

Research Article

Genevieve Hyacinthe*

Love is the Message: Barkley Hendricks's MFSB Portrait Aesthetics

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2017-0057>

Received June 10, 2017; accepted October 23, 2017

Abstract: Barkley L. Hendricks's (1945-2017) portraiture is considered in relation to camp's liminal nature. Hendricks employs the camp techniques of surface emphasis, and affective audience engagement, to relay a political message of black agency. His portraiture is framed with dynamics of MFSB, a popular culture movement developed in his hometown, Philadelphia, during the era of the 1970s. The paper brings to light Hendricks's participation within the complex histories of imaging the black body. His participation defies the hegemonies inherent within these histories and, at the same time, reifies them.

Keywords: Barkley L. Hendricks, Philadelphia International Sound, MFSB, Teddy Pendergrass, black portraiture

Writing the Black Body

Barkley L. Hendricks (b. Philadelphia, 1945-2017) carries a baton passed to him by a prestigious group of talented, mostly male, artists working in black portrait painting and related genres. Judith Wilson enquires about the manner in which some of Hendricks's forerunners interrupt the history of Global North depictions of the black body—particularly the black female body. As part of her process, she muses upon Archibald Motley's recirculation of art historical tropes like the nude at her toilet, substituting a black woman as the objectified body,¹ and Romare Bearden's use of pornography to also render black womanhood. Simultaneously, Wilson questions the extent to which the resultant formants of Motley and Bearden are departures from the history of the black woman's body as a figure of subjugation in “the language of Western high culture” (112). Wilson closes her essay in a manner that resonates with my own position on Hendricks's work where she acknowledges her deployment of a “sort of feminist interrogation” for artists of a “pre-feminist generation” (118-119). She has reservations concerning Bearden's silence on the subject of portraying black women with a pornographic aesthetic, and also questions critical silence on the subject as well writing:

The general silence about this disturbing aspect of Bearden's oeuvre is symptomatic of the state of criticism on African-American visual arts—the almost exclusively celebratory discourse produced by blacks and the intellectually ghettoizing discourse produced by whites. Here, too, we need to think about . . . shedding inhibitions and risking descent to uncharted depths in order to transcend existing cultural barriers (118–119).

¹ As Michael Harris points out, in addition to appropriating age-old art strategies of the objectification of the female body, Motley's black women are also, with few exceptions, light-complexioned, and his propensity for painting them reflects his “fascination” with women “of mixed heritage” (157).

*Corresponding author: Genevieve Hyacinthe, Ph.D. School of Visual Arts New York, New York, United States,
E-mail: ghyacinthe@sva.edu

Wilson's essay raises questions about the way we write about black art, what artists we write about, and what we are willing to say about them, particularly when the subject is black portraiture or genre painting.²

Henry Louis Gates Jr. submits that in our efforts to reclaim and redeploy images of “black America” (“The Black Man's Burden” 75), “our social identities represent the way we participate in a historical narrative. Our histories may be irretrievable, but they invite imaginative reconstruction” (77). As writers carrying out this imaginative reconstruction, we insert ourselves, often using the first person in our exegeses (77) not as an assumption that all readers will see the work as we do, but to illuminate what may initially appear to be somewhat obscure aspects of art. This is a tactic also employed in canonical art historical writing, like that of Heinrich Wölfflin (Wölfflin 47). Lisa Kennedy calls Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s approach a tactic of the black familiar (qtd. in Greg Tate) while Mark Jarzombek calls Wölfflin's the language of “empathetic seeing” (35).

The MFSB camp Hendricks uses is an aesthetic of rebellion and agency palpable in the music and the way the MFSB-era artists and listeners fashioned themselves. At the same time, Hendricks spins it to create not only portraits of black people of the era, but to fashion his own persona as a variegated hegemonic masculinity. As Trevor Schoonmaker notes, during the 1970s, Hendricks gained publicity as a featured artist in a Dewar's Scotch print campaign that appeared in *Playboy* and *Essence* (20), where Hendricks wore a shiny patterned shirt slightly unbuttoned to increase the intensity of his machismo. Yet as I revisit the image, the impression on me is the recognition of a feeling of vulnerability underlying his Dewar's contrivance. Framing Hendricks's portraiture in relation to black camp helped me access what we might view as some of the intersectional implications of his practice.

MFSB (Mother, Father, Sister, Brother) and Black Camp Terminologies

The acronym MFSB stands for Mother, Father, Sister, and Brother—the name of the iconic Philadelphia International Sound group, consisting of various singers and an ensemble of about thirty musicians, that came to prominence in the 1970s with songs such as “The Sound of Philadelphia” and “Love Is the Message” under the Philadelphia International Sound label. The group's sonic aesthetic contributed to a shift in the city's musical pulse from, for example, the weighty rhythm and blues of singer and performer Teddy Pendergrass's group, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, to a more tidal release that came to characterize “Philadelphia disco”: “All of a sudden there was this lush fluidity that had nothing to do with Motown . . . ‘Love is the Message’ represented what disco would become” (Lawrence 122-123).

LeeEllen Friedland's description of MFSB's aesthetics not only touches upon a similar effect of immersion and feeling of ritual and community but locates it as a phenomenon particular to a black section of Philadelphia:

In West Philly, disco . . . is a milieu of rhythm that extends across different performance genres and different communication systems. To the kids of the community, disco is part of life. At the same time that it succeeds in uniting community, distinctly Afro-American ethics of performance, it is also a vehicle that somehow brings them closer to an exciting world outside their community—a world that they synthesise from electronic media, graphic and plastic arts, and their own vernacular values. An exciting world that is part reality, part self-fulfilling, but wholly inspiring. (35)

The comments of Lawrence and Friedland suggest that the MFSB phenomenon promoted a new mode of physicality on the part of the beholder: an innovative physical, psychic, and political bodily awareness

² Since Wilson's article of 1992, there has been a rich and ever-growing discourse on the black body and its representation that embraces a spirit of intersectionality to varying extents, including: the recent consideration of the black body in circulation through the visual culture of the black Atlantic and throughout the globe (Raiford and Raphael-Hernandez); a discussion of contemporary explorations of black women's bodies in relation to the slave trade (Brown); an interdisciplinary study of various contexts for the black body in dance and various performance art contexts (DeFrantz and Gonzalez); the complexities of the black body, sexuality, and race (Musser); a comprehensive look at black portraiture in art history and popular culture from the eighteenth century to the contemporary moment (Powell); and an ongoing survey series presenting black representation in art and visual culture through the ages (Gates et al.), among others.

vis-à-vis a new black popular music force that was a local, “everyday people,” or familial Philadelphia phenomenon wherein the song “Love Is the Message” “defined the artistic emotional potential of the textured disco aesthetic in which various layers of instrumental sounds could shift gradually or dramatically between different moods” (Lawrence 122). These surface elements together evoke affective stirrings in the song’s beholders—in other words, its listeners and dancers. With the energy of a religious experience, or one of Wölfflin’s shimmering, immersive artforms, MFSB’s music has been called “subversively hypnotic” (Weems 187), a quality that evokes fear, founded on cultural and racial difference in some, and apparent pleasure in others, namely its Philadelphia MFSBs and those “people all over the world”³ who proclaim, in the words of one French MFSB album cover I uncovered during my research, “MFSB . . . The Sound of Philadelphia . . . No. 1 in the dance clubs.”

Susan Sontag suggests that camp is a dynamic wherein style, as well as more general surface issues such as ornamentation, sheen, and colour—“superficial” elements—evoke emotion or pleasure rather than reason. She refers to camp as the register where personal sovereignty or freedom resides (Sontag 277), a personal autonomy that is established through the intensification of the abovementioned elements to reflect camp’s “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag 275).⁴ Continuing my refinement of camp for the purposes of entering into a close discussion of the concept in relation to Hendricks’s portraiture, it is important to note the overlaps between Sontag’s sense of camp and Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, which “has survived and flourished to the present time, in however transmuted a form, in camp” (Boxwell 309). In Bakhtin’s carnivalesque:

All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people. This is a very important aspect of a carnival sense of the world. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact. . . . Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 123)

Carnavalesque is not only about deploying stylistic eccentricity and excess as a means of disrupting the “dominant symbolic order . . . [to] reveal a ‘politics of radical dissidence’” (Olds 21); more importantly, it seeks to reduce the social distance between community members who have been stratified by bureaucratic design. Bakhtin’s conceptualisation of the carnivalesque helpfully highlights an analogous communal potential in camp performances. Just like in the case of the carnivalesque, in camp, new intimacies are established through the use of style, and surface as techniques of affective overture to foster intimate engagements among artist, art form, and audience. In Barkley Hendricks’s portraits of the 1970s, these camp and carnivalesque overlaps are discernible in the black familial engagement that Hendricks creates between himself and his portrait sitter, and, in turn, the portrait sitter and its beholders.

