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Portrait of Jammie Holmes in his Dallas studio. Photo: Kathy Tran

Jammie Holmes, Painter of Poignant Scenes of American South, Joins Marianne Boesky Gallery

By: Angelica Villa
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Jammie Holmes, whose scenes depicting life in American South have developed a major following, is now represented by **Marianne Boesky** Gallery in New York in conjunction with Detroit's **Library Street Collective**. Holmes's first solo show with Boesky will be in fall 2022.

After relocating to Dallas in 2016 following stints in the army and working in an oil field, he began focusing more seriously on painting. The Louisiana-born artist's work is rooted in his childhood years, referencing his hometown of Thibadoux, Louisiana. Figures of family and neighbors populate domestic spaces or gather together to mourn those who have died. In *Carrying Caskets* (2020), he depicts himself pallbearer in a funeral procession, while *Blame the Man* (2021) shows two men dressed in black hold a third man in water, possibly for a baptism.

"I've always worked on learning myself before I studied any artist," said Holmes, who cites Caravaggio, Kerry James Marshall, and Gordon Parks among his influences. "I've always wanted to make sure I'm being honest with myself."

Holmes's work also addresses the specific history of his hometown, where a white militia killed 60 Black farm workers in 1887. Marianne Boesky, the gallery's founder, said in Holmes's work, he aims, "to bring everything in the microcosm in Thibodaux where he grew up, out into the open space so it can kind of be improved upon."

On June 1, 2020, Holmes initiated an aerial art project, *They're Going to Kill Me*, that flew those final words of George Floyd, who had been killed only days earlier in Minneapolis, above five U.S. cities, including New York, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Chicago. In a recent interview with *Art in America*, Holmes described the work as "a peace-type moment, a moment almost like, 'You know what? Man, you don't understand how tired we are.' I'm not about to go out there holding signs, man. I'm doing something different. I'm tired."

They're Going to Kill Me brought Holmes's practice to wider attention, and in August he had a solo show at Library Street Collective. Boesky, who has followed the Detroit gallery's programming over the years, said that works she saw in the exhibition and others during a studio visit showcased his practice, centered around Holmes's own specific experience as a Black man living in the American South. Boesky added that she was "floored by the authenticity—it shows in his practice. There is a sense of purpose and meaning in everything he does."

In January, Boesky included Holmes's work in a group show, "In Situ," at her New York location. Then in September, she partnered with Library Street Collective to show his works in a joint booth at the Armory Show in New York.

Over the past few months, international museums and collectors have been rapidly acquiring his work. The Dallas Museum of Art purchased *Four Brown Chairs* (2020), a painting showing four men playing cards in a mobile home kitchen. "Having my work in museums," Holmes said, "gives me the opportunity to invite more people from my community to a place where they didn't realize they are welcome to come as is."

Collectors of his work include Atlanta music producer Kevin "Coach K" Lee and singer-songwriter Lenny Kravitz as well as artists like Nick Cave, Derek Foudjour and Amoako Boafo. Seven of his paintings have been sold at auction between December 2020 to March 2021.

Holmes is currently at work producing a new body of work, "So What Happened To The Soul Food," that focuses on his family's traditions that have recently fallen to the wayside from childhood memories of his grandparents to church outings. He said, "It's about other traditions families create that are now lost."