

# Hugh Hayden

## Teaching Resource

*Hugh Hayden: Homecoming* / September 14, 2024 – January 5, 2025

### About Hugh Hayden

(Pronounced hew HAY-den)

Hugh Hayden was raised in Dallas, Texas by parents who worked in the Dallas Independent School District as a middle school mathematics teacher and school counselor. As a teen, Hayden dreamed of becoming a landscape architect and undertook landscaping projects in his family's backyard. Realizing that becoming an architect would allow him to design any structure, including gardens, Hayden earned an undergraduate degree in architecture from Cornell University. While supporting himself as an architect, he won an artist residency at Lower Manhattan Community Council and later earned an MFA from Columbia. Known for his work in the



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traditions of wood carving and carpentry, Hayden creates sculptures that look familiar at a glance and delve into themes such as nostalgia, American culture, and the human condition. Though wood is his primary sculptural material, he also works with fibers, cast metals, and found and readymade objects. The title *Homecoming* refers to the childhood memories that serve as Hayden's inspiration for this exhibition.

### Brush

Hayden's childhood in Dallas included regular visits to the Dallas Museum of Art along with a playground in Duncanville known as Kidsville. Like the original structure, *Brush* is constructed of wood and resembles a children's treehouse or Medieval fort. Much of Hayden's version is covered with boar hair bristles, a material commonly used in hairbrushes, rendering the playset attractive yet uncomfortable and unusable. Hayden often selects the source trees for his sculptures himself, choosing species that are indigenous to a given area or with a cultural or local specificity. *Brush* is carved from red oak, a prevalent tree in Dallas known for its beauty and the shade it provides.

Hayden's *Brush* honors the idea of community. Kidsville was imagined, designed, funded, and built entirely by volunteer residents of the Dallas suburb of Duncanville in 1989. In addition, the bristles allude to the grooming rituals found in barber shops and hair salons, places that offer safe havens for Black communities to gather, socialize, and discuss politics. Playgrounds, barber salons, and hair salons serve as third places: neutral, often public spaces where community and social connections can grow outside of school, home, or work.



TOP: Hugh Hayden, *Brush*, 2024. Red oak, Boar hair bristles, and steel. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora.  
BOTTOM: Original Kidsville playground in Duncanville, TX.

**What "third places" do you and your family or friends visit?**

**Nasher Sculpture Center**

## ***Supper***

**Many of Hayden's sculptures explore the idea of the "American Dream." Are you familiar with this phrase? What does it mean to you?**

The American Dream is the belief that the United States is a land of opportunity, with the possibility of upward mobility, freedom, and equality for all who work hard and have the will to succeed. For Hayden, the ubiquitous dining set for many 90s suburban homes that served as inspiration for *Supper* is a symbol of the

American family. With this sculpture, and its protruding pencils that prevent anyone from having a seat, Hayden asks questions of the viewer: Who has access to the American Dream? What does an ideal or traditional family look like?

In the 1990s, when the original dining set was popular, a heterosexual, cisgendered nuclear family composed of a husband and wife with their children was considered the traditional American family. The eraser tips in *Supper* suggest that this idea is being erased.

**What image comes to mind when you hear the words American family? What are other symbols of American life that have broken free from traditional ideas, and how could you show that in a work of art? Consider what materials you would use and sketch your ideas.**

## ***Rapunzel and Short and Stout***

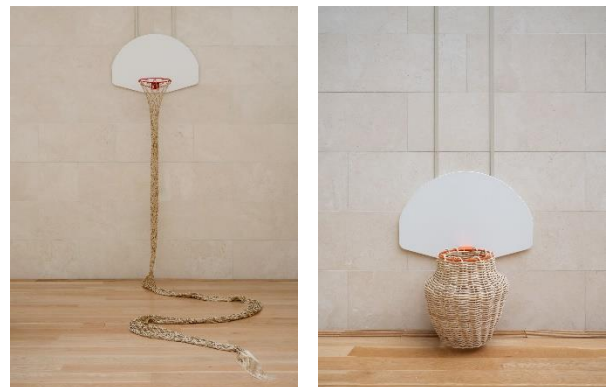
*Rapunzel* and *Short and Stout* belong to Hayden's basketball series, a group of sculptures that combine personal memories with historical and cultural references. Hayden grew up with wicker peacock chairs in his childhood home and had always thought they looked like a basketball backboard and net. Taking this idea, Hayden has woven an entire basketball backboard, rim and net out of fibers in some artworks. In the Nasher's exhibition, he handwove nets for readymade backboards and rims.

For *Rapunzel*, Hayden wove synthetic hair extensions into an exceedingly long net made of braids resembling cornrows, a vernacular African American hairstyling technique. The artwork title references the fairytale character's long hair and suggests the sometimes fairytale-like aspirations of becoming a professional athlete. In *Short and Stout*, Hayden weaves the net out of rattan, the same fiber used in peacock chairs. The title is taken from the nursery rhyme, "I'm a Little Teapot," and its shape may evoke such a vessel or an idealized female form. Both sculptures highlight the tension between masculine sports-related overtones and basketweaving techniques that commonly have a more feminine association. As a gay Black child, Hayden faced the expectations of him to be an athlete because of the way he looked, in addition to his father's encouragement to play team sports with the hope of becoming professional athlete. Works like the basketball series embody Hayden's appeasement of his father to join the football team and the internal tension he experienced.

**How do expectations from your family, friends, teachers, and other people in your life impact your sense of who you are?**



Hugh Hayden, *Supper*, 2024. Fir and rubber erasers. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery. Photo: Kevin Todora.



LEFT: Hugh Hayden, *Rapunzel*, 2024. Synthetic hair extensions, painted PVC, and metal rim. RIGHT: Hugh Hayden, *Short and Stout*, 2024. Rattan, metal rim, and painted PVC. Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery. Photos: Kevin Todora.

## Additional Resources

Montross, Sarah J., editor. *Hugh Hayden: American Vernacular*. The MIT Press, 2023.

“Meet the Artists: Hugh Hayden.” *Art Basel*, <https://www.artbasel.com/stories/meet-the-artists-hugh-hayden?lang=en>.

“Artist Hugh Hayden: An Adaption of the American Dream.” *Louisiana Channel*, uploaded December 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPjUHhOROSg>.

Explore the exhibition in the Nasher App:

- Access the Nasher Web App through the Nasher [website](#).
- Or, download the app [Bloomberg Connects](#) (available through the Apple Store App and Google Play) and enter Nasher Sculpture Center in the Search bar.

## Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Knowledge and Skills | §117.302. Art, Level I (b) (4)

Fine Arts: Critical Evaluation and Response | §117.4 (b), (d) and (e)

Fine Arts: Critical Evaluation | §117.52 Art, Level I (c) (3) and (4)

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