

Pan American Art **Projects**

**PURVIS YOUNG**  
A VISIONARY OF MIAMI'S  
CULTURAL IDENTITY

FEB 1 - MAR 22, 2025



# Purvis Young

BY DR. ADRIENNE VON LATES  
CURATOR, EDUCATOR AND ART CONSULTANT



This exhibition is a celebration of the life fervently lived and copiously recorded in countless images of an artist whose presence continues to haunt Miami's cultural history. Pervis (aka Purvis) Young has been gone now for almost 15 years, but his reputation has steadily grown over the years. In 2018, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York premiered its recent acquisition of Young's "Locked Up Their Minds," a large painting on wood showing two giant white horses guarding a group of black figures who triumphantly hold up padlocks to signal to hovering angels that their minds (and bodies) have been freed. The curators intentionally placed this designated "Masterpiece" next to the galleries that display works by so-called "mainstream" modern American artists.

The art world no longer silos self-taught creators like Young with labels like "outsider" or "naive." Today, Young's spontaneous gestural reveries, painted on found surfaces, are discussed in the same terms and with the same respect for their intellectual content as Neo-expressionists, like Jean Michel Basquiat, who shared Young's genius for scavenging debris from the streets to make assemblages that recorded the cacophonous noises of urban life, from a Black American perspective.

This exhibit is also a testament to the abiding love and devotion of Martin Siskind, who spent more than 20 years supporting his friend. Martin kept Young's creative fires blazing by making sure he got a pacemaker, a cornea transplant, dialysis and diabetes treatments, and a new kidney. He also facilitated Young's monumental e-installation, the "Wall of Peace" in 2007.



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From his earliest years, with his Goodbread Alley street display of hundreds of small paintings, it was Young's ambition to share his work with as many people as possible. His images cry out to be savored by a large audience, not locked up in storage. Most of the works in this exhibit have not been seen by the public since Young made them and entrusted them to Siskind, whose home has become a packed shrine to the artist. Visitors to this exhibition will be beguiled by images that look as fresh as the day they were painted. They remain forever Young.

# Purvis Young: A Visionary of Miami's Cultural Identity

CLAUDIA TABOADA CHURCHMAN  
CURATOR

This exhibition pays homage to the extraordinary legacy of Purvis Young, an artist whose work has indelibly shaped the history of Miami's art scene. As a self-taught visionary, Purvis defied traditional boundaries, carving out a unique place for himself as one of the most significant outsider artists of the 20th century. Through his singular voice, he captured the essence of Miami's cultural identity and the challenges and aspirations of its people.

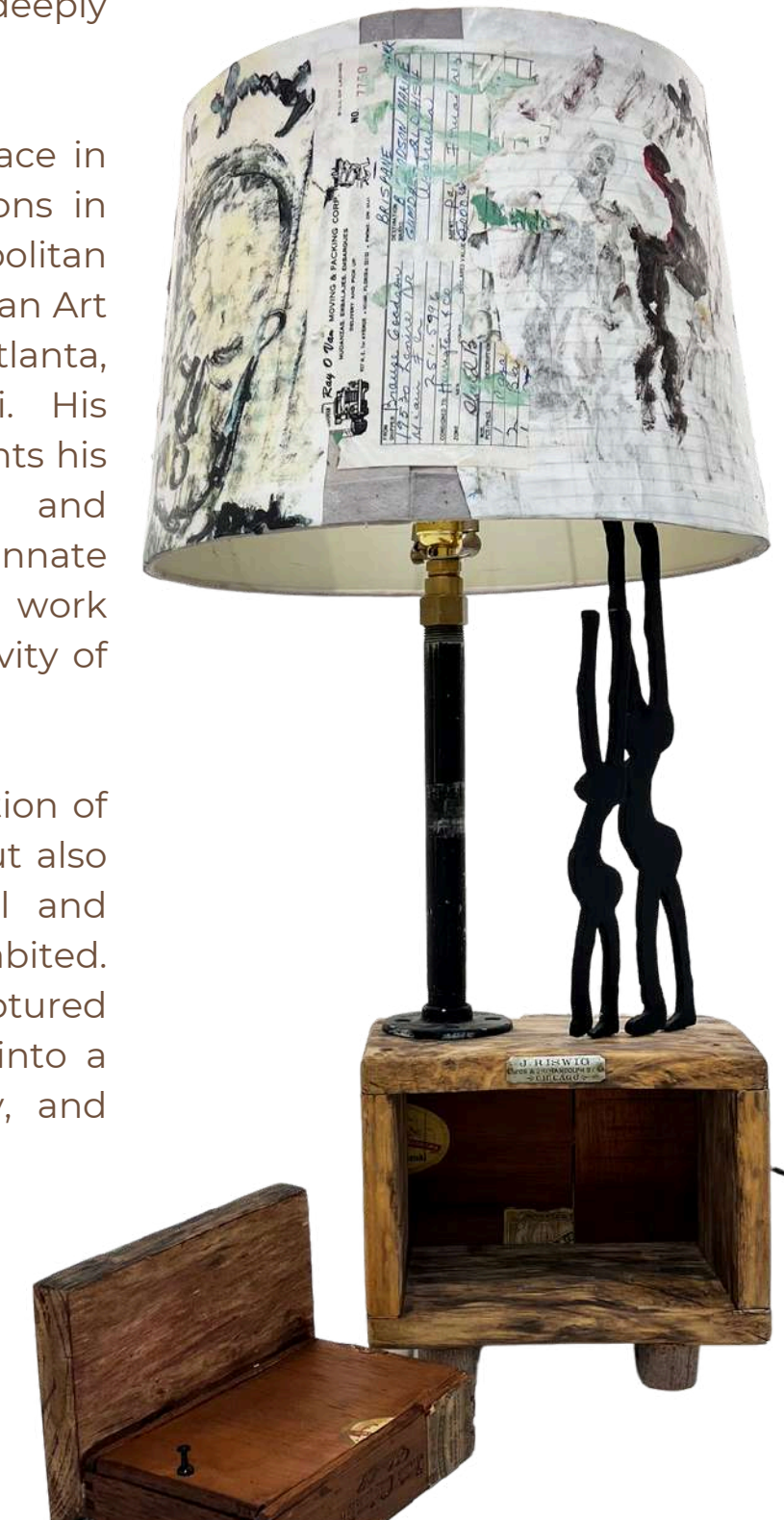
Born and raised in Overtown, one of Miami's historically Black neighborhoods, Purvis drew inspiration from his surroundings, imbuing his work with the raw energy and vitality of his community. His studio—a treasure trove of salvaged materials, functional objects, and historical artifacts—became a reflection of his life, filled with evidence of his relentless creativity. This exhibition seeks to recreate elements of that space, offering viewers a glimpse into the world where his art came to life.

At the heart of Young's work lies a profound engagement with social issues, articulated through deeply personal narratives. Themes such as freedom of expression, the role of wo-

men, religion, migration, and political realities feature prominently in his paintings and assemblages. These subjects, while rooted in his local environment, resonate universally, making his art both timeless and deeply human.

Purvis Young's oeuvre has earned a place in some of the most prestigious collections in the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and the Rubell Museum in Miami. His recognition as an outsider artist highlights his ability to transcend formal training and institutional frameworks, using his innate talent and life experiences to produce work that speaks to the resilience and creativity of the human spirit.

This exhibition is not merely a celebration of Purvis Young's artistic achievements but also an invitation to reflect on the social and cultural dynamics of the world he inhabited. Through his visionary lens, Young captured the soul of a city and transformed it into a universal language of hope, adversity, and triumph.

