

Bill Hodges Gallery

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Norman Lewis & Richard Hunt

The Connected Legacy of Two Distinguished Abstractionists

529 West 20th Street
New York, NY 10011
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NEW YORK, NY 5 August – In honor of the exceptional contributions **Norman Lewis (1909 – 1979)** and **Richard Hunt (1935 –)** have made to their respective genres, Bill Hodges Gallery is proud to present an exhibition of historic works by these seminal artists. *Norman Lewis & Richard Hunt* celebrates two major artists of the 20th and 21st century, distinguished for their fluency in abstraction. Placing in dialogue twenty-two works, a portrait of abstract art emerges; one that has been indelibly shaped by the brilliance of Black artists. Showcasing the inventive quality of modern and contemporary art, this exhibition urges viewers to consider the unique position Black artists have occupied within the development of abstraction. With Hunt's agile, insightful sculptures of welded metals and Lewis' titanic canvases of vivid color; this exhibition traverses a lively topography of artistic expression; rendered through the visual language of shape, form, color and line.

Over the years, Norman Lewis' role within the vanguard of Abstract Expressionism has been increasingly recognized; a legacy steadfastly informed by the artist's community and social milieu. Abstract Expressionism, a celebrated artistic movement of the mid-20th century, comprised diverse styles and techniques, all of which empowered an artist's liberty to convey attitudes and emotions through nonrepresentational means. Lewis, an unsung pioneer of the movement, was also a founding member of the renowned artists collective: Spiral Group. Although some members of the Spiral Group produced figurative work, their collective embrace of abstraction's potential to express a range of perspectives and juxtapositions was a profound aspect of their mission. Lewis has been quoted as saying, "I am not interested in an illustrative statement that merely mirrors some of the social conditions, but in my work I am for something of deeper artistic and philosophic content."¹

Lewis' vermilion composition, *Serpentine* (1970), a vibrant work of the artist's later period, is an energetic composition, accented by the tessellation of scales at the fore of the work. This constellated array of polygonal tiles shimmers in cobalt hue, puzzling into the winding shape of a serpent creature or basilisk; whose active angles break the blue fields with decisive motion. This painting



**Norman Lewis
(1909 – 1979)**
Serpentine, 1970
Oil on Canvas
60 x 48 in.
(152.4 x 121.9 cm)

¹ Siegel, Jeanne. "Why Spiral, Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Others on the 'Contradictions Facing Them in Modern America,' in 1966" *ARTnews*, 2005.

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was following the creation of Cinque Gallery in 1969, an artist-run space cofounded by Lewis along with Romare Bearden and Ernest Crichlow. Established with the aim of facilitating collaboration between Black artists across generations, the Cinque Gallery sponsored over 300 exhibitions and mentorship initiatives before closing in 2004. This commitment to collective was central to Lewis' artistic practice and characterized much of his career. An artist renowned for his processional compositions that portray crowds of congregated forms, Lewis brought this sensibility of aggregate concert to *Serpentine* as well. The abstracted form, comprised of a series of vibrant elements, invites viewers to imagine the arrangement as parts of a whole; with a spirit of aliveness represented within each polygonal shape.

Richard Hunt has indicated: "In some works, it is my intention to develop the kind of forms Nature might create if only heat and steel were available to her."² This sensibility is made manifest in this large-scale sculpture, *Inside and Outside the Frame*, a highlight of the present exhibition. Hunt, a Chicago-based artist, is celebrated for his facile handling of abstracted form and figuration, with unique silhouettes that bend and capture light from all angles of viewing. His sculptures are lauded for their fine balance of delicate, outstretched scions, often welded to a dense, angular base. This cast and welded bronze work, pictured to the right, showcases Hunt's keen eye for combining recognizable shapes with otherworldly abstracted forms. Emerging from a rectangular window-like frame base is a stretching, soaring, winged form with various knobbed branches and protruding limbs. The form is perched atop the sculpture's highest point, though rooted by the tail to the confines of its steel base. Both a critical aspect of the rectangular frame's adornment, yet existing outside of its borders, the abstracted avian creature exists in paradox, as the title suggests, *Inside and Outside the Frame*. At over six feet tall, it stands as a notable example of the artist's adroit sense of gravity and levity in his work.



Richard Hunt (1935 –)
Inside and Outside the Frame,
2006-2020
Cast and Welded Bronze
77 x 36 ¼ x 30 ½ in.
(195.6 x 92.1 x 77.5 cm)

Norman Lewis & Richard Hunt presents the remarkable artistic achievements of two distinguished Black abstractionists; both of whom have made tremendous contributions to their respective disciplines. In many ways, Lewis' journey through visually arresting two-dimensional abstraction finds simpatico within the resilient spirit of reinvention at the heart of Hunt's transcendent forms. As such, the curation of these phenomenal works allows viewers to appreciate two artists in conversation; singular in their fields, united in a shared legacy as Black Abstractionists.

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). For more information or to arrange a private viewing, please contact the gallery at (212) 333-2640 or at info@billhodgesgallery.com.

² "Richard Hunt: Why," Smart Museum of Art, *University of Chicago*, 1984.