

H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute

16 East 43rd Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64111

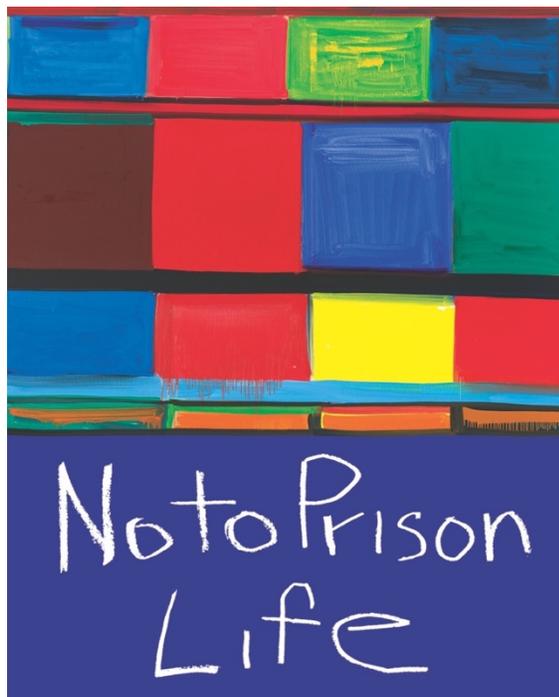
816.561.5563 | www.kcai.edu/artspace

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 12:00-5:00 p.m.

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NEWS RELEASE

PROJECT WALL: STANLEY WHITNEY



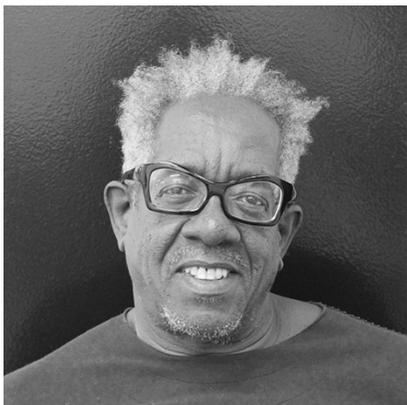
Kansas City, Mo. (March 29, 2019) – Representing his first commissioned public art project, internationally recognized artist Stanley Whitney will utilize the H&R Block Artspace Project Wall to deliver an emphatic message.

Known for his painterly, abstract compositions of organic grids with vertical and horizontal bands and blocks in vibrant hues, Whitney’s characteristic approach to painting is as an architect and builder of pictorial color. Parallel to this deep, lifelong study, however, is a smaller and lesser known series of drawings by the artist with words and phrases that explore relationships between text and image and their attendant meanings.

In *No to Prison Life*, Whitney worked with guest curator Larry Ossei-Mensah, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD) Susanne Feld Hilberry Senior Curator, to create and contextualize a new work of art for his alma mater. Whitney’s Project Wall intentionally combines painting and drawing to register an urgent public protest against a U.S. judicial system that promotes arrest, incarceration, and other forms of imprisonment that often further damages lives.

Whitney recently introduced the public to the phrase “No to Prison Life” as the title for a painting created for the international *Documenta 14* exhibition in Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany, in 2017. In this new context, however, the artist uses his agency to create a work that merges his stylistic painting with a provocative message and in so doing broadcasts an alert regarding the disproportionate number of African Americans in U.S. prisons.

The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Pew Research Center identifies the United States as having the highest per-capita incarceration rate and the largest prison population in the world, the majority of which (33%) are African American, while African Americans represent just 12% of the U.S. population.



Stanley Whitney was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1946, and now lives and works in New York City and Parma, Italy. He holds a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute as well as an MFA from Yale University. He is currently Professor emeritus of painting and drawing at Tyler School of Art at Temple University. Whitney has been exploring the possibilities of color since the mid-1970s. His works exhibit a masterful pictorial balance with an underlying tension; conflict and resolution between colors and forms simmer within each painting. Whitney's work is included in public collections around the world, including the Guggenheim Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Canada, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art.



Larry Ossei-Mensah, MOCAD's Susanne Feld Hilberry Senior Curator, uses contemporary art as a vehicle to redefine how we see ourselves and the world around us. The Ghanaian-American curator and cultural critic has organized exhibitions and programs at commercial and nonprofit spaces around the globe from New York City to Rome in addition to documenting cultural happenings featuring the most dynamic visual artists working today such as Derrick Adams, Mickalene Thomas, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Federico Solmi, and Kehinde Wiley. Ossei-Mensah is also the co-founder of ARTNOIR, a global collective of culturalists who design multimodal experiences aimed to engage this generation's dynamic and diverse creative class.

In 2017, Ossei-Mensah was the Critic-in-Residence at Art Omi, and in 2019 he co-curated the solo exhibition *Allison Janae Hamilton: PITCH* with Susan Cross for MASSMoCA and served on the Visual Arts Panel for the Charlotte Street Foundation. Continuing in 2019, he will serve as a curatorial mentor at the VisArt in Rockville, MD, and he is also organizing the upcoming exhibition entitled *Coffee, Rbun, Sugar, Gold: A Postcolonial Paradox* with Dexter Wimberly for the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco.

About the Project Wall

Situated on the west façade of the building and facing the intersection of 43rd and Main Streets, the Artspace Project Wall is an ongoing site for temporary public art projects featuring selected and commissioned works by national and regional artists. Since its inauguration, the Artspace Project Wall has received important support from the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.

About the H&R Block Artspace

Dedicated to artists, art, and ideas since 1999, the H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute presents exhibitions of contemporary art and a range of public programs for a growing audience of students, educators, artists, and the general public.

About the Kansas City Art Institute

Founded in 1885, the Kansas City Art Institute is a private, independent four-year college of art and design awarding the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with majors in Animation, Art History, Ceramics, Creative Writing, Fiber, Filmmaking, Graphic Design, Illustration, Interactive Arts, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, and Sculpture. For more information, visit KCAI on the Web at www.kcai.edu.

Images: *No to Prison Life*, 2019, and photograph of Stanley Whitney (Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery, New York); Larry Ossei-Mensah (Photo: Andy Boyle).

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