

Two Coats of Paint



Jammie Holmes, Book for Black Folks

JAMMIE HOLMES' URGENT INTIMACY

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Contributed by D. Dominick Lombardi / Jammie Holmes, a self-taught painter born and raised in Thibodaux, Louisiana, now based in Dallas, is one of the artists currently featured in Marianne Boesky Gallery's viewing rooms. ["Make the Revolution Irresistible,"](#) his first solo museum exhibition, is also up through November 26 at The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. I first came across a Holmes painting earlier this year at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut, as part of its exhibition ["Then Is Now: Contemporary Black Art in America."](#) The show carried an explicit message about how little the opportunities for African Americans had advanced in the last 60 years, and how much worse things had gotten since 2016.

The paintings at Boesky Gallery have a more intimate, day-to-day feel. Set in the far end of the gallery, Holmes's paintings generate an approachable intimacy that conveys warmth and confidence. His close engagement with his subjects is evident in their expressions. One of the common links among each of the four works on view is the use of gold in precisely controlled lines, shapes, and borders. Since the bright gold leaf and glitter contrasts sharply with the rest of his palette, it is one of the first things viewers are likely to notice upon entering the room. Why Holmes would employ such a conspicuous element is hard to say. But given the proclivity for incorporating symbols, words, and numbers he manifests in other compositions, the gold may be intended to frame memories.

Holmes apparently came to painting relatively late in life, after over a decade working in oil fields. In this light, and knowing that Holmes often works from early memories, one might expect personal narratives to propel the imagery. In *Book For Black Folks*, the artist appears to be fashioning a kind of conceptual self-portrait featuring a gold-framed image of Jesus partially obscured by brown fabric, a container of Tony Chachere's Original Creole Seasoning pointing to his Louisiana upbringing, and a book by the artist himself titled *Fa Black Folks*. An old-school phone receiver, food on a paper plate, and a pair of dice showing two twos round out phenomena presented as the passions of daily life.

To suss out the rest of the story, viewers are impelled to read between the visual prompts, tethered tenuously to a darkly stained knotty-pine table.

Hymns and Potato Salad, a triptych, is shaped like an upside down 'T' and features a triangular composition. This arrangement was often used in religious Renaissance painting to literally and figuratively elevate the figure at the top, which in this instance is a male staring back at us who looks very much like the artist. The shirt he is wearing states *Rest in Peace*, while music depicted around the main characters suggests a memorial service for a lost friend or relative. Flying clamshell take-out containers appear to be moving away from the scene, but it is the white of the firmly secured paper plates in the main figure's hands that most vividly indicate the fragility of life.



Jammie Holmes, *Hymns and Potato Salad*

The last two paintings add the element of humor, albeit subtle. *Smile For Me* is a portrait of a woman whose smile is almost completely covered by two large black flowers, one of which has a smiley face at its center. The eyes look sad and distant; perhaps she was present at the scene referenced in *Hymns and Potato Salad* and finds it difficult to lighten her mood. *Brake Em Off* depicts a card game bordered by a square of gold with rosy-red corners. Since there is no apparent monetary stake in this vignette, the game is presumably all in fun. The point of view is that of an unseen participant.

Among the most noticeable influences in Holmes's heartfelt and assiduously observed work is that of [Leon Golub](#) with respect to the handling of the volume of forms. While Golub creates much larger works whose texture is patchy and scumbled, Holmes's paint is thicker and his brushwork more painterly. Notwithstanding the pointed titles of his paintings, he is a nuanced artist who shows as much as he tells. But these characteristics emphasize a sense of lament and urgency on a par with Golub's and perhaps more personally, as opposed to politically, felt.

Paintings of Jammie Holmes, [Marianne Boesky Gallery](#), viewing room, 507 West 24th Street, New York, NY.

["Then Is Now: Contemporary Black Art in America,"](#) featuring Emma Amos, Benny Andrews, Radcliffe Bailey, Dawoud Bey, Elizabeth Catlett, Melvin Edwards, Barkley Hendricks, Jammie Holmes, Steve Locke, Titus Kaphar, Alison Saar, Betye Saar, Dread Scott, Mickalene Thomas, Charles White, Kehinde Wiley, and Kenneth Victor Young. Bruce Museum, 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich, CT. Through October 15, 2023.

["Jammie Holmes: Make the Revolution Irresistible,"](#) Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 3200 Darnell Street, Fort Worth, Texas. August 11 through November 26, 2023

