

RYAN LEE

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Herbert Gentry

Herbert Gentry: Paris and Beyond 1949-1978

November 14, 2020 – January 23, 2021

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce *Herbert Gentry: Paris and Beyond 1949-1978*, an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Herbert Gentry. Spanning from 1949 to 1978, the exhibition surveys the European years of a remarkable career that bridged the Atlantic and resulted in culturally important works reflecting the artist's cultural fluidity, artistic innovation, and lifelong position as an art community leader. This will be the gallery's first exhibition of Gentry's work, in cooperation with the artist's estate.

A Harlem native, Gentry was an important figure in the post-war European art scene, which he marked via his own vividly gestural canvases, and his remarkable role in fostering transcontinental relations between American artists and their European counterparts. "Gentry was among those American painters in Paris, who, beginning in the early 1950s, helped introduce the American concept of gesture, free invention, and the vivid dissonances of color to the European sensibilities," Romare Bearden wrote in 1982, "The style was then known in Paris as 'the school of the pacific' and, in this country, of course, as 'Abstract Expressionism.'"

Molded by the teachings of George Braque, jazz music and the extraordinary tempo of post-war Paris, Gentry's art reflects the cultural crossroad on which he built his career. His own role as a significant cultural and community leader among expatriated artists, poets, philosophers, musicians and writers in Paris, and, later, Scandinavian capitals, shaped his own artistic outlook, which followed the principle that an artist, as an inherently social being, produces work that is subconsciously molded by the social impulses surrounding him or her. This tenet is recognizable in the flurry of lines mingling together in Gentry's paintings—visual and social webs that are arguably metaphors for the vibrant community bonds that Gentry wove across the cultural avant-garde of Paris, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and New York City.

"I work with my subconscious, I don't calculate, I'm not generalistic, and the form plays the great role. Figures come into it, faces come into my work," Gentry said. "In my paintings (are) the people I've met throughout the world, American, African American. I've met people throughout the world, who are my friends, (whom) I love, and we've done things together, so this appears in my work." Gentry's compositions, characterized by luminous colors, undulating lines, reflect a deep and perennial appreciation for the human figure.

Figures come together organically in the swirling lines of his paintings, and appear more as unconscious reminiscences of a presence rather than an actual silhouette. They are alternatively the subject and background of the bustling activity that Gentry projects onto his canvas. These flittering profiles are a testament to the constant importance of people and human connections in Gentry's life and career. The 1949 painting *Chez Honey* makes reference to the popular gallery-jazz club he opened that same year in Paris. This café-club became a multicultural and multiracial gathering place not only for fellow expatriated American artists such as Beauford Delaney, Romare Bearden, Larry Rivers, Hale Woodruff, and Ed Clark, but also eminent minds such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Eartha Kitt, Orson Welles, James Baldwin, Benny Goodman, Roy Elridge, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Marcel Marceau, among others. *Chez Honey's* ethos of transatlantic cultural exchange and spontaneous artistic camaraderie invariably became a cornerstone of Gentry's practice, and his important friendships and artistic relationships laid the foundation for an inherently social oeuvre, considered through the prism of inner contemplation.

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Herbert Gentry (b. 1919 Pittsburgh, PA - d. 2003 Stockholm, Sweden) was a painter whose gesturally abstract works were influenced and shaped by the international career he led, that began with the Harlem Renaissance in which he grew up, took hold in a post-war Parisian art scene, and continued in leading Scandinavian jazz capitals and Manhattan's famous Chelsea Hotel, where he lived in between stays in Europe.

Gentry's work has been exhibited in group and solo exhibitions at the the Boston University Art Gallery's *Making Connections: the Art and Life of Herbert Gentry* (2014); the University of Rochester's *Facing Other Ways: Herbert Gentry and African American Abstraction* (2007); Wadsworth Atheneum's *Herbert Gentry: Moved by Music* (2006); and the Studio Museum in Harlem's *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris 1945-1965* (1996).

He further exhibited at the Saint Louis Art Museum (2019), Cornell Fine Arts Museum (2019), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte (2018), Montclair Art Museum (2018), National Museum of African American History & Culture (2016), Smithsonian American Art Museum (2014), and the Studio Museum in Harlem (2013).

Gentry's work is in numerous prominent museum collections, including the Amos Andersson Museum, Finland; Basel Kunstmuseum, Switzerland; Brooklyn Museum, NY; DeYoung Museum, California Fine Arts Museums, CA; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.; Howard University, Washington DC; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Moderna Museet, Sweden; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sophia, Spain; National Gallery of Modern Art, India; National Museum, Sweden; National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian, Washington DC; Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; Saint Louis Art Museum, MO; Smithsonian, American Art Museum, Washington DC; Stedelijk Museum, Netherlands; Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and Yale University Art Gallery, CT.