

50 | the Gantt
1974 - 2024 | Golden Year



JANUARY 26 – MAY 24, 2024

GALLERY GUIDE

VOLUME 1

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THE GANTT GOLDEN YEAR • 1974-2024

Celebrating 50 Years

Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture marks its 50th anniversary in 2024 with the Gantt Golden Year, a yearlong celebration of Black joy, genius, and excellence. This celebration trumpets the Gantt's fifty-year evolution from an idea of two University of North Carolina at Charlotte professors in 1974, Dr. Bertha Maxwell-Roddey and Dr. Mary Harper, to the luminous institution at Levine Center for the Arts in Uptown Charlotte.

Powerful works by exceptional Black artists from the region and around the globe will be on view at the Gantt during 2024. Art exhibitions will include celebratory opening and closing events; artist visits and talks; student tours; and panel discussions with national and local artists, curators, and art enthusiasts.

In the spirit of the Gantt's mission and vision, celebrating this landmark year will ignite community engagement, while exhibiting the contributions of the Gantt to the arts and cultural landscape of the Charlotte region.

The Gantt Golden Year will feature a series of premier performances and events, exceptional exhibitions, and outstanding programs across five arts and cultural pillars including Dance, Afro-Culinary Foodways, Literary Talks and Community Forums, Art Exhibitions, and Music.



Photograph by
Jalon Hill, QCity Metro

“The Gantt is a beacon for showcasing Black excellence and we are thrilled to commemorate our 50th anniversary with programs and events across visual, performing, literary, and culinary arts throughout 2024. During this major milestone, there is much to reflect on, to celebrate, to elevate, and consider. We welcome you to engage in all that the Gantt has to offer!”

- BONITA BUFORD, PRESIDENT & CEO

PATRICK ALSTON

Post-Traumatism: In Search of Freedom

CURATED BY DEXTER WIMBERLY

NOVEMBER 10, 2023 - MAY 12, 2024

For this, his first solo museum exhibition, Patrick Alston taps into the psychological impact of trauma and the triumph of perseverance. Alston's courageous and ambitious paintings are in direct dialogue with a celebrated lineage of Black Abstractionists who also sought to express themselves freely, regardless of socio-political headwinds and the expectations of others. Alston, too, feels liberated from the need to express his ideas literally.

Paintings like *We, The People* (2023), give us a glimpse into the artist's heightened awareness of color and its power to evoke deep emotion. Orange, red, and yellow, acrylics, gouaches, and oil paints dominate the canvas with energy and urgency. In comparison, the painting *PLAY* (2023) has a more muted background, but no loss of intensity. In this painting we see the artist's hand, perhaps more clearly, working with rich color in compounded layers. *Liberation March* (2023), a triptych and the largest work in the exhibition, is a universe of complexity. Reading from left to right, this painting is analogous to the passage of time: a bright morning, followed by an intense midday sun, and then a cooler, darker night.

For Abstract Expressionists, the authenticity or value of a work lies in its directness and immediacy of expression. A painting is meant to be a revelation of the artist's authentic identity. The gesture, the artist's "signature," is evidence of the actual process of the work's creation. With this exhibition, Alston earns his place in an important and ongoing art history.



Patrick Alston, *We, The People*, 2023. Acrylic, Gouache, Oil, Oil Stick, Pastel, and Spray Paint on Sewn Fabric. Courtesy of The Nina and Tim Summers Collection.



Patrick Alston, *PLAY*, 2023. Acrylic, Gouache, Oil, Oil Stick, Pastel, and Spray Paint on Sewn Fabric. Courtesy of the Hedy Fischer and Randy Shull Collection of Contemporary Art.

“Color has served as a place of freedom and refuge for me. It’s a place where I can observe harmony and tensions of the world around me. Color relationships are like any other interaction we see around us. There is a push and pull. A resistance and a harmony. An ebb and a flow. Color is the universe’s language; it stands as the placeholder

for infinity – just as there is an infinite number of hues and tones – color is a constant continuum and thus becomes the building blocks of reality. If there is a universal connection that binds the human experience and expresses the human spirit, it is my hope that color is that connector.

The linear gesture and mark-making is important to me because it represents an indication and stamping of one’s identity and personhood;

“Color is the universe’s language; it stands as the placeholder for infinity ...”

it acts as a signature in the world referencing the creative’s will. The erasure of the mark (i.e., letting paint be paint as coincidence) is a resistance point for me because it becomes an erasure of one’s cognizant being. I try to find the space between accident and intentionality, somewhat like the fight between creationism and the Big Bang theory.