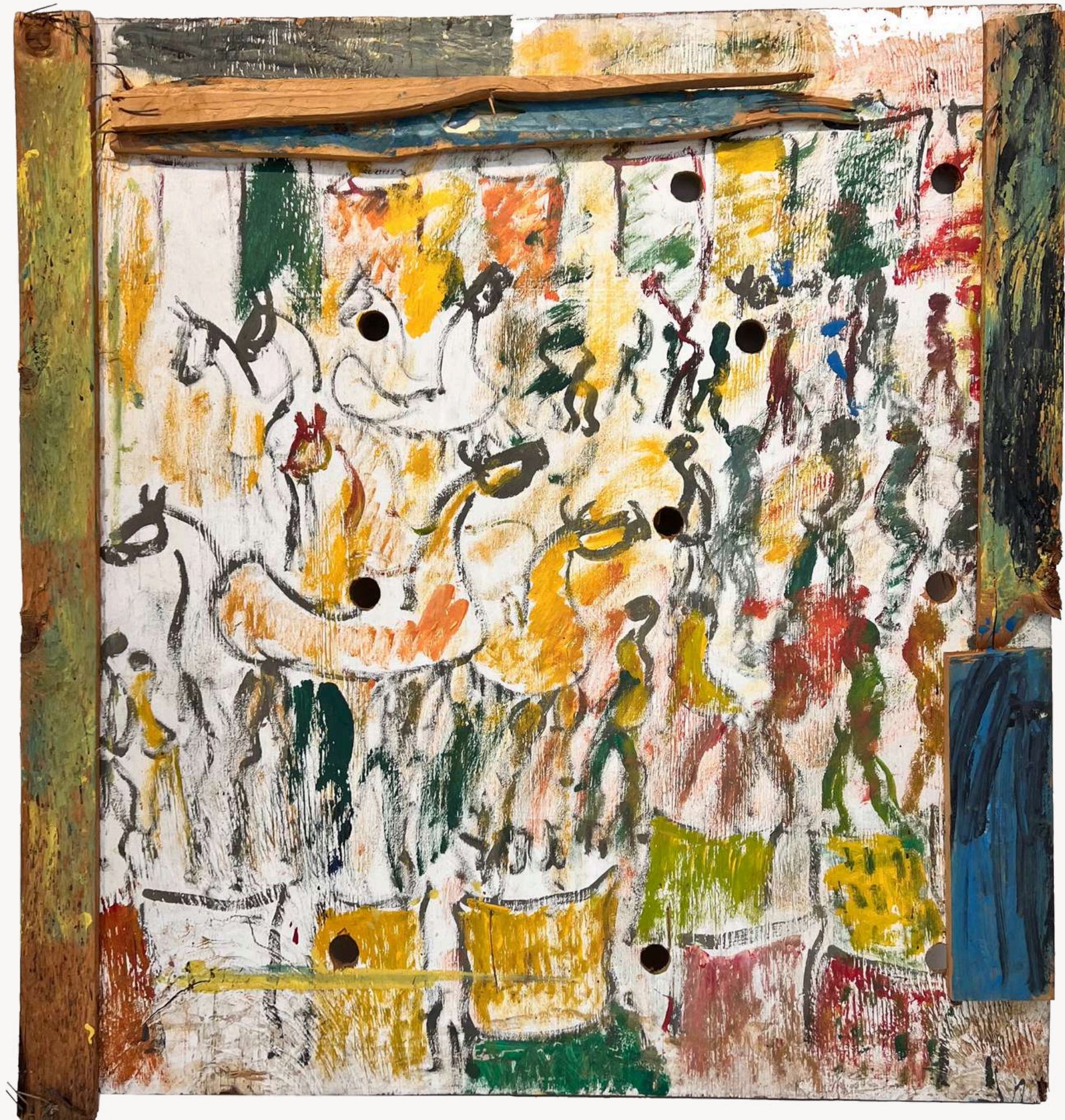




**Overtown**



*My home in Overtown, 80s*  
Mixed media on wood  
48 1/2 x 85 1/4 in  
123.2 x 216.5 cm



*Good Bread Alley*, 1978  
Mixed media on wood  
38 1/4 x 36 1/2 x 1 1/4 in  
97.2 x 92.7 x 3.2 cm



*Some chapters of my life*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
96 x 30 in  
243.8 x 76.2 cm

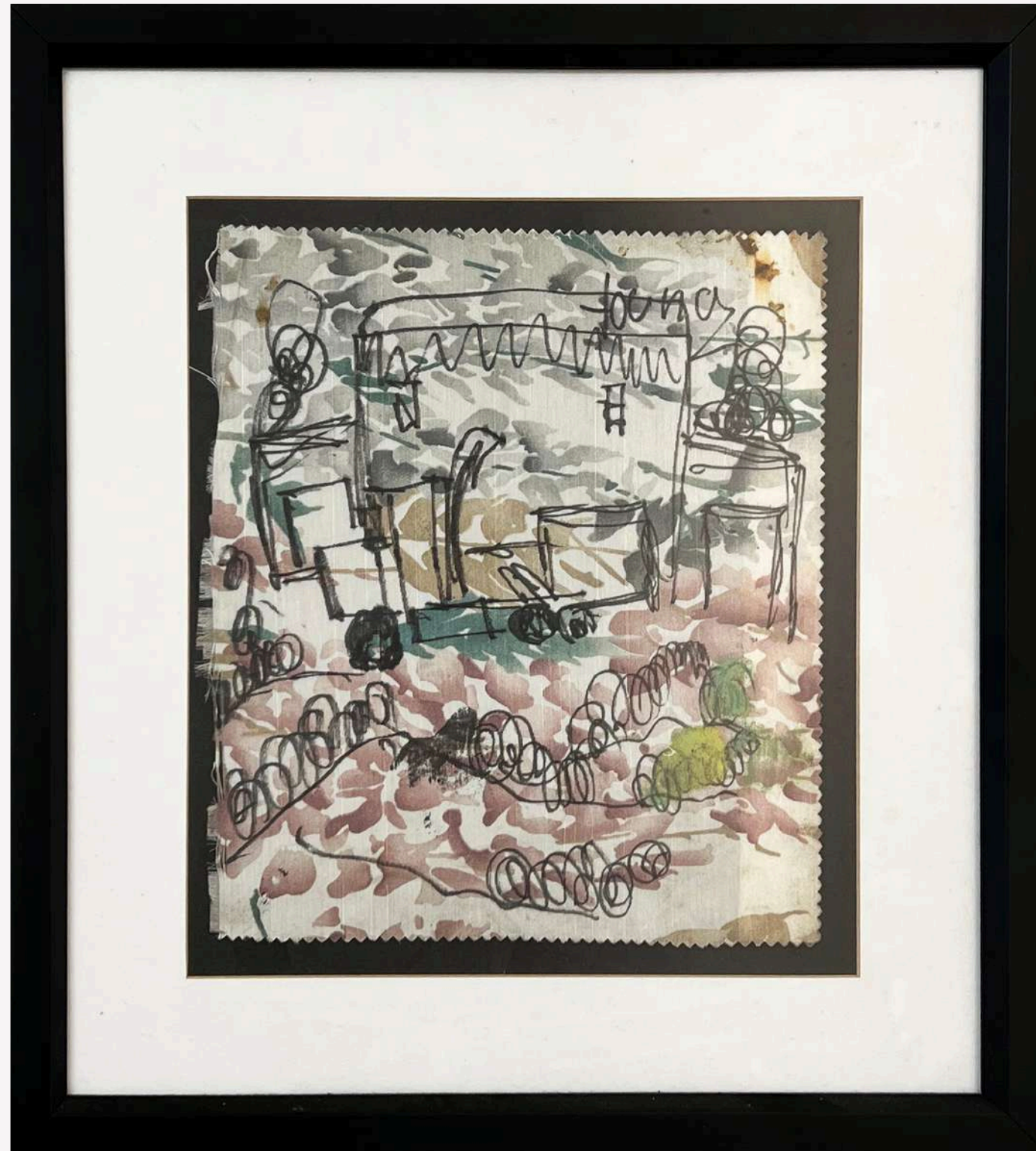




Detailed views



Detailed views



*Construction to Overtown, N.D.*  
Mixed media on cloth  
12 x 10 1/2 in  
30.5 x 26.7 cm



**Faith,  
religion...  
annunciations**



*The world is round*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
40 in diameter  
101.6 cm diameter



*Coming to America, N.D.*  
Mixed media on wood  
17 1/2 x 17 1/2 in  
44.5 x 44.5 cm



*Guardian Angel*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
96 x 46 in  
243.8 x 116.8 cm



**Horses,  
protests...  
freedom**





*Freedom for all*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
33 x 48 1/2 in  
83.8 x 123.2 cm



*Freeing the people, N.D.*  
Mixed media on wood  
70 x 48 x 3 in  
177.8 x 121.9 x 7.6 cm





*Freedom horse*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
15 x 12 1/4 in  
38.1 x 31.1 cm



*Fighting for peace, N.D.*  
Mixed media on paper  
11 1/4 x 17 1/4 in  
28.6 x 43.8 cm



