DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

Rapid and Laughterful (2020), a new sculpture by Evan Holloway, is a work whose potent symbolism, material immediacy, and art historical reach make it one of the definitive statements of his career.

One-on-One:Evan Holloway, Rapid and Laughterful will be on view through August 5, 2020, 8:00 am Pacific Time.

Like an altarpiece for a secret cathedral of the mind, Rapid and Laughterful is charged with mystical ideas that account—at least in part—for its idiosyncratic and immediately recognizable form. The multitude of small faces covering its elongated, helix-like shape is filled with individual moments of humor, perplexity, and psychological depth. Part of Holloway's lexicon for almost 20 years, the heads have appeared in a number of different sculptural contexts. They began as molds of his own head and the head of sculptor Karin Gulbran (the two artists are married); over time, the original molds have undergone a series of scale shifts and distortions, generating not only representations of a surprising array of humanoid forms, but a wide range of artworks in which groups of heads or faces are combined according to varied geometric systems. Holloway paints them colors that run the gamut from naturalistic to completely fantastical, adding eyes and mouths that inflect their facial expressions, and lending each a measure of individualism that prevents it from being subsumed by the surrounding collective.

Seen in the aggregate, however, the faces in Rapid and Laughterful constitute a rippling, texturally dense visual field that both complements and contrasts with any read of the work's overall structure. This push and pull, which is put into further motion as the viewer approaches and circles the object, is, on the one hand, a testament to Holloway's profound engagement with the major and minor narratives of modernist sculpture. On the other, though, it is driven by a worldview that is cosmological in scope, and that encompasses everything from the magical visions of Aleister Crowley, the spiritual architecture of ancient Egypt, and the psychedelic, DIY ethos that has characterized cultural production on the West Coast for decades. Such tendencies are prevalent in other works of Holloway's that feature head forms.

These include an ongoing, multiyear series sculptures titled for numbers, each of which consists of an elaborate metal stand in the shape of a numeral and a commensurate quantity of painted Sculptamold faces affixed to rods; drop-shaped lead counterweights allow the faces to balance in the air. Here, a form corresponding to a preexisting mathematical order serves as an armature for a swarm of visages that evokes—and can enact—movement. These works present two distinct, if interwoven, personalities. Depending on the viewer's proximity, they appear either as nodes in a mysterious, overarching system of knowledge or as handmade objects that reflect the sensibility of a single maker who seems to be motivated by more than just aesthetic concerns.

The number works, like Rapid and Laughterful and much of Holloway's output, resist the notion of sculpture as a standalone, self-sufficient medium. As curator Ralph Rugoff points out in a 2013 monograph on the artist:

press@davidkordanskygallery.com
www.davidkordanskygallery.com
T: 323.935.3030 F: 323.935.3031

"Holloway's lo-fi approach often serves as a means for breaking down, or at least questioning, the conventional (and institutionally sanctioned) distance between artist and audience. Instead of prompting us to regard its technical accomplishments with awe or reverence, his work encourages us to respond more in the manner of a potential collaborator. Indeed, perhaps the salient attitude of his sculpture (if sculpture can be said to have attitude) is its seemingly liberal interest in us, and in the nature of our mutual encounter."

Even as he absorbs and rearticulates ideas borrowed from recent and not-so-recent histories of art, then, Holloway directly orients his project toward both the viewer and the world, lending his sculptures an uncanny aura of functionality, though in many cases we are never completely sure about what their precise function might be. They therefore bring to mind, among other precedents, ancient artifacts that allude to modes of social organization and spatial engineering. A 4,000-year-old Egyptian model of a boat, for instance—complete with generic seated and rowing figures—reveals information about the life and practices of the people who made it; but it is also shrouded in a measure of mystery, not least of all because the activity it depicts seems to have some spiritual or ritual import.

Rapid and Laughterful arises from philosophical and physical conditions whose specificity need not be immediately known to viewers for its totemic power to be felt. Holloway has experimented with different degrees of cultural explicitness as his career has evolved. With Left-Handed Guitarist (1998), an important early work, he transformed the latter-day legend and myth of Nirvana lead singer Kurt Cobain into a sculptural meditation on death and the afterlife, the ritual importance of music, and two- versus three-dimensional form. Whether or not one is familiar with Cobain's story, the passion that comes through the object is readily accessible to anyone who encounters it.

