

HYPERALLERGIC

"How Berkeley's Countercultural Movement Shaped Artist David Huffman"

By Emily Wilson

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David Huffman, "Cosmic Pyramid" (2021), foil, wood, African textiles, video projection with sound, ceramic dish, organic egg, 10 x 12 x 12 feet (photo by Felix Quintana)

***Afro Hippie* examines Huffman's time at Berkeley and how it continues to influence him today.**

BERKELEY, Calif. — Artist [David Huffman](#) grew up in Berkeley, California in the 1960s and '70s, and the countercultural ideas all around him influenced his work. In his solo show at the [Berkeley Art Center](#), *Afro Hippie*, he examines that experience.

Huffman's mother, Dolores Davis, an activist and artist, was involved with the [Black Panther Party](#). A replica of her design of the Free Huey flag (for Huey Newton, who co-founded the party with Bobby Seale) hangs on a wall of the show, and a photo shows Huffman and his brothers as little boys with Seale.

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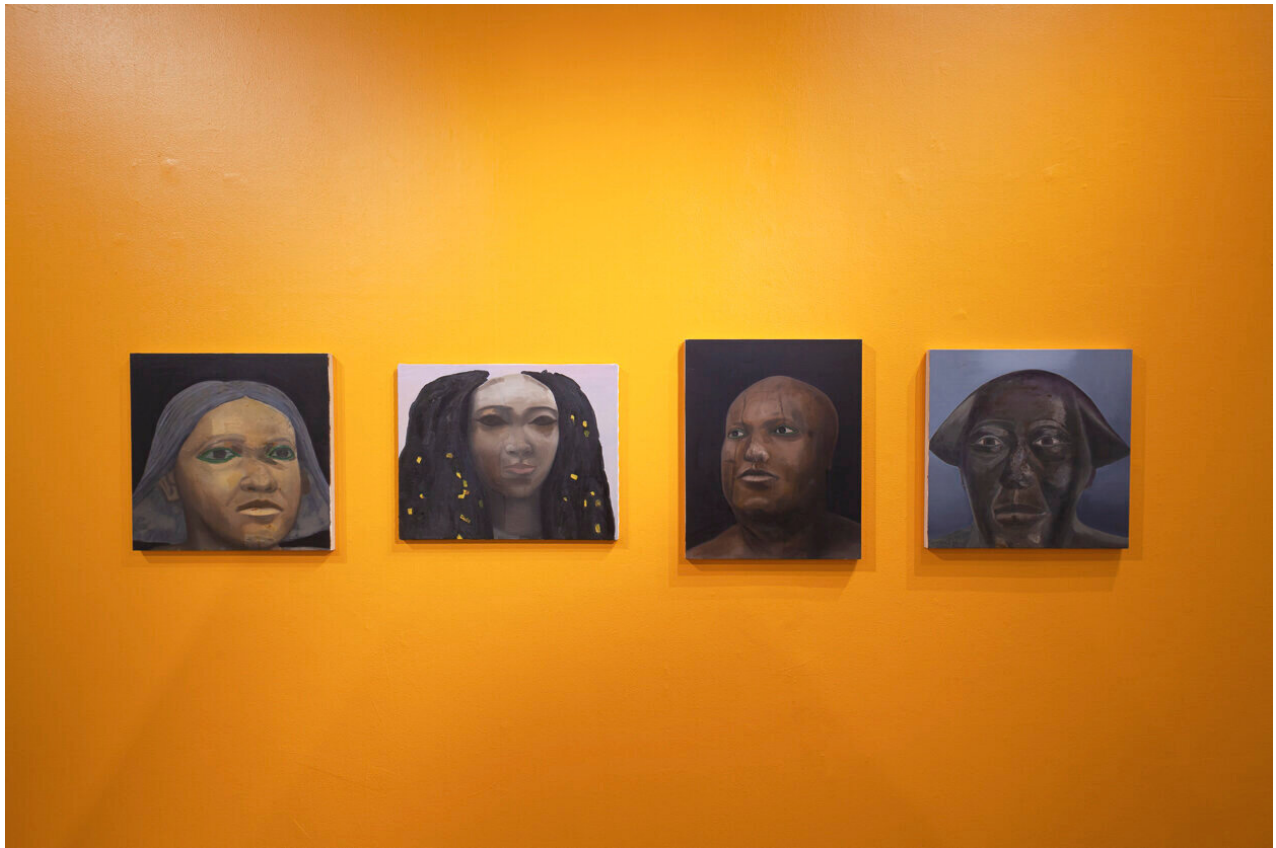
Dolores Davis, "Free Huey" (1968/2021), pigment print on canvas, 84 x 94 inches (printed by Local Language, NFS)

Davis was also a spiritualist who believed in pyramid power. *Afro Hippie* has a 10-foot-tall pyramid covered in tin foil, like one in the living room of Huffman's childhood home. As in his mother's house, there's a raw egg inside, meant to test the pyramid's energies. Along with this "Cosmic Pyramid" (2021), there are five small, colorful acrylics of pyramid silhouettes hanging on the wall.