*A Peace Warrior, N.D.*  
Mixed media on paper  
17 1/2 x 11 in  
44.5 x 27.9 cm



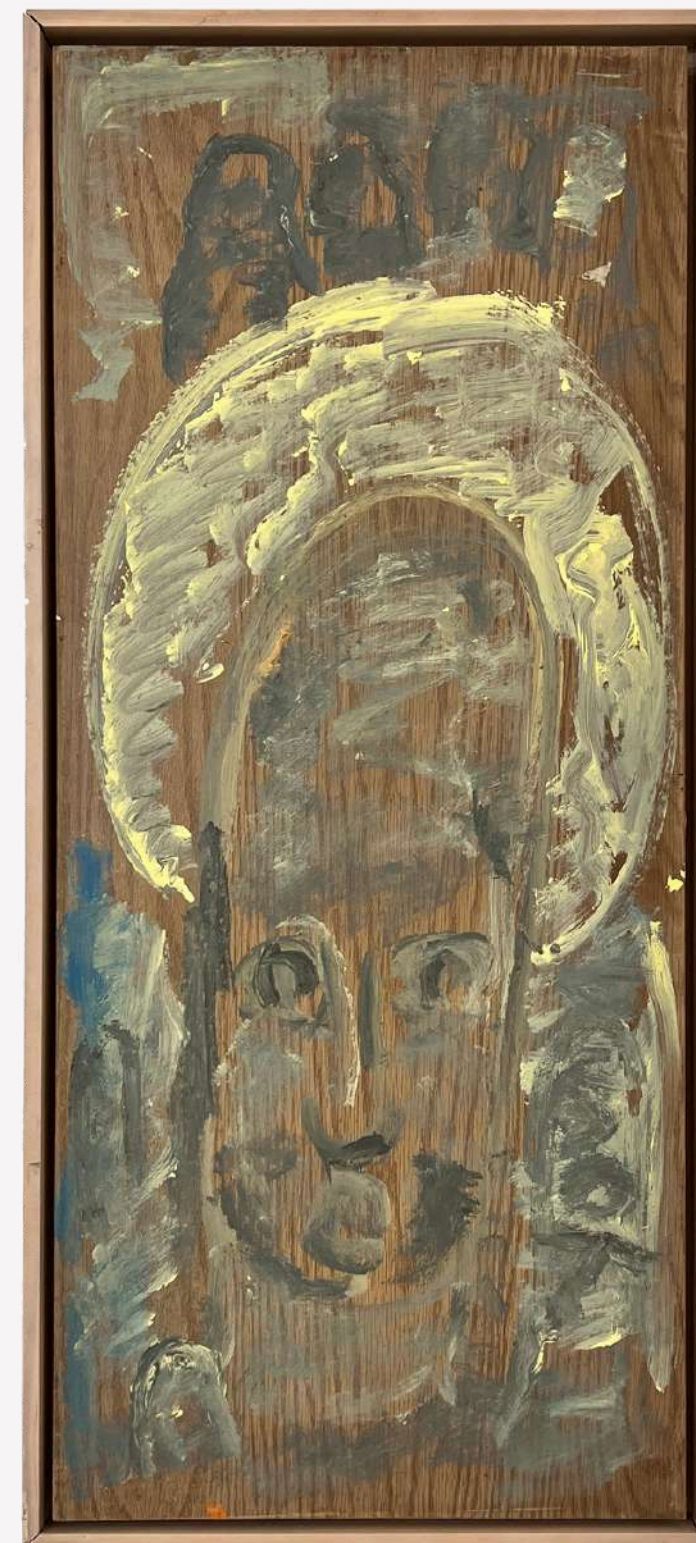
*Riders to Freedom, N.D.*  
Mixed media on wood  
17 1/2 x 17 1/2 in  
44.5 x 44.5 cm



**Portraits, self-portraits,  
or pregnant women...  
the human figure and  
its hope**

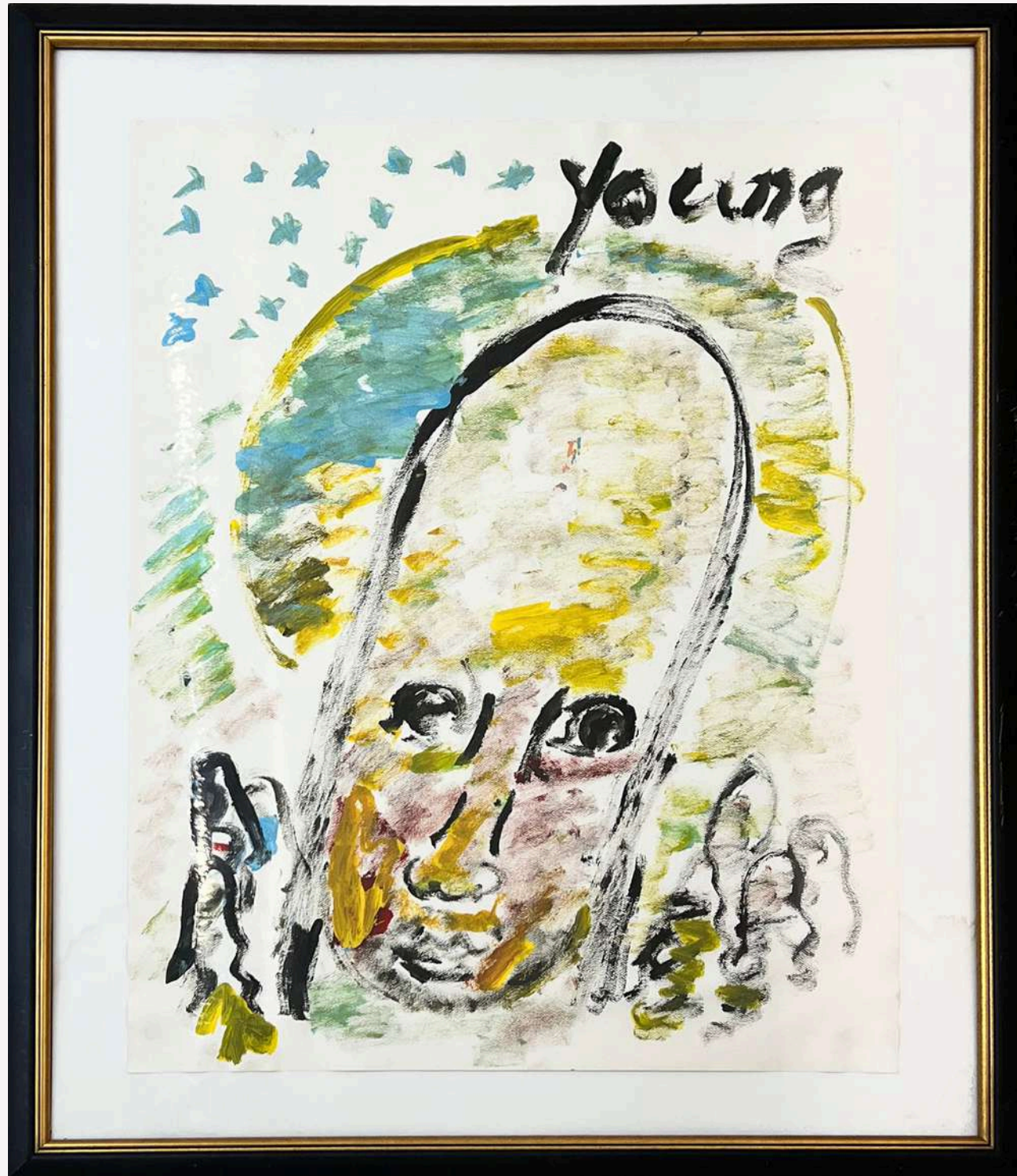


*Worries on my mind*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
31 1/2 x 19 1/2 in  
80 x 49.5 cm



*Angelic*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
33 x 14 in  
83.8 x 35.6 cm

