

BARKLEY LEONNARD HENDRICKS



Sir Charles, Alias Willie Harris offers a tripled image, its single subject captured as if in a time-lapse. Whether with eyes closed meditatively (on the left) or gazing into space (on the right), Sir Charles is alternately thoughtful and vigilant. More than life-size, this imposing figure clearly signals 1970s fashion, pop culture, and the assertion of black identity in the generation following the civil rights era. Barkley Hendricks casts his friends, lovers, family members, and men and women he meets on the street as portrait subjects. Stark and monumental against a monochromatic ground, his portraits fix acutely on the individuality and self-expression of his subjects.

Hendricks has said that a painting he saw in 1966 while visiting the National Gallery of Art in London—a portrait by Flemish master Anthony van Dyck featuring a red velvet coat—was a point of departure for this work. Intending to make a replica of the Van Dyck image, Hendricks received permission to paint as a copyist in the museum. But once in the process, he realized he could not copy another artist's work, "no matter how much I like it," he said. Years later he painted *Sir Charles* with Van Dyck's red coat in mind. Other writers have likened *Sir Charles* to the iconic three graces—artistic muses (usually female) as portrayed by European old masters such as Botticelli and Rubens in three different attitudes, one usually with her back toward the viewer. It might be said that Hendrick's artistic muses relate to classical Western art history as well as sources personal to the artist.

Hendricks, who was born in Philadelphia, studied there at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and earned BFA and MFA degrees from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Since 1972 he has taught at Connecticut College in New London. The recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, he has exhibited his work at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum at Connecticut College; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. The Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University organized a career retrospective of Hendricks' work, *Barkley Hendricks: Birth of the Cool*, to travel from 2008 through 2010 to the Studio Museum, Harlem; the Santa Monica Museum of Art; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston.