



End of Days

An exhibition of new works by **Hugh Hayden**
June 6 – July 20, 2019

Few young artists are addressing the spiritual in their work these days and no one is doing so with more force, insight, and seductive wit than Hugh Hayden. Inspired by his first visit to Brussels last September, Hayden has drawn from the city's artistic, religious, and natural histories to create nine new sculptures. The pieces in this exhibition, Hayden's first at the gallery, are primarily made of wood, from amorous skeletons to a menacing ladder covered in thorns. That they are on view here, in a gallery named C L E A R I N G in the heart of a neighborhood called Forest, is not lost on Hayden — the artist is a connoisseur of poetic coincidences.

Hayden is also an architect, not just by training, but in the way in which he engineers archetypes, history, and humor within his work. Using religious iconography, modern technology, ancient myth, and the natural world as his posts and beams, windows and walls, Hayden builds complex symbolic structures in which we can consider both past and present.

The influence of the city's medieval churches, particularly Our Blessed Lady of Sablon, and the biblical paintings in the Old Masters Museum pervades the show. *Untitled Threshold (After Victor Horta After Charleston)* involves a metal detector encased in wood, topped with neo-Gothic frills and quatrefoil flourishes. It scolds us for carrying our wallets, jewelry, mobile phones, and other earthly trifles into the gallery's nave-like space. The piece also evokes church shootings, particularly those in black communities, and the horrors of airport terrorism. But Hayden's sculptures operate on multiple levels at once — the piece also wryly nods to the ways we submit to higher powers and refers to the artist's religious upbringing in Dallas, Texas, where he attended an all-boys Jesuit high school. The sculpture, like much of Hayden's strongest work, acts as an unexpected portal between worlds.

Brussels is also home to the famed Bernissart Iguanodons, a herd of dinosaurs discovered in a coal mine near the French border in 1878. It was a time when prehistoric animals were often depicted as medieval monsters, and Hayden delves into the tangled history of science and sinister fantasy with *The Temptation Inside and Torment of Saint Anthony*, a hybrid skeleton with a long reptilian tail. *No More Dragons*, a life-size dinosaur bristling with salvaged Christmas trees, becomes an icon of extinction. These predators, however big and powerful, were doomed to disappear. The very title of the exhibition, *End of Days*, suggests biblical apocalypse as well as the environmental Armageddon our species seems bent on pursuing.

Hayden also probes the darker chapters of Belgium's colonial past. *Ark?*, a coffin-sized crate tattooed with transatlantic shipping stamps, tempts viewers to draw close and peer inside. There, West African sculptures lie embedded in white archival foam like so many victims. Packed in at right angles to one another, they recall the bodies in the notorious slave ship diagram illustrating how just much human cargo could be crammed onboard. In Hayden's sculpture, mirrors reflect the figures ad infinitum, conjuring the extent of slavery and its ever-present legacy. But the title of this piece does not only evoke destruction and loss. It promises salvation. As many Western museums consider the repatriation of looted goods, there may yet be some chance for atonement.

The artist invites you to take an apple.

—Zoë Lescaze

Hugh Hayden (born 1983 in Dallas, TX) lives and works in New York.

He received his MFA from Columbia University in 2018.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Lisson Gallery, New York; and White Columns, New York.

His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including JTT, New York; C L E A R I N G, New York; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; PPOW Gallery, New York; Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York; Postmasters Gallery, New York; MoMA PS1 Rockaway Beach, New York; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York; and Abrons Art Center, New York.