

# Barkley L. Hendricks in New London

May 26 – September 3, 2023



Lyman Allyn Art Museum

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## Preface

It is a rare privilege to be able to celebrate a local hero who has received widespread international acclaim. Barkley L. Hendricks (1945–2017), the artist and near-legendary personality who spent much of his career deeply enmeshed in the daily and cultural life of New London, inspired all who knew him – students, colleagues, and friends. He continues to do so today. Well beyond his immediate circle, of course, he also inspired an entire generation of artists with his direct clarity of purpose in exploring identity and his magnificent technique in depicting what he observed. We are deeply grateful, and it is our hope that this exhibition will contribute to the increasing renown Hendricks so richly deserves.

Our celebratory project could not have taken wing without the enthusiastic engagement of the artist's widow, Susan Hendricks. It has been a pleasure working with Susan and our curator, Tanya Pohrt, as they chose and refined this presentation of some of the generative images contained in Barkley's vast archive. With the goal of exposing the energy of the artist's photographic activity and showing his incisive eye, we are deeply grateful for Susan's knowledgeable and steady guidance provided throughout the last several years. We also very much appreciate the support of the Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and the scholarly contributions of Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Associate Professor at Princeton University. Finally, many thanks to those who loaned artworks and to our financial supporters; without them, this exhibition would not be possible.

Like artists of the ages he so loved, Barkley L. Hendricks observed and participated fully in the life all around him. With his cameras for recording, he represented and transformed what he saw and then showed us how to see in an entirely new light. We are changed, spiritually uplifted, and made better by his work.

Sam Quigley, Director  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum

## Doing his Thing: Barkley L. Hendricks' Visual Thinking

*by Anna Arabindan-Kesson, Ph.D.*

*Associate Professor of African American and Black Diasporic Art, Princeton University*

She is eye-catching in pale blue and stands framed by two friends: all three of them are dressed up and ready. The woman in blue poses with her arms raised in salutation. Her glistening dress is belted at the waist, and she sways ever so slightly to her left, a posture that translates her infectious joy into dynamic motion. This untitled photograph demonstrates Barkley L. Hendricks' unique brilliance, the way he fused his technical skill with his visual attention. Neither exists without the other, of course. And in this unique exhibition, we can see Barkley's commitment to the practice of artmaking, as he moved between painting and photography seamlessly.

Barkley L. Hendricks' artworks make you notice the material properties of his chosen medium. For him, artmaking was far more than representation. As with this photograph, the figures in a scene are not 'just' the subject. What you notice in the organization of his artworks – in the composition of a painting, the zones of a photograph – is how the self-representation of an individual, or the organization of a place, converges with the process of artmaking. This was because Barkley paid close attention to how places, people, and artworks are, each in their own way, assembled, put together, and structured forms. These well-dressed friends – posed like the iconic three Graces – may have been people Barkley knew or walked past on the street. The photograph is candid but 'put together,' and beautifully exemplifies Barkley's visual acuity. We see here his eye for gesture, his understanding of technique, his play with color. He shows us here the aesthetic relationship between the practice of making and the "all-over statement" of a person's self-fashioning that also becomes the means for creating a visual connection between the artwork, the viewer, and the artist.

Continued on next page



Barkley was deeply interested in what he saw around him, and the people who were part of his life in the different places that he lived and visited. This photograph was taken in New London, but in its arrangement and feeling, it reflects many of Barkley's interests in portraiture, in fashion, in beauty, in the relationship of color and form, in the boundaries between figuration and abstraction, and in relationships between people and place. These themes connect the works in this exhibition, which gives us a sense of the artist's range, while also returning us back to Barkley's deep connections to the Connecticut region – the place in which he taught and lived for decades. Teaching was important to Barkley, a practice that helped him expand his “visual thinking.” But his work also teaches us to do the same thing, providing us with new visual languages for centering the lives and experiences of Black communities and engaging with issues of injustice. Consequently, his work has indelibly shaped the work of contemporary Black diaspora artists in numerous ways. Ultimately though, Barkley was an artist who rejoiced in the radical possibilities of beauty as it was expressed through, and in, the layered complexity of human experience. For him, art was always central to conveying, and connecting us across, these intersections.



**Fig. 1**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 1982, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

## Barkley L. Hendricks in New London

by Tanya Pohrt, Ph.D., Curator

Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017) is perhaps best known for his compelling large-scale portraits, many from the 1970s, which present a powerful vision of modern Black identity. This exhibition examines the work of this internationally renowned artist from a regional standpoint, considering the role of place, community, and teaching in Hendricks' career in Connecticut.

