

[Hendricks at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York](#)

## Artist Resources – Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945-2017)

In 2008, the [Nasher Museum](#) at Duke University in North Carolina organized a traveling retrospective for Hendricks. *The Birth of Cool* brought together well-known portraits and lesser known studies and landscapes from the 1960s through the 2000's, traveling to [The Studio Museum](#) in Harlem as well as museums in Santa Monica, Philadelphia, and Houston.

“if I put something together, I want you to see it. And as I say, if you— If I’m a part of a group show, if you leave the show, you’re not going to remember everything. But I want you to remember mine. And there’s a variety of ways of doing that,” Hendricks tells the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in [a 2009 oral history](#) about the painter’s early interest and influences, the importance of music, his attention to the intricacies of his chosen materials and mediums, his relationship to photography, the impact of travel on his work, and his time at Yale.

[Hearts, Hands, Minds, Eyes](#), Hendricks’ first show with Jack Shainman Gallery showcased forty years of photography, landscapes, and portraits.

In [a conversation at Swann Auction Galleries](#) in New York in 2014, Hendricks spoke about his introduction to painting, education, his choice of paint and colors, and his relationship with photography, which he picked up after a studio-mate skipped town and left his dark room fully equipped. Hendricks taught himself about the chemicals and process, slowly building a portfolio that he used to get into Walker Evans’ course in advanced photography at Yale.



Hendricks, 2008  
Photograph: Duke Photography

Hendricks’ countered against political readings of his work and critical appraisals that begin with his race in two interviews conducted for his 2016 show of new work at the [Jack Shainman Gallery](#) in New York. “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,” he told [Hyperallergic](#). And with [Artspace](#), he argued for the necessity of “[talking] 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.”

In a [2016 artist talk](#) at the Art Institute of Chicago, Hendricks took his audience through his favorite portraits, recollecting the details of how portraits came about, his subjects, and the story behind his charismatic titles.

Read the Tate Modern’s comprehensive [In-Focus](#) feature on Hendricks’ 1974 painting *Family Jules*, which features interviews, discussions of the painting’s backstory, Hendricks’ relationship to portrait painting, photography, the painted surface, and 1970s aesthetics.

[The Atlantic](#) paid tribute to Hendrick’s influence, nuanced innovation, and underappreciated brilliance after his passing in 2017.

[The Rennie Museum](#) in Vancouver, Canada brought together Hendricks and fellow artist Lorna Simpson in 2020 for the first show in Canada to celebrate either artist, drawn entirely from the museum’s permanent collection.



Hendricks, 1976

Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945-2017)  
**Lagos Ladies (Gbemi, Bisi, Niki, Christy)**, 1978  
Oil, acrylic, and magna on cotton canvas

Private Collection; L2023:130.1

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Barkley L. Hendricks studied painting and photography at Yale University in the early 1970s. Inspired by the Black Power movement, the artist worked to fill a void in the history of portraiture by inserting Black American subjects into Western-style compositions. **Lagos Ladies (Gbemi, Bisi, Niki, Christy)** is one of Hendricks' iconic white-on-white paintings that utilizes different shades of white to enhance his subjects' diverse skin tones and accessories. The painting was completed after the artist traveled to Nigeria for the World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture and met these women, who were working as cooks at a hotel.

*On view February 7 – May 12, 2024*





Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945-2017)

**Pat's Back**, 1968

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:118.1

Barkley L. Hendricks took up portrait painting in the 1960s after an influential trip to Europe, where he was both inspired by Western masters and concerned about the lack of Black representation in canonical portraiture. The artist began painting friends and acquaintances in Philadelphia, Connecticut, and Jamaica to insert the Black figure into the history of Western-style portraiture. **Pat's Back** is one of the first examples of Hendricks's work on the Black body. Although the subject is facing away from the viewer, her comfortable stance points to the self-assurance that would define Hendricks's subjects throughout his career. The artist insisted, however, that his portraits were not meant to be wholly political: "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."

*On view December 7, 2022 – March 12, 2023*

Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945-2017)

**Northern Lights**, 1975

Oil and acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:104.1

Barkley Hendricks was drawn to art from a young age and maneuvered between painting and photography during his student days at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and Yale in the 1960s and early 1970s. Between degrees, Hendricks made his first trip to Europe and was captivated by Renaissance portraiture. He returned eager to translate the grandeur of these figures and compositions through his own curious eye and delight in the diversity people around him.

Throughout his career, Hendricks painted from life and his own photographs in order to capture and celebrate the beauty of Black bodies, the spectrum of human individuality, and the magnetism of personal style. **Northern Lights** explores the eclectic disco-infused flair of Hendricks' anonymous subject, his radiant joy coming to life in three poses. Hendricks frequently combined, and manipulated the two mediums of oil and acrylic in order to emphasize textures, matte backgrounds, and reflective surfaces. Through his singular approach, at once playful and thoughtful, Hendricks created compelling visual narratives that encapsulate a moment in time and express uncompromised individuality.

*On view October 20, 2020 – January 31, 2021*







Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945-2017)

**Blood (Donald Formey), 1975**

Oil and acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:80.1

Painter, photographer, and cultural commentator Barkley Hendricks received his BFA and MFA from Yale, where he studied with the legendary photographer Walker Evans, before rising to prominence in the 1970s while teaching at Connecticut College. He remained a teacher through most of his career, until his retirement in 2010. Though Hendricks also painted landscapes inspired by yearly trips to Jamaica, he is best remembered for large-format portraits that represent Black culture and a wide swath of society, influencing some of the most successful painters working today such as Kerry James Marshall and Kehinde Wiley.

Hendricks sought to translate the full scope of his sitter's personality, style, and experiences, often painting over multiple days. **Blood** delivers the artist at his height, engaged with the visual and conceptual impact of his favorite expressive agents: color and pattern. Almost lost in a haze of red and plaid, the gaze of his subject – Donald Formey, a former student – is direct yet aloof, a challenge and a request for recognition to viewers. Hendricks embedded his titles with multiple layers of meaning, some straightforward, such as the dynamics of the color red and a colloquial term of brotherhood in African American parlance at play here; and others of private significance, shared only between painter and sitter.

*On view September 16 – December 27, 2020*

#### **Extra Resources**

[Collector Kenneth Montague on his affection \*Blood \(Donald Formey\)\*](#)