We can imagine camp’s surface qualities, such as costume and play, as key to the affective and political power of the carnivalesque’s “*syncretic pageantry* of a ritual sort” (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 22). This nexus is palpable in what I offer as Hendricks’s Philadelphia MFSB aesthetics; Hendricks’s portraits are visual corollaries to MFSB. MFSB’s expansive black style projected a chicness and cool that, to some extent, destabilised heteropatriarchal norms, setting the template for this communal participation. Hendricks’s portraits embody this type of MFSB fashion and attitude and transcend the limits of the black male habitus and gender performativity.

For my discussion of MFSB aesthetics in Barkley Hendricks’s portraiture of the 1970s, I have selected a central image, *George Jules Taylor* (1972) (Figure 1), because it powerfully displays the crossover of camp surface and style as an exaggeration and the eccentricities of the carnivalesque as aesthetic syncretism or a commingling of media, particularly music and paint, to engage its beholders in an affective immersion. In considering *George Jules Taylor* and related Hendricks portraits (including the four portraits of George

³ “People all over the world”: is the refrain from a popular song by Philadelphia International Sound’s group The O’Jays; a line sung by the women vocalists *The Three Degrees* in their song, “T.S.O.P.” (The Sound of Philadelphia); for a time in the early 1970s, the song was the opening anthem for the pop cultural television show, *Soul Train*.

⁴ Although La Lupé (Guadalupe Victoria Yoli Raymond) appears to be the only artist of colour mentioned by Sontag in her essay (Sontag 283), “camp” can, to some extent, be viewed as an aesthetic with deep resonances in African and black Atlantic art-making traditions.

Jules Taylor that Hendricks paints between 1971 and 1974), I argue that a focus on the nuances of style, as encouraged by camp, empowers his painting and its beholder to jointly operate in an unbounded or breaking-the-mould sense that functions as a visual hagiography of personal liberation and expansion.

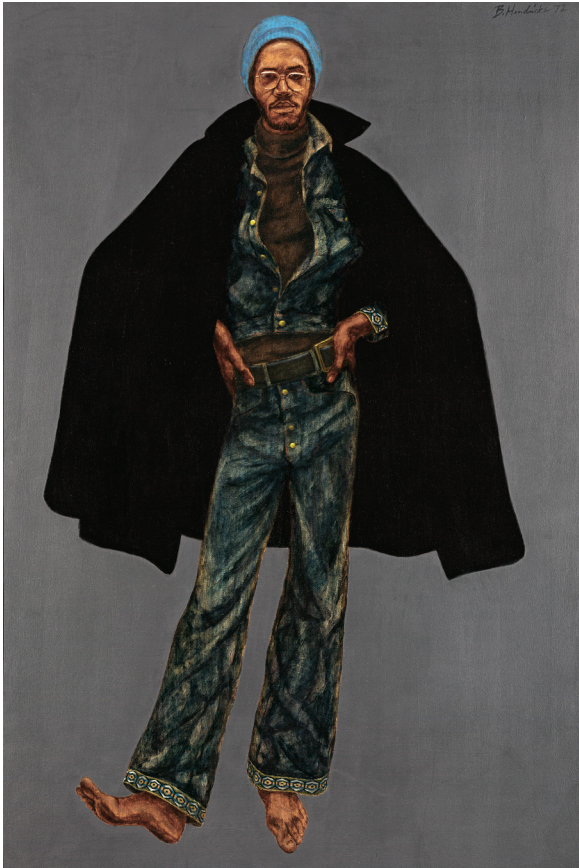


Figure 1. Hendricks, Barkley L., *George Jules Taylor* (1972). Oil on canvas, 91 7/16 x 60 1/4 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Although Hendricks's MFSB approach can be viewed through a camp lens, his enterprise remains ambivalent toward camp as a gay performative, a dynamic that is neither upheld nor refuted in Hendricks's painting (Dixon 16). Thus, to some extent, it bucks the trend of locating camp exclusively within the discourse of gay performativity (Olds 20). Concerning Hendricks, camp operates more generally as a means with which to render a spectrum black masculinity and as "a strategy for destabilising normative sociocultural constructions of sexuality and gender" (Boxwell 310). Hendricks's camp portraiture is deployed through his technique of affective immersion, which I explore as a visual hagiography where Hendricks hyperbolizes the surface, decorative, and flamboyant qualities stereotypically applied to the feminine, but like "camp . . . [his application] mimics and exaggerates but never achieves womanhood" (Dyer qtd. in Dixon 16). Michael Kimmelman writes that Barkley Hendricks's portraits evoke a sense of defiant black machismo and calls them one of the highpoints of *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1994) because in his view, they challenged the stereotypical images of black men pervasive in the media at that time. Kimmelman writes, "Mr. Hendricks is represented by three crisply realist portraits from the 70's, handsome images that can bring to mind Sargent in the dignity and scale they lend to their subjects" (C7). Thelma Golden asserts that Hendricks's portraits are "period pieces that represent a hybrid of black cultural consciousness and contemporary art practice" (*Black Male* 42) exuding "realness," a black vernacular term for authenticity. "Hendricks populates his paintings with real subjects drawn from the community. His ambitious body of work provides an astounding arsenal of every

vision of black masculinity possible. *Tuff Tony* (1978) exerts a youthful aggression as he pushes out of the frame. *North Philly Niggah* (1975) pictures a player, dressed straight out of the *Eleganza* catalogue...” (42).

The exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, traveling from Summer 2017–Winter 2019 to various museums, revisits the dialogue jump-started by curator Golden’s *Black Male* and is complicated by Hendricks’s self-portrait, *Icon for My Man Superman (Superman Never Saved Any Black People—Bobby Seale)* (1969) (Figure 2), included among the works on display. Hendricks paints himself not as an exceptional figure of fame, but also as an ordinary figure of greatness.



Figure 2. Hendricks, Barkley L., *Icon for My Superman, (Superman Never Saved Any Black People—Bobby Seale)* (1969). Oil, acrylic, and aluminium leaf on linen canvas, 59 1/2 x 48 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

His approach in this self-portrait highlights his adeptness in portraying everyday people with political impact through a sophisticated camp deployment of surface elements such as sheen and ornamentation and carnivalesque’s syncretic pageantry to create a mood of defiance.

In this case, an everyday black man is super-macho; the artist self-imagined in the portrait confronts the viewer as he stands with his arms folded with a detached affect, brought into increased tension by his act of just slightly revealing his phallus, barely visible at the bottom of the picture plane. In this way, and through Hendricks’s manipulation of surface and ornament, the self-portrait’s overall nonchalance turns enigmatic. With nothing else to distract a beholder in the background of evenly applied grey paint, our interaction with the figure of Hendricks is focused upon the “S” of the Superman shirt he wears, and his black-lensed sunglasses subtly reflect back the light from the environment as much as our gaze. Hendricks is Superman, a symbol of US strength usually occupied by a white man and at the same time, as the title infers, Black Panther Party co-founder, Bobby Seale. Hendricks’s amalgamation of personas come together as a portrait of US masculinity presented in a red, white, and blue striped frame, destabilising the idea of black victimhood by offering an image of hyperbolised and cool machismo.

The *George Jules Taylor* works, to which the discussion now turns, offer a “spectrumed” black masculinity that complicates the machismo of *Icon for My Superman...*; Hendricks’s use of camp creates a path to freedom. His compelling camp asserts to his audience—everyday Philadelphia people—that “Love Is the Message.”

Bold as Love

The aura of Hendricks's *George Jules Taylor* painting (Figure 1) is excessive and campy in every way. Hendricks renders the titular young man—one of his former art students (Powell, 145)—as a singular figure before a visually blank backdrop. The artist uses an innovative labour-intensive technique characterised by the dynamics of excess to create the portrait. The process falls under what Hendricks would describe as his Frankenstein process: a “feeling of creating a being who can almost speak to me or step out of the canvas” (Mangan 35). Like Dr. Frankenstein in the laboratory,⁵ Hendricks, who experiments by showing the same body from multiple angles in one portrait, most commonly by presenting a keenly fashioned figure from three vantage points within an empty field of colour to highlight style as much as an individual's identity, sense of physical air, or gesture. Hendricks asserts that “with certain individuals, one view isn't enough. . . . I want to create a total painting rather than just a portrait” (Mangan 38).

By endeavouring to create a sense of totality in his paintings of individuals, the implication may be the insertion of a spiritual significance. Hendricks's technique of simultaneity imbues the resultant portraits with a hyperrealism, if not supernaturalism,⁶ as seen in, for instance, Eastern Orthodox religious icon paintings, which exaggerate features and otherwise intensify an uncanny presence of the body to evoke “not the portrait of the outward form of a man but . . . the inner form of a saint” (Robinson 354-355). To appropriate and/or add an alternative significance to the hegemonic symbolism of the number three as a reference to the Holy Trinity showcased in Italian Renaissance painting (Aiken 173), in Hendricks's portraits, “three” might signify the jazz god Charles Mingus, whom Hendricks revered (Mangan 38). Mingus opens his autobiography with a line that may inform Hendricks' gesture of excess in this regard, which reads: “Mingus One, Two and Three. Which is the image you want the world to see?” (Mingus and King 3). Hendricks states that to a great extent, he transposes into his painting Mingus's musical approach, wherein the jazzman builds each composition “from the previous one” (Mangan 38).



