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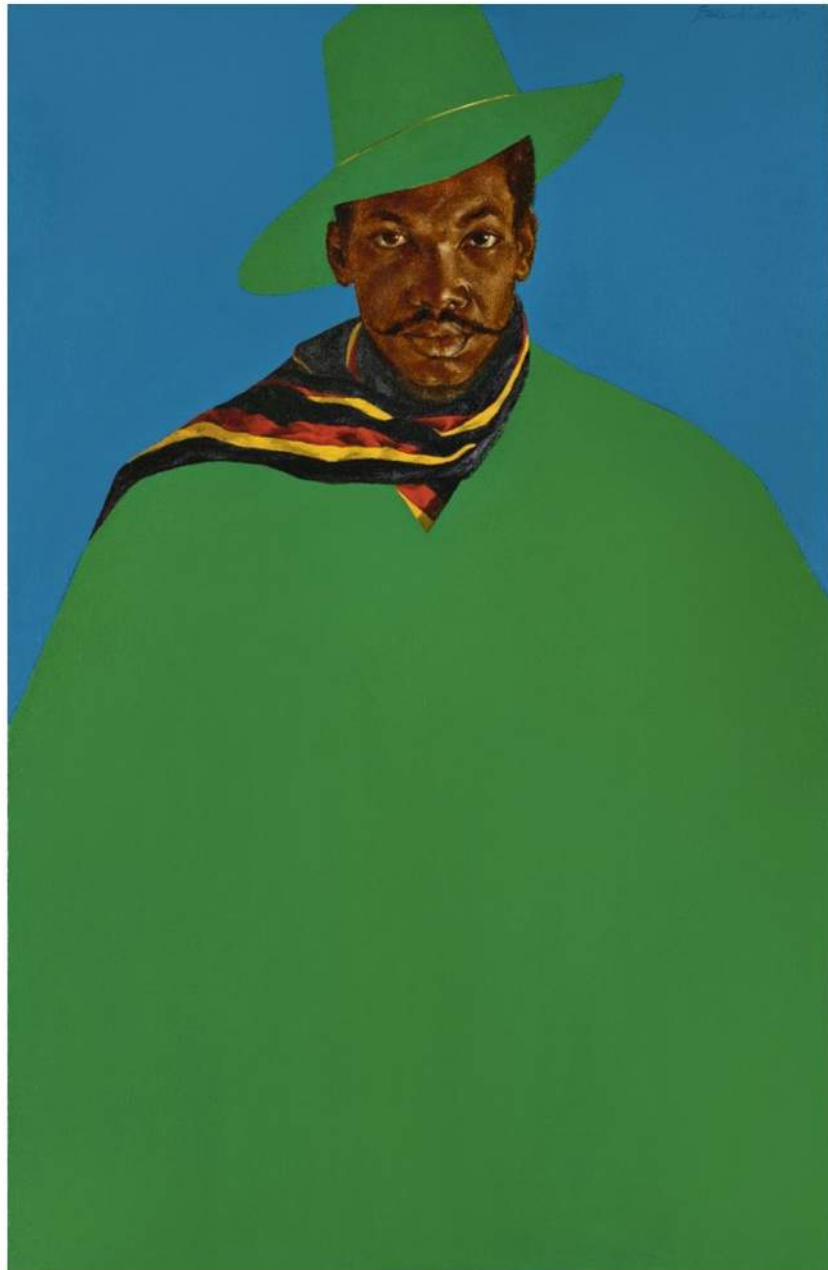
The Style & Substance of Barkley Hendricks's Revolutionary Portraiture

BY SOTHEBY'S | NOV 1, 2018

One of the most influential artists to have emerged in the late 20th century, Barkley L. Hendricks revolutionized portrait painting with his postmodern depictions of cool, stylish and self-aware black subjects. Two paintings by the artist come to auction at Sotheby's this autumn. His masterwork North Philly Niggah (William Corbett), 1975, will highlight Sotheby's Contemporary Art Evening Sale (14 November, New York). The following day, Sir Nelson. Solid!, 1970, will star in Sotheby's Contemporary Day Sale (15 November).

Created mostly between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, Barkley L. Hendricks's vivid, precise images of everyday black Americans, depicted in stylish, colorful attire, liberated the black body from a white-centered gaze and imbued his subjects with a degree of regality, autonomy and self-assertiveness unprecedented in Western art history. These decidedly cool paintings channeled such disparate artistic references as Dutch Golden Age portraiture, Pop art and Color Field painting to create an aesthetic utterly unique to Hendricks. Created five years apart, Sir Nelson. Solid! from 1970 and North Philly Niggah (William Corbett) from 1975 embody both the central and enduring themes in Hendricks oeuvre as well as illustrate important developments in his style.

Overflowing with rich color relationships and inventive stylistic variations, Sir Nelson. Solid! was made in advance of Hendricks first significant gallery show at Kenmore Galleries. The captivating portrait attests to Hendricks's dexterity in rendering the nuances of light reflecting on skin, fabric and metal – as well as the artist's playful fluency with art historical references. While traveling in Europe in the mid-1960s, Hendricks had found himself at once awe-struck by museums filled with Old Master portraits by the likes of Rembrandt and Velázquez, while simultaneously dismayed by the absence of images of or by people of color. The experience prompted the artist to turn his gaze to the black people he grew up with and create portraits imbued with the elevated dignity, vulnerability and immediacy these subjects had long been denied. Sir Nelson. Solid! integrates Hendricks's interest in such art historical precedents into an abstract framework that reflects his time and place in history and contemporaneous developments in the art world.



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, *SIR NELSON, SOLIDI*, 1970, ESTIMATE \$500,000-700,000 IN SOTHEBY'S CONTEMPORARY ART DAY AUCTION (15 NOVEMBER, NEW YORK).

Separated roughly into two sections, the painting is composed of a blue background and a forest green cloak and hat, both rendered completely flat. These passages of pure color are reminiscent of the works of Color Field painters such as Ellsworth Kelly and Morris Louis who were meeting with success at the time. Though Abstraction was the artistic trend of the era, Hendricks stayed true to his portraiture though such flattened fields of color were his nod to the developments within the greater art world. The subject, as well as his accessories, are so fully delineated that they appear lifelike, their realism standing in stark contrast to the surrounding planes of tone. Despite the contradictions in the two styles, the work feels indisputably finished, a heady concoction of uniformity and dimensionality, solid shapes and open forms. The artist's mastery of light takes his subject beyond the border of the canvas, introducing a sense of liveliness. Sir Nelson's confident stare is delineated in luminous reflected arcs and though Hendricks does not reveal his subject's identity beyond the title of the work, he has captured him so thoroughly, in appearance and energy, that he is unmistakable.



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, NORTH PHILLY NIGGAH (WILLIAM CORBETT), 1975. ESTIMATE \$1,200,000–1,800,000 IN SOTHEBY'S CONTEMPORARY ART EVENING SALE (14 NOVEMBER, NEW YORK).

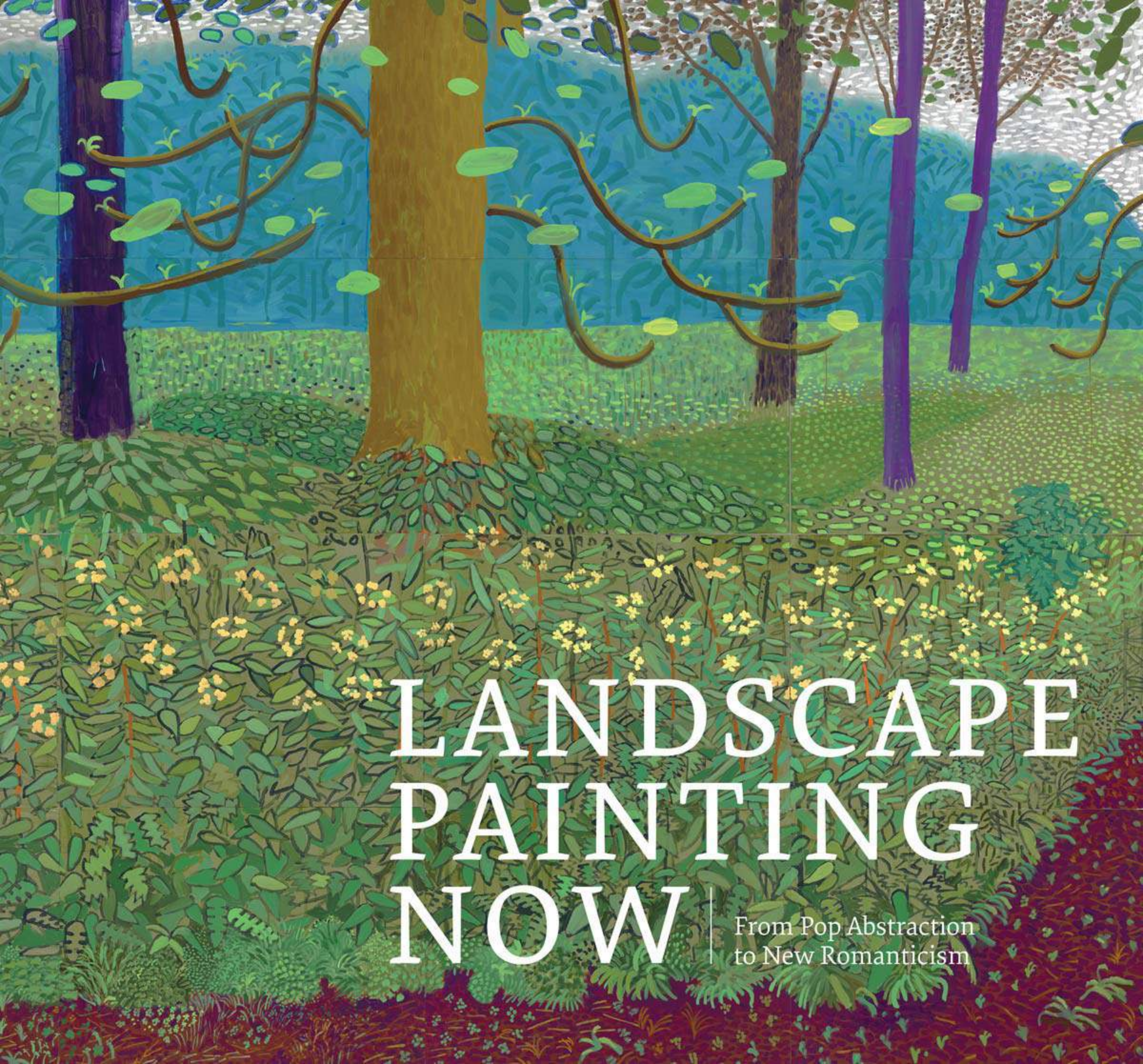
Created five years after *Sir Nelson. Solid!*, *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)* from 1975 embodies the height of his poetic postmodern practice. In this rare large-format portrait, Hendricks has dressed up his neighborhood companion, William Corbett, in a fur-trimmed camel coat. Corbett appears statuesque, exaggeratedly lengthened and emanating subtly from the monochromatic background; he stares at the viewer with a bold yet unassuming gaze. The painting's lush color palette, inextricably linked to the subject's fashionable attire, is dominated by tonal variations in peach and punctuated by the magenta cotton shirt and Corbett's own radiant brown skin. The degrees of color underscore Hendricks's elevated sensitivity to color's abilities to induce moods and emotions in the viewer.

Rendered in a photorealist style derived from tightly rendered brushstrokes, the canvas possesses a velvety smoothness that cleverly mirrors the textured furred lapels and the shimmering folds on the subject's elegant overcoat. These vivid stylistic attributes act to reinvigorate the Victorian legacy of dandyism with a relevant, contemporary spirit, thus expanding and reimagining the possibilities of black male expression.

In its evocative depiction of identity, *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)* is testament to Hendrick's nuanced handling of the culturally complex black body. Curator Thelma Golden included the painting prominently in her seminal 1994 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *The Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*. Of his practice, Golden remarked that Hendricks's portraits are "period pieces that represent a hybrid of black cultural consciousness and contemporary art practice."¹ *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)* remained in Hendricks's personal collection until 2008, when it was exhibited at his first solo retrospective, *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, curated by Trevor Schoonmaker at the Nasher Museum of Art.

Portraits such as *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)* and *Sir Nelson. Solid!* intimate cultural artifacts; personal visual documentations that reflect a broader transformation of black subjectivity during the post-Civil Rights decades. At once aesthetically captivating and socially aware, Hendricks's paintings influenced a new generation of noteworthy artists to pursue similar themes, among them Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and Rashid Johnson. The artist's dexterous manipulation of paint, evinced by the dazzling complexity of such portraits, establishes the notion that beauty, although culturally specific, possesses universality.

1. Thelma Golden quoted in: Genevieve Hyacinthe, "Love is the Message: Barkley Hendricks's MFSB Portrait Aesthetics," *Open Cultural Studies*, 2017, p. 607



LANDSCAPE PAINTING NOW

From Pop Abstraction
to New Romanticism

Barkley L. Hendricks

BORN 1945, PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA. DIED 2017, NEW LONDON, CT, USA

Barkley L. Hendricks is best known for his funky full-length portraits of black Americans from the 1960s and '70s; however, he started painting landscapes well before his figures, continued to do so throughout his five-decade career, and wanted them to be equally recognized. Starting in 1983, Hendricks would paint *en plein air* when he visited Jamaica during the winter months, often taking solace in its unspoiled nature. He favored the immediacy of time and place when he would finish a painting in one day versus the several months it would take him to complete his portraits. The round and oval-shaped canvases in thick, gilded frames hark back to Renaissance tondi featuring Saints by Luca della Robbia, Sandro Botticelli, and Michelangelo. As a result, each work resembles an elaborate window or a porthole looking out to a spiritual landscape.

While in Jamaica, rather than paint a tropical paradise filled with palm trees, Hendricks gravitated toward “marl holes,” or quarries of marlstone, because he admired their changing sculptural quality as time passed. He could paint them only on holidays, when the workers were off, which he said also gave him a “cathedral attitude.” In *My Back to the Bulldozer* (2008), Hendricks depicts a central cliff that appears to have veins. The towering size and central position lend it an imposing sanctity. In *New Year's Marl Hole* (2007), Hendricks paints from the hole looking up, almost as if into a convex mirror with an ever-changing horizon line. The clouds on the curved upper edge frame the clear blue sky, suggesting hope for the new year ahead.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

My Back to the Bulldozer, 2008. Oil on linen, 22 x 22 inches (55.9 x 55.9 cm)

Black River from the Elgin Road View, 2005. Oil on linen, 16 ½ x 28 inches (41.9 x 71.1 cm)

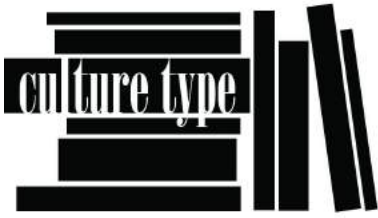
Lyrical View from the Villa, 2005. Oil on canvas, 12 x 21 inches (30.5 x 53.3 cm)

View from behind the School, 2000. Oil on canvas, 22 x 22 inches (55.9 x 55.9 cm)

New Year's Marl Hole, 2007. Oil on linen, 18 ¾ x 26 ½ inches (47.6 x 67.3 cm)

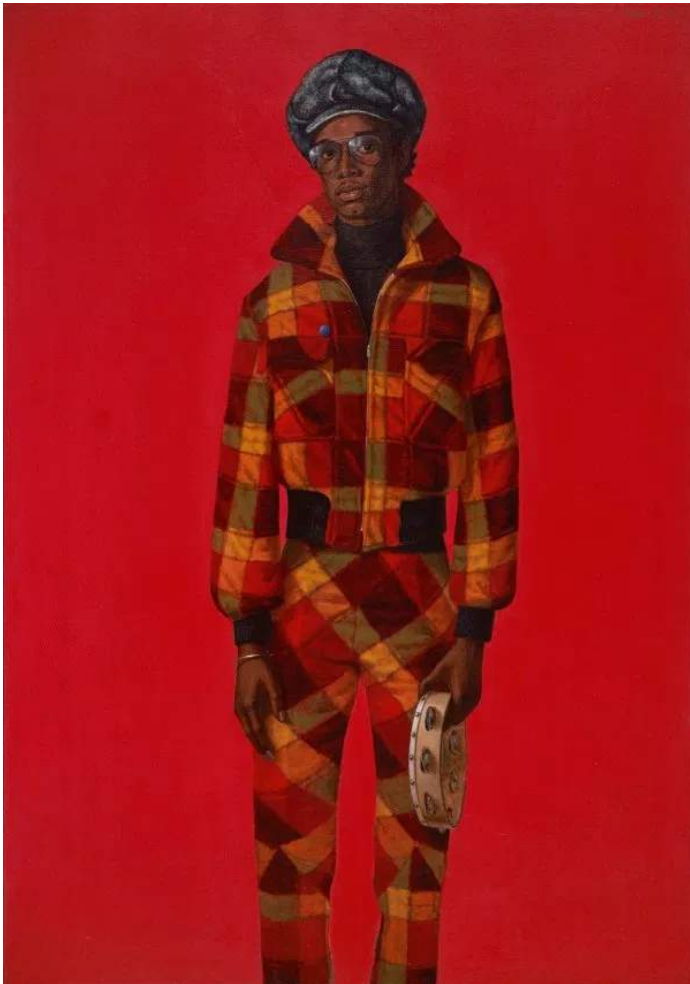
Cold Day on the Mountain, 2006. Oil on canvas, 17 ½ x 27 ¾ inches (44.5 x 70.5 cm)





Backstory: Art Collector Kenneth Montague on Acquiring ‘Blood (Donald Formey),’ the 1975 Painting by Barkley L. Hendricks

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Feb 3, 2019 • 4:28 pm



“Blood (Donald Formey),” 1975 by Barkley L. Hendricks

“I’m most concerned about Barkley’s legacy now that he’s gone. I want more and more people to understand what all the hoopla’s about. He was a master painter and this is one of his greatest works.”
— Collector Kenneth Montague

IF YOU VISIT the Brooklyn Museum's website looking for the "[Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power](#)" exhibition, a striking red-on-red portrait greets you. "Blood (Donald Formey)" by **Barkley L. Hendricks** (1945-2017) features a confidently cool subject in a pair of harlequin-checked pants with a coordinating bomber-style jacket. The artist painted his red outfit against a red background. Hendricks called such works his "limited-palette" paintings.

"Blood" (1975) belongs to Dr. Kenneth Montague. When he purchased the painting in January 2008, he didn't take physical possession of it for more than two years. After the Toronto dentist bought the painting, it was shipped directly from the artist's Connecticut studio to the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University where it was included in "[Barkley Hendricks: Birth of the Cool](#)," the landmark traveling survey organized by Trevor Schoonmaker that brought renewed attention to the artist's powerful portraits.

The touring exhibition finally concluded in 2010 and Montague hung the portrait on a prominent wall in his loft. Nearly a decade later, when the Brooklyn Museum requested the painting for "Soul of a Nation," he was hesitant about letting it go again, but embraced the opportunity to share it with the public in the high-profile show. The historic exhibition opened last September with "Blood" displayed alongside two other paintings by Hendricks — "What's Going On" (1974) and "Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait)" (1977).

Montague marveled at seeing "Blood" in the acclaimed show among works by more than 60 of the most critically recognized African American artists active between 1963 and 1983. He was particularly thrilled that "Blood" was used as the signature image for the exhibition, promoting the show on banners outside the Brooklyn Museum, a CD produced to accompany the exhibition, on the institution's website, and elsewhere.

Prior to purchasing "Blood," Montague focused on photography, mostly collecting works by black Canadian, West African, and African American photographers. He says acquiring the Hendricks portrait transformed his approach to collecting. He continues to buy photography primarily, but his collection also includes other mediums now, most notably paintings by Jordan Casteel, Jennifer Packer, Henry Taylor, and "Any Number of Pre-occupations," a large-scale portrait by British painter Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Montague provided an oral history of sorts about "Blood." The collector spoke with Culture Type about his first encounter with the work, how acquiring the painting has broadened his experiences in the art world, and a family connection with Hendricks that goes back generations.

Kenneth Montague established [the Wedge Collection](#) in 1997. An active enterprise, he's assembled more than 400 works, curated exhibitions, and pursued collaborative projects with museums and arts institutions. Shown, Montague in his Toronto dental office waiting room, with photographs by Jamel Shabazz (c. 1980-89). | Photo courtesy Kenneth Montague

First Impressions

CULTURE TYPE: Tell me about when you first saw the painting, "Blood (Donald Formey)." It was in 2005 in the "Back to Black" exhibition in London, right?

KENNETH MONTAGUE: Yes. I saw, I think, an ad in Timeout London. I was on a trip and I decided to pop in and I ended up missing a plane because I had to go back the next day to take it in for another two or three hours. It was one those pivotal moments. Young people would use hashtag "goals" now. There were three Barkley paintings in that show. I'd never heard of the artist and I just fell in love with the painting, "Blood," that was featured in a room with two other Barkleys. They were all just gems. They were this monochromatic kind of vibe. There was a red-on-red, this painting "Blood," and it immediately spoke to me.

Editor's Note: "[Back to Black: Art, Cinema and the Racial Imaginary](#)" at Whitechapel Gallery featured works by 40 artists and was a major component of Africa 05, a season of events across Britain dedicated to African arts. Co-curated by David A. Bailey (UK), Richard J. Powell (USA) and Petrine Archer-Straw (Jamaica), the exhibition explored the Black Arts Movement in the United States, Britain and Jamaica in the



1960s and 70s. Three works by Barkley L. Hendricks were included: "Blood (Donald Formey)" (1975), "Lawdy Mama" (1969), and "Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris" (1972).

I had been waiting for a show like "Back to Black" being Canadian born with parents of Jamaican descent. I had the Caribbean background, but I was born and grew up in Windsor, Ontario, which is the southernmost Canadian city and right across the river from Detroit, Michigan. I had this tri-cultural kind of upbringing. I was born in the 60s and so the 60s, 70s, 80s are my era. A show like "Back to Black," or "Soul of a Nation" for that matter, directly speaks to me.

In 2005, I was almost exclusively a photography collector. I already had works from West African photographers like Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé in my collection. I had works from Harlem Renaissance masters like Gordon Parks and [James] Van Der Zee. I had African Canadian artists in the collection and that has become a big part. I'm probably the person with the largest collection of African Canadian art at this point.

I never thought of acquiring the painting ("Blood") because I wasn't buying anything but photography. I just thought, my gosh, it's already in a show at Whitechapel. I thought it was a famous African American artist. I got the postcard in the gift shop that had the painting on it and I put it on my refrigerator in my condo in Toronto and I've been living with this image. I started reading Richard Powell and I met David Bailey because I met the people at Autograph. It was a really thrilling time. I was going to London often. I saw work from Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, and other artists that were coming up.

I had the Caribbean background, but I was born and grew up in Windsor, Ontario, which is the southernmost Canadian city and right across the river from Detroit, Michigan. I had this tri-cultural kind of upbringing. I was born in the 60s and so the 60s, 70s, 80s are my era. A show like "Back to Black," or "Soul of a Nation" for that matter, directly speaks to me.

A couple of years went by. What changed and made you think about the painting as a potential purchase?

This painting, "Blood" by Barkley Hendricks was burned in my brain and two years later, two summers later, I was in Venice for that famous (2007) Venice Biennale with El Anatsui's work coming out to the world and Malick Sidibe was the first black artist to win the Golden Lion. I was there with Thelma Golden and a group from the Studio Museum. It was my first Venice Biennale. At the Palazzo Grassi, I was introduced to Trevor Schoonmaker and Teka Selman by Thelma Golden and we just became fast friends from that moment. I'd actually met Teka Selman before, his wife, maybe two or three years before in a booth at Sikkema Jenkins at one of the art fairs because she was representing Kara Walker there.

Trevor, it turns out, is the guy who did "The Black President" (the [2003 exhibition](#) about the art and legacy of Nigerian Afrobeat founder Fela Anikulapo-Kuti presented at the New Museum in New York City). It was amazing to meet them. We sat down and had something to eat at the café in the museum and [he said], "What kind of art are you into? What are you collecting? And I told him about my Wedge project, you know, emerging black Canadian artists and doing the sort of international work and curatorial work. And I kind of just threw it out to them. "Gee, what I've really... the artist that's burned in my brain is this, have you heard of this Barkley Hendricks? I saw this great work in 'Back to Black' a couple of summers ago."

By then, they were both laughing and kind of falling off the chairs, Trevor saying that this is an artist who I love and I'm going to be producing his first career retrospective. It's going to be touring around America. This show's going to be opening next year, like February of 2008. Teka was like, we know Barkley and Susan, his wife. They've become friends of ours. If you are interested in that painting, I think you could probably acquire it. We could introduce you to the artist.

I'd almost fell off my chair, because I thought it was so out of my element. I immediately resisted. I told them, "Yeah well, I'd love that. But I'm really only primarily collecting photography and it would be a big jump for me." As you can imagine, the price was high for me as the dentist from Toronto, but it was nothing like what the price would be today. But still, it was a big jump for me at that time to consider.



Collector Kenneth Montague (in foreground) with, from left, Trevor Schoonmaker, now deputy director of curatorial affairs and curator of contemporary art at the Nasher Museum of Art; the collector's father Spurgeon Montague; and artist Barkley L. Hendricks, in front of work by Dawit L. Petros at the 2012 exhibition ["Becoming: Photographs From the Wedge Collection"](#) at the Nasher Museum of Art. | Photo courtesy Kenneth Montague

Meeting Barkley

When did you finally meet Barkley Hendricks and talk to him about the painting?

I started a dialogue with Trevor and Teka and ultimately was introduced to Barkley and Susan by phone. We didn't really talk on the phone until Christmastime of 2007. Just before maybe December 2007 was when I met the artist by phone. It turns out that Barkley and Susan were leaving the next day to go to Jamaica. They had a vacation home there for 35 years. He's been living in a place that they owned in Jamaica that was a stone's throw from the place that my father was born in a little town called Southfield in the south coast of Jamaica. When I say stone's throw, I could throw a stone. I don't have to be Tom Brady to throw from where that was. Preposterous coincidence.

When did you actually buy the painting?

That's a tough one. I would say it was probably formally bought, as in the transaction, would have been in January of 2008, formally. You know, asking about it and getting it together, making the deals for it. Talking to the artist, talking about it on the phone. Yes, we'd like you to have it. That was December 2007.

After working out the transaction essentially by phone, when did you and the artist first meet in person?

I bought the painting after talking to him in December. We met at the opening of "Birth of the Cool" (at the Nasher Museum), two months later in 2008. He ("Donald Formey") never came into my possession for two years while it toured around the four stops (beyond the Nasher). He came to me finally in Toronto in 2010.

Becoming 'Cool'

Did you see the painting in other venues during that time?

I went around and saw it like my baby that was on loan and had a lot of babysitters. I remember the pride of place Thelma gave it at the top of the stairs in her two-floor space (at the Studio Museum in Harlem). I remember meeting all those people who were interested in the work and pictures were taken in all these spots. One of the great stops L.A. was fun. Houston was great because my father was there. But PAFA, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where Barkley started as a student, that was a very special opening and I remember hanging out with Donald Odita who teaches at Tyler and became close friends after that opening.

That must of have been some experience. Seeing your first major painting presented all over the United States.

It became a personal journey, getting to know Barkley and Susan, Trevor and Teka. We've become great friends. It's fascinating to me that all of this came out of pretty much a chance meeting because I was on a tour. Nothing's by chance as you know. It's that I had a relationship with Thelma. They had a relationship with Thelma. Once again, she's the conductor of that. Then Trevor and Teka took the baton, passed it on and pulled me into Barkley's orbit.

The story of the painting is really the story of my entrée into the world of collecting in a much broader, bigger way. The painting enriched my life in numerous ways. First and foremost meeting the artist, his wife, meeting Trevor and Teka but also this greater story of watching the painting, that I felt like only I knew back in 2005 and have on my fridge, become this iconic thing.

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BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS (1945-2017), "View from Behind the School," 2000 (oil on linen). I Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Barkley L. Hendricks. © Barkley L. Hendricks, Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

The Jamaican Connection

"Birth of the Cool" also featured some landscapes by Hendricks. Those images depict Southfield. Tell me about your experiences with the artist in Jamaica.

It turns out their vacation spot is the little town, Southfield, that my father's from. I've also been vacationing in the summers there since I was a little boy. So we both knew this little town that's not a tourist spot in Jamaica, a beautiful little place. His portraits are mostly done in America, but his landscapes are all in Jamaica where he would spend his Christmases, leaving Connecticut College and going with Susan and just having some time of his own for a few weeks. He met my father. My father was an academic, retired teacher and he died last year. They became good friends. I have great photos of us on New Year's Eve in Jamaica only three years ago, last time we saw each other all together.

Just the one year we all celebrated in Jamaica. I feel like I'd seen him there before because we talk on the phone always at Christmastime while he was in Jamaica. And sometimes my auntie would be visiting. It was hilarious. My dad's late brother, an uncle and his wife still live in that house that is a stone's throw from his house. It was the Christmas and New Years of 2015 when my father, Barkley, Susan, we all finally were in Jamaica at the same time. We spent New Year's Eve together.

We have those pictures. That celebration at a big table enjoying Jamaican food and then a fantastic three or four days of going to each other's houses in Jamaica kind of filled in the blanks. Looking at his landscapes from Jamaica. Sitting on the roof of his home, which overlooked the roof of my auntie's home and the home that my father was born in and looking down this hill out to the ocean. I knew that view and my father knew the view when we saw the works that were touring in "Birth of the Cool."

“Looking at his landscapes from Jamaica, the view kind of sitting on the roof of his home, which overlooked the roof of my auntie’s home and the home that my father was born in and looking down this hill out to the ocean. I knew that view and my father knew the view when we saw the works that were touring in ‘Birth of the Cool.’”



Collector Kenneth Montague and artist Barkley L. Hendricks in front of *Blood* (1975) at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston in 2010. | Photo courtesy Kenneth Montague

Artistic Vision

Back in 2007, when you first got on the phone with Hendricks to talk about buying “Blood,” did he tell you about the painting? Why he painted it? Who his subject was?

Yeah, Donald Formey was a student of his when he was teaching art class, art school at Connecticut College. He was a student that then came around the studio and posed for him. I think it was over a series of months. Barkley was pretty meticulous, a slow painter that loved it the way you love fine wine. He would come back to it, you know, day after day or week to week. So it wasn’t a one off. The process is long and painstaking. This young student would pose and I believe he had a jacket that had that harlequin pattern on it, but Barkley took artistic license and doubled it, making it a pantsuit, adding the pants to it. He might’ve been wearing jeans or something. Then the props, holding the tambourine in his hands might have been Barkley’s idea, but the kid was wearing that cap.

What about the title of the painting? Did Hendricks tell you whether that was about the color of the painting or does it reference a slang term for black men or “brothers”?

Yeah, yeah. Both. Both things. I mean, I think it was, I’m not sure if he, I think I asked him, but I’m quite certain that his answer was both things. The literal obvious color red blood. The color, that monochromatic thing. That’s the obvious literal part. But it was more about, “Hey brother, hey blood,” which is a term that I actually grew up using too, growing up outside Detroit. Instead of saying, “Yo my brother,” I would say, “Hey blood.” It’s also a term of endearment between black men. It’s also a sacred word for Rastafarians in Jamaica. The blood is sacred for all of us that have African descent. We have a common blood. Cultural blood being a sacred element is something that really spoke to me, though the title of the work has the more obvious meaning—the color red and the use in African American parlance, you know, blood brother.

Does the painting speak to you on a personal level?

So much of the work that's mainly the portraiture in my Wedge Collection, like many collectors, it's really an exploration of self. I see a cooler, much cooler, imagined version of myself in that kid in 1975 (portrayed in "Blood"). I have that famous print by Dawoud Bey of the young kid in front of the Harlem theater with the sunglasses ("A Boy in Front of the Loews 125th Street Movie Theater Date," 1976). It seems like the same kid, you know? I've got pictures of myself at that age, not looking that cool, but wearing those sunglasses. Vanley Burke (the British Jamaican photographer) is in my collection, his picture of the kid with the British flag, the Union Jack on the bicycle in Handsworth Park ("Boy with Flag," 1970). These are iconic images and so much of that is a search for self, looking for of reflection of yourself in the contemporary art world.

