Speed Art Museum honors a long over-looked Louisville artist with *Loose Nuts: Bert Hurley’s West End Story*

**Louisville, KY (Tuesday, December 10, 2019)** On Friday, December 13, the Speed Art Museum will open an exhibition celebrating the life and work of the virtually unknown Kentucky artist Bert Hurley (1898 – 1955). Born in Louisville, Hurley worked at the city’s L&N Railroad office building for nearly 40 years in various positions, including as a departmental correspondent for the company employees’ magazine. He was widely known in Louisville’s African American community, specifically in the bustling Russell neighborhood, as a talented artist and musician. *Loose Nuts: Bert Hurley’s West End Story* takes an in-depth look at his hand-lettered and richly illustrated 125-page novella and the real-life spaces and characters found within.
Set in Louisville’s Russell neighborhood in the 1930s, *Loose Nuts: A Rapsody in Brow* is a whimsical satire of detective fiction genre, incorporating part journalistic investigation and part courtroom drama. The manuscript features a cast of real-life Louisvillians, including Hurley himself as a hard-nosed reporter for the *West End Tatler*, a fictional newspaper. With full-page pen and ink, crayon, watercolor, and ink wash illustrations throughout, *Loose Nuts* creates a time capsule of life in 1930s West Louisville, where African American businesses, such as restaurants, offices, theatres, and nightclubs, flourished.

Though single pages are regularly on display in the Speed’s Kentucky Gallery, this is the first time all illustration from the novella will be displayed together since the Museum acquired it in 2001. The exhibition will also feature new biographical research and findings about Hurley’s life in Louisville. New scholarship from curator Kim Spence also reveals insight into the Cast of Characters featured in *Loose Nuts*, and how their influence shaped the West End in and beyond Hurley’s time.

“Loose Nuts represents a fascinating cross-section of individuals living in Louisville during the 1930s, from Bert Hurley’s family and coworkers at the L&N Railroad general office building to respected leaders in the African American community,” said Kim Spence, Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the Speed. “One thing that has delighted me while curating this exhibition, explained Spence, “is discovering the playful intersection of Hurley’s fictional story and real-life, from his casting of a beloved principal of Central High School as a trial judge to the physical education director of the Chestnut Street Branch YMCA acting as referee in a championship boxing match.”

“Bert Hurley is the perfect way to close out our Year of Kentucky exhibitions,” said Stephen Reily, Director of the Speed Art Museum. “Bert Hurley was more than an artist, he was an active member of his community and a historian for his beloved Russell neighborhood, a part of Louisville rich in cultural history and memory. We’re so excited to once again bring his love letter to that community to life.”

*Loose Nuts: Bert Hurley’s West End Story* is the latest exhibition to open at the Speed, which has been focusing on artworks and exhibitions from Kentucky throughout the year. Other exhibitions have explored the work of Louisville natives Hunter S. Thompson and Enid Yandell, and currently on view is *Tales from the Turf: The Kentucky Horse, 1825-1950*, the first exhibition to examine Kentucky’s relationship with the horse through art. Coming in 2020, the Speed will host *Andy Warhol: Revelation*, as it travels from the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, examining the Pop artist’s complex Catholic faith in relation to his artistic process.

Programs at the Speed Art Museum presented in association with *Loose Nuts* include:

- **Friday, December 13, 5 – 10 pm**: Public opening as part of After Hours at the Speed!

Exhibition Sponsors

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About the Speed Art Museum

The Speed Art Museum is Kentucky’s largest art museum. Its mission is to “invite everyone to celebrate art forever.” An independent and encyclopedic museum located on the campus of the University of Louisville. In 1927, Louisville philanthropist Hattie Bishop Speed founded the Speed Art Museum, with a belief in the power of art to change people’s lives.

The Speed Art Museum is free on Sunday through March of 2021, thanks in part to Brown-Forman. After Hours @ the Speed events draw large and diverse crowds every third Friday of the month with music, drinks, and of course art. For more information, visit www.speedmuseum.org/events-programs.

The Speed’s current exhibitions are Tales from the Turf: The Kentucky Horse, 1825 – 1950 and Ebony G. Patterson...while the dew is still on the roses.... More information at www.speedmuseum.org/exhibitions.

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