

# Large Print Labels

**The Shape of Abstraction:  
Selections from the Ollie Collection**  
September 17, 2019—March 22, 2020  
Galleries 234 and 235, Main Building

# INFLUENCES ABROAD

Many artists included in this exhibition sought exposure to foreign cultures and landscapes. At various points in their careers, they actively pursued opportunities to travel or even permanently relocate abroad. For 20th-century black American artists, life outside the United States could offer freedom from the debilitating limitations imposed by the discrimination they encountered at home.

Considered a leading venue of modern art, Paris remained a destination of choice for many artists even after World War II (1939–1945).

The artists Herbert Gentry, Ed Clark, Robert Blackburn, Larry Potter, and Sam Middleton each resided there during the 1940s and 1950s. As United States military veterans, several utilized G.I. Bill subsidies to attend the city's prestigious art schools and establish their own studios in this art capital.

Daily life in the battered city of Paris, plagued by food rations and intermittent heat and electricity, proved challenging. However, access to many founders of abstraction, including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Constantin Brancusi, and the intellectual exchange fostered in the vibrant café culture were exceptionally formative. Gentry, Clark, and Middleton lived and worked abroad for decades, seeking, like the other artists in this section, inspiration for their art from their newfound environments.

# ATTENTION TO MATERIALS

Many of the artists in the Ollie Collection emphasized experimentation with materials and processes in the studio. Rather than following prescribed modes of abstraction, they created works that combined techniques borrowed from painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, and sculpture.

The invention of acrylic paint, introduced to the commercial market in the 1960s, was an influential development. Numerous artists such as Frank Bowling, Bill Hutson, and Frank Wimberley made this quick drying medium a central part of their creative practices. Alternatively, others were inspired by ancient techniques, such as James Little's adaption of encaustic painting.

These artists employed new methods of art making, using nontraditional materials like sticks or brooms to apply color and exploring unconventional processes such as dripping, staining, pouring, and weaving. Collage also allowed for a hybrid format combining formal theories with the influence of quilting. Some artists developed systems to streamline their processes. For example, Bowling created a floor platform and specialized stretcher to guide the flow of paint. This constant experimentation remains a critical concern driving these artists' creative approaches.



# REPRESENTATION'S ROLE

Although depicting the human form may seem contradictory to modern abstraction, figural representation has a long, intertwined history with the development of abstraction during the 20th century. Indeed, many artists enjoyed exploring the tension between the naturalistic portrayal of the figure or landscape and a purely abstract vocabulary. This section highlights works by artists who navigated this relationship.

Abstract art was a contentious topic in the black art community during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Black Arts Movement—the aesthetic counterpart to the Black Power Movement—advocated that these artists create empowering images of subjects that directly communicated shared experiences and heritage of their people. According to the Black Arts Movement, abstract art largely failed to meet this charge, and, as a result, the movement criticized many who focused on harnessing the potential of color, line, and shape alone.

For committed abstractionists, Norman Lewis, who articulated his own activism through a combination of abstraction and figuration, often stood as a beacon. From an older generation, Lewis and Herbert Gentry retained the figure to create a dialogue with the automatic, gestural approaches of abstract expressionism. The younger Benny Andrews and William T. Williams tapped surrealist, or dreamlike imagery, and geometric tendencies, respectively.

# TAKING SHAPE

Many artists defining abstraction during the late 20th century made shape the subject of their art. These explorations, combined with concerns for color and materials, manifested myriad visual outcomes from amorphous, fluid fields to crisply defined geometric designs. Moreover, artists' considerations of shape played a vital role in the reassessment of painting during the 1950s and 1960s, when the medium's definition fell under intense scrutiny.

Figures such as Ed Clark, Al Loving, and Sam Gilliam saw the medium as something more than a picture window into an illusionistic space. Thus, they refuted the rectangular canvas and instead configured their supports into rounds, hexagons, notched polygons, and even draped masses.

Clark, who is credited with one of the earliest shaped paintings, observed, "I began to feel something was wrong. Our eyes don't see in rectangles. I was interested in an expanding image, and the best way to expand an image is the oval or ellipse." Recalibrating categories, these artists emphasized the sculptural qualities of painting, as well as drawing and prints, inspiring multimedia and installation artists who followed them.

The five generations of artists represented here revolutionized abstract art from the 1940s to the present. Their innovations with form, color, process, and materials are paramount to the development of abstract expressionism and art movements that followed. Despite their significant contributions, many of these accomplished figures, all of whom are black artists working in the United States and abroad, have remained largely under-recognized and omitted from the existing narrative of art history.

As artists of African descent negotiating

racial inequality, they were often denied entry to exhibition opportunities and professional circles enjoyed by their famed American and European peers. Moreover, dedicated to abstraction, they encountered additional divisions with other black artists who insisted upon addressing issues of identity and struggle through representational art. Facing such headwinds, these abstractionists forged their own networks, fostering connections with each other as well as curators, scholars, dealers, and collectors to support creative production and critical discourse.



The re-examination and celebration of this history is underway. Ronald and Monique Ollie's transformative gift of 81 paintings and works on paper by black abstractionists, donated to the Museum in memory of Mr. Ollie's parents, Thelma and Bert Ollie, is a landmark contribution to this endeavor. The exhibition-its title based on Quincy Troupe's poem to the right-features a selection of works from the gift.



## **The Shape of Abstraction; or *Ron Ollie***

### **By Quincy Troupe**

the shape of abstraction is what the mind believes it sees,  
figures, colors emerging from a canvas  
(or a block of steel, limestone, wood chipped & cut,  
chiseled, shaped into a memory, sanded down,  
refined into grace, polished to a high sheen, almost  
a mirror, reflects a creative imagination, where  
the artist leaves their heart inside a language  
born from power of a hammer's head, artistry evolves  
from there, fertile dreams of makers are transferred  
in boogie-woogie riffs from bebop, deep in delta blues,

live inside a clean womb, hard surfaces birthing faces,  
where voices scat, rap over hot jazz licks in harlem, zing  
original forms, create words-like razzmatatazz-sling them  
sluicing colors into living language-whatever raises to life  
& sings, shocks, or disgraces the senses-as long as we are  
here in the world, if it doesn't burn, or explode into wars  
created by man-made nuclear infernos-when horror,  
conflict is chosen over beauty-a brushstroke can evoke  
memory as love, heard sometimes in whispers),

is what a painter's brushstrokes bring to life from empty  
blank white wombs of canvases-they could be red, brown,  
black, tan, or yellow canvases-until unknown pulse beats

birth embryos from there, raise them into breathing forms from deep  
inside creative impulses, splashed with colors,  
tones, as when we look up at cloud formations & see  
in the sky wonders, images created up there are their own  
music, rhythm, as when the sea rolls in clapping waves  
foaming, roaring, then snarling into what eye imagine  
mad animals might hear when suffering with rabies,  
on the other hand eye imagine eyeballs bulging to see  
what a ship way out on the infinite, razor-sharp blade edge

slicing the sea in half might mean from our view here on shore,  
on a gray day full of silhouettes, contours of waving figures,  
outlines of fluctuating images, forms dissipating  
inside exhaust gasses belching from a smokestack vessel's  
burner trailing shapes behind it as it sails eastward  
toward some unknown port it will reach in the dark dead  
moment right before midnight, a star shining bright high  
above in the night, is a white echo of light showing the way,  
or is a one-eyed cyclops blinking down from history,



they are paintings after all, disintegrating on that blue grey canvas of sky, is a rorschach test of faith, of what one thinks the eye recognizes as art, transfers back to probe the brain in an instant of volatility-which is the push & pull of capricious decision-making filled with impulsive hints of what or what not to choose when eyeing creative choices offered up as barter, in exchange for banknotes, trade, switch or swap, is a form of negotiation, is a haggling bargain point, which is an art form of sorts too, though not the same creative level of expression true art springs from-

because art is shrouded inside mystery & magic  
it is a force that can enrich, sustain life,  
nourishing through beauty, joy, mirroring truth,  
questioning what we know of ourselves, or don't know,  
asking us questions-why are we here & where  
will all these shapes take us to through colors splashed  
with beauty-or shock-where music evokes lines  
tap-dancing through forms, breaks into rhythms,  
takes us to a place where imagination wanders,  
fills up space with magical, mysterious wonder