For me going across the river on the weekends to Detroit when my dad was doing graduate work at Wayne State, my mother would take us to the DIA (the Detroit Institute of Arts). It was a mind blower. I got into art and when I could afford it as a dentist years later. I started wanting to have a longer relationship with the art that I was seeing in galleries.

Brooklyn Bound

When "Soul of a Nation" opened at the Tate, there were three paintings by Hendricks, but "Blood" wasn't included in London or Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. How did it end up being in the Brooklyn show?

I believe Ashley James, the curator at the Brooklyn Museum, she went to Prospect in New Orleans and saw the Barkley Hendricks room at the New Orleans museum that Trevor put together in that biennial, that triennial, and was blown away by "Blood." At the same moment, I think she had heard that the lender of the image that had been in use, I think it was on the cover of the "Soul of the Nation" British catalog. The Superman one. ("Icon for My Man Supermam (Superman never saved any black people—Bobby Seale," 1969.) I'm not sure, but the lender of that work, for whatever reason, wanted it back so they were looking to balance it out. They wanted another Barkley and she chose it. She saw "Blood" and was like, "Oh my God, who owns that one?"



From left, Installation view of "What's Going On," "Brilliantly Endowed (Self Portrait)," and "Blood (Donald Formey)," by Barkley L. Hendricks, "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," Brooklyn Museum (Sept. 14, 2018 -Feb. 03, 2019). I Photo by Jonathan Dorado, 2018

Editor's Note: I asked Brooklyn Museum curator Ashley James to weigh in. She told Culture Type via email the following about how "Blood" came to be included in the Brooklyn exhibition and why it was selected to

promote the show:

“Blood” was selected to appear in the Brooklyn show because another Barkley Hendricks painting could not travel to the venue, so I was looking for a replacement. In the fall of 2017, I just so happened to see “Blood” at Prospect New Orleans (4) which was curated by Trevor Schoonmaker, and was immediately taken with it and just knew it needed to be in the show. (And probably would have wanted to make space for it even if the former work did travel!)

Seeing it at Prospect wasn't a coincidence because Trevor also curated Barkley's significant “Birth of the Cool” show which really opened up Barkley's work to new (and even international) audiences, and Dr. Montague lent “Blood” for that show. So here you have two curators/collectors who have supported Hendricks's work for some time contributing to the show in their own ways. And perhaps to also further flesh out the networks of Hendricks's support, I believe Dr. Montague first saw the work in a show out of London on the Black Power period curated by David Bailey, Rick Powell, and Petrine Archer-Straw back in 2005. So all in all, “Blood” is a great reminder that the field is built through many curators, many shows, many collectors, and over time.

“‘Blood’ is a great reminder that the field is built through many curators, many shows, many collectors, and over time.” — Curator Ashley James

I got an email from her wondering if I'd be open to having it join the show and you know, it's a tough one because I'm protective of the work. But I also want as many people to experience the joy and the beauty of it. Also, ultimately, I'm most concerned about Barkley's legacy now that he's gone. I want more and more people to understand what all the hoopla's about. He was a master painter and this is one of his greatest works. So yeah, I was okay with it being in “Soul of a Nation.” It wasn't at the beginning. It was several months later after all the contracts had been signed and a few weeks before the show opened. It's like, “Hey, our graphics department wants to know if we could use it as a signature image.” And I was like, “Fine.”

Curator Ashley James: Many things drew me to it. This painting carries so much of what makes Hendricks's work particular and spectacular: his wonderful handling of people and their attendant personalities; his keen eye for style; his slick use of oil and acrylic paint to affect that pop of the figure; perhaps in particular I love what happens at the site where the red background of the painting meets the red in the figure's suit. For me it's a reminder that Hendricks was also [quite] interested in color theory, perception, opticality, all of these things we often discuss in the context of abstract art but is being worked out within the arena of portraiture.

There are many things to consider when choosing a promotional image. In this case, the image is strong and able to remain legible across various platforms. I also chose it for the reasons listed above: It calls forth many of the themes, questions of the show, like the tension between abstraction and figuration; black affirmational imagery, and so forth. It also engages style, which is also a thread to be followed in the show.

“I love what happens at the site where the red background of the painting meets the red in the figure's suit. For me it's a reminder that Hendricks was also [quite] interested in color theory, perception, opticality, all of these things we often discuss in the context of abstract art but is being worked out within the arena of portraiture.” — Curator Ashley James



Kenneth Montague outside the Brooklyn Museum in September 2018, in front of “Soul of a Nation” exhibition banners featuring Barkley L. Hendricks’s “Blood (Donald Formey)” 1975. | Photo courtesy Kenneth Montague

Pride of Place

From “Birth of the Cool” to “Soul of a Nation,” it sounds like you’ve had an incredible experience with this painting over the past decade.

It’s a great painting to see in this great show, “Soul of a Nation.” ...It’s all been a very happy kind of organic process. The painting, it’s gotten bigger than me and bigger than the Wedge collection. I’m happy to share it with the public and really feel in a lot of ways it’s emblematic of Barkley’s whole style. It’s all encapsulated in the one work. The music that he loves so much with the tambourine. Black style with that crazy confluence of color and pattern. It’s one of his most dramatic, monochromatic 70s paintings. This red-on-red. It’s an orangey red.

Also, of course, it is human scale. I hang it at home at a level maybe just a few inches off the ground. Very low so that it’s up to about the lower shin area where it cuts off in the painting. I hang it as if it continues down to shoes to the floor. It feels like you’re talking to Donald Formey, the way I hang it.

“It’s emblematic of Barkley’s whole style. It’s all encapsulated in the one work. The music that he loves so much with the tambourine. Black style with that crazy confluence of color and pattern. It’s one of his most dramatic, monochromatic 70s paintings.”

Where do you hang it in your home?

It has pride of place in an area that I think most people would put the mantle of a fireplace. It’s sort of like a big showcase area in my living room. It’s the most prominent place in a house that’s full of art. It’s got a dedicated

space. The loft was designed with the space where I knew the Barkley Hendricks painting was going to go. It's across from Calder's in my house (works by American artist Alexander Calder).

Any final thoughts about “Blood” being included in “Soul of a Nation”?

I was very proud because I know how much joy the painting has given my wife and I and our family and friends, you know, personally. So I knew that it was going to be a sensation in a sensational show. I really was thrilled. I also think that it's a very, very prescient very smart move on the Brooklyn Museum curator Ashley James's part because she knew that it was an image that would differentiate the show from London. It was not part of London or Crystal Bridges. It was a really good choice. It was pretty wonderful.

The whole journey's been very wonderful. It's been a thrilling process as a collector to see the life of a painting grow in the time that you own it. It's something that I hadn't experienced and hope to experience with other works in my collection. I'm really pushing African Canadian art. I think that our small black community in Canada has a lot of stories to tell, as well. **CT**

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

“Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power” is on view at the Brooklyn Museum through Feb. 3. The exhibition is traveling to The Broad (March 23–Sept. 1, 2019) in Los Angeles where “Blood (Donald Formey)” by Barkley L. Hendricks will be on view again.

TOP IMAGE: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS (American, 1945–2017), “Blood (Donald Formey),” 1975 (Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 50 1/2 inches / 182.9 x 128.3 cm). | Courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Montague, The Wedge Collection, Toronto. © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by Jonathan Dorado, Brooklyn Museum

BOOKSHELF

Edited by curators Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power” was published to accompany the exhibition. The catalog features images of works by Barkley L. Hendricks and more than 60 other artists, plus essays by the curators, explores major movements and moments from Spiral to FESTAC. The catalog for “Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool” documents the exhibition and the artist's practice. It features essay contributions from Trevor Schoonmaker, Richard Powell, and Franklin Sirmans, and an interview with Hendricks conducted by Thelma Golden. The volume also contains from by Hendricks and a chronology authored by the artist. The exhibition catalog for “Back to Black: Art, Cinema & the Racial Imaginary,” may also be of interest.

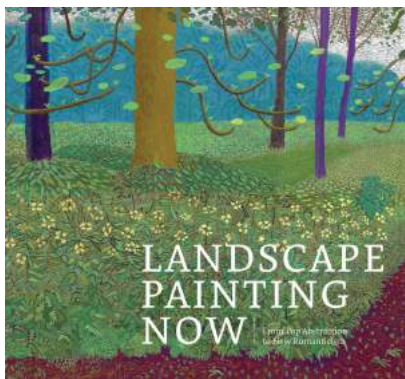


Collector Kenneth Montague in front of “Blood (Donald Formey)” 1975, displayed in his Toronto loft. | Photo courtesy Kenneth Montague

Why Landscape Painting Is Thriving in the 21st Century

Art critic Barry Schwabsky's new book presents a global survey of contemporary landscape painting.

Peter Malone



Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism, by Barry Schwabsky (DAP, April 2019)

Art critic Barry Schwabsky's new book, *Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism* (DAP), delivers a global and multi-generational perspective on what may be the most malleable of painting genres. Along with editor Todd Bradway and historians Robert R. Shane, Louise Sorensen, and Susan A. Van Scoy, Schwabsky sets out to update readers on what artists have been doing with the pliable clay of landscape painting since 1950. With a specific focus on paintings completed since 2000, a view unfolds of a genre that earned only sporadic attention from critics while its practitioners were busy

expanding, redefining, and generally complicating the form.

Three-hundred and sixty-eight pages beckon a leisurely read, spreading generous reproductions across six interpretive categories, each meant to expand on notions, suggested — unsurprisingly for a commentary on a wanderer's art form — in a rambling introductory essay, the gist of which is that abstraction's mid-century zenith marked, as Robert Rosenblum noted at the time, a revealing link between Abstract Expressionist painters like Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still and 19th century Romantics. This was to prove a link that only painters noticed.



Makiko Kudo, "Insomnia" (2010), oil on canvas, 71.62 x 89.37 inches, ©Makiko Kudo, Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery, photo by Ikuhiro Watanabe

By 1965, and for several decades afterward, conceptual, performance, installation and earth art dominated art criticism, while painters working outside recognized movements like Pop, Minimalism, New Image, Bad Painting (yes, that was once a thing), Neo-Geo, and Neo-Expressionism, were finding ways, as Schwabsky puts it, "to grapple with transformations both in the art of painting and in the conditions of life from which that art could emerge." In short, abstraction and

spontaneity remained fundamental to painting, even for landscape painters, which explains the wide variety in the book's roster of artists.

In attending to the sensibilities of art lovers who hold, as Schwabsky puts it, "a clichéd and outdated notion of what landscape painting is and isn't", his introductory essay follows a slender thread of historical indicators expanded upon in the book's groupings of artists into six categories, each explored in its own chapter. Though debatable, the categories bring an exuberance to the revelatory chaos the subject predictably generates. Each of the six groupings includes a dozen artists or more. The choice of who occupies each category is sometimes obvious, other times eccentric. As the author notes, there are quite a few artists that could occupy categories other than the one they were assigned.

To allay the fear many potential readers may entertain that the whole enterprise is a cynical touting of hot young things, I can report that the average age of the artists chosen for inclusion calculates to 60. Of the 82 painters included, Alex Katz and Lois Dodd are the oldest at 92, Matthew Wong the youngest at 35, a range indicating an admirable determination to peel back overlapping generational influences, while limiting the selected work, as the title word "now" suggests, to canvases completed in the new century.



Lois Dodd, "Winter Sunset, Blair Pond"
(2008), oil on linen, 48 x 52 inches
(Private Collection @Lois Dodd, courtesy
Alexandre Gallery, New York)

The first two categories are conventional. "Realism and Beyond" includes Lois Dodd, Rackstraw Downes, and April Gornik, among others. "Post-Pop Landscapes" relies on the color intensity favored by David Hockney, Yvonne Jacquette, and Matthew Wong. The third, "New Romanticism," concentrates on painting rooted in history, folk tradition and other subtexts, the signature artist being Anselm Kiefer. Of the remaining categories: "Constructed Realities," with Inka Essenhigh, Mark Tansey and Vincent Desiderio, offers the greatest variety of style and sensibility, while "Abstracted Topographies," with Julie Mehretu, Cecily Brown, and Ali Banisadr, emphasize the book's thesis regarding abstraction.

The sixth, "Complicated Vistas," is not only the least descriptive of the category titles, it is the most clearly aligned with current trends. Addressing political issues like pollution, factional distress and nature's presence in urban environments, it echoes themes that may be found in the Realism group if one looks closely. There is, for instance, a subtle environmental aspect in the work of Rackstraw Downes that goes largely unnoticed. Conversely, Liu Xiaodong, Noa Charuvi, and Li Dafang could have easily been placed in the Realism group. Their interchangeability hints at the genre's enduring breadth of perspective.

The author's inclusiveness is undeniable, yet it is because it is so inclusive that one feels the acute absence of artists like Elliott Green, Julian Hatton, Joyce Kozloff or Greg Lindquist, any of whom would have been more suitable candidates than Will Cotton or Barnaby Furnas, whose confectionary still lifes and gestural sweep



Barnaby Furnas, "Slanted 3" (2011), Dye-water dispersed pigment and acrylic on canvas, 224.2 x 177.8 cm (Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen. © Barnaby Furnas)

respectively seem a quirk too far in a landscape study. Seeking the criteria behind such incongruous choices brought my attention to this key paragraph:

"A Landscape painting is not necessarily a representation of a landscape, but rather something that, in being constructed out of pieces of representation, or possibly just echoes of former representations, kindles an experience of its own — one that, as those fragments of resemblance suggest, is somehow like an experience of nature."

Truer words were never spoken concerning contemporary visual art in general. Regarding landscape painting specifically, they introduce the book's roughest edge and consequently its most useful aspect. Readers will be left with the question: can landscape painting retain its distinction as a genre, or is it doomed to drift toward Jackson Pollock's "I am nature" paean to solipsism? For those invested in such

inquiry, I suggest post-it markers placed at the pages where they feel the author's inclusiveness led him adrift. For that participatory exercise alone, above and beyond the volume's intelligence and visual sumptuousness, I believe *Landscape Painting Now* could play a significant role in our conversations about contemporary painting and its meaning.



Barkley Hendricks, "New Year's Marl Hole" (2007), oil on linen canvas, 18.75 x 26.5 inches (© Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

[Landscape Painting Now: From Pop Abstraction to New Romanticism](#) by Barry Schwabsky is available from [Amazon](#) and other online booksellers.

Editors note 3/25: An original version of this review identified Alex Katz as 85 years old and Matthew Wong as 30. Katz is 92, and Wong is 35.

Art World

35 Stunning Museum Shows to See in New York Over the Holidays, From Renaissance Jewel Boxes to Heart-Thumping Surveys

Catch this fall's New York museum shows before they close.

Sarah Cascone & Caroline Goldstein, December 11, 2018

It's the most wonderful time of the year... to visit a museum! With central heating, cafes, book stores, *and* art, you can get a dose of culture while you buy holiday gifts—and keep every visiting family member occupied. Whether you're traveling to New York for the yuletide season, entertaining visitors from various generations of the family, or taking a break from the crowds (and cold), we've scoured the city for the best museum shows to see this holiday season.

"Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power" at the Brooklyn Museum

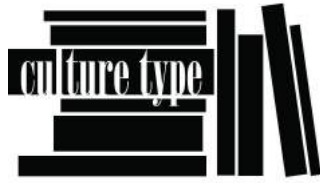
Through February 3, 2019



Barkley Hendricks, *Blood (Donald Formey)* (1975).

The internationally acclaimed exhibition bringing together more than 150 works by Black Americans, many of whom did not have their work acknowledged until long after they first emerged. The show covers the two decades when political and social debates roiled throughout the country, and the works reflect on that turbulence, while also showing moments of celebration and joy.

The Brooklyn Museum is located at 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn. General admission is \$16.



San Francisco Bound: Another Stop Added to ‘Soul of a Nation’ Tour, Exhibition Headed to de Young Museum This Fall

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Mar 28, 2019 • 5:58 am



“What’s Goin On” (1974) by Barkley L. Hendricks

A SECOND CALIFORNIA STOP has been added to the “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power” tour. The exhibition is headed to the [de Young Museum](#) in San Francisco, where it will open Nov. 9.

“Soul of a Nation” presents about 150 works by more than 60 black artists active between 1963-1983. The show is currently on view in Los Angeles at [The Broad](#) (March 23-Sept. 1, 2019). The de Young announced yesterday that it was adding the landmark exhibition to its fall schedule.

Organized by Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley at the [Tate Modern](#) in London, “Soul of a Nation” debuted in July 2017. The show spans a revolutionary period in American history and creativity during which artists responded to the unrest, change, and pride brought by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power era.

Featured artists include **Emma Amos, Benny Andrews, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Sam Gilliam, David Hammons, Barkley L. Hendricks, Lorraine O’Grady, Faith Ringgold,** and **Betye Saar**, along with collectives such as Spiral, which was co-founded by Bearden, Chicago-based AfriCOBRA, and Kamoinge, the photography group established in Harlem.

Initially, “Soul of a Nation” was scheduled to travel from London to two venues in the United States—[Crystal Bridges Museum](#) of American Art in Bentonville, Ark., and the [Brooklyn Museum](#). In August, the tour was extended when The Broad announced it was taking the show, bringing it to the West Coast for the first time.

A formidable contingent of Los Angeles artists appears in the show, figures such as Hammons, Saar, **Melvin Edwards, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy,** and **Timothy Washington**.

Plans to host the exhibition in San Francisco extend the tour schedule for a second time. The de Young said its presentation of “Soul of a Nation” will include an expanded selection of works by artists with connections to the San Francisco Bay area. Works by **Emory Douglas** are already included in the exhibition, with an entire section devoted to the graphic, political images he produced for the Oakland-based Black Panther Party’s newspaper.

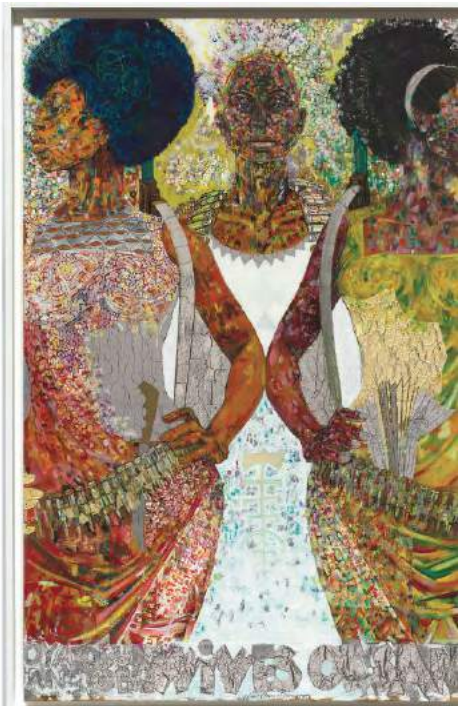
“The artists featured in ‘Soul of a Nation’ were on the front lines of creating social and political change,” Thomas P. Campbell, director and CEO of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, said in a statement. (The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco include the de Young in Golden Gate Park and the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park.)

“Their work changed the course of the art historical canon, and with this exhibition we continue to tell a truer, more holistic story of what American art is. The work is as relevant today as it was when created. It is my distinct honor to welcome this incredibly important exhibition to the de Young museum in San Francisco and introduce these artists to the next generation of changemakers.” **CT**

“Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power” will be on view at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, Nov. 9, 2019-March 8, 2020

TOP IMAGE: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, “What’s Goin On,” 1974 (oil, acrylic, and magna on cotton canvas, 65 3/4 x 83 3/4 in.). | © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist’s estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

F L A U N T



MARCH 19, 2019

SOUL OF A NATION: ART IN THE AGE OF BLACK POWER: 1963-1983 | BROAD MUSEUM

BY CHRISTOPHER ANDREW ARMSTRONG

After opening to near American audience at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas museum before relocating to the Brooklyn Museum in New York, *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963-1983* debuts at The Broad (<https://www.thebroad.org/soul-of-a-nation>) on March 23rd, which will give west coast dwellers their only opportunity to gaze upon the significant work created by Black artists over the span of two decades. Along with the exhibition's unveiling, the Broad will host a litany of events this weekend which will give viewers the chance to engross their minds by engaging in enriching conversations with filmmakers such as Ava DuVernay and other poets, artists, and scholars in the Black community.

Featuring ground-breaking work by influential minimalist and abstraction artists such as Noah Purifoy, Romare Bearden, and Barkley Hendricks, among many others, *Soul of a Nation* provides a rare glimpse into the face of art in America during a time period when the very basis of the idea was being radically shifted. Curated by Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley, the exhibition showcases pieces compiled from over 60 artists which artworks ranging from sculptures and paintings to street photography and murals.

On Saturday, March 23, The Broad celebrates *Soul of a Nation's* opening day with *Art and Politics: Soul of a Nation Symposium* (<https://www.thebroad.org/events/art-politics-soul-nation-symposium>), which brings together artists whose work is featured in the exhibition along with acclaimed poets and filmmakers such as the Academy Award nominated director Ava DuVernay, the mastermind behind films such as *Selma* and *13th*. On Sunday, March 24th, festivities continue with *The Un-Private Collection: Mark*

Godfrey and Zoe Whitley which hosts the curators of the exhibition for a conversation which will detail the process underwent when selecting artists for such an event, as well as the various themes highlighted throughout the collection.

Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963-1983 will be on display at the Broad museum in Los Angeles from March 23 - September 1

Two 1970s-Era Portraits by Barkley L. Hendricks Top \$2 Million at Sotheby's, Shattering the Artist's Previous Record

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on May 18, 2018 · 2:58 pm



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Brenda P," 1974

A STRIKING PORTRAIT of a statuesque woman named Brenda P set a new auction record for Barkley L. Hendricks (1945-2017) on Wednesday at Sotheby's Contemporary Art Evening Auction in New York. The 1974 painting sold for \$2.1 million including fees, which was twice the high estimate and shattered the artist's previous high, which was just shy of \$1 million.

The artist's subject has a confident stance and an unamused gaze. Her commanding presence is emboldened by the manner in which she has fashioned herself. Her fingernails and toe nails are painted black and she embraces red, which defines her look—from her head wrap, large-frame sunglasses and embroidery-accented blouse to her platform shoes. Hendricks demonstrates his mastery of color by juxtaposing all of these scarlet moments with sea foam green bell bottom pants.

Three years ago, the artist's auction record stood at \$365,000 ("Steve" and "Tuff Tony"). One month after his passing, the figure nearly tripled when two paintings breached \$1 million at Sotheby's in May 2017. A year later, the price of his work has doubled.

"Brenda P" is the first female portrait by Hendricks to come to auction since his death. Hendricks said there is no difference in the way he thinks about the female and male forms. In an interview with Thelma Golden published in the catalog for "Birth of the Cool," the artist's survey exhibition, he said, "...there's an obvious difference between males and females to a certain extent...but the personalities kind of directed my focus."

In the essay accompanying the lot, Sotheby's described how "Brenda P" fits into Hendricks's oeuvre:

"Presenting a figure of supreme confidence, poise, and sophistication, Barkley Hendricks' captivating portrait Brenda P from 1974 is a resounding testament to the artist's unrivaled ability to conjure compelling personalities with extraordinary specificity. Posing in graceful contrapposto, arms assertively akimbo, the elegant silhouette is at once alluring and elusive: catching the viewer's gaze from behind her stylish, oversized rose-tinted sunglasses, Brenda P both challenges and welcomes the viewer's participation, exemplifying the emotive complexity which distinguishes Hendricks' extraordinary brand of portraiture. Within his tightly rendered paintings, members of the artist's own community—his family, friends, and individuals who caught his attention on the street—are captured with unprecedented poignancy; indeed, no artist has exemplified a particular generation, urban aesthetic, notions of race or personal sensibility more acutely.

“*Brenda P* both challenges and welcomes the viewer’s participation, exemplifying the emotive complexity which distinguishes Hendricks’ extraordinary brand of portraiture.” — Sotheby’s

The lot essay, speculates Brenda P may be Brenda Payton, lead singer of the Philadelphia-based R&B group Brenda and the Tabulations. The band had a string of hits in the early 1970s around the same the painting was produced. In addition, Hendricks was born in Philadelphia.

“Brenda P” is the first of two female portraits by Hendricks that topped \$2 million this week. After “Brenda P” sold for \$2,175,000 million on May 16, the next day “Dancer,” a 1977 portrait, garnered \$2,055,000. It was prominently featured in Sotheby’s Contemporary Art Day Auction on May 17, the eighth lot in a lengthy sale of nearly 400 lots that lasted for more than six hours.



Lot 108: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Dancer," 1977 (acrylic and oil on linen). | Estimate \$400,000-\$600,000. **Sold for \$2,055,000 including fees**

Artist Barkley L. Hendricks Received a Posthumous Faculty Award From Connecticut College Where He Taught for Nearly Four Decades

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on May 7, 2018 • 6:58 am

No Comments



EMERITUS PROFESSOR **Barkley L. Hendricks** (1945-2017) was among five Connecticut College faculty members who received the inaugural President's Award for Creative Impact on May 2. The new awards honor professors who demonstrate excellence and innovation in research, teaching and leadership.

Hendricks taught at Connecticut College from 1972 to 2010. The award recognizes his work with "generations of students to develop and refine their artistic voices in courses on representational painting, drawing, illustration and photography, with a creative focus on portraiture, the figure and landscape."

A celebrated artist and photographer, Hendricks was best known for his distinct approach to portraiture. His realist portraits of friends and associates in the 1960s and 70s conveyed a certain hipness and attitude defined by cool authenticity and self-possessed style. A jazz enthusiast who spent winters in Jamaica, Hendricks admired the work of Dutch painters Van Dyck, Vermeer, and Rembrandt.

Over the course of his career, the artist spoke sparingly about his teaching at the small liberal arts college near his home in New London, Conn.

For Brooklyn Rail, Laila Pedro talked with Hendricks in Spring 2016 about a solo exhibition of new paintings he was presenting at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York (March 17–April 23, 2016). During the course of the conversation, she broached his role as a professor:

Brooklyn Rail: Speaking of school, you were a professor for how long? You taught at Connecticut College, my alma mater, until 2010.

Hendricks: I was at Connecticut College for thirty-nine years. Before then at Yale, and at the Philadelphia Department of Recreation, and in various visiting artist roles. So I've been a teacher for over forty years.

Brooklyn Rail: Does teaching inform your practice in a useful way, or is it purely a survival mechanism?

Hendricks: Both. It's a hand-in-glove situation.



Lot 189: BARKLEY HENDRICKS (1945-2017), "Innocence & Friend," 1977 (oil and aluminum leaf on canvas, in two parts). | Estimate \$100,000-\$150,000. **Sold for \$396,500 (including fees)**

DURING THE SAME TIME PERIOD, I interviewed Hendricks about the exhibition and several other subjects including his teaching. In the previously unpublished conversation, he expressed ambivalence about the experience:

Culture Type: You've taught for many, many years. Tell me about your work with students. Tell me about your experience with students. Do you like teaching?

Hendricks: Well, it has its place. It helps to pay the rent. When I needed to go to Pearl Paint, I had enough money to do that. Teaching has its rewards. It's a noble profession and there are a number of nice people that you meet. Every now and then, there is an asshole. But that's life.

Culture Type: Beyond paying the bills, did you feel fulfilled working with students and training the next generation and seeing the talent out there?

Hendricks: I was just trying to do the best I could and make sure I wasn't wasting my time or wasting theirs.

In a [remembrance for The New York Times magazine](#), Jazmine Hughes, who attended Connecticut College during Hendricks's tenure, wrote, "He made a striking reputation for himself: Students either loved him or hated him." She recalled how he conducted a core course for nearly four decades:

"Barkley Hendricks began his Art 111/112 class by asking each student to bring in three small objects that meant something to them. The items varied, but he dubbed this the bottle-shoe-and-plate project, because these were the objects most students chose. Over the semester, the students would draw and redraw them — in different styles, in different media, in different orders — until he was satisfied. While each student worked, he circled the room, clutching his thermos of tea with honey and lemon, peering at their papers. He was known to harangue students for not-perfectly-rounded teacups or loudly harrumph at overdramatically shadowed plates. "You're in college," he would chide those who disappointed him. It was a class people cried in."

“*He made a striking reputation for himself: Students either loved him or hated him.*” — Jazmine Hughes, *New York Times Magazine*



TOP IMAGE: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Slick (Self-Portrait)," 1977 (oil, acrylic, and magna on linen canvas). I © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

TREVOR SCHOONMAKER, chief curator at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, organized "[Birth of the Cool](#)" (2008-2010), the traveling survey that re-introduced Hendricks and cemented his legacy. The artist and curator became close friends after Hendricks contributed two early portraits to "The Magic City," a group show Schoonmaker put together for Brent Sikkema gallery in 2000. Two years later, Hendricks made a portrait of Fela Kuti for another exhibition Schoonmaker was planning. It was the first portrait the artist had painted since 1983, after spending nearly two decades concentrating on his photography, landscape painting, and works on paper.

Schoonmaker served as artistic director of [Prospect.4: The Lotus In Spite of the Swamp](#), the citywide triennial in New Orleans. (Nov. 18, 2017-Feb. 25, 2018). The programming included a [posthumous exhibition of 12 portraits](#) by Hendricks at the New Orleans Museum of Art. In the wake of the show, long-planned in advance of his death, Schoonmaker reflected on his introduction to the artist and his life and work. [The curator wrote:](#)

"I was told that Barkley had a reputation for being kind of prickly. ...I was unsure what to expect. Maybe he wouldn't take my call or maybe I'd get a couple of minutes to make my case. What I found on the other end of the line was a warm, generous, funny and inquisitive person with whom I shared more common interests and experiences than I could have realized. We spoke for over two hours—about his work, about music, about our experiences in Nigeria, about Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti. ...It was an exhilarating experience for a young, aspiring curator.

"...Barkley was a pioneering spirit who defiantly went against the grain and remained true to himself at all times. He thankfully didn't care much about other people's opinions and he didn't suffer fools—but he was also a thoughtful teacher, a keen observer of life, and a loyal and generous friend with a great sense of humor. His unrelenting dedication to his vision and style has deeply inspired younger generations, and he has left behind a powerful legacy. Today Barkley stands out as an artist well ahead of his time. His extensive body of work is as vital and vibrant as ever, and the full impact of his art and teaching is only beginning to unfold."

"His unrelenting dedication to his vision and style has deeply inspired younger generations, and he has left behind a powerful legacy. Today Barkley stands out as an artist well ahead of his time. His extensive body of work is as vital and vibrant as ever, and the full impact of his art and teaching is only beginning to unfold." — Curator Trevor Schoonmaker

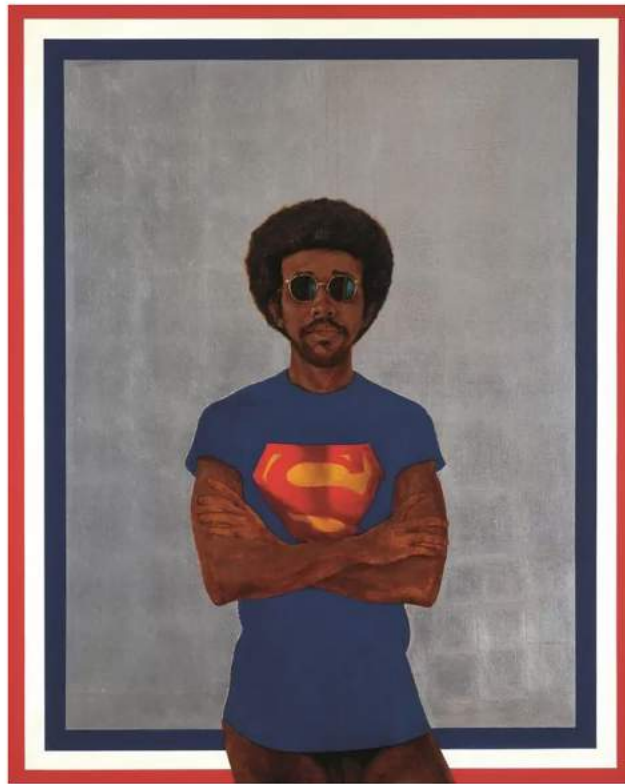
Hendricks authored a selected chronology of his life and work in the [catalog for "Birth of the Cool,"](#) and noted key experiences at Connecticut College. He became an instructor in 1972 and a year later had his first exhibition at the campus galleries. Subsequent exhibitions followed in 1983 and 1984. Hendricks was awarded tenure in 1978, and promoted to full professor at Connecticut College in 1987. Twenty-three years later, he retired in 2010.

