

# Matthew Angelo

# Harrison



## Sculptured

## Memories

*Resin, 3D technology, memorabilia, artefacts, history, work, humans, machines, memory - individual and collective, the encapsulation of ideas through objects...it's easy to start the list of elements in his work but difficult to finish. It's not that there's too much going on in his work. Not in their appearance. In fact there's a sparseness in the elements he chooses, the way some are encased in clear resin, in blocks. Items, disparate, chosen because of what they represent or what they mean to him. How they connect with him as an individual, with his own past, with a joint societal past, or indeed how these objects connect with all of us. I think what Matthew does is to put on actual display the paradoxical links between opposing elements in our lives. The disconnect which ultimately connects. Those elements - thoughts, beliefs, objects - which are literally put on a pedestal to be looked at, admired, questioned, and used for further thought and analysis. I feel they're totemic. I also find them very personal. They are those life collectibles that can build a picture of where we come from, and perhaps where we should be going. It's a combination of contrasts: man and machine, the individual and society, life and work, these elements that we try to combine and balance in our own lives are in his work, and tell of his own life and concerns. The materials he uses reflect his own experiences as growing up as an African American in Detroit. In a city once reliant on the American automobile industry, where his own mother used to work, industrial parts point to stories of industrial unrest and labour issues. The sharpness of metal, the threat of injury, the precarious nature of factory life make sure that these found objects, now safely encased and rendered harmless in resin. They were part of a far larger industrial structure which employed and dismissed people because of commercial demands and financial priorities. People used ultimately as materials and components like metal and rubber.*

*Matthew has a graduate of the of Detroit. I get helped form the He can use tra-but with an eye does it represent ments of African his identities, to and pedagogi-cation of which*



*very strong hold over this combo of Fine Art and Industrial Design. He is a School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but he also worked in the factories the impression that he holds both experiences in high esteem, and they both artist he is. His artwork is often created by machines that he creates himself. ditional methods and the latest 3D printing. He's into the process of creating, to showing the reason for it. What is the object, why was it chosen, what to him, and what might it represent to others? What he chooses to use - ele-sculpture, machinery, language - all form part of a search to his own origins, his position in society. His art is so powerful because it works aesthetically cally. It's there to be admired but it carries a message, the effective communi-is of the greatest importance.*

*Nick Byrne:* What you create, the sculptures, the installations, the spaces which are formed, they connect with many things. There's something a bit sci-fi, there's a definite anthropological element, and the influence of industrial design. All of this sounds a little impersonal, but of course when you see it, it's all very personal. Is anything left to chance as works get created, or is it all meticulously planned out?

*Matthew Angelo Harrison:* I think it's a bit of both, some aspects as a consequence of pure planning, and others because of the process itself. I mean the process is sequential, and the fact that the actual physical making of it has an effect, but the conceptualization probably runs in parallel with all the ideas running at once. So, if you enter the work through the making of it, you can consider the object inside, you think about the encapsulation itself. It creates a living metaphor for what the object represents, and what it is at the same time. So, you find the singularity in the metaphor and also in the materiality of the object. You bring it all to one point and then you can fractal it off from there into all the various universal ideas. So I try my best to create a position, to find the universality in the messaging of the work, analyzing instruments for learning, such as science, anthropology and those types of investigations which reach right into our existence and our reality. So I think that it's the only way to actually get a true third person perspective on something that is identity based.

*NB:* I really like the way you use materials and objects. Sometimes it's about physically repurposing, or it's shifting the concept, both making the viewer see things and situations in a different light. Can you talk a little bit more about this?

*MH:* Do you mean, how do I change the energy of the object? I think there's something unique about the mechanical processes that humans have invented in the 20th century and 21st century. They all implement a bit of violence in the manipulation of the materials, and in the manipulation of the resource in general. So when I think about my objects, I actually think about conflict a lot, and how to process that conflict and distill it out of the work. So it's a distillation of the work. I feel especially like the object inside becomes a distillation of all the things that have happened to it, and of the things that it represents. I feel like, that is a scientific approach in a way. So I think it allows me to create the emotional, the appropriate emotional distance between me and the work so that I don't violate it, if that makes sense. You know, it's a tight rope walk indeed, because even I could violate these objects with my ideas or my manipulation or my intentions. So I'm very careful myself, because I feel like at the same time, it's the best

way to show the traces of how things came to be, and I focus on those vectors very intentionally when I find them. But I have to find them in my process. So, there's a little bit of risk involved in the work in, in like conceptualizing this way. But it's also rewarding. It allows me to actually show what I'm talking about.

*NB:* In a sense this question comes perhaps a little early in our conversation, but I'm interested in how you process change. It's a very personal narrative, and the way you tell stories, this mix of local and personal rubbing shoulders with global and political themes, it a process which is clear, but very demanding. You change, the world changes, how does that change your art? Do you feel this pressure of change?