Figure 3. Hendricks, Barkley L., *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* (1972). Oil, acrylic, and aluminium leaf on linen canvas, 84 1/8 x 72 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

⁵ Hendricks is the namesake of his father, “Barkley (Better known as “Doc”) Hendricks” (Campbell), a fact we might read in relation to Hendricks's embrace of the (Dr.) Frankenstein metaphor as a descriptor for his painting process.

⁶ Hendricks renders both men and women in this format; see *Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris* (1972) (Figure 3) and *October's gone...Goodnight* (1973) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Hendricks, Barkley L. *October's gone... Goodnight*, (1973). Oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 72 x 72 inches ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Moreover, the energy of Hendricks's works is not to be exclusively a function of his portrait scale, but one that is most viably actualized by his virtuosic attention to surface details, such as the sheen of skin or a sunglass lens and the fuzz of a fur lapel, the sparkle of a button or medallion, and the shine of a hairdo or faux-leather coat, to create an overarching sense of “making everyday black people special,” to borrow Ellen Dissanayake's term, “making special” being how artists distinguish between states of the ordinary and the “extraordinary, or supernatural,” and exhibit this difference in their works (22). The “shimmering whole” (Wölfflin 46) that Hendricks creates through his mastery of surface elements is one of a black “familial”⁷ as a visuality of artistic and social agency and freedom.

My creative extension of visual hagiographic interactivity imagines the interaction between saint and beholder as one that is as “bold as love,” to borrow from the iconic Jimi Hendrix; following bell hooks's assertion that “the practice of love . . . is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination...” (40) Several critics note in passing an aesthetic relationship between Barkley Hendricks and Jimi Hendrix,⁸ but without carefully considering the link within any one particular painting.

To some extent, *George Jules Taylor* appears as a “bold as love” figure in the Jimi Hendrix sense, where love is believed in but is considered beyond reach or a consistent manifestation; Taylor appears conflicted because, among other things, the large-scaled and excessively adorned figure of the man hovers within a black backdrop; he seems bold, yet unstable, like Hendrix's sentiment of love:

And all these emotions of mine keep holding me from
Giving my life to a rainbow like you
But, I'm bold as love, yeah, I'm bold as love. (Hendrix)

Engaging with the portrait of Taylor and one of Jimi Hendrix, photographed by Bruce Fleming in 1967 (Figure 7), we have a face-to-face encounter between two charismatic, yet vulnerable, caped black men, with whom we lock eyes. The visual tension created by our exchange of gazes—the boldness and vulnerability we might read in the eyes—is intensified due to the collision of excessive surface intensity and ornamentation, contrasted by a surround of emptiness.

⁷ While “familial” is an adjective, it is used as a noun here to suggest a dynamic that is “like family”—bonded, intimate like family—but is not in actuality.

⁸ The comparison of Barkley Hendricks's portraiture to the style of Jimi Hendrix's music and persona may also be implied by the fact that a solo exhibition of the work of Barkley Hendricks at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum at Connecticut College where Hendricks taught for more than three decades was called *The Barkley L. Hendricks Experience* (2001) (F. Thomas). The word *Experience* is one famously used in the title of Jimi Hendrix's band, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*.



Figure 5. Jimi Hendrix and the Band of Gypsies Concert Poster, April 12, 1969. The Philadelphia Spectrum, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 6. The Jimi Hendrix Experience Concert Poster, May 16, 1970. Temple Stadium, Philadelphia, PA.



Figure 7. Jimi Hendrix in a cape, 1967. The ensemble and pose remind us of Barkley Hendricks's *George Jules Taylor* (Figure 1). photo: © brucefleming.com.

Floating, Taylor stands as a camp antinomian presence that perhaps mirrors not only Hendrix's vulnerability concerning love, one bereft of a sense of stable macho confidence, but also the singer's camp style, appearing as he does in a denim suit with a button trail that starts at his neck, open to reveal a brown turtleneck beneath it, before it comes together, buttoned before his navel. George Jules Taylor appears as an individual with attitude, in a bold posture, despite the apparent sinuousness of his frame. The brown of the turtleneck interrupts the button trail, which resumes with the pants under the thick leather belt, in place of a more efficient zipper (Dickenson). The jean buttons are excessive, taking the form of a stylish decorative element and sexual tease, with broad, rather than merely homoerotic, appeal.

As Chenoweth submits, Jimi Hendrix employed various modes of amplification, both the virtuosic and hackneyed, "plus the visual mystique of the black sexual marauder" (qtd. in Somma 137). The button ornamentation provides a visual and sensorial trail from Taylor's radiant head to his similarly glowing hands, which are clutching his hips at the beltline at either side of his *contrapposto* lean, to his shoeless feet, which are striking in both their unexpected bareness and glowing tonality. The edges of his sleeves and jean cuffs are also overly elaborate, embroidered as they are with the matching Moroccan-style geometrical pattern common for bohemians of the day.

Hendricks adorns Taylor's head not with a black militant beret, but rather with a snugly fitted light-blue skullcap, which suggests that his hair is closely cut and creates a sort of halo contrast to the gold undertones of his skin. Taylor's capped head and golden glow, created by the glimpses of his skin from head to hands and feet in collaboration with the trail of golden points throughout his torso provided by the button trail, draw our attention to the radiance emanating from his body, his face being the greatest point of light. This feeling is intensified—made more campy and theatrical—by the contrast created by the copious and dramatic black "Hendrix marauder's cape" that drapes his shoulders and cascades thickly to his knees, giving him the impression of levitating like a saint or Superman. Now imagine Hendricks's body of camp: Jimi Hendrix's aesthetics, visual intensity and texture, sexual tension, love, excess, saint or superman appearance, and ambivalence supersized. We do not have to imagine encountering George Jules Taylor in person; we can experience it.

With a campy affect akin to the photograph of Hendrix, who is similarly dressed with campy excess and wearing a cape layered over a stylish ensemble rendered more dramatic by his frontal pose assumed before an empty backdrop, Barkley Hendricks paints the polyphonic and multi-sensorial figure of George Jules Taylor, portrayed larger than life, as a full and richly fashioned body positioned in a featureless grey landscape. The National Gallery of Art cites the painting's dimensions as 91 7/16 x 60 1/4 inches, and the subject himself is imposing, scaled to dominate the pictorial plane.⁹ In essence, Taylor occupies the otherwise empty space of the canvas with a thickly laid-on camp. The inclusion of a "natural" landscape may have evened out the presentation of Taylor as a figure, rendering his appearance more lifelike; instead, the smooth grey background intensifies Taylor's presence—it *camp*s it. Its blankness is a strong (though not singular) contributor to the subject's larger-than-life appearance. In this way, this black masculinity becomes mutable and free.

A potential conundrum when comparing *George Jules Taylor* to Jimi Hendrix is the popular conception that the latter was not connected to black audiences; thus, evoking his likeness or affect might distance him from black beholders of his image. Although he was not entirely successful in gaining acceptance among mainstream black listeners, John Blake argues that Hendrix's quest for the same was a lifelong journey. "He first tried to make it in black clubs on the Chitlin' Circuit, but his virtuoso guitar playing did not fit with the black popular music taste of the time." Greg Tate concurs, stating that "there was no place for him" (Tate qtd. in Blake). Hendrix's radical style of playing was ahead of its time and transgressed the popular black music of the late 1960s (Blake).

However, Hendrix actually reflects a sense of black radicalism through this very avant-gardist playing style that Blake and Tate say isolate him from black people, and through other performance-related political actions, the two writers also seem to miss. First, Hendrix employs strategies of "signifying" described by

⁹ The National Gallery of Art's description for Barkley Hendricks, *George Jules Taylor* (1972): www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.53819.html.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. as a black strategy of confronting hegemony, as “punning disruption,” in lyrics such as the memorable line “‘Scuse me while I kiss the sky” from “Purple Haze” (Zak 605). Hendrix formed the trio Band of Gypsies with Buddy Miles and Billy Cox (Blake). The band was described as an “all-black power-rock trio [that] produced a never-before-heard amalgam of [music]” (Vincent 293), and during this time, he was also in consultation with Miles Davis, “who encouraged him to stretch” (Blake). Band of Gypsies “would change the face of black music, setting a template for the spectacular glam-funk of the 1970s. . . . Bootsy Collins credits Hendrix with changing the entire social and music landscape for his generation” (Vincent 293). Some of Hendrix’s Band of Gypsies lyrics credited “the Power of Soul” with providing black people with agency: “With the Power of Soul/ Anything is possible!/ With the power of you/ Anything you wanna do!” (Hendrix “Power of Soul,” qtd in Vincent 293). Pushing back against racial categories and their prohibitions, Hendrix’s statements strive for a new, and undefined, means of black empowerment:

I don’t look at things in terms of races. . . . I’m not thinking about black people or white people. I’m thinking about the obsolete and the new. . . . The frustrations and riots going on today are all about more personal things. Everybody has wars within themselves, so they form different things, and it comes out as a war against other people. They get justified as they justify others in their attempts to get personal freedom. That’s all it is.

