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MICHAEL C.
CARLOS
MUSEUM

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The Michael C. Carlos Museum presents
Crisscrosses: Benny Andrews and the
Poetry of Langston Hughes

[Atlanta, Georgia, September 20, 2023]— Curated by Nadia Scott, *Crisscrosses: Benny Andrews and the Poetry of Langston Hughes* presents a selection of works created by the renowned artist Benny Andrews (1930-2006) for the publication *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*.

Benny Andrews is celebrated not only for his distinctive built-up oil and collage canvases but also for his groundbreaking activism during the late 1960s and 70s, where he fervently advocated for greater inclusion of women and people of color in New York City museums. *Crisscrosses* reveals another facet of Andrews's multifaceted artistic practice — illustration. From his contributions to the 1968 poetry collection, *I Am the Darker Brother* to his work on children's picture books in the early 2000s, Andrews consistently used his art to reach a wider audience, transcending the confines of traditional gallery spaces.

The drawings, paintings, and collages on display underscore Andrews's lifelong dedication to bringing fine art into diverse spaces, which he often referred to as the "crisscrosses" of his practice. His commitment to community engagement and social change was exemplified by his art classes in New York prisons and detention centers through his affiliation with the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, his teaching in the "Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge" program at Queens College, and his creation of a series specifically for the Plainview Baptist Church in his hometown of Morgan County, Georgia. By producing artwork for children's books, Andrews effectively brought art into the homes, schools, and libraries of countless families, using his craft as a tool for political activism and community building. His approach underscores the significance of integrating the arts into interdisciplinary solutions to the multifaceted issues our society faces today.

Crisscrosses invites viewers to delve into the "collaboration" between Benny Andrews, the self-described "people's painter," and Langston Hughes, "the people's poet." Although the two artists never met, their pairing represents a continued utilization of social realism by Black American artists to shed light on socio-political concerns within their community. Both artists harnessed their respective mediums to connect with new audiences and encourage them to engage deeply with their work. Andrews's illustrations, while deceptively simple, create dynamic worlds for Hughes' words to inhabit. While some of these works offer literal interpretations of the poetry, the majority reflect Andrews's personal interpretations. This creative liberty in translating Hughes' poems allows audiences, young and old alike, the space

to establish their own connections and explore the joys, tragedies, and sorrows of the Black American experience found in the poet's verse.

The *Crisscrosses* exhibition was developed through Nadia Scott's summer 2023 internship with the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective and partner organizations the Andrews-Humphrey Family Foundation, the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, and the Carlos Museum. The exhibition is on view in the John Howett Works on Paper Gallery from October 7 to December 10, 2023.

Nadia shares about her internship experience stating, "Working at Emory had a profound impact on my curatorial journey. Delving into the treasure trove that is the Benny Andrews papers significantly influenced how I approached the interpretation of his work. This immersion added a layer of depth to my perspective that would have otherwise been missing. Throughout this process, the Emory team's unwavering support and expertise played a pivotal role, elevating every aspect of our collaborative endeavor."

About the Curator

Nadia Scott is a senior history major and curatorial studies minor attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. From a young age, she has been captivated by the power of the historical record. With keen interests in public history, education, and cultural heritage, Nadia's aspirations as an emerging historian are centered around breaking down barriers. She aims to make history more inclusive and approachable to a wide range of people. She believes that history shouldn't be confined to academic circles; rather, it should be an engaging and accessible narrative for everyone. Her research focuses on how visual culture impacts identity formation, nation-building, and ideas of citizenship. Following her graduation from Spelman, Nadia hopes to pursue a PhD in history.

Associated Program

On Tuesday, October 17, at 7:30 p.m., the Carlos Museum and Emory Libraries present "[It's the Work, Stupid!](#)"—a conversation moderated by Clint Fluker, Senior Director of Culture, Community, and Partner Engagement for the Carlos Museum and Emory Libraries, featuring Nadia Scott, Martina Dodd, and Tina Dunkley. The title of the conversation is inspired by a 2003 interview with Benny Andrews in his studio, where he shared insights into his philosophy about discussing his work as an artist. He famously stated, 'It's the Work, Stupid!'—expressing the sentiment that an artist's work should speak for itself if we are willing to listen.

In this moderated conversation, participants will delve into the work of Benny Andrews and his enduring legacy as an artist and activist. Each of these curators will open exhibitions in October, each focusing on different aspects of Benny Andrews' life, and will discuss their unique insights into Andrews and his impact on society. This event is free and open to the public; registration is required.

About the Michael C. Carlos Museum

Set in the heart of Emory's Atlanta campus, the Michael C. Carlos Museum is a dynamic, interdisciplinary center for study of art and culture, with collections from Africa; ancient Egypt; Nubia, and the Near East; ancient Greece and Rome; the Indigenous Americas; South Asia; and American and European Works on Paper.

Through our permanent collection galleries, engaging special exhibitions, and innovative programs for audiences of all ages, the Carlos Museum connects the past with the present and the campus with the community.

Curators and faculty develop original exhibitions, engage in interdisciplinary research and teaching, and host touring exhibitions that complement our collections and support the teaching mission of the university. The museum's conservators collaborate with staff, faculty, and students to conduct research and manage preventive care on the museum's varied collections. Museum educators reach across the museum, campus, and city to develop opportunities to engage the intellect and the imagination of university students and faculty, preK-12 students and teachers, and the larger Atlanta community.

The Michael C. Carlos Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sunday: noon – 5 p.m. For more information, visit carlos.emory.edu/visit, call 404.727.4282, or follow @CarlosMuseum on social media.

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