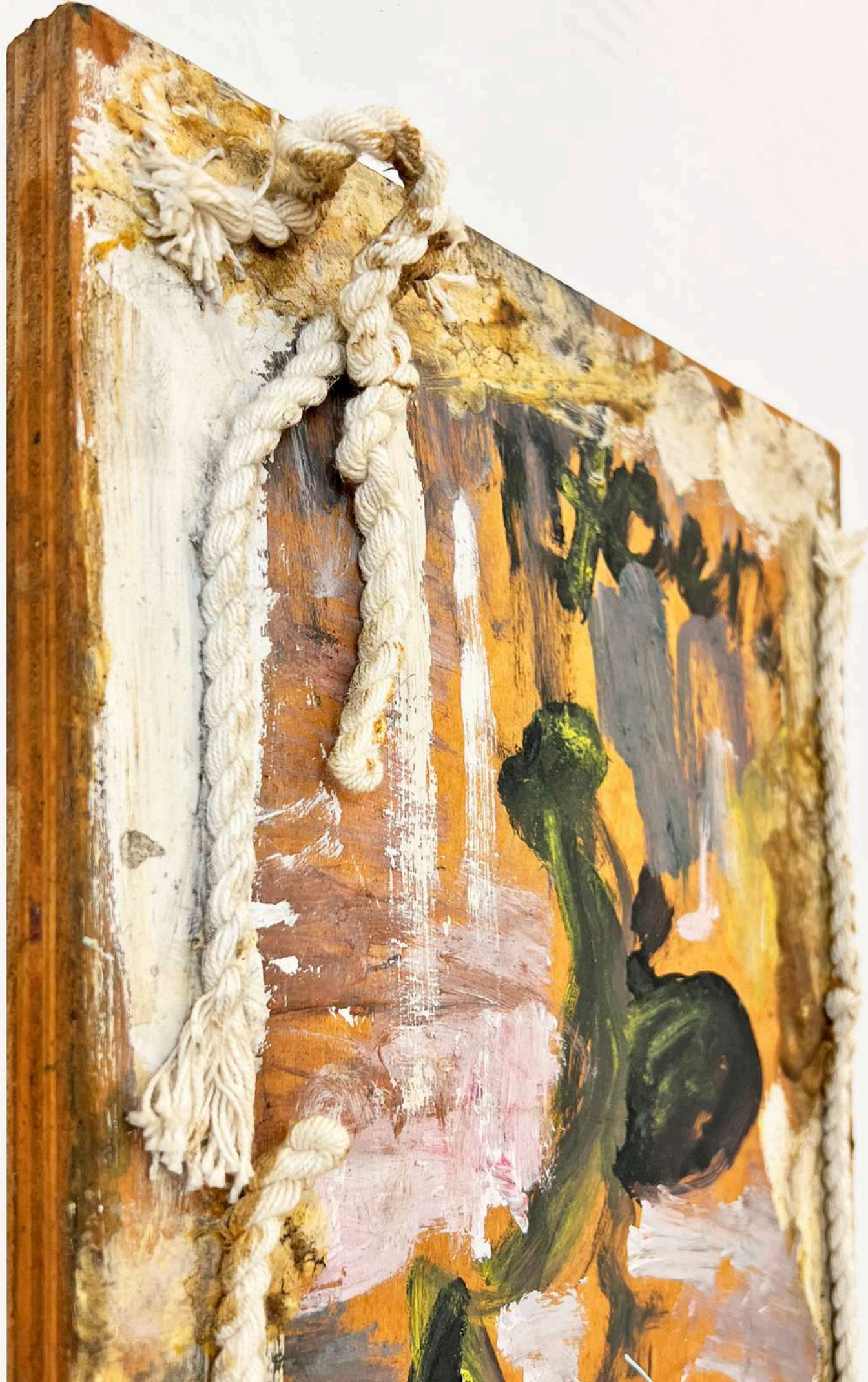




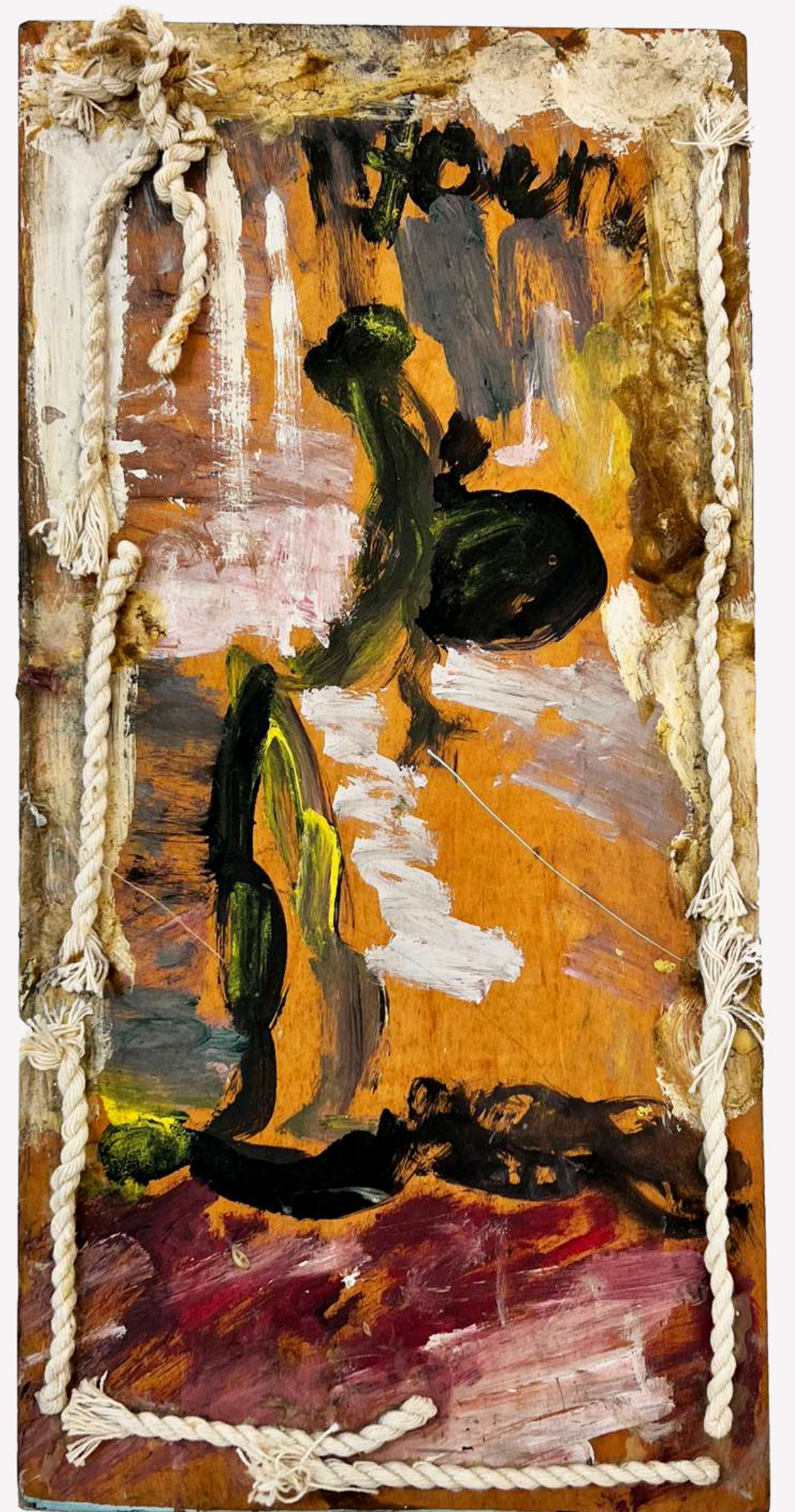
*Overlooking the Past, N.D.*  
Mixed media on paper  
26 x 20 in  
66 x 50.8 cm



