

# LISSON GALLERY

## Press Release

### Hugh Hayden *Hughmanity*

26 September – 1 November 2025  
27 Bell Street, London

A dining table engulfed in flames, a lifeboat lined with thorns, a child's dress fashioned from tree bark—these are among the striking new works featured in *Hughmanity*, Hugh Hayden's first return to London since his 2020 debut with the gallery was abruptly closed just days after opening due to COVID-19 restrictions. Now staging his seventh show with Lisson Gallery, the Texan-born artist expands upon his ongoing investigation of congregation, passage and assimilation through the transformation of familiar cultural symbols into allegories of community, rupture, and belief. These new works, meticulously crafted from trees through a series of techniques like felling, milling, carving, and laminating, extend Hayden's sculptural language, while the introduction of painted surfaces signals a significant new expanding element within his practice.

At the center of *Hughmanity* is *The Last Supper* (2025), a stretched table encircled by flames and rendered unreachable. Dining tables, he reminds us, are not only sites of joy and communion but also of fraught family gatherings, unspoken grief, or absence. The flames that rise from its surface also echo religious and art historical precedents, from Leonardo da Vinci's composition of the same name to Ed Ruscha's *Burning Gas Station*. Suspended nearby, 13 cast-bronze skillets embedded with African masks extends the allegory. First conceived as "melting pots" in his previous London exhibition, *American Food*, these diasporic skillets now embody Jesus and his disciples. Their specialized forms and polished surfaces suggest both individuality, purpose and collectivity. Together, the fiery table and its floating counterpart form a pairing that questions the conditions under which communion, whether spiritual, social or cultural, can occur.

Tension between refuge and danger shapes *The Good Samaritan* (2025), a dinghy lined with thorns carved from Christmas-tree branches that point inward toward the boat's center. Partially navigable with its two oars left clear of protrusions and a small smooth space remaining at its core, the boat hovers between promise and threat. The vessel recalls Hayden's earlier *Gulf Stream* (2022), inspired by Winslow Homer's painting of a lone fisherman adrift at sea. Here, though, the narrative shifts toward an allegory of possible survival despite treacherous conditions.

Elsewhere, painted wooden flags punctured by cigarettes, pencils or fragment patriotic imagery into narratives of anxiety, erasure, and defiance. One flag adorned with fifty wooden cigarettes in place of stars, presents a portrait of a nation under strain. Another, *Gone with the Wind* (2025), is studded with erasers seemingly caught in motion. In *Medusa* (2025), the fifty stars are replaced with carved and painted timber rattlesnakes, their writhing presence casting the banner as both myth and menace. These works collapse the line between patriotism and critique, underscoring how a nation's or a person's identity can be rewritten through conflict, erasure, and resistance.

Nearby, a sharply tailored blazer lined with thorns recalls the traditions of English suiting and emphasizes how such markers of status can also torture. Other works, including *Pinocchia* (2025), a bark-covered child's dress layered with pink tulle, men's dress shoes and a set of Mary Jane flats all encased in bark, highlight the tension between blending in and being defined, or even being consumed, by the very structures that promise acceptance.

Taken together, these works lend *Hughmanity* a spiritual undertone that oscillates between Biblical allegory and contemporary critique. As in earlier public projects—from *Brier Patch* (2022), a forest of branched school desks in Madison Square Park, to *The End* (2025), a skeletal form slowly dissolving into the New England woods—Hayden turns familiar forms into metaphors for entropy, exclusion, and renewal.

## About the artist

Hugh Hayden's practice considers the anthropomorphisation of the natural world as a visceral lens for exploring the human condition. Hayden transforms familiar objects through a process of selection, carving and juxtaposing 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 utilises 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. Hayden's work has been the subject of numerous exhibitions in the United States and abroad. Recent solo exhibitions include public art installations, 'Gulf Stream' at the Boston Public Art Triennial's Lot Lab, Boston, MA (2024), 'Huff and a Puff', at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA (2023), and 'Brier Patch', at the Madison Square Park Conservancy in New York, NY, which later traveled to the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, NC, and Dumbarton Oaks Gardens in Washington, DC. Other solo institutional and gallery exhibitions include 'Hugh Hayden: Home Work' at the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA; 'Hugh Hayden: Homecoming' at the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, TX; 'Hughmans' at Lisson Gallery, NY; 'Hugh Hayden: American Vernacular', Laumeier Sculpture Park, St. Louis, MO, USA; 'Hughman' at Lisson Gallery, LA; 'Boogey Men' at Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, Miami, FL, which traveled to the Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, TX; 'Huey', Lisson Gallery, New York, NY; 'Hues', C L E A R I N G, Brussels, Belgium; 'Hugh Hayden: American Food', Lisson Gallery, London, UK; 'Hugh Hayden: Creation Myths', Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; and 'Hugh Hayden', White Columns, New York, NY. Recent group exhibitions include 'Sharjah Biennial 16: to carry', Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE (2025); 'A Garden of Promise and Dissent', The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2024 - 2025); 'Post Human', Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles, CA (2024); 'Objects: USA 2024', R & Company, New York, NY (2024), 'Forest of Dreams: Contemporary Tree Sculpture', Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Grand Rapids, MI (2023) and 'NGV Triennial', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2023).

He is the recipient of residencies at Glenfiddich in Dufftown, Scotland (2014); Abrons Art Center and Socrates Sculpture Park (both 2012), and Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2011). Hayden holds positions on advisory councils at Columbia University School of the Arts, Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University and Cornell College of Architecture Art and Planning. His work is part of public collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA; Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, Miami, FL, USA; deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA; Smart Museum, Chicago, IL; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX; Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY, USA; Zuzeum Art Centre, Riga, Latvia; Tank Shanghai, Shanghai, China; X Museum, Beijing, China; Dib Bangkok Museum of Contemporary Art, Bangkok, Thailand; and more.

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