I am in search of a sense of freedom through painting and am questioning the status of society’s freedom at large, as well as one’s own freedom in today’s political climate. As an artist, my canvases serve as a conduit for both personal and collective narratives, bearing witness to the struggles and triumphs that define our shared human experience.”

- PATRICK ALSTON

POST-TRAUMATISM IN ART

Post-Traumatism is an artistic and philosophical movement that emerges from the recognition of the indelible impact of trauma on individuals and communities. Artists create within a world that acknowledges the scars of trauma but envisions a future state where such afflictions have been transcended. Within this movement, viewers and participants are invited to immerse themselves in the concept of a world free from trauma, transforming their perspective to see their present reality as part of this future utopian vision.

Post-Traumatism, as a movement and ideology, embodies the artistic endeavor to envision and manifest a utopian world where trauma’s grip has been relinquished. It recognizes the lasting impact of trauma while inviting viewers to coalesce their consciousness with a vision of a future state where the world has transcended these afflictions. Art can serve as a conduit to this post-trauma utopia, providing viewers with glimpses of this envisioned realm and inspiring collective action towards its realization.



Patrick Alston, *Liberation March*, 2023. Acrylic, Gouache, Oil, Oil Stick, Pastel, and Spray Paint on Sewn Fabric. Courtesy of The Rodney M. Miller Collection.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

PATRICK ALSTON

Patrick Alston is an American painter whose practice focuses on gesture and materiality. Through abstraction, Alston's work reflects upon spirituality, socio-politics, identity, language, and the psychology of color. His re-contextualized subjects, rich and complex compositions, are expressed through gestural mark-making and the combining of various materials and techniques. His art is characterized by its ability to challenge the way we interact with and think about color, achieved through the application of various mediums onto the canvas.

Alston often incorporates visual elements that are typically associated with the New York School (Abstract Expressionism) and serial mark-making, also found in the aesthetic makeup of urban landscapes, reflecting the unique time period in which Alston is creating his works.

Like many abstract painters, Alston's art reflects the process of its creation, serving as a documentation of how the movement has evolved over time. His works are a testament to the changing nature of art and the way in which artists seek to push the boundaries of what is possible.

Alston, born in New York, New York in 1991, grew up in the South Bronx. He lives and works between New York and New Haven, Connecticut.



A *Superlative Palette* brings together the work of twelve generation-defining, contemporary Black women artists from around the world. In the realm of contemporary art, the contributions of Black women artists have been transformative, challenging traditional narratives, and enriching the cultural landscape. Their powerful and thought-provoking work has not only redefined artistic expression, but has also played a significant role in advocating for social justice, equality, and empowerment. Black women artists have historically faced marginalization and underrepresentation within the art world. Despite these obstacles, they have persevered and crafted an artistry that encompasses a diverse range of themes, mediums, and styles.

THE ARTISTS

Combining representation and abstraction, **Nina Chanel Abney's** paintings capture the frenetic pace of contemporary culture. Broaching subjects as diverse as race, celebrity culture, religion, politics, sex, and art history, her works eschew linear storytelling in lieu of disjointed narratives. **ruby onyinyechi amanze** composes drawings that defy the two-dimensional bounds of paper. Her objects float across the pages, untethered by indicators of gravity, space or time. All the forms are free from the restrictions of land; all sense of directionality is lost and they are light and unbounded.

Lauren Halsey is rethinking the possibilities for art, architecture, and community engagement.

Halsey's work maintains a sense of civic urgency and free-flowing imagination, reflecting the lives of the people and places around her and addressing the crucial issues confronting people of color, queer populations, and the working class. In her paintings, **Rachel Jones** grapples with the challenges of finding visual means to convey abstract, existential concepts. The figures in her work are notably abstracted and Jones uses bold color, competing forms, and an interplay of textures to communicate her ideas to viewers, who bring their own experiences and cultural backgrounds to the interpretation of her works.

