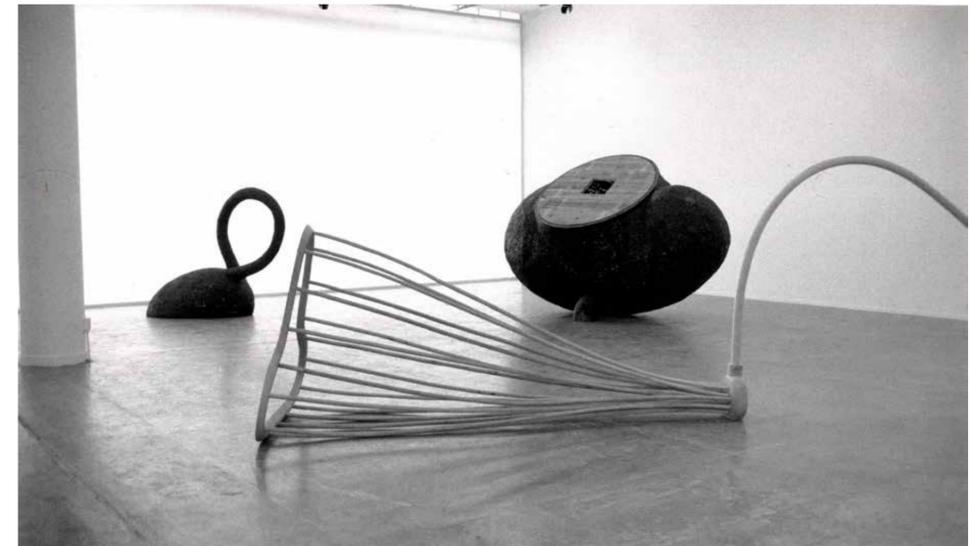
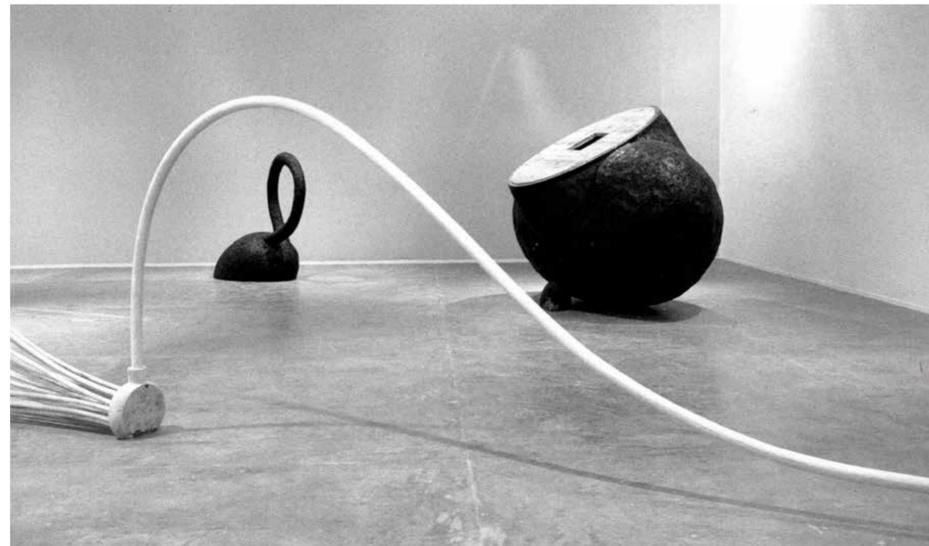
My idea was to install an extremely large stretched scrim-type fabric over the windows, covering all the infrastructure to create a clear surface that allowed natural defused light to flow into the space. This accentuated the linear qualities of Puryear's work as one entered the space, which Martin liked very much, and was inspired by a conversation I had with him as he sketched while in flight to Brazil. The scrim also maintained some light in the gallery space when frequent power outages happened.

The other specific feature of my installation design was the floor treatment and lighting within the space. I realized the floor was the backdrop for most of the exhibition content, so I had the cement floor totally stripped and sanded down to a smooth surface. It required many layers of paint and residue from previous events to be removed. I then had multiple layers of wax—with buffings between coats—applied to the floor. My idea was that visitors walking through the space footprints on the waxed floor would create subtle paths through the installation, and it worked beautifully. I found a local lighting supply company to create a make-shift lighting system with specific color temperatures and controllable beam spreads that allowed me to highlight specific elements of each work, while creating a very warm overall environment unlike any other installation at the Bienal. (WW)

Walker received special accolades from the U.S. Consulate in São Paulo not only for the praised design of the Grand Prize winning artist's installation, but also for the relationship he built with the teams from other countries, and with the teams who managed, maintained, and secured the facilities. With recommendations and assistance from the U.S. Consulate two years later, Walker was awarded an AAM-IPAM partnership grant, enabling him to return to São Paulo to design a new collection storage facility for the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP).



In the images to the left and below left, you can see the impact of the scrim that I installed over the windows. These photos by Sarah Wells were taken at night, when the gallery light dominates. The image below is during the day, when the scrim would create a glowing backdrop, accentuating the linear aspects of Martin's sculpture. (WW)



Installation view of Bienal showing two untitled works from 1988-89. Foreground, red cedar, 169 by 134 by 18 inches. Art Institute, Chicago. Background, painted red cedar, 96 by 81 by 43 inches. Photo Sarah Wells.

The image below, which is on the home page of this website, and the image at right are from a review of the installation in Art in America, January 1990. All photos by Sarah Wells.

Immediate Right:
Martin Puryear's installation, 1989, which won first prize at the 20th Sao Paulo Bienal. Photo Thor Crespi, courtesy USIA

Far Right:
Installation view of Bienal showing two untitled works from 1988-89. Foreground, red cedar, 169 by 134 by 18 inches. Art Institute, Chicago. Background, painted red cedar, 96 by 81 by 43 inches. Photo Sarah Wells.