It isn’t that I’m not relating to the Black Panthers. I naturally feel a part of what they’re doing, in certain respects. Somebody has to make a move, and we’re the ones hurting most as far as peace of mind and living are concerned. (Hendrix, “Starting at Zero”)

Jimi Hendrix’s black camp radicalism, which we can read into *George Jules Taylor*, may have both gone unrecognised by many audience members because it went beyond black aesthetic standards and expectations of the day, as suggested by Tate and others. While this was likely isolating for Hendrix himself, his example offered a position of black otherness that may have nonetheless resonated with some, providing a template for freedom and possibility regarding the expression of black masculinity.

Black camp, as familial radicalism, also manifests in the work of Barkley Hendricks’s contemporary Emory Douglas. Like Hendricks, Douglas, Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party and art director of *The Black Panther* newspaper, produces images that portray everyday black people as figures of awe and agency. For Douglas, this takes the form of poster-sized prints of black people as upholders of justice (however they define it), reproduced in his newspaper, where they reach audiences that resemble their subjects. Gaiter posits that Douglas renders women as heroically as men, noting that he uses “Vietnamese propaganda poster[s] showing a female warrior “as a model for the “Black Panther Party’s position that women’s participation was essential [in the local effort and] international Third World revolutionary movements” (98).¹⁰

While Douglas’s visual hagiography renders everyday people as heroes and saints, more resolution can be seen in his images, partly perhaps because of his use of text; as a result, their sense of camp surface excess and social critique might be more contained than Hendricks’s approach because we are grounded by captions. Although I have argued that Hendricks’s hagiography privileges the camp elements of affect or the sensual, amplifying the excess over reason and intellect, critics have identified both poles in *George Jules Taylor*. While arguing that Hendricks offers alternatives to either socially mainstream or stereotypical imaging of black men, Richard Powell situates *George Jules Taylor* within a new confining limit, that of the expectations of “American portraiture”:

In 1972’s *George Jules Taylor* . . . a theatrical black cape, denim ensemble, and bare feet underscore a flamboyance that codes Taylor not only as uninhibited in his gender and sexual orientation but as physically and racially expansive. This portrait achieves a heretofore unrealized enactment within black portraiture: the painting of a gay man as a forceful presence, and not dominated by stereotype. At a time and in a cultural milieu that frowned upon representational deviations from a heterosexual black nationalist model, *George Jules Taylor* registered a shift, while at the same time taking its place in a continuum, in terms of an American portrait tradition that accentuated individuality and varying degrees of intimacy. (146)

¹⁰ Emory Douglas images can be viewed at “Exhibition: Emory Douglas: Black Panther,” July 22–October 18, 2009, New Digital Archive Museum, New Museum.org website: http://archive.newmuseum.org/index.php/Detail/Occurrence/Show/occurrence_id/941

Returning back to Powell's account of *George Jules Taylor*, the excitement regarding what Powell sees as Hendricks's innovative move (the transgressive, the camp) toward the radical expansion of black male expression is tempered by a distant descriptive tone that may, again, mute a wider political significance connecting the artist's familial connection with black audiences.

Powell does important work, calling for the placement of *George Jules Taylor* into the lineage of great American portraits. He does so by describing the painting's emotive quality in general terms with an air of removal rather than with an expression of first-person arousal and address either directly articulated through choice of grammatical person or evinced through excessive descriptive attention to camp features like the decorative in the vein of Gates—how in our efforts to reclaim and redeploy images of “black America . . . our social identities represent the way we participate in a historical narrative” (Gates, “The Black Man's Burden” 75, 77), or Wölfflin's “empathetic seeing” (Jarzombek 35). Although reference is made to *George Jules Taylor's* flamboyance, it is quickly linked to reason: the flamboyant style is alluded to as evidence of a cultural broadening of strategies of comportment, as well as gender identification and sexual permissibility for black men.

In complement and contrast to Powell's steady positioning of *George Jules Taylor*, Antwaun Sargent's feelings concerning the painting are more charged, with a “Bold as Love” brashness and irresolution. Sargent's words emphasize Sontag's camp dynamic of style over content or privilege the power of *George Jules Taylor's* style and posture to create an affective reception over one of reason and historicity (Sontag 287). In essence, Hendricks constructs *George Jules Taylor's* style as the penultimate content because it is what gives vivacity and stimulates affect as a deep receptive connection with the viewer, wherein the painting's individual personal address and concomitant beholder's receptive engagement are political apparatuses.¹¹ Sargent's comments are more personally reflective than concerned with aligning Hendricks's practice with collective histories:

As a young queer black man, desperately looking for representations of people who had made peace with both of those identities by radically existing in the world, one painting... that really stuck out to me was George Jules Taylor. Hendricks painted the gay black male student in 1972. . . . It's a slick, sublime portrait of intersectional individualism that blurs the lines of realism to show exactly who Taylor is by capturing him in a moment of transcendence. The first time I saw it, I swear to God I wanted to *be* that picture. (Sargent)¹²

Sargent's voice is excessively emotive, and his descriptive emphasis—his empathetic seeing—focuses upon the ornamental and flair of Taylor. This creates for Sargent a kinship with Taylor, based upon the idea of mutual transcendence of social prescriptions for black masculinity. Like a painted saint, *George Jules Taylor* buoys Sargent to testify, “I swear to God, I wanted to *be* that picture.”

Hendricks names the painting *George Jules Taylor* and, in so doing, creates a quandary of signification: Is the painting of George Jules Taylor? Or, is the painting itself George Jules Taylor? Sargent's interaction with *George Jules Taylor*/George Jules Taylor stirs him to make proclamations with God as his witness, swearing that he desires to *be* that picture, to *be* *George Jules Taylor*/George Jules Taylor. Hendricks's use of liminality as verbal signifying dynamics and also pose (as he straddles the material and spiritual worlds) adds to Sargent's fervent interaction with the presence (painting or being), and moves him to envision a transcendent state of being, that we might assume as pleasurable but not without tension; perhaps something like a “Bold as Love” sensibility. Sargent beholds Hendricks's affective camp, illustrated in *George Jules Taylor*, as gay expression (Olds 21), while I view it more generally, but indubitably to include gay expression among other possibilities of black freedom.

¹¹ My statement references the oft-quoted phrase attributed to Carol Hanisch, “The personal is political.”

¹² Hendricks's portrait *Hasty Tasty* (1977) depicts two young men, of uncertain racial identity, dressed in jeans and white t-shirts. They embrace each other around the hip, and this gesture, in addition to their *contrapposto* fashion, the slightly bulging breasts of the smaller man, and the sexually suggestive title of the painting (reprinted on the shirt of the taller man) give them a queer affect. *Hasty Tasty* suggests to me, as does *George Jules Taylor*, that black and Latino gay men are, as is the case in the MFSB movement, brothers. See *Hasty Tasty* on the Museum of Fine Arts Houston website: www.mfah.org/art/detail/125813?ret urnUrl=%2Fart%2Fsearch%3Fshow%3D30%26page%3D5

George Jules Taylor lives within a field that has yet to be defined. Where Douglas screens colourful lines of dynamism to attract and entrance the beholders of his images, Hendricks inserts a blank screen that intensifies for the beholder the theatrics or camp hagiography of *Taylor*. This is a quality that connects with black beholders via stylistic cues, yet lacks just enough resolution so as not to limit any one individual's imaginary (Kennedy, qtd. in Tate), or privilege anyone, path. All told, the co-presentation of the excessive styling of *George Jules Taylor* and its ambivalent grey backdrop offers impossibility and limitlessness as a hagiographic visuality whose boldness comes from love rather than foreboding.

MFSB Hagiography and Gender: Deifying All Family Members Equally?

In religious icon painting traditions, a compelling and excessive outward surface (similar to camp) signifies a concomitant spiritual import with which a beholder resonates, if not aspires to become (Kenna 354-55). Sargent seems to reflect this sort of icon interactivity in his discussion of *George Jules Taylor*. Like Sargent, we feel a pleasurable attraction toward, a kind of love for, and possible affinity with, *George Jules Taylor* because Hendricks creates him out of his own sense of love. If we consider that Barkley Hendricks painted four portraits of George Jules Taylor (one in 1971,¹³ two in 1972,¹⁴ and one in 1974¹⁵), all with a camp sense of visual hagiography to some extent, then the suggestion might be that “love is the message” (Powell 145-46).