Featuring 34 works of art, this exhibition includes paintings, works on paper, and a sizable group of photographs of the New London region. These pieces suggest the range of Hendricks' artistic production and the overlap between his creative work and his teaching. Since the artist's death in 2017, there has been a push to catalog his vast photographic output, unearthing new photographs and expanding what is known of Hendricks' oeuvre.

Hendricks celebrated everyday people in his art, inspired by Grand Manner portraiture and a desire for diversity in the fine art canon. His portraits offer powerful and complex visions of contemporary identity. “My paintings were about people that were part of my life,” Hendricks noted in a 2016 interview. “If they were political, it’s because they were a reflection of the culture we were drowning in.”<sup>1</sup> William Corbett, for example, grew up in North Philadelphia with Hendricks, but their lives took different turns. While Hendricks attended art school, Corbett served time in prison. After his release, Hendricks encountered Corbett on a visit back to Philadelphia and photographed him, later painting this portrait in his New London studio (**fig. 2**).



**Fig. 2**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)*, 1975, oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 48 inches. Collection of Art Bridges.

<sup>1</sup> Barkley L. Hendricks, interview with Laila Pedro, *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2016.



**Fig. 3**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Brenda P*, 1974, oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 × 50 inches.  
Collection of Art Bridges.

Painting his figures in oil in a highly detailed, almost hyper-realist mode, Hendricks often set them against monochromatic acrylic backgrounds with a matte finish. The disjunction between the vividness of these portraits and the flatness of their non-linear ground gives the paintings a modern timelessness and a slightly uncanny quality. Hendricks experimented with color and hue as well, sometimes using a limited palette for his subjects' clothing and backgrounds. In *North Philly Niggah (William Corbett)*, the subject's dark skin, hair, and shirt offer a marked contrast with the peach and beige tones of his coat and background.

A woman gazes out with her hands on her hips in *Brenda P*, 1974 (**fig. 3**), striding forward with energy and authority. Her beauty and confidence convey a mystique that viewers and critics have sometimes confused with celebrity, a not uncommon occurrence with Hendricks' large-scale portraits. This painting was mistakenly thought to portray Brenda Payton from the Philadelphia R&B group, Brenda and the Tabulations. In fact, she is Brenda Perry, a New London resident. Hendricks also painted Brenda's sister, Barbara Perry, on several occasions.



*APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers)*, 1978 (**fig. 4**) portrays two men Hendricks saw and photographed on a trip to Paris, rendering them on canvas back in his New London studio. Hendricks later noted, "There was a style at the time with the long, slit-back suits that you saw a lot of tall, graceful African brothers wearing, and these gentlemen were gracious enough to allow me to photograph them."<sup>2</sup> Hendricks painted this portrait at a time of growing interest in the African diaspora. In 1977 he traveled to Lagos, Nigeria, for FESTAC '77, the World Festival of Black Arts, a celebration of Pan-African culture, art, and music, where Hendricks and other African American artists made lasting connections with musicians and artists from around the world.

**Fig. 4**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers)*, 1978, oil and acrylic on linen, 72 × 50 inches. Yale University Art Gallery, Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund, 2005.311.

<sup>2</sup> Barkley L. Hendricks, interview with Thelma Golden, 2007, in *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, ed. Trevor Schoonmaker (Durham, NC: Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, 2008), p. 63.



Hendricks often worked on multiple projects at a time, shifting between media and genres. “Everything is up for grabs in the creative arena,” he remarked in a 2007 interview with Thelma Golden, reflecting on his expansive approach.<sup>3</sup> Hendricks painted a remarkable series of oval and round *plein air* landscapes on annual winter visits to Jamaica during semester breaks. Inspired by the island’s beautiful scenery and the desire to work in nature, he painted scenes such as *New Year’s Day in the Quarry #2* (**fig. 5**) in a single day. This unusual composition depicts a quarry that Hendricks periodically painted, reflecting his interest in how the stone was reshaped over time. Here the artist renders a section of rock that is cut away, revealing an odd window-like view that compresses foreground, background, and sky.

