

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

KARL HAENDEL: *Praise New York*

534 West 26th Street, New York

March 10 – April 16, 2022



This spring, artist **Karl Haendel** (b. 1976, New York) will unveil ***Praise New York***, a group portrait of contemporary religious diversity and practice in New York City. The exhibition presents a series of large-scale, realist drawings depicting the hands of some of the city’s most inspiring Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Sikh faith leaders, paying homage to a diverse group of pastors, imams, rabbis and priests who have shared vital resources—from wisdom and hope to food and shelter—with thousands of New Yorkers in a time of pandemic, racial injustice, climate crisis and civil unrest. Highlighting how these communities of believers are vibrant, welcoming and tolerant, the artist hopes to provide space for viewers to reassess their own systems of belief, embrace complexity and expand their acceptance.

“While this project is about religious diversity, it is equally about ethnic and racial diversity, as much of the religious activity is found amongst the city’s immigrant groups, providing community and systems of support,” says Haendel. “New York, a place that generations of immigrants have called home, is one of the most diverse places in the world. What New York looks like at any point in time is what America looks like many decades later. Using my ability to render (to draw) I hope to help render (bring to fruition) the multi-racial, multicultural, multi-faith democracy that New York currently is and that America will one day be.”

For Haendel, the act of drawing invokes the human impulse to leave a mark while also offering a physical system to reconsider accepted imagery. This exploration—of the act of drawing itself—has led the artist to examine the hand as a tool of creation, a means of expression and an organ of knowledge. Over the past two years, the New York-born, Los Angeles-based artist has been exploring portraiture through the drawn representation of his subjects’ hands. “It’s a novel way to make a portrait, allowing people to express themselves with gesture and nuance, but free from the tropes and standards of beauty associated with traditional representational portraiture, which generally focuses on the face,” explains the artist. “In a time of pandemic when touching isn’t allowed, representing hands became only more interesting to me. 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.”

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To make the work, the artist met with each leader in their house of worship, to talk about their faith, the history of their congregation in the city and to take reference photos of their hands. Back at his studio, Haendel digitally manipulated these photos to create new and often physically impossible hand compositions, which subtly reference hand gestures found in religious imagery across art history. But the digital affect is left imperceptibly visible (the same hand holding itself or a hand with too few or too many fingers), reminding us that these mystical and uncanny appendages are of the present. With these digital renderings used for reference, Haendel drew each hand portrait in pencil on paper, slowly and meticulously, at very large scale.

“As much as *Praise New York* is a portrait of contemporary faith it is just as much 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 deliberately sought out leaders who not only support inter-faith dialogue and practice tolerance but who also 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 look we must as each subjects’ hands are drawn nearly 9 feet tall, towering over the viewer as an embodied presence.”



The artist has said that the reason he chooses drawing is that “no other medium can combine touch, scale and intimacy to such powerful effect.” A parallel forms between the power of drawing as a mode of artistic creation and the religious symbolism surrounding the hands of gods as creators and protectors—from *hamsa*, the middle eastern helping hand and protector from the evil eye; to the Mexican *mano poderosa*, the all-powerful hand; to *mudras*, ritual gestures found in Hinduism and Buddhism, often facilitating spiritual knowledge, protection, stimulation and healing. “I will use my hand and my labor to honor each leader’s labor, be it intellectual or as service to their community, as a kind of homage,” said the artist. “It will be drawing as ritual, as meditation, as service.”

The artist would like to thank Alana Reibstein, Siobhan Hebron, and Andrew Currey, without whose help this exhibition would not be possible.

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## About the Participants

The artist is grateful to his subjects and collaborators for their participation in *Praise New York*, including Reverend Dr. Jacqui Lewis, pastor of Middle Collegiate Church in the East Village; Venerable Chang-Hwa of the Chan Mediation Center in Elmhurst; Ravi Vaidyanat Śivāchāriar of the Ganesh Temple in Flushing; Imam Souleimane Konaté of Masjid al-Aqsa Mosque in Harlem; Reverend Emma Jordan Simpson, Executive Pastor of the Concord Baptist Church in Bed-Stuy; Rabbi Rachel Timoner of Congregation Beth Elohim in Park Slope; Reverend Christine Lee, Priest of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Chelsea; Simran Jeet Singh of the Sikh Coalition and faculty at Union Seminary, Morningside Heights; Father Patrick Longalong of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Queens Village; Reverend Dr. Terry Troia

of Project Hospitality and the Reformed Church of Huguenot Park in Staten Island; Reverend Samuel Cruz, Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Sunset Park; Father Enrique Salvo of the Church of St. Anselm and St. Roch in the Bronx; Reverend Dr. Protopresbyter Nicholas Kazarian, Priest of Saint Eleftherios Greek Orthodox Church in Chelsea; Imam Khalid Latif of the Islamic Center at NYU in Greenwich Village; Venerable Bhante Heenbunne Kondaña, Abbot and Chief Incumbent of the Staten Island Buddhist Vihara Meditation Center; Reverend Joe Holland of Bethel Gospel Assembly in Harlem; and Reverend Sherin Swift of New Life Fellowship in Elmhurst.

## About Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Founded by Lucy Mitchell-Innes and David Nash, who previously headed the worldwide Contemporary and Impressionist & Modern Art divisions of Sotheby's, Mitchell-Innes & Nash places exemplary contemporary artists within a historical context, revealing a continuity of ideas and aesthetic virtuosity from the Modern era through the present day. Lucy Mitchell-Innes is also a member of the selection committee of Art Basel and a former president of the Art Dealers Association of America. Mitchell-Innes & Nash's renowned exhibition program fosters excellence within artistic practice, while forging an informed dialogue between emerging and established internationally recognized artists. From acclaimed surveys of 20th century masters, such as Jean Arp, Anthony Caro, Jay DeFeo, Willem de Kooning, Leon Kossoff, Kenneth Noland, Roy Lichtenstein, and Nicolas de Stael, to solo exhibitions of Sarah Braman, Keltie Ferris, Daniel Lefcourt, Eddie Martinez, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, and Jessica Stockholder, Mitchell-Innes & Nash has proven expertise in both advancing the careers of emerging artists and maintaining the superior standard set by established artists.

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Images Caption #1, Karl Haendel, *Praise New York 10 [Rev Dr Jacqui Lewis]*, 2021, Pencil on paper, 103 x 83 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell & Innes & Nash, New York.

Image Caption #2: Karl Haendel, *Praise New York 8 [Father Patrick Longalong]*, 2021, Pencil on paper, 103 x 85 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell & Innes & Nash, New York.

Image Caption #3: Karl Haendel, *Praise New York F [Rabbi Rachel Timoner]*, 2021. Pencil on paper, 55 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell & Innes & Nash, New York.

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