

BILL HODGES GALLERY

LeRone Wilson: From Beyond

February 11 – March 19, 2021

PRESS RELEASE

Bill Hodges Gallery is pleased to present *LeRone Wilson: From Beyond*, a solo exhibition of New York artist and sculptor LeRone Wilson (New York, NY; 1968). This exhibition is the first individual survey of a living artist presented by Bill Hodges Gallery in nearly five years. It also marks Wilson's debut solo exhibition of the new decade.

Twenty years ago, following his graduation from the University of Illinois at Chicago, School of Art and Design, LeRone Wilson began his career as a painter and trained metalworker, using metal as his primary sculpture media. This changed when Wilson walked into a local art store and noticed the owner discarding a trash can full of unused craft wax. Wax allowed Wilson to explore his interest in color - from oil painting - alongside his fascination with texture and sculpture - from metalworking - within the infinite confines of an unfamiliar media. Over the years, Wilson has honed his encaustic craft, producing remarkable abstract "sculpture paintings" and, most recently, figurative works inspired by his studies in Kemetism.

Using a mixture of beeswax, carnauba wax, propolis and powdered pigment, Wilson builds his sculptures gradually by applying pigmented beeswax atop a foundation then layering the molten, pigmented wax in sessions until the work takes on a desired form, aided by the unconventional use of palette knives. The beauty of Wilson's sculptures lies in their intricate and infinite details. Each ridge, valley and spiral, or "appendage", as the artist refers to them, is meticulously created by the careful addition or removal of wax. Straddling the boundary between painting and sculpture, Wilson's encaustic "sculpture paintings" are also both abstract and minimalist. In his own words: "Every component, every detail and every function has been reduced or condensed to the essential. The simplicity of my work explores the possibility of working creatively without disrupting the purity of the material". The result is a visual experience that encourages curiosity and introspection while engaging all of the senses.



Ra #4, 2020, Beeswax and Pigment
on Ceramic, 17 x 17 x 10 in.

Ra #4 (2020) is a tantalizing example of Wilson's genius. Built upon salvaged ceramic, *Ra #4* accentuates and emphasizes the artist's "sculptural painting" technique on a three dimensional plane. The work's protruding and robust volume invites viewers to investigate the depths of Wilson's encaustic terrain. Named after the central dignitary of Kemet, Ra was known as a father-figure and high-priest of Ntchr and is most commonly represented by or symbolized as the sun. The bright yellow of the piece captivates while its abnormal shape and organic texture beckon fascination and encourage viewers to muse at its rich complexity.

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Another encaustic achievement by Wilson is *SPT SNU* (2019) a work that further pushes the bounds of sculptural painting as the artist manipulates his appendages into a spiral formation. Introducing cyclical movement into his compositions directs the viewer's contemplation into the depths of this rich landscape. With its gray tonality, *SPT SNU* remains committed to minimalist perfection, all the while exploring the nuances and potentialities of encaustic painting.



SPT SNU, 2019, Beeswax and Pigment on Foam, 25 ½ x 25 ½ x 6 in.

Beeswax itself is also a critical component of Wilson's oeuvre, not solely

because of its capabilities as a material but also as an anthropological exploration for a Black artist. For Wilson, beeswax became a vehicle for retracing history back to the kingdom of Kemet, now referred to as Egypt, and reclaiming Black identity in the face of historical miseducation. The importance of bees to civilization is not unheard of - especially in light of recent environmental and climate change discussions - but honey, wax and bees were crucial to Kemet society. In fact, some believed that the soul of a man (referred to as "ka") took the form of a bee after his passing.

For the past 5 years, Wilson has incorporated his Kemetic studies into his abstract works via their titles, palette and material, as evidenced above, but in 2020 – the artist leapt into figuration. This stylistic transition is a nod to his formal art school training that is enhanced by a divine motivation and a more experienced hand. Wilson's newer works are intentional in all aspects and not merely replicas of mass produced iconography. Instead, these newer works are the artist's own interpretations of tomb inscriptions he saw during his travels to Egypt as well as a manual, creative analysis that brings him closer to his own personal history. The use of encaustic in these recent, figurative works is not out of convenience or coincidence either; these materials are homage to Kemetism itself, as well as a continuation of the artist's *modus operandi*.

LeRone Wilson's encaustic paintings have garnered significant attention, earning the artist selections at art fairs, highly prestigious awards and placements in corporate and private collections around the world. Wilson was featured at the Scope Art Fair, Miami (2012); Cutlog Art Fair, New York (2014); SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York (2017, 2018); and Art Basel, Miami (2019), where he also won the Bombay Sapphire Artisan award in 2011. Other awards include the Best in Show for the Carroll Harris Sims Awards (1999), and recognition as a finalist for the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award (2003). Wilson's work has also been shown in galleries throughout the country, including Rush Arts, Kim Foster, Boccaro Art, White Box, and G.R. N'Namdi. Other achievements include a residency at the Pierce and Hill Harper Foundation Artist Residency in Detroit and selections in the Museum of Biblical Art in New York, the African American Museum in Dallas and the Studio Museum. Most recently, Wilson's work was selected by Uber for their initiative supporting Harlem restaurants through the winter months of the pandemic with strategically designed outdoor structures incorporating fine art and a selection of his works are currently on view at the Wallach Gallery at Columbia University as part of the *Uptown Triennial 2020*.

Bill Hodges Gallery is located at 529 W. 20th Street, suite #10E, between 10th Avenue and 11th Avenue. Our closest subway stations are 14th St. & 8th Ave. (A-C-E) and 23rd St. & 8th Ave. (C-E). The gallery is open Monday to Friday from 11 AM – 6 PM and Saturday 1 PM – 6 PM by appointment. Appointments are strongly encouraged but walk-ins are accepted. The gallery is implementing social distancing measures; requiring guests wear appropriate personal protection equipment. Masks can be provided. For more information or to arrange a private viewing, please contact Bill or Navindren Hodges at (212) 333-2640 or at info@billhodgesgallery.com.