



CLEARING

Hues

An exhibition of new works by **Hugh Hayden**

May 6 – June 6, 2021

For his second solo exhibition at CLEARING, Hugh Hayden continues to expand on a series of works he began in Summer 2019. Inherently composite in nature, fusing language, craft, humor, and history, the sculptures result from the hybridization of cast-iron skillets and wooden West African masks. The first iteration of the series was shown at Princeton University Art Museum in the domestic setting of the 18th century, colonial era Bainbridge House. An installation entitled *The Choir* later followed at Columbia University's Uptown Triennial 2020, seeing the copper-plated and enameled skillets hung from a metal rack and colored for the first time.

For *Hues*, Hugh Hayden pursues combinations of both contemporary and pre-civil war skillets with masks from tribes sharing his own genealogical lineage. He uses sand-casting (the same process used for making utilitarian cookware) in order to combine the elements, skewing and layering upon the already complex cultural background of an everyday domestic item.

This low-tech process of composition, molding, casting and enamelling leads to the painterly uniqueness of each work: rather than an industrial multiplication of one form, Hayden offers a multiplicity of individuals, more or less faithful to their original components.

The abstraction and loss of information can be read as an analogy for the dilution and (re)construction of identities as part of the greater African Diaspora and as a reflection on ideas of "African Americanness". For the series' third evolution shown here, Hugh Hayden takes this point further and appends his body parts (nose, lips, penis, eyes) to the skillets and masks, creating Frankenstein-like self portraits. The show's title *Hues* is therefore not only a hint to the many vibrant colors that coat the enamelled surface of each skillet, but also a riff on the artist's name and identity.

Supposedly traced back to a naturalized New Yorker in 1782 and to essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, the phrase "Melting Pot" comes to the tip of the tongue when considering *Hues*. Indeed, the Melting Pot theory posited that every non-American could jump (or be shoved) into the boiling cultural crucible and simmer down their ethnic differences into a new and homogenous alloy of democracy and freedom. As Hugh Hayden recasts his body onto the skillets, could this be read as a refusal to be dissolved into the broth of assimilation?

By means of the symbolic potential contained in the skillet, a common utensil used in Southern cuisine, Hugh Hayden posits food and cooking as a vital cultural phenomenon and ritual, bringing to the table ideas of America's creation, Belgian and French colonization of Africa, the consumption of Blackness, and the creation of one's personal identity.

Ailsa Cavers

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

He received his Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University in 2007, and his MFA from Columbia University in 2018. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at White Columns, New York; Lisson Gallery, New York and London; Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey and C L E A R I N G Brussels.

His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including Hayward Gallery, London; MoMA PS1 Rockaway Beach, New York; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York; The Shed, New York; and Abrons Art Center, New York; Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York; Massimo De Carlo, London; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; JTT, New York; PPOW, New York; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles; and C L E A R I N G New York.

The artist has upcoming solo exhibitions at ICA Miami, Miami; Blaffer ART Museum, Houston and Philadelphia Contemporary, Philadelphia.

Hugh Hayden's work is part of the collections of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey; Dib Museum, Bangkok; X Museum, Beijing and Start Museum, Shanghai.