

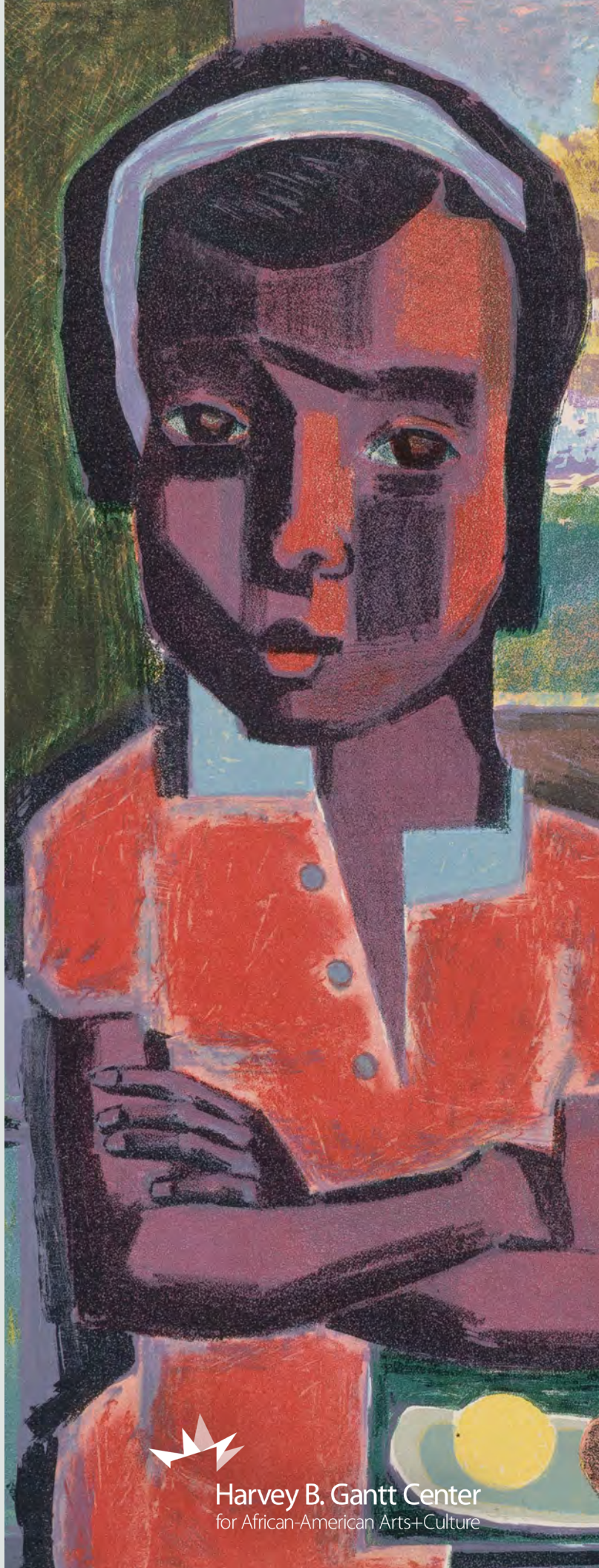
# V I S I O N S

| A Study of Form

## GALLERY GUIDE

JANUARY 27 – JULY 23, 2023

Robert Blackburn, *Girl in Red*, 1950. Lithograph on paper, 18 1/4 x 12 1/2 inches, courtesy of the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African-American Art. © The Trust for Robert Blackburn. Used with permission.



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

## *Visions* Features Original Art From

Romare Bearden

J. Eugene Grigsby

Robert Blackburn

Ronald Joseph

Calvin Burnett

Paul Keene

Ralph Chessé

Hughie Lee-Smith

Ernest Crichlow

Haywood Rivers

Joseph Delaney

Walter Sanford

James Denmark

Thelma Johnson Streat

Herbert Gentry

Hale A. Woodruff

## About the Curator

### **LEANDRA-JULIET KELLEY**

Leandra-Juliet Kelley is a curator and art historian based in Charlotte, North Carolina. Originally from Dayton, Ohio, Leandra earned a BA in Ethnomusicology from Earlham College where her love of art and music resulted in a documentary on Cincinnati's electronic music scene. In 2014, Leandra earned an MA 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, Leandra traveled extensively throughout the UK and Europe, residing in Rome, Italy for a time. Upon returning to the U.S., 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, Leandra worked at the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art for over three years before returning to the UK in 2019 to earn a MSc 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 Collections + Exhibitions Manager at the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture.