Part of Hendricks’ genius was his ability to explore the boundaries between traditional realism and modernist abstraction, skillfully evoking pictorial illusionism while also integrating elements of flatness. This can be seen in the quarry landscape, in his painted portraits, and in his photographs. In *Untitled (Girl Legs)* and *Walk this Way* (**fig. 6 & 7**), Hendricks used tight framing and a low viewpoint to compose scenes that explore vision, depth, and flatness. In the former image, the swath of green grass beyond the legs of a student seems to extend upward as a backdrop rather than receding beyond the figure. In *Walk this Way*, the asphalt parking lot presents a flat expanse, leaving the viewer slightly unmoored before comprehending the scene and connecting the joke between the arrow and feet.



**Fig. 5**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *New Year’s Day in the Quarry #2*, 2004, oil on linen. 17 ½ x 27 ¼ inches. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Susan Hendricks, 2017.14.2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 74.



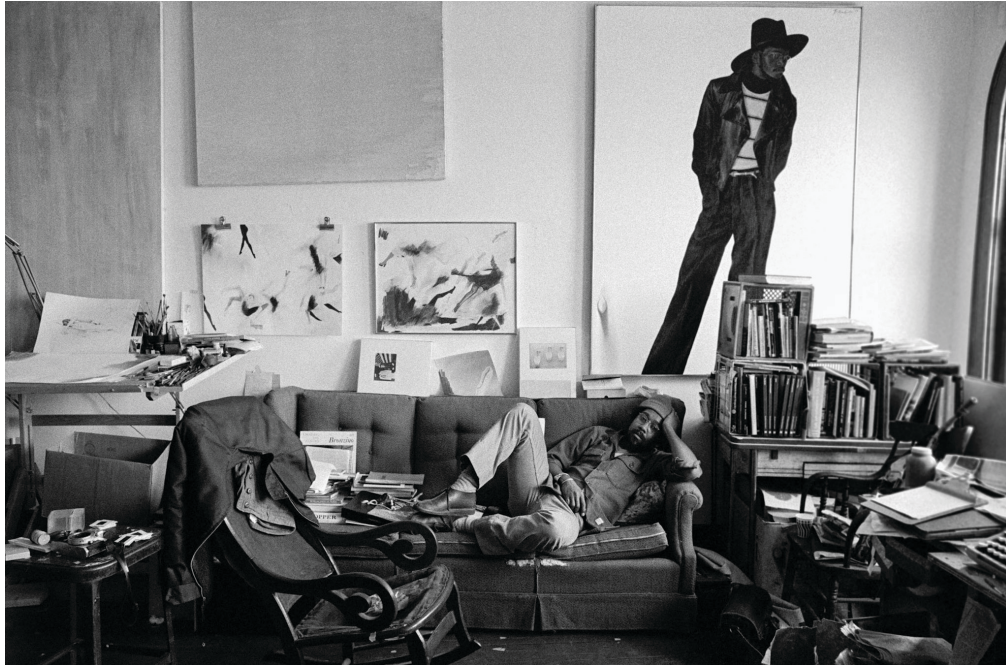
**Fig. 6**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 2007, archive inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



**Fig. 7**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Walk This Way*, 1992-2013, digital Cibachrome print, 34 ½ x 52 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



## Teaching at Connecticut College



**Fig. 8**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Originally from Philadelphia, Barkley L. Hendricks came to Connecticut in 1970 to study fine art at Yale University, following rigorous study in figurative art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Hendricks received a combined BA / MFA from Yale in 1972 and taught Studio Art at Connecticut College from the fall of 1972 until his retirement in 2010, finding subjects and stories for his art in the community around him.

Hendricks welcomed the opportunity to teach at the college level. With great respect for his own teachers, he wanted to follow in their footsteps and train young artists. The schedule of academic life was also ideal, allowing time to pursue his own work alongside teaching. Hendricks generally taught on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and spent Tuesdays and Thursdays working in his State Street studio in New London (**fig. 8**).



Hendricks had high expectations of his students and had a reputation as a challenging professor. Working with young people “keeps the mind active in trying to communicate,” Hendricks remarked to the college’s student newspaper in 1981, noting the synergy between teaching and his own artistic production, as “each year I am confronted with various approaches to visual thinking.”<sup>4</sup>

In his 38 years at Connecticut College, Hendricks taught the core tenets of representational drawing and painting in classes that focused on these subjects. Hendricks used live models in some courses, adhering to traditional academic training in figure studies. The artist documented the model Nile posing in an art studio classroom in the Cummings Art Building, holding a basketball (**fig. 9**).

