

Artist Profile – Barkley L. Hendricks

b. 1945 Philadelphia, PA; d. 2017 New London, CT

Hendricks was born to parents who had moved to Philadelphia to escape the Jim Crow laws in the South, and experienced his own struggles growing up in a rough neighborhood. Hendricks attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1963 to 1967 where he set the stage for his portrait paintings. Early on in college Hendricks knew he wanted to create a new representation of black individuals; self-possessed and alluring.

During his time at PAFA, Hendricks received two travel scholarships that took him to Europe and North Africa where he studied the old masters and different textile patterns. During his travels he realized how little representation there was of African Americans in art, and the representations that did exist were dehumanizing and depersonalized. After PAFA, Hendricks attended Yale University as well as doing a stint in the National Guard. He became a teacher in 1972 and continued to teach until his retirement in 2010, between the years 1984 and 2002, Hendricks decided to take a break from painting and focus on photography, mainly portraits of jazz musicians.

Hendricks began by painting life sized portraits of people of color, including self-portraits, using his interest in the history of portraiture to create images that were hard-hitting and true-to-life and gained attention in the art world. His paintings are neither photorealistic nor idealized, but are emotional, honest portraits of everyday people he meets. A common subject for Hendricks is nudes, but instead of portraying the white female that is so typical in art, he is depicting self-assured black men. In many of his paintings, Hendricks includes tiles or textiles from his trip to North Africa, showing African culture and adding color and pattern to his works.

An important aspect of Hendricks' works is that he captures the personality of his subject by including gestures and expressions that they commonly use. Another technique Hendricks employs is taken from the Greek and Russian icons; he uses gold leaf in the backgrounds of some pieces which fit with his style of theatricality he borrowed from the old masters of Europe. Each portrait Hendricks creates is full of color and personality, each stands alone strong as an individual piece and represents the African American subject in a genuine and positive way. Although he is best known for his portraits, Hendricks also painted a series of landscapes and a series that focused on the subject of the basketball hoop.

A few examples of Hendricks' works include *Lawdy Mama (1)*; showing his use of gold leaf, *Family Jules (2)*; an example of a nude where he depicted a black man as opposed to a white woman, and *Tequila (2)*; portraying a subject with an individual personality through her expression and stance.

