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

Listen to an oral history interview with Andrews from June 30, 1968, for the Smithsonian’s Archives of American Art.


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.


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.


Andrews’ work is on view year-round in a permanent collection exhibition space at New Orleans’ Ogden Museum of Southern Art.
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