

Music

**Beauty and the Beat**

L.A. Reid, Pharrell, and J.D. all believe in Leah LaBelles.

BY DERRICK HEMPHILL

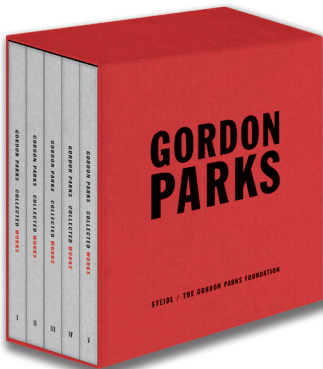
“I just want to inspire people to be themselves, and follow their dreams,” says singer Leah LaBelle. She should know. She met multi-hyphenate superstar Pharrell Williams after sneaking backstage at a N.E.R.D. concert as a teen. During their brief encounter, LaBelle made a bold prediction. “You’re going to produce my album one day,” the 24-year-old recalls telling Williams, whom years later would fall in line with her prophecy.

But before they would meet again, LaBelle, a finalist on Season Three of *American Idol*, spent a year at Boston’s prestigious Berklee College of Music and toured as a backup singer with Jordin Sparks, Eric Benét, and Keri Hilson. At the point of exhaustion and just as she was thinking of giving up, LaBelle’s self-made YouTube videos caught the attentions of both Williams and fellow hit maker Jermaine Dupri. Both agreed it was a project for newly minted Epic Records president and *X Factor* judge L.A. Reid. “I expected her to be cute, but I was really blown away [by her talent],” says Reid. “She is a bonafide soul singer. This girl is the truth.”

“Sexyf,” her first single off her debut album, due later this year, is representative of the groove-laden, Saturday-morning anthems present throughout the CD. “Every song has a story, and the lyrics are very honest,” says the Toronto native, who was inspired to sing after seeing Lauryn Hill sing “Joyful, Joyful” in *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit*. “I want people to know that you can open up and not be afraid.”



Books

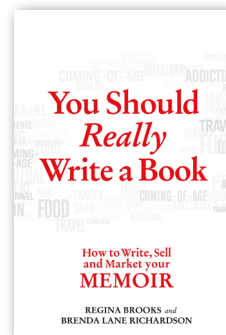


**A Life in Pictures**

Celebrate legendary photographer Gordon Parks with this beautiful new retrospective volume.

BY ORION MCBEAN

Best known for his controversial photograph *American Gothic*, Washington, D.C. and the 1971 film *Shaft*, Gordon Parks is an internationally renowned author, director, and photographer who changed the face of black art. Throughout his career, Parks worked with notable titles such as *Life* and *Vogue*, creating visuals targeting the often unspoken issues of American racism during the 1950s and '60s. Parks was also the original editorial director of *Essence* magazine and winner of the NAACP Spingarn Medal in 1972. *Gordon Parks Collected Works* (Steidl, \$285) takes a deeper look into Parks’ notable writings and iconic collection of images. From an array of thematic and photographic essays interpreted by nationally acclaimed authors Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Harvard University) and Maurice Berger (University of Maryland) to endnotes written by Parks himself, the five-volume compilation is a one-of-a-kind treasure.

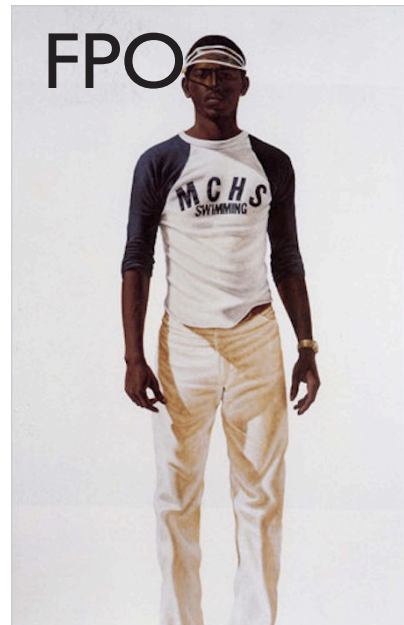


**D.I.Y.: Best Seller**

Two Experts Tell You How to Become a Renowned Author.

BY ISOUL H. HARRIS

What was your friend’s reply when you told her your tales of five lovers, three continents, and two aliases? “Girl, you should write a book,” most likely. Cowriters Regina Brooks and Brenda Lane Richardson agree. And their how-to manual, *You Should Really Write a Book: How to Write, Sell and Market Your Memoir* (St. Martin’s Griffin, \$15), is just what you need to take your autobiographical antics from brunch talk to the top of the best-seller list. Using analytics such as the latest social networking trends to proven marketing strategies, Brooks (the founder of Serendipity Literary Agency) and Richardson (an award-winning journalist and author) demonstrate how to think like a publisher and act like a reader. See you at your book signing.



Art

**The Cool Continues**

*Barkley L. Hendricks Experiences a Rebirth.*

BY URI VAKNIN

When it comes to painting, Barkley L. Hendricks is indisputably the creator of cool. His 2008 traveling retrospective, *Birth of the Cool*, took its title from the 1957 Miles Davis compilation of the same name. “You don’t decide to be hip, it just happens that way,” said Hendricks, who has inspired many younger artists, including überstar Kehinde Wiley and international phenom Fahamu Pecou—both of whom look to Hendricks as a primary influence. He was the vanguard who gave them the conceptual framework with which to see not just portraiture, but the black body.

Hendricks, born in Philadelphia in 1945, came of age in the art world when abstraction and minimal-

ism were all the rage. While at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, he received travel scholarships to Europe and North Africa, where he became painfully aware of the lack of black representation in Western art. In 1971, while he was attaining his MFA at Yale, his work was curated into his first major museum exhibition, *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

In a definitive reference to Blaxploitation, his images—portrayals of black people as seen from within—are raw, realistic, and liberating. With names like *Sweet Thang* (Lynn Jenkins), *Michael BPP* (Black Panther Party), *Slick* (self-portrait), and *Dr. Kool*, his paintings depict real-life characters.

Despite his numerous significant exhibitions, New York City gallery representation, acquisitions by major museums, a teaching position at Connecti-

cut College, and even an inclusion in the paradigm-shifting exhibition *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* in 1994 at the Whitney, he never gained the notoriety of his peers. But he was celebrated. At the *Black Male* exhibition, Hendricks’ work accompanied pieces by Robert Mapplethorpe, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Glenn Ligon. In an otherwise scathing review of the exhibition in *The New York Times*, Hendricks’ paintings are singled out: “Their forthright depictions of black men are a high point of the show, and nothing else quite like them is in it.”

Trevor Schoonmaker, the curator of *Birth of the Cool*, sums it up best: “[His] groundbreaking work is as fresh today as it was 30 to 40 years ago, and a generation of young artists is deeply indebted to him.”

BURKS KEVIN/KUNSTADT AND ANDREW KENNEY