

Press Release

Hugh Hayden *American Food*

12 March – 2 May 2020
27 Bell Street, London
Opening: 11 March, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present Hugh Hayden's first solo exhibition in the UK. It is also the first to directly engage with Hayden's culinary installation practice, bringing together wooden picnic tables, cast-iron skillets, and a multimedia stove to reflect on the history and significance of cooking and dining together in America.

Influenced by his background as an architect – in particular designing concepts for new restaurants – Hayden is interested in African cultural inflections on food, art and music. Hayden considers Southern cooking the first uniquely American cuisine, having originated in kitchens run by the enslaved cooks, who infused recipes with African tastes, ingredients and techniques. For the artist, Texas-born and New York-based, the African origins and contributions in the creation of America's cuisine are equally embedded in the country's cultural and economic development and lasting infrastructure. More specifically, Hayden is "interested in celebrating the indebtedness to African origins in the cooking – as a form of creation of America, Western culture and Modern Art".

The exhibition will feature a variety of new and recent works, including 26 'skillets', recast from a unique pairing of a wooden West African-style mask and a found cast iron frying pan. The function and form of both the skillets as early African cookware and the masks' ancestral and ceremonial origins are merged in a technique called sand-casting; Hayden adopts this rudimentary means of manufacture to celebrate the imperfectness of the materials, their colonial histories, and the inherent loss of detail in the reproduction process. Hayden likens the abstraction of the original objects that occurs in the sand-casting process as a form of diaspora that transforms the skillets into something layered and culturally syncretic. The artist also holds this mirror up to his own identity as an African American: an abstraction on the African antecedent.

Hayden will also unveil a new series of commissioned picnic tables, presented indoors and in the gallery's courtyard, created from specially sourced wood with protruding branches and sculpted thorns. Hayden is known for using politically charged materials; for his 2018 exhibition at Lisson Gallery New York he travelled to the US-Mexico border, at the height of immigration disputes, to gather wood for their native and/or invasive status. Here, he uses two species found growing across the UK – the native Hornbeam and the 'honorary native' Chestnut. The democratic gesture of Hayden's picnic tables are complicated by the rich history of these woods: the hornbeam coppiced from rootstock was believed to be planted by the Romans as a natural boundary, and the Chestnut was naturalised after being introduced from continental Europe to feed their soldiers.

Alongside these, a new multimedia stove will be presented, playing a recording of the artist cooking and eating bacon – a foundational ingredient of Southern food as the fat was historically used to 'season' a skillet. Activating the exhibition with the presence of the artist, this work alludes to the continued embedding of Southern culture and community in America and beyond today.

American Food follows the opening of Hayden's solo show, *Creation Myths*, at Princeton University, New Jersey, USA, in January 2020, as well as the recent commission at New York City's newest cultural outpost, The Shed, in 2019. Hayden is also included in the Hayward Gallery's exhibition *Among the Trees*, opening 4 March.

About Hugh Hayden

Hugh Hayden's practice considers the anthropomorphization of the natural world as a visceral lens for exploring the human condition. Hayden transforms familiar objects through a process of selection, carving and juxtaposition to challenge our perceptions of ourselves, others and the environment. Raised in Texas and trained as an architect, his work arises from a deep connection to nature and its organic materials. Hayden utilizes wood as his primary medium, frequently loaded with multi-layered histories in their origin, including objects as varied as discarded trunks, rare indigenous timbers, Christmas trees or souvenir African sculptures. From these he saws, sculpts and sands the wood, often combining disparate species, creating new composite forms that also reflect their complex cultural backgrounds. Crafting metaphors for human existence and past experience, Hayden's work questions the stasis of social dynamics and asks the viewer to examine their place within an ever-shifting ecosystem.

Hugh Hayden was born in Dallas, Texas in 1983 and lives and works in New York City. He holds an MFA from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Architecture from Cornell University. His work was the subject of a solo exhibition at White Columns in New York in 2018. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including JTT, New York (2018); Clearing, New York (2018); Tanya Bonakdar Gallery (2018); PPOW Gallery, New York (2017); Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York (2017); Postmasters Gallery, New York (2016); MoMA PS1, Rockaway Beach, New York (2014); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York (2014); and Abrons Art Center, New York (2013), among others. He is the recipient of residences at Glenfiddich in Dufftown, Scotland (2014); Abrons Art Center and Socrates Sculpture Park (both 2012), and Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2011).

Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London and two in New York as well as one in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky

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