While Taylor was one of Hendricks's art students in the early 1970s, the two remained friends until Taylor died in 1984 (Golden, “A Conversation with Barkley Hendricks” 63). The titles that Hendricks uses for his portraits point to the prevalence of verbal coding in both icon and black vernacular culture, and they represent a way of talking among intimates. I called this dynamic “signifying” in the analysis of *George Jules Taylor* in relation to Jimi Hendrix. As in the painting *George Jules Taylor*, black Atlantic signifying (Gates; Hutchinson) or what we might entertain as spoken soul (Claude Brown, quoted in Miller-Young, 97) is again at work verbally and visually in Hendricks's 1974 portrait of Taylor, *Family Jules: NNN (No Naked Niggahs)* (Figure 8). In the large-scale painting, Taylor holds a marijuana joint in his hand as he assumes a campy odalisque position with his nude body sprawled out on a sofa leaning against a tile wall evocative of the harem settings common to the presentation of the odalisque. Disrobed, the way he reclines mimics the rhythm of his kimono, which is designed with the face of a white woman fashioned with orientalism; indeed, Hendricks obviously creates equivalency between the two.

The *Family Jules* element of the title suggests that Hendricks views Taylor as kin. Yet, just as quickly, Hendricks generalises Taylor by subtitling the painting *NNN—No Naked Niggahs* (Schoonmaker 25). All told, however, the title seems jocular, as if Hendricks is ribbing his brother. *Jules* takes on obvious sexual overtones, and the use of the term “Niggah” in reference to his friend further intimates an intimacy between them, as does the fact that Hendricks paints a naked Taylor in the first place. Powell concurs, remarking that Hendricks has “obvious comfort with depicting black nudity.” Schoonmaker's comments further underscore the MFSB familial intimacy of *NNN*:

His portraits are unique in that they are neither clinically rendered photorealist representations nor culturally idealized romantic images. Rather, they are tightly rendered and emotionally stirring, honest portraits of everyday people—his family, friends, associates, students, and local characters from the neighborhood. . . . To further complicate matters, Hendricks depicted the human nude not as the passive white female most commonly portrayed and sanctioned in art history but as a self-aware and self-assured black male . . . ; in doing so, he directly tackles the widely accepted notion of the hypersexualized black body that continues to be codified and consumed around the globe. (25)

¹³ Barkley Hendricks, *Jules* (1971) (Figure 10).

¹⁴ Barkley Hendricks, *George Jules Taylor* (1972) (Figure 1) and *New Orleans Niggah* (1973) (Figure 14).

¹⁵ Barkley Hendricks, *Family Jules: NNN (No Naked Niggahs)* (1974) (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Family Jules: NNN (No Naked Niggahs)* (1974). Oil on Linen, 72 x 66 inches. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Perhaps making another camp statement probing the boundaries of black male expression and/or gay performativity, Hendricks does not reserve the odalisque convention for Taylor. He also renders a young Mother or Sister in an odalisque lean in *Sweet Thang (Lynn Jenkins)* (Figure 9) that, in part, echoes Taylor's *NNN* position. Hendricks uses camp to give visibility to intimate black spaces and an expanded habitus in Philadelphia MFSB contexts by simultaneously referencing significations of orientalism within these imaginaries. In this way, Hendricks's painting offers an opportunity to reflect upon the manner in which both black vernacular and "orientalised" cultures have been historically subjugated by heteropatriarchal design (Smith 67, 68).

Reversing expectations, Taylor is nude, whereas *Sweet Thang* is dressed in a laid-back 1970s style. As is the case in *George Jules Taylor*, *Sweet Thang*'s ensemble is used to some extent as drapery was during the Northern Renaissance to show the refinement of the woman's form and her attitude to create an energy of palpable "psychological significance" (Wölfflin 3), as well as to reflect the virtuosity with which an artist can paint (Wölfflin 3).



Figure 9. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Sweet Thang (Lynn Jennings)* (1975). Oil and linen on canvas, 52 1/8 x 52 3/4 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Illustrative of Wölfflin's point, in *Sweet Thang*, Hendricks includes a form-fitting, long-sleeved green jersey with an orange stripe extending horizontally across her bustline to help accentuate her well-proportioned figure without baring it. The eye flows from her top to her green-and-orange A-line floral skirt, and then down her casually outstretched legs, which are positioned as a more laid-back manifestation of Jules in *NNN*, even though the sheen of her skin has a gold luminosity that outshines his muted earth-toned complexion. *Sweet Thang* wears envy-inducing platform sandals, and their psychological pull is counterbalanced by the delicate, yet impactful, sprinkling of gold around her head as golden skin undertones. Shimmering gold also appears in dainty accessories, such as a nose ring, hoop earrings, and an almost imperceptible chain that our eyes might overlook if it were not for the slight star medallion that rests between her clavicle, right at her neckline. The distribution of these graceful accoutrements around *Sweet Thang*'s face captures us through his delivery of an ethereal shine that intensifies her gaze, much like the delicate spectacles Taylor wears in *George Jules Taylor* and *NNN*.

Hendricks verbally signifies again, swapping an "i" for an "a" in the painting's title. *Sweet Thang* is beautiful, and the title is a vernacular wink to her sexual desirability. Self-possessed in the face of her objectification, we might also interpret her name as a reference to her apparent sweet tooth, which we view her satisfying through her very visible and unconcerned consumption of chewing gum that she has blown into an enormous bubble that may cover her mouth but does not silence her.

Hendricks's visual signifying reveals itself not only in the synchronic yet subtly shifted recline of *Sweet Thang* and Jules in *NNN* but also by taking the design of the head wrap adorning the white woman on Jules's robe and putting *Sweet Thang* in it. This gesture again evokes orientalist presentations of women of the harem as well as an MFSB woman of Philadelphia protecting or decorating her hair, while inverting the black-and-red-striped patterning. The Islamic tile patterns of the backdrop of both paintings are also subtly different, as are the couches and "oriental" carpets. Mindful, however, of the way I have been casting camp affect, the power of surface details operates as an emotive-inducing whole, rather than as atomised elements to be considered for their individual details.

The message Hendricks sends through the dialog he creates between the two portraits and invites us into, is one of MFSB gender equivalence—*MFSBs with attitude*—or as Mary Schmidt Campbell remarks: "Even when Hendricks's paintings of women are not as complexly composed as [the diptych of a woman] 'Arriving Soon,' they have an appeal as engaging as his paintings of men" (Campbell). While of different genders, both *Sweet Thang* and *Jules NNN* have a confident, relaxed bravado. As in medieval icon paintings of saints or Christ, both perform hand gestures meant to engage the viewer through benediction (Kenna 357). *Jules* does so with his right hand and hashish pipe, and *Sweet Thang* with her left hand where the pronounced length of her sharply manicured middle finger is easily apparent. Whereas medieval hand gestures relay encoded messages of love and blessing to its beholders (Kenna 357), *Jules*'s and *Sweet Thang*'s hands are subtly but provocatively positioned as if they are *flipping the bird* (colloquial) to their beholders as a familial rib or act of disapproval.

Hendricks again uses verbal signifying or spoken soul for the title of another portrait of Taylor, *Jules* (1971) (Figure 10). Although Jules is Taylor's middle name, Hendricks's emphasis on it conjures a sense of camp excess as expensive, precious, and shiny (precious jewel) as qualities perhaps shared by the subject (Taylor) and the painting as an object in its own right. In *Jules*, Hendricks simultaneously employs visual camp as an update of visual hagiography techniques that used precious jewels and metals, as we see in Bernardo Daddi's *Madonna and Child* (1345-1349) (Figure 11), for example, to imbue the portrait with the icon sensibility that it is the presence of a saint, more than merely an illustration of one (Powell 146).¹⁶

Painters in the medieval icon tradition established interactivity with their audience sparked by the stimulating sentience of what lies at the surface. From the saints' vibrantly rendered skin tones, robes, and accoutrements, all on display before the shiny gold-leaf backdrop, all "shimmering" (Wölfflin 46), "the whole is dominated by the rhythm of light-waves" (46-47) or shine. Medieval saint paintings stimulate

¹⁶ Historically, black portraiture artists like Beauford Delaney have used the icon convention to illustrate everyday people. See, for instance, Beauford Delaney, *Dante Pavone as Christ* (1948): www.knoxart.org/exhibitions/gathering-light-works-by-beauford-delaney-from-the-kma-collection/

viewers' emotions, creating within the beholder a sense of love for something that is received as alive. "Ikons [use a] symbolic treatment of subjects . . . [, a] special technique of design and colouring, and above all [create] . . . the change in their substance through the love and transforming prayer of those who made them and those who venerate them" (Kenna 359).



Figure 10. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Jules* (1971). Oil and acrylic on linen canvas, 60 1/2 x 45 3/4 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Figure 11. Workshop of Bernardo Daddi. *Madonna and Child*. 1345–1349. Tempera and gold leaf on panel, 27 1/16 x 18 7/16 in. Baltimore: Walters Art Museum. Web. 27 May. 2017. < <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/38112/madonna-and-child-26/> >.

