

BILL HODGES GALLERY

Gallery Picks: Selections from the Collection

April 15th – June 11th, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bill Hodges Gallery is pleased to present *Gallery Picks: Selections from the Collection*, a group exhibition curated entirely by the gallery's staff. This exhibition is an intimate, deep dive into the gallery's exemplary collection done by the people who know it best. From intimate portraits to colossal sculptures, these works showcase the breadth of personal taste among our staff and within our gallery. This exhibition will be on view at our Chelsea location until May 29th, 2021. Artists featured in the exhibition include sculptor Richard Hunt (Chicago, IL; 1935), abstract expressionist Norman Lewis (New York, NY; 1909 – 1979), printmaker and sculptor Willie Cole (Newark, NJ; 1955) and many more.

Making its debut in *Gallery Picks* is *Earth, Wind and Fire*, 2005 by Brooklyn based artist William Villalongo (Hollywood, FL; 1975). Composed of acrylic paint, gold leaf and paper laid on velvet - Villalongo creates an unparalleled sensorial experience of color and texture. At a height of 8 feet, this canvas envelops viewers in a chaotic and mystical terrain. An aged face hovers in the upper left corner exhaling a cloud of towards a burning totem composed of violently assembled faces crowned with a cloud of gold foil. The flames branch out, literally - forming scions of fire that connect tens of individual heads, all animated by a variety of emotions. Some faces in this web of fire show fear, surprise or injury while others show sadness and even calm. All of the characters feature green, root like sprigs emerging from their skin and hair while petals of blue droplets descend upon them, to little reprieve. Villalongo depicts wind, fire and earth in lawless harmony, managing still to emphasize their interconnectedness - reminding us just how delicate this elemental balance is.

Gallery Picks: Selections from the Collection includes eight sculptures throughout both of our galleries - the largest being *Elle*, 1961 by Agustín Cárdenas. Sculpted from burnt oak, *Elle* is over 10 feet tall (122 ³/₄ inches/312 cm) and was created during Cárdenas' first distinct stylistic period defined by Dogon-inspired totems that he crafted from wood, such as oak and ebony and stone. *Elle* is a wonderful example of Cárdenas' style - his transformation of dense, rough natural materials into sensual, aqueous biomorphic forms that embody visual poetry and is among the largest sculptures he created. Cárdenas' dedication to the metamorphosis of his media is also visible in the pseudo-buttresses carved within the larger form – replacing structure with vacuity and incorporating air and light into the work's core.

Featured on its own wall in the main space is Norman Lewis' *Serpentine*, 1970. This legendary abstract expressionist painting radiates electricity and energy thanks to its vibrant palette of contrasting colors and its graphic, explosive style. *Serpentine* reflects formal conceits Lewis experienced throughout his career; especially after being shunned from the Abstract Expressionist movement in New York. The dynamic mass in the canvas' center reference his processions. Portrayed in rich red and blue tones that visually compete against each other, various sharp forms that comprise the central mass resemble shards of glass exploding across the

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painterly terrain. The work's title, *Serpentine*, conjures a visceral interpretation of this enlivened compositional space - creating a pulsating and visually compelling experience.

Located in the back gallery is Chester Higgins Jr.'s (Lexington, KY; 1946) luminous platinum-palladium print *A Young Muslim Woman in Brooklyn*, 1990 (reprinted 2007). Higgins Jr. is an American photographer most known for his work in the *New York Times*, *Essence* and *Life* magazines, dating back to the 1970's. His photographs are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the International Center for Photography, New York; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; the Jewish Museum, New York and more. *A Young Muslim Woman in Brooklyn* is a closely cropped portrait of a young Black woman, her tender and focused gaze framed by her white niqab. The faint reflection in her eyes invites viewers into her world, if only for a moment.

The exhibition also features three works by legendary American public sculptor, Richard Hunt (Chicago, IL; 1935). In the main gallery is *Thrivent Variation*, 2021, an incredibly recent work by the artist. Done in the abstract style that his large scale public sculptures are known for, Hunt's artfulness transforms steel into a unique phase of matter that appears solid yet liquid at the same time. Large, sharp wings emanate from the work's base, growing upward as it rides the air around it. The crystallites or grain of the steel remain natural and reflect light in small, smooth waves. In the back gallery, we are pleased to present a rare sketch by Hunt that appears to be inspired by his Howard University sculpture by the same name, *Over Wisdom Bridge*. This epic and abstract take on a physical sculpture shows the incredible artfulness of Hunt's hand and practice.

This exhibition also features works by **Mickalene Thomas** (Camden, NJ; 1971); **Sam Gilliam** (Tupelo, MS; 1933); **LeRone Wilson** (Harlem, NY; 1968); **Alvin Hollingsworth** (New York, NY; 1928 – 2000); **Romare Bearden** (Charlotte, NC; 1911 – New York, NY; 1988); **Ángel Botello** (Galicia, ES; 1913 – San Juan, PR; 1986); **Charles Sebree** (Madisonville, KY; 1914 – Washington, D.C.; 1985); **Helen LaFrance** (Graves County, KY; 1919 – 2020); **Iona Rozeal Brown** (Washington, D.C.; 1966); **Lyle Ashton Harris** (New York, NY; 1965); **Chuck Close** (Monroe, WA; 1940); **Marion Greenwood** (Brooklyn, NY; 1909 – Kingston, NY; 1970) and **Melvin Edwards** (Houston, TX; 1937).

Established in 1979, Bill Hodges Gallery is a modern and contemporary art gallery specializing in influential artists of the African Diaspora. The gallery's collection is well known for its strong inventory of works from the Harlem Renaissance and Abstract Expressionist movement by prominent artists including Norman Lewis (1909 – 1979), Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), Romare Bearden (1911 – 1988), Sam Gilliam (1933), and Ed Clark (1926 – 2019). Responding to market and scholarly interest in artists who are underrepresented in the canon of art history, the gallery advocates for their status as leading artistic pioneers of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Bill Hodges Gallery is located at 529 W. 20th Street, suite #10E, between 10th Avenue and 11th Avenue. Our closest subway stations are 14th St. & 8th Ave. (A-C-E) and 23rd St. & 8th Ave. (C-E). The gallery is open Monday to Friday from 11 AM – 6 PM. Appointments are strongly encouraged but walk ins are accepted. The gallery is implementing social distancing measures; requiring guests wear appropriate personal protection equipment. Masks can be provided. For more information or to arrange a private viewing, please contact Bill or Navindren Hodges at (212) 333-2640 or at info@billhodgesgallery.com

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