



RELIGIOUS HANDS OF NEW YORK CITY

Posted by Tony Carnes | Mar 26, 2022 | 0 | ★★★★★



Karl Haendel, Installation view *Praise New York* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, 2022

Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Ever since the cave artists left outlines of hands on walls, humans have shared their faith and personhood with future generations.

When we look at our own hands, they are rich with meaning and somehow reflect who we are. The pioneering hand surgeon Paul Brand wrote that intact hands remind us that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” by a Creator. So, we lift our hands in prayer and worship; we thrust our hands forward and around those whom we love. We withdraw our hand when we want to communicate anger and hate.

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Those whose hands are damaged say that they feel singularly assaulted in their soul. When hand surgeons like the renowned late Harold Dick at Columbia Physicians and Surgeons put them back together, we feel more whole, like we have recovered part of who we are.

In New York City, hand gestures speak much. They talk about our ethnicity and our gods.

“Praise New York,” an exhibit of Karl Haendel’s large-scale drawings of the religious hands of our city, is taking place from March 10th to April 16th in Chelsea, Manhattan at Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery, 534 West 26th Street, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 6 PM.

The artist Haendel explores the world with his own hands by drawing portraits of other people through a close look at their hands. The drawings are larger than a human being is tall which in the gallery creates the feeling of hands as living fashion models standing in poises of praise and offerings of grace. He says, “It’s a novel way to make a portrait, allowing people to express themselves with gesture and nuance” using hands rather than faces, which moves too quickly in our day and age to invoke standards of beauty rather than portraits of the soul.

The drawings of the hands also invoke the tactile dimension that we lack in the era of the pandemic. They make large our hopes for human touch and healing. “In a time of pandemic when touching isn’t allowed, representing hands became only more interesting to me,” the artist writes in his introduction to the exhibit. “And the hands of religious leaders, as they pray or perform rituals, are filled with potential healing and spiritual resonance, further compelling me to the project in a time when faith is in short supply.”

The renditions of the religious hands may appear at first glance very literal. The portraits were slowly and meticulously drawn on paper at a large scale. But Haendel’s hands make subtle references to hand gestures throughout religious history by drawings of the same hand holding itself, or a hand with too many or too few fingers, a reminder that gestures of faith move toward and into the mystical, partially visible, often invisible world.

Haendel, who was born in 1976 in New York, also is using multi-ethnic, multi-racial hands of religious leaders to be a portrait of New York City itself. “Although the city is often thought of as secular, in truth it is home to numerous religious communities and, according to demographers, would be considered fairly religious,” says Haendel. “We all regularly walk by storefront mosques and basement temples, often without notice. For this reason, I have deliberately sought out leaders who ... lead houses of worship located in neighborhoods within all five boroughs of New York, making clear that religion is all around us if we only take the time to look. And in this gallery, you must look closely because each of the hands is drawn nearly nine feet tall, towering over the viewer” as if embodying Praises walking down the street. The artist’s preference for tolerance among faiths is visually set up by an indoor gallery street of hands that orchestrate the clasping and clapping together in a symphony of curbside praise.

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When Haendel explained to us what he wanted to do, Journey jumped at the chance to help by providing introductions to faith leaders across the city. His vision of religion in New York City is very close to our own, so we felt that he would be portraying Journey's vision of the city, also.



Karl Haendel, artist, Joseph Holland and Jacqui Holland, Bethel Gospel Assembly in Harlem. Photo courtesy from Joseph Holland; and Karl Haendel, Installation view *Praise New York* at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York