

RYAN LEE

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Herbert Gentry
Independent 20th Century
September 8 – 11, 2022

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce *Herbert Gentry At The Chelsea Hotel*, a selection of lyrical paintings made during Gentry's tenure at the Chelsea Hotel between 1971 and the late 1990s. A New York native who grew up in Harlem, Gentry established himself in the post-war art scene of Paris and Scandinavia before returning to New York to participate in downtown Manhattan's thriving art scene.

A community gatherer, Herbert Gentry (b. 1919 – d. 2003) always played an important role in serving as a transatlantic link for artists between New York and European capitals. One of the first artists to go to Paris on the G.I. Bill in 1946, Gentry exhibited widely in landmark gallery and museum exhibitions throughout Europe. His circle was multi-racial and multi-generational, and throughout his travels in Paris, Copenhagen, and Stockholm, he forged deep relationships with many important artists and intellectual figures such as Ed Clark, Romare Bearden, and Bill Hutson. In the early 1970s he returned to the United States beginning with an initial stay at the Chelsea Hotel in 1971. Taken by his hometown's blossoming art scene, Gentry shifted his practice from Europe to New York, though he continued to maintain a Parisian studio throughout his New York years.

"I'm an American. I come from the country where Abstract Expressionism was born. At the same time I am an expressionist, my approach to painting was Abstract Expressionist work, and quite naturally that's in me," Gentry explained. *"I'm Afro-American, and in some of my work you can see — not necessarily the figures — but the tempo and composition that the CoBRA uses. Which was natural: I didn't go and intellectually try to paint that way. It's quite instinctive for me to work that way."*

In New York, he continued to be implicated in the city's vibrant jazz circles, and this musical impulse is reflected in the lyrical nature of his art. He surrounded himself by an extraordinary network of brilliant minds in the Chelsea Hotel, which was widely regarded as a rich center of bohemian life and thought. There, he reconnected with old friends from Paris who had returned to New York. He continued his role as a community gatherer by inviting European artists to the Chelsea Hotel, including Karel Appel and Carl-Henning Pederson. Living and creating in the hotel alongside him were figures such as Bernard and Judith Childs, Larry Potter, Viva (the Warhol Superstar), Shirley Clarke, and Stella Waitzkin.

The three decades spent intermittently in Chelsea, Paris, and Malmö, Sweden, were prolific for Gentry. Affiliated with and influenced by the CoBRA movement, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism as well as African art, Gentry's output in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s are vividly gestural and highly colorful. The gestured figures, faces and profiles in his paintings became metaphors for his passionate relationships and invariable travels—his figures are intentionally universal. He started painting figurative groups on large canvases using reds, blues, greens, and yellows. His compositions were never planned, rather they freely emanated from Gentry's unconscious thoughts and instincts.

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Gentry's presence in the New York City art world came with increased American curatorial attention from the 1980s on. In 1996, he was included in the Studio Museum in Harlem's important exhibition, *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris 1945-1965* and *An Ocean Apart: American Artists Abroad* in 1982. Today, American museums are increasingly exhibiting Gentry's work. SFMOMA is currently exhibiting a Herbert Gentry painting from its permanent collection. In 2023, Gentry's work will be included in *Americans in Paris; Artists Working in France, 1946-1962* at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalog with an essay discussing Gentry's relationship with jazz music.

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 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.