Passion has a variety of registers and comes in personal as well as more universal guises, including religious ones that have fueled artistic practices for millennia. Some of these are works like paintings whose functions, vis-à-vis their religious content, are largely illustrative. But some, whether due to their stylized aesthetics or physical construction, enact spiritual concepts in more literal or performative ways. The latter are often notable for the clarity of their overall design, something that certainly can be said of the vertically oriented, twisted loop of Rapid and Laughterful. With its three points of crossing and its emphasis on both upward and downward movement, it can be read in relation to Crucifixion scenes that place equal weight on material aspects of construction and theological intentionality. A 16th-century German Descent from the Cross sculpture from the Circle of Daniel Mauch is one case in point: its rough-hewn, utterly realistic ladder has been rendered at approximately three-quarters scale, so that it hovers between the ideal world of archetypes and the real world of human ingenuity—and limitation.

Holloway's work is similarly resourceful. In one way or another, the elements that make up Rapid and Laughterful existed in his studio for years before the opportunity and inspiration arose to

combine them. Each component and each material has its own life, its own history and eventual teleology. The heads, which represent iterations of an ongoing process that has resulted in a variety of different sculptures, are one clear example. But so is the central form to which they are affixed; made from corrugated flex tubing coated with Aqua-Resin, this iconic form was conceived and produced in its original state almost five years ago, so that it has had time to germinate on its own terms. Like a metaphysical magnet, it attracted associations and ideas that entered its creator's consciousness from different directions. These included impressions of rippling water in a river, as well as a verse from The Book of the Law (1904), a prophetic text channeled by British esoteric writer Aleister Crowley:

"Thou art exhaust in the voluptuous fullness of the inspiration; the expiration is sweeter than death, more rapid and laughterful than a caress of Hell's own worm."

Crowley authored a spiritual vision by weaving together received information from supernatural sources and tendencies from a range of gnostic traditions, transposing them into a language that spoke to the 20th century's increasingly fractured psyche. While he is often misunderstood by those who dismiss or parody his treatments of magic and other alternative belief systems, his ideas have influenced any number of artists, writers, and musicians who have sought to reexamine suppressed, subterranean legacies of Western culture.

Considering Crowley's words helps capture the sense of movement engendered by Rapid and Laughterful, which performs visual inhalations and exhalations as the eye traverses the circuit of its form. This effect is in large part due to the way in which a multitude of small things—the heads—plays against the monumental form that supports them. Holloway has consistently explored this theme, perhaps most notably in a series of sculptures studded with batteries or casts based on them. Earth Angel (2018) is an embodied paean to methodologies and technologies that are quickly becoming things of the past. Made from cast bronze and designed to be installed outdoors, its volumetric central mass is built from surprising combinations of concave and convex planes; these in turn are punctuated by hundreds of cylinders and rectangles cast from spent batteries, resulting in a sculpture whose imposing bigness and unknowability are tempered by the textural intimacy of small, familiar things.

Parallels can be drawn between Earth Angel and the work of artists like Martin Puryear who transpose modernist investigations of pure form into metaphorical meditations on history, the self, and the relationships between humans and materials. The traditional masonry techniques used to make Sentinel, an outdoor work by Puryear from 1982, are also responsible for the variegated "skin" that offers a balancing contrast to its looming biomorhpism and its otherwise austere presence alike. The work exudes an aura of warmth and even a hard-to-define, wry comedy connected to the feel of the stones and mortar and their relationship to the work's scale.

Addressing serious thematic material, however topical or abstract, through disarmingly humorous means, has also been a hallmark of Holloway's practice since the beginning. That an artist might

take on existential questions with punk-like economy and insouciance would seem at first to be a particularly contemporary phenomenon. Rapid and Laughterful, with it its technicolor palette and bewildering—and bewildered—faces does not shy away from the cartoonish; nor do any number of other works by the artist, including his signature "head stack" sculptures, in which cast aluminum heads, complete with working lightbulb noses, are stacked one atop the other to create carnivalesque riffs on Brancusi's Endless Column (1938). As their lightbulbs switch on and off according to a variety of patterns, they become off-kilter sources of illumination in whatever environments they happen to be installed.

