



Art: *Pavilion in the Trees*

Site: Lansdowne Glen

Place: West Fairmount Park

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Artist: Martin Puryear

Deeply hidden on its site, this work is in a wooded glen in a vast city park within shouting distance of this country's first zoo. There is an irony in the fact that here the roles are reversed, and we are the caged ones looking out to the natural world. Maybe as it should be. This tree house among the trees is built on a long wood pier over a natural basin, the whole resembling a dock and possessing other boat and boat-building references in its structural framework. There is also something sweetly elephant-like in its arching back, gray color, thick sturdy legs and long trunk-like ramp that reaches out to greet you. Babar aside, it is the experience within the structure that counts: the feeling of containment and openness all at once, the ability to see in three dimensions – up, down and all around – and the perfect height of 2½ stories for feeling surrounded and included in the environment, inserted somewhere between human scale and a nesting bird. The pavilion is made of varying sizes of grids, in both wood and steel, an imposed manmade system providing multiple framing devices for the surrounding views (not to mention safe harbor from our stupider tendencies). One of the best, though, is of the tree canopy above and, beyond, the sky and its curvature reflected in the lovely curving see-through roof. A kind of do-it-yourself artwork – in the sense that the more you gain from the experience is directly proportional to how much of yourself you lose – it creates a lovely and respectful way of engaging with nature.



probasco haus press

Impact:

- Context/contrast
 - Scale
- Experiential
- Integrated in setting
 - Material
 - Architectural

Art-to-Site Rating: High

View Date: November 2009