Ed Clark

American, born 1926

**Untitled (Bahia Series), 1988**

dry pigment and acrylic on paper

Throughout Ed Clark's work, the interplay of color is paramount. In *Untitled (Bahia Series)*, layered and adjacent atmospheric fields of magenta, orange, yellow, and aquamarine create complex visual relationships. Clark often credits his environment as being the catalyst for new, unexpected chromatic explorations. Since 1971, he has completed multiple working trips abroad to Greece, Nigeria, Mexico, Martinique, Brazil, and China, among other locations, to inform his art. While in the Bahia region of Brazil, the area's coastal light inspired a series of works including this one.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 130:2017

Larry Potter  
American, 1925–1966

**Untitled**, n.d.  
gouache and acrylic on paper

The green and blue fields and sporadic black lines dividing this composition reflect the way Larry Potter transformed color with opaque or nontransparent paints. This work was likely made after the artist's move from New York to Paris in 1958. Shortly after his arrival, Potter noted how the environment influenced him to use blues and greens. In the city, he focused his time on intensive studio sessions and lively debate with fellow artists, including Herbert Gentry, whom he befriended there. Gentry observed that Potter “painted like he argued, and he argued aggressively....”

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 178:2017



Stanley Whitney  
American, born 1946

**Out into the Open, 2000**  
acrylic on canvas

In this painting, squares of bold colors form a loosely organized grid. Stanley Whitney's travels abroad and the architecture he encountered influenced his work significantly. Visiting Rome in 1992, he admired the blocks used to construct monumental ancient structures. Later, in 1994, he said, "I went to Egypt—the pyramids and all the tombs. I realized that I could stack all the colors together, and not move the air. I realized in Egypt—it just came to me—that I could get the kind of density I wanted in the work."

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 193:2017

Winston Branch  
British, born St. Lucia, 1947

**III**, 2001  
gouache and oil on paper

The smeared and blotched application of color—a verdant green accented by bright spots of red, pink, and blue—resembles lush, blooming vegetation. This work approximates the forest surrounding Winston Branch’s studio, which he constructed in his home country of St. Lucia following three decades in London. The influence of location is an important aspect of Branch’s artwork. To capture the energy of a landscape, he often taps into his memories of past residences and travels.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 123:2017

Sam Middleton  
American, 1927–2015

**Untitled**, 1990

collage of cut and torn printed and painted papers,  
with paint and graphite

This work is populated with layered references to the artist's life in the Netherlands, where he relocated in 1961. Cut and torn ephemera form a textured collage: stamps, receipts, and musical scores with Dutch text, along with a small black-and-white image of windmills and a map of the Netherlands. The primary colors—blue, red, and yellow—refer to important Dutch artists active in the early 20th century. The underlying blue and image of a seagull suggest traditional Dutch seascapes.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 174:2017

Evangeline Montgomery  
American, born 1933  
published and printed by Brandywine Workshop,  
Philadelphia

**Sunset**, 1997  
offset lithograph and screenprint

*Sunset* evokes flames engulfing redwood trees during a wildfire, a distinct memory from the artist's time living in California from 1955 to 1976. Memory is a central theme of Evangeline Montgomery's work. She uses travel diaries and photographs to transform her experiences and awe of nature into visual representations. Montgomery traveled extensively throughout her career starting in 1983, when she began work for the Arts America Program at the United States Information Agency. In her role there, she coordinated tours of American museum exhibitions at home and abroad.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 176:2017



Herbert Gentry  
American, 1919–2003

**Untitled**, 1971  
ink on paper

**Untitled**, 1974  
graphite on paper

Among a web of interwoven lines, figures gaze and a couple embraces in these minimal, yet lively, drawings. For Herbert Gentry, the interconnected bodies evoke the vast network of international artists, writers, and musicians he developed. First studying in Paris in 1946 and later founding the exhibition space and jazz club Chez Honey there, he reveled in the relationships he cultivated. He was also inspired by the European café culture and its fluid social interactions. He eventually maintained—often simultaneously—homes and studios in five cities, including Stockholm and Copenhagen, among others.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 149,147:2017

Robert Blackburn  
American, 1920–2003  
published and printed by the artist

**Faux Pas**, 1960  
lithograph

A visual symphony of layered colors and shapes, *Faux Pas* represents Robert Blackburn's gestural mode of abstract art. Blackburn developed this approach, which he also applied to his printmaking, following a year of study in Europe on a John Hay Whitney Traveling Fellowship in 1953. A devoted advocate of the medium, he opened the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop in New York in 1948. Several artists in this exhibition produced works there, such as Norman Lewis, Ed Clark, William T. Williams, and Herbert Gentry.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 121:2017