In addition to Hendricks, President Katherine Bergeron honored Connecticut College professors Virginia Anderson, Sunil Bhatia, Tristan Borer, and Ross Morin. About Hendricks, Bergeron said: "We are proud to honor his legacy."

CT

BOOKSHELF

The catalog for "[Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool](#)" is an amazing documentation of the exhibition and the artist's practice. It features essay contributions from Trevor Schoonmaker, who organized the exhibition at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University; Art historian Richard Powell of Duke University; and Franklin Sirmans, now director of Perez Art Museum Miami; and an interview with Thelma Golden, director and chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem. The volume also contains informative acknowledgements by Hendricks and a chronology that includes personal and pithy comments from the artist about his milestones and experiences over the years. "[Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power](#)" was published to coincide with the exhibition, now on view at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, before it travels to the Brooklyn Museum.



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Icon for My Man Superman (Superman never saved any black people — Bobby Seale)," 1969 (oil, acrylic, and aluminum leaf on linen canvas). | Collection of Liz and Eric Lefkowsky, © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Superman S-Shield © & ™ DC Comics. Used with permission

ARTFORUM

April, 2017

Barkley L. Hendricks

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

The great Barkley L. Hendricks, who passed away last year, is best known for his majestic painted portraits of confident, self-assured black men and women, their dignified presence amplified through attitude and sartorial panache. Hendricks also worked in many other media—notably photography—and the full-breadth of his creative practice is only now beginning to emerge. “Them Changes” at Jack Shainman presented forty works on paper, including mixed-media collages and watercolors, that Hendricks produced between 1974 and 1984. Though touted as “newly discovered bodies of work” by the gallery, at least some were included in his solo exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1980.

The mixed-media collages, which made up the bulk of the show, are surprisingly spare given the sheer variety of marks and images the artist used to create them—graphite, ink, watercolor, and glow stick, as well as collaged elements including pornography, postcards, postage stamps, ink stamps, dollar bills, blue-foil seals, price stickers and packaging, graph paper, and empty music paper. Music, and especially jazz, had a strong influence on Hendricks, who himself was an accomplished player. Icons such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus are repeatedly referenced in his titles, and reappear throughout these works as faint outlines and ghostly graphite renditions haunting the frame. Even the compositions seem inspired by jazz’s improvisatory spirit, repetitive structures, syncopated rhythms, and meandering melodies; they feel like intuitive riffs. In *Sidecar #1 (For Miles)*, 1979, a silhouette of Davis floats atop a facsimile of the Declaration of

Barkley L. Hendricks,
Sidcar #1 (For Miles),
 1979, graphite, glow
 stick juice, ink,
 blue-foil seal, and
 collage on paper,
 22 1/4 x 29 1/4".



Independence, extending the ideals of freedom and independence from the political to the musical. Hendricks challenges the authority of the founding fathers, exaggerating their ornate signatures into lines of nonsensical squiggles and scratch marks, and embellishing the foot of the document with a blue-foil seal. Such signs of power are rendered decorative and repeated in other works.

Hendricks's portraiture, especially of himself, is known for its frank sexuality and, unsurprisingly, these works are filled with double entendres and suggestive humor. *Rear Entry*, 1974, features an X-ray of a pelvis shown from behind, and framed by stamped pink hearts. Hendricks softens the edges of the hand-drawn image precisely where it cuts across the body, allowing its fleshiness to diffuse onto the paper. One of three works featuring such imagery, it demonstrates Hendricks's tremendous drawing skills. A row of three minimal line drawings based on the same pornographic shot, the genitals highlighted through delicate shading, fills the top half of *Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 1975. In the third iteration, the bodies appear as white cutouts against a ground of gridded graph paper, emphasizing their salacious subject. A postcard of the titular figure appears below, his power and prestige compromised through the vulgar pun. The same basic composition is repeated in *Vacuum Packed*, 1975, but here the collaged element is an empty hot dog packet. Featuring the various sizes and types available—tiny, tall, skinless, with casing, etc.—the juxtaposition evokes a sexual slang while simultaneously undermining pornography's masculine bravado.

Hendricks never idealized his human sitters, and a series of watercolors from 1979 demonstrates a similarly uncompromising approach to various nonhuman subjects: the peel of half a watermelon, emptied of its luscious pink flesh; bananas, blackened but still firm, a racially coded phallic reference; an ass's jawbone; pairs of unshelled peanuts and mushrooms, both rendered to resemble testicles. Isolated on paper, accompanied only by their carefully sketched shadows, they felt more like character studies than conventional still lifes.

In each of the four works in the most recent series, titled after poet and humorist Langston Hughes, a television screen occupies the center of the frame. In one work, it becomes a yin-yang-like abstraction, harking back to Hendricks's occasional experiments with that idiom. In *Grand Master*, 1983, a spectral image of a hip-hop group appears in the space, with the phrase *ASK YOUR MAMA*, a reference to the title of a jazz-inspired poem by Hughes from 1961, scrawled at the foot of the frame. Possibly a meditation on jazz's legacy in the era of music television, it posits a genealogy of black culture defined by music, poetry, and irrepressible swagger, extending from jazz and poetry to the rhythms and rhymes of hip-hop.

—Murtaza Vali

BARKLEY HENDRICKS: *Them Changes*

by Osman Can Yerebakan

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | FEBRUARY 15 – MARCH 24, 2018

Dedicated to Barkley Hendricks's lesser known works on paper, *Them Changes* starts with an X-ray image of a person's derriere superimposed over a graphite drawing of an anonymous buttocks, the X-ray overshadowing the liveliness of human flesh. Surrounded by red hearts repeatedly stamped around its rectangular frame, this image perfectly encapsulates the exhibition's demure potential in understanding the late artist's prolific career as a painter and photographer. In *Rear Entry* (1974), Hendricks compresses crucial traits of his painterly faculties with humor. This skill, which the artist furtively implemented into his larger body of work, eloquently surfaces in the exhibition's watercolors, drawings, and mixed-media collages. Delving under the skin towards the core, he meditates on human form in its most organic and voluptuous sense.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Rear Entry*, 1974. Watercolor, graphite and ink stamp on paper, 22 × 28 inches. © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Bringing together a selection of works discovered by his widow and his dealer, the exhibition takes the audience into the backstage of Hendricks's studio, breaking down the stimuli and aspirations that constituted the base of his grand practice. In his most emblematic body of work, the Philadelphian painter transcends the imposed limits of representation of black identity towards a timeless and placeless territory where posers occupied his frames not unlike fashion models or public protestors behind single-color backgrounds. This transient stance they manifested between swag and activism was amplified by their impossibly cool apparel and dandy postures, stripping them from social codes or historical narratives. Imbued with pride, vigor, and elegance, Hendricks's subjects stare at us in their most embellished and buoyant selves.

A number of watercolor drawings date back to 1979, including an uncomplicated depiction of a half cut watermelon, a quartet of rotting bananas, and a trio of gradually decaying flowers inside a jar. One would

be forgiven to ask, “How did these moderate still lives function for a thriving painter at the height of his career?” Hendricks envisioned his agrarian subjects similar to his portraits of nonchalant posers. Detached from any narrative amidst placid whiteness, the harvests convey poise and humility in Hendricks’s characterization of their corporeality. Intricate patterns and lavish garments transmit decorum in his most significant paintings; Hendricks here depicted the banana’s punctuated skin or the flower’s elegant demise with perseverance and denotation.

Infusing carnality and animation into his nonhuman subjects, the artist furthers his fascination with sexual playfulness, which prevailed in his portraits through overt or latent means. Think of *Brilliantly Endowed* (Self Portrait)

(1977) or *Icon for my Man Superman*

(*Superman never saved any black people*) (1969) to grasp the tongue-in-cheek sexual innuendo Hendricks ingrained into the canvas while tackling issues of racism and objectification of the male Black body and identity. Either peeled off and devoured or horizontal and erect, the artist’s rendition of the banana resonates with his lighthearted approach to painting while remaining true to his subject’s physical and ethereal aspects. Replacing his models’ sharp sartorial choices in this exhibition are blue Chiquita brand stickers that accentuate each fruit with a humorous personification.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Brilliantly Endowed*, 1977. Oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 66 × 48 inches. © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist’s estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Icon for my Man Superman* (*Superman Never Saved Any Black People-Bobby Seale*), 1969. Oil, acrylic and aluminum leaf on linen canvas, 59 1/2 × 48 inches. © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist’s estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN is a curator and art writer based in New York. Osman holds an MA in Art Management from the Fashion Institute of Technology. Among his fields of interest are fluid states of audience interaction, kinship between literature and fine arts, and performance of identity as political declaration.

THE ART OF BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

Irene Pazzanese • March 23, 2018



Sweet Thang (Lynn Jenkins), 1975-76

HENDRICKS WAS BORN IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA AND LIVED AND WORKED IN NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT.

During the 50s and 60s he found personal balance with his love of music, basketball, and art, that the artist kept channelling in his paintings up until his death in 2017.

Barkley was a visual artist in every sense of the word and his constant goal was just to reproduce what he saw around him. So whether that was a nun or a guy on the street wearing cool clothing, that's what he painted. He deftly captured and conveyed the spirit and personality of his subjects through their personal style, posture, clothing or attitude. His lifesize portraits easily became icons on par with the greats who inspired him, like Caravaggio and Jan van Eyck.

Hendricks embraced the complexities of black culture and life, with an eye for detail and a taste for the flamboyant.

In history, black people were always relegated to the margins, so he thought, "Why can't black people be the main subject of a painting?".

Barkley was doing what nobody had really done before and that was giving black people a prominent space by themselves on canvas. If a portrait is taken of someone, the audience's reaction is "This must be someone worth taking a portrait of..."

In 1971, Hendricks exhibited his first work in a major museum show: *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum, New York. In his life-sized self-portrait, "*Brown Sugar Vine*" (1970), Hendricks appears nude, wearing sunglasses and a stocking cap, artfully confronting and subverting American stereotypes about black male sexuality.

Instead of looking to the galleries, the museums, the auction houses, and art fairs, Hendricks drew from the world in which he lived in order to maintain the integrity of his vision and his process.

As a portrait painter, he did not draw preparatory sketches for his work: he used a camera to record the people he chose to paint.

In his death, a wealth of previously unseen works have been revealed. At the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, is on view *Barkley L. Hendricks, Them Changes*, the first ever exhibition of the works on paper made contemporaneously with his famous portrait paintings.

These newly discovered works on paper fall into distinct categories – each of which is cohesive and dynamic enough to stand alone as a body of work.

Some incorporate x-rays, an apt metaphor for the inner mechanics of Hendricks's mind and process – an insight into his tendencies and unique concerns.

If the connections between the multimedia works on paper and the portraits for which we best recognize Hendricks are not apparently obvious, it is because their similarity lies in character and areas of concern, rather than strictly in aesthetics. The sureness of Hendricks's line, the specificity of his effort, this minute attention he paid his subjects – human, vegetable, or mineral – these are the defining themes that make his work unmistakable.

Trevor Schoonmaker wrote in his essay for *The Birth of the Cool*: "While best known for his bold life-sized portraits, Hendricks is also an accomplished photographer, landscape painter, watercolorist, draftsman, assemblage artist, carpenter, and jazz musician". Schoonmaker had identified the essential aspect of Hendricks's relentlessly questing mind: "a desire to continually learn, experiment, and take risks".

DAZED



ART & PHOTOGRAPHY
FEATURE

15th February 2018

Text Miss Rosen

"YOCKS", 1975 © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

The artist who captured the height of African American cool on canvas

A close look at Barkley L. Hendricks, who took the Tate show 'Soul of a Nation' by storm last year with his nude painted self-portraits

Barkley L. Hendricks

27 IMAGES



In October 1968, Bobby Seale, the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, made it plain in a court of law, when he faced conspiracy charges as part of the Chicago 8, stating: “We’re hip to the fact that Superman never saved no black people. You got that?”

Seale gave voice to a fact that was widely understood. So long as black folks are denied the opportunity to share their vision with the world, their lives and stories would be marginalised, misrepresented, or eradicated from the historical record.

Seale’s words were not lost on African American artist Barkley L. Hendricks (1945-2017), who donned a novelty Superman t-shirt, sunglasses, and nothing else for a self-portrait titled “Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved any Black People – Bobby Seale)” in 1969. The North Philadelphia native embodied the height of cool, a sensibility that dates back to 15th-century Nigerian Empire of Benin and has found its way across the African diaspora for six centuries.

Adopting the “cool pose,” with his arms folded across his chest against a simple grey backdrop framed in red, white, and blue, Hendricks tells it like it is. He is calm, fearless, and aloof, fully in control, poised, and dignified. Such is the strength of the painting that it was chosen as one of the primary images to promote *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, the landmark traveling exhibition which originated at Tate – opening just a couple of months after Hendricks’ death on April 16 at the age of 72.

“If you’re gonna do it, you might as well be memorable” – Barkley L. Hendricks

“If you’re gonna do it, you might as well be memorable,” Hendricks told Thelma Golden, the Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, in the seminal 2008 monograph, *Birth of the Cool* (Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University), which has just been republished to include a memorial to the artist and a selection of new images from his oeuvre.

The book, edited by Trevor Schoonmaker, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Nasher, brilliantly presents a masterful look at the figurative painting, a selection of which can be seen in the next iteration of *Soul of a Nation*, which opened earlier this month at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as in the exhibition catalogue, available from the Tate, which features Hendricks' painting "What's Going On" (1974) on the cover.

But Hendricks' genius goes far beyond the known. In his death, a wealth of previously unseen works have been revealed. Today, at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, will present Barkley L. Hendricks, *Them Changes*, the first ever exhibition of newly discovered works on paper made contemporaneously with his famous portrait paintings.

These works take us inside Hendricks' process, giving us a look at the way he crafted and mastered a visual language entirely his own. "While best known for his bold life-sized portraits, Hendricks is also an accomplished photographer, landscape painter, watercolourist, draftsman, assemblage artist, carpenter, and jazz musician," Schoonmaker wrote in the introduction to *Birth of the Cool*, reminding us that the man behind the easel was just as fascinating as the subjects he painted.

Here Elisabeth Sann, Director of Jack Shainman Gallery, shares insights into Hendricks' singular career that never fails to surprise and delight people from all walks of life.



"Steve", 1976 © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

HE FOCUSED ON THE WORLD HE KNEW

Growing up in North Philadelphia during the 1950s and 60s, Hendricks learned the rules of the streets and found personal balance with his love of music, basketball, and art. His love of soul and jazz music found its way into his work, with titles taken from songs like “Sweet Thang” by Rufus featuring Chaka Khan and “Lawdy Mama” by Buddy Moss.

He embraced the complexities of black culture and life, with an eye for detail and a taste for the flamboyant. He deftly captured and conveyed the spirit and personality of his subjects through their personal style, be it posture, clothing, grooming, or attitude. His lifesize portraits easily became icons on par with the greats who inspired him, from painters like Caravaggio and Jan van Eyck to musicians such as Miles Davis and Nina Simone.

“Barkley is a visual artist in every sense of the word and his constant goal was just to reproduce what he saw around him. So whether that was a nun or a guy on the street wearing cool clothing, that’s what he painted. He did notice the absence of black figures in the art historical canon but I think his thing was just representation,” Sann explains.

“The elevation and the icon status comes with presenting subject matter that has not been presented before, but that wasn’t Barkley’s intention. In history, they were always relegated to the margins, so I think he thought, ‘Why can’t black people be the main subject of a painting?’ Barkley was doing what nobody had really done before and that was giving black people a prominent space by themselves on canvas. If a portrait is taken of someone, the audience’s reaction is, ‘This must be someone worth taking a portrait of.’”

HE USED THE CAMERA AS A SKETCHPAD

While pursuing his MFA at Yale during the early 1970s, Hendricks studied photography with Walker Evans, and quickly mastered the medium, winning his first award in 1971. His love for photography continued throughout his life, and he rarely left home without his camera.

As a portrait painter, Hendricks did not draw preparatory sketches for his work; instead, he used a camera to record the people he chose to paint. “Photography was like his sketchpad,” Sann observes. “He didn’t really work from sketches so he was constantly documenting everything around him and because he painted what was around him, it was natural that he would use a camera in this way.”

“Barkley was doing what nobody had really done before and that was giving black people a prominent space by themselves on canvas. If a portrait is taken of someone, the audience’s reaction is, ‘This must be someone worth taking a portrait of’” – Elisabeth Sann

HE MADE HISTORY WITHOUT TRYING

In 1971, Hendricks exhibited his first work in a major museum show: *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum, New York. In his life-sized self-portrait, "Brown Sugar Vine" (1970), Hendricks appears nude, wearing sunglasses and a stocking cap, artfully confronting and subverting American stereotypes about black male sexuality by claiming ownership of it.

"It's important because it wasn't really done before, but it wasn't something Barkley was considering," Sann reveals "He was painting what was around him."

As an outsider in the art world at this time, Hendricks was not connected with the scene or the storm brewing around the show. As *The New York Times* reported of the show, 15 of the 75 scheduled artists withdrew from the exhibition, "in sympathy with a boycott called by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, a group of black artists that initiated the show nearly two years ago."

Schoonmaker writes in the book, "Hendricks was accustomed to going against the grain; it was more his style to do his own thing, independent of any group or movement."

HE MAINTAINED A PRIVATE WORLD OF CREATION

In 1976, Hendricks was featured in "Dewar's Profiles," a print advertising campaign for the "White Label" line of the noted Scotch whisky. The ad features a portrait of Hendricks in his studio surrounded by his work, along with a brief bio that includes a quote from the artist, stating, "My work provides me with total freedom. In turn it demands total honesty. So long as one can remain honest with himself and his work, he'll have the freedom for the exploration and satisfaction of his foremost feelings and desires."

Those words ring true more than four decades after the ad ran, with the discovery of the new works on paper in *Them Changes*. Sann and Jack Shainman travelled to New London, where Hendricks had lived, to visit his widow Susan, who had discovered flat files filled with mixed media works on paper and watercolours.

"They are kind of portraits of objects that were around his house," Sann explains. "They are so unexpected because people mostly only consider his portrait paintings, but he was a musician, a photographer, a landscape painter, and an expert draftsman. He had notebooks and notebooks and notebooks of these drawings. He is known for his portrait paintings but he had such a wider practice beyond that. This body of work really gives such a deeper context to his larger practice."



"Them Changes", 1974 © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

HE TREATED ALL HIS SUBJECTS WITH TREMENDOUS RESPECT

"Barkley was constantly looking and painting and photographing whatever caught his eye, whether it was somebody's shoes or the way they walked or their hair," Sann reveals. "He treated all his subjects the same way. We have a few watercolours that someone called still lifes or watercolours of fruit or flowers in varying states of decay, and they have just as much personality as the portraits. He gives the same amount of attention to detail to each unique thing that he is representing."

Imagine an x-ray of the pelvis, half a watermelon eaten down to the rind, an empty Coors beer can be folded in half, a few bananas blackening yet still holding their shape, and abstracted likenesses of jazz legends like Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong, and Charles Mingus.

The newly-discovered works on paper are wildly diverse yet beautifully intertwined by concept and style. "Barkley invented this new visual language. There are a lot of astral visual motifs, sexual motifs, and the sense of humour that he treats everything with that is very present in his portrait paintings as well. They really seem like the fabric that holds all these at first glance disparate media that he worked in together," Sann observes.

"They wouldn't be something you would expect from Barkley but spending time with them, they couldn't be anyone else's. They seem almost like slices of his brain in some way, these mental exercises, and the amount of attention he paid to each and the amount of deliberateness of each stroke is really similar to the rest of his work."



"A.P.B's (Afro Parisian Brothers)", 1978 © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

HE STAYED TRUE TO HIS VISION

Hendricks was a true independent, never following anything but his own internal demand to create. In his interview with Thelma Golden, he explained, "Since I'm not in the hot bed of activities in the city, I'm not quite sure what's going on other than what I see or read in the papers."

He noted that he was inspired by the works of painters such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt, and then added, "I don't see too many contemporary painters I get inspiration from." Instead of looking to the galleries, the museums, the auction houses, and art fairs, Hendricks drew from the world in which he lived in order to maintain the integrity of his vision and his process.

"Barkley had no interest in the market whatsoever," Sann laughs. "He wanted to paint what he wanted to paint. In fact, a lot of the works on paper we have in the exhibition have never been seen before but he was making them contemporarily with his most prolific years in the 1970s along with his most iconic portrait paintings."

HE WORKED TO FULFILL HIS INNER DEMAND

It was in the creation of these works on paper that Hendricks maintained a running dialogue with himself. While the subject matter and style differ from that which he exhibited and sold, the confidence of his hand and the detail of his eye are present throughout his work.

"What's amazing about these works on paper is that Barkley never showed them to anyone," Sann reveals. "He was working, making about six paintings a year in the 70s, which at the time was a lot for him and that's all anyone got to see – but in the meantime he was making tons of these works on paper that all have the same amount of attention as each of the portraits and that's because he was fulfilling his own demand to create."

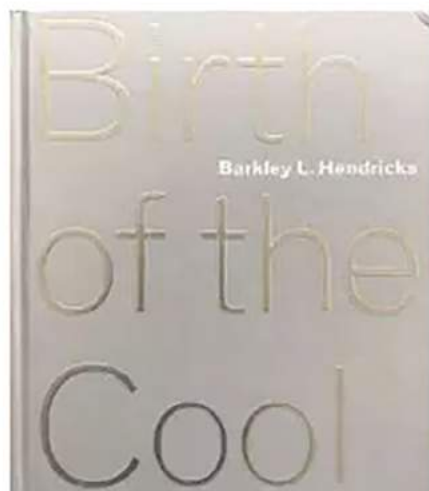
Re-Birth of the Cool: A Second Printing of the Catalog for the Seminal Barkley Hendricks Exhibition Has Been Published

by VICTORIA L. VALENTINE on Feb 7, 2018 • 12:58 pm



A DECADE AGO TODAY, "[Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool](#)" opened at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University (Feb. 7-July 13, 2008). The traveling survey brought renewed attention to **Barkley L. Hendricks** (1945-2017), the artist and photographer whose powerful portraits dating from the 1960s and 70s masterfully capture the individuality, attitude and style of his subjects, nearly all of them African American. The exhibition featured 57 paintings from 1964 to 2007 and a catalog was published to document it.

In the intervening years, Hendricks's post-modern, realist images have become a barometer against which portraiture by a new generation of artists is compared and contrasted. Fascination with his work remains unabated and asking prices for the now rare, out-of-print catalog start at \$350. In the wake of his death last April, a [second printing](#) of the fully illustrated volume was published by Duke University Press in January.



The new hardcover catalog retails for less than \$40. The content is the same as the original paperback with contributions from Trevor Schoonmaker, who organized the exhibition, essays by Franklin Sirmans and Richard Powell, and a conversation with the artist conducted by Thelma Golden. The sole update is a two-page spread that concludes the volume. The brief un-bylined tribute states that the Nasher Museum is proud to have worked with Hendricks on the exhibition and summarizes the late artist's career.

Similar to the first, the re-issued volume is an invaluable resource documenting Hendricks's many works and also conveying a sense of the artist himself. Toward the end of the catalog, Hendricks authors his own artist chronology. The year-by-year timeline is illustrated with family photos and images of some of his paintings. It's a rollicking journey through his life, career, and exhibition milestones with candid and

humorous comments from the artist along the way. He begins with his birth date (April 16, 1945) and place (Philadelphia), and also lists the same information for his parents and siblings, noting that his twin sister died at birth. From there, his life unfolds. Key highlights include:

1963-67: At PAFA, Hendricks is the first African American to be awarded two consecutive travel grants. (He goes to Europe and North Africa.)

1968-74: Joined New Jersey National Guard, completing obligation after six years.

1970-72: Studied photography with Walker Evans at Yale University.

1975: First solo exhibition in the South at the Greenville County Museum of Art in South Carolina. There was an issue with some of the works he wanted to present. "I was told I would not be able to show any nudes. I later discovered they had white nudes in their collection. My black nudes were just too 'black,' so I've been told."

1976: Featured in an advertisement for Dewar's Scotch Whiskey that is a profile. Among other details, it notes Hendricks is 31 and his Most Memorable Book is "I Wonder as I Wander" by Langston Hughes.

1977: Traveled to FESTAC '77 (Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture) in Lagos, Nigeria.

1978: Solo exhibition at Arch Street Gallery in Philadelphia yields fringe benefits. "Gallery director, John Phillips, a former student of mine at Connecticut College, later became an assistant to George Wein, founder of the Newport Jazz Festivals. This allowed me backstage access to photograph many jazz greats."

1980: First solo exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

1982-1984: Solo exhibitions at Spectrum Gallery on 57th Street, New York, N.Y. "The now-defunct gallery was run by a friend from Philadelphia. This was a sports gallery where my basketball paintings were on view in the Big Apple for the first time. Other exhibition spaces and galleries had a very closed mind about showing any work that was not a black figure."

"The now-defunct gallery was run by a friend from Philadelphia. This was a sports gallery where my basketball paintings were on view in the Big Apple for the first time (1982-84). Other exhibition spaces and galleries had a very closed mind about showing any work that was not a black figure." — Barkley L. Hendricks



This painting, which was featured in Birth of the Cool, was offered for sale at Sotheby's in March 2017. Lot 212: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "DIPPY'S DELIGHT," 1969 (oil and acrylic on canvas). I Estimate \$50,000-\$70,000. Sold for \$68,750 (including fees).

April 2, 1983: After meeting at local Aldo's Jazz Club (1979), Hendricks and Susan Weig are married at their home in New London, Conn. Two ministers officiate (a man and a woman) and 13 guests attend.

1984-2002: No portraits are produced during Reagan presidency and in wake of brother's 1999 murder. Hendricks turns to his landscape works, finding a measure of mental relief painting outdoors in Jamaica. "As I prepared the timeline for this catalog, I noticed something about my figurative painting output during the 'Renaissance' (the age of Ronald Reagan). As we have learned about this period of our nation's recent history, it in no way resembles the age of enlightenment we call the Renaissance. It was two steps forward and four steps backward in many aspects of us coming together as a national and thoughtful country on the planet."

2000: "The Magic City," a group exhibition at Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York, N.Y., is first collaboration with curator Trevor Schoonmaker.

2003: "Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti" opens at New Museum, New York, N.Y. Curated by Schoonmaker, it features "Fela" Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen" (2002) the first figure painting Hendricks completed since his 18-year hiatus making portraits.

2006: Hendricks participates in Whitney Biennial. "This is my third group exhibition at the Whitney and the first time I have shown photographs. I was gratified that my provocative Ku Klux Klan images were selected for inclusion in this show."



This work was offered for sale at Sotheby's in May 2017. Lot 189: BARKLEY HENDRICKS, "Innocence & Friend," 1977 (oil and aluminum leaf on canvas, in two parts). I Estimate \$100,000-\$150,000. Sold for \$396,500 (including fees)

Hearing directly from Hendricks about his life and work brings the chronology to life. The catalog's greatest reward is the opportunity to spend time studying Hendricks's powerful "people paintings" (as he has referred to them), including works from his "limited palette" series, many images of women, various self portraits, and large-scale double, triple and multiple portraits.

Of course, there is no substitute for experiencing the paintings in person. Powell, the Duke University art historian, testifies to the benefits of viewing the works repeatedly and considering them anew. In his essay he writes: "Every intermittent sighting of Barkley L. Hendricks's work over the past few decades has been a revelation. Paintings previously seen (and about which I claimed some critical expertise) were invariably a surprise and an art historical conundrum to behold again and again." CT

ON VIEW: There are currently a number of opportunities to see paintings by Barkley L. Hendricks. An exhibition of his rarely seen drawings from 1974 to 1989 opens Feb. 25 at Jack Shainman Gallery, which represents the artist's estate. Hendricks is featured in Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp. Trevor Schoonmaker is serving as artistic director of the triennial, where a solo exhibition of Hendricks's work is on view at the New Orleans Museum of Art through Feb. 25. His paintings also appear in "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," which recently made its U.S. debut at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Feb. 3-April 23, 2018). His photographic self portrait from 1980 is featured in the exhibition "Portraits of Who We Are," which explores how artists portray themselves, at the David Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, College Park, through May 18. In addition, the Massachusetts College of Art and Design is presenting "Legacy of the Cool: A Tribute to Barkley L. Hendricks," a celebration of the artist's legacy through figurative works by a new generation of 24 artists working in a variety of mediums.

TOP IMAGE: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS (1945-2017), "Bahsir (Robert Gowens)," 1975 (oil and acrylic on canvas). I Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University. Museum purchase with additional funds provided by Jack Neely. © Barkley L. Hendricks, Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

BOOKSHELF

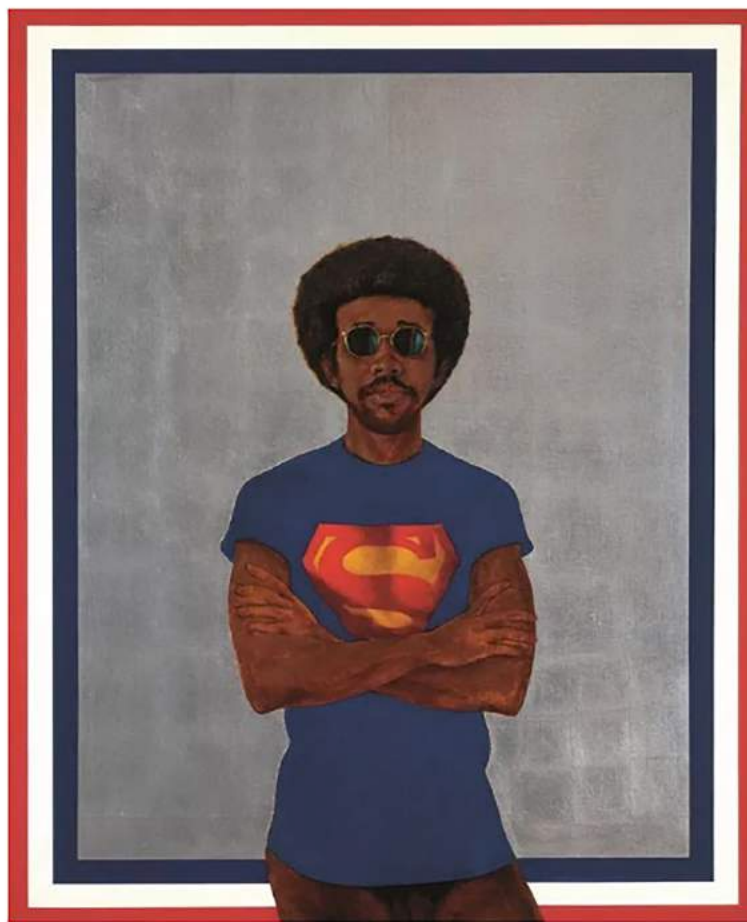
The catalog for "Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool" is an amazing documentation of the exhibition and the artist's practice. It features essay contributions from Trevor Schoonmaker, who organized the exhibition at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University; Art historian Richard Powell of Duke University; and Franklin Sirmans, now director of Perez Art Museum Miami; and an interview with Thelma Golden, director and chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem. The volume also contains informative acknowledgements by Hendricks and a chronology that includes personal and pithy comments from the artist about his milestones and experiences over the years. "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power" was published to coincide with the exhibition, now on view at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, before it travels to the Brooklyn Museum.



