



REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM
of Maryland African American
History & Culture

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:

Lisa Woods

Reginald F. Lewis Museum

443-263-1809

woods@maamc.org

Alyse Clepper

Reginald F. Lewis Museum

443-263-1815

marketing@maamc.org

A NEW DEFINITION OF 'SWAG': PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION *DANDY LION* OFFERS REFRESHING PERSPECTIVES ON BLACK MALE IDENTITY, ON VIEW AT REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM JANUARY 29 – MAY 13, 2012

**Traveling Exhibition Analyzes the Phenomenon of 'Black Dandyism' in the
African Diaspora, Pays Homage to Sophisticated Urban Fashion**

BALTIMORE, MD (January 9, 2012) — *Dandy Lion: Articulating a Re(de)efined Black Masculine Identity*, is a striking exhibition that explores style, sophistication and a



Hanif Abdur-Rahim, *A Revolution in Etiquette - Connoisseurs of SWAG*, 2010.

commitment to culture through the examination and celebration of the contemporary “Black Dandy,” the sophisticated urban gentleman whose “swagger” engages both African aesthetics and elements of classical European fashion. Guest curated by **Shantrelle P. Lewis**, this exhibition, on view at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture January 29 – May 13, 2012, showcases the works of 20 emerging photographers and filmmakers who present refreshing images of young black men who challenge popular notions of urban black masculinity. This exhibition creates an opportunity for viewing black masculinity through a new lens, as it suggests alternative styles of dress, comportment and lifestyle.

“A Dandy Lion is a gentleman of exceptional manners who consciously postulates what it means to be black, masculine and of quintessential style,” states Lewis. “Juxtaposed against an urban backdrop where the clothing of choice for many black men consists of a

Dandy Lion/2

pair of sagging pants, exposed boxers and white tees, the ‘hip-hop’ generation has produced another phenomenon of style – the New Age dandy.”

Dr. Michelle Joan Wilkinson, director of collections and exhibitions at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum notes, “Curator Shantrelle P. Lewis shines a new light on traditions of self-fashioning that have been a core part of black cultural expression. Her focus is not only ‘dandy’ aesthetics, but also on showing black men as ‘lions’ who stand proud, regal, and in command of their domain.”



Kia Chenelle, *Ready*, 2011.
Digital photography on canvas.
Courtesy of the artist

This exhibition debuted at Society HAE in Harlem, then traveled to Amsterdam, the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art (MoCADA) in Brooklyn, and most recently to Newark’s Aljira, A Center for Contemporary Art, before coming to the Reginald F. Lewis Museum. Since its inaugural showing, *Dandy Lion* has grown in breadth and scope, and the Baltimore installation features the most comprehensive list of photographers of all venues.

“*Dandy Lion* is an exhibition that provides opportunity for thoughtful conversation on black male identity and a chance to evaluate societal perceptions of a uniquely sophisticated style,” says Dr. A. Skipp Sanders, interim executive director of the Reginald F. Lewis Museum.

Evolution of the Dandy

Dandyism, which developed in London during the 18th century largely inspired by the fashion choices of Englishman George Bryan “Beau” Brummell (1778–1840), is a unique sartorial style characterized by lace ruffles, elegant embroidery, wigs, top hats, and decorated footwear. While early dandy fashions gained prominence in colonial America, the dandy figure has held a certain cultural prominence in black contexts since the earliest encounters of European fashions with African attire. Fluctuating between an iconic character and a marginal figure, the “Black Dandy” has taken many forms across the globe, from the stylized Harlem Renaissance prototypes to Central Africa’s sapeurs, “La Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élegantes” (SAPE) that originated in the French-speaking Republic of the Congo.

Dandy Lion features the work of local, national and international photographers and filmmakers, offering artistic interpretations from diverse perspectives. Raised on Baltimore’s west side, model-turned-photographer **Kia Chenelle** debuts *Ready* which highlights the meticulous grooming habits of the dandy. **Jati Lindsay**, a New Jersey native who has lived in D.C. for over 20 years, contributes a collage composition of the traveler dandy, visual artist Billy Colbert, outfitted with rolled-cuff trousers, tailored jacket and an assortment of vintage suitcases. **Delphine Fawundu-Buford**, of Sierra Leone, captures the essence of a Haitian dandy, musician Tiga Jean-Baptiste. Jamaican photographer **Radcliffe Roye**, who recently returned from the Republic of the Congo, will premiere his images of sapeurs that he documented in Brazzaville.

A New Definition of ‘Swag’

With “swagger” as his point of departure, today’s young dandy combines Victorian-era dress styles with hip-hop accoutrements. One may find a Dandy Lion dressed in both ascot and shell-toe Adidas sneakers, or wearing a blazer paired with G-Star Raw brand jeans and a variety of hats. Also popular among today’s black dandies are vintage and pre-worn clothing that convey the essence of classic apparel redefined. Contemporary dandies borrow their grandfather’s style to express a more refined self.

Each photographer in *Dandy Lion* offers a unique interpretation of the black dandy, as photographs move beyond mere fashion statements to the dandy lifestyle. Hanif Abdur-Rahim’s photograph, *A Revolution in Etiquette – Connoisseurs of SWAG* groups four Dandy Lions together in an almost military formation. Done up in plaids, stripes, bowties and suspenders, their armor of choice, they are prepared to battle both ideologies and individuals who may try to out-style them. Like Abdur-Rahim, all of the emerging photographers featured in *Dandy Lion* use their cameras to celebrate elegant black gentlemen and capture their fashionable glory.

Featured Artists

Hanif Abdur-Rahim

Kwesi Abbensetts

Laylah Amatullah Barrayn

Kia Chenelle

Bouba Dola

Delphine Fawundu-Buford

Russell K. Frederick

Cassi Amanda Gibson

Akintola Hanif

Jamala Johns

Caroline W. Kaminju

Phillis Kwentoh

Jati Lindsay

Lafotographeuse (née Amanda

Adams-Louis)

Ray Llanos

Devin Mays

Terence Nance

Brandi Pettijohn

Radcliffe Roye

Nyugen E. Smith

**Media are invited to preview the exhibition January 26-29, 2012 by appointment.
Call 443-263-1815 for details.**

Images available upon request.

ABOUT THE REGINALD F. LEWIS MUSEUM

Reginald F. Lewis Museum is Baltimore’s premier facility highlighting the history and accomplishments of African Americans with a special focus on Maryland’s African American community. A Smithsonian affiliate, the museum is the East Coast’s largest African American museum occupying an 82,000-square-foot facility with ample permanent and special exhibition space, interactive learning environments, auditorium, resource center, oral history recording studio, museum shop, café, classrooms, meeting rooms, outside terrace and reception areas. The museum is located near Baltimore’s Inner Harbor at the corner of Pratt and President streets. The museum is also accessible on Baltimore’s Charm City Circulator Orange and Green Routes. For more information, please call 443-263-1800 or visit the museum’s website at www.AfricanAmericanCulture.org.

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