

Forbes

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By Natasha Gural

Lucifer Lighting Amplifies Nuance Of Jammie Holmes' Paintings Examining The Black Experience In America's Deep South



Jammie Holmes 'Back Horse' (2023), acrylic on canvas, 90 inches by 120 inches

PHOTO BY GARRETT CARROLL

Under the precise and painstakingly positioned [Fraxion 3](#) and [Monopoint](#) lights, camouflage patterns emerge from the shiny coat of a horse depicted on a monumental 10-foot wide, 7.5-foot tall canvas.

The painterly camouflage on Jammie Holmes' striking acrylic on canvas *Back Horse* (2023) is apropos, as we learn from the artist's inspiration for the symbolic equine subject. With the custom lighting, the coat's disguising effect transforms the painting and forces our gaze deeper into the seemingly simple realistic subject.

"Most of my work is Black males and females. Around the time of that painting I worked on a Vietnam series about Black soldiers having to fight in America for equal rights and in Vietnam for America. That horse came around the same time so I replaced the human figure with the endurance of the horse. So the horse is a human," [Holmes](#) explained.

Some 300,000 Black Americans served in the Vietnam War, according to the Library of Congress. In 1965, mid-way through the conflict in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Black Americans filled 31% of the ground combat battalions in Vietnam, nearly triple the percentage of Black Americans as a minority in the general U.S. population at the time (12%). Black Americans accounted for a staggering and grossly disproportionate 24% of the U.S. Army's fatal casualties in 1965. Through this portrait, we confront the dark history of Black people in the U.S., along with the history of horses in warfare, which dates back to at least 4000–3000 BC in Eurasia. Meanwhile, in the U.S., the Voting Rights Act was signed into law on August 6, 1965, by President Lyndon Johnson, outlawing the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many Southern states after the Civil War. For nearly a century (95 years) before the amendment was ratified, Black Americans in the South wrangled poll taxes, literacy tests, and other bureaucratic hurdles, while risking physical and mental retribution if they tried to register or vote.

Last month, an exclusive exhibition of Holmes' work, presented in partnership with [Marianne Boesky Gallery](#), was the highlight of [Lucifer Lighting](#)'s 45th anniversary celebration at its Tribeca showroom, which extended outdoors with luscious Texas BBQ, expertly prepared in Ol' Smokey, a smoker designed by Lucifer Lighting engineers and driven to New York City from San Antonio. Inside, live music curated by Randall Poster, with DJ sets by Stretch Armstrong and Isabella Massenet, set the mood for appreciating Holmes' painting in ideal light. The minimalist Fraxion 3 is best suited for shallow plenums, while the Monopoint design features an elbow built into the fixture body that allows a full 90 degree tilt.

Under this light, we engage more deeply with visceral scenes of Black families, communities, and traditions in the American Deep South. Holmes (b. 1984, Thibodaux, La.) draws on memory to depict the human range of emotion from sorrow to joy to hope for a better future. Examining his expressive brushstrokes, we marvel at the self-taught painter's fluidity across figurative, symbolic, and textual imagery to awaken our senses and expose the poverty and racism that continues to plague Black Americans.



Installation view Jammie Holmes paintings on view at Lucifer Lighting NYC flagship showroom, in collaboration with Marianne Boesky Gallery

PHOTO BY GARRETT CARROLL

We return to the human figure with a portrait of a Black man in a cap and wire-rimmed eyeglasses that glitter under the light. The man's gaze is slightly askew as his head is tilted to fit the round frame, compelling us to consider his point of view. Choosing the tondo canvas for *He*(2024), an acrylic and gold leaf, Holmes is inserting his Black figure into the dead-white-male art historical canon. From round-shaped painting or sculptures found in Greek Antiquity, to a design element in High Renaissance architecture, round art appears across centuries. Derived from the Italian word *rotondo* (round), *tondi* (plural for *Tondo*) were widely found in 15th-century Italy, notably in Raphael's Madonna paintings.

Holmes' work lends masterfully to Lucifer Lighting's goal, as details – such as glittering metallics and nuanced patterns – emerge with the installation.

Lucifer Lighting, a multi-generational, family-owned company born from passion for art, design and engineering, celebrates the global art world in its first flagship New York City showroom opened in 2023, following the success of a showroom launch a year earlier in San Francisco's Jackson Square. Both were designed by global giant [Gensler](#).

The Mathews family and Lucifer Lighting have been providing significant philanthropic support to museums and performing arts centers by funding and offering scholarships to design and architectural associations. The Mathews family collects postmodern and contemporary art, focused on works by a wide range of masters and pioneers, including: Pablo Picasso; Henri Matisse; Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec; Dutch painter, sculptor, and poet Karel Appel; American Abstract Expressionist painter, sculptor and printmaker Adolph Gottlieb; American Conceptual artist Mel Bocher, best known for his text-based paintings; German photographer Candida Höfer, renowned for exploring public spaces and architecture; Mexican painter, sculptor, and graphic artist Francisco Toledo; Sonia Delaunay, co-founder of the Orphism art movement, an offshoot of Cubism centered on pure abstraction and bright colors.; and Swiss sculptor, painter, draftsman and printmaker Alberto Giacometti. They also collect design objects, antiques, and rare books, including a significant Charles Dickens collection.

The Mathews family's keen eye for art is evident in their choice of Holmes, whose work has been featured in group exhibitions across the U.S., as well as in China and Israel, along with his first solo museum exhibition, *Jammie Holmes: Make the Revolution Irresistible*, at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, in 2023.

Before Marianne Boesky Gallery, Lucifer Lighting collaborated with Lehmann Maupin Gallery and Berry Campbell Gallery, underscoring the need for exquisite lighting to magnify great art.



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