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Lawdy Mama," 1969 (oil and gold leaf on canvas). | The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Stuart Liebman, in memory of Joseph B. Liebman 1983.25; © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "What's Going On," 1974 (oil, acrylic, and magna on cotton canvas, 65 3/4 x 83 3/4 inches). | Megan & Hunter Gray. © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, "Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved any Black People – Bobby Seale)," 1969 | Collection of Liz and Eric Lefkowsky, © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Superman S-Shield © & ™ DC Comics. Used with permission



BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS (1945-2017), "Take All the Time You Need (Adrienne Hawkins)," 1975 (Oil on linen canvas). | Gift of Kelsey and David Lamond. 2014.6.1. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, New York, Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion

ART REVIEW

Celebrating Barkley L. Hendricks at MassArt

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 17, 2018

When the painter Barkley L. Hendricks died last April, at 72, Instagram became a gathering place for grieving. Many artists remembered the first Hendricks piece they had seen. “It was in this painting that I first saw myself in art,” Heather Hart wrote on Instagram alongside an image of Hendricks’s 1969 painting “Lawdy Mama,” depicting a stern young black woman with a magnificent Afro. The artist had shaped his canvas like an altarpiece and coated it in gold leaf.

Many mistook the woman to be a Black Power activist, either Angela Davis or Kathleen Cleaver, but she was Hendricks’s second cousin. He painted people he knew, or people who caught his eye on the street, making proud, uncompromising life-size portraits lit up with pungent, sunny colors.

He set a tone of dignity and sparkle that inspired many. “Legacy of the Cool: A Tribute to Barkley L. Hendricks,” in Massachusetts College of Arts’ Bakalar & Paine Galleries, gathers two dozen artists whose work follows his example.

Hendricks did not consider himself a political artist, but for more than 40 years he painted subjects that a white art world had for centuries ignored. He sprang from a lineage of black artists — Jacob Lawrence, John Wilson — who spurned abstraction even at its height. People of color, long invisible, needed to be seen, and their stories needed to be told.

Hendricks’s legacy, like his art, can’t help but be political. Maybe especially now.

Darci Hanna, associate curator of the Bakalar & Paine Galleries, has put together a bright and breathtaking show that toggles between celebratory, Hendricks-style cool and a more urgent reckoning with racism. That reckoning takes a stunning turn near the end of the show, but let’s begin with the celebration.



SHAWN THEODORE

Shawn Theodore's "Being Black Outweighs One's Blues"

In photographs, Elia Alba, Delphine Diallo, Rashid Johnson, and Zanele Muholi honor their subjects' grave beauty. Diallo shot portraits of stylish men and women at an Afro-punk festival, and her photos of regal hair designs by Joanne Petit-Frère depict emblems of power and self-possession.

"Lawdy Mama" finds a granddaughter in Alba's "The Braddonian (LaToya Ruby Frazier)," in which Frazier, another artist who has turned a compassionate lens on her own community, reprises the steady gaze of Hendricks's iconic subject. The women in Muholi's black-and-white images of queer black South Africans know their own power and what they have come up against. They regard us, self-contained and weary.

Painting heroic portraits of everyday people of color, Hendricks rebuked portraiture's history of puffing up the privileged. Soon, Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sutherland's official portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama will be unveiled at the National Portrait Gallery, and the images will certainly be heroic. Both artists share Hendricks's aesthetic — zingy and cool, with tangy hues, an eye to fashion, and large-scale figures.

Hanna snared one of Sutherland's paintings in this show. You can tell from the title, "Well Prepared and Maladjusted," that this subject resists heroism.

She's young, and despite her imposing pink blouse with an enormous bow (the well-prepared part of her), her gaze is guarded. She won't let us in. She is not self-possessed. Amid all the commanding figures here, "Well Prepared and Maladjusted" magnetizes because she hides.

Painting her at a large scale, Sutherland honors young people plagued by doubt, and here "The Legacy of the Cool" segues smoothly from pride to the doubt, anger, and frustration prompted by living in a society plagued by racism.

For her "White Shoes" series of performance photographs, Nona Faustine posed nude, save for white high heels, at places in New York with ties to slavery. In "Over My Dead Body" we follow her up the stairs of Tweed Courthouse, erected atop an African burial ground. She carries shackles in one hand.

Two hundred years ago, Faustine's body would have been one among many disrespected, objectified, and abused. But today we can't help but see her, nude and bold on the courthouse steps, calling attention to that history with fierce eloquence.

Faustine brings the ghosts of her ancestors to life. Other ghosts, drained of pride and filled with helpless fury, appear near the end of the show. Their bloodless white faces do not belong at this party, but their presence at this exhibition is incisive.

Steve Locke, in a new series called “Killers,” draws portraits of men who have murdered unarmed people of color. These small, cramped images depict the likes of Dylann Roof, who murdered nine worshipers at a church in Charleston, S.C., in 2015, and Jeremy Christian, alleged to have stabbed to death two on a commuter train in Portland, Ore., last year.

Locke’s drawings are the antithesis of cool: colorless, small, floating in seas of white. In such a warm-blooded show, these are icy. Aesthetically, “Killers” isn’t part of Hendricks’s legacy, but including these drawings in “Legacy of the Cool,” Hanna makes a cunning choice.

Hendricks and his acolytes plant gardens that celebrate the beauty and rectitude of people of color. Works in this show are lusty and declarative, even as they tangle with the choking weeds of racism. Locke’s drawings, which seem especially frightening after last week’s revelations of racist slurs in the Oval Office, remind us there’s a snake in the weeds, and that the soil might be quicksand.

All the more reason to tend the garden.

THE

Lives

THEY

LIVED

Remembering some of the artists, innovators and thinkers
we lost in the past year. For readers' tributes to loved ones
who died this year, see [The Lives They Loved](#).

B. 1945

Barkley

HENDRICKS

He rejected the label of black political painter.



BY JAZMINE HUGHES



"Slick," a self-portrait by Hendricks from 1977.

The estate of Barkley L. Hendricks/Jack Shainman Gallery

For 38 years, Barkley Hendricks began his Art 111/112 class by asking each student to bring in three small objects that meant something to them. The items varied, but he dubbed this the bottle-shoe-and-plate project, because these were the objects most students chose. Over the semester, the students would draw and redraw them — in different styles, in different media, in different orders — until he was satisfied. While each student worked, he circled the room, clutching his thermos of tea with honey and lemon, peering at their papers. He was known to harangue students for not-perfectly-rounded teacups or loudly harrumph at overdramatically shadowed plates. “You’re in college,” he would chide those who disappointed him. It was a class people cried in.

At Connecticut College, a small liberal-arts school that had enough blond heads and Vineyard Vines belts around its arboretum that it looked, on certain days, not unlike a country club, Hendricks was considered “intense.” (I should know. I was there.) He made a striking reputation for himself: Students either loved him or hated him. Either way, they warned one another about him: “Knows what he’s doing but kinda mean about it,” read one review on RateMyProfessors.com, a virtual bible of student-generated reviews that was popular on campus. Another wrote, “Consider taking his courses during 2nd semester because he hates winter, so he’s more sympathetic when grades close in the spring!”

Hendricks really did hate the winter. On his holiday break, he often traveled to Jamaica with his wife, Susan, where he painted landscapes. He began painting professionally in the mid-1960s; frustrated by a lack of black representation in the Western canon, he created life-size portraits of mostly black subjects: family members, people he met on the street, himself. The audacity of his subjects, who often faced forward in braggadocious stances, wearing monochromatic clothing, combined with the charged politics of the era, made critics label Hendricks a capital-B Black painter with political aims, which he vehemently rejected. In his most famous work, “Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait),” he stands nearly naked in a pair of bright white tube socks and a brimmed hat, his thumb and forefinger framing his penis. It wasn’t a major political statement: He’d just heard that your own self is a good subject “since,” he once said, “you are always around.” One of his first portraits, “Lawdy Mama,” of a light-

skinned woman with a luxuriant Afro, was rumored to be a militant activist, maybe, inevitably, Angela Davis or Kathleen Cleaver, but it was Hendricks's cousin. He maintained that he painted solely what he liked, without any hidden messages. His landscapes, which he loved, never received the same attention his portraits did.

'I'M DOING WHAT I WANT TO DO. I PAINT BECAUSE I LIKE TO PAINT. I PAINT BECAUSE I'M MOTIVATED FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS THAT I DON'T THINK ARE ALWAYS NECESSARY TO BLAB ABOUT.'

In March 2016, Hendricks had what turned out to be his final solo show at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. The news release called the exhibit his “most political to date.” The show included the monochromatic portraits he was known for — like “Manhattan Memo,” a shadowy depiction of a man in an expletive-laden black T-shirt and paint-smeared jeans, or “Photo Bloke,” of a man outfitted in a soft pink suit — but art-world coverage of the show focused on paintings that seemed to strike a new tone. “In the Crosshairs of the States” features a young black man with his arms raised, a gray hoodie flipped up around his face. On the front of the garment, a messianic figure, also black, looks up; a Confederate flag and the fabric of an American flag engirdle the portrait.

In interviews about the exhibition, Hendricks rebuffed any assumptions that he had adopted a new radical bent. “Anything a black person does in terms of the figure is put into a ‘political’ category,” he chided one reporter. “I’m doing what I want to do. I paint because I like to paint. I paint because I’m motivated for a variety of reasons that I don’t think are always necessary to blab about.” He was just painting, he insisted to the end, what he saw.

ART SY

August 16, 2017

Rarely Seen Barkley Hendricks Paintings Show Early Talent as Portraitist of “Black Cool”



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Northern Lights*, 1976. Courtesy of Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Earlier this year, the great American portrait painter Barkley L. Hendricks died at the age of 72. The news was particularly devastating because Hendricks had just returned to portraiture after a long, two-decade break from painting stylish black men and women in ways the art world had never seen before. He was even set to exhibit new works at this fall's "Prospect.4: The Lotus In Spite of the Swamp." (The New Orleans-based triennial will now be showing his work from the 1970s.)

His sudden death has produced a yearning among many to see more of his art and measure his legacy. That's why the Bowdoin College Museum of Art curator, Joachim Homann, decided to convince two private collectors to lend the museum five paintings by Hendricks, four of which have never been seen publicly before, for a tribute show at the museum titled "Barkley Hendricks: 'Let's Make Some History.'"

Born in 1945 in North Philadelphia, Hendricks embarked on a formative trip to Europe in 1966 as a student at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. (He would later receive his undergraduate degree and a Masters of Fine Arts in painting from Yale University.) During that trip, a slew of Old Master and early Modern paintings in European museums made a strong impression on the young artist.

But before Anthony van Dyck, Diego Velázquez, and Paul Cézanne, he had encountered Nina Simone and Miles Davis and the audiences they played to. Hendricks once called Davis “the epitome of being cool.”



Barkley L. Hendricks, *"Toast" of Amos*, 1966. Courtesy of Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

So the artist began to mix the three influences—the attitude of musicians like Simone and Davis, the iconic style of old world European painting, and the everyday black folks he knew from the neighborhood or saw strutting through the streets—in a distinct visual style that has been referred to as “cool realism.” Works like his 1974 oil *What’s Going On*, titled after Marvin Gaye’s smooth 1971 protest album, often show black figures, *en vogue* or nude, against flat, bright monochrome backdrops.

The four portraits and one still life on display in “Barkley Hendricks: ‘Let’s

Make Some History’” were all painted early in Hendricks’s career. *Toast of Amos* (1966) is the earliest work on display. It shows a young student, teasingly nicknamed “Toast” because of the shade of his skin, fashionably sporting a long side part in his closely cropped brown hair. Set against an olive green background, he wears a woolly red turtleneck and blue cardigan; his eyes are cast downward behind circular thin frames as if he’s reading a book.

Hendricks portrays a dynamic subject who is complexly layered. He is pensive, stylish, and intellectual. Before Hendricks’s *Toast*, black subjects like him were hard to find in art. The artist was adamant that his work was not political and that he painted “personal joy and enlightenment,” but his early works manifested a new, liberating way of seeing the black body on canvas. *Toast* is not a stand-in for a cause—which was typical of the art of the Black Aesthetics Movement—but a self-possessed individual. As Hendricks wrote in a 2008 essay, “How cool is that?”



Barkley L. Hendricks
Lawdy Mama, 1969
 The Studio Museum in Harlem

The picture of Toast illustrates the artist's talent for exploring race by employing elements of 1950s abstraction, street photography, and touches of Old Master techniques such as chiaroscuro, thereby imbuing his figures with a strong physical presence. A similar cocktail of influences is present in Hendricks's 1976 painting *Northern Lights*, a study in three poses of a black, disco-inflected Bostonian man, depicted against a muted grey background.

He wears a green trench coat and matching wide brim hat.

"Someone once referred to the figure I did in the *Northern Lights* painting as a pimp," wrote Hendricks in his exhibition catalogue essay for "Birth of the Cool," his first career retrospective, which took place at the Nasher Museum of Art in 2008. "It was his big hat and large fur-collared coat that was behind that assessment. I said I once saw Ronald Reagan in the same large fur-collared coat. Did that make him a pimp?"

The two paintings are indicative of the style of large-scale portraiture that Hendricks became known for in the years that followed, and which was a critical influence on artists such as Mickalene Thomas, Kehinde Wiley, and Rashid Johnson, as well as his students at Connecticut College, where he served as Professor Emeritus of Studio Art. These portraits belong to the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, and the Tate Modern, among other institutions.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Sister Lucas*, ca. 1975. Courtesy of Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Hendricks contributed not only to the representation of black men in art, but also to the portrayal of black women. His 1975 tondo *Sister Lucas* depicts a nude black female with a hand on her hip and hair tied back underneath a colorful headscarf. She stands alone, self assured, in a sea of purple. What does the painting say about this ordinary woman, and black femininity more broadly? With nothing in the background to draw attention away, she is the sole focus of the viewer's eye.

For an artist who is well-known for nude self portraits like *Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait)* (1977), the presentation of *Sister Lucas* shows that Hendricks also deeply considered the black female form—and that he sought to counter disempowering representations of black men and women and art's overwhelming championing of whiteness as the only celebration of corporeality, spirituality, and truth. Hendricks's paintings established that, in art and life, black people are as worthy of being seen as they are.

Despite Hendricks's explicitly apolitical stance, he did create a few paintings that took a clear political position. Created for his last ever solo show while the artist was alive, at Jack Shainman Gallery in 2016, *Roscoe* (2016) shows a man wearing a shirt that says, "Fuck Fox News." Another, the portrait *FTA* (1968), whose title is an acronym for "Fuck the Army," is also on display at Bowdoin. It's the only work in the show that has been seen publicly before, having been shown at the Nasher retrospective, which was curated by the artist's longtime friend and the museum's chief curator, Trevor Schoonmaker.

Homann points out, however, that when Schoonmaker presented it, he did not give an explanation of the letters FTA. "I think it adds important context," he says. *FTA* was painted in 1968 after the artist was drafted into the New Jersey National Guard during what Hendricks called "the corruptness of the Vietnam War." The work reflects the anxiety and betrayal that many black men who served felt about potentially dying for a country that resisted the Civil Rights Movement.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *FTA*, 1968. Courtesy of Bowdoin College Museum of Art. Barkley L. Hendricks, *Star Spangled Chitlins*, 1967. Courtesy of Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Also on view at Bowdoin, the 1967 still life *Star Spangled Chitlins* depicts an American flag spilling out of a brown chair. It's another in which Hendricks intimates a subtle political message: the idea that the American flag, all crumpled up, looked like chitlins, a stew made from the bowels of pigs (considered the worst cut of meat) that was historically eaten by slaves. The dish is now considered an African-American Thanksgiving delicacy. Here, Hendricks seems to both celebrate and abominate America.

“Barkley Hendricks: ‘Let’s Make Some History’” is mounted in a gallery across from another exhibition featuring some of the museum’s vast collection of federalist era portraiture. In the doorway, connecting the galleries, one can see two works: Hendricks’s *Northern Lights* and Robert Feke’s painting *Portrait of Brigadier General Samuel Waldo* (c. 1748–50). The black man from Boston and the white man of colonial America are both brilliantly costumed—as it turns out, quite similarly. Despite the time and space that separates them, they stare at each other as free men would.

This conversation between the two artists and their subjects conveys the power of representation in the canon of American portraiture, and indeed speaks volumes of the history that Barkley L. Hendricks made, painting black Americans with such a radical, equalizing coolness.

Wall Street International

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Barkley Hendricks

20 Jul — 29 Oct 2017 at the Bowdoin Museum in Brunswick, United States

5 AUGUST 2017



Barkley Hendricks. Courtesy of Bowdoin Museum

Barkley Hendricks is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential American painters of his generation for his superlative talent, his evocative reinterpretation of portraiture, and his reckoning with contemporary life—whether he assumes a critical or celebratory perspective.

For younger artists today, Hendricks's work provides an important touchstone as they articulate their own identities and question perceptions of race in America.

This commemorative exhibition is organized in response to the news of Hendricks's passing on April 18, 2017. It is drawn from two New England private collections and features five rarely seen canvases from Hendricks's Philadelphia years that represent themes and concerns at the beginning of his artistic career.

Bowdoin Museum

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agoodyea@bowdoin.edu
www.bowdoin.edu

Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday
From 10am to 5pm
Thursday from 10am to 8.30pm
Sunday from 1pm to 5pm



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Captions

1. Barkley Hendricks. Courtesy of Bowdoin Museum
2. Barkley Hendricks. Courtesy of Bowdoin Museum
3. Barkley Hendricks. Courtesy of Bowdoin Museum

Related articles

The New York Times

April 21, 2017

Barkley L. Hendricks, Portraitist of a New Black Pride, Dies at 72



Barkley L. Hendricks in his home in New London, Conn., in 2007, with "Frog" (1976).
C.M. Glover for The New York Times

[Barkley L. Hendricks](#), a painter who gave new representation to ordinary black men and women, memorializing them in portraits that echoed the grand manner of the old masters, died on Tuesday in New London, Conn. He was 72.

His wife, Susan, said that the cause was a cerebral hemorrhage.

While touring Europe as an undergraduate art student in the mid-1960s, Mr. Hendricks fell in love with the portrait style of artists like van Dyck and Velázquez. His immersion in the Western canon, however, left him troubled. In his visits to the museums and churches of Britain, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands, he saw virtually no black subjects. His own race was, in effect, a void in Western art.

As the Black Power movement unfolded around him, he set about correcting the balance, in life-size portraits of friends, relatives and strangers encountered on the street that communicated a new assertiveness and pride among black Americans.

"[Lawdy Mama](#)," one of his first portraits, showed a young woman with an enormous Afro looking impassively at the viewer. Although her dress was modern, the arched top of the canvas and background in gold leaf suggested a Byzantine icon.

Throughout the 1970s Mr. Hendricks produced a series of portraits of young black men, usually placed against monochromatic backdrops, that captured their self-assurance and confident sense of style. The subject of "Steve" (1976) stood nonchalantly, his hands in

the pockets of his belted white trench coat, looking into the distance through a pair of sunglasses, the blackness of his skin and his shoes a stark contrast to the dazzling white background.

“As an added note of audacity, he paints into the reflections of the mirrored sunglasses the figure is wearing two little cityscapes and what may be a miniature self-portrait of the artist himself at work,” the critic Hilton Kramer wrote of the painting in *The New York Times*. “It is all quite stunning.”



Mr. Hendricks often used himself as a subject. In “Icon for My Man Superman” (1969), he appeared, arms crossed, wearing a Superman jersey and sunglasses, naked from the waist down. The painting’s subtitle, “Superman Never Saved Any Black People,” echoed a remark by Bobby Seale, a founder of the Black Panther Party.

In his sardonic 1977 painting “Brilliantly Endowed (Self Portrait)” — its title borrowed from Mr. Kramer’s review — he stood naked except for a pair of drooping striped tube socks and a floppy white cap perched on his head. A toothpick at the corner of his mouth, balanced at a jaunty angle, accentuated the relaxed so-what? attitude of the pose.

Mr. Hendricks resisted classification as a political painter, or as a black painter for that matter. The subject of “Lawdy Mama,” he liked to point out, was not a militant, despite the Angela Davis Afro, but a second cousin.

“My paintings were about people that were part of my life,” he told the art newspaper [The Brooklyn Rail](#) in 2016. “If they were political, it’s because they were a reflection of the culture we were drowning in.”

Barkley Leonnard Hendricks was born on April 16, 1945, in Philadelphia. His father, also named Barkley, was a construction worker turned contractor, and his mother, the former Ruby Powell, was a homemaker who later worked as a teacher’s aide.

After graduating from Simon Gratz High School in 1963, he enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied with the black landscape painter [Louis Sloan](#), earning a certificate in 1967.

With the military draft looming, he enlisted in the New Jersey National Guard and found work as an arts and crafts teacher with the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. In 1970 he enrolled in Yale's school of art, where he was able to complete both his bachelor's and master's degrees in fine art in two years. Immediately after graduating, he joined the art department at Connecticut College in New London, where he taught until 2010.



Mr. Hendricks in an undated photographic self portrait.
Barkley L. Hendricks, All Rights Reserved, via Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

At a time when minimalism, abstraction and conceptual art ruled the day, Mr. Hendricks's work was profoundly out of fashion. "I didn't care what was being done by other artists or what was happening around me," he told The Brooklyn Rail. "I was dealing with what I wanted to do. Period."

He gravitated toward photography and studied for a year under Walker Evans, for whom he produced a portfolio of photographs taken at the Port Authority bus station in Manhattan, as he shuttled back and forth between New Haven and his National Guard post in New Jersey.

Mr. Hendricks remained, throughout his career, a somewhat neglected figure. His 1970 self-portrait "Brown Sugar Vine" was included in "Contemporary Black Artists in America," a large exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in 1971. But it was not until 2008, when Trevor Schoonmaker organized the traveling retrospective "[Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool](#)" at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, that he began receiving his due. The exhibition, with more than 50 paintings dating to 1964, was seen in New York at the Studio Museum in Harlem. He began showing at the [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) in Manhattan in 2009.

In the early 1980s, Mr. Hendricks began painting landscapes on annual trips to Jamaica. It was at this time that he married Susan Weig. In addition to his wife, he is survived by his mother; a sister, Arlene Hendricks; and two brothers, Andre and Methun. His younger brother Dwight was murdered in Philadelphia in 1999.

Mr. Hendricks returned to portraits in 2002 with “Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,” a tribute to the Nigerian Afrobeat pioneer [Fela Kuti](#), whom he depicted as a secular saint, resplendent in gold with a halo over his head, holding a microphone in one hand and his crotch in the other. In front of the painting, Mr. Hendricks placed 27 pairs of high-heeled shoes, a reference to the women in Fela’s life.

Some of his most striking portraits followed, notably “Photo Bloke” (2016), depicting a black man in a shocking pink suit and white tennis shoes, posing against a solid pink background; another, the timely “Roscoe” (2016), shows a young black man wearing a T-shirt that makes a profane statement against Fox News.

Mr. Hendricks’s work forms part of the exhibition “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,” which opens at the [Tate Modern](#) in London in July. Speaking to the museum’s curators last year, he said, “I’m just trying to do the best painting of the individuals who have piqued my curiosity and made me want to paint them.”

Correction: April 22, 2017

An earlier version of this obituary misstated the given name of Mr. Hendricks’s wife. She is Susan, not Ruth. It also misstated the year of his painting “Steve.” It was 1976, not 1977.



POLITICS

SURFACE TENSION

THE PORTRAITURE OF BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

EZEKIEL KWEKU

04/27/2017

Barkley L. Hendricks, a giant of American portraiture, died last week. He was 72. When I heard that he was gone, the first thing I thought of was his 1969 painting, "Lawdy Mama." "Lawdy Mama" depicts a life-size woman, a black woman. The bottom of the canvas meets the middle of her thighs, so that only the upper three-fourths of her body is in frame. She faces the viewer as if looking into a camera or mirror. She is wearing a charcoal gray turtleneck dress with thin, horizontal black and sienna stripes. The expression on her face is not so much inscrutable as it is layered - her lips are pursed, though not tightly, her

gaze measured and appraising. She is lightly holding her right elbow with her left arm, which is slightly bent, her posture both guarded and vulnerable.

Her full afro haloes her head, and she stands in front of a background of gold leaf, the top of the canvas curving into a lunette. In this setting, her comportment takes on a ceremonial, sacred grandeur. She looks iconic, in the literal, religious sense — an icon of a saint, tucked into its niche in a cathedral. She also looks iconic in the colloquial, modern sense, which is to say that she also looks cool as hell. Because of his decision not only to portray a black woman, but to venerate her, critics assumed that Hendricks must have been making some kind of provocative statement with his work. Some assumed that “Lawdy Mama” was a painting of Kathleen Cleaver or Angela Davis. Hendricks pointed out, with some irritation, that it was actually a portrait of his cousin.



Born in 1945 in Philadelphia, Barkley Leonnard Hendricks studied landscape painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he also discovered a love for photography. He joined the New Jersey National Guard in 1964, and a few years later, enrolled in the BFA program at Yale. These decisions were characteristically practical and strategic — with the Vietnam War approaching, Hendricks wanted to avoid being drafted and shipped overseas. And being in a National Guard unit in New Jersey, Hendricks figured, would lessen the possibility that he would be called out to quell a riot. He finished both his BFA and MFA in two years, then joined the faculty at Connecticut College in New London, teaching art there until 2010.

Hendricks worked in many forms — among his earliest works are geometric abstracts of basketball hoops, he painted landscapes throughout his career, and he was a prolific photographer. But his most well-known work is his series of full-size portraits of black people. The reception of “Lawdy Mama” illustrates a central tension in Hendricks’s work. He didn’t see anything inherently controversial or contentious about a black person painting black people. But because of what Hendricks memorably called “the **fucked-up-ness** of American culture” — a culture that loves blackness but not black people — everything he painted was political. “It was political in *their* minds,” Hendricks **said** last year. “My paintings were about people that were part of my life. If they were political, it’s because they were a reflection of the culture we were drowning in.”

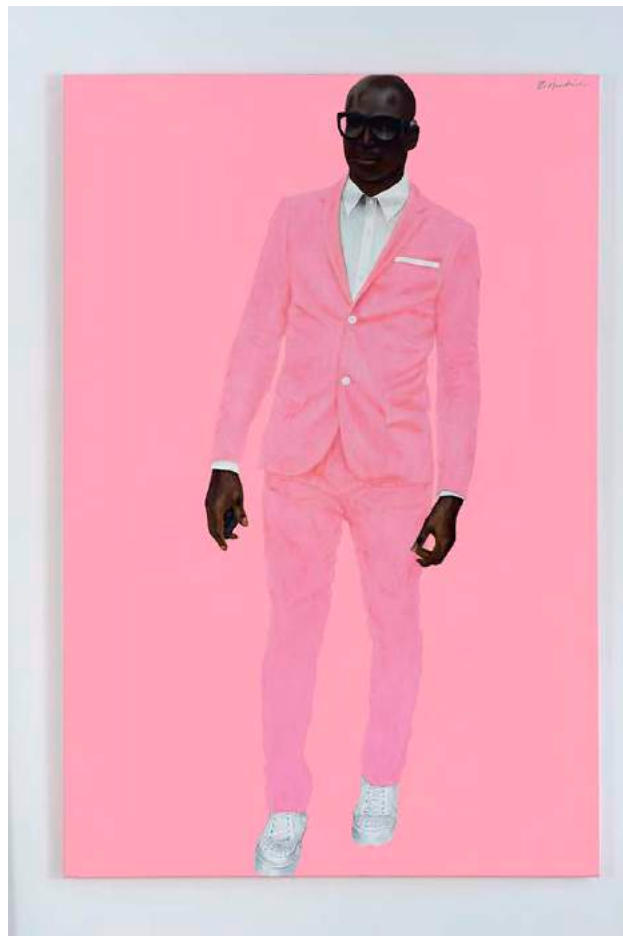
One way that privilege operates is that it decides who has the permission to not mean anything in particular, and Hendricks, a black artist operating in the lily-white art world, did not have that permission. His judgment that he needed no special reason, no angle, no purpose in order to paint the black people from his North Philadelphia neighborhood was itself an indictment of a culture that did not see black people as worthy subjects. Instead of being seen as an artist painting the world around him, for instance, he was seen as setting out to “correct the balance” of the lily-white canon. Hendricks saw this as a trap, and he tried everything to escape it: From 1984 to 2002, he didn’t finish any paintings at all. But he couldn’t stay away.

There’s an irony in the way the critical dialogue around Hendricks revolves so much about what is unseen and unsaid, because Hendricks was so fascinated in what was said by what was visible. His portraits are about the surface, which is not to say that they are superficial. Instead, they take the way a person chooses to present themselves as a conscious decision worth taking seriously. His portraits are fastidious about the construction of image: the details of fashion, the geometry of pose and gesture, the alchemy of facial expression. The people in his paintings aren’t captured candid and

alchemy of facial expression. The people in his paintings aren't captured candid and unaware. They know that they are being seen, and so Hendricks asks the question in his paintings: What does this person intend me to see, and what do I see?

In “**Tuff Tony**” (1978), Hendricks sees the glint of gold in Tony's earring, his watch, and his belt buckle, but also in the way clear light turns amber, diffused and tinted as it passes through Tony's transparent visor. Painted the same year, “**Tequila**” concerns itself with the self-possession in its eponymous woman's loud fashion, in her confident pose, in her still, sidelong stare, in the casual way her cigarette dangles from her fingers. 1975's “**Sweet Thang**” drapes herself over the couch in an insouciant slouch, her head propped up on splayed fingers, her face occluded by the pink bubble she's blowing with her gum. She looks distantly annoyed, the way people look when they're trying to ignore someone who is staring at them.

Hendricks's people burst off of the canvas, making eye contact with you, demanding your attention. They are vivid and lifelike, the illusion that they are three-dimensional heightened by the flat, monochrome backgrounds Hendricks often placed them against. Hendricks used his backgrounds like a photographer's studio. He had the uncanny ability to make people stand out by blending in, as in “**Photo Bloke**,” (2016) which places a man in a crisply tailored bright pink suit and against a pink background.



The ability to capture the way that people are self-aware and self-stylized makes an artist an insightful and skillful portraitist. The decision to paint people in a way that celebrates and even valorizes them makes a person an empathetic artist. But to do this when your subjects are black, and you are black, well, that's something else entirely. That's advocacy. That's radical. Hendricks was alternately amused and infuriated by this. His blackness and the blackness of his subjects shunted the discussion of his work down a track well-worn by black artists before and after him — his art becoming only a vein from which politics can be extracted. Critics could shortcut the process of critically engaging with his craft and form, skipping over it to opine what the art meant. They saw black and presumed to know what he and his work were about.

It wasn't that Hendricks religiously abstained from commenting on the society he lived in. "[Icon for My Man Superman \(Superman Never Saved Any Black People — Bobby Seale\)](#)" (1969) is a self-portrait in which Hendricks appears naked from the waist down, arms folded across a t-shirt emblazoned with the superhero's logo, wearing sunglasses, and framed in red, white, and blue. The title's parenthetical was borrowed from Black Panther founder Bobby Seale. Subtle it isn't. "[Crosshairs Study](#)" (2015) is a tetrptych: a hooded black face in the center canvas, flanked by paintings of two upraised palms. Crosshairs and a red dot are superimposed over the face. "I No Can Breathe," reads the fourth canvas. Hendricks's explicitly political works are so over the top — sometimes playfully, sometimes ponderously — that they feel like attempts to distinguish the rest of his work from advocacy.

Hendricks's interest in surfaces extended to the technique of painting itself, to the literal surface of his images. The son of a construction worker turned contractor, Hendricks spent his summers, while in art school, helping out his dad, and Hendricks inherited his father's eye for the way things are made. When asked questions about the broader themes of his work, Hendricks would often divert to the material of painting — thickness of the paint and its interplay with the texture of the canvas, the mixing of pigments, the choice of scale, the wood of the frame. He got excited when he talked about how he painted jeans (he wanted the denim in his paintings to seem worked and weathered), or how to choose white paint that won't yellow over time (part of the reason he started using acrylics).

His facility with technique did not make his paintings cold and antiseptic, and his fascination with image didn't lead him to flatten his characters into caricature. His portraits are as warm as they are grandiose, thick with love for the people in them. He didn't need a reason to love them. He just did.