# Visions: A Study of Form

On view from January 27 to July 23, 2023

*Essay written by Leandra-Juliet Kelley*

*Visions: A Study of Form* examines African Americans of the 20th century and their explorations of natural and abstract forms through various media. The techniques employed by these artists demonstrate not only their mastery, but their approaches to capturing and illustrating sentiments, societal perspectives, and quotidian moments. *Visions* analyses the forms within these works - the silhouettes, patterns, range of hues, and brush strokes - to reveal the motives and inspirations that lie beneath.

## ARTIST IN FOCUS: THELMA JOHNSON STREAT

This notion is exemplified in Thelma Johnson Streat's artwork, which examined the place of Blacks within American society. Born on August 29, 1912 in Yakima Washington, Streat began creating art at a young age. In her 20s and 30s, her watercolor and oil works were exhibited at the De Young Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Art, with the Museum of Modern Art purchasing her painting *Rabbit Man* in 1942.

Streat transitioned her focus to murals and in 1945, she chaired a committee dedicated to sponsoring murals for "Negro in Labor" education.<sup>1</sup> This same year, Streat painted *The Negro in Professional*

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<sup>1</sup> Ginny Allen, *Thelma Johnson Streat (1912-1959)*, Oregon Encyclopedia, 2022.

BELOW ARTWORK CREDIT: Robert Blackburn, *Color Symphony*, 1960, Color Lithograph, 28 1/2 x 34 1/2 inches, Courtesy of the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African-American Art, © The Trust for Robert Blackburn. Used with permission.





*[Streat's] works are accessible – her color choice and use of soft edges – while challenging the viewer, serving as a mirror for societal self-reflection.*

*Life (Mural Study Featuring Women in the Workplace)* on view in *Visions: A Study of Form*.

In *The Negro in Professional Life*, yellows, pinks, reds, whites, creams, and blues guide you through a tapestry of scenes depicting challenges of the workforce in the United States. Her use of red, white, and blue harks back to the colors of the United States flag while yellow evokes a sense of hope and perseverance. In the top left corner, we see two female figures with a plow and a farmhouse in the distance. As we move clockwise, three Black figures are stopped from joining the line of White jobseekers while three more Black individuals look on. Above the line of White applicants, we see a sign reading "Help Wanted (White Only)." To the right, a Black woman and White woman attentively watch a Black man as he holds a tool with a distant cityscape behind him, mirroring the female farmers to the left. Two maids are depicted towards the bottom of the painting while three women collect cotton and Black hands hover over cotton stems. In contrast to the line of detailed White workers above, silhouettes of four Black figures appear at the bottom of the painting, faceless and looking in one direction.

Streat added handwritten text throughout the painting. In addition to the "Help Wanted (White Only)" sign, "WAR" is written in large



ABOVE ARTWORK CREDIT

LEFT: Thelma Johnson Streat, *Herd of Cattle*, c.1940, Oil on Canvas, 24 1/2 x 26 inches, Courtesy of the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art

RIGHT: Thelma Johnson Streat, *The Negro in Professional Life (Mural Study Featuring Women in the Workplace)*, 1945, Watercolor, ink, and crayon on cardstock, 10 x 20 inches, Courtesy of the Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African American Art

red letters above the cityscape with a smoke cloud billowing in the background. In red cursive and block letters, Streat writes, "Negro woman [sic] for many years picked cotton, worked on farms and did the housework. Other jobs were closed to them. They made great contributions to our nation's wealth by their sweat and toil." Streat outlines the everyday challenges facing Black Americans in the workplace, painting the fatigue and determination present in the quest for equality and respect. *The Negro in Professional Life* showcases Streat's ability to convey important topics, educating while prompting discourse. Her works are accessible - her color choice and use of soft edges - while challenging the viewer, serving as a mirror for societal self-reflection.

*Visions: A Study of Form* encourages visitors to take a moment with these works of art, noticing the individual elements - the colors, shapes, layers. In doing so, the internal meanings of these works and values of the artists will begin to appear. Like Streat, African American artists utilized a range of media to depict the shifting shapes and ideals of society, encapsulating their personal stories and preserving these visions for future reflection.



Hale A. Woodruff, *The Card Players*, 1978, oil on canvas, 36 x 42.25 inches, Permanent Collection of the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture. Generously donated by Bank of America Corporation.

## About the Gantt Center

The 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 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 Center is housed in an iconic, award-winning structure designed by architect Philip Freelon, co-designer of the Smithsonian National Museum for African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

**For more information about the Gantt Center, visit [ganttcenter.org](http://ganttcenter.org)  
and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.**



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