**Fig. 9**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Nile)*, ca. 2005, archival inkjet print, 24 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hendricks expanded his course listings in 1980/81, teaching watercolor for the first time. This class reflected his growing interest in watercolor painting and may have helped him explore nuances of the medium. At the Lyman Allyn the previous year, Hendricks had his first solo exhibition of watercolors, which included landscapes and focused still life studies. *Mutant Plum* (**fig. 10**), a small, carefully rendered plum with sensuous curves, was shown alongside other botanicals such as overripe bananas and wilting flowers, Hendricks’ meditations on beauty and ephemerality.



**Fig. 10**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Mutant Plum*, 1979, watercolor on paper, 22 ¼ x 28 ¾ inches. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Linda Hall Smalley, 2017.9.

<sup>4</sup>Barkley L. Hendricks, interview with student Kim Kellogg, for *The Voice*, Connecticut College student newspaper. Special “Art Beat” format. Undated, ca. 1981. Linda Lear Center for Special Collections & Archives, Connecticut College, Art Department files.



## Hendricks as a Photographer

With a sharp eye for composition and an interest in everyday beauty, Barkley L. Hendricks was an avid and skilled photographer. Using his camera as a “mechanical sketchbook,” he captured moments of visual interest wherever he went. Hendricks exhibited some photographs as stand-alone works of art, while others became building blocks for his large-scale painted portraits. One such portrait photograph depicts Lynn Jenkins, a Connecticut College student, sitting on a couch (**fig. 12**), an image that became a source for Hendricks’ large-scale painted portrait *Sweet Thang*, 1975-76, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Self-portraits were ideal for formal and technical experimentation because, as Hendricks commented, “you are always around.”<sup>5</sup> Hendricks painted and photographed himself at various junctures in his life and career, interested in exploring aspects of his own identity. Standing in his State Street studio in New London between two painted self-portraits, Hendricks bridges a gap between two presentations of self, literally and with his attire (**fig. 11**). On the topic of self-portraits, Hendricks opined: “.... much deeper than the reflection that confronts me daily, I’m faced with that part of me no mirror, canvas, camera, super-X-ray vision, or any human can see but me. And it’s my relationship with my interior that helps determine how I portray my exterior.”<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 11**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1977, gelatin silver LE print, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



**Fig. 12**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Lynn Jenkins, Connecticut College)*, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In and around New London, Hendricks photographed a variety of people and places, including a fashionable trio relaxing at Harkness State Park on Long Island Sound, all wearing stripes (**fig. 13**). This contemporary riff on the pastoral tradition features Black sitters in nature, their poses recalling those of shepherds, musicians, and others in paintings from the Renaissance onward. Another trio forms a contemporary vision of the three Graces, a stylish group of women standing on Bank Street in New London, in front of the U.S. Custom House (**fig. 1**). When taking candid photographs of people, “he would always let the subjects do their thing,” noted Susan Hendricks, the artist’s widow, explaining that Barkley was interested in “the all-over statement of their fashion presentation to the world.”<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 13**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Harkness)*, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

<sup>5</sup>Barkley L. Hendricks, “Palette Scrapings,” *Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, ed. Trevor Schoonmaker. (Durham, NC: Nasher Museum of Art, Duke University, 2008), p. 104.

<sup>6</sup>Barkley L. Hendricks, “Beneath the Surface,” *Philadelphia Bulletin*, 25 October 1970

<sup>7</sup>Susan Hendricks, *Barkley L. Hendricks: The Photography Archive*, Lecture, Connecticut College, October 24, 2022



An intriguing photograph of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Cadet Band shows musicians at practice, their torsos and instruments reflected in a puddle, while their legs and shadows present a rhythmic pattern above (fig. 15). With a dynamic composition and unusual framing, Hendricks captured what French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson called ‘the decisive moment.’ Always drawn to music, Hendricks may have shot this photograph after hearing the Coast Guard band practicing outdoors from the nearby grounds of Connecticut College, as the two schools share adjacent space on the banks of New London’s Thames River.

Hendricks was a musician himself and a devoted jazz aficionado. Musical imagery and musical references appear in many of his pieces and he photographed numerous musicians in concert, including Ray Charles performing live at Harkness State Park (fig. 14). Hendricks also documented casual encounters with street music culture, such as *Untitled (Boy with Boombox)*, 1983, (fig. 16), in which a young man stands in profile with a boombox in his arms. The horizontal shot includes the surrounding neighborhood, with Huntington Street receding in the distance, suggesting journeys ahead.



