

Kennedi Carter

Sight Unseen



GALLERY GUIDE

OCTOBER 6, 2023 - JANUARY 15, 2024

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CURATOR

ESSAY BY LEANDRA-JULIET KELLEY

Kennedi Carter: *Sight Unseen* explores the photographer's intimate and authentic depictions of Black life. Born and raised in Durham, North Carolina, Kennedy Carter has garnered international acclaim through her portraits of "overlooked beauties of the Black experience: skin, texture, trauma, peace, love, and community." Defined as "without inspection or appraisal," Carter's work exemplifies the phrase "sight unseen." Her images approach and depict moments without judgement or preconceived notions of what constitutes memorable or worthy. This exhibition draws on Carter's ability to capture moments often overlooked or invisible to society – the "unseen."

BOTTOM LEFT Kennedy Carter, *Gone*, 2021, Archival pigment print, 22.5 x 30 inches, Courtesy of the artist and ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica, California.

TOP RIGHT Kennedy Carter, *Jaelle II*, 2020, Archival pigment print, 22.5 x 30 inches, Courtesy of the artist and ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica, California.



Featuring a number of new works, the exhibition demonstrates the breadth of Carter’s vision and provides a glimpse into the personal worlds she photographs. *Gone* (2021) and *Jaelle II* (2020) offer intriguing insights into such worlds. In both images, the figure is photographed from behind, providing the viewer with layered perspectives – what the subject sees and what the photographer sees. Both figures face a horizon, one of mountains and the other, a row of suburban homes. These static backdrops are contrasted with what can be described as “still movement.” In *Gone*, the desert wind’s flowing dress is frozen in time by the camera’s lens. *Jaelle II* depicts a young girl with a pinwheel in her right hand and a bed sheet hanging on a clothes line before her, both objects seem to wait in anticipation of the next gust of wind.

Both photographs display an array of earth tones – from green and brown to yellow, taupe, and other pastels – all of which mingle below the pale blue sky. The color palettes express a connection with nature. Even in the suburban landscape of *Jaelle II*, the young girl stands barefoot, grounded and connected to the earth.

A cyclical relationship emerges between the artist, the viewer, and the work of art. Such a relationship requires open engagement. In both *Gone* and *Jaelle II*, the figures’ faces are turned away. A sense of mystery and intrigue befall the subjects. Who are they? What are they thinking? In the same

**“THIS EXHIBITION DRAWS
ON CARTER’S ABILITY
TO CAPTURE MOMENTS
OFTEN OVERLOOKED OR
INVISIBLE TO SOCIETY...”**

vein, an element of mystery befalls this multi-faceted relationship between artist, viewer, and artwork. Although biographical information about an artist is often readily available, viewers are unknown to the artist. The artist-viewer-artwork relationship is linked through anonymity while remaining open

and unguarded. Such a bond is continuous and potentially never-ending. As Robert Storr writes, exhibitions can serve as “the beginning of a renewable acquaintance with someone or something it will take a long time to know well and whom one will never know completely.” Carter’s photography introduces the viewer to worlds “unseen.” As the photograph *Gone* suggests, Carter’s relationship with the subject is borderless and, as a result, the viewer’s subsequent engagement with the artwork has no bounds.

1 Robert Storr, “Show and Tell,” in *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, ed. Paula Marincola (London: Reaktion Books, Limited, 2007), 14-31.



About the Artist

KENNEDI CARTER

A Durham, North Carolina native by way of Dallas, Texas, Kennedy Carter is a photographer with a primary focus on Black subjects. Her work highlights the aesthetics and sociopolitical aspects of Black life and aims to reinvent notions of creativity and confidence in the realm of Blackness.

When capturing portraits, Carter aims to help her subjects feel at ease and comfortable sharing themselves. She connects with her subjects closely and with care to ensure a bond between photographer and subject.



Kennedi Carter, *(Untitled) Self Portrait*, 2019, Courtesy of The Michael G. and C. Jane Wilson 2007 Trust.

About the Curator

LEANDRA-JULIET KELLEY

Leandra-Juliet Kelley is a curator and art historian based in Charlotte, North Carolina. Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Kelley earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ethnomusicology from Earlham College where her love of art and music resulted in a documentary on Cincinnati's electronic music scene. In 2014, Kelley earned a Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology at King's College London with her dissertation that integrated interviews and a photographic series of the local grime music scene.

While abroad, Kelley traveled extensively throughout the UK and Europe, residing in Rome, Italy for a time. Upon returning to the US, she lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, working for the Cincinnati Art Museum, Taft Museum of Art, and Contemporary Arts Center before relocating to Charlotte, North Carolina in 2016. While in Charlotte, Kelley worked at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art before returning to the UK in 2019 to earn a Master of Science degree in the History of Art (Theory & Display) from the University of Edinburgh. She currently resides in Charlotte, North Carolina where she works as the Director of Collections + Curatorial Affairs at Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture.



Kennedi Carter, *Ridin Sucka Free I*, 2019, Archival pigment print, 31.5 x 39.5 inches, Courtesy of the artist and ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica, California.



Kennedi Carter, *Grooming*, 2020, Archival pigment print, 20 x 20 inches, Courtesy of the artist and ROSEGALLERY, Santa Monica, California.

About the Gantt

Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture is a multidisciplinary arts institution located in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina. Founded in 1974, the Gantt'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 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).

Join us on socials! @HBGanttCenter



Harvey B. Gantt Center
for African-American Arts+Culture

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



Harvey B. Gantt Center is supported, in part, by the Infusion Fund and its generous donors.