



APRIL 2021

# FROM ARCHITECTURE TO ART

*Housetop* | Lucy T. Pettway



Lucy T. Pettway. *Housetop*. c. 1970. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation; and purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., BMA 2020.33. © 2021 Estate of Lucy T. Pettway / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Start by looking at the solid navy square in the center of this work and let your eye travel outward to take in the progressively larger squares delineated in thin strips—like frames for paintings or photos. You first notice white, then yellow, then red, then yellow again. As you continue to let your eye move around the image, you will see a wide array of colors and patterns—from bright solid colors to a subtle pastel floral pattern. Each “frame” may contain several different colors and patterns consisting of long or short strips, connected to form the entire square. Taking in the entire work, you may notice a sense of depth as the navy square recedes and the colorful frames seem to advance towards you.

The quilt you are looking at was created by Lucy T. Pettway, a master quiltmaker from Gee’s Bend, a community in rural Alabama that has produced a rich and influential body of work in quilts, beginning in the early 19th century. It is entitled *Housetop* because it is the artist’s interpretation of the interior of a wooden rooftop of a Gee’s Bend bedroom. “Housetop” is a recurring pattern in Gee’s Bend quilts—one among many distinct patterns. Lucy T. Pettway was not only an expert at working with these patterns, but also drew inspiration for new patterns from the natural and architectural forms around her.

The Black craftswomen of Gee’s Bend have not only contributed unique designs to the American artistic landscape but have played a critical role in the civic and economic life of Gee’s Bend. Inspired by a visit in 1966 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 60 women from Gee’s Bend formed the Freedom Quilting Bee (1966–2012) which allowed them to collectively promote and sell their work. As a result, Gee’s Bend quilts have been featured in museum exhibitions, studied and documented in books, and sold for proceeds that ended up directly and rapidly supporting the needs of the quilters and their families as well as providing community resources such as electricity, school supplies, college tuition, and roadways.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Invite students to look closely at *Housetop* and share their observations. As students share, offer relevant information about the artwork, including about the artist, Lucy T. Pettway, and her approach to using local nature and architecture as starting points for her quilt designs. As homework, ask students to look around their living spaces and/or communities to find and sketch or photograph natural or built objects they find inspiring. Then invite students to take the forms they have chosen and break them down to basic geometric shapes such as circles, squares, triangles, etc. Ask students to take these shapes and find ways to repeat them to create a pattern composition in colored pencil.

To learn more about Gee’s Bend quiltmakers and quilts, and see more examples of “housetop” quilts, visit <https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>, a resource made available by the Souls Grown Deep Foundation.



To comment or register for Art-To-Go,  
email [lwilson@artbma.org](mailto:lwilson@artbma.org)

For visitor information, visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org)

Generous support for Art-To-Go  
is provided by Art Bridges and  
Wilmington Trust.







***Housetop*, Lucy T. Pettway**

Lucy T. Pettway. *Housetop*. c. 1970. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation; and purchase with exchange funds from the Pearlstone Family Fund and partial gift of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., BMA 2020.33. © 2021 Estate of Lucy T. Pettway / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York