

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lonnie Holley
What Have They Done with America?

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles
July 9–August 13, 2022
Opening Reception: Saturday, July 9, 5–7pm

Thursday, July 7, 7:30pm at Brain Dead Studios (611 N Fairfax Ave.):
Screening of Lonnie Holley's Short Film / *Snuck off the Slave Ship* + Live Music Performance

Saturday, July 23, 2pm at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles:
Lonnie Holley in Conversation with Jane Fonda

Los Angeles, CA, June 28, 2022—Blum & Poe is pleased to present Atlanta-based artist Lonnie Holley's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and his first in Los Angeles.

Holley's life and work read as a narrative retelling of Black American history—the residual effects of the Jim Crow era, the triumphs of the Civil Rights movement, and the struggles with false narratives around class mobility and race. Holley's multidisciplinary practice seeks to educate viewers as a means of remedying the historical amnesia surrounding these topics. Rooting himself in the events of the past, the artist moves into the future—presenting synesthetic, multimedia work that visually engages its viewers with unique found objects and intricate motifs to subsequently inform on topics such as inequity and history as memory.

Now a key figure within the Afro-Atlantic artistic movement, Holley began making sculptural work in 1979. The artist's initial foray into this practice was driven by a desire to memorialize loved ones who had passed—with his family unable to afford commercially engraved stones, Holley created gravestones from castoff slabs of industrial sand for two of his sister's children. The sculptures presented here extend from this interest in memorialization, as Holley identifies and deploys stories from his life, from the lives of his ancestors, and from the Civil Rights movement. Continuing to use his signature found materials—a practice that the artist views as giving worth to that which has been cast aside, much like Black Americans under Jim Crow—Holley builds his recent sculptures from discarded objects such as wire, electric cables, beads, denim, holiday decorations, and American flags.

A key motif in Holley's oeuvre is that of the profile: it has appeared in his sculptures for roughly four decades and proliferates in the paintings presented here. While these configurations clearly depict a human form, the figures never quite solidify. In the case of the sculptures, these faces are formed from wires and are hollow in the center; in the paintings, they are partially translucent, created with thin layers of spray paint. This state of incompleteness alludes to themes of erasure and self-assertion that Holley has tackled in his own life: fighting for a place within his own family after a difficult childhood enduring foster homes and forced labor, finding a vocation after working many different jobs to make ends meet, and, finally, carving out a place for himself in the traditionally exclusive, Eurocentric canon of art history.

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

The paintings Holley presents here are not merely figurative; they layer this facial profile motif to create a series of paintings that is simultaneously atmospheric and narrative, figurative and abstract. When following the curved lines of Holley's patterns, the viewer's eye is drawn to the negative space between forms. Sometimes executed on canvas and other times on quilts, these many faces quickly become disassociated markings that, when taken in unison, create a swirling, nonlinear grid—unbound by the rigidity of the grids used by the likes of Renaissance painters to trick the eye and create depth from flatness. Holley's figurative abstractions flow en masse and interweave to convey their message via their multitudes: layers of spray paint create compositions that compete in equal parts for the viewer's attention while triumphantly retaining their flatness to draw the eye into every bit of the painting at once. Holley uses the quilt as a picture plane to pay homage to women's work and to harness the charged aura of Black American ancestral history and culture. Often discarded or dismissed by mainstream society as handicraft, quilts here become sacred grounds upon which the artist further explores some of the tropes of his signature visual language. These works are metaphors for the multitudinous narratives of history—each new layer building upon, or muting, the one before it to create the finished product.

Holley uses his platform to create visually stunning objects that compassionately educate their audience on the Black struggle for equality in the United States and its nuances. Formally, the artist's work has acquired a keen density over his long career. These compositions become increasingly loaded with historical and narrative value as the artist acquires ever more experience. As Holley once described it, "This is memory. Everything is memory. Every face in these paintings."

Lonnie Holley (b. Birmingham, AL, 1950) lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia. His work is represented in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; among many others. Holley's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions including at Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, TX (2022); Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY (2021); Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA (2017); Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art; Charleston, SC (2015); Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL (2004), and many more. Holley has been the subject of several documentary films, and his own directed short film *I Snuck off the Slave Ship* premiered at Sundance in 2018.

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Tim Blum and Jeff Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-seven-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work. Currently, Blum & Poe represents fifty artists and nine estates from sixteen countries worldwide.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000-square-foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since staged museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese

BLUM & POE

Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo

Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in new contexts. These expansions tie into the gallery's wide-reaching program that includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. Blum & Poe's publishing division democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

Across the three global locations, Blum & Poe prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. Blum & Poe is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in their physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

Press Inquiries

Nicoletta Beyer
Communications and Editorial Director, Los Angeles
nicoletta@blumandpoe.com

Christie Hayden
Communications and Social Media Editor, Los Angeles
christie@blumandpoe.com

Follow Blum & Poe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe

 @blumandpoe