

Scarecrow

2021

Cherry bark on Burberry coat on Gabon ebony rack

Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

A Burberry trench coat hangs on an ebony clothing rack, its panels covered with cherry tree bark. With Hayden's translation of textile into wood, the altered garment transforms into a camouflage-like device—simultaneously suggesting a figure that aspires to hide or, conversely, one that desires to belong, or join in. The artist's citation of an iconic, high-end fashion staple references societal perceptions of luxury goods and the many implicit uniforms of privilege and social class that circulate today. Poised somewhere between capitulation and caveat, the object's "arms" are raised in a consequent gesture of warning, like those of a scarecrow.

America

2021

Black locust, milk paint

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Hayden regularly transforms recognizable pieces of American furniture into hybrid objects that reflect the materials, languages, and customs of a society in flux. For *America*, Hayden works with black locust trees, which are native to the United States but considered invasive in the state of New York where he is currently based. He carves the wood into an Adirondack lawn chair covered with gnarled Baroque protrusions that suggest flames. In so doing, Hayden invokes the imagery of the late queer artist/activist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), whose fiery motifs were directed towards very personal causes of social justice, human rights, and attacks upon antiquated institutions. In Hayden's consequently fraught chair, stasis and comfort give way to immolation and a new becoming.

Boogey Man

2021

Painted, hammered stainless steel

Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

This ominous yet eerily cartoonish sculpture is produced at three-quarters the size of a typical Ford Crown Victoria, which underscores both its real-life reference as well as a toy-like spectral presence. Fusing man and machine, the silhouette of *Boogey Man* suggests a shrouded police car with a pair of oval cut-outs for eyes. Here, Hayden evokes the Halloween ghost costume created by cutting holes out of a bedsheet, as well as the more imminently, and materially terrifying guise of a hooded Klansman. Both slide between malice and the make-believe, inflicting terror and violence upon their subjects. This nod to fantasy or "fairy tales" connects to Hayden's broader practice of intertwining stories of childhood, the Black experience in the United States, and the pursuit of the American Dream. While some look to this car as a vessel of protection and security, others see a phantom figure, a threat, and a very real history of violence and death.

Nude

2021

Bald cypress, plywood, aluminum

Courtesy of C L E A R I N G, New York/Brussels

In Hayden's hands, wood is a powerfully evocative material that speaks to both his familial history as well as the migrations of labor, craft, and working communities in America. *Nude* is a monumental skeletal figure without identifiable race or gender, sculpted from the leafless branches of bald cypress: a species synonymous with the Gulf Coast and Southern states that Hayden sourced from Louisiana, where his mother grew up, and where he visited frequently in his youth. As such, this work suggests a family tree in which the collective body secedes an absent head. One of the artist's signature techniques is to sculpt figures transformed by dense, proliferating branches that simultaneously obscure and amplify their source/subject. The resulting works weave together Hayden's chosen materials, content, and histories—frequently meditating on the meaning and experience of materials.

Soul Food

2021

Copper-plated cast iron and copper-plated found brass instruments

Courtesy of Zabłudowicz Collection

Hayden has often used cuisine and the craft of creating customs from food and music as subjects in his practice to consider the African foundations within U.S. history and culture. The kitchen-like arrangement in *Soul Food* pairs twelve cast-iron skillets customized using aspects of African masks, as well as the artist's mouth and ears, with twelve copper pots fused to brass instruments. The copper cladding employed in this work evokes James Hemings (1765-1801), the first American chef to train in France, and an indentured pioneer who helped introduce French cuisine to the United States in the late 18th century while being enslaved by Thomas Jefferson for most of his life. Hayden's sculpture and its referential constellation subsequently convenes a cacophony of histories, cultures, and atrocities in a place hovering between celebration and mourning.

Tightrope

2021

Ebony, boar hair, plywood

Collection of Ray Ellen and Allan Yarkin

Before pursuing a career as an artist, Hayden trained as an architect and worked for a number of years in the field. This experience cultivated an interest in reading the symbolic exercise of built space, as well as the political residue of domestic furnishings. In the quasi-diorama sculpture *Tightrope*, we are introduced to a bisected half of a staircase, with each ascending step adorned by industrial bristles patterned to mimic decorative carpet runners. The staircase, which could reference the steps often found in a suburban home, also suggests a metaphorical "ladder" of advancement or recognition. In both cases, passage seemingly necessitates a scrubbing or sweeping, or loaded acts of labor and sanitation. For Hayden, the bristles thusly render this

subject, and this pursuit, as simultaneously desirable and uncomfortable, creating order via an abrasive action that—like the American Dream—is thorny to pursue.

Pride

2021

Zebra hides, La-Z-Boy recliner, child car seat, artist's desk chair

Courtesy of C L E A R I N G, New York/Brussels

A child's car seat, a desk chair, and a recliner have all been re-upholstered with zebra skin by the artist in this pointedly surrealist trio of works. In so doing, Hayden conflates ideas of Black representation, "exotic" motifs seen in luxury goods, and symbols of contemporary American life at varying stages of childhood/parenthood, working life, and domestic retreat. Must the staples Western society has established as vehicles of prosperity and security be fused with otherness and escapism to be tolerable? For this installation, the artist has placed these objects closely together, creating a camouflage effect that evokes the collective practice of zebra herds gathering to protect themselves from possible predators.

High Cotton

2021

Gabon ebony, shellac

Collection of Rona and Jeffrey Citrin