

Artist Resources – Benny Andrews (American, 1930-2006)



Andrews in his studio, 2006
Photograph: Yuwadee Tantipech

[Benny Andrews Estate](#)

[Andrews at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery](#)

[Andrews at MoMA](#)

Listen to an [oral history interview](#) with Andrews from June 30, 1968, for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art.

Andrews was a founding member of the [Black Emergency Cultural Coalition](#) (active 1971-1984). A 2018 exhibition at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Gallery, [Acts of Art and Rebuttal in 1971](#), revisited BECC's 1971 protest of *Contemporary Black Artists in America* at the Whitney Museum of American Art when the museum refused to hire a black curator for the exhibition.

Read excerpts from [a 1975 interview](#) originally printed in *Ataraxia 4* with the artist and editors Phil and Linda R. Williams. A 2003 [interview](#) with Stanley J. Staniski discusses similar themes of Andrews' family history, path from Georgia, to Chicago, to New York, and advocacy for Black artists.

Andrews served as [Director of the Visual Arts Program](#) for the National Endowment for the Arts from 1982 to 1984.

A [1988 article](#) by Judd Tully calls Andrews "a man of extraordinary insight, talent, and commitment." That same year, a [New York Times article](#) reviewed both an exhibition of Andrews' work at the Studio Museum in Harlem and an exhibition at The Drawing Center organized by the artist himself.

Click through Google Arts & Culture's digital collection of [The John Lewis Series](#) from the early 2000s. When Andrews passed away, the Congressman wrote: "For Benny there was no line where his activism ended, and his art began. To him, using his brush and his pen to capture the essence and spirit of his time was as much an act of protest as sitting-in or sitting-down was for me."

[Watch a video](#) of Andrews discussing the legacy of his work in the context of the larger African American visual arts movement.

Victoria L. Valentine's [article](#), "Benny Andrews: The People's Painter" reviews the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery's exhibition, *Benny Andrews: There Must Be a Heaven*, the [first comprehensive survey](#) of the artist's work after his death in 2006.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery installed [Benny Andrews: The Bicentennial Series](#) to revisit Andrews' view of 1970s America on the eve of the 2016 presidential election.

Watch a [Smarthistory video](#) with Robyn Farrell, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, discussing the artist's famous 1966 painting *Flag Day*.

Roberta Smith's [New York Times article](#), "Benny Andrews: A Life in Portraits," reviews the [2020-2021 exhibition](#) *Benny Andrews: Portraits, a Real Person Before the Eyes*.

Andrews' work is [on view year-round](#) in a permanent collection exhibition space at New Orleans' Ogden Museum of Southern Art.



Andrews in his studio, 1970s
Photograph: Anthony Barboza

Benny Andrews (American, 1930-2006)

Louie, 1977

Oil on canvas with painted fabric and mixed media collage

Private Collection; L2021:107.2

Benny Andrews was born in segregated Plainview, Georgia to a family of sharecroppers. After receiving an honorable discharge from the U.S. Air Force in 1954, Andrews used the G.I. Bill to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. At SAIC, the artist developed his “rough collage” technique that blends paint with fabric, canvas, and paper to create portraits with a three-dimensional quality. Andrews’ portraits focus on everyday people to capture the history of marginalization in the United States, ranging in theme from the Civil Rights Movement to Native American relocation, antiwar protests, and the effects of Hurricane Katrina. **Louie** focuses on man in a wide-brimmed hat and striped shirt holding delicate flowers. In the distance, a line of naked BIPOC figures disappear behind a tree, evoking the generational trauma and cultural memory of racial oppression.

On view September 1 – December 5, 2021