Daddi's *Madonna and Child* exhibits this sense of artist-audience interactivity through radical surface attention. Beyond the deities' presence, there is little else for the believer to focus on because the gold-leaf background serves to abstract the painted space rather than create a sense of perspectival depth and landscape according to the techniques of the then emerging Renaissance tradition. Instead, Daddi enlists camp as "the eccentric" in the form of an exaggerated and stilted pose and embellished, florid dynamics. Daddi carves delicate arabesques to form the variations of gold panelling from the frame to the hinted archway and the field concurrent with the *Madonna and Child*. The decorative veils of the gold leaf do not distract from the holy presences; rather, they add to their importance by both subtly echoing and complementing the presences' fashion patterns and colour scheme. Devotees are left to focus upon the presence and actions of the Madonna and Child. Without distraction, they lock eyes with holiness as the Madonna looks at the baby Christ.

Hendricks's recasting of this medieval aesthetics with camp sensibility then helps foster some level of intimate attraction to George Jules Taylor as *Jules*. All in all, he has a captivating, shimmering presence: We cannot help but love *Jules*. He *shines like a yellow diamond*, a total sensibility put forth by the commingling of elements including his beguiling ensemble of jean overalls with blue-edged white suspenders, which have the visual effect of giving more "pop" to the Ochun-hued turtleneck that he wears underneath it.¹⁷ The baby-blue halo of *George Jules Taylor* is in this portrait an applejack hat made of the same jean material that comprises its overalls; both overalls and applejack are punctuated by flecks of gold dust. This halo is tilted at a gangster angle, underscoring his presence as a liminal figure that in its very liminality possesses a transcendent appeal from art history to popular black vernacular style and beyond. We are subtly reminded of this power by the soft warming from the gold-leaf field that softly mists the edges of his body like the ephemeral glow of a spirit. As in *George Jules Taylor*, *Jules* looks at us with Afro-cool through his delicate wire-rimmed glasses, tilted down a bit to provide the option of catching our eyes without interruption (R. Thompson).¹⁸ *Jules* is gangster, has a body of waiflike sinuousness, and is both angel and trickster with an affect of gender fluidity, slick and elegant. *Jules's* camp performance, like those of medieval saints, occurs before a gold-leaf backdrop.

Within the excessive surface attention as a liminal swath of grey in *George Jules Taylor* or the gold leaf expanse of *Jules*, we find African and black Atlantic *shine*. Paraphrasing Krista Thompson, I read shine as the deployment of artistic and visual cultural black aesthetics of visibility through metaphors of light and excess—shine, luminosity, sheen, transparency, gloss, and so on—both locally and transglobally by black professionals and everyday DIY artists (Thompson, *Shine* 6). Shine as "[l]ight has the power to bring geographic transcendence and social ascendance" (6), uniting the artists in a familial "diasporic imaginary" (60).

Jules's icon-styled, gold camp has a corollary in *Lawdy Mama* (1969) (Figure 12), reminding us of the "Mother, Sister" in Hendricks's Philadelphia MFSB aesthetics. At slightly under 5 feet tall by 3 feet wide, *Lawdy Mama* is a three-quarter-length portrait of a young black woman whom we encounter head-on based on her frontal positioning and direct eye engagement, within an arched set of rich gold leaf, shine, and undisturbed by any ornamentation beyond its surface polish. Like her "brother" *Jules*, *Lawdy Mama's* affective pull comes from its shimmering dynamism of golds and complementary blues; the two Hendricks works also share signifying, spoken soul.

¹⁷ "Shine like a [yellow] diamond," is a playful reference to Rihanna's song, "Diamonds" (Def Jam 2012) and a nod to the feminine aspects of *Jules's* presence.

¹⁸ The term *Afro-cool* is both a nod to the title of Barkley Hendricks's retrospective, *Birth of Cool*, and Robert Farris Thompson's use of the term to describe a black affect of composure in the face of myriad challenges.



Figure 12. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Lawdy Mama* (1969). oil and gold leaf on canvas 53 3/4 x 36 1/4 inches ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Schoonmaker makes a similar observation in his discussion of Hendricks's more recent portrait of Afro-beat star Fela Anikulapo Kuti, *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen* (2002) (Figure 13). His comments also point out that Hendricks continued to explore modes of image and audience interactivity, including its visual and verbal messaging, of the medieval icon tradition throughout his career:

[Hendricks's] melding of religious iconography with irreverent secular playfulness is a recurring theme, perhaps most clearly exemplified in his 2002 work *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen*. With one hand grabbing his crotch and a joint between his fingers, a crown of thorns around a flaming heart in the shape of the reversed African continent, gilded background, and halo over his head, Fela in Hendricks's portrait is a potent concoction of bad-boy rock star, man of the people, and religious icon. (19)

While the *Fela* portrait itself is impressive, Hendricks does not seem to clearly address the Afrobeat star's misogynistic tendencies.¹⁹ The music icon's importance as an otherwise admirable, global "legendary Nigerian musician and political activist" (Powell 166) "synonymous with music and protest" (Shonekan 127) exists primarily through exaggerated scale and surface shine. Janis Koplos's description of Hendricks's *Fela* painting is instructive here because it reflects the silence around the afro-beat star's misogyny:

¹⁹ In the installation of *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen* at the New Museum (July 11-October 19, 2003), the portrait hangs in the gallery, as we see it in the New Museum's Digital Archive, <https://archive.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/403>. However, the portrait has also been presented in an extended installation that includes the placement of 27 pairs of shoes under Fela's image, not unlike the placement of flowers or candles in a memorial context. This addition was in place when *Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti*, was installed at the Nasher Museum. An image capturing this installation is here: "Barkley L. Hendricks," Africanah.org: Arena for Contemporary African, African-American and Caribbean Art website (July 3, 2016) at <http://africanah.org/barkley-l-hendricks/>



Figure 13. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Fela: Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen* (2002). oil and variegated leaf on linen canvas, wooden frame, altarpiece, armature, 27 pairs of high heels 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 46 $\frac{2}{4}$ in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In the Nasher [Museum version of the] show, the framed painting sat on an altar shelf above a jumble of 27 pairs of hand-painted high-heel shoes, representing the women in Fela's life (singers, dancers, girlfriends).

The addition of the shoes injects the presentation with another layer of camp's affective surface pleasure because new or lightly worn, thus already unblemished, they are exquisitely attended to through the addition of fanciful painted detailing of African patterning and other abstract designs.²⁰ We might argue that there was more care given to these shoes, representative of Fela's twenty-seven wives whom he married during a single wedding ceremony in 1978 (Adams 83) than to the women themselves.

“Painting Locally, Thinking Globally”: MFSB Global Cosmopolitanism and Black Mobility

Hendricks had an interest in Africa. But Hendricks's camp treatments reflect West African and black Atlantic dynamics of visual excess, including surface shimmer, for the purposes of communication between the deity or hero and the aspirant or devotee, and also for the establishment and maintenance of a communal and/or family structure. A point from Hendricks's personal history connects with the Yoruba culture of Nigeria and areas of Benin, not only with respect to his interest in Fela Kuti but also with regard to the prevalence of twins in his immediate family history. Hendricks's sense of MFSB familial aesthetics may have been informed by the fact that he was born a twin; however, his sister passed at the time of their birth

²⁰ At this time, I have not been able to ascertain through my research whether or not Hendricks painted these shoes and further, whether or not it was his decision to add them to the portrait installation.

(Schoonmaker 116). Elisha Renne informs us that Yoruba women of southwest Nigeria “have one of the highest rates of twinning in the world” (306). It is perhaps this circumstance that causes Yoruba people to believe “every living person is thought to have a spirit double . . . in heaven, in addition to being an interface of spirit and matter—that is, a physical body . . . and a soul . . . that enlivens it” (Lawal 82). The Yoruba idea of beauty is manifest in ibeji visual arts, where Yoruba artists make memorials to twins to “maintain a spiritual bond between living and deceased twins” (Lawal 81). It could be that being born a twin and experiencing the loss yet perhaps constant presence of his sister had an impact on Hendricks’s imagination, if not on his art and life. Could this inform his tactic of painting a person from various perspectives à la Mingus or his belief that “with certain individuals, one view isn’t enough” (Mangan 38).

As I suggest, we have a fraternal twinning in that the two subjects take on mirrored poses. *Lawdy Mama* (1969), who stands frontally like her contemporaries—the Mothers and Sisters of Faith Ringgold’s *Black Light Series* (1967) for instance—is posed in stark contrast to the sinuous flow of *Jules*’s body. Yet they both captivate through their radiation of icon shimmer. With the Yoruba twin memorial tradition in mind, *Lawdy Mama*’s frontality, performed within a gold-leaf archway that dictates not only the field for the young woman depicted but also comprises the actual shape of the canvas, begins to read more like a coffin or tomb than a medieval throne. In this way, we might view *Lawdy Mama* as a memorial for the surviving twin, her “brother” *Jules*. Although the *Lawdy-Mama* portrait was made in 1969 and *Jules* in 1971, they are conjoined by a palette of shimmering gold leaf and ornamentation, its shine enhanced by the interplays of complementary, yet subdued, blues.