But artists have productively relied on slapstick, goofiness, and dramatically straightforward execution for centuries, even when realizing works with profound spiritual content. Hieronymus Bosch provides one clear example of someone who allowed hilarity and caricature to populate his theological universe. In Christ Carrying the Cross (circa 1490–1510), the mob surrounding the condemned has been rendered with satirical glee, which nevertheless does nothing to take away from the scene's compositional complexity and convincing pathos.

If Bosch exemplified a certain brand of pictorial inventiveness, breaking through stale notions of sanctity by expanding the emotional register of religious tableaux, other medieval and renaissance artists employed structural innovations to tell holy legends in new and affecting ways. A 14th-century panel by Donato and Gregorio d'Arezzo depicting the life of St. Catherine reads almost like a comic book, with each of its dozen cells devoted to a significant event leading up to her martyrdom. Despite the grave and far-reaching nature of the information conveyed, the panel is suffused not only with lightness of touch, but with what seems to be a pragmatic acknowledgement of the ridiculousness of much human endeavor, up to and including the most devotion-worthy acts of religious fervor.

While Holloway's work is not devotional in any traditional sense of the word, it does put faith in the power of connection generated by art as it opens new spaces for its viewers.

"I work under the assumption that a portion of the audience will share the experience I'm having—whether I feel a certain mass of an object resonating with my own mass, or an empty space being activated."

Such exchanges can transform how a viewer sees, sometimes in concrete ways. Third Verse (2018) is another bronze sculpture that, like Rapid and Laughterful, features cast heads and a title informed by Holloway's interest in Aleister Crowley and The Book of the Law. Its spoked-wheel form functions as a portal or window, not only framing a view of the surrounding landscape, but constituting a physical representation of what it feels like to see. A series of elongated arms radiate from a slightly irregular circle, positioned at a height that would allow many viewers to peer through it; at the end of each arm is a small head, its unique facial features indicative of an individual psychology and perspective. The star-like object projects the human visage into space literally and figuratively, allowing the work to be read as a representation of the

senses themselves as they reach out into the world they perceive.

Third Verse gives viewers an expanded sense of human beingness itself, demonstrating how mind, eye, and body are expressions of their environment in addition to observers of it. As many modernist artists made clear, naturalism is not necessarily the best way to faithfully convey a given experience. Alberto Giacometti's attenuated bodies, for instance, became symbols for the existentialist crises associated with two world wars; they are also important predecessors for the kinds of figuration and distortion that drive Holloway's work, which nonetheless speaks to a different set of concerns and curiosities.

Finished during a season of generation-defining uncertainty, Rapid and Laughterful evokes both the hilarity and fear that come along with not knowing whether you are moving up or down, whether you are being resurrected or extinguished, whether the fluidity of time is chaotically sweeping you along or whether history has an identifiable shape and order. These are predicaments that have reached a fever pitch in our rapidly changing shared existence, but Rapid and Laughterful also finds its footing in the ancient, and even the eternal: if these lofty words sound impossibly goofy from our current standpoint, that makes them no less vital. Holloway steers us precisely toward this perennial vitality, offering an allegory for the strange ride all souls must take to get where they need to go.

The work of Evan Holloway (b. 1967, Whittier, California; lives and works in Los Angeles) has been featured in numerous institutional exhibitions, including 40 for LA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019); Jing'an International Sculpture Project (JISP), Jing'an Sculpture Park, Shanghai (2018); The Sculpture Park, Madhavendra Palace, Nahargarh Fort, Jaipur, India (2017); Los Angeles, a fiction, Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, France (2017) and Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2016); Lightness of Being, Public Art Fund, City Hall Park, New York (2013); All of this and nothing, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2011); 2008 California Biennial, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, California; The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2006); and Whitney Biennial 2002, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Palm Springs Art Museum, California; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.