

kolaj

#31

**A MAGAZINE ABOUT
CONTEMPORARY
COLLAGE**



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CONTENTS

KOLAJ #31

NEWS & NOTES 4

Age of Collage 3

Lisa Barcy Wins Awards

Roberta Guarna Wins Apulia Contemporary Art Prize

Varujan Boghosian (1926-2020)

BENDING HISTORY 6

Editorial: What We Have to Offer

WE NEED TO KNOW OUR HISTORY 8

The Work in Progress Mural by Jann Haworth and Liberty Blake

BENNY ANDREWS: PORTRAITS 14

A New Book by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

LOST & FOUND 16

Marco Antonio Núñez Recalls the Collage Stolen from UNCTAD III
During the 1973 Military Coup in Chile

JUST FOR THE RECORD 22

Patricia Leeds Uses Collage to Deconstruct Whiteness and Patriarchy

PASSION IN ACTION 28

Suzanne Winkel Recounts the Birth of the Arizona Collage Collective

FEBRULLAGE 30

The Importance of Artist Play

GETTING GOOD 32

Hazel Pitt Shares the Potential of Collage as a Tool for Wellbeing

ARTIST PORTFOLIOS 39

Gavin Benjamin, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Caiozzama, Santiago, Chile

Guy Vording, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Nancy Baker, Brooklyn, New York, USA

Jay Riggio, Los Angeles, California, USA

KOLAJ ARTIST DIRECTORY 62

ON THE COVER

from "Heads of State"

series by Gavin Benjamin
16"x12"x2"; exhibition canvas, Moab
Entrada paper, lacquers, Swarovski
crystals; 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

BACK COVER

Nueva Constitucion (New Constitution)

by Caiozzama
Placed in the Plaza de la Dignidad,
Santiago, Chile, 24 October 2019.
Photo by Caiozzama.

BENNY ANDREWS: PORTRAITS

A New Book by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

In *Benny Andrews: Portraits, A Real Person Before the Eyes*, Kyle Williams recounts a moment in Benny Andrews' journal where the collage artist transcribes word for word a memo from *The New York Times* art critic John Canaday to Eleanor Hass of The Studio Museum in Harlem. Williams reflects:

"Canaday's profoundly dismissive conclusion is that the work is not deserving of critique. Primitive without mastery. Intentional without sophistication. He looks past the painting in search of a requisite but ineffable quality, located, not in the artwork, but in the artist. 'The premise of sophistication.' He is unable to imagine it in Andrews.

"Rewritten by hand in Andrews' journal, the letter becomes its own retort—like two stoic raised eyebrows. His sardonic introduction speaks to how accustomed he was to a resistant art world. His dutiful transcription quietly paints his resolve, his anger, and his confidence."

Benny Andrews: Portraits is a remarkable and well-documented collection of the artist's portraits accompanied by three essays and an annotated timeline of the artist's life. The book illustrates how Andrews' choice of portraiture at a time when abstraction reigned supreme was a natural byproduct of his personal history and commitment showing Black life in his work. Connie H. Choi, Associate Curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem, writes how Andrews was a forerunner of the contemporary Black figurative work of artists like Mickalene Thomas and Kehinde Wiley who "place black figures at the heart of a new canon." Jessica Bell Brown, Associate Curator for Contemporary Art at The Baltimore Museum of Art, writes how Andrews used relief form and composite construction "to stake a claim on a non-essentializing understanding of portraiture's potential." And Kyle Williams, Director of the Andrews-Humphrey Family Foundation, writes about how Andrews used collage to bring meaning to his work, negotiated realism in his paintings, and as a metaphor for the experience of a Black artist working in a white art world. An in-depth time-

line charts the artist's life, career, and work towards social justice. Illustrations go beyond simple plate reproductions of the artwork and include some close-up detail shots of Andrews' work that allows the reader to understand his complex approach to making and layering. In short, *Benny*

Andrews: Portraits is everything we want in a book about collage: insightful research that deepens our understanding of the medium. The book goes beyond that, however, and speaks to how Black artists used collage to make space for themselves in Black American art.

His sardonic
introduction speaks
to how accustomed
he was to a resistant
art world. His dutiful
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confidence.

Benny Andrews (1930-2006) was an African-American painter, printmaker, and collagist. Drawing from surrealism and Southern folk art, Andrews' work offers a social critique of 20th-century America and speaks with humanism to issues of injustice, militarism, sexism, and suffering. Andrews was also a steadfast advocate for artists of color. In 1969, Andrews co-founded the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition to protest an exhibition at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968", which contained no art and in which no African-Americans had been involved in organizing. In the 2013 exhibition catalog, Benny Andrews: There Must Be a Heaven, Civil Rights leader and Congressman John Lewis wrote, "For Benny there was no line where his activism ended, and his art began." Benny Andrews: Portraits, A Real Person Before the Eyes was commissioned and published by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in New York in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name, which opened on 26 September 2020. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery has represented the Benny Andrews Estate since 2008. Learn more at www.michaelrosenfeldart.com and www.bennyandrews.com.

Benny Andrews: Portraits, A Real Person Before the Eyes by Jessica Bell Brown, Connie H. Choi and Kyle Williams. Hardcover; 14"x9.5"; 188 pages, including 35 color plates and 13 detail spreads; ISBN 978-1-930416-62-8. Edition of 1500; \$75 US. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, New York, 2020.

BENNY ANDREWS

PORTRAITS

A REAL PERSON BEFORE THE EYES