*Rejoicing, N.D.*  
Mixed media on paper  
20 x 13 1/2 in  
50.8 x 34.3 cm

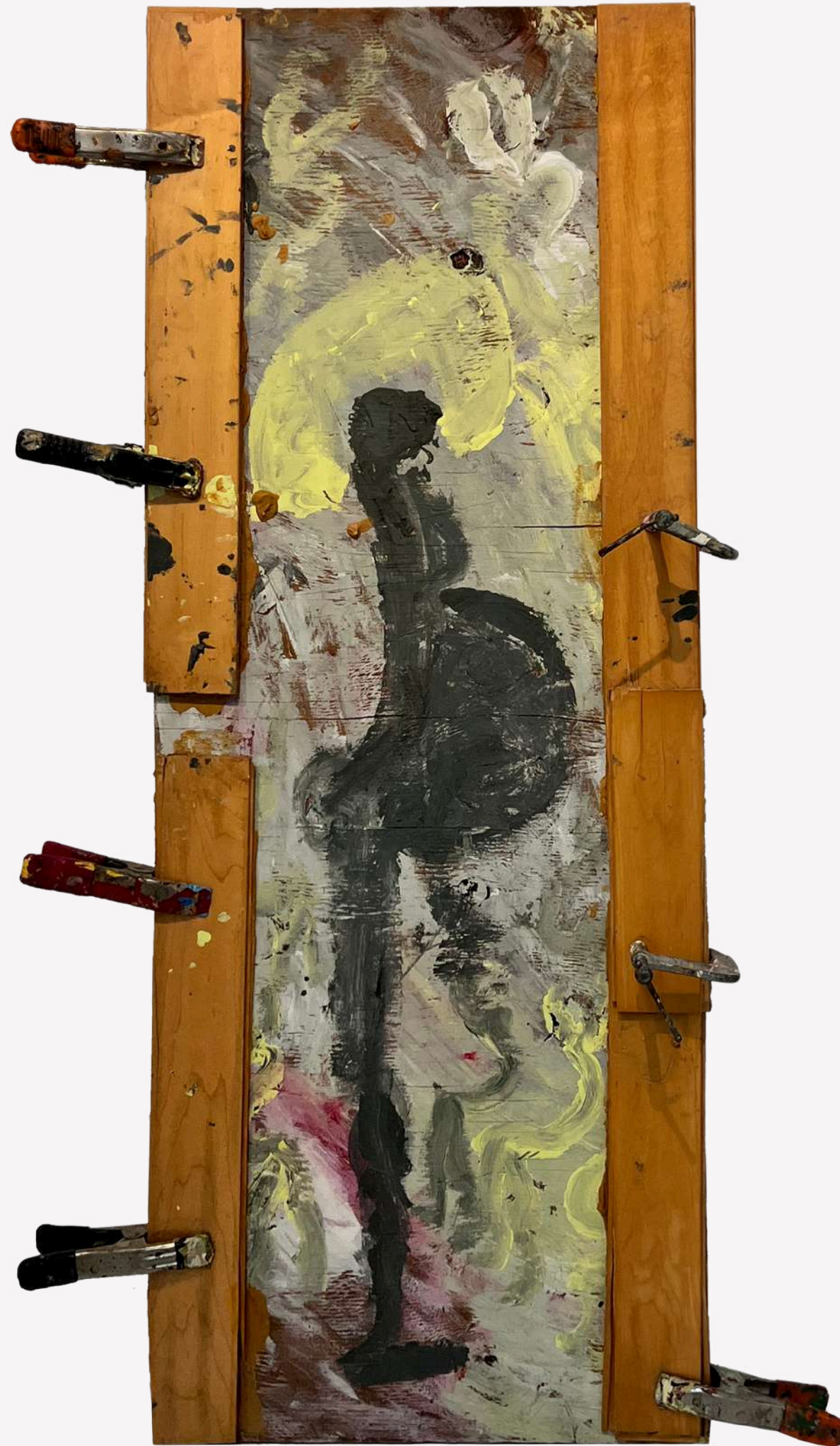


*Birth to a new life*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
19 x 9 1/2 in  
48.3 x 24.1 cm





*Behold new life*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
50 x 12 1/2 x 2 in  
127 x 31.8 x 5.1 cm



*Hope for a new world*, N.D.  
Mixed media on wood  
48 x 27 x 6 1/2 in  
121.9 x 68.6 x 16.5 cm



# Homages



*My respect to Pollock, N.D.*  
Mixed media on wood  
96 1/2 x 48 1/2 in  
245.1 x 123.2 cm



*Homage to Mona Lisa, N.D.*  
Mixed media on wood  
28 1/2 x 19 x 2 in  
72.4 x 48.3 x 5.1 cm



# About the Artist

Purvis Young was born in Liberty City, a neighborhood of Miami, Florida, on February 2, 1942. As a young boy, Purvis spent time with his uncle, Irvin Young, a well-known local sign painter who introduced him to drawing and painting. Purvis had a very limited formal education and did not attend high school.

As a young man, Purvis spent three years (1961–64) in prison at North Florida's Raiford State Penitentiary for breaking and entering. While in prison Purvis realized the life of crime was not for him and made a choice to leave that world behind and pursue the life of an artist. He regained his interest in art and began drawing and studying art books. When released, he began to produce thousands of small drawings, which he kept in shopping carts and later glued into discarded books and magazines that he found on the streets. He proceeded to move into the Overtown neighborhood of Miami. Young became attracted to a vacant alley called Goodbread Alley, which was named after the Jamaican bakeries that once occupied the street; he started living there in 1971.

In the early 1970s, Young found inspiration in the mural movements of Chicago and Detroit, and decided to create a mural of inspiration in Overtown. He had never painted before, but inspiration struck and he began to create paintings on discarded pieces of plywood, nailing them to the boarded up storefronts that formed the alley. Occasionally paintings would "disappear" from the wall, but Young didn't mind. About two years after starting the mural, tourists started visiting the alley. Young sold paintings to visitors - tourists and collectors alike - right off the wall. The mural garnered media attention, including the attention of millionaire Bernard Davis, owner of the Miami Art Museum. Davis became a patron of Young, providing him with painting supplies as well. Davis died in 1973, leaving Young a local celebrity in Miami. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he explored other inspirations by watching historical documentaries about war, the Great Depression, commerce, and Native American conflicts and struggles in the United States. In 1999 the Rubell family, notable art collectors from New York, asked to purchase some Purvis art. Purvis explained the works in the studio were like a family and he didn't want to split them up. With that said the Rubell's purchased the entire current content of Young's studio, a collection of almost 3,000 pieces.

In 2008 the Rubell's donated 108 of those works to Morehouse College. In January 2007, Purvis was selected as the Art Miami Fair's Director's Choice at the Miami Beach Convention Center and helped to establish a number of outdoor art fairs in South Florida that continue today.

Young suffered from diabetes, and toward the latter years of his life, he had other health problems, undergoing a kidney transplant in 2007. He died on April 20, 2010 in Miami, from cardiac arrest and pulmonary edema. He is survived by his partner Eddie Mae Lovest; his two sisters Betty Rodriguez and Shirley Byrd, brother Irvin Byrd, four stepdaughters, and 13 step-children.

In 2015, The Bass Museum of Art announced that it is donating almost 400 pieces of Young's art to the permanent collection in the Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida. The foundation is located in the Lyric Theater in Overtown.

Young found strong influence in Western art history and voraciously absorbed books from his nearby public library by Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin, El Greco, Daumier and Picasso. His work was vibrant and colorful, and was described as appearing like fingerpainting. Reoccurring themes in his work were angels, wild horses, and urban landscapes. Through his works, he expressed social and racial issues, and served as an outspoken activist about politics and bureaucracy. He is credited with influencing the art movement terms Social Expressionism or Urban Expressionism.

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# Public Collections

- Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York, New York. USA
- Whitney Museum of American Art. New York, New York. USA
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Los Angeles, California. USA
- Smithsonian American Art Museum. Washington, DC. USA
- American Folk Art Museum. New York, New York. USA
- Art Brut Connaissance & Diffusion Fondation. Paris. FRANCE
- Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach. Miami, Florida. USA
- Birmingham Museum of Art. Birmingham, Alabama. USA
- Block Museum of Art. Evanston, Illinois. USA
- Boca Raton Museum of Art. Boca Raton, Florida. USA
- Corcoran Gallery of Art. Washington D.C., USA
- Federal Reserve Board of Atlanta. Atlanta, Georgia. USA.
- Hampton University Museum. Hagerstown, Virginia. USA.
- High Museum of Art. Atlanta, Georgia. USA.
- Houston Museum of Fine Art. Houston, Texas. USA
- Perez Art Museum Miami. Miami, Florida, USA
- Miami-Dade Public Library System. Miami, Florida. USA
- Minneapolis Institute of Art. Minneapolis, Minnesota. USA
- Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. USA
- Motorola Corporation. Chicago, Illinois. USA.
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, Florida. USA
- National Museum of African-American History and Culture. Washington, D.C. USA
- New Orleans Museum of Art. New Orleans, Louisiana. USA.
- Newark Museum. Newark, New Jersey. USA
- Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. USA
- Rockford Art Museum. Rockford, Illinois. USA.
- Rubell Family Collection. Miami, Florida. USA.
- Springfield Museum Of Art. Springfield, Ohio. USA.
- Studio Museum In Harlem. New York, New York. USA.
- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Richmond, Virginia. USA.