Bill Hutson

American, born 1936

printed by Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia

**Ebco Na**, 1990–91

offset lithograph with acrylic

This work's floating spirals, arcs, and leaf-like shapes are both printed and painted. Bill Hutson is inclined to revise his own compositions and paint on unconventional supports. After returning from Brandywine Workshop with a stack of impressions of the offset lithograph *Ebco Na* and responding to cues from the underlying image, he applied acrylic to create several variations, of which this is one. A staining method is coupled with hand-brushed marks—thick, linear accretions of finely blended color—evoking depth.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 160:2017

Allie McGhee  
American, born 1941

**Moon Dust**, 1994  
acrylic on paper

Allie McGhee drew attention to the physical manipulation of paint in this very tactile work. He allowed the layers to dry between applications, thereby achieving multiple surfaces and preventing colors from mixing. Some hues were applied with a brush, while others were scraped with a palette knife, revealing the texture of the heavy paper below. In addition, the artist used his finger to create spontaneously placed lines through wet paint at the bottom of the image. In this and other examples, the artist alluded to astronomy and the cosmos.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 173:2017

Frank Bowling  
British, born Guyana, 1936

**Fishes, Wishes and Star Apple Blue, 1992**  
acrylic on canvas

The title of this painting evokes a sense of childlike wonder. Frank Bowling referenced the deep indigo color of the star apple, a fruit native to the Caribbean region and his childhood in Guyana. The artist works the surfaces of his paintings with clear acrylic gel using a spatula and a palette knife, often mixing pearlescent and metallic pigments into the paint. After Bowling graduated from the Royal College of Art in London, he began to work with acrylic paint, which was introduced to the commercial market in the 1960s.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 187:2017



Frank Wimberley  
American, born 1926

**Siempre (Always)**, 1998  
collage of cut painted paper with pastel

Energetic gestures of vivid red, yellow, white, and silver seem to fight in a messy brawl against a black background. To achieve this effect, Frank Wimberley incorporated cut pieces from other examples of his work. This technique was utilized by some of the earliest collage artists in the 20th century. Deckled edges, splattered paint, and scratches into existing brush marks add further dimension to the varied surface.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 184:2017

James Little  
American, born 1952

**Study for the Surrogate, 2002**  
watercolor with graphite on paper

Atmospheric areas of color shift from a deep shade of black to bright orange, divided by sharp diagonal lines. When working with watercolor, which provides a brilliant luminosity, James Little will often score the surface with a sharp tool to trap color. As a result, there is a satisfying play between precise geometry of straight lines and the free-form washes achieved with watercolor. Little describes his method as “painting ideas” about color and matter, and his drawings, like this one, are a critical step in this process.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 168:2017

James Little  
American, born 1952

**Double Exposure, 2008**  
oil and wax on canvas

Bright pastel colors and repeated geometric shapes create a dynamic composition; triangular planes transform into vertical stripes from left to right. The title alludes to the photographic technique of double exposure, which combines two separate images to construct a new work. To create his colors and crisp lines, James Little painted with a heated mixture of beeswax and raw pigments, developing a version of the painting technique called encaustic first used by ancient Egyptians and Greeks.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 190:2017

Nanette Carter  
American, born 1954

**Slightly Off Keel #60**, 1999  
oil on Mylar

*Slightly Off Keel #60*—a title referring to a sailboat's delicate balance as it speeds through water—consists of multiple mark-making types, both structured and loose. Moving away from canvas in the late 1990s, Nanette Carter adopted Mylar, a translucent polyester film, as her support of choice, which she admired for its potential to be used on both sides. The material is frosted on the surface, providing a satisfying tooth to hold oil paint, which she applies by brush or sometimes through printing.