**Fig. 15**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Coast Guard)*, 1979, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



**Fig. 14**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Ray Charles and the Raylettes*, 1992–2008, Cibachrome print, 60 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



**Fig. 16**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 1983, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Interested in mass-media imagery and its role in modern culture, Hendricks documented events on TV in numerous photographs. He often ate lunch at the historic Dutch Tavern, located near his studio in downtown New London. There he captured moments such as this one, an interview with Michael Jordan following the Chicago Bulls’ 1992 NBA basketball championship victory, viewed amidst the bar’s eclectic interior (fig. 17).

Using his camera to record racism and protest social injustice, Hendricks documented a KKK rally in Scotland, Connecticut in 1982, an experience he later described as “sobering and saddening.”<sup>8</sup> (fig. 18). Other photographs note the presence of Confederate flag imagery in local public spaces (fig. 19). Powerful and disturbing, these photographs show a side of Connecticut at odds with the politically progressive and liberal reputation the state has long held.



**Fig. 17**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Michael Jordan*, 1992–2008, Cibachrome print, 40 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

<sup>8</sup> Barkley L. Hendricks, “Rome Rendezvous: Rendezvous with Myself,” in *The Barkley L. Hendricks Experience* (New London, CT: Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 2001), p. 45.





**Fig. 19**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Racesonomic Duncenpack Series*, 1982, Cibachrome print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



**Fig. 19**  
Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 1996, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Barkley L. Hendricks lived in New London, Connecticut from 1972 until his death in 2017, teaching studio art at Connecticut College for 38 years and contributing significantly to the city's artistic and cultural fabric. In that time, he rose to prominence in the art world, exhibiting in group and solo exhibitions, with major museums and collectors acquiring his work. Hendricks' vision and his groundbreaking portraits shifted the course of contemporary art and helped blaze a path for the creative richness of Black portraiture produced today. Utilizing local subjects and settings to reflect on a range of artistic, social, and cultural issues, Hendricks' art illuminates and was shaped by his environment, his teaching, and the community around him. As Hendricks' art continues to gain admirers and critical acclaim, we can reflect on his work and his legacy in this region.

Checklist of additional artworks in the exhibition



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved Any Black People - Bobby Seale)*, 2009, pigment print, 23 x 19 inches. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Susan Hendricks, 2017:14.3.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Cool Raymond*, 1979, oil and acrylic on canvas, 66 x 48 inches. The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, CT Artist Collection & Art in Public Spaces Collection.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Self-Portrait*, 1981, digital Cibachrome print, 29 x 18 ½ inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Sacrifice of the Watermelon Virgin or Shirt Off Her Back*, 1987, color offset lithograph, Published by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, 21 ¾ x 29 ¾ inches. Collection of the Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, CT, Museum purchase, 2020.5.1.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *General Dynamics in the Fog, Thames River*, 1979, watercolor on paper, 22 x 29 inches. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of the artist, 1979:346.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Picture for a Sunday Afternoon*, December 30, 2001, oil on canvas, 17 ½ x 27 ¾ inches. Lyman Allyn Art Museum, gift of Susan Hendricks, 2017:14.1.





Barkley L. Hendricks, ***Student Drawing***, 1989/ 2013, digital Cibachrome print, 20 x 13 ¼ inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (**Sailfest, New London**)*, 1983, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, ***Untitled (Connecticut College)***, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



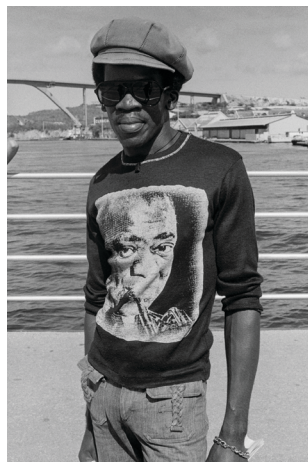
Barkley L. Hendricks, ***Untitled***, 1974, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, ***Vendetta in Lotus Position***, 1977-2013, gelatin silver print, 29 x 29 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, ***Untitled***, 1982, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Thames River)*, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 24 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 2008, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled*, 1982, archival inkjet print, 16 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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Front: Barkley L. Hendricks, *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, ca. 1975, gelatin silver print, 16 x 24 inches.  
Courtesy of the Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.