

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 2016

Media Contacts:

Elena Grotto 312.397.3828 egrotto@mcachicago.org

Karla Loring 312.397.3834 kloring@mcachicago.org

Images: www.mcachicago.org/media



KERRY JAMES MARSHALL: MASTRY

April 23 - September 25, 2016



This spring, the **Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago** presents the first retrospective exhibition of acclaimed artist **Kerry James Marshall**, considered one of America's greatest living painters. Over the past three decades, Marshall has been an inspired and imaginative chronicler of the African-American experience. Best known for large-scale interiors, landscapes, and portraits featuring powerful black figures, Marshall explores narratives of African-American history from slave ships to contemporary culture, and draws on his deep knowledge of art history from the Renaissance to 20th-century abstraction, as well as other sources such as the comic book and the muralist tradition.

His powerful paintings confront the position of African Americans throughout American History, with direct and intimate scenes of black middle-class life, painted in vibrant color with detailed patterning. *Kerry James Marshall: MASTRY* runs from April 23 to September 25, 2016, and is co-organized by the MCA with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. It is co-curated by Dieter Roelstraete, a member of the curatorial team of Documenta 14 and former Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA; Helen Molesworth, Chief Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and Ian Alteveer, Associate Curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The exhibition focuses on Marshall's paintings made over the last 35 years, from his seminal statement in *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self* (1980), to his most recent explorations of African-

American history. Organized in a broadly chronological order, the exhibition considers the dominant themes in Marshall's practice over the years, including: history painting, landscape, portraiture, the nude, religion, and abstraction. These thematic concerns revolve around his interrogation of the canon of Western art history, which is central to Marshall's artistic vision and his preoccupation with mastery. The exhibition consists of nearly 70 paintings, along with a selection of drawings, and works of related media such as photography, video, and sculpture.

Marshall was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1955, before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, and he moved to Los Angeles with his family in 1963, two years before the Watts riots in 1965. The exhibition begins with some of Marshall's earliest drawings, made in Los Angeles while studying at Otis College of Art and Design under the legendary social realist painter Charles White. There, he learned the language of portraiture, a pictorial tradition that White believed could uplift race through aspirational images. However, in the wake of the Watts riots, and the general breakdown of urban life in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marshall was not content with merely adding to a tradition structured by exclusion. Instead, Marshall's work through the present day is driven by an examination of the historical absence, or 'invisibility' of the black figure in the tradition of painting.

Marshall has since created work that is concerned with the aesthetic challenge of how to tell the story of African-American daily life and history, and the impact these stories have on the grand tradition and master narratives associated with Western culture. His critical questions come through the canon's most recognized forms—history painting, landscape, and portraiture—and other vernacular forms such as the comic book, including his comics such as the *Rythm Mastr* drawings (2000-present). In each, he makes what was once 'invisible,' visible.

These issues are evident in his first cabinet paintings of the "Lost Boys," exceedingly moody and impossibly black portraits of young black men. They continue through his exploration of modernism's failed legacy with the international style housing blocks built to house poor and working class black families in America's urban centers. These paintings, which brought Marshall to prominence, suggest that abstract painting, modernist architecture, and the philosophical abstraction of 'blackness' as an identity overlap with one another. Only through a solid knowledge of history—as shown through Marshall's "Memento" series, works dedicated to the history of the civil rights and black power movements—does the United States have a hope at enacting its highest goals of freedom for all of its citizens.

Marshall's work also forms a sustained meditation of the problem of blackness as both a social and aesthetic concern. His re-thinking of abstraction—either in his recent work concerning Barnett Newman's 'Stations of the Cross,' or his large-scale paintings depicting fictional artists in their studios, at work on paint-by-number canvases—foregrounds the problem of blackness as a color, pigment, hue, historical idea, and identity.

While Marshall continues to work in painting as his primary medium, concerned with the century-long struggle between figuration and abstraction, he also takes on the challenges of photography, sculpture, comics, and installation, and has made significant work in all of these areas. To accompany his exhibition at the MCA, Marshall has also been commissioned to create a special wall project for the second-floor

atrium of the museum. Vividly colored and printed on vinyl, this 38-foot mural, titled *Happy Revolution Day*, features characters from Marshall's *Rythm Mastr* project.

Kerry James Marshall has received solo exhibitions throughout Europe and North America and his work has been included in such prestigious international exhibitions as the 1997 Whitney Biennial, the 2003 Venice Biennial, the 2009 Gwangju Biennial, two Documentas (1997 and 2007), and the 1999 Carnegie International. His paintings are in private collections and foundations as well as major public collections including the MCA.

Exhibition Tour

- Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: April 23 - September 25, 2016
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art: October 25, 2016 - January 29, 2017
- Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles: March 12 - July 2, 2017

Education Programs

MCA Talk: Kerry James Marshall

Saturday, April 23, 2 pm, Tickets \$10

Artist Kerry James Marshall discusses his practice and current exhibition at the MCA. A conversation in the galleries with exhibition curator Dieter Roelstraete follows the talk.

The Richard and Mary L. Gray Lectures are made possible through a generous gift to the Chicago Contemporary Campaign.

