

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Norman Lewis: Small Paintings and Drawings

September 12 – October 25, 2014

New York, NY- Bill Hodges Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of work by Norman Lewis. The show will run from September 12 – October 25, 2014 at 529 W. 20th Street.

The exhibition consists of small works executed between 1935 and 1974 tracing Lewis’ style from Social Realism to a mature abstraction and finally to a serene melancholic series of churning ocean waters.

A 1935 drawing, the earliest work in the exhibition, is representative of Lewis’ crafting of the figure. A possible study for a painting it is very clearly a figure and yet it is evident how abstraction was beginning to influence Lewis’ style.



Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, 1970, Oil on Paper, 29 ½ x 41 ½ in.

In an elongated untitled dark oil painting dominated by small moving black stick figures, Lewis’ shift away from the realistic figure is evident. Here, Lewis displayed his characteristic *little people* motif, which he described as “humanity in terms of the space in which you live in”¹. Most striking against the neutral tones of the work is the blood red paint, which is concentrated at the top of the canvas but fades as you move towards the greatest mass of figures. This surprising color unquestionably signifies blood, human suffering and isolation and the work is indicative of the Abstractionists movement of which Lewis was a major player.

Contrastingly, a black and blue untitled work on paper from 1970 signals the evolution of Lewis’ style in the decade of his death. The little people have disappeared giving way to a geometric string of concave circles. During this time period, it is said that Lewis had become fascinated by the sea and his trips to Black Island which is reflected in this work.

Lewis’ versatility is quite evident and he certainly adapted to certain inclinations in American art, even helping define certain movements such as Abstract Expressionism. Conceivably more substantial than Lewis’ influence on such artistic movements, was his ability to forge his own distinctive style, which delicately or perhaps explicitly addresses the intricacies of the human condition.



Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, 1935, Graphite on Paper, 12 ¼ x 10 in.



Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, ca. 1949, Oil on Canvas, 50 x 19 ½ in.

Norman Lewis was born on July 23, 1909, in Harlem, New York. From 1933 to 1935, he attended classes at the Savage School of Arts and Crafts while enrolled at Columbia University. During his career, Lewis was an avid activist, campaigning for social equality and artists’ rights. Lewis was the first president of SPIRAL, a group founded in the 1960s, a collective of African-American artists including Romare Bearden, Hale Woodruff, and Charles Alston aiming to negotiate the role of the black artist in society and support the artistic endeavors of individuals in the group. He continued to create thought-provoking works until his death in 1979. Lewis’ works are on display in a number of major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MoMA, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Bill Hodges Gallery is located on the 2nd floor of 529 W. 20th Street between 10th Avenue and 11th Avenue. Our closest subway stations are at 14th St. & 8th Ave. (A-C-E-L) and 23rd St. & 8th Ave. (C-E). Gallery Hours are Tuesday to Friday 10am – 6pm and Saturday 12:30pm – 5:30pm. Press viewings can be arranged. For more information or to arrange a viewing, please contact Bill or Navindren Hodges at (212) 333-2640 or via email at info@billhodgesgallery.com

¹ Oral history interview with Norman Lewis, 1968 July 14, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution