

BEDFORD GALLERY PRESENTS
**THE HARMON & HARRIET KELLEY COLLECTION
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART: WORKS ON PAPER**



Now through December 18, 2022
Leshar Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek

WALNUT CREEK, CA (27 October 2022) —*The Harmon & Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art: Works on Paper*, an exhibition that celebrates 54 African American artists and their tremendous contributions to U.S. art and culture, continues at Bedford Gallery through December 18. Curated from the extensive collection of Harmon and Harriet Kelley, featured artists include Grafton Tyler Brown, the first documented professional graphic artist on the West Coast, and contemporary printmakers like Margo Humphrey. The works on paper – spanning the 20th and early 21st centuries – consist of drawings, etchings, watercolors, pastels, and color screen prints that chronicle the lives of Black Americans through scenes of family and community, urban and rural workers, poverty and success, cultural pride, and political turmoil. Presented by **Bedford Gallery**, and organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA, *The Harmon & Harriet Kelley Collection of African American Art: Works on Paper* is on view **now through December 18, 2022**, from 12:00pm-5:00pm, Wednesday through Sunday at **Bedford Gallery** in the **Leshar Center for the Arts**, 1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$5, free for children under 13 and Bedford Gallery members), visit www.bedfordgallery.com. Tickets can be purchased online or at the door.

This exhibition provides a rare opportunity for visitors to experience the master graphics of African American art. The majority of the works were produced in the 1930s and 40s, during the Great Depression when the Works Progress Administration of the Federal Arts Project provided employment for many artists. Rural and urban settings in bold post-cubistic style were depicted

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in many of the works, including scenes showing factory workers, dockworkers, farmers, bridge builders, and road menders.

By the 1950s, many African American artists favored abstract expressionism, choosing nonrepresentational subject matter over traditional imagery. Other artists, including Charles White, Jacob Lawrence, John Biggers, Romare Bearden, Claude Clark, and Elizabeth Catlett – all of whom are featured in this exhibition – defied this influence and continued their explorations in African American imagery.

The 1960s and early 70s gave birth to the politically motivated and African inspired art of the civil rights period. While African Americans had always made valuable contributions to American art, they were hardly recognized due to the brutalities of slavery and the systemic racism of Jim Crow laws. Despite continued oppression, African American artists continued to create works that would reflect their experiences. During the Civil Rights era, the political use of art became a popular form of activism – marking the beginning of the Black Arts Movement throughout the 1960s and 70s. Known for resisting traditional Western influences and finding new ways to portray the Black experience, this African American-led art movement shared many of the ideologies of Black self-determination, political beliefs, and African American culture. Among the civil rights-themed works in this exhibition are a 1963 lithograph by Jacob Lawrence entitled *Two Rebels* and Elizabeth Catlett’s well-known print, *Malcolm Speaks For Us* from 1969.

By the late 20th and into the early 21st century, contemporary artists began to emerge – from Margo Humphrey to Alison Saar, Dean Mitchell, Robert Colescott, Lionel Lofton, Charles Criner, and self-taught artists Bert Long and Ike E. Morgan. Examples of their works bring a contemporary perspective to this extensive exhibit.

Artists included:

Ron Adams (1934-2020)
Benny Andrews (1930-2006)
Romare Bearden (1911-1988)
John Thomas Biggers (1924-2001)
Robert Hamilton Blackburn (1920-2003)
Elmer W. Brown (1909-1971)
Grafton Tyler Brown (1841-1918)
Calvin Burnett (1921-2007)
Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012)
Claude Clark (1915-2001)
Robert Colescott (1925-2009)
Eldzier Cortor (1916-2015)

Ernest T. Crichlow (1914-2005)
Charles Criner (born 1945)
Mary Reed Daniel (born 1946)
Richard W. Dempsey (1909-1987)
Aaron Douglas (1899-1979)
William McKnight Farrow (1885-1967)
Allan Randall Freelon (1895-1960)
Reginald Gammon (1921-2005)
Rex Goreleigh (1902-1986)
Margo Humphrey (born 1942)
William H. Johnson (1901-1970)
Sargent Johnson (1888-1967)

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Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998)
Lawrence Arthur Jones (1910-1996)
Paul F. Keene, Jr. (1920-2009)
Wifredo Lam (1902-1982)
Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000)
Norman Lewis (1909-1979)
Lionel Lofton (born 1954)
Bert L. Long, Jr. (1940-2013)
Whitfield Lovell (born 1959)
Sam Middleton (1927-2015)
Dean Mitchell (born 1957)
Ike E. Morgan (born 1958)
William Pajaud (1925-2015)
Alison Saar (born 1956)
Charles Louis Sallée, Jr. (1913-2006)

William Edouard Scott (1884-1964)
Charles Sebree (1914-1985)
William E. Smith (1913-1997)
Albert A. Smith (1896-1940)
Raymond Steth (1916-1997)
Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937)
Margaret Taylor-Burroughs (1917-2010)
Alma Woodsey Thomas (1891-1978)
Dox Thrash (1893-1965)
James Lesesne Wells (1902-1993)
Charles White (1918-1979)
Hilda Wilkinson Brown (1894-1981)
Walter Williams (1920-1998)
John Woodrow Wilson (1922-2015)
Hale Aspacio Woodruff (1900-1980)

About Harmon & Harriet Kelley

Harmon and Harriet Kelley collected the majority of their works during a short decade beginning in 1987 – a time at which works by acclaimed African American artists had become scarce in the art market. They were inspired to begin collecting after viewing an exhibition of African American art at the San Antonio Museum of Art.

About Bedford Gallery

Bedford Gallery (BG) is a contemporary art space housed in the City of Walnut Creek’s Leshner Center for the Arts that exhibits the work of historic, modern, and contemporary artists. In conjunction with each exhibition, BG offers engaging workshops for the public, varying from arts and crafts with featured artists, to dance performances, gastronomical experiences, and more. BG provides visitors with opportunities to learn about visual arts through public programs that are varied, accessible, challenging, and educational, with a mission to provide exhibitions and other programs that both reflect and engage the diverse audiences of the entire Contra Costa region. In addition to organizing and presenting several exhibitions each year, BG presents lectures, workshops, panel discussions, and other public programs. With 3,500 square feet of exhibition space, Bedford Gallery is the largest community-based visual arts facility between the Bay Area and Sacramento.

About the Leshner Center for the Arts

The **Leshner Center for the Arts** is the premier arts venue in Central Contra Costa County. Located in the heart of downtown Walnut Creek, the center offers three separate theatres and Bedford Gallery, a fine art gallery, presenting the best of theater, ballet, comedy, and visual art.

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For Calendar Editors:

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WHERE: **Bedford Gallery at the Leshner Center for the Arts**
1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek

WHEN: **Now through December 18, 2022**
12:00pm-5:00pm, Wednesday through Sunday

INFO: Bedford Gallery members enjoy free gallery admission (plus one guest) to all exhibitions for a year. For more information or to become a member, the public may call or (925) 295-1417 or visit www.bedfordgallery.com/support/membership.

TICKETS: Nonmember tickets are \$5, and free for children 12 and under. Tickets can be purchased online or at the door.

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PRESS: Contact Sydney Albin Carla Befera & Co.
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PHOTOS: Media may download high-res photos at:
<https://cbpr.co/press/hkafricanamericanart/>