Chakaia Booker  
American, born 1953  
published by James E. Lewis Museum of Art  
Foundation, Inc., Baltimore  
printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking  
Workshop, New York

**Untitled**, 2014  
woodcut and lithograph with chine collé

Chakaia Booker combined overlapping shapes produced with relief printmaking and lithography techniques to create this enigmatic image. The arranged and collaged printed papers relate to Booker's sculpting process, in which she assembles large-scale works from cut recycled tires. Some of the elements in this work, especially the repetitive patterns in an inky palette, resemble tire treads or perhaps their imprint.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 122:2017

Frank Wimberley  
American, born 1926

**Journey Signs, 1993**  
acrylic on canvas with collage

This seemingly simple work actually contains many layers of paint and fabric. Scratches through the black on the left reveal a ground of bright orange, also evident under white areas in the lower half. The white rectangle in the center is built up from layers of cut canvas, and its side shimmers with iridescent pinks and gold. Frank Wimberley's approach to assembling these elements was improvisational and inspired by jazz. In turn, it was appreciated by musicians such as Miles Davis, who collected his work.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 194:2017

Alonzo Davis  
American, born 1942

**Rock Steady**, 1992  
collage of cut and woven paper with paint

Constructed of interwoven paper strips, *Rock Steady* combines the bright colors and braided texture of southwestern textiles with the splatters and drips of expressive painting. Alonzo Davis created this work while he was dean of the San Antonio Art Institute during the early 1990s. He was drawn to motifs he encountered in Southwest Native American arts, which led to his “blanket series,” a collection of woven paintings. This work is one of over a hundred in that series, which later inspired large-scale installations.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 134:2017



Herbert Gentry  
American, 1919–2003

**Our Web**, 1990  
watercolor and gouache on paper

**Our Talk**, c.1989  
watercolor and gouache on paper

Herbert Gentry created dream-like fantasy worlds, populated by totems and mask-like faces emerging from a tangle of color contours. A devoted abstractionist, Gentry studied with the French cubist painter Georges Braque and American abstract expressionist artist Beauford Delaney. Gentry retained the figure as a means “to see form.” Above all, Gentry insisted his images be allowed to unfold freely without plan, relying on “a certain spontaneity” where his “subconscious plays a great role.”

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 151,152:2017

Norman Lewis  
American, 1909–1979

**Untitled**, 1966  
oil on paper

Amorphous fields of color create a hazy atmosphere in this experimental painting on paper. Norman Lewis spent most of his life in Harlem and regularly visited galleries and museums around New York City, where he absorbed influences from the art he encountered. He admired a range of styles. In this work, he combined methods of applying paint: both wet-on-wet, wherein water-saturated paper causes colors to bleed into one another, as well as drybrush, an effect achieved by lightly sweeping a brush with minimal pigment over dry paper.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 167:2017

Norman Lewis

American, 1909–1979

printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop,  
New York

**Untitled**, c.1940s

ink on paper

**Togetherness**, 1973

etching

Short, calligraphic brushstrokes appear in this untitled drawing, reflecting the artist's interest in East Asian scroll painting with a similar long, vertical format. Norman Lewis' quick, gestural marks also suggest dispersing figures, like people on a crowded street. After producing artworks for the Work Projects Administration (WPA), a government-sponsored program that provided jobs for Americans during the Great Depression, Lewis migrated away from a representational style. He was one of the first African American artists to experiment with abstract expressionism, although he engaged with abstraction while still alluding to the figure.

In *Togetherness*, dozens of overlapping shapes create a configuration of individuals walking or parading with collective purpose. Lewis was active as a protester for black civil rights and involved with the artists' group Spiral, which sought to raise the visibility of black artists in museums and galleries. In 1947, Lewis began depicting processions of people portrayed as both terrifying and empowering in response to marches of the Ku Klux Klan and civil rights demonstrations during his lifetime.

Lamerol A. Gatewood  
American, born 1954

**Untitled No. 02–038**, 2002  
oil on canvas

Energy pulsates between arcing lines punctuated by layers of red and orange pigment. In the year he created this work, Lamerol Gatewood made many paintings addressing the human form and vessel-like shapes. Here, Gatewood seemingly deconstructs the figure, simplifying the body into a rhythmic set of black curvilinear brushstrokes, which could reference the skeletal structure, perhaps the rib cage. In addition, the parallel hatched linework in the center creates a sense of volume against the flat background.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 135:2017

Benny Andrews  
American, 1930–2006  
printed by Springgraphics, New York

**Black Bird**, 1980  
lithograph

In this lithograph, Benny Andrews depicted a bird taking flight within an ambiguous setting. The surreal landscape relates to his *Utopia* series, in which he imagined an idyllic world without humans—free from all kinds of discrimination. His fantastical scenes, like this one, which fluctuate between abstraction and a representational style, present poignant themes throughout his work. Here, Andrews also explored the perceived textures he could achieve in lithography.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 117:2017

William T. Williams  
American, born 1942  
printed by Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop,  
New York

**Red Fern, 1979**  
etching and aquatint

A bisected rectangle frames a tangle of curvilinear designs, suggesting a window looking out to an active scene. The work's title refers to Redfern Houses, a public housing project in Queens, New York, where William T. Williams spent part of his childhood. Here, the composition resembles architectural plans or some kind of map. Williams was influenced by family quilting patterns and his studies at Yale University under artist Josef Albers, who had also taught at Germany's renowned Bauhaus school of art, architecture, and design.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 182:2017

Jack Whitten  
American, 1939–2018

**Self Portrait, 1993**  
collage of cut painted paper

This fragmented collage comprises a self-portrait. The carefully arranged small squares create a paper version of Jack Whitten's unique approach to painting, where he collaged small tiles of dried acrylic paint. This work is related to a series by Whitten titled *Black Monoliths*, which pays homage to black individuals who contributed to society including poet Maya Angelou and professional boxer Muhammad Ali. With this collage, Whitten places himself among these groundbreaking luminaries. While Whitten's primary focus here was investigating artistic materials, his title also grounds this image in the tradition of portraiture.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 181:2017



Ed Clark  
American, born 1926

**Untitled**, 1968  
acrylic on paper

In this work, horizontal bands of color slice across a round sheet. Ed Clark is considered among the first American artists to experiment with shaped supports, a radical departure from traditional rectangular formats, which redefined painting. He first exhibited his transformative shaped work, which had elements extending beyond the frame, in 1957 at the Brata Gallery. This was an influential venue in New York at the heart of the city's mid-century avant-garde art scene. In 1968, he began to explore circular and oval profiles, of which this work is an early example.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 125:2017

Al Loving  
American, 1935–2005

**Mercer Street series VI**, 1986  
collage of painted and printed papers

This brightly colored geometric composition is part of a series inspired by the architecture Al Loving encountered on Mercer Street in Manhattan. The edges of the sheet are irregular and symbolize an imperfect box that alludes to the form of a building. In the 1980s, Loving started experimenting with the print medium following a number of artist residencies and incorporated handmade and printed papers into collages such as this.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 171:2017

Sam Gilliam  
American, born 1933

**Half Circle Red, 1975**  
acrylic on canvas

Sam Gilliam's *Half Circle Red* combines separate pieces of canvas, which gap, bulge, and double over. Without a traditional mount or frame, they are pinned in place directly to the wall. Interested in how his paintings interact with the surrounding space, Gilliam jettisoned stretchers—typically wooden rectangular support structures—altogether during the late 1960s. Instead, his relaxed, undulating canvases suspend from the wall or ceiling to create “drape” paintings. This method, along with his drip and stain painting technique, emphasized the intrinsic properties of his materials—how acrylic pools and canvas sags, for example.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 189:2017a,b

Al Loving

American, 1935–2005

published and printed by Brandywine Workshop,  
Philadelphia

## **Life and Continual Growth, 1988**

collage of cut printed paper with acrylic

For many years, Al Loving adopted the spiral as a central motif. The shape appears here in repeated variations, and for the artist, it signifies life and continued growth. His interest in the spiral was inspired by the imagery associated with the religious traditions of Santeria and Vodou, which the artist encountered on a visit to Cuba. Here Loving used collage, a technique he adopted in the 1970s in response to memories of his grandmother's quilts, to manifest his experimentations with the spiral form.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 170:2017

Al Loving  
American, 1935–2005

**Zayamaca #4**, 1993  
collage of painted paper mounted on Plexiglas

Layered spirals—a signature motif for Al Loving—create a dynamic vertical composition, which seems to sprout new forms as it ascends the wall. Since his early career, the artist created sprawling configurations of repeated shapes large enough to take over walls. Loving, along with contemporaries such as Sam Gilliam, was interested in producing art that rejected traditional supports such as wooden stretchers or frames. For this work, he constructed a Plexiglas backing, which gives the collage a free-floating sculptural presence.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 172:2017