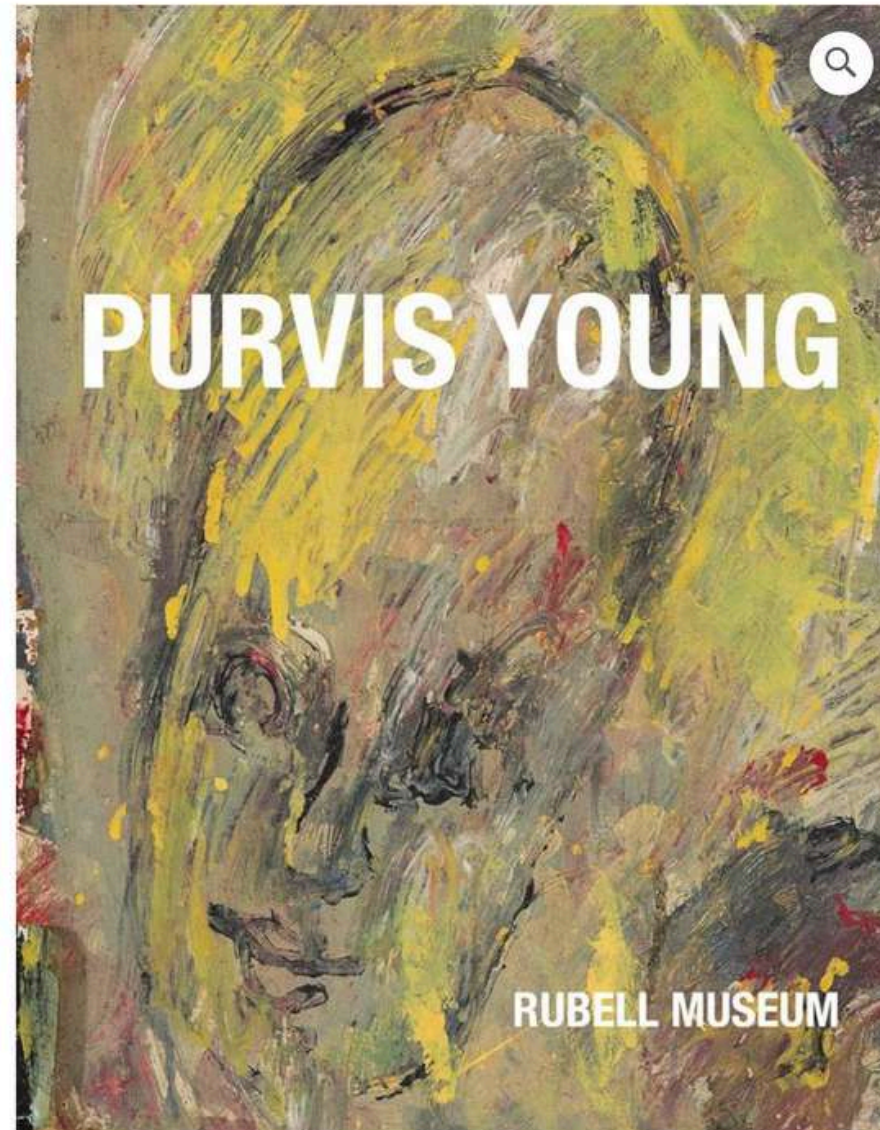




# Publications

PURVIS YOUNG - RUBELL MUSEUM  
2019

[Read more](#)



Purvis Young – Rubell Museum, 2019

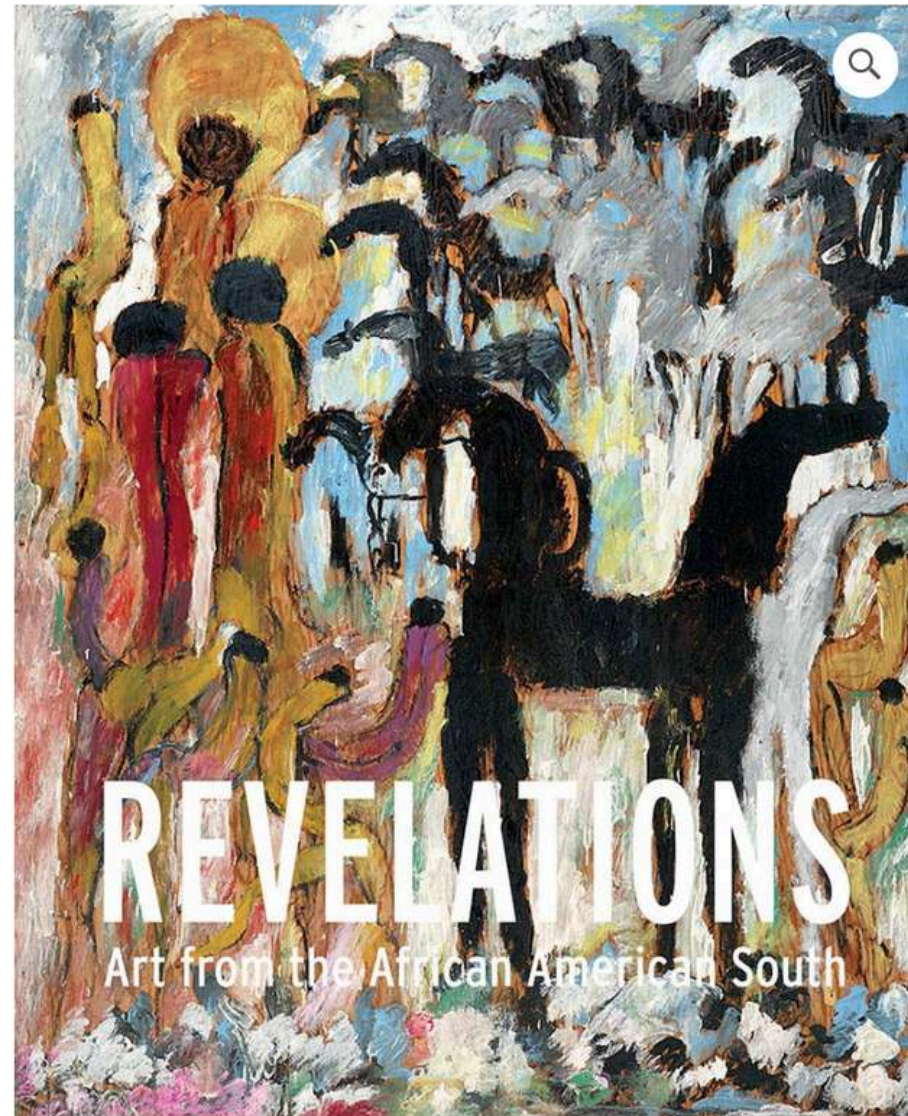
This publication, the first comprehensive monograph on the paintings of Purvis Young (1943–2010), collects 254 works by the Miami-born African American artist known for his lyrical depictions of current and historical events.

A self-educated artist who began drawing while incarcerated as a teenager, Young became widely known in Florida in the early 1970s with his large-scale murals consisting of paintings on scrap wood, metal and book pages, which he nailed to the walls of abandoned buildings in the Overtown neighborhood of Miami's downtown. Surveying paintings from throughout his career, the book is thematically arranged in 14 chapters illustrating various stages of life and concerns present in Young's work. The book also includes an interview with Young conducted by Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2005, along with essays by Rashid Johnson, Gean Moreno, Franklin Sirmans, César Trasobares and Barbara N. Young.

# Publications

REVELATIONS  
2017

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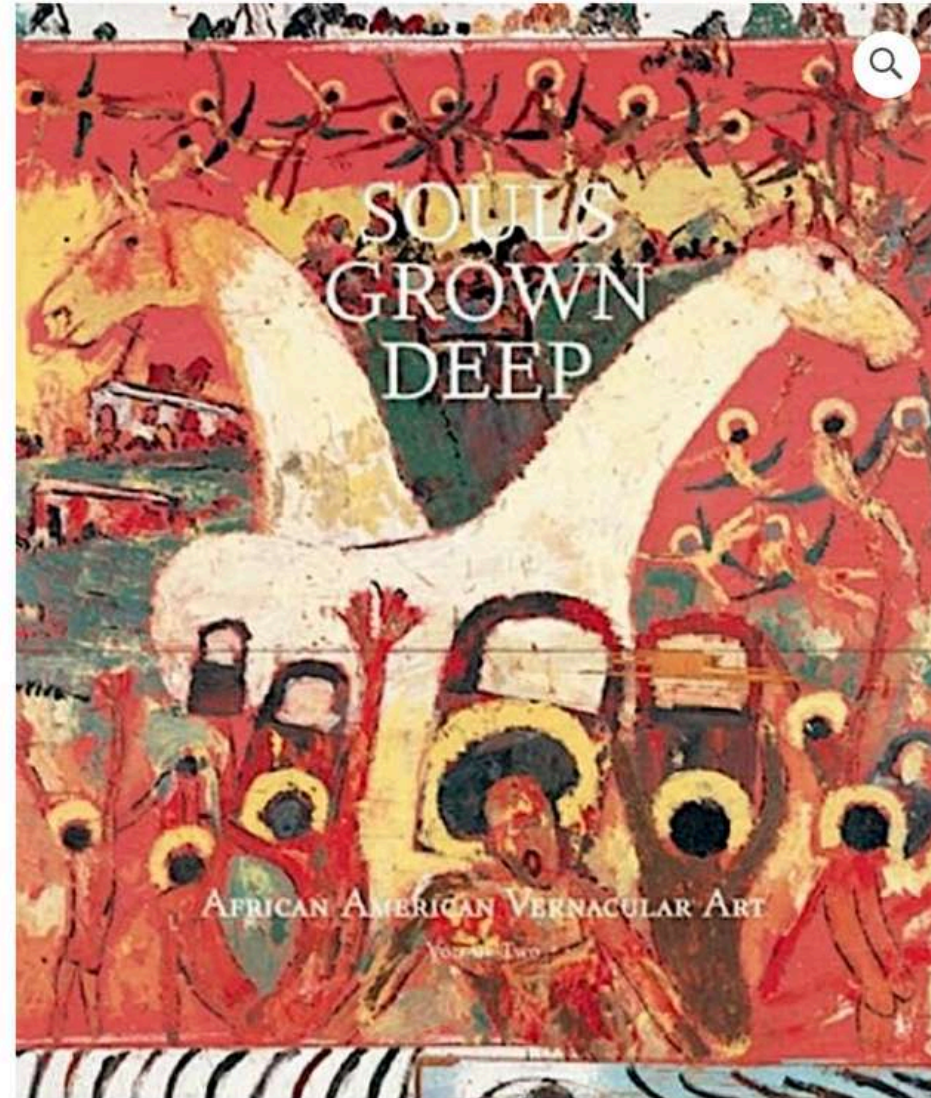


