



1

This exhibition traces Benny Andrews (1930-2006) commitment to portraiture, beginning in 1957 with his seminal collage painting 'Janitors at Rest', and including portraits of fellow artists Marcel Duchamp, Ludvik Durbachek, Norman Lewis, Ray Johnson, Alice Neel, and Howardena Pindell, and also of his father George C Andrews, and wife, Nene Humphrey. While Andrews created portraits of people he knew, as well as of himself, portraiture also served as a vehicle through which he could metaphorically express the personification of ideas, thoughts, emotions and values.

Benny Andrews | Portraits

A Real Person Before The Eyes

In his deeply humanizing portraits, Andrews employed his signature and pioneering use of paint and collage to build surface in order to create depictions composed of fleshy tactility, extending his sitters into three-dimensional space as a way of reinforcing their human presence and defining their distinct characteristics, since 'collage provided him with a degree of depth and breadth not found in painterly realism.' His discovery of collage and texture was a way to construct surface in order to affirm both the individual and shared experience of humanity.

Searching for a visual language to capture the immediacy of everyday life and the quotidian nature of his subject matter, Andrews first developed his 'rough collage' technique, combining scraps of paper and cloth with oil paint on canvas, as a student. He honed this technique in a breakthrough period at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, when, in 1957, he was struck by the school's African American janitors and created the pivotal 'Janitors at Rest', which first introduced collage into his painting. This critical component would inform the rest of his artistic career.



2



3



4



5



6

Opposite page

Cherokee

1990, Oil on paper with
painted fabric collage
76.8 x 57.5 x 0.6 cm

1

Time for Church

1998, Oil on canvas with
painted fabric collage
152.4 x 66 x 2.5 cm

2

Howardena

1978, Oil and graphite on
canvas with painted fabric
collage

76.2 x 61 x 1.9 cm

3

Here Comes the Wind

1980, Oil, spray paint and ink
on paper with painted fabric
and paper collage

72.4 x 57.5 x 0.3 cm

4

Portrait of Alice Neel

1985, Oil on canvas with
painted fabric collage
215.6 x 144.8 x 3.8 cm

5

For Colored Girls

1977, Oil on canvas with
painted fabric collage
116.8 x 101.6 x 1.9 cm

6

Malice

1978, Oil and graphite on
canvas with painted fabric
collage

127 x 106.7 x 5.1 cm

All works

© Benny Andrews Estate;
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld
Gallery LLC, New York, NY