

# BRANDON V. LEWIS

*Say Amen, Somebody*

11 April – 27 May 2023

(New Orleans, LA) **JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY** is pleased to announce *Say Amen, Somebody*, the premiere solo exhibition of Baton Rouge-based artist **Brandon V. Lewis**. Following the inclusion of three paintings in the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual *NO DEAD ARTISTS* International Juried Exhibition of Contemporary art at the gallery in 2022, he was awarded the grand prize, solo exhibition in 2023. Offering a deeper view and understanding of the artist's practice, this exhibition unveils sixteen new paintings and a sculptural work. Lewis' works honors and depicts Black family and culture with a particular observance of Louisianan traditions and personal tales and reflections.

Lewis expounds on the purpose of the exhibition . . .

*Say Amen, Somebody is a celebration of the culture, tradition and heritage that makes up the African American experience. It is a tribute to the men and women who have shaped, encouraged, and poured into me. I come from a family of strong faith. I can still hear my maternal grandparents' wooden closet doors rolling back on Saturday evening; that sound signaled that the 'ritual' had begun. I would walk to their bedroom and be met with the shuffling of dry cleaner plastic, shoe boxes scattered across the floor, the jewelry box's door would be opened...its treasures dangling and sparkling like tinsel on a Christmas tree. The main characters of this display would be my grandmother's white hat boxes, dozens, and dozens of them would be spread out across her bed. On the side of the lids, words written in pencil, "Summer white' or "Winter purple', identifiers of what each box held. Feathers, satin ribbons, veils and silk flowers, all these elements and so many more made up her crowns. The scent of her Giorgio Red perfume had its place amongst all her garments. My Grandfather would have his suit, shirt and tie hanging on the back of the bedroom door, his shoes freshly shined and his gold watch, which we only saw on Sunday, would be in the dish on top of the dresser.*

*One neighborhood over my paternal Grandmother and Great-Grandmother would be engaged in the same ritual. When Sunday morning came, the Saturday evening preparations came full circle. I would marvel at the attention to detail the elders put into their attire. It wasn't until I was in my early 20's that my Grandmother explained why 'Sunday Best' was so important, she said " We were all laborers or domestics, everybody had a uniform to wear Monday through Friday, and sometimes on Saturday, by looking at a uniform you could tell who the person worked for, what job they belonged to, so on Sunday, we wear our best clothes, our best uniforms, because when people see you on Sunday, they should know you belong to the King."*

*The vibrant and rich colors that make up this collection are my way of showing gratitude, gratitude to those early laborers of our communities, to the men and women who had the very least, but built solid foundations, those of which we still stand on. The stories that these pieces hold are their voices, though many now sleep, their stories live within the works, they speak their names, they sing their songs, they honor them, Amen.*

A native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, **Brandon V. Lewis** is the product of a single mother's love and dedication and the beneficiary of the hard work and strong convictions of his grandparents. Lewis began drawing at the age of three, when he returned from school one evening, the teacher sent an assignment home which instructed his parent to draw a bumblebee and he was to color it. Not being gifted with the talent to draw his mother handed him the pencil and told him to 'try', and he did more than try, when his mother looked at the paper, he had in fact drawn a bumblebee that looked better than one any adult in the house could fashion.

After the faithful bumblebee assignment Lewis' grandmothers began to invest in his talent. He would be given drawing tablets, pencils and most importantly a wealth of motivation. It was his maternal grandmother, a devout woman of God who told him ' the lord has blessed you with a gift, and it will make room for you.' As he traveled through the East Baton Rouge Parish School System he was admitted to the talented arts program and was introduced to phenomenal art teachers who introduced him to mediums he had never heard of. His high school art Mr. Bob White shed light on the style Lewis had created. He pointed out how even though he didn't paint faces on any of his subjects, Lewis' paintings still told very colorful and complex stories. Mr. White encouraged him to stick to this unique way of storytelling. While studying folk artist such as Clementine Hunter, Jacob Lawrence and Bill Hemmerling, Lewis began to realize that he had in fact been telling the stories of his grandparents and great grandparents with a paintbrush.

After High School Lewis studied history at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Studying African American history on the College level allowed him to gain an even further understanding of the rich heritage that is the African American experience. Over the course of the past ten years Lewis has dedicated his work to the celebration of his people and their stories. When asked ' What inspires you?' he says " I was raised by a unit of strong and relentless black women and a phenomenal grandfather who served as my father, those individuals along with the elders I've encountered in the church and on porches in small country towns such as Ethel and Clinton, Louisiana are my inspiration. Women with large ankles and 'settled bodies', who took pride in their appearance and always walked unapologetically in their own truth, men of little words but possessed tremendous wisdom, those people are the reason I create. I am a custodian of their stories. Every time I pick a paintbrush it is like picking up a pen. I am simply re-telling their stories with some paint and a brush. Artwork outlives its creator, one hundred years from now when I am a mere memory, my story, my mothers, my grandparents and all the those who came before us, our stories will celebrate our history to a new age."

The exhibition will be on view from 11 April through 27 May 2023 with an opening reception on **Saturday 6 May** coinciding with the Arts District of New Orleans' (ADNO) event **JAMMIN' ON JULIA** - the annual event that turn New Orleans' most creative corridor into a stage; featuring musical performance, food trucks, and art-centric block party – as part of the monthly *First Saturday Gallery Openings* from **5 – 9 PM**.

For more information, press or sales inquiries please contact Gallery Director **Matthew Weldon Showman** at **504.343.6827** or **matthew@jonathanferraragallery.com**. Please join the conversation with JFG on Facebook (**@JonathanFerraraGallery**), Twitter (**@JFerraraGallery**), and Instagram (**@JonathanFerraraGallery**) via the hashtags: **#BrandonVLewis**, **#JonathanFerraraGallery**, and **#ArtsDistrictNewOrleans**.