The last work of the George Jules Taylor suite of images is *New Orleans Niggah* (1973) (Figure 14), resulting in a total of four portraits Hendricks did of Taylor in multiples of two, keeping with the notion of twinning.



Figure 14. Hendricks, Barkley L., *New Orleans Niggah* (1973). Oil and acrylic on cotton canvas, 72 x 52 in. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

New Orleans Niggah does not seem to reflect the gender-bending masculinity of Taylor in *NNN* as odalisque or *George Jules Taylor*’s floating marauder position of a Jimi Hendrix-styled radicalism. *New Orleans Niggah*’s emotional pull is partly attributable to its scale, out of which emerges a heroic portrait of an everyday young

man, but with perhaps Hendricks's most straightforward, visually mimetic approach within the suite. Closer reflection suggests that there may be more to the image. Taylor wears a gold turtleneck with orange and blue-black horizontal stripes, inverting the pattern of *Lawdy Mama's* dress. In this case, Taylor's heart centre and upper torso is rendered with golden impact and draped by layers of blue-black created by his open leather jacket, pinstriped pants, the collar of his turtleneck, and wide-brimmed black hat. The dark shadow created by the semi-billow of George Jules Taylor's black marauder cloak

becomes tighter and more controlled. Taylor's sideways glance, again through his exquisitely rendered gold glasses, doubles the intensity of his gaze. Taylor wears glasses in every portrait, and even though we are met with a frontal view of his body, Taylor turns his head slightly, making *New Orleans Niggah* the only portrait where he does not meet our gaze head-on. Taylor turns away from us and disrupts the potential of a strong and steady interaction between the young man as icon and us, the beholders. Hendricks seems to substitute the interaction between Taylor as icon and the beholder for one in which the icon becomes an artist.

Hendricks has appropriated the slight turn of the head in Jan van Eyck's, *A Man in Red Turban (Self-Portrait of Jan van Eyck)* from 1433,²¹ for instance, in some of his own self-portraits (Schoonmaker 27),²² and perhaps it influenced this rendering of Taylor here. As Hendricks presents himself as an artist of greatness, taking possession over the techniques of masters like van Eyck, and signifying his alliance with them by appropriating their elements of self-portraiture, *New Orleans Niggah* may be, as the name implies, Taylor as an ordinary young black man, presumably of New Orleans, who, like Hendricks, is a person of greatness, painted in his own image. Being of New Orleans, Taylor is a figure of local and global significance. Historically, the city has been a centre of black urbanity where black citizens whose ancestors laboured under the slavery/capitalist matrix (Smith 67) and black Atlantic immigrants intermingle. This history is tied to its dual position as "metaphorically . . . the northernmost port of the Caribbean sea" (Lipsitz 263), and as the capital of the "plantation bloc" area of the Mississippi Delta (Lipsitz 263). New Orleans's urbanity speaks to Taylor's style as *New Orleans Niggah*, one simultaneously possessing a pan-African internationalism and an American black vernacular sensibility.

While Taylor's name here suggests that he leans more toward a Southern black vernacular sense of New Orleans blackness because of the informality and signifying feel of his title, his viscosity lacks specific geographic placement. He is posed in front of a bare white backdrop without any coordinates or landscape features that might ground it to a specific location. In this case, the lack of place not only increases the intensity of Taylor's gaze and closed appearance, but may also infer his position as a figure of black mobility, or what Manthia Diawara referred to as contemporaneous figures of *Homeboy Cosmopolitanism*: US Black Action film protagonists Diawara viewed on screen and related to as a teen movie-goer in Monrovia, who experienced a unique freedom navigating the cityscape due to their savvy and style (Diawara 52).

New Orleans Niggah and the full suite of George Jules Taylor may indicate that Taylor is a "Homeboy Cosmopolitan" figure of local and global black mobility transcending limiting categories of black male expression and ways of seeing and existing in the world. Despite, or perhaps due to, camp surface—signs of immanence—we, as "attuned allies" (Hubbs 238) assign these deeper meanings (Diawara and Kolbowski 51; Hubbs 238; Sontag 276; Wilson 119).

Conclusion: When Somebody Loves You Back

In "When Somebody Loves You Back" (1978), Teddy Pendergrass sings the lyric, "We can build a world of love, a life of joy," set to the intermittently whimsical and uplifting horn section in his version of "The

²¹ Jan van Eyck, *Portrait of a Man (Self-Portrait?)*, (1433) is available at the National Gallery of London's website: www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-van-eyck-portrait-of-a-man-self-portrait

²² See, for example, Barkley L. Hendricks, *Bedroom Eyes (Self-Portrait)*, 1975 at the Painters on Paintings website, "Barkley Hendricks on Louis Sloan (February 14, 2017): <https://paintersonpaintings.com/barkley-hendricks-louis-sloan/>

Philadelphia Sound.”²³ The lyrics and music suggest the creation of free space that defines MFSB love primarily through a black coalition that is open to participants from diverse backgrounds, those “people all over the world” (Morrison). Pendergrass’s music more generally reflects MFSB’s local feel merged with a slow-jam vibe, and a performative befitting of his liminal persona as preacher, conjurer, and lusty specimen of machismo who appealed to both women and men across racial lines. He delivers transcendence for beholders through immersive engagement with music and the polymorphic aesthetics of MFSB pageantry (Friedland 27, 28); the feeling of local, global, and multicultural connectivity (Friedland 27; Lawrence 122); and a simultaneous embrace of heteronormative and queer strategies of black male comportment as well as a sentiment of LGBTQ inclusivity (Hubbs 232), even though he remained closeted.

Viewing a recording of a live performance of “When Somebody Loves You Back” (see note 23), we get the sense of Pendergrass’s intense, expansive physicality, characterised by his height and musculature, which became hyperbolised through his sultry stage movements. He wears a white tank top and matching pant ensemble, an outfit that became one of his staples. The fact that his t-shirt is low cut and lacks sleeves gives us unhindered visual access to his glistening skin and the sparkling chains that he wears adds to the overall sense of shimmering (Wölfflin 47). The sense of camp surface as hyperbolized sexuality enhanced to some extent by the shine of Pendergrass’s body and its accouterments, intersect with the carnivalesque: the performance, on the one hand, seems to unfold around the formidable presence of Pendergrass, yet at various moments, there is a sense of decentralization, resonant in part with the carnivalesque’s ritualistic and “syncretic pageantry” (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 22). Pendergrass is accompanied by a symphony-sized troupe of diverse musicians whose sonic swell balances out Pendergrass’s presence through fluid interplays of call and response. The action of the performance extends off of the stage as Pendergrass engages with the assembly of fans swooning back to the singer’s overtures. The fans become participants as Pendergrass gets close to them, often passing the microphone to individuals as he stares into their eyes. He affectionately touches many with an encouraging and protective hand, hug, or kiss, and offers up the opportunity for some to sing choruses in response to his verse and/or to duet with him.

George Jules Taylor’s gaze of nuanced confrontation, inviting allure, and tease takes the form of first-person voice when Pendergrass stops singing to both speak to audience members directly and to make these physical overtures. In so doing—like the Mother Sister of MFSB as the knowing look of *Lawdy Mama* or the soft feminine protection and touch of Daddi’s medieval Madonna looking at baby Christ—we might feel that “Teddy” is or could be, in some manifestation, intimate with us. Teresa L. Reed speaks of Pendergrass’s deployment of religious sentience amid his campy performatives, noting that while on stage, he uses statements such as, “Somebody told me to deliver this message. . . . And I know you know who it is,”²⁴ referring to God (136).

Hendricks can build MFSB portraits, “world[s] of love, a life of joy” because he imagines and lives within them. In his self-portrait, *Slick* (1977) (Figure 15), he appears within a white space, subtly dimmed so that his presence can be viewed in the best light. *Slick*’s ethereal white suit is low cut, à la “Teddy,” to reveal his chest, which is ornamented with a gold chain and medallion. His eyeglasses are delicate, and his gaze is provocative and omniscient. *Slick*’s lean is similar to George Jules Taylor’s. It runs in the family.

²³ See Teddy Pendergrass – “When Somebody Loves You Back” performed live here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRQ8m-JfeVM>

²⁴ “It could be that Pendergrass spent much of his life perfecting hagiographic charisma because he “sang in church as a child, and thought he wanted to preach” (Keys 2010).



Figure 15. Hendricks, Barkley L. *Slick (Self-Portrait)* (1977). Oil, acrylic, and magna on linen canvas, 72 x 48 inches. ©Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA Gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York 78.62

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to the Open Cultural Studies editorial board for dedicating this issue to black camp. I honour Barkley L. Hendricks as the “people’s painter” of the 1970s, and my consideration is offered in the spirit of MFSB love. This is dedicated to the memory of Barkley Hendricks, George Jules Taylor, Jimi Hendrix, Teddy Pendergrass, Fayette Regina Pinkney (The Three Degrees), and all those MFSBs styling on in eternal light.

