



Birds and Water: The career of Bay area artist Tom Holland

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Tien, 1976, epoxy on aluminum, 131 x 34 in.

Tom Holland is primarily known for his early work from the 1960s–1980s. Bivins Gallery challenged that narrative with *Tom Holland: Birds and Water*, a solo show that highlighted some of Holland’s most recent work juxtaposed with a few his earlier works dating back to 1970. The gallery will continue to offer private views of Holland’s work.

Tom Holland grew up in San Mateo, California, and attended San Mateo High School. Upon graduation, he went to Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Holland began to focus seriously on a career in painting while at Willamette, and he subsequently transferred to the University of California, Berkeley.

It was at UC Berkeley that Holland began to work as David Park’s assistant. Park would leave a lasting impression and heavily influence Holland’s life and career. Holland remarks that it was mostly Park’s “method” and “his irreverence for materials,” that really influenced his work. Another major lesson was that it was “okay to have a family and be an artist.” To that, Holland and his wife are nearing sixty years of marriage. Together they have raised three children, and five grandchildren. Following his time at UC Berkley, Holland traveled to Santiago, Chile, as a Fulbright Grant recipient. While Holland and his wife were in Chile, Holland sent several unanswered letters to which Park’s wife wrote back saying, “By the time you get this letter David will be dead.” He had lung cancer and died at the age of 49. “He was a wonderful influence. He was a wonderful man, wonderful teacher,” Holland says of Park.

Early in his career Holland was labeled as one of the “funky” artists coming out of San Francisco exemplified by another artist in the Bivins’ roster, William T. Wiley. Holland’s work and the work of other Funk Art artists are linear but differ.

Although his early work was traditional oil on canvas, it was when Holland began to work with aluminum during his early years teaching at UCLA in Los Angeles that he really achieved critical acclaim. In the 70’s Holland began using materials that were light and strong but did not require a frame. Using fiberglass and aluminum, making pieces of color, which hang on the wall like a stiff tapestry, the thin edges allow Holland’s paintings to become a part of the space occupied. “I like the work to be seamless with the wall, for the planes to be equal” explains Holland.



Vertical Berkeley, 1970, epoxy on fiberglass, 48 x 96 in.



Pope Creek #30, 2001, epoxy on aluminum, 38 x 50 x 14 in.

Using simple materials and a unique approach combining paint and sculpture, he cuts thin sheets of aluminum or fiberglass, using the same sheers for decades, to build either a painting or freestanding form. He hand rivets the cut pieces to a single sheet and then, after applying a white base coat, he uses epoxy paint to achieve the effects of depth, light, reflection and shadow. He works alone, without assistance, in his downtown Berkeley studio, as well as in his country studio. Holland considers himself a traditionalist stating, “I can’t stand machines, and there’s no character to it. Put it in anybody’s hands it’ll do the same thing.”



Spillway, 2015, epoxy on aluminum, 98 x 30 x 24

Holland considers the landscape and his attachment to the natural world to be the basis and constant inspiration for his long career of over 50 years as a California painter. Rather than copying nature, Holland captures the emotion and movement of nature. In *Birds and Water* he turns his focus to magpies, foxtails, waterfalls, and spillways.

Holland frequently speaks about his work and his career to university classes, museum groups and arts clubs, collectors of contemporary art, art students and arts faculty. He also opens his studio to students, museum groups and collectors for visits and discussions upon request. On asked what advice he gives to his students he says, “I would always say to them, particularly graduate students from Yale, was ‘don’t surround your paintings with words.’ It makes no sense because your painting is going to go someplace else and you’re not going to be there to explain it. I’d encourage them to go into themselves and bring something you’ve never seen before. Make it personal and make sure it’s yours, but don’t be afraid of influences.”



Magpie, 2016, epoxy on aluminum, 48 x 48 in.



Pope Creek #31, 2001, epoxy on aluminum, 34 x 26 in.

Birds and Water marks Holland’s third show in Dallas. He states that, “Texas has been a lot of fun. I’m old enough now that a lot of San Francisco galleries say, ‘Oh, is he still alive, is he still producing?’ So, Texas has been kind of a rebirth.” Dallas is better for it.

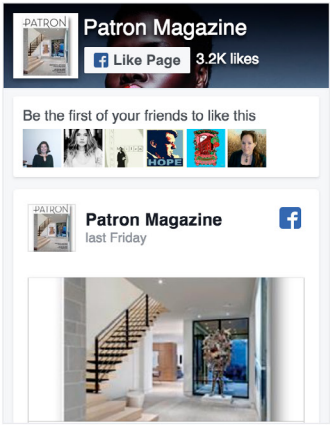
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