

The temporary new home of The Frick Collection

Media Alert: *Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick*

Exhibition to Focus on Influential American Artist

September 21, 2023, through January 7, 2024



New York (July 13, 2022)—Since opening to the public in 1935, The Frick Collection has inspired generations of artists, writers, and other makers, offering a singular experience of historic European art within the evolving culture of New York City. Barkley L. Hendricks (1945–2017) was one such artist. In the fall of 2023, at its temporary home, Frick Madison, the museum will celebrate and explore the remarkable work of this pioneering American painter with an unprecedented exhibition of paintings drawn from private and public collections. The show is organized by the Frick’s Curator Aimee Ng and Consulting Curator Antwaun Sargent.

Along with the exhibition, Hendricks’s art and its impact will be further explored through a richly illustrated exhibition catalogue with contributions by artists and creative figures including Derrick Adams, Nick Cave, Awol Erizku, Jeremy O. Harris, Rashid Johnson, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Fahamu Pecou, and Kehinde Wiley. The Frick will also offer a robust roster of educational public programs to complement the show.



Hendricks revolutionized contemporary portraiture with his vivid depictions of Black subjects derived from photographs of hired models or figures he encountered on the street. Beginning in the late 1960s, his work drew from and challenged traditions of European art, and The Frick Collection—with its iconic portraits by Rembrandt, Bronzino, Van Dyck, and others—was one of his favorite museums. Through a selection of some dozen of Hendricks’s finest portraits displayed in the context of the Frick’s holdings, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue will consider the complex place of European painting in Hendricks’s art and how his work, in turn, continues to inspire major artists and designers today.

Comments Ng, “The Frick offers stirring encounters with figures painted centuries ago. As our temporary display at Frick Madison has shown, these works can look and engage visitors so differently outside of the Frick mansion, in the Brutalist setting of the Breuer building. Here, many of our visitors are new to the Frick, a revelation that has prompted reflection on who the Frick serves, has served, and will continue to serve. This project—the first major museum exhibition and catalogue to focus solely on Hendricks's early period of portraiture—allows us to consider connections the Frick has made with artists since it became a public museum in 1935. Hendricks’s astonishing portraits of predominantly Black figures, not represented in the Frick's historic paintings yet who, with their self-assured style, appear right at home among them, grants unprecedented opportunities to celebrate and explore the Frick's collection, Hendricks's groundbreaking innovations, and the bridges between them.”

Adds Sargent, “When Aimee and I first began speaking about the Frick and its place in today's world, I suggested an exhibition on Barkley L. Hendricks—obviously because of his interest in historic art as he developed his own style of portraiture of Black subjects, but also because the quality, dignity, and visual impact of his paintings are what I would think Henry Clay Frick might be drawn to if he were collecting now, thinking of future visitors to the museum in another hundred years. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition is an exciting way to highlight and reflect on Hendricks's own legacies, how he has inspired generations of artists and designers and still does today. Presenting Hendricks's art at a storied institution like the Frick pays due tribute to the historic significance of Barkley L. Hendricks, and it also honors the evolving role of the Frick in modern American culture.”

ABOUT BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

Hendricks developed his signature style at a time of significant social and cultural change in the United States, especially with regard to Black artists, and amid a perceived binary between abstraction and representation. He



produced portraits from the late 1960s through the early 1980s; following a hiatus during which he made landscapes, basketball paintings, works on paper, and photographs, he resumed his portraiture practice from 2002 until his death in 2017. This exhibition brings together some of the most innovative and striking examples from his first period of portrait painting, including a set of “limited-palette” canvases—featuring Black figures dressed in white against white backgrounds—a self-portrait, and boldly colorful works that spotlight their subjects’ spectacular styles and poses.



Following trips as a student to European museums in the 1960s, from which he returned “with a head full of inspirations,” he revisited those institutions (including the Frick) throughout his career. His reshaping of the conventions of portraiture grew in large part out of his study of Old Master painting, among the most prominent

of his varied interests, which also included African and Indigenous art, fashion, and jazz music. His predominantly Black subjects are self-possessed and treated with individuality and reverence, celebrating Black identity that was so glaringly underrepresented in the canons of historic European art and of modern American art. At the same time, he was deeply committed to exploring abstraction and the eloquence of color and form in figurative painting.



