



Donna Dennis, *Ship and Dock/Nights and Days or The Gazer*, 2018. Mixed media, 2 views of installation, day and night.

chic energy to the level of the sublime, where there is no beginning and no end. This merger of media was a touch of genius. The viewer as participant and witness was present—for an infinitesimal flash of time.

—Joyce Beckenstein

NEW YORK

Hugh Hayden

White Columns and Lisson Gallery

Hugh Hayden's wooden sculptures—skeletons and furnishings fused with branches—evoke many associations. His recent debut solo exhibition at White Columns, which followed showings at Frieze London and FIAC Paris (after a 2018 MFA from Columbia University, where he served as Rirkrit Tiravanija's teaching assistant), featured two large-scale works. In *Hangers* (2018), bones strung from two hangers on a rolling garment rack form the top and bottom of a human torso pierced by branches. The title, which acknowledges Hayden's African American roots, refers to the public lynchings perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan and others. *Brier Patch* (2018) depicts six handmade, old-style school chairs with a thicket of branches growing out of them, conjuring the trickster that originated in Senegalese, Algonquin, and other tales before Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908) included his version, Br'er Rabbit, in the Uncle Remus tales. Fleeing from a tar baby and a fox, Br'er Rabbit uses a briar patch as an escape route. Does education serve the same purpose?

Most of Hayden's construction methods are transparent, but some are not. The joinery and treatment of the tree pieces, which have been partially de-barked and shaped and partially left as branches, give

and supported two small, generic houses. One, lit within by a light bulb and connected to exterior pipes and wires, pulsed with inner life. The second, "the gazer," was a shadow of the first house, dimly lit by an indeterminate source. It faced a projection of a ship on the distant horizon, its sole company the crescendo of winds, the clink of a swinging hal-yard, and the relentless lapping of waves. Beneath the dock, and difficult to discern, sat a pile of coal.

Dennis's overriding focus on mortality is often inspired by actual events. *Coney Night Maze* (1997–2009), which re-invented the substructure of the famed rollercoaster, the Cyclone, evolved in response to the events of September 11, 2001.

Little Tube House and the Night Sky (2015), a re-invention of a vernacular electrical shack with exposed wires and tubes, served as a metaphor for Dennis's dying friend. *The Gazer*, about life passing, energy being processed, burned, and burned-out, made a mournful comment on the current political state of mind, asking, "What happens when the world goes dark?"

Dennis pieced together her answer by photographing and then merging two gouache drawings. A video artist mapped the day-into-night scene, a shift from light to dark that made the ship appear to move slowly along the horizon, though it was as constant as the two houses. Scale, a crucial physical and psycho-

logical element for Dennis, informed every inch of her process as she conveyed the enormity of mammoth architecture afloat in infinite space within the confines of a small corner. A bit smaller than actual size, the human-scale houses allowed awed viewers to feel stoically equipped in the face of mortality.

Dennis then stretched the concept of scale further, engaging it as a vehicle to navigate the viewer dynamically between delicate gouaches and rugged ore dock. In the gouaches, thin washes of transparent black paint render the sturdiest of manufactured forms ephemeral. Transitioning within the larger installation to become part of a cosmic cycle, they elevate physical and psy-



Above and detail: Hugh Hayden, *Hangers*, 2018. Sanded wood and garment rack, dimensions variable. **Right:** Hugh Hayden, *America*, 2018. Sculpted mesquite on plywood, 109.8 x 205.7 x 205.7 cm.



dead fall a new life. By turning tree branches into skeletal forms, Hayden implies that the ongoing desecration of the earth will haunt—and ultimately kill—the human perpetrators. The bones, while recalling Halloween, more somberly evoke exposed grave pits like the one I once stumbled across in a churchyard in the Italian Alps, which contained the remains of unburied bodies from World War II. Many early African American graveyards, like the site of the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York, have been either covered over or exhumed and moved to make way for urban development. Hayden’s materials and images run through endless associations, but there is a coherent message. As the exhibition press release states, his “work considers various methods and different approaches to the idea of ‘camouflage’; exploring the idea of blending into the natural landscape as a metaphor for assimilation into or rejection from greater social ecosystems.”

Shortly after Hayden’s *White Columns* show, “*Border States*” opened at the Lisson Gallery, continuing his signature combination of salvaged wood and cautionary tales. This time, his artfully made wood objects included a baby stroller (a nod to Nari Ward’s sym-

phony of abandoned strollers), a table and chairs (*America*), a crib (*Oreo*), and a picket fence (*The Jones Part 3*). These iconic tropes for “home” all feature sharp points that may signify danger or fear—from the thorns lining the crib to spears on the table and chairs, to jutting branches on the baby’s *Wagon*. The various hues of the wood—all from species in Hayden’s home state of Texas, including aromatic Eastern red cedar, ashe juniper from the Hill Country, Texas ebony found near the border with Mexico, and mesquite—suggest that race, ethnicity, and nationality affect assimilation and acceptance, especially in “border states.”

Hayden’s other works are equally nuanced in meaning. His Adirondack chair looks traditional except for the fact that long round pieces thrusting out at odd angles like fingers make it impossible as seating. His take on a picnic table, *The Jones: Part 2*, which was shown at Frieze New York, is likewise covered in spiky wooden parts, reminding us of living trees

when it’s outside and of the nature we’re missing when it’s inside. Jones and bones are soul words, again with many meanings. An African American composer friend says that “*The Jones*” can be a habit or urge and “earning” or “making one’s bones” is about belonging. Simultaneously cautionary, critical, and aesthetically attuned, Hayden’s work suggests two overriding things: that we all need to recognize each other and that we all belong to the earth.

—Jan Garden Castro

NEW YORK
“Songs for Sabotage”
New Museum

The New Museum’s fourth Triennial presented the work of 26 emerging artists, artist collectives, and groups from 19 countries. As in earlier iterations, this sparse, spaciouly installed show, which filled the entire museum, had an agenda. Conceived by curators Gary Carrion-Murayari and Alex Gartenfeld as “songs,” the featured works could all be viewed as calls to action or even as propaganda committed to