Revelations, 2017

While the artists featured in this groundbreaking catalog were born in the Jim Crow period of institutionalized racism, their works embody the promise and attainment of freedom in the modern Civil Rights era and address some of the most profound and persistent issues in American society, including race, class, gender, and spirituality. Originally created as expressions of individual identity and communal solidarity, these eloquent objects are powerful testaments to the continuity and survival of African American culture. This gorgeous book features lush illustrations of works by artists such as Thornton Dial, Bessie Harvey, **Purvis Young**, and the Gee's Bend quilters—including Gearldine Westbrook, Jessie T. Pettway, and more—and presents a series of insightful essays.

# Publications

SOULS GROWN DEEP VOL 2.  
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART  
2000



Souls Grown Deep, Vol. 2, 2000

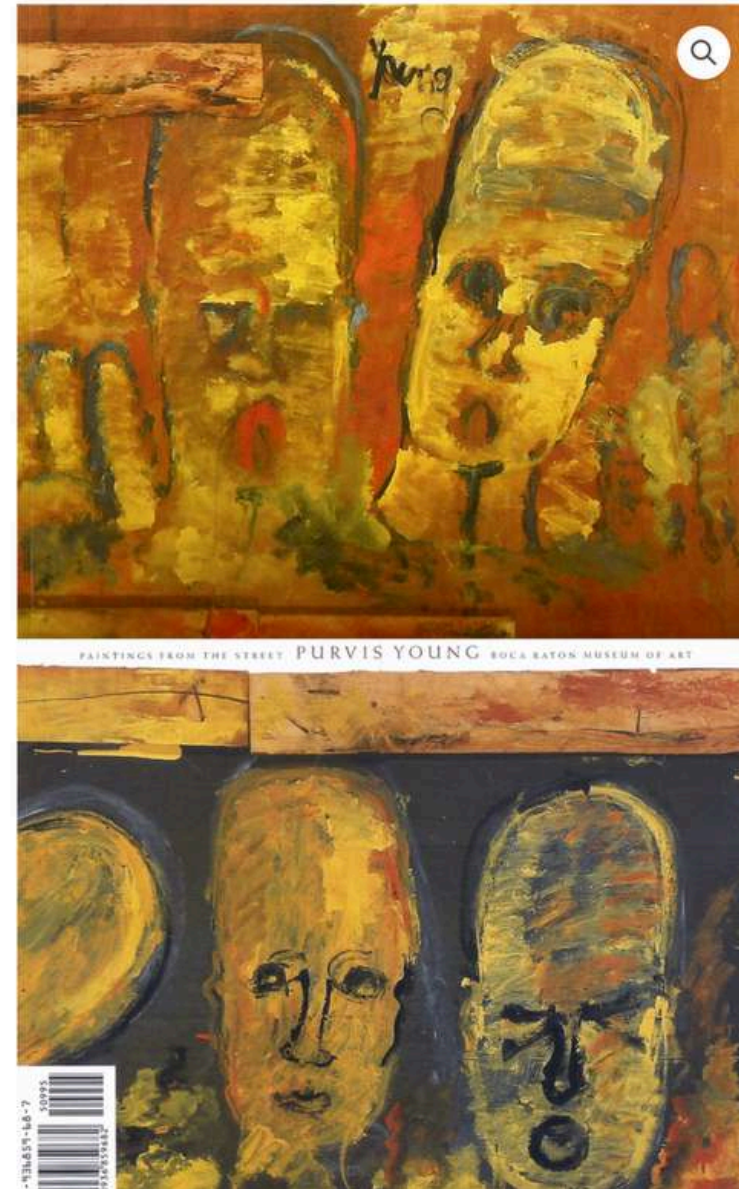
Completing the two-volume set, *Souls Grown Deep, Vol. 2* takes the visual and historical presentation of the first volume to a richer level, offering an even broader array of artistic styles and media. Published in 2000, the first volume explored the diverse historical roots of the genre and introduced artists whose work recalled the South of the pre-civil rights era. This sequel brings the movement into the present, delving into the work of the current generation of artists who are creating a complex form of art that blurs the boundaries between folk and contemporary art.

[Read more](#)

# Publications

BOCA RATON MUSEUM OF ART RETROSPECTIVE:  
"PAINTINGS FROM THE STREET"  
2006

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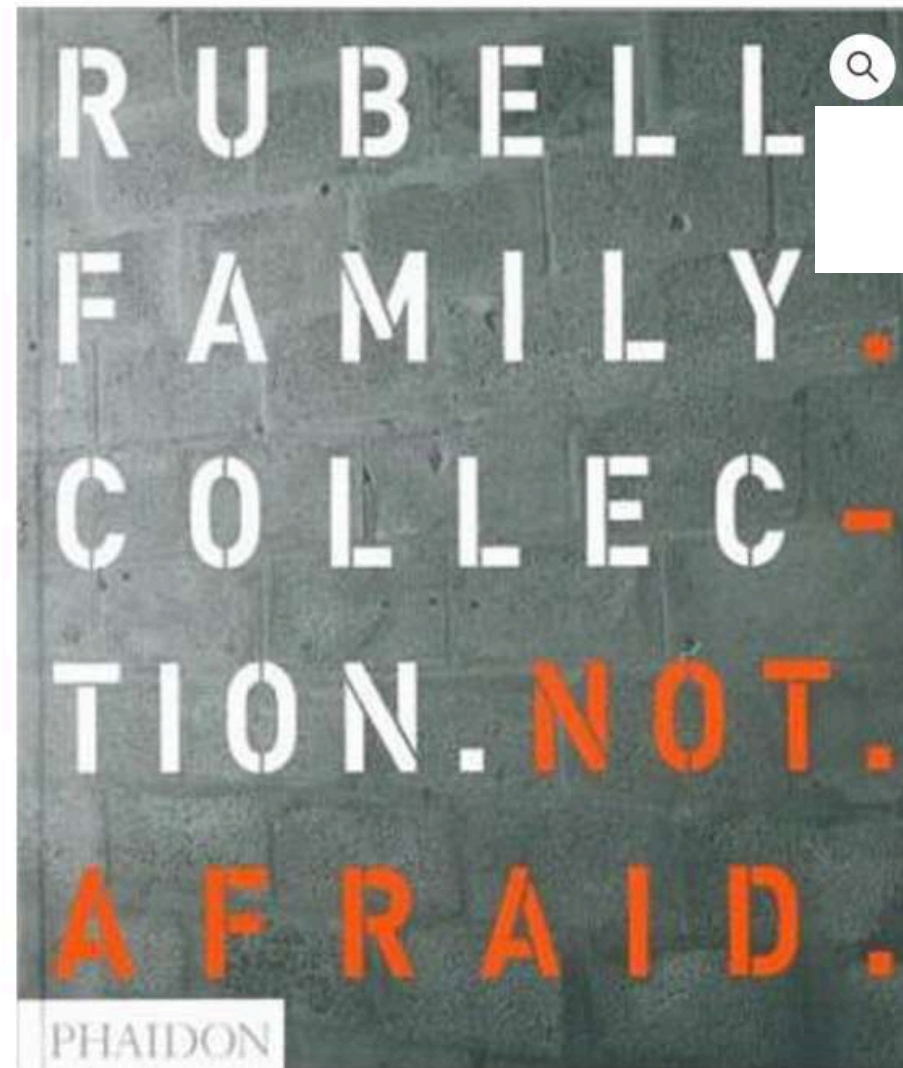


Boca Raton Museum of Art Retrospective: "Paintings from the Street", 2006

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# Publications

RUBELL FAMILY COLLECTION  
NOT AFRAID



Not Afraid: Rubell Family Collection,

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# Press

NEW YORK TIMES  
2021

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The New York Times

Account ▾

## Saving the Artwork of the South: Deep Investment, and a Drone

From Birmingham to Gee's Bend, the Souls Grown Deep Foundation is directly investing in Alabama communities where artists and quilters live, work — and struggle.