Some of the art on display has never been seen before, like the four figurative *Psychic Portraits* (2008-9), which the artist says come from his interest in early African sculptures that have worn away with age.

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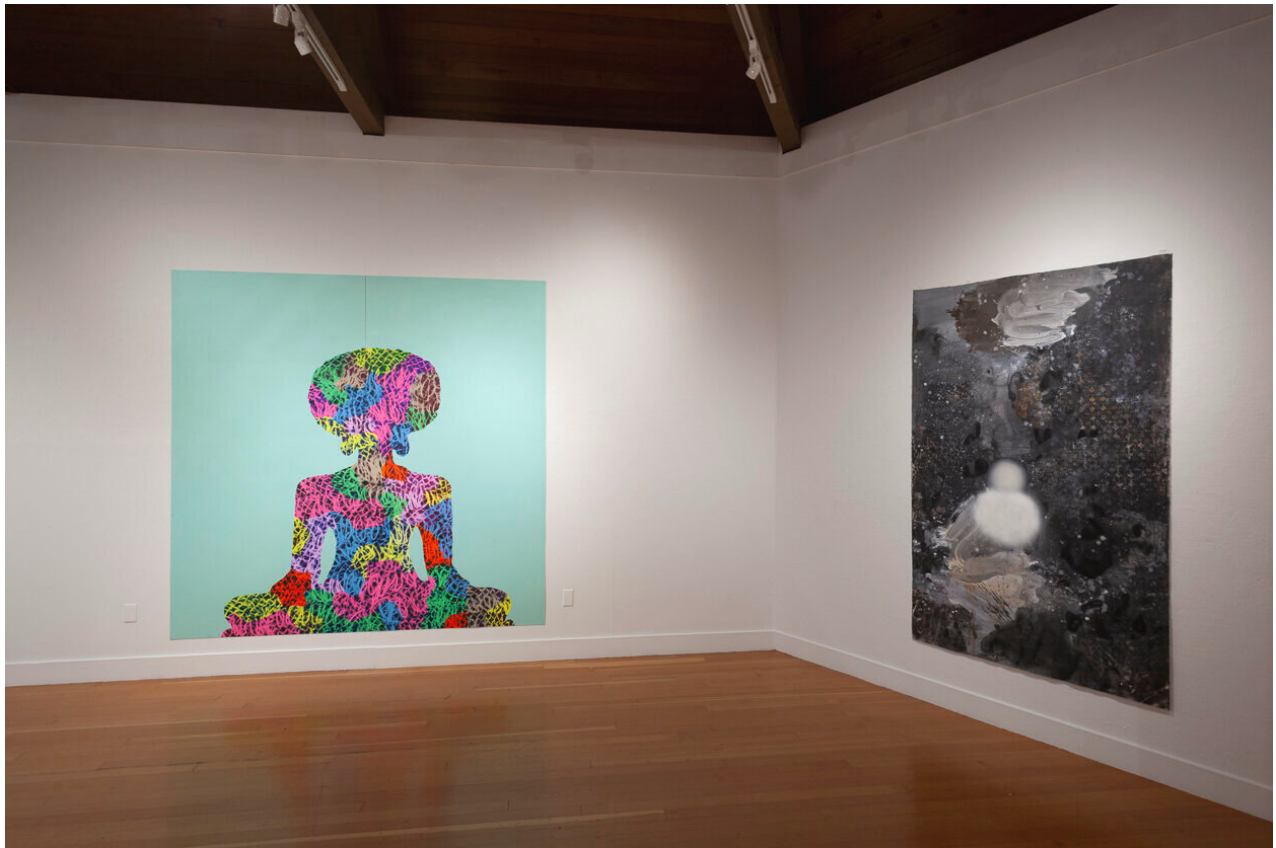
"I basically painted them to the point of being a person, and once that happened, I just stopped," he said. "You get this hybrid thing of the materiality of the sculpture, whether it be wood or stone, and this kind of flesh-like being."

Huffman collaborated with the Berkeley Art Center in organizing the show, and he described it as "the inside of a lab," showing where many of his ideas come from. The show has mementos and snapshots from his childhood, geometrical paintings, and abstractions, such as ones where he has put down basketball nets and spray painted over them to create a pattern.

These stenciled basketball nets make up a figure sitting cross legged with an Afro in "Cosmic Soul Buddha," (2021) and they're also part of "This Season's People," (2021), which features several sphinxes (modeled on his mother's profile), bits of African fabric, glitter, and spray paint.

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Huffman calls these paintings, which he's been doing the last couple of years, his "Social Abstraction" series and says they are in conversation with the history of abstract painting, but with social content. They came out of his going to Berkeley's [Provo Park](#) in the '60s and '70s to see art shows and music, and people from the Jefferson Airplane and Santana might show up along with the Panthers.

"It was a real kind of hippie fest," he said about Provo Park events. "And it always struck me as an interesting space where so many cultures and ideas came together rather well."

[David Huffman: Afro Hippie](#) continues at the Berkeley Art Center (1275 Walnut Street, Berkeley, CA) through October 16. The exhibition was curated through a collaboration with the artist and the Berkeley Art Center.

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