MCA Live: Brooksdays

Tuesday, May 3, 6 pm, Free with museum admission

This is an evening of readings by local writers in tribute to poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

MCA Talk: Michael Darling

Tuesday, May 10, noon, Free with museum admission

Chief Curator Michael Darling leads a tour of *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*.

MCA Screen: Black Radical Imagination

Tuesday, May 17, 6 pm, Free with museum admission

This program explores black culture through visual shorts that explore new media, video art, and experimental narrative.

MCA Live: Rashayla Marie Brown

Tuesday, May 24, 6 pm,

This is a live performance by Chicago artist Rashayla Marie Brown, whose work explores ideas of personal agency, the private in public, queer Afrofeminism, popular culture, and spirituality.

On Painting Series

Free with museum admission

Held in the Kerry James Marshall exhibition, this series features artists and art historians in conversation about the history, aesthetics, and contemporary state of the practice of painting. Themes addressed include abstraction versus representation, the weight of art history, and visibility and invisibility.

Saturday, June 18 – Matthew Jesse Jackson and Judy Ledgerwood

Saturday, July 23 – Tony Lewis and Jacqueline Stewart

Saturday, August 13 – Michelle Grabner and Angel Otero

Black Aesthetics and Life

Thursday, September 15, 6 pm, Tickets \$10

The notion of a politicized “black aesthetic” gained credibility in the mainstream art world in the 1960s and has continued to take on multiple meanings ever since. In this panel discussion, art historians and artists working at the intersection of art, race, and African-American history, consider the following question: What is the relationship between black aesthetics, art, and transformative social change today?

Catalogue

A comprehensive monograph on Kerry James Marshall's extraordinary oeuvre accompanies this major traveling retrospective, published by Skira Rizzoli and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. The catalogue features essays by each of the curators—Dieter Roelstraete, member of the curatorial team of Documenta 14 and former Manilow Senior Curator at the MCA; Ian Alteveer, associate curator in the department of modern and contemporary art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Helen Molesworth, chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, who is also the volume's editor. In addition, the book includes essays by Lanka Tattersall, assistant curator at LAMOCA, and Kerry James Marshall, along with previously published essays by the artist. Richly illustrated, this catalogue features more than 100 paintings that demonstrate Marshall's mastery of the traditions of art in history painting, landscape, portraiture, the nude, religious imagery, and abstraction, to name a few.

#

Image: Kerry James Marshall, *School of Beauty, School of Culture*, 2012. Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art; Museum purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth (Bibby) Smith, the Collectors Circle for Contemporary Art, Jane Comer, the Sankofa Society, and general acquisition funds, 2012.57. Photo: Sean Pathasema.

Lead support for *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* is provided by the Harris Family Foundation in memory of Bette and Neison Harris: Caryn and King Harris, Katherine Harris, Toni and Ron Paul, Pam and Joe Szokol, Linda and Bill Friend, and Stephanie and John Harris; R. H. Defares; Andrea and Jim Gordon; the George Lucas Family Foundation; Liz and Eric Lefkofsky; Helen and Sam Zell; and Nancy and Steve Crown. Major support is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; The Bluhm Family Foundation; David Zwirner, New York; the Ford Foundation; the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation; the Joyce Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; and Phillips. Additional generous support is provided by Dr. Anita Blanchard and Martin H. Nesbitt; Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation; Allison and Susan Davis; Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson; Jack and Sandra Guthman; David Herro and Jay Franke; Jack Shainman Gallery; Gretchen and Jay Jordan; Anne L. Kaplan; Nancy Lauter McDougal; Robert Rennie and Carey Fouks; Marilyn and Larry Fields; Sara Szold; Cari and Michael Sacks; Eleana Del Rio and Koplín Del Rio Gallery; Lois and Steve Eisen and the Eisen Family Foundation; the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation; Agnes Gund; Ashlee Jacob; the North Shore Affiliate of the MCA; the Robert Lehman Foundation; Ambassador Louis and Marjorie Susman; the Terra Foundation for American Art, on behalf of board member Nora Daley; Lynn and Allen Turner; Dick and Gloria Anderson; Dr. Daniel S. Berger; BMO Wealth Management; Dontrey Britt-Hart and Brett Hart; Mandy and Cliff Einstein; Denise and Gary Gardner; Helyn D. Goldenberg and Michael Alper; Paul and De Gray; Nickol and Darrel Hackett; Mary E. Ittelson; James W. Kenyon; Nancy Lerner Frej and David Frej; the Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg Foundation; Eric McKissack and Cheryl Mayberry McKissack; and Sylvia Neil and Daniel Fischel. Air transportation is provided by American Airlines. The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The museum is generously supported by its Board of Trustees; individual and corporate members; private and corporate foundations, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; and government agencies. Programming is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. Museum capital improvements are supported by a Public Museum Capital Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The MCA is a proud member of Museums in the Park and receives major support from the Chicago Park District. The MCA is located at 220 E. Chicago Avenue, one block east of Michigan Avenue. The museum and sculpture garden are open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm and Tuesday from 10 am to 8 pm. The museum is closed on Monday. Tuesdays are Community Free Days with free admission for Illinois residents. Suggested general admission is \$12 for adults and \$7 for students and seniors. Children 12 years of age and under, MCA members, and members of the military are admitted free. Information about MCA exhibitions, programs, and special events is available on the MCA website at mcachicago.org or by phone at 312.280.2660.