April 24, 2017

Barkley L. Hendricks Painted Black People As We Are

Remembering the incredible legacy of one of America's greatest artists, who captured the essence of every person he painted.

Last week, word filtered through the art world that the 72-year-old artist **Barkley L. Hendricks** had died. Hendricks was best known for his post-modern and realist paintings of highly stylized, cool black subjects. He singlehandedly changed the possibilities of representation by depicting the people he knew and saw: black mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, uncles, aunties, and cousins. Today, you can see his influence in everyone from Rashid Johnson and Kehinde Wiley to Mickalene Thomas and Jordan Casteel. And his work can be viewed in the most august museums, such as the Whitney, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Tate Modern, and the recently opened National Museum of African American History and Culture.

I don't remember the first Hendricks picture I ever saw, because I have seen the people he painted everyday of my life. For example, my grandfather, who belongs to Hendricks's generation, has a perfectly picked afro that recalls the painter's 1969 self-portrait, *Icon for My Man Superman* (*Superman never saved any black people* — Bobby Seale).

However, I do remember that feeling of validation I had when I first really engaged with his work. Nothing I've seen on canvas or in a museum has blended pop and abstraction with a stylized black vernacular the way that he did. It is this unique quality that he had that continues to escapes many of the contemporary black artists who have won praise from the white art world.

Go visit a museum today and look at a painting of a black subject. Rarely is the work simply about them and their soul. Instead, symbolism and idealism consume much of the representation of black bodies that we see. It's hard to view these figures' desires when racism, whiteness, America, and "the struggle" make them everything but themselves.

This phenomenon speaks to the ways mere representation has been misconstrued as liberation. Unfortunately, "diversity" in the museum can sometimes fail to truly free the black image. You see this in the arena of art that is in desperate search of an "inclusivity" that is wholly informed by white liberalism. There, the black body has been reduced to a

series of problems in need of being fixed. This kind of visibility can be a trap, because it ignores the significant difference between depicting real everyday people and their convenient symbolic facsimiles.

Hendricks confronted these tired notions of the black body. There are no victims or celebrities depicted among his cast of ordinary icons, who root the black image in real life. Instead, there is, for instance, the photorealistic *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)*, a fiercely chic brother from the hood who shows his sensibility by wearing a fresh and long pink trench with fur accents. When looking at paintings like this, it becomes clear that Hendricks was a modern master who painted *us*.



"Icon for My Man Superman (Superman never saved any black people — Bobby Seale)" by Barkley L. Hendricks

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1945, Hendricks grew up in North Philly and received both his BFA and MFA from Yale University, where he studied classic works by artists like Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In the 1960s, on a trip to London's National Gallery, he was deeply moved by Anthony Van Dyck's 1621 *Portrait of Agostino Pallavicini*. But it also made him wonder why the black people he saw and knew in his own life weren't in the museum.

So he took his camera, which he referred to as his "sketchbook," and started snapping pictures of his family, friends, students from New Haven, Connecticut, where he taught studio painting. He would then invite his subjects into his studio or use the photographs to make portraits.

This was at a time when the Black Power movement inspired the poet and playwright Amiri Baraka to found the Black Arts Movement, which called for the creation of positive black nationalist images. BAM was a corrective measure to white racism and a homage to black history that Hendricks resisted. *Brilliantly Endowed (Self Portrait)* is one example of how Hendricks used his canvas to defy respectability

politics, garnering both praise and criticism. In the 1972 acrylic nude, Hendricks stands against a black monochrome backdrop, toothpick in mouth, hand on his thigh, wearing a hat, socks, and sneakers, with his dick exposed. Despite the calls for uplifting images of the black community to combat racism, Hendricks recognized it was time for the black body to signify something else. With paintings like *Brilliantly Endowed*, Hendricks confronted the respectability politics of the era by empowering subjects to just be themselves.

As a young queer black man, desperately looking for representations of people who had made peace with both of those identities by radically existing in the world, one painting of Hendricks that really stuck out to me was *George Jules Taylor*. Hendricks painted the gay black male student in 1972. In the portrait, Taylor wears a baby blue skull cap, a grey turtleneck under a denim jacket that matches his jeans. Over his shoulders is a cape. He's got his hands on hips, while his shoeless feet dance off into the foreground. Taylor appears to be floating above it all—blackness and gayness—against a blueish grey background that compliments his ebony body. His eyes, behind a pair of groovy frames, look directly at the viewer, subverting the consuming and fetishistic gaze. It's a slick, sublime portrait of intersectional individualism that blurs the lines of realism to show exactly who Taylor is by capturing him in a moment of transcendence. The first time I saw it, I swear to God I wanted to *be* that picture.



"George Jules Taylor" by Barkley L. Hendricks

For nearly five decades, against abstract monochrome pop-like backgrounds, Hendricks developed an oeuvre that in the 1970s was termed, "cool realism." His paintings—*Lawdy Mama* (1969), *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* (1972), and *What's Going On* (1974), among others—of our people spoke to the reality of the black experience, bucking against its commodification.

By 1984, his portraits had fallen out of style like painting in general. For nearly two decades, he did not produce oil portraits at all. Instead, he taught and developed bodies of work that included photographs, drawings, and small *plein air* studies. I wonder though, what would he have made of the Reagan years? Or the 1990s, when crack, hip-hop, and the hyper-commodification of black cool consumed black communities?

Curator Trevor Schoonmaker encouraged him in the early 2000s to start painting again by commissioning a new work for the New Museum. And in 2008, Schoonmaker organized the artist's first comprehensive traveling retrospective, *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, that featured nearly 60 large scale portraits.

Last March, he presented what turned out to be his last solo exhibition, *Barkley L. Hendricks* at Jack Shainman Gallery. It displayed a remarkable return to large scale portraiture that was reminiscent of his early works and provided glimpses into what he thought of Black Lives Matter and the police violence happening against black children, women, and men. In *Crosshairs Study*, several small diamond shaped canvases show a black subject wearing a grey hoodie with a sniper laser trained on his forehead. Underneath the scene, Hendricks painted: "I No Can Breathe."



Before the opening of *Barkley L. Hendricks*, I spoke with the artist for a **story for VICE's art and culture site, *Creators***. I didn't quote Hendricks directly in the story because as soon as the interview started, we were fighting. Because the work in the show was his most political yet, I thought he would finally want to talk about the social context in which he painted. "What inspired this show?" I asked the man. "It's a continuum of what I've been doing for 40 years," he said, sounding annoyed. "It's not just what inspired this show. I paint because I like painting." I nervously chuckled to myself and tried again: "Can you describe the situation the paintings are responding to?" He responded by asking me if I was familiar with police brutality. I told him I was and he said, "Alright well, it should be obvious."

For the next ten minutes the interview continued like this with Hendricks growing increasingly agitated. As I was admitting defeat and thanking him for his time, Hendricks

said, almost in a hushed tone, "You focused too much on the politics and not the art." It was a lesson that has forever changed the way I look at art.

*Hendricks art is currently on view at the Studio Museum in Harlem in the exhibition, "Regarding the Figure." And this summer, several of his canvases will be on display at the Tate Modern in a major survey of black art titled, **"Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power."***

The Atlantic

April 19, 2017



Remembering Barkley L. Hendricks, Master of Black Postmodern Portraiture

The prescient painter—who died at the age of 72—documented the African American figure as a cultural, and commodified, phenomenon.

What's Going On, one of the best-known portraits by Barkley L. Hendricks, arrived in 1974, three years after the Marvin Gaye album of the same name. At the time, Gaye's record was well-regarded, but not yet universally recognized as a masterpiece of protest art. Hendricks saw in it something not far off, a moment when black protest music would come into its own as a commercial concern. His striking portrait acknowledged the record's place in the commodification of black culture happening at a break-neck speed in the 1970s.

Hendricks, one of the finest figure painters of his generation, died on Tuesday at 72. Large in scale, his paintings combined the tonality of Rembrandt with the sensibility of Andy Warhol. His stylized portraits—realist African American figures set against abstract backgrounds—starred friends and neighbors from his life, posed for timelessness. His broader project was to document the black image as a phenomenon, as it manifested in fashion, billboards, magazines, and movies.

Along with Philip Pearlstein and David Hockney, Hendricks stands out as a pillar of postmodern portraiture. But he was never a well-known artist. While he is widely cited as a major influence among contemporary black artists today, Hendricks's work is under-represented in American museum collections. That owes in part to his black subject matter, but also to interests that kept him away from painting for almost 20 years.

He has since emerged as an overlooked but critical artist who touched on Pop Art and historical painting. In a 2009 essay for *Artforum*, Huey Copeland, an art historian at Northwestern University, wrote that Hendricks's paintings "illuminate the crisis of blackness within representation—a crisis everywhere shaped by an engagement with and an opposition to those persistent forms of reification, high and low, that transform liberatory self-fashioning into co-opted cliché."



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama* (1969). Oil and gold leaf on canvas. (Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.)

Copeland's point about art bridging high and low sources of imagery could easily describe the work of Kehinde Wiley, one of the biggest names in contemporary art today. Wiley's paintings of popular black figures (LL Cool J, Ice-T) in anachronistic, historical modes (Renaissance, Rococo) are forever indebted to Hendricks. The late artist's influence is also evident in the work of Jeff Sonhouse, Mickalene Thomas, Amy Sherald, Rashid Johnson, and others—to say nothing of the scores of painters Hendricks taught at Connecticut College, where he joined the faculty in 1972. (He received both his degrees in art from Yale University.)

Hendricks challenged the strictures of the art world in sly and overt ways. In 1977, he painted a life-sized nude of himself, *Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait)*, [so named](#) after

a line the art critic Hilton Kramer used to describe his style. Life-sized portraits of everyday black folks were hardly the way of the fine-art world in the 1960s, making him a radical; portraiture in general took a back seat in the 1970s, making him retrograde. His work could be dramatic—like his so-called limited-palette paintings, including *What's Going On*, with its subjects' crisp, white clothing blending into the background—but in the knowing way of a Blaxploitation movie poster.

In 2008, the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University organized a retrospective of Hendricks's work that traveled to Harlem's Studio Museum as well as to museums in Santa Monica, Houston, and Philadelphia (where Hendricks was born in 1945). That show, [“Birth of the Cool,”](#) curated by Trevor Schoonmaker, was the first to re-think Hendricks's role in portraiture, at a time when interest in his work was at an ebb. (He stopped painting from 1984 to 2002, in part to focus on his photography of jazz musicians.) Recently, Hendricks's work has gone up at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and at the Studio Museum; his paintings will also be at the center of the upcoming Tate Modern exhibit, [“Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power.”](#)

In that show, Hendricks's work may serve as something of a counterpoint. He never painted black people in protest or in crisis. Ideas about black nationalisms surfaced in his work as they were reflected in the world of images. He borrowed endlessly from the commercialization of black culture—a Pop Art way of turning the white gaze back in on itself. The artists who have followed in his footsteps are sometimes described as “post-black.” Hendricks may have beaten them to that.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Slick (Self-Portrait)* (1977). Oil, acrylic, and magna on linen canvas. (Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.)

HYPERALLERGIC

NEWS

Painter Barkley L. Hendricks Dies at 72

The artist, best known for his bold portraits of Black people, passed away early this morning

Jillian Steinhauer | April 18, 2017



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Slick (Self-Portrait)" (1977), oil, acrylic, and magna on linen canvas, 72 x 48 in (© Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Barkley L. Hendricks, a towering artist best known for his celebratory, uncompromising oil portraits of Black people from urban places, passed away early this morning. His death was sudden but due to natural causes. He was 72 years old.



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Sweet Thang (Lynn Jenkins)" (1975-76), oil on linen, 52 x 52 in (© Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Born in Philadelphia in 1945, Hendricks received a certificate from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and a BFA and MFA from Yale University. He studied photography before delving into painting — in a [Tate video](#) from last year, he calls his camera “my mechanical sketchbook” — and over the course of his decades-long career worked in fashion as well. The last is what often drew him to his subjects, whose clothes are typically as evocative as their expressions and poses. Hendricks began painting portraits of everyday people — friends, acquaintances, and individuals he met on the street — in the 1960s and ’70s, earning acclaim for a style that was both nuanced and unbothered. Many of his subjects face the viewer head on, and Hendricks was an expert in rendering the fullness of their human complexity.

Hendricks spent a large part of his life in cities in the northeastern US, and many of his subjects were people of color residing in those areas. The artist repeatedly said that he did not see the decision to paint full-size, scrupulous portraits of Black people as political — even in the face of a show at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) last year that included an image of a young Black man with his hands up, posed against the backdrop of a Confederate flag and in the crosshairs of a gun. “Well, I paint and make art because I like doing it; that’s always the motivating factor,” he [told Hyperallergic](#) on the occasion of that exhibition. “The subject matter I’m involved with, though, has always been seen as suspect, given the screwed-up culture we live in. I’m not sure how you are with other artists, but generally, how many white artists get asked about how their whiteness plays into their work? I didn’t [start to] paint or take photographs because I was Black.”



Barkley Hendricks, “In the Crosshairs of the States” (2016), oil and acrylic on canvas, 35 1/2 in diameter (© Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Regardless of his protestations, the art world welcomed Hendricks's work as a political statement; Black curators and younger Black artists especially saw it as foundational. Thelma Golden included Hendricks in the landmark *Black Male* exhibition that she curated at the Whitney Museum in 1994, and the text for his first retrospective, organized by Trevor Schoonmaker at the Nasher Museum of Art in 2008, notes that "Hendricks's artistic privileging of a culturally complex black body has paved the way for today's younger generation of artists."

"Over the past 17 years Barkley and I have worked closely together on numerous exhibitions, talks and projects, but it is his deep friendship that I will miss the most," Schoonmaker said in a statement shared with Hyperallergic. "To be blunt, he changed the course of my life. With so many artists and writers now responding to his paintings and photography, Barkley stands out as an artist well ahead of his time."

Though his work has defied easy categorization and his rugged individualism kept him outside of the spotlight for too many years, his unrelenting dedication to his pioneering vision has deeply inspired younger generations. ... Today Barkley's extensive body of work is as vital and vibrant as ever, and the full impact of his art and teaching is only beginning to unfold."

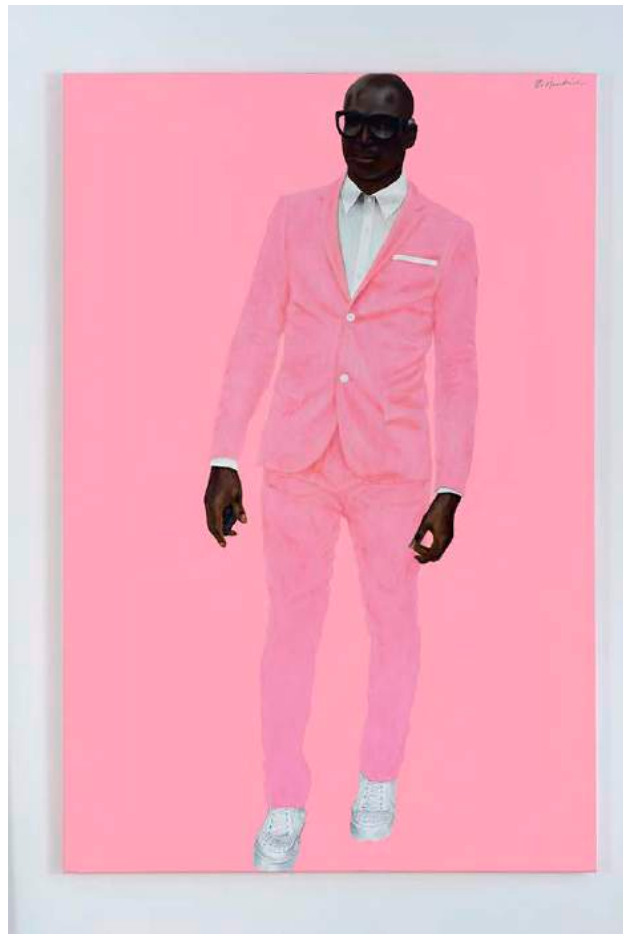
In addition to making his own work, Hendricks served as a professor of studio art at Connecticut College from 1972 to 2010.



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Lawdy Mama" (1969), oil and gold leaf on canvas, 53 3/4 x 36 1/4 in (© Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

“We have had the great honor of working with Barkley since 2005,” said Hendricks’s dealer, Jack Shainman, in a statement. “He was a situational painter, documenting the world around him in vivid and highly detailed paintings that capture the distinctive personalities of his subjects. He was a true artist’s artist, always dedicated to his singular vision; he was a figurative painter when it was trendy and especially when it wasn’t.

“Barkley’s groundbreaking oeuvre represents everyday people, shining a light on subjects who weren’t typically depicted in life-sized oil paintings. His work paved the way for a new generation of figurative painters, and his absence in the art world will surely be felt. The gallery will continue to represent Barkley’s outstanding legacy through ongoing advocacy of his tremendous body of work.”



Barkley L. Hendricks, “Photo Bloke” (2016), oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 in (© Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Hendricks, who is survived by his wife, Susan, of 34 years, reflected on his legacy in the Tate video shot last year: “I’ve been painting for 40 years. ... I get all kinds of different thoughts about what my painting’s about, and many of them don’t relate to the areas of inspiration. There should be a degree of mystery — what can I tell you? You know enough. I want it to be what I call memorable. I don’t want it to go poof.”

IN CONVERSATION

BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS with Laila Pedro

Since the 1960s, Barkley L. Hendricks has been creating powerful images of intense formal sophistication. Engaging and reworking conventions of portraiture, fashion, and iconography, Hendricks's work reveals an intense visual focus and a concern with the tactile, technical, and chemical effects of paint, pigment, and surface. On the occasion of his second solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery (March 17 – April 23, 2016), Hendricks spoke with Laila Pedro about creating illusions, photography as complementary practice, and learning to work with gold.



Portrait of Barkley Hendricks. Pencil on paper by Phong Bul. Reference photo courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery.

Laila Pedro (Rail): The paintings in the current show are graphically political—with text like “Fuck Fox News” prominently featured. In your early works from the '60s and '70s the politics seem more iconographic, emerging through relationships of subject, scale, and composition, rather than through words.

Barkley Hendricks: Let me correct the assumption that my early work was explicitly political. I was only political because, in the 1960s, America was fucked up and didn't see what some artists or what black artists were doing. It was political in their minds. My paintings were about people that were part of my life. If they were political, it's because they were a reflection of the culture we were drowning in. One example is *Lawdy Mama* (1969). The sitter in *Lawdy Mama* is my cousin, who had a beautiful 'fro. There are always reactions to that piece from people who thought they knew something about art, thinking it was Angela Davis, or someone like that. No. I did it because it was my cousin.

Rail: *Lawdy Mama* is an iconic work—literally. Formally, it recalls Byzantine icons. Was that a way of rendering sacred those close to you?

Hendricks: I did several paintings with arched tops. Three of them together were part of my “Basketball” series. I had one arch piece left, and it turned into *Lawdy Mama*. It was the first time I used gold leaf for the background. That was my first major gold-leaf painting. So it was an education.

Rail: An education in what sense?

Hendricks: I'll give you a technical background in terms of what I experienced. First of all, I was working on a canvas. Usually gold leafing is done on a surface that is rather rigid or even hard; it's done on panel. Many of the major icons were done on very hard surfaces to ensure that they could be burnished or made shiny—that they could be gone back into with tools that would give a kind of glow or reflective quality. I was using canvas, and canvas didn't have that rigid back surface on which to use a burnisher. What came through was the texture of the canvas. And that was cool with me. I didn't need to burnish it or make it shinier than what it was.

The second area that kicked my ass was the fact that I knew nothing about the whole process of leafing; I knew only what I read. When I did a study piece, it helped me deal with the larger one. I found that I had misrepresented the amount of time it would take and the material that I would need given the time. What I mean by that is that there are a number of different glues, or adherents. At the time I'd gotten a slow size, which meant you could put the adherent down and wait for a particular amount of time to get ready and then you'd lay the gold leaf down. I was actually working on that piece for almost ten hours straight. The lesson I learned was how to modify the time experience. It depended on if I used slow or fast size. That was an important lesson.

The third lesson was that gold is very finicky, very delicate. The slightest wind or heavy breath will send it fluttering all over the place. I had to close all the windows so there was no air circulating. I had started with my air conditioner on and a window open and I realized the slightest gust would crinkle it up so it wouldn't work. So that was the next lesson I learned about working with gold leaf.

Rail: Your paintings sometimes recall candid photographs drawn from in-the-moment experiences.

Hendricks: I had a painting from when I was in the Army. I took a little camera and I shot some things. One of the pieces that I did was of a fellow recruit that I had a bit of fun with in terms of sarcasm with his image. He was a Private. And I did a painting with a Lieutenant's bar on his helmet. I called the painting *FTA* (1968), which stands for "Fuck the Army." When we were marching we'd chant that: "FTA all the way!"

Rail: Did being in the Army affect your work in other ways?

Hendricks: Made me want to stay the fuck away from the Army.

Rail: Did you continue working with photography after that?

Hendricks: Yes. Photography has always been an important adjunct. I went to Yale and took a class in American photography. I spent more time with the photographers at Yale than with the painters.

Rail: Why was that?

Hendricks: The painters weren't figurative; most of them were abstract. They were pour painters. They were nice guys, but it wasn't anything that interested me. The photographers offered a direction that I didn't know a lot about, like working with the Zone system and the printing area of imagery and the variety of cameras. I learned a lot from them.

Rail: Speaking of pour painters and non-figurative painters, you were doing primarily portraiture at a time where most of the value and focus in the art world were on formalism and abstraction. What was your relationship with other painters, and with what was going on in painting around you?



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Crosshairs Study*, 2015. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 4 paintings, each 12 × 12 inches. Overall installed dimensions TBD. ©Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Hendricks: I didn't give a fuck what was going on. There's nothing new out here. That's what irritates me about this culture—it always wants to play some dumbass game. I didn't care what was being done by other artists or what was happening around me. I was dealing with what I wanted to do. Period.

Rail: Can you tell me about the composition of the new works, in the current show at Jack Shainman Gallery?

Hendricks: I was actually thinking just yesterday about writing something about these images myself. Previously, as in my survey at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2008, most of the paintings leaned more to oil than acrylic. Now there's an equal amount of acrylic—if not more, in some areas. I've been learning to manipulate and work with acrylic a bit more from a standpoint of drawing and image making, rather than the acrylic being a backdrop or the flat area of my pieces. This body of work relies on acrylic coming closer to the way I would have handled watercolor. I love watercolor a lot. Some parts of the paintings have a watercolor quality in terms of the drawing. I'm being more ambidextrous and am more able to marry the two in ways that I feel happy with, in terms of what I've learned over the years handling watercolor. Watercolor is a transparent medium, so it is about using that approach. And it's a quicker drying medium so if I needed to make an area drier I just whip out my hair dryer and get my area dry so I can work on it quickly. There are some areas of detail where, now, it is a bit more logical to use an acrylic approach.

I have a series of paintings that I call my “Limited Palette” series. The one I’m working on currently is white on white. The way the watercolor approach works for me is that now I don’t have to use an impasto quality of paint layering: I can use more of a watercolor to get what I want. An interesting situation with my “Limited Palette” area is a work that was recently acquired by the Whitney Museum, called *Steve* (1976). It was a white-on-white piece that was oil, acrylic, and Magna. Magna was a paint that was used that was very workable, close to oil, but it dried faster. Being a synthetic resin material, it wasn’t supposed to yellow. Oil, being a paint that was ground with linseed oil or walnut oil, over the years would tend to yellow a bit more than acrylic and Magna. So I wanted to use the double-core Magna for the clothing area. It had gotten damaged with the previous owner and the Whitney acquired it and put their conservation team on it. I haven’t seen it since it’s been restored. There was recently an article in the New Yorker, [“The Custodians: How the Whitney is Transforming the Art of Museum Conservation” January 2016], about their conservation team.

Rail: That was an interesting article, because it elucidated how quickly and critically conservation practices are evolving. As someone who is a very sophisticated technician when it comes to paint, what was your experience working with the Whitney’s conservation team?

Hendricks: It was interesting: when they acquired it they invited me to visit the museum and meet with them and talk about it. As you say, I’m a technician. I like the area of the chemistry of paint. When I was in art school, for example, I did not miss materials and techniques class, because it was full of knowledge. I find I’m constantly dealing with certain areas of chemistry. I had a nice talk with them.

Rail: Speaking of school, you were a professor for how long? You taught at Connecticut College, my alma mater, until 2010.

Hendricks: I was at Connecticut College for thirty-nine years. Before then at Yale, and at the Philadelphia Department of Recreation, and in various visiting artist roles. So I’ve been a teacher for over forty years.

Rail: Does teaching inform your practice in a useful way, or is it purely a survival mechanism?

Hendricks: Both. It’s a hand-in-glove situation.

Rail: In the current show, there’s a very powerful signifier of our cultural moment: *In the Crosshairs of the States* [2016] depicts a figure wearing a hoodie, framed within crosshairs. *Crosshairs Study* [2015] has that same figure, but fragmented, so that there are several diamond shapes that make up the painting. It evokes, through a visual distillation, “Hands up: Don’t shoot.”

Hendricks: It’s a current theme that is part of the culture now. I’m touching on what’s going on. Have you ever been thrown against a wall and frisked? It’s not something I’ve experienced every day, but I’ve been thrown against a wall and frisked. Philadelphia was like a Gestapo city. The police chief there when I left in 1970 was a man named Frank Rizzo. Anywhere you went in areas of color you had to address the police. You had to watch out for the police and you had to watch out for the thugs. In a way the police and the thugs were one and the same.

Rail: The works in this show reflect some of your long-time themes: black bodies, fashion, posing. Are they a series of work unto themselves? Or do you see them as part of a sequence or lineage with your earliest portraits?



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Roscoe*, 2016. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 41 1/2 inches diameter. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Hendricks: Well, I'm still alive. [Laughter.] So it's a continuum. I was reading something in the Times this morning about the Hollywood situation. I was always relating to fashion issues. I was thinking, "Damn; I should do some women and more fashion." I've done that before. But I mean the formal, floor-length dress, and heels, and things like that. I've done some sketches, but I haven't done anything recently that has dealt with glamour fashion. I have a few friends and associates who would pose for me, but I haven't moved in that direction recently because of what has piqued my interest as of late. My photography approach is such that, at Connecticut College, for example, I would constantly have models in the drawing and painting classes and I could take a glamour approach where we'd work with a given clothing industry. The wedding industry, for example, is a billion-dollar enterprise. So I would have a model with wedding dresses. Or the Halloween approach, where I would have someone dressed up in all kinds of Halloween costumes.

Rail: Maybe the most fashion-driven image in this show is the pink-on-pink Photo Bloke (2016). Hendricks: That was a dude I met in London. He was actually doing some photography himself. His style was such that I had to approach him, and I took some images of him. That led to the pink-on-pink, although it's not the first time that I've used pink as an area color in my work. Recently I'm using some of what's happening in the culture again. I was just telling my wife, not long ago, that I did a series of three paintings of a young man, Michael. One of them was called *Michael BPP (Black Panther Party)* (1971). When I made that painting he was in the Black Panther Party. The next one was when he'd gotten out of the party. I called it *New Michael* (1971), and his attire was entirely different. Another piece was another image of him that didn't reflect any of the attire that any of the Black Panthers were using. These were people that I knew. *Michael BPP* could be a part of the political shit. But I just knew him.

And the man with the pink suit was to me a logical connection to the area around him. I got the chance to mix up—I think—a beautiful pink with the acrylic. If you showed it under a black light it would get a little bit of a glow to it, because I used a paint that had a bit of ultraviolet in it, which gave a powerful pink.

Rail: Was he wearing that color, or did that emerge in the process?

Hendricks: No, he had on a color close to it. In that particular piece, I was working with how to make paint respond to what I wanted. I kind of laid the color down, and then used a way to take

some color up so there's a translucent element. There's only two pieces where I've done jeans. You see a lot of people paint jeans. But no one paints jeans like me, with the consciousness of the fact that jeans are a material that is worn rather than painted. When I say "worn" I mean the way denim actually looks—you can see the fabric that has been worn down, especially now that they're selling you material with gaping holes.

Rail: I'm wearing some right now.

[Laughter.]



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama*, 1969. Oil and gold leaf on canvas. 53 × 36 inches. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Hendricks: I was actually busting a young woman's chops the other day. I'd just come back from Manhattan and she had a pair of jeans with holes. And I said, "You know, it's interesting. When I was growing up, if you went to school with jeans like that, they'd bust the shit out of you! They'd call you a poor motherfucker! You could not step out and be seen in any of today's fashion." Actually, I have a pair on right now with holes and paint on them—because I wipe my brushes on them.

Back to the approach to painting denim: The art of painting is not only about putting paint down. I like to use the texture of the canvas as a vehicle to get the illusion that I'm interested in. People have always connected me with a political situation. I'm more about illusion. When you look at one of my paintings, you'll see that there are glasses, or a shirt that looks like wool. I want that to be something that resonates with you first, rather than you trying to be connected with the unfortunate situation people of color face. There's a script that's been written, whether we like it or not. We're all a part of it. What needs to happen is for artists to get up and get out of that headlock scenario—out of that script that's been written that you had no control over.

CONTRIBUTOR

Laila Pedro

LAILA PEDRO is Managing Editor of the *Brooklyn Rail*.



PEOPLE

Why Barkley L. Hendricks Is the Mack Daddy of Living Portraitists

Christian Viveros-Fauné, Thursday, March 31, 2016



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Crosshairs Study* (2015).

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Before Kehinde Wiley patented his slick likenesses of black aristocracy or Titus Kaphar foisted painted images of Ferguson protesters onto the cover of *Time Magazine*, there was Barkley L. Hendricks—the originator of painting's cool school. Scoping out his wide-ranging influence, it seems inconceivable that this pioneer of Pop-inflected portraiture ever worked in obscurity. A terrific exhibition of new paintings at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York serves as a reminder of why Hendricks remains, for contemporary painting and painters, the undisputed godfather of soul.

The tag "The Birth of the Cool" was originally coined to baptize Miles Davis's 1950s sound. But the phrase fit Hendricks' timeless paintings so naturally that, in 2008, it titled the artist's only survey to date. The exhibition, organized by current Nasher Museum of Art Chief Curator Trevor Schoonmaker, was a traveling revelation for those not yet acquainted with Hendricks' achievements (I caught the show, like an epiphany, at the Santa Monica Museum of Art). In the words of LA Times critic Christopher Knight, "Hendricks explored the intersection of the black experience and painting history." Most important, Hendricks' multi-museum exhibition delivered an artistic tour de force that appeared to emerge, full-blown, from within America's racially wounded psyche.



Barkley L. Hendricks. 524 West 24th Street.

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

If the key experience for the young 23-year-old Hendricks, circa 1968, was a grand tour of European museums—it mixed direct lessons in Old Master paintings with first-person schooling on the black figure's historical invisibility—the 70-year-old artist has lately become a leading portraitist of Obama-era America. Where his figures once chronicled the defiant stylings of 1970s blackness, today they occupy a far more central place—much like black culture does in the national discourse. Now as then, Hendricks' canvases galvanize whole fields of visual stimuli that include sports, politics, music, fashion, and, of course, painting. His iconic portraits—nine of which grace Jack Shainman's West 24th Street space—plug modern ways of seeing into thousands of years of art history, revealing correspondences, incongruities and, as often as not, yawning gaps.



Barkley L. Hendricks, Manhattan Memo (2015).

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Though all of Hendricks' latest oil and acrylic on canvas works jibe with the most prominent paintings in his oeuvre—he is best known for realistic portraits of fashionable black people against flat, single-color backgrounds—several take a hard turn toward the political, echoing slogans from newspaper headlines and the Black Lives Matter

movement. This development is, to say the least, uncharacteristic in an artist who much prefers entertaining eccentric figure and ground arrangements to espousing overt social commentary. (If you don't believe me, see Hendricks' contentious March interview with Karen Rosenberg at [Artspace](#).)

