

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

My Way: Gee's Bend Today

Lillie B Witherspoon Jackson	Essie Bendolph Pettway
Marlene Bennett Jones	Mary M. Pettway
Mary McCarthy	Rita Mae Pettway
Lue Ida McCloud	Stella Pettway
Loretta Pettway Bennett	Creola Ramsey
Caster Pettway	The Hall Sisters (Mary Hall, Doris Mooney, and Elaine Spencer)
Eddie Mae Pettway	Andrea Williams

November 21, 2024–January 4, 2025
Opening reception Thursday, November 21, 6–8pm

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery is pleased to announce *My Way: Gee's Bend Today*, the third exhibition in a three part series following *My Way: The Gee's Bend Quilmakers and Contemporary Abstraction* (2020) at Parts and Labor, Beacon; and *My Way: A Gathering* (2023) at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York.

In Wilcox County, Alabama, descendants of enslaved laborers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers have resided in Gee's Bend—a geographically isolated, rural Black community on the Alabama River (formally known as Boykin)—since the mid-19th century. Generation after generation, the women of Gee's Bend have made asymmetrical, provocative quilts noted for their stylistic ingenuity, bold materiality, and improvisational use of geometry; an endeavor passed down for both its utility and its rich visual culture. This textile tradition, taught by mothers to their daughters and families to their friends, is a well-practiced vernacular art form within Black communities across the American South. Quilting became a social pillar within towns and counties as women gathered together to stitch, share stories, sing songs, and discuss politics.

This exhibition, which takes its title from a specific style of quilt, focuses on 14 living and working, contemporary members of the Gee's Bend Quilting community. 'My Way,' refers to a quilt that embodies a quilter's individual artistic vision and relationship to the fabrics at hand, rather than adhering to a guide or template. The intuitive piecing of materials—such as denim, corduroy, and cotton—results in deeply personal abstractions. Both Essie Pettway and Lou Ida McCloud expand on the 'My Way' tradition with irregular blocks and patterns in their work.

Further labels have been assigned to distinguish particular styles: Marlene Bennett Jones and Creola Ramsey's 'Housetop' and 'Log Cabin' quilts detail concentric squares and right angles that mimic architectural constructs, while Eddie Mae Pettway's 'Flying Geese' quilt is a traditional design borrowed from the Underground Railroad, where quilts were encoded to indicate the location of hidden resources.

This exhibition highlights the shared creative impulses that have passed through strong networks and communities of quilters, instilling a confident approach in this current generation. Descending from the long legacy of Gee's Bend's quilters, this new work celebrates the diverse, experimental, and interpretive pattern-making that is still very much alive today.

My Way: Gee's Bend Today is dedicated in loving memory to Rubin Bendolph Jr.

Please contact gallery@nicellebeauchene.com for more information and biographies on each Quiltmaker.