Works Cited

- Adams, Sarah. “Black President: The Art and Legacy of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, New York, July 11-September 38, 2003.” *African Arts*, Spring 2004, pp. 83-84.
- Aiken, Jane Andrews. “The Perspective Construction of Masaccio’s ‘Trinity’ Fresco and Medieval Astronomical Graphics.” *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 16, no. 31, 1995, pp. 171-187.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Blake, John. “How Jimi Hendrix’s Race Became His ‘Invisible Legacy.’” *CNN Entertainment*, 18 October 2014. www.cnn.com/2014/10/18/showbiz/jimi-hendrix-invisible-legacy/index.html
- Boxwell, D. A. “(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of Orlando’s Sapphic Camp.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1998, pp. 306-320.
- Brown, Kimberly Juanita. *The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Campbell, Mary Schmidt. “Barkley L. Hendricks: Oils, Watercolors, Collages and Photographs.” *Barkley L. Hendricks: Oils, Watercolors, Collages and Photographs, January 20-March 30, 1980*. New York: The Studio Museum of Harlem, 1980.
- Chenoweth, Lawrence. “The Rhetoric of Hope and Despair: A Study of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the Jefferson Airplane.” *American Quarterly*, 1971, pp. 25-45.
- DeFrantz, Thomas, and Anita Gonzalez, editors. *Black Performance Theory*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- Diawara, Manthia, and Silvia Kolbowski, “Homeboy Cosmopolitan.” *October*, vol. 83, Winter 1998, pp. 51-70.
- Dissanayake, Ellen. “The Core of Art: Making Special.” *Journal of Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2003, pp. 13-38.

- Dixon, Steve. "Metal Performance: Humanizing Robots, Returning to Nature, and Camping About." *TDR*, Winter, 2004, pp. 15-46.
- Friedland, LeeEllen. "Disco: Afro-American Vernacular Performance." *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1983, pp. 27-35.
- Gaiter, Colette. "What a Revolution Looks Like: The Work of Black Panther Artist Emory Douglas." *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, edited by Sam Durant, Rizzoli, 2007, pp. 93-128.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. "The Black Man's Burden." *Black Popular Culture, A Project by Michelle Wallace*, edited by Michelle Gina Dent, Bay Press, 1992, pp. 75-84.
- . *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- et al. Editors. *Image of the Black in Western Art* series, Harvard University and The W. E. B. Du Bois Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, ongoing.
- Golden, Thelma. "A Conversation with Barkley Hendricks." *Birth of the Cool*, edited by Barkley L. Hendricks and Trevor Schoonmaker, Nasher Museum of Art, 2008, pp. 58-77.
- , editor. *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994.
- Hanisch, Carol. "The Personal Is Political." at: <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>
- Harris, Michael D. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Hart, Joan. "Reinterpreting Wölfflin: Neo-Kantianism and Hermeneutics." *Art Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1982, pp. 292-300.
- Hendricks, Barkley L. "Barkley Hendricks on Louis Sloan" (14 Feb. 2017) at: <https://paintersonpaintings.com/barkley-hendricks-louis-sloan/>
- Hendrix, Jimi. "Purple Haze," *Are You Experienced?* Track Records, Mar. 1967.
- . "Starting at Zero: His Own Story." *The Observer*, 7 Dec. 2013. www.theguardian.com/music/2013/dec/08/jimi-hendrix-in-his-own-words. Accessed 1 Sept. 2017.
- hooks, bell. "Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love Got to Do with It?" *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, edited by Alan Read. Bay Press, 1996, pp. 76-85.
- Hubbs, Nadine. "'I Will Survive': Musical Mappings of Queer Social Space in a Disco Anthem." *Popular Music*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 231-244.
- Hutchinson, Sydney. "'A Limp with Rhythm': Convergent Choreographies in Black Atlantic Time." *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 44, 2012, pp. 87-108.
- Jarzombek, Mark. "De-Scribing the Language of Looking: Wölfflin and the History of Aesthetic Experimentalism." *Assemblage*, no. 23, 1994, pp. 28-69.
- Kenna, Margaret E. "Icons in Theory and Practice: An Orthodox Christian Example." *History of Religions*, 24, no. 4, May, 1985, pp. 345-368.
- Keys, Allison. "Teddy Pendergrass: A Raw Soul Voice, Silenced." *NPR Music*. 14 Jan. 2010. www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122580403
- Kimmelman, Michael. "Constructing Images of the Black Male." *The New York Times*. 11 Nov. 1994, p. C7.
- Koplos, Janet. "Flashback: High Style, Art Historical References and Black Popular Culture Coalesce in the Art of Barkley L. Hendricks." *Art in America* (November 1, 2008), as accessed 20 July 2017 at: www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/barkley-l-hendricks/
- Lawal, Babatunde. "Sustaining the Oneness in Their Twoness: Poetics of Twin Figures (Ère Ìbejì) among the Yoruba." *Twins in African and Diaspora Cultures: Double Trouble, Twice Blessed*, edited by Philip M. Peek. Indiana University Press, 2011, pp. 81-98.
- Lawrence, Timothy. *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970-1979*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Lipsitz, George. "New Orleans in the World and the World in New Orleans." *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2011, pp. 261-290.
- Mangan, Doreen. "Barkley Hendricks and His Figurative Drama." *American Artist*, July 1976, 34-9, 68-70.
- Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Mingus, Charles, and Nel King. *Beneath the Underdog: His World as Composed by Mingus*. New York: Vintage Books, 1963.
- Morrison, Jim. "Forty Years of Philadelphia Sound." *Smithsonian.com*, 18 Feb. 2011. www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/forty-years-of-philadelphia-sound-326818/. Accessed 15 Sep. 2017.
- Murray, Derek Conrad. "Hip-Hop vs. High Art: Notes on Race as Spectacle." *Art Journal*, Summer 2004, pp. 4-19.
- Musser, Amber Jamilla. *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Olds, Kirsten. "'Gay Life Artists': Les Petites Bonbons and Camp Performativity in the 1970s." *Art Journal*, vol. 72, no. 2, 2013, pp. 16-33.
- Powell, Richard. *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*. University of Chicago, 2009.
- Raiford, Leigh, and Heike Raphael-Hernandez, editors. *Migrating the Black Body: The African Diaspora and Visual Culture*. University of Washington Press, 2017.
- Reed, Teresa L. *The Holy Profane; Religion in Black Popular Music*. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2003.
- Renne, Elisha P. "The Ambiguous Ordinarity of Yoruba Twins." *Twins in African and Diaspora Cultures: Double Trouble, Twice Blessed*, edited by Philip M. Peek. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011, pp. 306-326.

- Robinson, David. "Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Amadu Bamba and the Murids of Senegal." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 21, Fasc. 2, 1991, pp. 149-171.
- Rubin, Arnold. *African Accumulative Sculpture: Power and Display*. Pace Gallery, 1974.
- Sargent, Antwaun. "Barkley L. Hendricks Painted Black People as We Are." *Vice*, Apr. 2017. www.vice.com/en_us/article/barkley-l-hendricks-painted-black-people-as-we-are
- Schoonmaker, Trevor. "Birth of Cool." *Birth of Cool: Barkley L. Hendricks*, edited by Trevor Schoonmaker. Nasher Museum at Duke University, 2008, pp. 15-37.
- Shonekan, Stephanie. "Fela's Foundation: Examining the Revolutionary Songs of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the Abeokuta Market Women's Movement in 1940s Western Nigeria." *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2009, pp. 127-144.
- Smith, Andrea. "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy." *The Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, South End Press, 2006.
- Somma, Robert. "Rock Theatricality." *The Drama Review: TDR*, 1969, pp. 128-138.
- Sontag, Susan. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. Picador, 1964.
- Tate, Greg. "In Praise of Shadow Boxers." *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2003, pp. 128-138.
- Thomas, Jr. Floyd R. "A Personal Reflection on The Barkley L. Hendricks Experience—As I See It." www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa614.htm
- Thompson, Krista A. *Shine. The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. "An Aesthetic of the Cool." *African Arts*, Autumn 1973, pp. 40-43, 64-67, 89-91.
- Vincent, Rickey. *Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panthers' Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music*. Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.
- Weems, Mickey. *The Fierce Tribe*. University of Colorado Press, 2008.
- Wilson, Judith. "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-U.S. Art." *Black Popular Culture, A Project by Michelle Wallace*, edited by Michelle Gina Dent. Bay Press, 1992, pp. 112-122.
- Wölfflin, Heinrich. *Principles of Art History, the Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. Translated by M. D. Hottinger. Dover Publications, 1929.
- Zak, Albin J. "Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: Juxtaposition and Transformation 'All along the Watchtower.'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 3, Fall 2004, pp. 599-644.