But whatever Hendricks' past preferences, there's no avoiding his current views on American politics at Shainman. Among other works, the paintings *Crosshairs Study* and *In the Crosshairs of the States*—both of which consist of multiple canvases—feature a young man in a hooded sweatshirt with upraised hands whom the artist places squarely in a gun's sights. If the image appears crude or unusually straightforward, consider Manet's three versions of Emperor Maximilian's execution—pictures that also used deadpan depiction to describe a very public martyrdom. The largest of Hendricks' two Trayvon Martin-as-Jesus pictures uses the confederate battle flag as background; his grayscale “study” includes a stenciled adaptation of Eric Garner's last words: “I No Can Breathe.”



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Roscoe* (2016).

Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Other Hendricks' portraits also wear their own politics openly, but do so characteristically on their chest. There's *Roscoe*, a large circular canvas featuring a rainbow background with a centrally located player in jeans, shades, and a blue t-shirt that bluntly reads “Fuck Fox News.” And then there is *Manhattan Memo*, a full-length portrait of a black man in Timberlands, paint-flecked jeans, a baseball cap, and dark t-shirt; it's slogan repeats the legendary f-bomb cluster from Spike Lee's 2002 film *25th Hour*: “Fuck You You Fucking Fuck.” Despite the harshness of the expression, Whistler or Bronzino unavoidably come to mind. Like Hendricks, both precursors were expert at projecting their subjects' aristocratic bearing—what we call “coolness” today.

But not everything reads political in Hendricks' new show; conversely, those paintings that propound politics are never reducible to mere slogans. Take, for instance, the square and rectangular canvases the artist turns on their axes to suggest movement or instability.

In keeping with this minor innovation, the paintings *Anthem* and *Passion Dancehall* use their frames' tilt to underscore the energy of their dancing, singing and partying subjects. A third portrait, featuring a spindly Chris Rock look-alike Hendricks has ironically titled *John Wayne*, uses the diamond format of its hand-made frame to echo the bling its subject gleefully sports on his left ear.



Barkley L. Hendricks. 524 West 24th Street.
Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

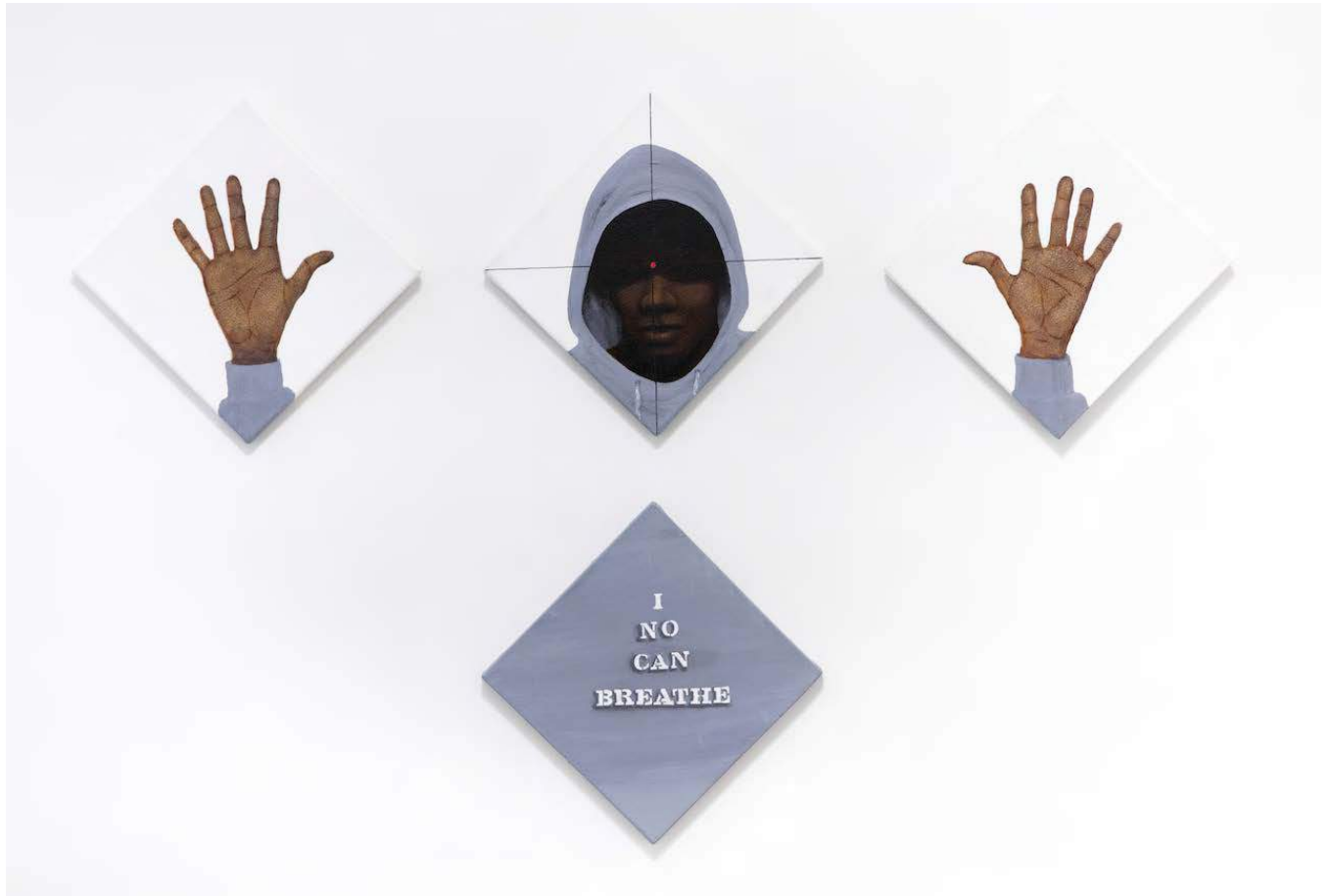
Ultimately what animates Hendricks' paintings is an eye for the public impostures that attire private selves, with a specialty in the attitudes inflamed by America's ongoing racial dilemma and, by extension, the insecurities attendant to stubborn power dynamics. Oscar Wilde, a dandy like Hendricks and most of his portrait subjects, once said the following about the art of painting people's likenesses: "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter." In Hendricks' case his portraits are also frank, unsparing glimpses into the American-born, globalized, self-expressive phenomena called soul.

"Barkley L. Hendricks" is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York from March 17-April 23, 2016.

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Barkley L. Hendricks on “the Fucked-Up-Ness of American Culture”

by [Lee Ann Norman](#) on April 7, 2016



Barkley L. Hendricks, “Crosshairs Study” (2015), oil and acrylic on canvas, 4 paintings, each 12 x 12 in (all images ©Barkley L. Hendricks, courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Barkley L. Hendricks is well known for creating life-size oil paintings of mostly black American subjects from northeastern cities, but his practice involves much more than that. For nearly 50 years, Hendricks has worked across different media, from painting and drawing to photography and fashion, to capture the essence and likeness of friends, family members, and acquaintances whose style or manner caught his eye and imagination.

Many of his most famous images feature African Americans, a gesture that in itself can be considered radical within a predominantly white, western art historical context. But political agitation or re-writing history isn't necessarily the artist's first impulse. Last month, I spoke with Hendricks to learn more about the roots of his work and practice, and his new exhibition of paintings at [Jack Shainman Gallery](#).

Lee Ann Norman: *You've been working as an artist for quite some time now, but most people who know your work are familiar with the iconic images of mostly black and brown people in urban settings. Your show at Jack Shainman features a new body of these paintings. What inspired you to return, in a sense, to portrait painting, since you've also worked a lot in photography and fashion, and have painted landscapes?*



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Roscoe" (2016), oil and acrylic on canvas, 41 1/2 in diameter (click to enlarge)

Barkley L. Hendricks: Well, I paint and make art because I like doing it; that's always the motivating factor. I've created a variety of imagery over the years — figurative painting, photography, fashion portfolios. The subject matter I'm involved with, though, has always been seen as suspect, given the screwed up culture we live in. I'm not sure how you are with other artists, but generally, how many white artists get asked about how their whiteness plays into their work? I didn't [start to] paint or take photographs because I was black. We have a lot of work to do [in the art world] — black, white, yellow, red — all of us. How we go about that work is another issue, but that's where you, as a critic, come in.

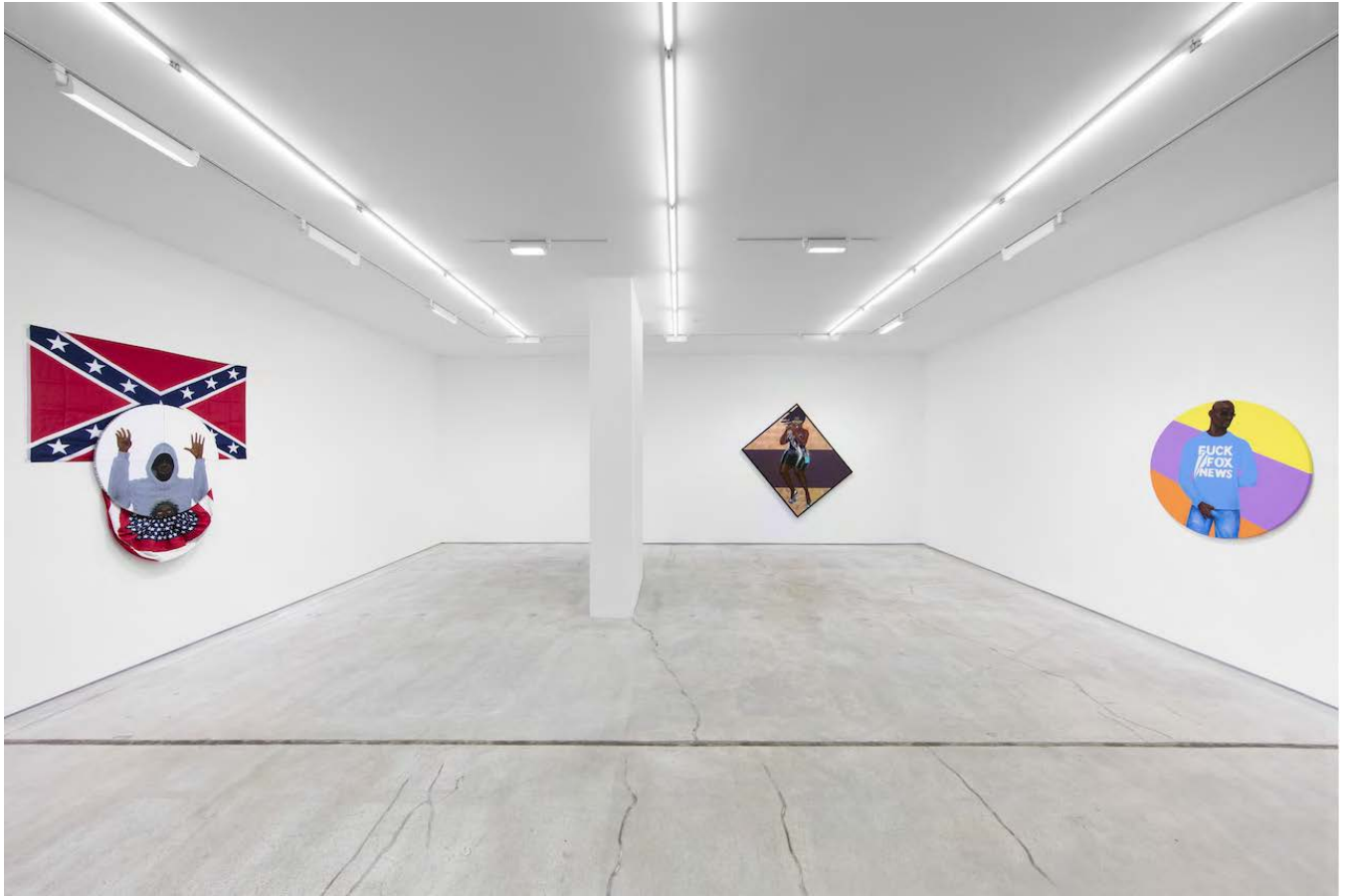
LAN: *Critics have a lot of power in how we interpret and translate the meaning of artwork. So tell me about some of your influences, or how you think and go about making your work.*

BLH: Do you know where hipness comes from? [Hipness] meaning "in the know" ?

LAN: *I think it was in relation to jazz musicians — their slang, right?*

BLH: Well, yes, but its origins come from more than that. Let me give you an example. My connection to photography goes all the way back to Yale. By the time I got there, I had a full dose of

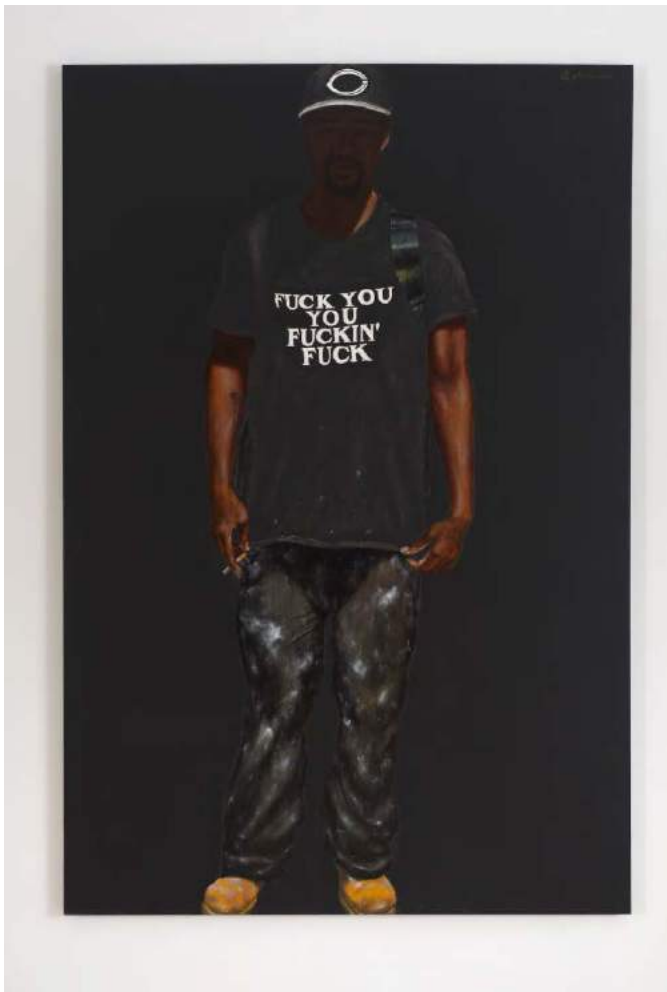
professional study with photographers like Walker Evans. Back then, I spent more time with photographers in basement labs than I ever did with painters. The education I got from them was important.



'Barkley L. Hendricks' installation view at Jack Shainman Gallery (click to enlarge)

When I was at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, there was a painting class that I never missed with Ted Siegal. I gained a lot of knowledge about paint as material, and I use it all the time. For example, in this exhibition, I wanted to make something that was white on white, and if you use oil, the paint will yellow a bit over time. Acrylic has a plastic base, so it won't yellow as fast. I wanted these white-on-white images to yellow less. Other examples of this [learning] are scattered throughout the show. In a painting, I might have one area in acrylic, and then use oil in another. One piece has copper leaf and variegation in it. When I first started experimenting with gold leaf, it was an experience. (*Laughs.*) No one knew how to use it, so I had to do my homework and figure out how to lay it and work with it on canvas since it's mostly been used on the rigid surfaces like board or glass and is usually associated with Greek and Roman icons.

LAN: *Over the years, you've been quietly making images that many critics and historians have said inspired younger artists who are also working with black figuration and representation in art. Some of them, like [Kehinde Wiley](#), are very clear that they see their images serving as correctives to the canon, so they carry the weight of politics. Do you see your images functioning in that way, or do you see yourself that way?*



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Manhattan Memo" (2015), oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 in (click to enlarge)

BLH: Given the fucked-up-ness of American culture, we can say that everything [I've made] is political, but that's not the case. My painting "[Lawdy Mama](#)" (1969) is a good example. Critics and writers likened her to [Kathleen Cleaver](#) [activist and wife of Black Panther Party (BPP) member Eldridge Cleaver], but the woman who posed for that painting is my cousin. It had nothing to do with the Black Power movement. I get irritated by this. Sometimes critics think they know more than the artist, but my images speak to many areas of culture. When I was at Yale, I made a series of works called *Michael BPP*. I knew him when he was a Panther, but also when he left — his attire completely changed. I made three paintings of him in total. That connection he had to the BPP did not color my whole representation of him.

I can understand the reasons why artists might be motivated to correct art history, or make a political statement, but I also think about stupid shit that happens. I paint people, black and white, who I like and who want to pose for me. There are actually quite a few white people who want to pose, but can't due to timing. I've resorted to photography now to overcome some of that. I keep using "white" and "black" but that's because we've set up this situation where using those terms as descriptors has become part of the dialogue. I have a whole mess of what I call "Pretty Little White Girls with Dreads." (*Laughs.*) Mind you, I have black girls too — I don't discriminate [based on race]. I understand young artists and their motivation, as long as they do their homework.

LAN: *After this exhibition, what's next for you? More paintings? Photography? Landscapes? Jamaica?*

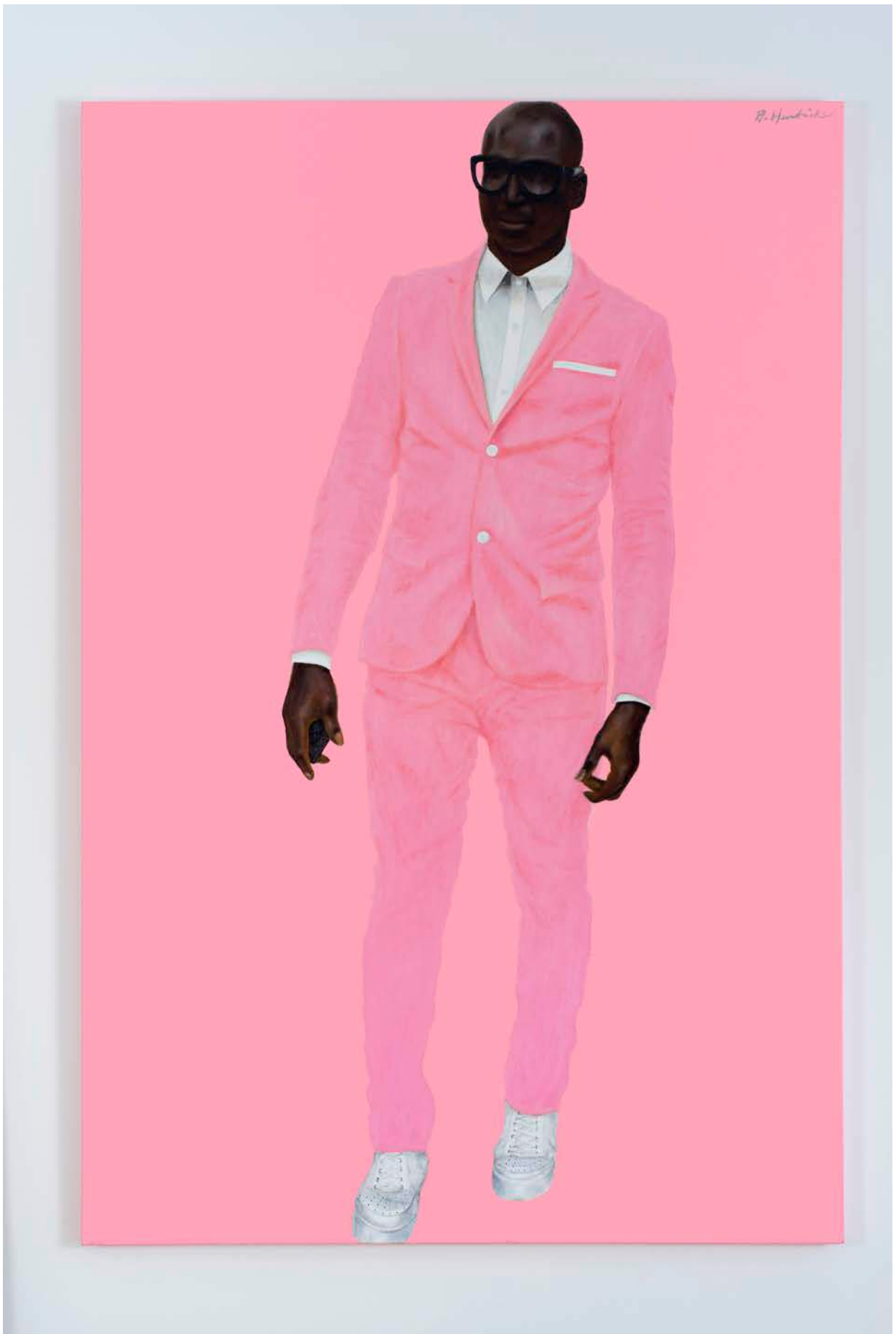
BLH: Of course, I will continue with these works and continue going back to the Caribbean as much as I can — cold weather sucks. (*Laughs.*)



Barkley Hendricks, "In the Crosshairs of the States" (2016), oil and acrylic on canvas, 35 1/2 in diameter



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Anthem" (2015), mixed media including copper leaf, combination leaf, oil, and acrylic on canvas, 75 x 77 in



Barkley L. Hendricks, "Photo Bloke" (2016), oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 in



Barkley L. Hendricks, "JohnWayne" (2015), oil and acrylic on canvas, 68 x 68 in

Barkley L. Hendricks continues at **Jack Shainman Gallery** (524 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through April 23.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Forms, Portraits and Cars

Serge Alain Nitegeka, Barkley L. Hendricks and Sarah Braman in this week's Fine Art

By PETER PLAGENS

Updated April 11, 2016 7:39 p.m. ET



'In the Crosshairs of the States' (2016) by Barkley L. Hendricks PHOTO: BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Barkley L. Hendricks

Jack Shainman

524 W. 24th St.
(212) 337-3372
Through April 23

Barkley L. Hendricks is Kehinde Wiley avant la lettre. Born in 1945, Mr. Hendricks has been painting portraits of African-Americans since the 1960s, and is well known for his full-length studies that include people wearing emphatically 1970s bell-bottoms and heeled boots while giving off an overall Walt “Clyde” Frazier vibe. Although he knows how to get the most out of a silhouette and a slam-bang single background color, he’s less technically show-offy than Mr. Wiley, and he seems to have a real rapport with his subjects.

Mr. Hendricks, who is a professor emeritus of art at Connecticut College, veered away from his trademark style in the 1980s and concentrated instead on landscape painting, favoring views of Jamaica in oval formats. After about 20 years, he returned to social portraiture—his much stronger suit. In this show, Mr. Hendricks also ventures—a bit obviously—into political commentary with two pieces, one of them with a Confederate flag above and Union bunting below, and both involving a young person’s face in a hoodie with the bright red dot of a laser gun sight on his forehead.

Given that the exhibition overall is crisp, colorful and sincere, it’s a cavil to observe that there’s something just a bit off in the execution of a few pictures. But when you take in “Photo Bloke” (2016), a painting of a very dark man wearing a pink suit over a white shirt, all against a slightly lighter pink background, you taste delicious vintage Hendricks and then some.

Artspace

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Q&A

Barkley L. Hendricks on Why You Shouldn't Call Him a Political Artist

By Karen Rosenberg

March 15, 2016



The artist Barkley L. Hendricks. Image courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

From his 1969 portrait of **Bobby Seale** in a Superman t-shirt to his new painting of a modern-day London dandy in a fitted pink suit, the artist **Barkley L. Hendricks** has painted figures that are spatially isolated yet sartorially and attitudinally in touch with vital issues of the day. “His portraits have always been people of the time,” says **Elisabeth Sann**, a director at **Jack Shainman Gallery** who has worked closely with the artist.

That’s unmistakable in Hendricks’s latest show at the gallery, which opens on Thursday. It includes two variations on the image, instantly recognizable from national coverage of **Trayvon Martin**’s death and ongoing protests, of a young black man with upraised arms and a gray hooded sweatshirt drawn around his face. One of them, *In the Crosshairs of the States*, attaches a confederate flag and American flag bunting to a painted tondo; superimposed on the canvas are the crosshairs and red laser dot of a gun scope. On the subject’s sweatshirt is a haloed black figure with upraised eyes—a nod to Jesus, according to the gallery. Stenciled text around the circumference of the canvas lists states in which members of the police have shot and killed

African Americans.

Not everything in the show is so clearly involved with a current national crisis. In addition to the timelessly cool *Photo Bloke*—the man in cotton-candy pink who became an [Instagram sensation](#) when the aptly titled painting was exhibited in Shainman’s booth at [the Armory Show](#) earlier this month—there’s a casually attired *John Wayne* in a basketball jersey, voluminous denim cut-offs, and diamond earring. And there are two pictures, of a man and woman dancing frenetically in matching white outfits and a woman in a metallic minidress and sculptural platform shoes who is belting out a song with evident strain, in which a complex interplay of color, music, and gesture transcends the date stamps of particular fashion choices.

And as Hendricks is quick to point out, there are experiments in composition and technique in this body of work—including shaped and multi-part paintings and a new focus on acrylics, after decades of working in both acrylic and oil—that also demand scrutiny. In an unexpectedly combative interview in advance of the show’s installation, he spoke to Artspace deputy editor [Karen Rosenberg](#) about what critics do or don’t see in his work, whether figurative painting is having a resurgence, and why the word “political” carries so much baggage.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *In the Crosshairs of the States*, 2016. Oil and acrylic on canvas with bunting and Confederate flag, 35 1/2 inches diameter (painting), 69 x 61 x 6 inches installed. ©Barkley L. Hendricks.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

To start off, could we talk about fashion and politics in your portraits and how they intersect? Politics seems to be at the heart of your newest work—

It’s not the heart of the new work. It’s a portion. I’m curious, how much are you aware of my work? Prior to this particular situation?

Quite a bit.

All right, then you’re aware that it’s not basically about the politics. Are you not?

Yes, I'm aware that there are many other aspects of your work. However, the press release for your show at Shainman calls it your "most political to date," and highlights your painting *In the Crosshairs of the States*, of a black man in a gray hooded sweatshirt who is holding his hands up and is seen through the crosshairs of a gun scope.

Well, that's sort of one of those unfortunate situations—a part of promoting my work. It's a small portion, and certainly a small portion along my career. Now, to address what I'm pretty sure that you have gotten from the press release, yes there are several that are involved with political statements and the way that I put together some pieces deals with my photographing people and with ways of making composites for a particular image that takes me around the world where I've traveled.

Some of these portraits are composites, of people that you see on your travels and other things that you come across, as opposed to a portrait of a specific individual?

Correct. It depends on the particular piece. Sometimes they're direct from photographs, sometimes there are composite sketches, or current events or current images that can be a part of doing my homework.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Roscoe*, 2016. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 41 1/2 inches diameter. ©Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Some of those current events are very clearly foregrounded in the new paintings. Why don't you think of this work as political?

No, I said it wasn't *all* political. A portion of it is political. And then we would have to talk about the word "political" in this particular culture, in America. Anything a black person does in terms of the figure is put into a "political" category.

That's an important point. I'm referring, though, to your use not of the figure per se but of specific images that have come to symbolize the Black Lives Matter movement, such as the man in the hoodie with raised hands.

It's in direct correlation to what's happening as we speak.

Yes, exactly. So I guess what I'm saying is, a lot of viewers will see it in a political context. Is that something that's fair to say?

I mean, it's obviously meant to reflect what's going on. And how you deal with the politics of the day, that depends on what your view of America is or is not.

It's hard to argue with that. Circling back to the topic of style in your work, the gray hoodie is an example of how something that we might initially think of a style choice can become a political statement.

Did you happen to read [the piece on the hoodie in last Sunday's New York Times Magazine?](#) It has a direct relationship to how that particular garment has evolved into a statement that America has distorted with certain people. I mean, I didn't see anything in that article about Bill Belichick. You know who he is?

I believe he has something to do with football, although that is not my area of expertise.

Yeah. He's the coach of the New England Patriots. He's an old white guy. Google him.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *In the Crosshairs of the States*, 2016, oil and acrylic on canvas, 35 1/2 inches diameter. Inventory #BH16.003. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

I think another type of garment that is front and center in the new work are these message t-shirts, which are very blunt and confrontational and, in the painting *Roscoe*, reinforced by an equally strong gesture. Were these shirts something you saw people wearing, or is the text a separate element in the composite?

You're in New York, I take it.

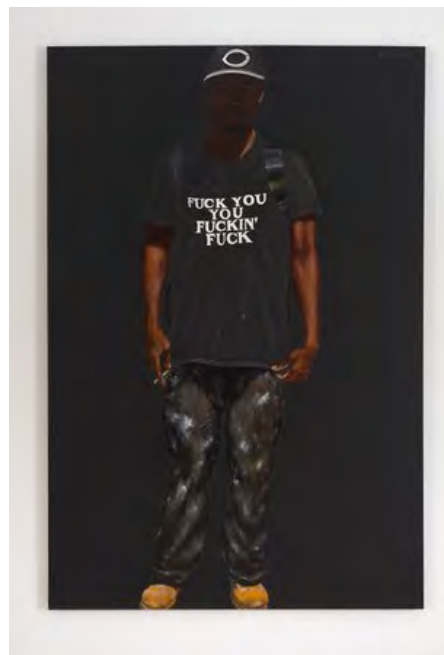
Yes.

[Laughs] You must be aware of the number of t-shirts with lettering on it, walking around. They're out there. I came close to doing the "Fuck the Police" t-shirt, but I opted elsewhere.

I've been in situations with the police where I've been up against a wall: "motherfucker." The Philadelphia police, are you familiar with them? I've had my encounters with them. Luckily it's not a whole lot, but yes, I've been frisked down.

So there's an element of personal history.

About 30 years ago I did a particular piece that was called *F.T.A.*—"Fuck the Army." And I did a series of paintings of a friend at the time when I was at Yale, that was in the Black Panther party. So when I mention people being aware or not aware of certain style directions, I can't say any more than that.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Manhattan Memo*, 2015. Oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 inches. ©Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Coming back to contemporary activism: do you have a view on how art and artists can most productively engage with the Black Lives Matter movement?

To be honest, I don't really give a shit! I'm doing what I want to do. I paint because I like to paint. I paint because I'm motivated for a variety of reasons that I don't think are always necessary to blab about. The fact that I've had experiences within the context of what's going on currently adds fuel to particular formats or ideas—that's a part of what's going on currently.

There's obviously a lot more going on in the paintings. But, again, this is an element of the works that, given the context, people are going to be thinking about and discussing.

Don't write for that! Don't make the mistake of writing for that. You see, you fall into the same

kind of, as I say, trap and stupidity that I've been dealing with all my career.

In terms of the press about you?

Yes.

Is there anyone who you think really got it right?

Are you familiar with Rick Powell? Or Trevor Schoonmaker? First of all, they didn't start off with my being a black artist. It's a component. It's a sort of situation that I happen to be a part of, in a nation that's constantly thinking about black and white. All right? I paint because I like to paint.

With this conversation, we haven't even talked about the material nature of painting. In fact, we haven't talked at all about the variety of paint handling that this show has.

Let's talk about that. What do you mean by the variety of paint handling, and is this a new development in your work?

For a long time, I would be referring to oil and acrylic painting. Well, this particular show, I'm using acrylics more, and doing certain things with acrylic paint that I hadn't done previously. This particular exhibition gave me a lesson in how to develop my format, outside of the use of oil. This is not abandoning oil, this is making the acrylic more fundamental in certain areas. There's also the surfaces of certain paintings—wet and dry or reflective against matte imagery.

Let's move beyond that whole area of “political” that seems to be a part of people's thinking, rather than introducing them to the methods and style and focus of my work that doesn't rely on that area of political-ness.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Photo Bloke*, 2016. Oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 48 inches. ©Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

I think it will be difficult for viewers, in an intense election year, to approach this new work without getting drawn into the powerful symbolic reference points and statements.

Well, some things are directly involved with what's going on.

Right.