Sam Gilliam  
American, born 1933

**Ruby and Ossie, 2000**  
acrylic on plywood with metal hardware

In this work, flowing passages of color interact with elliptical voids cut to reveal the space behind. In addition, the panel's right side, mounted on a hinge, pivots forward. This interaction with the surrounding space continues Sam Gilliam's longstanding interest in the sculptural qualities of painting, which began to occupy his art during the 1960s. Following his earlier canvas-based "drape" paintings on view nearby, Gilliam turned to industrial materials such as plywood and metal after completing several large-scale public installations in the 1980s. These projects inspired the artist to investigate architectural considerations of construction and assembly.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 188:2017

Sam Gilliam

American, born 1933

published and printed by Brandywine Workshop,  
Philadelphia

**Golden Neck, 1993–94**

screenprint, offset lithograph, and hand-applied acrylic,  
with stitching

Complex color and texture are evident in *Golden Neck*, which is assembled from fragments of printed paper thickly coated with acrylic and stitched. As with his shaped paintings, including *Half Circle Red* also on view in this gallery, Sam Gilliam's prints, like this one, often deviate from the traditional rectangular format and have sculptural qualities. Working experimentally at Brandywine Workshop, a studio founded in 1972 to expand printmaking opportunities for artists of color, Gilliam cut up, reassembled, sewed, and raked paint across the prints he pulled from the presses.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 154:2017



Ed Clark  
American, born 1926

**Untitled**, 1969  
acrylic and dry pigment on paper

Ed Clark produced bands of interfused color, such as those evident in this work, by pushing pigments across the surface with a single, swift stroke. This maneuver, often executed horizontally on a floor, offers Clark the implied motion he desires in his images—a directional force further accentuated by a shaped support. He explained, “It seemed to me that the oval as a natural shape could best express movement extended beyond the limits of the canvas.”

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 126:2017

Sam Gilliam  
American, born 1933

**Hav-a-Tampa 15, 1995**  
screenprint and monoprint, with stitching

In this work, yellow and orange irregular rectangles appear to pass over as well as slip behind the dominant blue and violet background. Faint lattice-like patterns advance and recede throughout the composition. Sam Gilliam produced this complex optical space by overlapping layers of ink in varying opacity and translucency. This effect can be linked to the artist's early experiments with watercolor—specifically the medium's sheer, luminous quality.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 155:2017

Ellsworth Ausby  
American, 1942–2011

**Meditation in Blue**, 1998  
acrylic on paper

With its bold colors and clearly defined shapes, this work is a vibrant example of hard-edged geometric abstraction. Multiple layers create a rough texture, so that the predominant blues give the impression of a swirling vortex. Dynamic angles and varying patterns keep the eye moving around the composition. The artist also made works in stained glass.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 118:2017

Terry Adkins  
American, 1953–2014

**Untitled**, 1979  
ink and gouache with graphite on paper

A vibrant celebration of color and form, Terry Adkins' drawing features three geometric arrangements stacked along a central axis. Each is comprised of an upper arc of fanned wedges, some densely toned, and others dappled with stain, resting upon a concave curve. Together, these parts approximate a circle, a shape that remained a recurring and evocative motif for Adkins throughout his career as a sculptor and conceptual artist. For him, the circle became an indicator of sound, and in later works, he often incorporated rounded parts of musical instruments, such as drumheads and horn bells.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 114:2017

Mary Lovelace O'Neal

American, born 1942

published and printed by Brandywine Workshop,  
Philadelphia

**City Lights (Prophet with No Tongue), 1988**

offset lithograph and screenprint

This print is constructed of cut paper inked with colors that evoke a city skyline. The deep blue is punctuated by bright pinks and yellows—evidence of bright lights in a bustling metropolis—and the irregular shape evokes a silhouetted cityscape. Mary Lovelace O'Neal worked primarily as a painter until 1984, when Robert Blackburn invited her to his printmaking studio. Captivated by the print medium, she created this work at the Brandywine Workshop in Philadelphia in 1988.

The Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection,  
Gift of Ronald and Monique Ollie 177:2017

## **An Ocean Apart: American Artists Abroad**

New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem,  
1982, designed by Al Cucci

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art Museum *An Ocean Apart: American Artists Abroad* presented the work of four black American artists-Herbert Gentry, Clifford Jackson, Sam Middleton, and Walter Williams-who left the United States to pursue their art. Each established a significant career in Europe following World War II (1939-1945), and the exhibition and catalogue reintroduced their work to an American audience. In her catalogue essay, art historian Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell recognized that generations of black artists "lived abroad because they were convinced they could not create freely in America nor could they receive serious critical attention."

## **Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop: Artists of Color**

New York: Printmaking Workshop, 1991  
designed by Judy Collis chan

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of  
Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research  
and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art  
Museum

## **A Place by the Sea: Gregory Coates, Nanette Carter, Frank Wimberley, Alvin Loving**

Albany, NY: The Sage Colleges, 1999  
designed by Rebecca Damour

*(left, closed)*

Richardson Memorial Library, Saint Louis Art Museum

*(right, open)*

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art Museum

The four individuals featured in *A Place by the Sea* share a deep connection to the shore town of Sag Harbor on the eastern tip of Long Island, New York, a region long renowned for its artist enclaves. Sag Harbor supported a community of black artists and intellectuals since the 1920s, and Frank Wimberley built a home there in 1965. Young artists, including Nanette Carter,



gravitated to him, resulting in a supportive network that nurtured the pursuit of abstraction.

## **RESEARCH MATERIALS FROM THE OLLIE COLLECTION**

The items in this case are a small sampling of exhibition catalogues pertaining to the artists whose works Ronald Ollie collected. Over a 30-year period, Ollie amassed a sizable number of books, catalogues, biographies, brochures, posters, postcards, and gallery guides. They emphasize themes such as abstraction, innovation, diaspora, collaboration, and mentorship and chronicle Ollie's rich social engagements with gallerists, dealers, artists, and their families. Their international scope makes them especially suited to in-depth research on the history of black abstractionists and their collectors. Such resources are growing incredibly scarce. Many are classified as ephemera, fleeting records of everyday life.

With aims toward preservation and future educational programming, Ollie donated these research materials to the Saint Louis Art Museum. They are available to researchers by appointment in the Museum's Archives.

**Dix artistes negres des Etats-Unis: Premier festival mondial des arts negres, Dakar, Senegal, 1966 (Ten Negro Artists from the United States: First World Festival of Negro Arts, Dakar, Senegal, 1966)**

New York: United States Committee for the First World Festival of Negro Arts, 1966 designed by Joseph Lawe

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art Museum

This catalogue presents the work of 10 black American artists, including Sam Gilliam, whose work was featured at the First World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1966. Organized as a collaboration between the Government of Senegal, UNESCO, and the Societe africaine de culture, the festival featured an exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture by artists throughout the African diaspora.

It represented the first of many pan-African cultural festivals that followed in the 1960s and 1970s, shedding light on the anti-colonial struggle.

## **The Deluxe Show**

Houston: Menil Foundation, 1971  
designed by Penny Johnson

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of  
Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research  
and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art  
Museum

*The Deluxe Show*, credited as the first integrated exhibition of white and black artists in the United States, featured the latest innovations in abstraction. Works by Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, and Al Loving, among 16 others, were installed in the repurposed De Luxe movie theater (pictured on the catalogue's cover) in Houston's Fifth Ward, a district facing impoverishment and violence. The unconventional setting was chosen "to let people who don't normally attend museums to see some of the best work that's being created in our time."

## **Blacks: USA: 1973**

New York: The New York Cultural Center in  
association with Fairleigh Dickinson University,  
1973

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of  
Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research  
and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art  
Museum

## **Afro-American Abstraction: An Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture by Nineteen Black American Artists**

New York: April Kingsley, 1981  
designed by Michael Edstrom

Thelma and Bert Ollie Memorial Collection of  
Abstract Art by Black Artists: Files for Research  
and Education, Archives, Saint Louis Art Museum

*Afro-American Abstraction* opened in 1980 at PS., an exhibition space in Long Island City, Queens. The space had existed since 1971 to showcase the innovative and experimental work of contemporary artists. The *Afro-American Abstraction* exhibition was an important survey of contemporary painting and sculpture by 19 black American artists organized by curator and art historian April Kingsley. It included seven artists also in this exhibition: Ellsworth Ausby, Ed Clark, Sam Gilliam, James Little, Al Loving, Jack Whitten, and William T. Williams.