

BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

All is Portraiture

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79 rue du Temple, 75003 Paris



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Self-Portrait, New Haven, CT)*, 1972. Archival inkjet print. 16 x 24 in. (40.6 x 61 cm).

Marian Goodman Gallery Paris is pleased to present *All is Portraiture*, an exhibition devoted to the work of Barkley L. Hendricks (1945-2017), a painter and photographer renowned for revolutionizing the art of portraiture through his depictions of Black Americans. This exhibition, his first solo show in Europe, highlights the central role of portraiture in his practice while offering a more comprehensive overview of his multifaceted oeuvre. The paintings, photographs and works on paper in the exhibition shine a light on an artist who never stopped experimenting and never followed trends, whose attentive gaze on the world nourished his entire body of work.

Throughout his 50-year career, Hendricks has drawn inspiration from his immediate surroundings to create interdisciplinary works. From the late 1960s and throughout the following decade, he produced portraits of individuals from his personal circle or those encountered by chance on the streets giving unprecedented visibility to an otherwise anonymous demographic of Black Americans. These portraits are distinguished by a rigorous attention to the rendering of personality and style imbued in their subjects. The attention to detail, texture and clothing materials helps to reveal the uniqueness of each model. Their theatricality and technical virtuosity stem from studying the greatest European masters, such as Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Caravaggio, and Van Eyck, whom Hendricks discovered in the collections of the world's greatest museums during his first trip to Europe in 1966. The composition, which centers the subject against a monochrome background to set them apart, and its chromatic harmony are the emblematic elements of Hendricks' portraits that influenced several generations of Black American artists, as evidenced by the work *John Wayne*, 2015. At the center of a square painting, tilted at a 45° angle, appears not the famous American Western actor, but a young black man with an infectious smile, dressed in a basketball jersey, denim shorts and open-toed shoes.

Even with his talents in portraiture, Hendricks refused to limit himself to a single genre and chose to explore other pictorial avenues. In the late 1960s and 1970s, he applied his research into color and geometry to paintings devoted to the theme of basketball, directly inspired by his assiduous practice of the sport since childhood. These minimalist canvases, neither fully abstract nor strictly figurative, convey various squares and circles inspired by the ball and the basketball court. In *I Want to Take You Higher*, 1970, Hendricks used the color red to stylize the bounce of a ball, while in *Untitled*, 1971, and *The Virgin*, 1969, he rendered the movements of a ball thrown at full speed against a bold colored background. Years later between 1997 and 2012, Hendricks developed an exceptional series of paintings inspired by the landscapes of Jamaica. Staying regularly on the Caribbean island from 1983 onwards, he depicted idyllic views of specific, identifiable natural places with great acuity, devoid of any human presence: seashores in *Cows and Cabbage View*, 2012 and cliffs in *Untitled (Tondo)*, 2012. While the palette, the half-moon, tondo or oval formats, and the gilding of the frames are borrowed from the Italian and Flemish Renaissance, these views crystallize as portholes providing a timeless space for contemplation. Modest in size and intimate in character, these landscapes, painted outdoors to capture the changing luminosity, are reminiscent of the instantaneous approach that is characteristic of photography.

A photographer before he was a painter, Hendricks also left behind a large body of photographic work, a small part of which is presented at the gallery. Begun during his formative trip to Europe, photography allowed him to keenly capture what he observed on a daily basis and to nourish his approach to portraiture. A disciple of Walker Evans, whose student he was at the Yale University School of Art in the early 1970s, Hendricks developed a perspective that was both humanistic and documentarian, attentive to places as well as those who inhabit them. His camera, which he describes as a 'mechanical sketchbook,' accompanied him everywhere in his daily life and on his travels. His interest in street photography took flight in the late 1960s, visible in the exhibition through photographs taken in the 1980s of young city dwellers in New London, Connecticut, where he lived

and taught for much of his life. In Jamaica, he took numerous photographs, including street scenes such as *Untitled (Southfield, Jamaica)*, circa 1990 and landscapes such as *Untitled (Alligator Pond, Jamaica)*, 1992.

For Hendricks, photography maintains a close dialogue with painting: his painted portraits are always based on one or more photographs that he combined, augmented with details invented by the artist. Some of the models photographed later became the subjects of his paintings, such as his dancer friend in *Vendetta in Lotus Position*, 1977-2013. The exhibition also features several self-portraits created in the privacy of his studio or home between 1968 and 1981. He often depicted himself alongside his paintings, as in *Untitled (Self-Portrait, Philadelphia, PA)*, 1968, or *Untitled (Self-Portrait, New Haven, CT)*, 1972, where he appears in front of his then unfinished *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris*, 1972, inspired by Van Dyck's *Portrait of Cardinal Guido Bentivoglio*. Self-representation is by no means anecdotal in Hendricks' photographic work; posing in front of his works is less about introspection and more about the conscious affirmation of himself as an artist.

Finally, a collection of works on paper from the 1970s and early 1980s completes the presentation at the gallery. In a number of these works, Hendricks referred to a solar eclipse, which he witnessed several times in the 1970s. These evocations of the astronomical phenomenon take the form of abstract landscapes, incorporating collage elements and heterogeneous materials such as glow sticks on paper. In *Mingus Fingers*, 1980, the eclipse is combined with a subtle tribute to famous African American musician and composer Charles Mingus, (1922-1979) whom he deeply admired, transposing the spirit of his improvisational jazz skills into a pure visual invention of the mind.

Barkley L. Hendricks (born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1945; died in New Haven, Connecticut, in 2017) attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts from Yale University in 1972. *Birth of the Cool*, a major solo exhibition, was curated by Trevor Schoonmaker at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, and subsequently shown at four other institutions (2008-2010). Recent solo exhibitions include *Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick*, The Frick Collection, New York, New York (2023-2024), *Barkley L. Hendricks in New London* at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, CT (2023), and *My Mechanical Sketchbook - Barkley L. Hendricks & Photography*, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, MA, (2022). Hendricks' works have been featured in major exhibitions such as *Giants: Art from the Dean Collection of Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (2024); *High Museum*, Atlanta, Georgia (2024-2025). Other major exhibitions include *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, presented at Tate Modern, London, UK (2017); *Crystal Bridges Museum of Art*, Bentonville, AR (2018); *Brooklyn Museum of Art*, Brooklyn, NY (2019); *The Broad*, Los Angeles, CA (2019); and the *Museum of Fine Arts*, Houston, TX (2020).

Hendricks's work is included in numerous public collections in the United States and abroad, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California; the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; and the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

This exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Marian Goodman Gallery champions the work of artists who stand among the most influential of our time and represents over five generations of diverse thought and practice. The Gallery's exhibition program, characterized by its caliber and rigor, provides international platforms for its artists to showcase their work, foster vital dialogues with new audiences, and advance their practices within nonprofit and institutional realms. Established in New York City in 1977, Marian Goodman Gallery gained prominence early in its trajectory for introducing the work of seminal European artists to American audiences. Today, through its exhibition spaces in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris, the Gallery maintains its global focus, representing some 50 artists working in the U.S. and internationally.

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