As I said earlier, ever since I started painting there was a connection to certain areas of the culture that, again, wasn't a major motivating factor. Just by virtue of what America is or is not. That's why I like to talk with people who are going to be writing about me, rather than them all of a sudden taking a white myopic approach to what I do. Very little has been said about the fact that I like to paint landscapes.

That's true. Are there any landscapes in this latest body of work?

No, there are not. But what I'm getting at is that I paint a lot of things. It just so happens that under the circumstance, with this culture, this is what seems to be the major factor. I have no problem with particular work—how can I say—taking center stage, but I paint a lot of different things and it would be great if those who are writing about me start to get hipper to an artist that's not all political. It's one of the components. It's one or two of the images. Let's not fall into that stupid racial quicksand, which is a part of American culture. Let's not follow a proscribed line that seems to come to the front rather than dealing with a whole artist.

Now, I can mention a few articles that are totally stupid, by—I was informed you used to write for the *New York Times*?

That's right.

Well, I got some stupid articles in the *New York Times*. There's been a series of one-track directions that have nothing to do with what my work is. I paint people. I've painted white people. That hasn't been a part of anyone's observations. That's not what some esteemed writers have written. You follow me?

I think I do. For younger artists today who are working with some of the same issues of representation, and representation of the black body, do you think they have it easier in terms of the way their work is being received or interpreted? Has there been progress?

That's a very good question. My wife read something that said that I'm now working with the figure, and had in quotes [that representational and figurative paintings will be back](#). We both laughed—it hadn't gone anywhere, as far as I was concerned! There is, or was, [a leaning towards putting representation and figurative work](#) down, and if there's a comeback I'm glad to hear.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *John Wayne*, 2015. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 68 x 68 inches, 70 1/8 x 70 1/8 x 2 1/8 inches (framed).
©Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Speaking of portraiture and representation, you’ve made self-portraits time to time. Is that something you’re still doing?

I haven’t done anything recently. I’ve thought about it. Again, the writing—it shows you what people see. I have a meeting coming up with the Tate Modern. They have one of my paintings there, and someone said, “Is that a self-portrait”? And I said, “How the hell could you think it’s a self-portrait, when the painting is of a nude black man about six feet tall?” I’ve done several nude images, and there were some interesting comments made concerning them.

One of those images was actually a reaction to a critic’s comment—your self-portrait *Brilliantly Endowed* was a response to Hilton Kramer, who wrote in the *Times* in 1977 that you were a “brilliantly endowed” painter.

Good old Hilton. [laughs] As I say, there have been interpretations from day one, anytime I’ve gone public. And some of them have been stupid, asinine, and a few other things I’d like to describe. And what can I say? So I’m spending a little time with you, to make some history here. Let’s make some history.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

10 Things to Do in New York's Art World Before March 18

By Paul Laster • 03/14/16 4:29pm



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Photo Bloke*, (2016). (Photo: © Barkley L. Hendricks, Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

Opening: “Barkley L. Hendricks” at Jack Shainman Gallery

Barkley L. Hendricks is an amazing painter who managed to exist under the art world's radar until his 2008 exhibition “Birth of the Cool” at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University thrust his figurative work into the national spotlight. Mr. Hendricks realistically paints stylish African American men and women, plucked straight from urban streets. For his newest work, Mr. Hendricks integrates political themes with images of men wearing T-shirts with such provocative texts as “Fuck Fox News” and “Fuck You You Fuckin’ Fuck.”

Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 West 24 Street, New York, 6-8pm

NEW YORK OBSERVER

'Barkley L. Hendricks: Heart Hands Eyes Mind' at Jack Shainman Gallery

By Andrew Russeth 3/26 4:30pm



The Studio Museum in Harlem's 2008 retrospective for Barkley L. Hendricks proved that he was one of the defining artists of the postwar era, albeit working in a mode that hadn't yet earned him the recognition he deserved. Since the 1960s, Mr. Hendricks has been painting life-size portraits of black people, typically posing in front of monochrome backdrops. His subjects are almost always prepossessing and confident, meeting the viewer's gaze head-on. The paintings were inspired by a trip he took through Europe when he was in his 20s, and everything that he did not see in the art there.

Russeth, Andrew. " 'Barkley L. Hendricks: Heart Hands Eyes Mind' at Jack Shainman Gallery" (exhibition review). *New York Observer*, 26 March 2013: illustrated.

Now in his late 60s, Mr. Hendricks, who was born in Philadelphia and works in Connecticut, is back in New York with his first gallery show since 2008, and his first with Shainman, which has turned over to him both its West 20th Street gallery and its new space on 24th Street. Both sections of the exhibition are stunners, presenting not only a handful of those portraits (most new, plus a few strong older ones), but also the artist's lesser-known photographs, which were sadly missing from the Studio Museum show, and landscape paintings.

The 20th Street portion opens with a bang—three portraits that look like icons of saints thanks to the gold leaf his models pose in front of, a common Hendricks motif. In one, a chiseled young man in SpongeBob boxers and dreadlocks looks strong but vulnerable. In another, a woman in white, heels emblazoned with Warhol Marilyns, hip cocked, takes a drag from a cigarette and engages the viewer in a stare-down. It's titled *Triple Portrait: World Conqueror* (2011), which sounds about right. A new series called *Passion Dancehall* (2011–2013) has men and women dancing closely together in pairs before a backdrop divided into high-pitched colors. They may be the most joyful paintings in Chelsea right now.

Mr. Hendricks's Polaroids and other photographs, taken throughout his career, are not nearly as compelling as his paintings, but the accumulation of offhand street scenes and spur-of-the-moment portraits provides a glimpse of sorts into his life, and provides a moving context for his major works.

With his camera, he is also a canny self-portraitist, and a progenitor of what in social media is now called the "selfie," appearing in a variety of guises over the years, ever debonair. In a particularly striking one, from late 1977, he's posed in a T-shirt and short shorts in front of two self-portrait paintings, one on a black background, the other on white. In the former, he's naked save for a white cap and socks, wearing a stern expression, a toothpick in his mouth. In the latter he's in a loose white suit, skullcap and glasses, a hint of a smile tracing across his face, like a charismatic leader who is ready to chat. The two works chart the range of his art, masterfully encompassing pleasures erotic, emotional and intellectual, and images that are at once beautiful and thoroughly radical. (*Through April 6*)



March 1, 2013

Barkley L. Hendricks Talks Latest Exhibit, 'Hearts Hands Eyes Mind'

By TAYLOR HARRIS



Barkley L. Hendricks
Photo By George Chinsee

Barkley L. Hendricks has his own distinct sense of dress. On a recent mucky day, the artist is in a gloomy monochromatic ensemble: black loafers, black jeans, black vest over a black oxford, and a black handkerchief wrapped around his neck, accentuating his fuzzy salt-and-pepper goatee. His accessories have a little more quirk: a leather fedora, a trio of chunky gold chain bracelets and a toothpick tucked discreetly behind his ear.

He's milling about "Hearts Hands Eyes Mind," his new exhibition on display until April 6 at Jack Shainman Gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. Its stark white walls are punctuated by the brightly hued paintings and graphic photographs on which Hendricks has built his more-than-40-year career. He first gained notoriety in the Sixties and Seventies for his portraits, which often

depict full-figured, African-American subjects whose distinct sense of style were reflective of the urban street culture then on the rise.

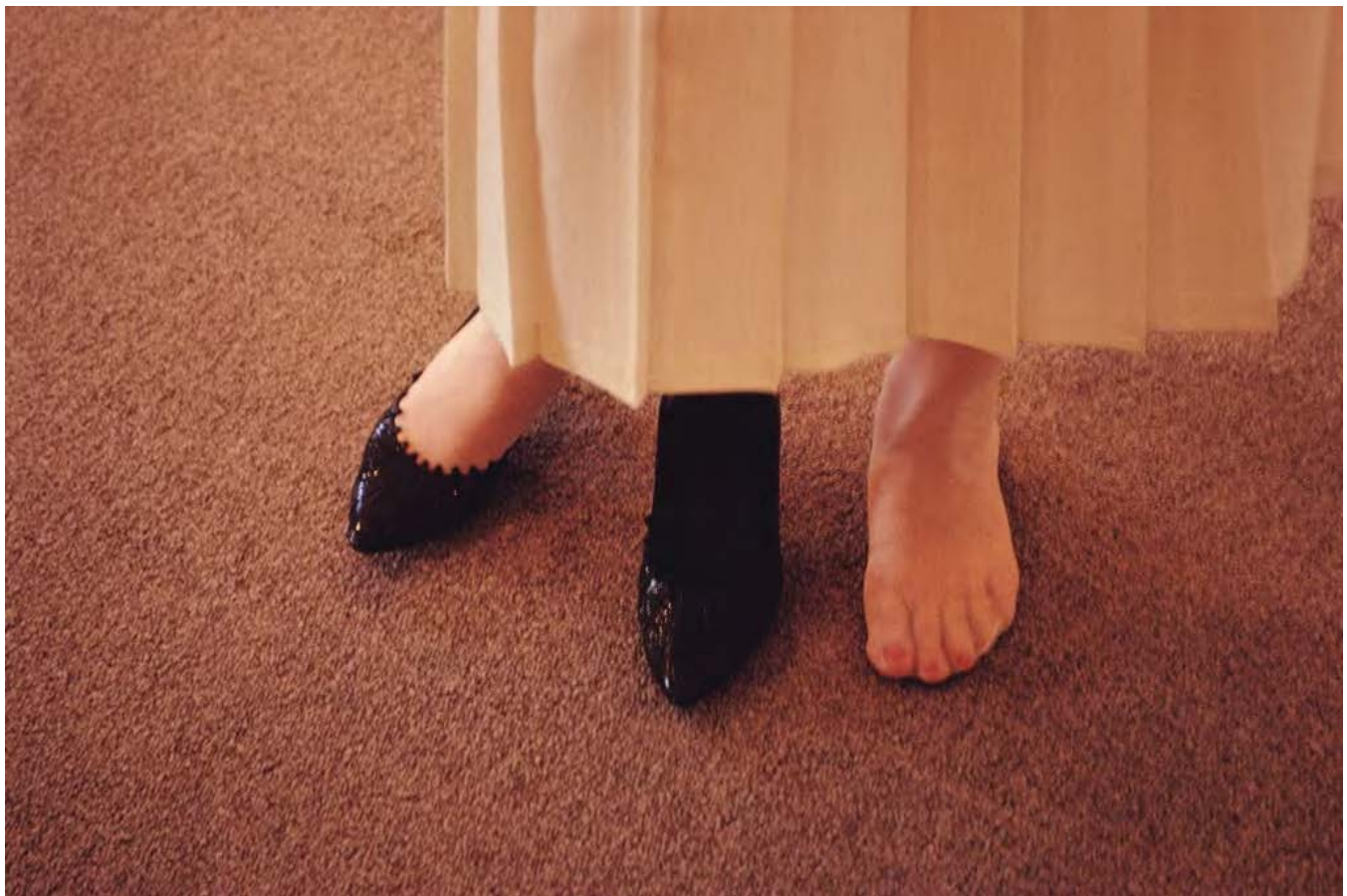
“Fashion is a situation we all find ourselves in every day, when we wake up and have to put on clothes,” Hendricks says.

Both Peter Som and Derek Lam have cited him as a source of inspiration for recent collections. “There’s a statement we all make with clothes and it’s a contribution to the culture that surrounds us.”

When it’s time to pose for his own portrait, he puts his hand in his pocket, stares down the lens and doesn’t move a muscle. It’s that unshakable sense of confidence to which Hendricks is drawn. His one requirement when selecting a subject? “Attitude.”

Lately, Hendricks’ fascination with street style has led him to a focus on footwear. He admits to having procured thousands of heels over the years to accessorize his subjects. “I don’t wear them though,” he stipulates. “Do you see her shoes?” he asks, motioning to a piece, “Triple Portrait: World Conqueror.” In the painting, a brassy Latina woman is sucking down the last bits of a cigarette, wearing a pair of white slingbacks with Marilyn Monroe’s visage emblazoned on them.

“You know that Marilyn Monroe quote right?” Hendricks asks before illuminating. “Give a woman the right pair of shoes and she can conquer the world.”



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Figures and Grounds

By turns extravagant and direct, the portraits **Barkley L. Hendricks** has made of his African-American friends and neighbors since the late 1960s variously recall the indolent nudes of Philip Pearlstein and the deadpan chic of David Hockney. But in these canvases and in other works—such as his series of landscapes freighted with Barbizon-school scrupulousness—the artist has sought modes of representing that go beyond the pursuit of likeness, gesturing toward abstraction, anamorphosis, and anachronism. On the occasion of a major traveling exhibition centered on these two bodies of work (organized by Trevor Schoonmaker for the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, recently shown at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, and appearing this summer at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in California), *Artforum* asked art historian **HUEY COPELAND** to engage Hendricks's alternate realisms.

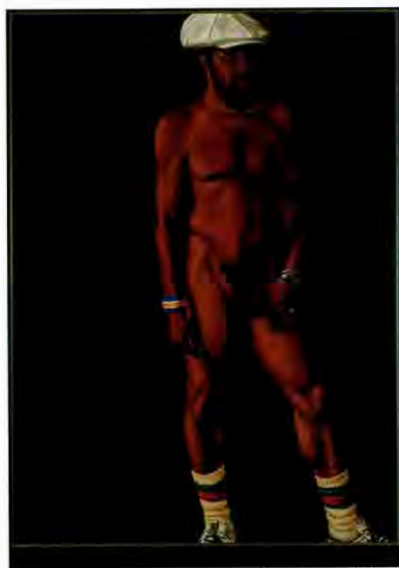
THE WHITE-SUITED BLACK SUBJECTS are rendered with varying degrees of realism: There is the chalky brown man at left, who possesses all the charm of a department store mannequin; the androgynous youth at right, with unfurled scarf and ghostly tinted glasses; and, of course, the woman at the center of the work, whose adjacent nude double seems to both teasingly recede into and forcefully protrude beyond the group. Barkley L. Hendricks executed this large-scale canvas, *What's Going On*, in 1974, and it is perhaps the most striking of what the artist calls his “limited palette” works, with its fractured modes of depiction and hue. Indeed, for all their matching *Ebony* elegance, the figures might as well inhabit separate pictures, appearing less a community than a cast of characters layered into the same phantasmic envelope. Cool, aloof, and ethereal, these men and women are *packaged* together, in an assembly that evokes at once the rhetoric of *grande peinture* and that of the Pictures generation—one part *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, one part deconstructed album cover.

Like the Manet it recollects, Hendricks's painting is decidedly inconclusive, its personages inscrutable and its narrative indecipherable; yet it is rendered in terms that resonate with the visual production of African-American culture as consumer spectacle. The work's life-size figures in oil, shimmering against a monochromatic acrylic ground, illuminate the crisis of blackness within representation—a crisis everywhere shaped by an engagement with and an opposition to those persistent forms of reification, high and low, that transform liberatory self-fashioning into co-opted cliché. Not incidentally, Hendricks painted *What's Going On* just three years after Marvin Gaye's eponymous record was released, recalling the way in which, as scholar Mark Anthony Neal reminds us, Gaye's album became the “quintessential black protest recording”

Barkley L. Hendricks, *What's Going On*, 1974, oil, acrylic, magna on cotton canvas, 66 1/4 x 84 1/4".



This page, above: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Tequila*, 1978, oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 60 1/4 x 50 1/4". Below: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait)*, 1977, oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 72 x 53 1/4". Opposite page: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen . . .*, 2002, oil and variegated leaf on linen canvas, wooden frame, altarpiece armature, twenty-seven pairs of high heels, 66 1/4 x 46 1/4".



Hendricks does not present his subjects as protesters or victims or celebrities. They are, rather, avatars of themselves who model a range of imaginary relations to dominant culture, from the merely dandyish to the queerly transgressive.

even as the black protest genre was being successfully commodified. At the same time, advances in recording technology had allowed Gaye to layer multiple vocal registers in new ways, thus echoing the sound of black resistive communities and traditions threatened, as ever, with violence, rupture, and dissolution—a threshold that Hendricks has limned for more than forty years with inimitable virtuosity.

In the 1960s and '70s, such pressures were acutely felt and sharply reflected across African-American culture, particularly among its panoply of black nationalisms. In a series of insightful essays addressing Hendricks and this moment from which he emerged, art historian Richard J. Powell has shown how the artist's pictures participated in this transformation of racial imaginaries, which not only valorized blackness but gave rise to emphatic displays of a new, self-conscious "to-be-looked-at-ness." These surfaced across the visual spectrum, from Huey Newton posters, to films like *Shaft*, to the 1976 Dewar's Scotch ad in which Hendricks himself appeared. Take the figure in *Tequila*, 1978, who stands in a familiar pose, cigarette in hand. The work, however, is no ad for Virginia Slims: The woman's idiosyncratic chic, probing glance, and stilled self-possession are a far cry from the smiling insouciance of the typical magazine model. Hendricks is interested not so much in the look of mass culture as in the individuated appearance of the mass subject—he tests the fragile boundaries between subcultural experience and middlebrow consumption, between avant-garde tactics and kitsch genres. The artist's sitters present themselves with an attitude and a sartorial flair that, as the critic Kobena Mercer has argued, attract the gaze yet also defend against primitivist projection, carving out a space where the self and its aesthetic construction can take center stage.

MANY OF HENDRICKS'S SUBJECTS are, in fact, people he saw in his local neighborhoods: New London, Connecticut, where he has been a professor of art at Connecticut College since 1972; New Haven, where he went to graduate school at Yale in the early '70s; and the hoods of North Philadelphia, where he grew up in the '50s and '60s. When recently seen together at the Studio Museum in Harlem in "Birth of the Cool," the traveling retrospective of Hendricks's work—a rhyming and rhythmic layout of individuals and groups, dark paintings and light ones, men and women—the artist's compositions suggested a series of contrapuntal relations between various forms of cultural alterity and vernacular style. For example, in the second-floor gallery of the museum, a fiercely styled woman of color in skintight yellow capris smiled out from a gold ground, calling to the orange-clad, crotch-grabbing superstar Fela Kuti to her left, while between them the protagonist of *North Philly Niggah* (William Corbett), 1975, luxuriated in his peach coat and beige surround, casting a wary eye on the whole scene. Hung close to the floor and brightly lit, the paintings evoked religious icons in both their format and their sumptuous adornment—even as the figures

within them seemed liable to emerge from the frame, doubly restructuring our understanding of the social arenas in which they moved and the museal space of the viewer.

As exhibition curator Trevor Schoonmaker has noted, when Hendricks's canvases first appeared, they proposed a figural

confrontation that disrupted the art world's racial status quo. The artist often represented those groups whose protests for rights and recognition had splintered the social field in the '60s and '70s and paradoxically opened new vistas of commodification. Yet Hendricks does not pose his subjects as protesters or victims or celebrities. They are, rather, avatars of themselves who model (to

This page, from top: Barkley L. Hendricks, *George Jules Taylor*, 1972, oil and acrylic on cotton canvas, 93 1/2 x 62". Barkley L. Hendricks, *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris*, 1972, oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 84 1/2 x 72". Opposite page: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Vertical Hold*, 1967, oil, acrylic, metallic silver on cotton canvas, 47 x 44".



borrow from art historian Thomas Crow) a range of imaginary relations to dominant culture, from the merely dandyish to the queerly transgressive, from what Powell identifies as the “player chic” of the small-time drug dealer depicted in *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* to the gay intellectual swing of Hendricks’s Yale student who is the subject of *George Jules Taylor*, both 1972. The latter two figures take up and twist black masculine style conventions, just as African-American gay, working-class, and women’s groups were beginning to critique the bourgeois and heterosexist tendencies of certain black liberationist politics. This proliferation of perspectives is key to Hendricks’s figurative painting and its central unit, the personage: He would paint Taylor in different moods and poses at least four times over the course of as many years. But, as the artist insisted in a 1976 interview, “I want to create a total painting rather than just a portrait.” Thus *Sir Charles* is trebled within a single canvas to arrive at a distinctive brand of totality—one that flirts with the conventional treatment of the Three Graces only to displace it, and that destabilizes modernist tactics meant to secure the “facingness” (to use art historian Michael Fried’s term) of the picture as a whole.

Throughout his career, Hendricks has stood alongside the subjects featured in his series, as in *Slick (Self-Portrait)*, 1977, a limited-palette painting whose title winkingly refers to a common characterization of his work by critics. One such writer was Hilton Kramer, who also notoriously described the artist as “brilliantly endowed”; Hendricks adopted this designation as the title for his nude 1977 self-portrait, at once appropriating and fulfilling the language of critical appraisal: *Brilliantly Endowed (Self-Portrait)* depicts the artist as an embarrassment of riches—his body, his adornments, and his skill in rendering both—as he adopts a knowing and confident pose. At the Studio Museum, this painting took its place next to several self-portraits that depict the artist similarly undressed, including the charmingly vulnerable *Brown Sugar Vine*, 1970, and the deadpan *Icon for My Man Superman (Superman never saved any black people—Bobby Seale)*, 1969. In each of these works, he wears not only an array of vaguely fetishistic accents—a toothpick, a joint, a “third leg” around his neck—but also his own poise, which renders his nudity a kind of performative suiting-up. In so doing, Hendricks contravenes the modernist pictorial injunction against ornament and intervenes in an African-American tradition that has often shied away from the unclothed body, owing to the violent and anxious stereotypes with which black male sexuality has been burdened from slavery to the present.

For Hendricks, reckoning with such realities means painting against historical stereotype and humanist essence. He therefore undertakes abstraction as well as figuration, in order to activate a multiplicity of visual and cognitive experiences that define and dislodge the contours of blackness. In *Vertical Hold*, 1967, for instance, a basketball and backboard become the basis for an urban take on the shaped canvas, as if to reply to Fried’s declaration that painting circa 1966 needed to hold its shape to compel conviction. Here, shape is modeled not on the abstract geometry of a pictorial image but on a tabular field crisscrossed by black subjects. This is, then, a reorientation of the modernist picture in art historian Leo Steinberg’s sense, a move from vertical plane to horizontal site. Such a shift differentially inflects our notion of location—whether on the canvas-as-basketball-court of *Granada*, 1970, or before the chessboard motif in *Buck*, 1967, both emblematic traversals of black diasporic culture.

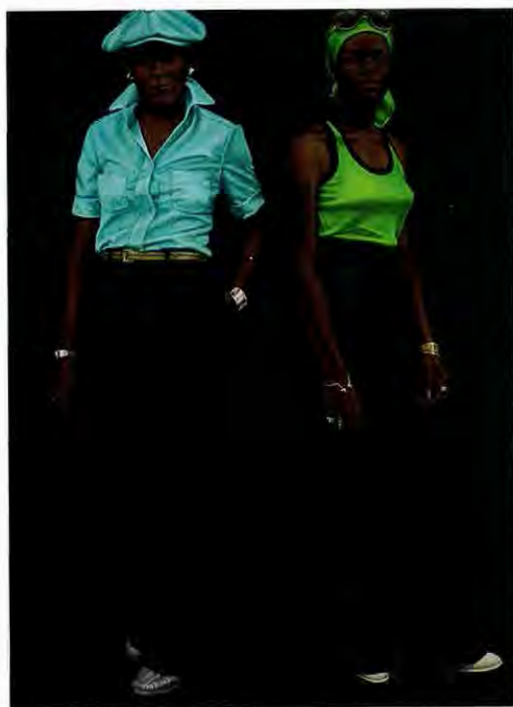
HENDRICKS IS NO STRANGER to this terrain, having visited Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean on trips that bolstered the sense of Pan-African connection revealed in his work. Consider his *APB’s (Afro-Parisian Brothers)* of 1978, which depicts smartly dressed figures who look like they might easily commune with the fabulously laid-back *Sisters (Susan and Toni)*, 1977, hung next to them at the Studio Museum, and who could seem equally at home staring out of a





For Hendricks, shape is modeled not on the abstract geometry of a pictorial image but on a tabular field crisscrossed by black subjects.

This page, above: Barkley L. Hendricks, *APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers)*, 1978, oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 72 x 50". Below: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Sisters (Susan and Toni)*, 1977, oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 66 x 48 1/4". Opposite page, from top: Barkley L. Hendricks, *New Year's Marl Hole*, 2007, oil on linen canvas, 18 1/4 x 26 1/2". Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama*, 1969, oil and gold leaf on linen canvas, 54 1/2 x 36 1/2".



photograph taken by Malick Sidibé before a concrete wall in Bamako or by Sanford Sawyer before an ornate gold curtain in Nassau. By placing his subjects against grounds that appear to stand in for such surfaces—but that hold out no such spatial or architectural purchase—Hendricks suggests the differences and affinities among modes of self-visualization across the black world in the '70s, when, as art historian Krista Thompson has written, blackness appeared as if it could be “dislodged from a particular space and time and . . . embodied anywhere.” While Hendricks has stated that he prefers to work with live models, his paintings are often produced after photographs. Indeed, because his back-

drops tend to rhyme with the coloration of the subjects themselves, his figures might be said to metaphorically develop from the grounds on which they sit, a kind of perverse photographic effect that commingles the real and the

virtual. Hendricks's settings are suggestive of the studio, the screen, and monochrome painting, as well as the flat permutations of what Steinberg has called “design technology,” against which transnational and diasporic blackness could startlingly become visible.

In painting a subject like the one in *Steve*, 1976, a youth decked out in a downy white coat, Hendricks probes these conditions of visibility: He renders the white ground as a flat halation from which the figure's textural edges emerge. While the reflections in Steve's sunglasses position him within Hendricks's studio, this is the only clue that situates him before the painter. He is both present and absent, flattened and in depth, unmoored from the sites to which black subjects are presumed to belong. In such paintings, we must engage with the figures on the grounds they offer rather than those that we supply: Ostensibly frontal, Hendricks's paintings slyly induct us into a hall of mirrors and subjects who cast no shadows. They suggest, in the words of scholar Richard Iton, a whole host of “black fantastic sensibilities” that outstrip the limitations imposed by the modern, the aesthetic, and the political as rationally understood.

The paintings of Jamaica that Hendricks began making in the early '90s—such as the characteristically gold-framed *New Year's Marl Hole*, 2007—manifest another itinerant optic. Instead of picturing human subjects, the artist gives us views of the island in oval and tondo frames, formats that have been compared to the porthole of a tourist ship, though they might as easily conjure fifteenth-century Florentine painting. The works thereby reproduce—and then disarticulate—spectatorial expectations of religious allegory and of what Thompson has called the Caribbean picturesque, the island landscape imagined as a site of verdant exoticism structured by dreams of tourist, imperialist, and colonial consumption. Bypassing such tropical hallucinations, Hendricks depicts a quarry: Jamaica as a literal and figurative mine for the extraction of resources, whether limestone, bauxite, or the image of the place itself.

THE EXHIBITION AT the Studio Museum featured several of these canvases, a few basketball works, and a number of figurative portraits, numbering nearly forty in all. Taken together, Hendricks's oil paintings describe both the expansive possibilities and storied limitations of those key sites of blackness that have presented themselves to his gaze. By seizing upon the ambivalence of various painterly systems—portraiture, landscape, icons, shaped canvases, monochromes—that can be read as either transcendent or commercial or both, Hendricks is able to perform a conversion of his own: adapting modes of representation that have historically occluded or instrumentalized black subjects into vehicles that cut through the dross of racial phantasm.

Not surprisingly, then, Hendricks's work has been positioned in relation to Pop, hard-edged abstraction, Photorealism, and old-master painting, and has garnered comparisons to a dizzying array of figures (Rembrandt, Malevich, Ellsworth Kelly, Alex Katz, Chuck Close, David Hammons, and Corot among them). The term *cool realism*, which originated in the '70s to describe Hendricks's work, seems inadequate, as does any single categorization: His practice is as revelatory as it is materialist, drawing on any aesthetic means necessary. When Hendricks's paintings were shown in the 1994 exhibition "Black Male," at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, they stood out not only against the other work in the show, much of which took a deconstructionist approach to race, but also against images of black masculinity such as O. J. Simpson's, then seemingly omnipresent within the public sphere. In fact, from 1984 to 2002, during what Hendricks calls the "'Renaissance' (the age of Ronald Reagan)," he produced little figurative painting, as if that era's provisions for possibility, range, and depth within the visual field could no longer sustain a meditation on the facts of the black image.

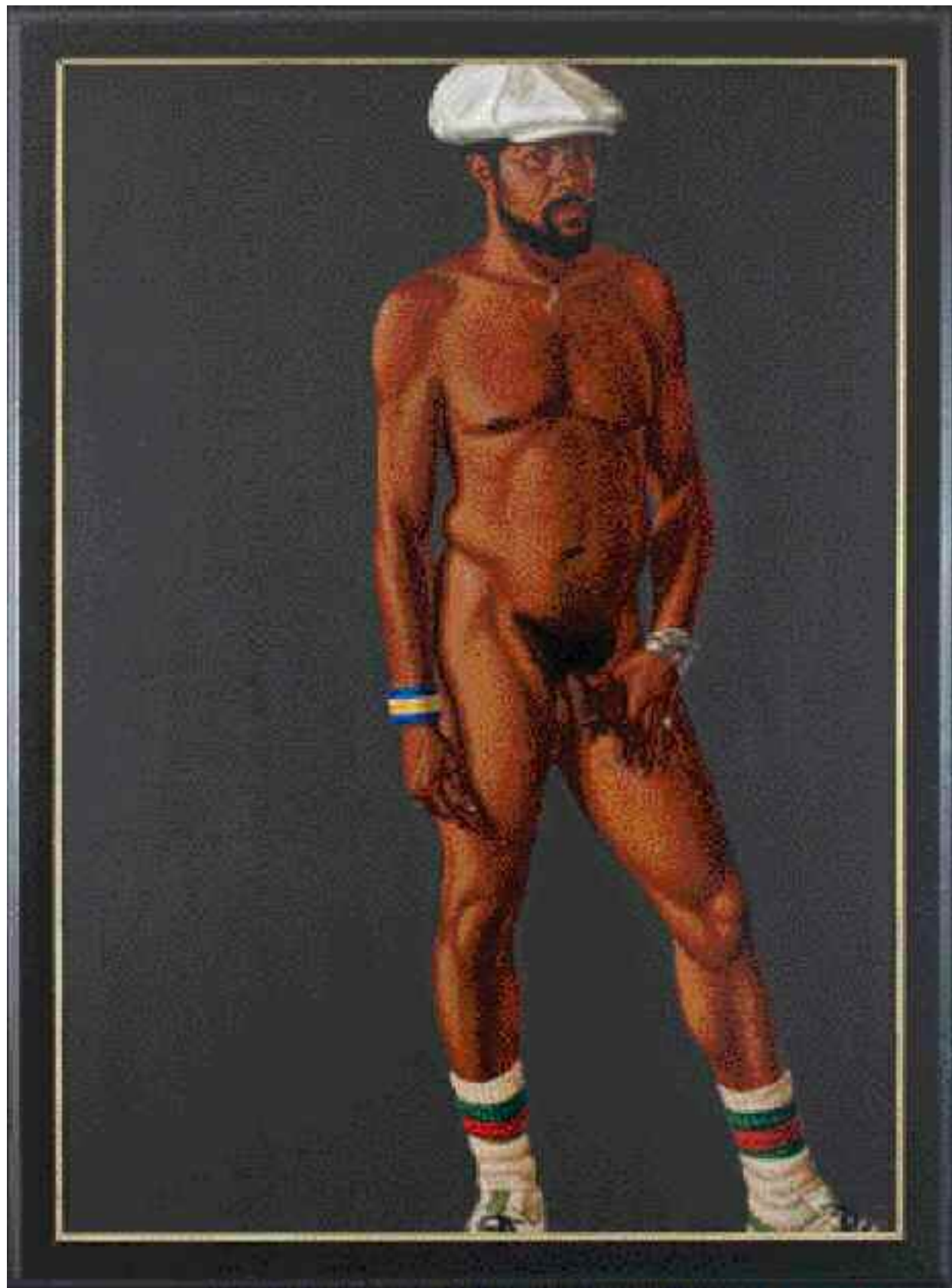
During this time, however, Hendricks continued to produce prints, photographs, watercolors, drawings, and collages, such as *I've Known Rivers*, 1987—a schematic outline of the female figure that is suggested with the merest of means: a shock of human hair denoting "head" and what appears to be a grommeted belt for "spine" connected to a hand-drawn pelvis. These engagements allowed for an exploration of symbol and index at the very moment that the black icon seemed saturated yet again with the historicity of its dereliction. Hendricks avows that different media are integral to his practice, allowing him "to get a different perspective" both on his painting and his subjects. Although they have been featured in his retrospectives in 1980 at the Studio Museum and in 2001 at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London, Connecticut, such works are not included in "Birth of the Cool." In time, a retrospective is due that accounts for a fuller range of Hendricks's practice, including his figurative oil paintings of white subjects.

Today, amid younger artists concerned with the black figure and its effects, such as Mickalene Thomas, Jeff Sonhouse, and Kehinde Wiley—whose exhibition "The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar" immediately preceded "Birth of the Cool" at the Studio Museum—Hendricks's practice seems all the more relevant for its desire to depict actual black subjects in all of their fullness and particularity. If practitioners of the "post-black" generation have, as curator Thelma Golden noted in 2001, emerged in a moment when "their particular cultural specificity is marketed to the planet and sold back to them," then Hendricks's canvases might be seen as the *Nachträglich* anticipation of and answer to this condition. His art considers what is possible within representation given the dialectic of commodification, co-optation, and resistive self-fashioning that has shaped the black image in modernity. Hendricks's paintings thus offer not so much transcendent portraits as temporal disruptions. In *Lawdy Mama*, 1969, the layering of postponement and projection reaches a fever pitch: A young black woman is centered on a gold background, the shape of her Afro echoed by the round frame of the canvas, a double halo that suggests Black Power's enshrinement of the female figure, so many Madonnas lost to history, and black subjectivity's never-ending iteration as shining spectacle, the optical effect par excellence. Hendricks launches a deferred action that allows us to see how the black past, present, and future continue to manifest themselves in the image. □

"Birth of the Cool" travels to the Santa Monica Museum of Art, CA, May 16–Aug. 22, 2009; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Oct. 17–Jan. 3, 2010; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Jan. 30–Apr. 18, 2010.

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Trevor Schoonmaker

Barkley L. Hendricks

Brilliantly Endowed, 1977

Oil and acrylic on linen canvas

167.6 x 122.5 cm

Image Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Barkley L. Hendricks: Reverberations

One of the great American artists of the past fifty years, Barkley L. Hendricks is a highly accomplished painter and photographer with a style and vision unlike any other. He is best-known for his life-sized painted portraits, largely of people of color, which have called attention to and championed those in society who have been underserved and otherwise rendered invisible. Working apart from any artistic group or movement, he has pioneered a new way of looking at the figure in art, whether or not the art world has been willing to follow. Today his body of work stands out as unique among his contemporaries and even the earliest works feel as fresh as when first produced.

Despite having a long and prolific career, only fairly recently has Hendricks begun to receive the attention his work commands. A newfound interest in the artist can in part be attributed to some combination of exhibitions such as Thelma Golden's *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art* (1994), *Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti* (2003), and the 2008 painting retrospective *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, as well as the probing scholarship of art historian Richard J. Powell (particularly in his recent book *Cutting a Figure*), a renewed interest in the figure in contemporary art, and the general opening up of the commercial art world to artists of color.¹ With the increased exposure over the past several years, Hendricks's paintings have been rediscovered by and are now having a profound effect on a younger generation of creative minds, helping to pave the way for artists of color to achieve both critical and commercial success while investigating identity through representation.

A look at the work of three other artists in *Fresh Paint*—Kerry James Marshall, Kehinde Wiley, and Wangechi Mutu—helps provide a clearer contextualization of Hendricks's work and its revolutionary spirit. While all three artists have different approaches to painting, each shares with Hendricks individual elements of style, technique, and use of materials. Moreover they all highlight the human figure, and largely the black body, as a key component of their practice. Likewise, Hendricks's ripples of influence on a new generation are starting to be felt in significant ways, as seen in the works of artists such as Mickalene Thomas, Jeff Sonhouse, Rashid Johnson, Fahamu Pecou, and Luis Gispert.

Hendricks was born in Philadelphia in 1945 and attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) from 1963 to 1967. There he was the first African-American student to be awarded two consecutive travel scholarships, which brought him to Europe in 1966 and then North Africa in 1968. As Hendricks visited the major art museums across Europe, he noticed just how limited the representation of black figures has been in Western art history, and how few of those depictions have been truly humanizing or personalized portraits. At the same time, he was fascinated by the elaborate images of wealthy individuals that were so often present in museums—in the work of such artists as Rembrandt, Caravaggio, van Dyck for example—and paid close attention to the formal techniques employed in their creation. Shortly after his return home, Hendricks began painting life-sized representations of the figures in his own court, blending his interest in the history of portraiture with the growing consciousness of black self-representation, and in the

1. Richard J. Powell has researched and written about Hendricks's work for many years, including texts in *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (1997), *The Barkley L. Hendricks Experience* (2001), *Back to Black: Art, Cinema & the Racial Imaginary* (with David A. Bailey in 2005). *Black President* and *Birth of the Cool* (as well as *The Magic City* in 2000) were exhibitions that I organized, which highlighted Hendricks's work.

Jeff Sonhouse
Decompositioning, 2010
Mixed media on canvas
208.3 x 193.7 cm
Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, USA
Museum purchase, Fund for Acquisitions
© Jeff Sonhouse, Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion



2. Trevor Schoonmaker, “Birth of the Cool,” in Trevor Schoonmaker (ed.), *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, 2008, p. 19.
3. It is worth mentioning the Yale MFA connection in terms of Hendricks’s influence. Yale MFA graduates since 2000 who would have had access to Hendricks’s work via University classes or institutional memory include Kehinde Wiley, Mickalene Thomas, Wangechi Mutu, Luis Gispert, William Cordova, and Njideka Akunyili.
4. Barkley Hendricks in conversation with Trevor Schoonmaker, May 13, 2007.

process creating some of the most remarkable portraits of the time.² In 1970 Hendricks went to Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, where he earned both his BFA and MFA in two years.³ There he was one of only two figurative painters enrolled at a time when most artists were working with abstraction and minimalism. His interest in representation led him to study with photography professor Walker Evans, and he ultimately spent more time with Yale’s photography students than those in the painting department.⁴ In 1971, while still a student at Yale, Hendricks participated in his first major museum exhibition, *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. By the mid-1970s Hendricks began to garner greater attention for his work, but as was the case with most African-American artists of his generation, large-scale mainstream commercial success was much more elusive.

In order to grasp the complexity of Hendricks’s artistic contribution, one needs to look closely at the era in which he first painted portraits, from 1968 to 1983. Considering the volatile social climate of that period, his hard-hitting and true-to-life representations of black and Latino individuals and street culture were challenging to the status quo of the art world. His portraits are unique in that they can simultaneously convey the depth of one’s psychology and elevate the common person to iconic status. They are neither dispassionate, clinically rendered photorealist representations nor culturally idealized, romantic images. Rather, these are honest portraits of everyday people—his family, friends, associates, students, and local characters from the neighborhood—stylized but emotionally stirring. Hendricks’s paintings reveal the artist’s rare talent for capturing and conveying the individual personality of his subjects through their distinctive style, attitude, gestures, and expressions. But at the same time, these images were visually and conceptually loaded and thus potentially threatening to many in mainstream society; to recognize the validity of many of Hendricks’s portraits, one would have to also acknowledge the racial, cultural, and economic divides between the upper- and underclass of the time. To further complicate matters, Hendricks was not only painting people rarely represented in the contemporary portraiture of the time, but works that included the nude, self-assured black male.

Hendricks has painted numerous nudes of both women and men throughout his career, and his self-portrait *Brilliantly Endowed* from 1977 is one of his most provocative. The painting is bold and defiant, but also demonstrates the artist’s playful sense of humor. Hendricks depicts himself in the nude with a strong, idealized physique that plays to stereotypical perceptions of the hyper-masculine black male. He looks the viewer in the eye with a stern, self-assured gaze. But within the apparent machismo there is vulnerability, as well as a healthy dose of self-parody. The title of the painting is taken from a review by *New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer, who described Hendricks as a “brilliantly endowed” painter. The inherent sarcasm in his nakedness is emphasized by the fact that he wears nothing but a cap, tube socks, low-top sneakers, and fashionable accessories. Despite the pervasive humor in this work, neither the general public nor the art world was ready for such a daring portrayal of the black male at the time it was painted. *Brilliantly Endowed* also exemplifies a formal strategy often employed by Hendricks, described by the artist as his “limited palette” series, in which he paints the figure on top of a solid, flat ground within the same color field. Through their monochromatic backgrounds, flattened space, and simplified palette, this series demonstrates Hendricks’s limited, but willful, engagement with minimalism through the unlikely genre of figurative representation. *Vendetta* (1977) for example positions a woman in white clothing on a white background. In *Brilliantly Endowed*, Hendricks’s brown body set against a dark brown, almost black background, might also suggest a subtle ideological and conceptual connection with the Black Power movement.

Kerry James Marshall
Untitled (Painter), 2008
Acrylic on PVC
73 x 62.8 cm
Collection of Noel Kirnon
Image Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



Another *Fresh Paint* artist whose inventive work has helped open up opportunities for younger generations is Chicago-based Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955, Birmingham, Alabama). While Hendricks’s engagement with socially conscious ideology is largely a byproduct of *whom* he has been painting, Marshall has pursued a more overt socio-political agenda. In *Untitled (Painter)* from 2008, Marshall engages a similar minimalist strategy of putting a dark black figure against a light black background, suggesting the intention of creating a cultural dialogue about representation. Marshall renders his subject in flattened, black planes as if she is more an archetype than a portrait of an individual. Marshall states: “Extreme blackness plus grace equals power. I see the figures as emblematic; I’m reducing the complex variations of tone to a rhetorical dimension: blackness. It’s a kind of stereotyping, but my figures are never laughable.”⁵ Indeed, the artist depicted with apron and palette may be read as a metaphor for Marshall’s interest in creating a new artistic paradigm.

Marshall’s paintings *Watts 1963* (1995) and *Souvenir II* (1997) have more direct engagement with his ideological aims. In *Watts 1963*, Marshall depicts himself, his sister, and brother in the Nickerson Gardens housing project where they lived. Rather than a place of despair and poverty that one might expect, the work portrays an anti-ghetto utopian space full of hope, dreams, and beauty. Likewise, in *Souvenir II*—part of Marshall’s *Memento* series that commemorates the civil rights

5. Kerry James Marshall, “Kerry James Marshall and Arthur Jafa: Fragments from a Conversation, June – July 1999,” in *Kerry James Marshall*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2000, p. 90.



Rashid Johnson
Self-Portrait in Homage to Barkley Hendricks,
 2005
 C-print
 Image Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

6. Kerry James Marshall, "Notes on Career and Work," in *Kerry James Marshall*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2000, pp.120–122.

7. Hendricks created this work for the exhibition *Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York (2003). He came to know Fela's music during a visit to Nigeria in 1977 and subsequently met and photographed him during concerts in Connecticut in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

and black liberation movements—Marshall presents the struggles of black America in the 1960s as a grand history painting set in the interior of a family member's home during that period.⁶ By clearly addressing the narrative of African-American history in this way, Marshall presents a very different conceptual framework than Hendricks. Both artists embrace black figures as central to their work, but for Marshall they are components of a broader mission to reframe their position in history and society's collective dialogue. Hendricks's work on the other hand more so reflects one man's personal engagement as an artist with the immediate world around him, which happens to be largely African-American. Still, in many ways, by depicting the everyday lives of black Americans, both artists arrive at a similar place of inserting positive black figures into the art discourse, which then serves to undermine existing stereotypes.

Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977 Los Angeles, California) is also engaged in a conceptual project that is larger than the process of painting. His *World Stage* series seeks to ask questions about the construction of power, empire, and historical narrative. While this global enterprise has taken him to faraway places like India, China, Brazil and Nigeria, the origins of his process are based in the streets of Harlem and Brooklyn, and before that, in New Haven where the artist earned his MFA while at Yale. In common with Hendricks's interest in capturing the quotidian, Wiley's early portraits focused on young African American men who he approached on the street.

Wiley's photorealist approach to everyday black men positions him squarely as a contemporary descendant of Hendricks. Their mutual investigation of the black male body and their engagement with the history of painting links them together in art history's genealogy, but their processes and aims are far different from one another. Hendricks borrows techniques from the Old Masters—such as Caravaggio's theatrical use of light and shadow or Rembrandt's attention to minute detail—and applies them to his contemporary subjects. Wiley's work has another art historical engagement, directly referencing a range of artistic and urban vernacular styles, positioning young African-American men dressed in today's casual fashions in the same heroic or sensual poses as figures in specific Old Master paintings. Furthermore, Hendricks is interested in the pursuit of the individual, aiming to depict the very realness of his subjects. Wiley meanwhile engages in fantasy with his sitter, constructing their poses as a means of building an archetype more than a specific personage. Still, both artists examine critical notions of masculinity, sexuality, and identity and have positioned themselves as contemporary descendants of a long line of portraitists.

Hendricks also shares his use of visual embellishment as an important tool in his work with Marshall, Wiley, and fellow *Fresh Paint* artist Wangechi Mutu. Wiley frequently depicts his subjects against ornamental, wallpaper-like backgrounds, whose decorative patterns weave around and even on top of the figure. In *Souvenir II*, Marshall uses gold glitter to overlay text on top of the painting and create fringes that frame the image. His use of a cheap, flashy material to serve a serious socio-political agenda demonstrates his understanding of the connection between commemoration and kitsch. Hendricks masterfully walks a similar line between reverence and outlandish garishness with *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen . . .* (2002), the only commemorative portrait that Hendricks has produced.⁷ His painting depicts the complex and revolutionary Nigerian Afrobeat musician and political activist Fela Kuti. In a confrontational stance with one hand grabbing his crotch, he unapologetically presents Fela as a potent concoction of bad-boy rock star, man of the people, and religious icon. Hendricks deftly melds Catholic symbolism with irreverent secular playfulness by adding symbolic iconography and materials to the work: a microphone in one hand and joint in the other, a halo over his head, a

Kehinde Wiley
St. John the Baptist II, 2006
 Oil on canvas
 243.8 x 182.9 cm
 Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
 Promised gift of Blake Byrne
 © Kehinde Wiley, Photo Peter Paul Geoffrion



Fahamu Pecou
Nunna My Heros: After Barkley Hendricks' Icon for my Man Superman 1969, 2011
 Acrylic, gold leaf, oil stick on canvas
 160 x 125.7 cm
 Image Courtesy of Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, and the artist

8. The painted high heel shoes were added by Hendricks to honor Fela's "queens," his singers and dancers whom he married in a single ceremony as an act of solidarity.



crown of thorns around a sacred flaming heart in the shape of the reversed African continent, a gilded background, a hand crafted altar-like frame, twenty-seven pairs of individually painted high heels on the floor, and iridescent paint that produces a mystical glow when seen under black light.⁸ This extreme overabundance speaks to the larger than life persona of Fela and the way in which the man and his myth have become one.

Brooklyn-based Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972, Nairobi, Kenya) demonstrates a deep understanding of the capacity of materials to carry meaning and takes the accumulation of imagery to an even higher level than Hendricks. Combining found objects like fake pearls, animal furs, and glitter with paint and magazine cutouts, she samples from sources as diverse as the fashion industry, African traditions, international politics, pornography, and science fiction to produce her maximalist collages. Though works such as *Humming* (2010) are both looser and denser in style than Hendricks's portraits, both artists share a passion for personalized craftsmanship, and employ unique materials as transformative elements—such as fashion accessories like high heels—to explore the vast potential of the human figure.⁹ In Mutu's

Mickalene Thomas
Baby I Am Ready Now, 2007
Acrylic, rhinestone, and enamel on wooden panel, diptych
182.8 x 335 cm overall
Rubell Family Collection, Miami
© Mickalene Thomas



ongoing investigation of the representation of black female bodies she explores critical issues of gender, race, colonialism, and globalization.

As the work of Barkley Hendricks has become more visible over the past several years, more and more artists are creating visual responses that affirm the lasting artistic and cultural import of his work. Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971, Camden, New Jersey) cites Hendricks as a significant influence as she investigates contemporary black femininity and sexuality. Hendricks's portraits have "this incredible sexiness and formal sophistication that are so seductive, coupled with a sort of confrontational coolness that practically dares you not to acknowledge their presence and seriousness."¹⁰ Thomas also references Hendricks by presenting her subjects through the historical lens of 1970s style and fashion. As a time of heightened social awareness and empowerment within Black Power and feminist circles, the era functions as an important conceptual framework in which to locate her portraits. In her paintings and photographs she carefully constructs the period setting, from rhinestone beadwork to patterned textiles and wood-paneled background. Works like Thomas's *Baby I Am Ready Now* (2007) radiate with a similar sensuality and lushness of ornamentation as Hendricks's *Sweet Thang* (Lynn Jenkins) (1975–1976). *Sweet Thang* is one of the clearest examples of how Hendricks embraced the Netherlandish tradition of embellishing the image for our visual consumption. From the woven carpet and Moroccan-tiled wall to the subject's shimmering skirt, striped head wrap, and sparkling jewelry, a rich array of complex patterns and luxurious surfaces abounds. Such abundance serves not only to catch our eye but to convince us of the artist's dexterity in the complex representation of materials, fabrics, and light. Thomas's *Baby I Am Ready Now* shares Hendricks's interest in layered pattern, intense color, and embrace of decorative sensibility.

When Jeff Sonhouse (b. 1968 New York, New York) first saw Hendricks's painting *Tuff Tony* (1978) in 1994 in Thelma Golden's *Black Male* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, he realized just how loaded with meaning, misconceptions, and power the black body could be.¹¹ Hendricks's work later proved to be a catalyst for Sonhouse's own investigation of black masculinity, particularly his interest in challenging notions of racial stereotypes through a more complex representation of the black male. On the one hand, the masks on Sonhouse's nattily dressed subjects serve to conceal their identity and consequently undermine traditional portraiture. Yet, these masks still reveal the eyes, nose, and mouth, which are most closely associated with racial caricature. The resulting works allow the figure to function as both trickster and oracle, simultaneously spoofing stereotypes and conveying a tranquil spiritual presence. When first looking at Hendricks's paint-



Luis Gispert
Dios Mio D&G, 2011
C-print
171.5 x 122 cm
© Luis Gispert
Images Courtesy of Mary Boone Gallery, New York

ings, Sonhouse says he was "drawn to his figures and how they embody a spirit of calm that allows you to comfortably experience whatever else is going on in the painting."¹² In *Decompositioning* (2010) Sonhouse's subject personifies that same sense of calm as a swirling piano breaks apart behind the figure while piano wire and wood scraps are thrust forward from the surface of canvas. Drawing a parallel between musical and visual compositions, the work reads as a commentary on the act of painting itself.

In addition to those whose style and process have been influenced by Hendricks, in recent years some younger artists have reinterpreted some of his most iconic portrait paintings. Twenty-eight years after Hendricks painted *Brilliantly Endowed*, the conceptual artist Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago, Illinois) was inspired to create his photographic work titled *Self-Portrait in Homage to Barkley Hendricks* (2005). When Johnson first came across an image of *Brilliantly Endowed* in print in 2003, the painting's style and content struck him as dramatically different from any black artists he had known before. As a representation of the black figure it was neither tragic nor angry, but stood out in its complexity as being both bold and vulnerable.¹³ Johnson's photographic tribute to Hendricks is a faithfully detailed reenactment that remarkably captures both the brashness and openness of the original.

In another homage to Hendrick's bombastic style of self-portraiture Atlanta-based Fahamu Pecou (b. 1975 Brooklyn, New York) inserted himself into one of Hendricks's earliest self-portraits, *Icon for My Man Superman* (*Superman never saved any black people – Bobby Seale*) (1969) in his new painting *Nunna My Heros: After Barkley Hendricks' Icon for my Man Superman 1969* (2011). Creating a self-portrait in the role of Barkley Hendricks playing superman is a daring move, but it is in part the swagger and attitude of Hendricks's portraits that many of today's artists so admire and attempt to emulate. Pecou was drawn to the detailed rendering of Hendricks's figures, but he was most impressed by the audacity of his work, "asserting that one can and should be his own hero rather than waiting on a rescue."¹⁴ Meanwhile, Luis Gispert (b. 1972 Jersey City, New Jersey) recreated the look and feel of Hendricks's *Lawdy Mama* (1969) for his photograph *Dios Mio D&G* (2011). Borrowing the Byzantine icon-like gold background and the curved lunette frame, he updates Hendricks's portrait of his cousin with perfectly spherical Afro with a Dolce & Gabbana clad, ghetto-fabulous sister in bleached blond dreads. If imitation is indeed the highest form of flattery then Hendricks has some serious admirers. With so many artists today responding to his work, Hendricks stands out as an artist well ahead of his time. Though his work has defied easy categorization and his rugged individualism landed him outside of the mainstream, his unrelenting dedication to his pioneering vision and his empowering portrayal of those who have been overlooked will continue to inspire new generations. Today his ongoing body of work is as vital and vibrant as ever, and the full impact of his work is just beginning to unfold.

9. Mutu and Hendricks have exhibited together three times, in *The Magic City* at Brent Sikkema, New York (2000), *Black President* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2003), and *30 Americans* at the Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2008).

10. Mickalene Thomas in conversation with Trevor Schoonmaker, March 1, 2012.

11. Franklin Sirmans, "Barkley Hendricks: Ordinary People," in Trevor Schoonmaker (ed.), *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*. Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC, 2008, p. 87.

12. Jeff Sonhouse in conversation with Trevor Schoonmaker, February 26, 2012.

13. Rashid Johnson in conversation with Trevor Schoonmaker, February 27, 2012.

14. Fahamu Pecou in conversation with Trevor Schoonmaker, February 22, 2012.

The New York Times

ART REVIEW | BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

Slick and Styling: Provocative Poses



Barkley L. Hendricks's "Sir Charles, Alias Willis Harris" (1972) plays on the Three Graces; "Icon for My Man Superman (Superman never saved any black people—Bobby Seale)," 1969; Mr. Hendricks stands perfectly cool and composed in his 1977 self-portrait, "Slick."

Barkley L. Hendricks did not birth the cool — that was Miles Davis — but his suave portraits from the 1960s, '70s and early '80s give him the right to use "Birth of the Cool" as the title of his five-decade retrospective at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

By KEN JOHNSON

Published: December 5, 2008

Barkley L. Hendricks did not birth the cool — that was Miles Davis — but his suave portraits from the 1960s, '70s and early '80s give him the right to use "Birth of the Cool" as the title of his five-decade retrospective at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

Mixing realism, abstraction and Pop, Mr. Hendricks's life-size paintings of beautiful black people in extravagantly fashionable outfits against flat, single-color backgrounds captured a period sensibility with uncanny acuity. They also made him famous: he was included in numerous museum exhibitions and featured in a Dewar's Scotch magazine advertisement.

Today, with figurative art resurgent and portrait painters like Kehinde Wiley, Elizabeth Peyton and Chuck Close enjoying great popularity, Mr. Hendricks's work is back in style. The exhibition was organized by Trevor Schoonmaker, curator of contemporary art at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, where it appeared earlier this year.

Mr. Hendricks's spirit is epitomized in a self-portrait called "Slick" from 1977, in which the bearded artist appears shirtless in a snowy-white, double-breasted suit against a matte, slightly off-white background. He wears a colorful African skullcap and a fine gold necklace with a little votive leg

hanging from it, has a toothpick jutting from one side of his mouth and gazes back at us through gold-rimmed glasses with a calm, appraising mien. He is perfectly composed in all senses of the word.

Many complexities unfold from what might seem at first to be a fairly straightforward picture. The clothes bring to mind cinematic, disco-era associations: “Shaft,” “Saturday Night Fever.” The skullcap evokes the period’s surge of Afro-centric pride and the influence of African art on European Modernism.

There is the formal tension between the dimensional figure and the flat, white rectangle. Mr. Hendricks, who was born in 1945, came of age when formalist abstraction ruled, and artists like Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt and Robert Ryman were revered. The flat, monochrome rectangles that surround many of his figures wed the modern to the traditional. Perhaps Wayne Thiebaud’s deadpan paintings of people against blank backgrounds were an inspiration. Alex Katz’s way with figuration and abstraction was surely an influence too. And it’s not too much of a stretch to think of Kazimir Malevich’s seminal pure abstraction of 1918, “White on White.”

The first painting in this exhibition that shows clearly where Mr. Hendricks was headed is a head-and-shoulders portrait of a young African-American soldier, whose olive-green helmet and shirt harmonize with the bright-green background. It was 1968, and Mr. Hendricks was serving in the National Guard a year after graduating from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and two years before he would head for Yale, where he would earn his Master of Fine Arts in 1972.

Besides its finely tuned formal qualities, the painting of the soldier is historically arresting. You can’t help but think about Vietnam and the disproportionate number of African-Americans who fought and died there. It makes no explicit statement about the war; nor does it overtly comment on the racial strife at that time. But because the young soldier has his eyes meditatively closed in the shadow of his helmet’s brim, and because the painting allows the viewer mental space to reflect on its implications, it has a haunting resonance.

That Mr. Hendricks was keenly aware of how paintings play in the socio-political arena is shown most conspicuously in a full-frontal self-portrait from 1977 in which he is wearing only sports socks and sneakers, some jewelry, glasses and a white leather applejack hat. The title is “Brilliantly Endowed,” a double-entendre that plays on a favorable review of Mr. Hendricks’s work by Hilton Kramer, then an art critic for *The New York Times*, who wrote that Mr. Hendricks was a “brilliantly endowed” painter. With understated economy, the painting mocks American fantasies about the black male body.

But the clothed body would be Mr. Hendricks’s signature subject. His interest as a portraitist was not in private selves but in public personae. See, for example, “Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris” (1972), whose subject, in a play on the Three Graces, appears in triplicate — facing right, left and into the background — wearing a scarlet trench coat, black suit, white turtleneck and two-tone wingtips.

Mr. Hendricks toys ambiguously with stock associations. Hollywood stereotypes of disreputable characters often played by black actors — pimp, drug dealer, gangster — come to mind. On the other hand, Sir Charles could be a magazine fashion model or a real-life dandy. So there is a provocative connection between the individual person and Pop culture — much enhanced by the unspoken background of racial craziness in America.

Some people seem more real. In “Sweet Thang (Lynn Jenkins)” the subject reclines on a couch blowing bubble gum. A young woman named Tequila in a 1978 painting has a look all her own: in loose, bright-red below-the-knee shorts, canvas basketball sneakers, striped athletic socks, a wide-collared sailor shirt, denim jacket and a long-billed cap, she poses with one fist on her hip, a cigarette in her other hand and an amused, slightly skeptical expression.

Mr. Hendricks, who has taught at Connecticut College since 1972, stopped making his large figurative paintings in the early ’80s and for the next two decades devoted himself to outdoor landscape

painting during vacations in Jamaica. A half-dozen of those small works on oval and lunette canvases are included, but they are not nearly as captivating as his portraits. (Excluded from this all-painting exhibition is Mr. Hendricks's considerable work in photography.)

Recently he has returned to life-size portraiture, and the exhibition includes an example from 2002. An image of the African pop star Fela Kuti performing in an orange track suit with a gold halo over his head against a golden, tapestrylike field, it has a wide, wooden frame and a collection of high-heel shoes on the floor in front of it representing the singer's 27 wives, or "queens." You can imagine a series of hagiographic tributes to other artists following from this, but for now Mr. Hendricks's most memorable achievement remains his early pictures of coolness personified.

"Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool" is at the Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 West 125 Street, (212) 864-4500, studiomuseum.org, through March 15.

The New York Times

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Pop Art Meets Photorealism



C.M. Glover for The New York Times

Barkley L. Hendricks in his New London home with a portrait called "Frog."

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Published: January 27, 2008

DRESSED in black jeans and a buttoned vest on a brisk December day, the artist Barkley L. Hendricks potted about his studio, which occupies just about every room of a two-story house in this quiet blue-collar town.

One of this state's most gifted but least-known artists, Mr. Hendricks, who also plays trumpet and saxophone in a local band, has been photographing women's shoes lately.

"I can't help it," he said, almost apologetically. "Pairs of shoes appeared in one of my paintings in 1975, and it just opened the door to something. Now I photograph them, include them in my paintings and have even begun to collect them through donations and purchases from yard sales and thrift stores."

Mr. Hendricks's house is tucked away on a typical suburban street, about a mile from the old port on the Thames River, but the interior is far from typical. Across the living room, pairs of shoes were arranged along the floor, while on the walls were a photograph of red platform shoes and a print of a stiletto heel kicking a watermelon.

There were more shoes upstairs in boxes, along with wigs, baseball caps, piles of photographs (mostly of women's shoes), several stand-up cardboard cutouts of women in bikinis advertising alcohol (a friend at a

local liquor store keeps them for him), empty bottles of San Pellegrino, groupings of thunder eggs and crystals, antique pith helmets, stacks of records and CDs, and other odds and ends arranged in what he calls “piles of ideas.” And yet there was order amid the chaos. “I know where stuff is,” Mr. Hendricks said.

Down in the kitchen, Mr. Hendricks offered some hot tea along with theories about his fascination with shoes. They are “telling social signifiers,” he said, through which to examine identity, fashion and style. These themes, which have preoccupied Mr. Hendricks throughout his career, are at the heart of his first retrospective, which opens on Feb. 7 at the Nasher Museum of Art in Durham, N. C., and tours nationally from there for the next three years. (No Connecticut venue has yet stepped forward.)

Funky and hip are terms often used to describe Mr. Hendricks’s painting style, which mixes pop art, photorealism and black nationalism. He mostly paints full-figure portraits of people, often of color, from the Northeast. At least this is the sort of artwork he is known for. He pays particular attention to a subject’s attitude and style. “How people dress is how they want to be seen by the world,” he said. Shoes are a part of that.

Critics and curators have come to regard Mr. Hendricks’s portraits as some of the most distinctive in recent art. “He has always done his own thing and avoided easy categorization,” said Trevor Schoonmaker, curator of contemporary art at the Nasher and organizer of the exhibition. “His groundbreaking work is as fresh today as it was 30 or 40 years ago, and a generation of young artists is deeply indebted to him.” Among them is Kehinde Wiley, a newcomer from Los Angeles whose slick portraits of the black entertainment aristocracy adopt much from Mr. Hendricks’s bold photographic portrayals.

Mr. Hendricks was born in Philadelphia in 1945 and studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and at Yale University, where Walker Evans was among his teachers. He credits Mr. Evans with an interest in photography, which remains an important part of his art practice.

“I like to paint live models if I can get them to sit for me,” he said, “but oftentimes I work from photographs.” Inspiration comes from the people themselves. “With certain people there is a style or a feel that I have gravitated to — in particular, I like stylish women. But it could even be something as minor as the sight of a well-turned ankle.” He is back to shoes.

Sometimes he knows the subjects, but other times he meets them by chance. “One time I met this guy on the street in Philadelphia dressed completely in white holding a black briefcase — a white suit, hat, shoes. I was so attracted to his sense of style I asked if I could photograph him. This was around 1970. I kept the photograph for two or three years, then made a painting using white acrylic, oil and magna paint for a total monochromatic effect. I called it Dr. Cool.”

Mr. Hendricks opened his books of photographs of people taken over the decades. “This is my mechanical sketchbook,” he said. “I like to photograph people, recording them to maybe use later.” The people he paints are always in their own clothes, but sometimes, he admits, he switches stuff around, adding in a color or a piece of clothing, or changing other things a little for a better image.

Mr. Hendricks came to New London in 1972 for a job teaching art at Connecticut College. He is still there, dividing his time between the classroom, his studio and Jamaica, where he goes every winter to paint the landscape. Everything is done on the spot.

“I am at that time in my career where I want immediate gratification,” he said. “Most of the portraits are done over days and months, while I can usually get the landscapes done in a day. This gives them a kinship with a time and a place. It is therapeutic and pleasurable.”