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## ART

# Hugh Hayden

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**PORTRAIT BY JULIAN UNGANO AND  
TOMMY AGRIODIMAS**


(TOP TO BOTTOM) Hugh Hayden in his Brooklyn studio. Hayden's "American Hero 3" (2012).



Perhaps the artist Hugh Hayden's interest in subcultures stems from his own unconventional art background. Hayden, 30, studied architecture at Cornell—he never took an art course—and established a career in retail a couple years after graduating in 2007. (He's currently the associate director of store design at fashion brand Alice + Olivia.) But after hours, and largely through a series of residencies at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Abrons Art Center, and Socrates Sculpture Park, Hayden has built an art practice that explores themes often unexplored in the art and fashion worlds to which he now belongs.

For his first collection of sculptures, Hayden's primary medium was hair. In his "American Hero" series, developed between 2011 and 2012, he manipulated the fur of various taxidermed animals, including a mountain goat, musk ox, and buffalo, with the help of friends and braiders found on Craigslist. "I took indigenous American animals and subverted them with cornrows, a vernacular African American hairstyle," he says. "It's about integrating a subculture into the larger American social context."

Hayden also focused on the animal kingdom for a new series of works on view in "Fact of the Matter," a group exhibition organized by

Socrates Sculpture Park at a gallery in Midtown Manhattan's UBS Financial Services building (through May 16). The artist meticulously covered logs, dowels, or branches with bird feathers so that they appear to blend in with pieces of wood or bark positioned near them. "Birds have evolved over centuries to adapt to their environments, whether it's for survival or procreation," he says. "That means using camouflage to hide from predators, and balancing that with standing out."

Hayden explores how exotic birds—and, by extension, human beings—learn to conform to their surroundings in works like "Untitled (Peacock 1)" (2013), a dowel covered in brown peacock feathers and placed in front of a panel of ash bark. "In Western culture, a peacock is seen as very flamboyant," he says. "But if you see one in the wild, they sort of exist in the background."

The subject of how parrots—and people—must acclimate to fit into the conventional world isn't often broached in industries like fashion. But Hayden sees a common thread in all his mediums. "Fashion, feathers, hair, and tree bark—those are all natural and artificial means of identification," he says. "It's about how you can fit into the social environment around you."