# Press

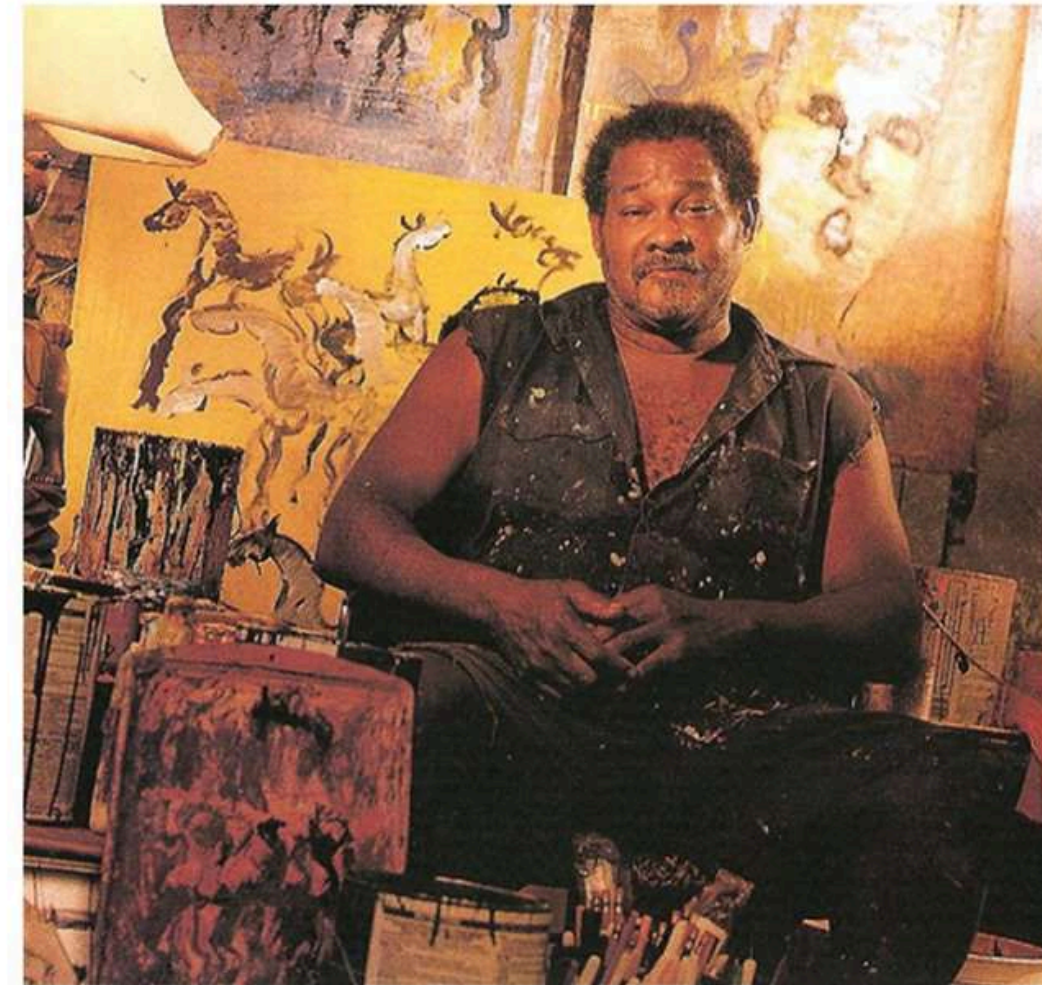
ARTNET  
2020

Read more

## 'Self-Taught' Black Artists Are Often the Last to Benefit When Their Prices Go Up. But We Can Change That—Here's How

The president of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation and Community Partnership makes a case for resale royalties regardless of government action.

Maxwell Anderson, November 25, 2020



Purvis Young. Courtesy of Skot Foreman Gallery.

SHARE



Imagine if Black jazz and blues musicians from the South had been excluded from the world of music because they didn't receive formal training in conservatories and lacked representation in the entertainment industry. What would this historical omission have meant for American culture?

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# Press

THE WASHINGTON POST  
2020

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The Washington Post Magazine

## Who Should Get the Artwork of Purvis Young?

Lawyers, collectors, 'voodoo stuff with a cut chicken head': The extraordinary tale of a beloved painter — and the people who wanted his art.





# Press

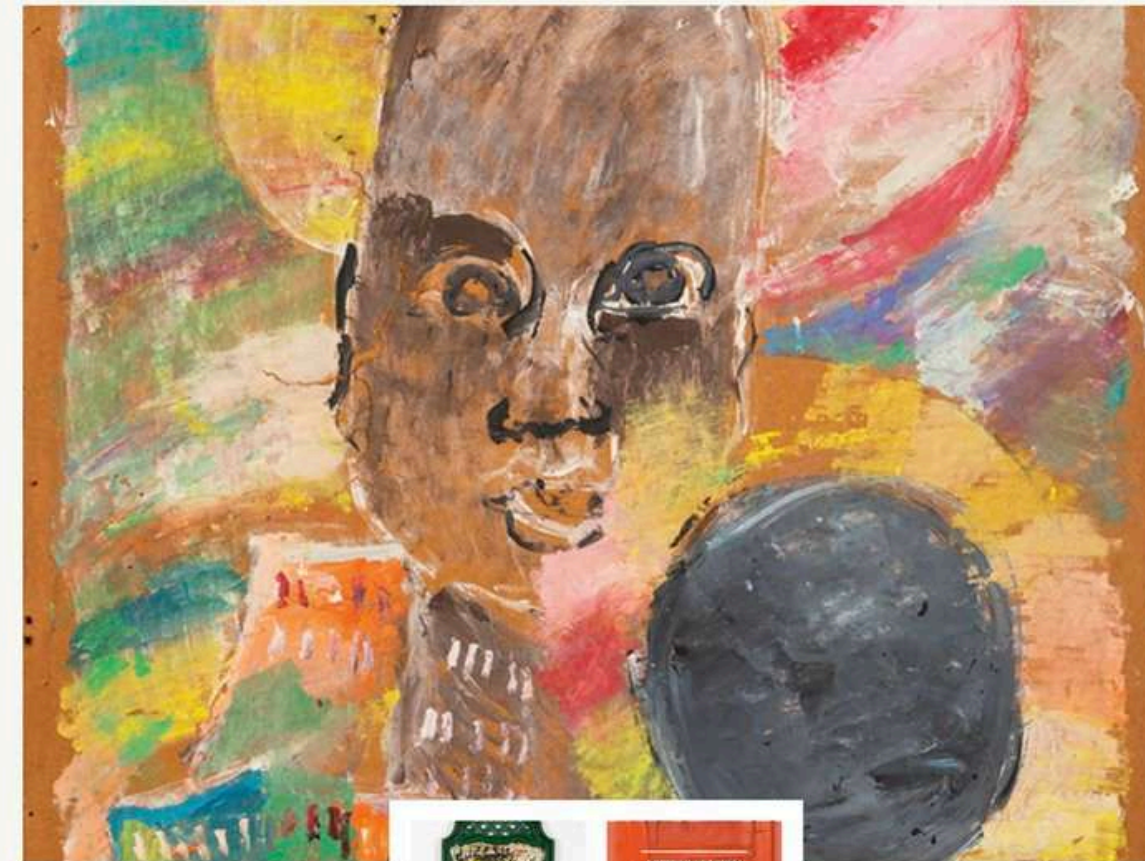
ART IN AMERICA  
2019

Read more

Art in America

## PURVIS YOUNG

By David Ebony May 1, 2019 9:03am



During his lifetime, self-taught Miami painter Purvis Young (1943–2010) was something of a legend in his city and gradually gained national prominence in the realm of “outsider art.” Extraordinarily prolific, he created sprawling murals in Miami’s historically black Overtown neighborhood, where he lived, in addition to making countless paintings in his studio, usually on found wood panels. His work generally consisted of figurative compositions that explored social issues and demonstrated a distinctive artistic style defined by squiggly brushstrokes and bold color combinations. Young, a high school dropout, began to paint while incarcerated in his teens for breaking and entering. From early on, his work conveyed a quest for freedom and alluded to his experiences as a black artist navigating a violent, segregated city and a disinterested, if not hostile, art world.



# More information



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