*MH:* Yes, I feel that I really experience that all the time, that feeling that something is coming up, because in a way we were just talking about the proto-typical or the proto and the future aspect of my work. Like I'm always looking back at the past, but I'm always feeling like the work is also a current event. And I'm also very in touch with what's going on in the world of different geopolitics. I think in 2021, when I had the show at Kalo, it was post



MATTHEW ANGELO HARRISON  
Beak, 2024  
Sculpture 27 x 15.5 x 24 cm / 10 5/8 x 6 1/8 x 9 1/2 in  
Pedestal 112 x 18 x 29.5 cm / 44 x 7 1/8 x 11 5/8 in  
HARRI60080  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber,  
Zurich / Vienna  
© the artist

COVID, that's where the marker started. In 2021, you know how we were coming up with solutions for the problem, and it started to look like de-globalization a bit, you know, and the de-construction of all of the time spent trying to bring the world under one perspective of how things should be done, and how we should move around our globe. There's a collective in all that, that includes the trade part, that

also includes the violence that includes the communication using all these platforms we created, and there's a lot of change in these platforms, so much is changing, you know, and so rapidly. I feel like my message is already changing at this point to bring awareness to that aspect of our life now, because globalization will never go away.

*NB:* Again, there's such a strong feeling of your need to communicate through your artwork, it naturally exists as an artwork, an abstract, and can be seen, appreciated as such...but I like it even more because it contains ideas, reflections which come from your own experiences and those you feel connected with...either directly or indirectly. And that you still seem to be learning, working things out, how to distill and further distill what you want to communicate.

*MH:* I don't think I've gotten there yet...I still have a lot of learning to do myself. I think that it is interesting to try to do this, and to try to get there, there's power in being concise in that way. I don't think I've discovered it yet because I feel at least the resin



MATTHEW ANGELO HARRISON  
Missing Face, 2024  
Sculpture 57 x 25 x 22 cm / 22 1/2 x 9 7/8 x 8 5/8 in  
Pedestal 112 x 27.5 x 24.5 cm / 44 x 10 7/8 x 9 5/8 in  
HARRI60090  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna



aspect of my work is just one dimension to the things that I could possibly want to do. It's just an investment in the technique, and like the reality of it being very hard to produce and everything. But, you know, there's elements of automation and about humanism in general that I want to tap into further, but I'm entering it through the angle of my personal experience and identity, and then trying to open it up even further, to bring in the human experience. And I think could do that through other media, I experimented with 3D printing in the past, in clay early on, when I first started, when I make these exhibitions that kind of can be generated on site in real time, and then decompose and then reconstitute it again, you know, as another installation. You know and create something truly immersive but which also feels kind of meaningfully dangerous, you know not

sensational in the sense that I want to just provoke a sense of danger, but like, I want to direct you through a timeline that is dictated very much by danger and by being motivated to find safety. And what I'm saying, this security is actually helpful to people's understanding of what I am seeing, and what I am invested in as far as research goes. But I'm careful not to underestimate the audience, but yes, I do sometimes check myself and make sure that I am communicating as effectively as possible. It is the best way that I can think of because we live in a very confusing world already. I don't think it's clever to just add to the confusion... you want to be actually provoking a real clear emotion, even though they might not understand the information being sent... but you know there's a clear connection to the work that allows them to actually enter the work. You know, it's like at another point in time, I feel like it was interesting to be confusing as an artist, you know, mysterious in terms of who the artist is and what they're trying to communicate in terms of what they are feeling as an artist. But I feel directness is helpful these days, especially because we live in a world where you can generate so much... information.

*NB:* And then there's AI... how do you feel about artificial intelligence? I mean, personally, it's such a weird combination of words, they grate.

*MH:* It's like it's a perversion of the model of intelligence.

I think against the present backdrop, I really think it is urgent to be generously communicative, and in a very concise clear way, like we need to be actually helpful as artists at this point. It's not just about generosity though, I feel it's literally our job to be concise and communicative at this point, because otherwise we're screwed, like, we're absolutely cooked!

I think we live in a world right now where most of our technology is - I wouldn't say necessarily too advanced for our current society - but it's moving faster than what we can process, how to use it. So that's also a dangerous position to be in. I mean, I could go on and on about this, there are just so many issues. I'm

thinking about war a lot right now, I'm thinking about drone technology, and I'm thinking about how that is all commercially available. You know, I was on Alibaba and I was just looking at different motors for a human eye robot... and I found a drone that could carry a payload of like, I don't know, 80kg or something insane like that... it's like having war platform develop out of the market for commercial goods. That's dammed alarming for me, and that tells me a lot about the use of technology.

MATTHEW ANGELO HARRISON  
Red Hat, 2024  
Sculpture 37 x 23 x 25 cm / 14 1/2 x 9 x 9 7/8 in  
Pedestal 112 x 27.5 x 25.5 cm / 44 x 10 7/8 x 10 in  
HARR160086  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna



*Matthew's successful run of exhibitions continues. He recently became a father, and his son brings in an Iranian narrative to his own family story. Again it's a story of migration, generational separation, loss and gain. The way the sharp edge of history - wars, politics, social injustice - slices through lives, leaving the people to piece together their past stories to give a sense of belonging, origin and purpose. And to make sense of the present. It's part compartmentalisation, part continuous narrative, making the rigidity of his industrial sculptures bend to the power of experience.*

Words by Nick Byrne



MATTHEW ANGELO HARRISON  
Stoic (production costs record)

2024  
Sculpture 35 x 14 x 15 cm / 13 3/4 x 5 1/2 x 5 7/8 in  
Pedestal 112 x 19 x 20 cm / 44 x 7 1/2 x 7 7/8 in  
HARR159423

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna