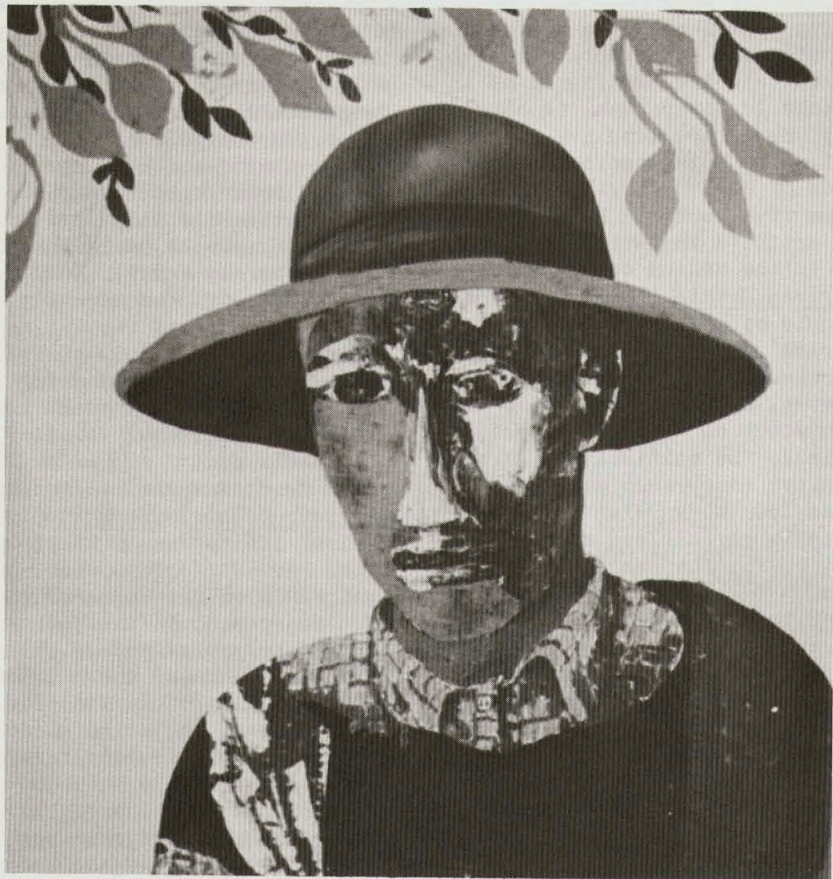


Shades, 1977



MATRIX is supported in part  
by a grant from the National  
Endowment for the Arts, a  
Federal agency.

Benny Andrews has been one of the most articulate and most passionate critics of this society's costly deviation from its avowed principles of liberty and justice for all. His words are eloquently forceful and his images are often disquieting. Consequently the breadth of Andrews' expressive range is sometimes overlooked.

Andrews seems to be best known for his trenchant portrayal of those societal transgressions which assault the well-being of this promised land. His monumental collages called The Bicentennial Series made manifest the guilty conscience of a nation during its year of celebration. Yet, implicit in Andrews' sense of urgency is his refusal to abandon hope. He is an exemplary citizen willing to speak against the misdeeds of his country.

The five works in MATRIX survey the artist's long-standing interest in the medium of collage. American Gothic (1971) is a good example of the statement of moral outrage usually associated with Andrews. The other four works, however, confirm an artistic vision which on repeated occasion explores the subtleties of fraternity, tenderness and love. These four works also convey the artist's certain and strong affection for the subject matter at hand.

Janitors at Rest (1957), Andrews' first collage, dates from his student years at the Art Institute of Chicago. Stylistically it reflects a struggle between the prevailing influence of abstract expressionism on art students at that time and Andrews' own tenacious insistence on the validity of narrative art. The artist speaks of the kinship he felt with these janitors who, when they were not mopping up spillage in the art school classrooms, could be found resignedly at rest in the men's lavatory. Andrews directly incorporates the artifacts of their station (old newspapers, paper towels, etc.) into a beautifully refined composition

which reflects his warmhearted regard for these men. This co-mingling of the concerns of life and the concerns of art so clearly evidenced in this early piece becomes a constant in Andrews' work and his public persona.

Ecstasy (1964) suggests the female as a powerful and benevolent tender of pleasure. The scant towel which veils her torso is a particularly sensuous passage. The dwarfed figure is a man who luxuriates in her warmly agreeable attentions.

Pain and irony abound in American Gothic (1971). In the well-known earlier painting of the same name, Grant Wood somewhat chauvinistically asserts the primacy of midwestern American values. Andrews' revision protests the rampant and witless militarism which led to the tragedy of Vietnam. Wood's stolid and hardworking couple is here transposed into the proverbial "little old lady in tennis shoes: astride a servile human war machine. In this sordid scene, the young soldier is stripped bare but for the emblems of combat: boots, helmet and a sleeve with military stripes. Andrews brings the blame for the debacle of war "back home" and reminds us that every soldier is a mother's son.

Far from the grim tensions of American Gothic, The Bath (1976) is a lyrical ode to one of life's simple pleasures. With gentleness and good humor Andrews has captured the essence of a weary soul in intimate repose.

For many years Andrews has routinely destroyed those works which fail to please him. These discarded materials, cut up and piled about his studio, frequently resurface in subsequent collages. The bathroom tiles, for instance, were carefully cut from previously rejected canvases. In recent years Andrews has been increasingly interested in the challenging dynamics of juxtaposing his subject matter against a light (sometimes monochromatic) background. In The Bath, although the palette of the background has been confined to whites and greys, the background texture and composition are ultimately intriguing in their own right. The energetic rectangular



patterns and the exaggerated perspective offer a fine counterpoint to the fully relaxed curves of the more colorful human forms.

In Shades (1977) Andrews employs the technique of collage to create a portrait which communicates the many layers of a personality. A zipper on the lips indicates a self-repression for the sake of survival. Beneath the lonely mask are the rich and unrevealed complexities of a human soul. The nose protrudes suggesting, perhaps, our inevitable vulnerability.

Benny Andrews was born in rural Madison, Georgia in 1930. His parents were share croppers and Andrews was able to attend school only when he was not needed on the plantation. His artistic talents, evident when he was a young child, won him several early scholarships. Andrews was a member of the United States Air Force during the Korean War. He received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1958 and moved to New York City that same year.

In 1969 Andrews was the co-founder of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, an organization which vigorously sought greater minority participation in the institutions of the cultural establishment. Andrews was the recipient of a John Hay Whitney Fellowship in 1965, the University of Bridgeport's Dorne Professorship Award in 1970 and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1974. He has been a Fellow at the MacDowell Colony in 1973, 1974, 1975 and 1978 and is currently chairman of the MacDowell Fellows Committee. Andrews is presently on sabbatical from Queens College where he has taught since 1968. He is also a leading authority on prison art programs. Andrews, who travels and lectures widely, lives in New York City where he is represented by the Lerner-Heller Gallery.

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PLEASE NOTE: Benny Andrews will deliver a MATRIX Evening Lecture at the Wadsworth Atheneum on Tuesday, September 12, 1978 at 7:30 p.m. The event is free and the public is cordially invited.

Works in MATRIX:

Janitors At Rest, 1957, oil and collage on canvas, 50" x 36". Lent by Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York City.

Ecstasy, 1964, oil and collage on canvas, 50" x 36". Lent by Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York City.

American Gothic, 1971, oil and collage on canvas, 60" x 50". Lent by Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York City.

The Bath, 1976, oil and collage on canvas, 45" x 52". Lent by Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York City.

Shades, 1977, oil and collage on canvas, 36" x 36". Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum. Gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Selected one-man exhibitions:

Paul Kessler Gallery, Provincetown, MA '60 (first); Forum Gallery, NYC '62, '64, '66; Acts of Art, NYC '70; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NYC '71 (travelled); ACA Galleries, NYC '72, '73, '75; The High Museum, Atlanta, The Bicentennial Series '75 (travelled); Craftery Gallery, Hartford, '75, '76; Lerner-Heller Gallery, NYC '76, '78; Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, KS '77; Allen Priebe Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh '78.

Selected group exhibitions:

Detroit Institute of Art, 13th Biennial of Painting and Sculpture '59; Philadelphia Academy of Art, 153rd Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture '60; American Academy of Arts and Letters, NYC, Contemporary Painting, Sculpture and Graphics '66; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 30 Contemporary Black Artists '68 (travelled); Museum of Modern Art, NYC, In Honor of Dr. Martin Luther King '68; New School for Social Research, NYC, Rhino Horn Exhibition '70; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston '70; Museum of Modern Art, NYC, The Artist As Adversary '71; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NYC, Harlem Artists '71 '71; Oakland Museum, Black American Experiences '72; New York Cultural Center, NYC, Blacks: USA: 1973 '73; Fisk University, Nashville, Amistad II: Afro-American Art '75; San Jose Museum, CA, Twentieth Century Black Artists '76; Priebe Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, Four Directions '78.

Selected bibliography by Andrews:

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The Attica Book, co-edited by Rudolph Baranik, Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (New York) '72;

"New York City's Kitchen Galleries," New York Age, Sunday, June 22 '74.

"Positive Pull for Black Arts," Encore, vol. 4 no 3 (February 3 '75), p. 38.

"Autobiography...[a selection]," Ataraxia, no. 4 '75, p. 34+

"Black Emergency Coalition Teaches in Prison," Art Workers News, vol. 5 no. 10 (February-March '76).

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Selected bibliography about Andrews:

Glueck, Grace. "Into the Mainstream, Everybody," The New York Times, June 15 '69, sec. II, p. 24.

Fox, Elton C. Seventeen Black Artists, The Cornwall Press (New York), p. 236+.

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Sheridan, Lee. "The Albany Ave.-Atheneum Gap," Valley Advocate, vol. 1 no. 15 (April 3 '75).

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Campbell, Mary Schmidt. "Critical and Cynical," Art News, vol. 74 no. 8 (October '75), p. 81+.

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