Interested in the topography of skin, **Toyin Ojih Odutola** has a distinctive style of mark-making using only basic drawing materials, such as ballpoint pens, pencils, pastels, and charcoal. This signature technique involves building up of layers on the page, through blending and

"... [Black women artists] have persevered and crafted an artistry that encompasses a diverse range of themes, mediums, and styles."

shading with the highest level of detail, creating compositions that reinvent and reinterpret the traditions of portraiture. **Jennifer Packer's** paintings are rendered in loose line and brush stroke using a limited color palette, often to the extent that her subject merges with or retreats into the background. Suggesting an emotional and psychological depth, her work is enigmatic, avoiding a straightforward reading.

The paintings of **Calida Rawles** merge hyper-realism with poetic abstraction. Situating her subjects in dynamic spaces, her recent work employs water as a vital, organic, multifaceted material, and historically charged space. **Deborah Roberts** focuses her gaze on Black children—historically, and still today, among the most vulnerable members of our population—investigating how societal pressures, projected images of beauty or masculinity, and the violence of American racism conditions their experiences growing up in this country as well as how others perceive them.

The formal and conceptual aspects of **Tshabalala Self's** work seek to expand her critical inquiry into selfhood and human flourishing. The figures in her work take up space on large pieces of paper or colorful canvases and seem to be caught in private, joyous moments: dancing with a lover, reclining on a bed, greeting a friend. Subverting the genre of portraiture and challenging accepted notions of American identity, **Amy Sherald** attempts to restore a broader, fuller picture of humanity. Sherald's work thus foregrounds the idea that Black life and identity are not solely tethered to grappling publicly with social issues, and that resistance lies equally in a full interior life and an expansive vision of selfhood in the world.

Mickalene Thomas introduces complex notions of femininity and challenges common definitions of beauty and aesthetic representation. Her work stems from her long



Calida Rawles, *Requiem for my Navigator*, 2021. Courtesy of the Shah Garg Collection. © Calida Rawles. Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London. Photo by Marten Elder.

study of art history and classical genres of portraiture and landscape. **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye** creates fictional figures that are untethered to a specific time or place, and are born from various untraceable subjects: people, objects, thoughts, photographs, or images she has drawn, observed, or recalled. This lack of fixed narrative reference leaves her work open to the projected imagination of the viewer.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

DEXTER WIMBERLY

Dexter Wimberly is an American curator based in Japan who has organized exhibitions in galleries and institutions around the world including the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, The Green Family Art Foundation in Dallas, KOKI Arts in Tokyo, Bode Projects in Berlin, and The Third Line in Dubai. Wimberly is a Senior Critic at New York Academy of Art, and the founder and director of the Hayama Artist Residency in Japan.



Nina Chanel Abney, *Always Ready, Always There*, 2018. Green Family Art Foundation, courtesy Adam Green Art Advisory. © Nina Chanel Abney. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

CHRISTOPHER MYERS

Please Trouble, Carry Me

ORGANIZED BY HARVEY B. GANTT CENTER FOR
AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTS + CULTURE

FEBRUARY 2 - JULY 21, 2024

In *Please Trouble, Carry Me*, Christopher Myers employs tapestry and stained-glass compositions to think about the ways in which Black lives and stories prefigure notions of destiny, home, and history in a global context. The show's title comes from "Trouble, I've Had It All My Days" by Mississippi John Hurt, an African-American blues singer whose work Myers often returns to as a source of inspiration and intersection. Hurt's tone, artistry and lyrics are filled with notions of home and return that were central to his music, and the world view that he represented.

Mississippi John Hurt lived at the kind of diasporic crossroads that Myers is consistently exploring - from the distribution models of his work in the new technologies afforded him to the mythologies and lies told around his life. These intersections are reflected throughout references in the exhibition. A search for home and the persistence of historicity remain: in *Touki Bouki*, two queer Senegalese subjects imagine a new home; in the ancient-Greek ritual of Nekiya, history is made manifest towards the future through the mechanism of the ghost. These narratives - at the confluence of mythology, geography, and history - are palpable in Myers' colorful tapestries.

Let the Mermaids Flirt with Me, a collection of stained glass works inspired by another Hurt song, engages the Black aquatic, from the iconography of Brooklyn fire hydrants to Mami Wata; Langston Hughes to the crisis of forced migration. Liquidity, Myers argues - just like music, mythology, and the diasporic condition - is inextricable from the past and bound to the future.

In the words of Toni Morrison: "All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was." Through water, mythos, and music, Myers offers a meditation on diasporic memory - and in conjunction, pain, joy, destiny, and tradition - toward the terms of the world to come.

- COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER MYERS AND JAMES COHAN, NEW YORK.



ABOVE ARTWORK CREDIT Christopher Myers, *Polyphemus (I am nobody)*, 2023. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York. © Christopher Myers 2024. Photo by Dan Bradica.

BELOW ARTWORK CREDIT Christopher Myers, *Polyphemus (I am nobody)* (detail), 2023. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York. © Christopher Myers 2024. Photo by Dan Bradica.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

CHRISTOPHER MYERS

Christopher Myers (b. New York City in 1974) is an artist and writer whose work across disciplines is rooted in storytelling. Myers delves into the past to build narratives that speak to the slippages between history and mythology. His diverse practice spans textiles, performance, film, and sculptural objects, often created in collaboration with artisans from around the globe. He has worked with traditional shadow puppet makers in Jogjakarta, silversmiths in Khartoum, conceptual video artists in Ho Chi Minh City, young musicians in New Orleans, woodcarvers in Accra, weavers in Luxor, metal workers in Kenya, and textile printers in Copenhagen. These collaborations are driven by his interest in understanding the ways in which globalization is intimately intertwined with notions of self and community.



Courtesy the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photo by Tricia Zigmund.

Myers is part of a lineage of artists for whom the seemingly domestic and ornamental quality of the tapestry belies a rich tradition of radical craft. This medium has created physical space and pathways for resistance and liberation within the handmade object. In his ongoing series of textile works, Myers uses appliqué, a technique that appears often in quilting and banner making, and has developed as a tangible union of diverse cultural and visual practices – African, European, and American.

Each of Myers' artworks highlight extraordinary histories and contexts, translating careful research into evocative material form. One recent monumental tapestry, *What Does It Mean to Matter (Community Autopsy)* (2019), depicts the abstracted figures of nine victims of police violence, yellow and red fabric targets indicating wounds mapped by forensic autopsy diagrams. *The Talented Tenth and the Beauty of Statistics* (2019), transforms the data visualization created by WEB Du Bois and his team of Black sociologists for the Paris Exposition of 1900 into abstract geometric appliqué.



Christopher Myers, *A Story Falls Into The Ocean* (Based on the film, *Touki Bouki*), 2020. Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer. © Christopher Myers 2024. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York.

Working with longtime collaborator Kaneza Schaal, Myers has designed theater that has travelled from PS122 in New York City to the Genocide Memorial Theater in Kigali, Rwanda. Major upcoming projects include *Fire in the Head: The Journals of Vaslav Nijinsky*, an evening-length theatrical work conceived, designed and directed by Myers and *King Leopold II*, co-directed by Myers and Schaal and designed by Myers, which will premiere at the Walker Art Center in January 2022. He has collaborated with Hank Willis Thomas on a short film *Am I Going Too Fast*, which premiered at Sundance, and has written essays that have been published by *The New York Times*.

Christopher Myers earned his B.A. in Art-Semiotics and American Civilization with focus on race and culture from Brown University in 1995 and participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Studio Program in 1996. His work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally at venues including MoMA PS1; Art Institute of Chicago; Akron Art Museum; Contrast Gallery, Shanghai; Goethe-Institut, Accra, Ghana; San Art, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. His work is included in the permanent collections of institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Studio Museum in Harlem. Myers won a Caldecott Honor in 1998 for his illustrations in the book *Harlem* and a Coretta Scott King Award in 2016 for illustrating *Firebird* with Misty Copeland. Myers currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

About the Gantt

Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture is a multi-disciplinary arts institution located in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina. Founded in 1974, the Gantt Center's mission is to present, preserve and celebrate excellence in the art, history and culture of African-Americans and those of African descent through visual and literary arts, dance music, film, educational programs, theatre productions and community outreach. The Gantt Center features fine art exhibitions from around the world and is home to the nationally celebrated John and Vivian Hewitt Collection of African-American Art, which was generously donated by Bank of America, and is accessible online.

Named for Charlotte civic leader and former mayor Harvey Bernard Gantt, the Gantt is housed in an iconic, award-winning structure designed by architect Philip Freelon, co-designer of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).



Harvey B. Gantt Center
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AT LEVINE CENTER FOR THE ARTS
551 S.TRYON ST • CHARLOTTE, NC 28202
704.547.3700 • GANTTCENTER.ORG

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