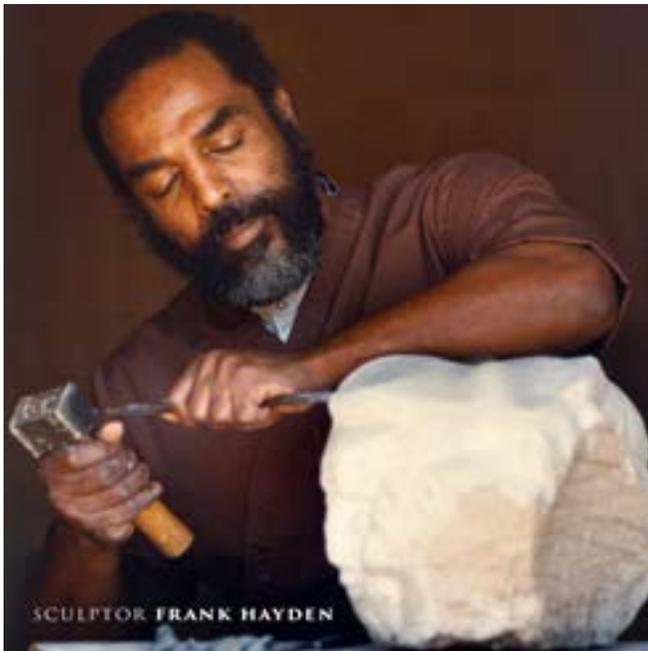


Frank Hayden's work in new exhibit shows renowned sculptor was a voice for social justice and unity

BY ROBIN MILLER | STAFF WRITER JUL 6, 2020 - 7:30 AM 3 min to read



Elizabeth Weinstein had no idea how powerful the work of the late Frank Hayden would still be today when she assembled the new show about the renowned sculptor for the Louisiana Art & Science Museum. Hayden created his “Lift Every Voice” sculpture in memory of two Southern University students who were shot and killed by police in 1972 during a peaceful protest on campus over a lack of resources for the predominantly Black school.

The sculpture stands in front of the university’s Smith-Brown Memorial Union, named for Denver Smith and Leonard Brown who died on that November day — almost 50 years before George Floyd would take his last breath under the knee of a police officer in Minneapolis and spark protests for racial justice across the world.

Hayden, who died in 1988 at age 53, is being celebrated in LASM’s new exhibit, also called “Lift Every Voice,” where the moving piece stationed at Southern is represented by photos. The exhibit opens July 7 and runs through Jan. 3. Hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays.



LIFT EVERY VOICE IN MEMORY OF LEONARD BROWN AND DENVER SMITH
FRANK HAYDEN, SCULPTOR

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SEQUENCE OF LIFE, FRANK HAYDEN SCULPTOR

“When I gave it the name, I didn’t have any clue how relevant that phrase might be at this point and time,” said Weinstein, the museum’s former director of interpretation and chief curator who spent the past year putting the show together. “It’s the title he gave to his memorial for the students who were killed, but I also thought of it as ‘lift every voice’ as kind of a call to lift every voice in praise in remembrance of Frank.”

The piece at the student union was not the first or last time Hayden would use his talents in the name of social justice. Other of Hayden’s pieces in the show include a small 1968 wood sculpture called “Caged Figure,” which has a coin slot in the top and addresses the politics of incarceration. His untitled drawing for Mariana Scott’s book of poems, “Sketches in Black and White,” illustrates the angst felt in the Black community in the late 1960s.

Hayden was the first sculptor commissioned to create pieces celebrating the civil rights legend. His best known King monument, a 10-foot-tall bronze sculpture, stands along Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard in New Orleans.

Hayden’s 1960 study for “Sequence of Life,” which depicts birth, family, death and resurrection, includes headlines of the time, such as “Jewish Boy, Catholic Girl Marry Despite Protests.” While there are works in the exhibition that speak to social justice more directly, Weinstein said there are also pieces about unity.

“I think his repetition of form speaks to unity,” she said. “Frank would duplicate the same figure in a piece, but each figure was a little different. He gave them identities, but the bigger aspect was that they were unified with a message of ‘We’re stronger together.’”

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Hayden’s wooden sculpture, “Sixteen Men Make a Rod,” from 1977 illustrates that concept. The word “rod” is biblical, referring to a line of family descent. From afar, the men look identical, but, up close, each is different. And each holds a ballot, while the figure at the front prepares to cast his into the ballot box. “It’s important for people to know the person behind the work,” Weinstein said. “And by knowing the artist, you can appreciate the meaning behind his artwork. It adds a richer depth to your understanding.”



SIXTEEN MEN MAKE A ROD, FRANK HAYDEN SCULPTOR



SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES, FRANK HAYDEN SCULPTOR

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, Hayden attended Catholic schools, and his faith would also become a pronounced part of his work. He earned his bachelor’s degree on scholarship at Xavier University in New Orleans, then enrolled at Notre Dame University, where he studied with the sculptor [Ivan Mestrovic](#), the most prominent modern Croatian sculptor.



RENOWNED CROATION SCULPTOR IVAN MESTROVIC AND SCULPTOR FRANK HAYDEN

“Mestrovic was nearing the end of his life when Frank Hayden was at Notre Dame,” Weinstein said. “But he allowed Hayden to work on a commission with him.”

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Mestrovic's style influenced Hayden, and by the time Hayden joined the Southern University art faculty in 1961, he'd already achieved a certain amount of recognition as a sculptor for his public pieces.

Still, Hayden had a hard time getting his works shown in Baton Rouge. That's when Adalie Brent entered the picture. She was the first director of the Louisiana Art and Science Center (now the museum) and was instrumental in the selection and placement of public art by Hayden and Mestrovic.

"She also helped Frank Hayden get commissions for a lot of Baton Rouge churches," Weinstein said. "St. Joseph's Cathedral was being renovated at the time, and Ivan Mestrovic was commissioned to do the crucifix. He died before it was finished, so Hayden was commissioned to finish it."

Weinstein said that although the show isn't a retrospective, it does represent the most comprehensive exhibit of Hayden's work by any institution.



OLIVER POLLOCK, FRANK HAYDEN SCULPTOR

"Here you've got a guy who must have encountered challenges and obstacles, and who knows where he would have gone?" she said. "And when you think about it, Baton Rouge was pretty progressive at the time, when it chose an African American sculptor to create the Oliver Pollock (a patriot from the Revolutionary War) monument for Galvez Square. That monument has become an icon of Baton Rouge.

"I think Frank Hayden is one Louisiana's most significant artists."

Hayden died in 1988.