A number of his elegant and often humorous portraits make direct reference to historical precedents. One of the earliest works in the show, *Lawdy Mama* (1969), for example, adapts the centuries-old technique of gold leafing in Christian paintings—exemplified by a group of early Italian Renaissance panels in the Frick’s collection—to a portrait of his cousin, wearing an Afro hairstyle (see page 1). Stylish and contemporary, *Lawdy Mama* also offers a meditation on archetypes of the feminine form and the enduring impact of European art and Christian culture in modern societies. In the limited-palette painting *Steve* (1976), meticulously painted reflections of arched windows in the subject’s sunglasses evoke Northern Renaissance

artists like Jan van Eyck, whose paintings were so striking to Hendricks during his European travels and whose *The Virgin and Child with St. Barbara, St. Elizabeth, and Jan Vos* is among the most popular works in Frick Madison’s Northern European galleries. Each portrait in the exhibition highlights a distinct dimension of Hendricks’s practice, which, in taking inspiration from history, transformed figurative painting for future generations.



ABOUT THE FRICK COLLECTION AND FRICK MADISON

The historic buildings of The Frick Collection are currently closed for renovation and enhancement, their first comprehensive upgrade since the 1930s. For the duration of the renovation project, the collections of the museum and library remain accessible to the public at Frick Madison, the Marcel Breuer–designed building at 945 Madison Avenue that was once the home of the Whitney Museum of American Art, and most recently, The Met Breuer. The project ensures that the public continues to enjoy the Frick’s masterpieces, while also giving the museum a unique opportunity to reimagine its presentation of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts within a completely different context. For the first time, audiences are able to enjoy a substantial gathering of highlights from the Frick’s permanent collection outside the domestic setting of the Gilded Age mansion.

Honoring the institution’s architectural legacy and unique character, the project plan designed by Selldorf Architects will provide unprecedented access to the original 1914 residence of Henry Clay Frick, while preserving the intimate visitor experience and beloved galleries for which the Frick is known. Conceived to address pressing

institutional and programmatic needs, the plan will create new spaces for permanent collection display and special exhibitions, conservation, education, and public programs, while improving visitor amenities and overall accessibility.

Images: Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Lawdy Mama*, 1969. Oil and gold leaf on canvas, 53 3/4 x 36 1/4 in. (136.53 x 92.1 cm). The Studio Museum in Harlem, gift of Stuart Liebman, in memory of Joseph B. Liebman; Frick Curator Aimee Ng with Consulting Curator Antwaun Sargent at Frick Madison. Photo: George Koelle; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Self-Portrait with Black Hat*, 1980–2013. Digital C-print, 27 3/4 x 18 3/4 in. (70.49 x 47.63 cm). © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *October's Gone...Goodnight*, 1973. Oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 66 x 72 in. (167.6 x 182.9 cm). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Richard Norton Memorial Fund. © President and Fellows of Harvard College; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Misc. Tyrone (Tyrone Smith)*, 1976. Oil and magna on linen canvas, 72 x 50 in. (182.88 x 127 cm). Private collection. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Woody*, 1973. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 84 in. (167.64 x 213.36 cm). Private collection. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Steve*, 1976. Magna, acrylic, and oil on linen, 72 x 48 in. (182.9 x 121.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase and gift with funds from the Arthur M. Bullowa Bequest by exchange, the Jack E. Chachkes Endowed Purchase Fund, and the Wilfred P. and Rose J. Cohen Purchase Fund. © Whitney Museum of American Art, licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY; Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017), *Blood (Donald Formey)*, 1975. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 50 1/2 in. (182.88 x 128.27 cm). Private collection. © Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

INTERACT

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#FrickMadison

BASIC INFORMATION

Website: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

Bloomberg Connects app: frick.org/app

Frick Madison visitor address: 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York, NY 10021

Museum hours: Thursday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Monday through Wednesday. See website for holiday schedule.

Admission: Timed tickets are strongly recommended and may be purchased online. \$22 general public; \$17 seniors and visitors with disabilities; \$12 students. Admission is always free for members. Pay-what-you-wish admission is offered Thursdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Please note: Children under ten are not admitted to the museum.

COVID-19/health and safety policies: frick.org/visit/guidelines

Ticket purchase link: frick.org/tickets. For questions: admissions@frick.org

Group reservations: For questions: groupreservations@frick.org

Public programs: A calendar of online, virtual, and video events is available on our website.

Shop: Open during museum hours as well as online daily.

Refreshments: A light menu, offered by Joe Coffee, is available on the lower level during museum hours.

Subway: #6 local to 77th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 75th Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 74th Street

Museum mailing address: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021

Photography: Allowed only in the Frick Madison Lobby.

Reading room: Access is offered by appointment Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For further information, visit frick.org/tickets.

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For further press information, please contact us at communications@frick.org.