In the late eighties, I had the privilege of encountering the captivating work of Lonnie Holley for the first time. It was a modest sculpture, composed of wire seemingly sprouting from a concrete block, delicately entwined with roots or bones and tethered together with either string or more wire. While my recollection of the precise materials used may be somewhat hazy, the essence of the artwork remains vivid in my memory. This artwork, with its simple yet elegantly composed fragments, conveyed profound themes of burden and resistance, kinship and transcendence. Leaving the gallery that day, I knew that I had witnessed the creations of an artist of immense integrity and talent. Thus, it is with great pleasure that I witness Lonnie Holley being honored by Skowhegan.

Praise the hands of Lonnie Holley!

His left hand is embellished with rings and bracelets of shells, beads, and thread, twined together. His right hand remains undressed and bare, but powerful none the less. Together, his hands speak to us, in constant motion as if to sculpt his words as they fill both space and time. His hands can also listen, as he holds his found objects, they hear the story of past histories and a desire for a more just and equitable future.

It was the act of carving a tombstone for his nieces, who tragically perished in a fire, that first ignited Holley's artistic calling. With a blade in hand, he chiseled a memorial as an aesthetic offering to another world—one that transcends the commonplace and its persistent suffering and oppression.

One can argue that his work is aspirational, Lonnie is an artist born from both the joy and the trauma of his childhood experiences. As a boy playing in the ditches and creeks of Birmingham, Alabama, he would collect bits of detritus that caught his eye. On days when he would accompany his mother to the landfill, where she would sift through the refuse to find recyclable metals to redeem for cash, he would observe and see beauty in the rubbish. Reclamation as resurrection.

Praise the heart of Lonnie Holley!

He calls himself an investigator, with a curiosity of all things, but he is also an instigator, imbuing in his viewers the desire to be curious, to ask “why”, “how”, and “when.” It is an art of guided possibility. Conjuring the light, showing us the way.

Holley once expressed, "I am like a pot of gumbo, and I keep stirring myself where I won't burn." And into that pot he has brewed up a rich stew of music, poetry, performance, and film. Through sonic improvisation and transcendent musical talents, Holley music heals our spirit and moves our body beyond time and space. His remarkable film debut, "I Snuck off the Slaveship," submerges viewers in a misty realm where past, present, and future coalesce, blurring the lines between reality and dreams.

Lonnie Holley's artistic journey has been nothing short of remarkable. Hisprofound message urges us to "get out of the mystical, beyond the realm of Hoodoo and Voodoo and into the realm of 'you do' and 'I do.'