

ARTE FUSE

Assemblage and Process: Deconstructing the Works of Nicolas Holiber

03/22/2016 by [KIM POWER](#)

Paint is for painting, except when it's not. Nicolas Holiber's portrayal of constructed images in relief utilize repurposed wooden pallets and recycled wood, creating dynamic figures and forms that demand to be seen outside of the formal limitations of the picture plane. In their jutting and angular formations they take part in real space with a visceral definition that defies the accepted parameters of both painting and sculpture.

Stolen Idols at Gitler&_____ is a departure from Holiber's previous work in that the faces of his characters leave behind the deconstructed amalgamation of forms recently displayed in his larger than life *Head of Goliath* installed at Tribeca Park (2015). His new portraits are flat jigsaw-like shapes painted with actual recognizable features albeit distorted and abstracted almost purely from imagination.



Oracle, 2016, 31" x 26" x 7", wood, screws, acrylic, oil

Layers of wood cut and shaped with hammer, saw, chisel and axe are drilled, screwed and arranged in a manner not unlike Picasso's *Still Life with Guitar* (1913). The space is compacted into an altered and almost Cubist perspective. Case and point, *Still Life with Dog* (2016) displays a red-checked tablecloth that appears to be slanting down and out of the picture plane. The objects upon it, a plaster model (consisting of a thick sculptural oil impasto over an acrylic painted silhouette of a bust) rests on an unpainted wooden pedestal, two glasses of wine, a plate of cheese and a vase of flowers break the rules of physics by not showing any signs of instability. The cast shadows of these objects create a heightened sense of three-dimensionality. A large dog, painted in black with a sgraffito pattern of rectangles, appears behind the table, the lower half of his panting muzzle overlapping the back corner of the tablecloth, its ear partially obscuring a white framed window which reveals two black buildings with yellow windows, implying an evening landscape. Each layer rests on the previous one creating a bas-relief.



Still Life with Dog, 2016, 34" x 36" x 5", wood, screws, acrylic, oil

There is a crude yet purposeful intent, which denies the assumption of a lackadaisical approach to the subject matter. Splinters of broken wood are left to show, screw holes where previous placement has been reconsidered are left unfilled. In several paintings the raw wood is left untouched, such as in *Oracle* (2016) where it bears its original manufacturing stamp. Working without previous studies or sketches, Holiber responds to the materials, arranging and rearranging them to achieve an inner sense of aesthetics. The result is an effect of freshness and impromptu decisions.



Memento Mori I, 2016, 18" x 20" x 4",
wood, screws, acrylic, oil

This method of assembly is most successful in Holiber's portraits, where he reaches beyond the art historical references that inspire him. When the subject is represented less obliquely, such as in *Memento Mori I, II, III and IV* (2016), the work is less convincing. *Youth with Dog* (2016), whatever its initial inspiration, seems to



Youth with Dog, 2016, 44" x 32" x 10",
wood, screws, acrylic, oil

have a more honest relationship with the medium. The black dog returns, embraced with one arm by an androgynous figure sporting a red swimsuit and bathing cap. The paint on the figure is a rough impasto smoothed out in cakey layers with hatching and demarcations denoting planar changes. Holiber hides nothing, leaving a jagged edge under the dogs' jawline that echoes the dark hatching/scratching into the lower half of the muzzle. The textural modeling of the paint, across and around the nose, reinforces the value changes. The technical metaphor for fur works well here. Pre-painted split pieces of wood cut into shorter segments create the illusion of its spiky coat, twisting and turning to reveal both bare hewn wood and painted areas together. This transition, from paint to actual wood as the language for texture, is surprisingly not distracting but adds visual interest in spite of its incongruity. The arm is made from molding and the finger from railing spindles. This combination of raw wood versus painted wood, shaped versus broken, and the revelation of process gives a participatory sense, as if the viewer is following the artist in his choices of placement and construction.

Creating in the interstices of painting and sculpture is a complex challenge. It is a risk; one Holiber seems to take with aplomb. Reaching back to his roots of art history while pushing forward his own search for personal meaning becomes not a story of striving for success but of individual self-actualization.