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National Gallery of Art Acquires Works by Kerry James Marshall and Anne Truitt

Works on Paper by Khan, Castle, Spiegelman, Schwitters, and Van Doesburg Also Acquired



Kerry James Marshall, *Great America*, 1994, acrylic and collage on canvas
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Collectors Committee, 2011

Washington, DC—At its annual meeting in April, the Collectors Committee of the National Gallery of Art made possible the acquisition of *Great America* (1994) by Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955)—the Gallery's first painting by the midcareer African American artist—and *Knight's Heritage* (1963), a sculpture by Anne Truitt (1921–2004). Both works will be on view beginning May 1 in the East Building's Concourse galleries.

"This year, the Collectors Committee's selections brought the Gallery two important works by significant American artists: a powerful painting by Kerry James Marshall and a breakthrough piece by Anne Truitt," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are very grateful to the Collectors Committee, which enables the Gallery to continually enhance its holdings of contemporary art."

The Collectors Committee discretionary fund for photographs, drawings, and prints supported the acquisition of a photograph by Idris Khan (b. 1978), *The Creation* (2009); a lithograph by Art Spiegelman (b. 1948), *Lead Pipe Sunday #2 (Derby Dugan)* (1997); a drawing by Al Taylor (1948–1999), *Fairly Mean / Mean Fairly* (1995); a collage by James Castle (1899–1977), *Untitled (Purse ! Discusses)* (1937 or later); and a lithograph by Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) and Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931), *Kleine Dada Soirée (Small Dada Evening)* (1922/1923).

Great America by Kerry James Marshall

A devoted student of the human figure and the history of art, especially the genres of portraiture and narrative, Kerry James Marshall draws upon the experience of African Americans like himself to create imposing, contemporary history paintings.

Marshall's mature career can be dated to 1980, when, inspired by the opening lines of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, he developed his signature motif of a dark, near-silhouetted figure in *A Portrait of the Artist as His Former Self*. Refusing both negative and positive stereotypes of black people, Marshall's figures of "extreme blackness" operate, he explains, "right on the borderline," forcing the viewer to find nuance and articulation within only apparently black forms. This strategy has been influential for younger artists, including Kara Walker and Glenn Ligon.

Great America is contemporaneous with Marshall's well-known Garden Project (1994–1995), a series of paintings based on housing projects with "gardens" in their names, such as Nickerson Gardens in Watts, where he grew up. In those works, Marshall sought to convey the dignity and complexity of lives set within difficult circumstances. In this work, he re-imagines a boat ride into the haunted tunnel of an amusement park as the Middle Passage of slaves from Africa to the New World. What might in other hands be a work of heavy political irony becomes instead a delicate interweaving of the histories of painting and race. The painting, which is stretched directly onto the wall, creates a screen or backdrop onto which viewers project their own associations triggered by the diaphanous yet powerful imagery.

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955, Marshall grew up in Los Angeles and

graduated from Otis Art Institute. After spending time as a fellow at the Studio Museum in Harlem, he moved to Chicago in 1987, where he still lives and works.

***Knight's Heritage* by Anne Truitt**

Although often connected to minimalist sculptors such as Donald Judd, who also made simple painted wooden objects at roughly the same time, Anne Truitt had little in common with the anti-aesthetic and anti-compositional stance of that loose movement. Rather, her epiphany came in 1961, when she first saw paintings and sculptures by Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt in person. Like Newman, Truitt was committed to the expressive value of carefully chosen color and to the importance of compositional decisions regarding the division of the rectangle.

Both are on full view in *Knight's Heritage*, an important transitional piece in which she still employed a brushy texture to define the paint surface and actual grooves to mark the three divisions—elements she abandoned in her later, smoother work—but began to break out of the somber tones of her earliest work and embrace glowing color. The title has several possible references, including the popular 19th-century medieval fictions of Howard Pyle, which Truitt enjoyed, and the Kennedy administration ("Camelot"), which she admired and to which she had social connections. The simple frontal array of the work has a heraldic aspect that reinforces these associations.

Born in Baltimore in 1921 and raised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Truitt settled in Washington, DC, in 1948, and the region remained her base until her death in 2004. While the Gallery holds two towering columnar works and one small horizontal piece from the 1970s, the addition of this major work from her breakthrough years enables the Gallery to fully represent the career of this major American sculptor.

Photographs, Drawings, and Prints

Idris Khan is an artist based in London who creates multilayered photographs that have addressed the power of images, text, and music on our collective memories. In the work acquired by the Collectors Committee, *The Creation*, Khan photographed every page of the score of Franz Joseph Haydn's master oratorio *The Creation*.

Superimposing one negative over another, he created a magnificent print, 68 1/4; by

119 inches, that is as powerful, complex, and ambitious as Haydn's original score.

The Gallery also acquired two drawings and two prints, ranging in date from 1922 to 1997. *Kleine Dada Soirée (Small Dada Evening)*, a lithograph by Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg, reads like an explosion of red and black text scattered across the page and variously oriented. The work is ostensibly an advertisement and program for a series of Dada evenings, and its message, in true Dada fashion, is functionally subverted by the dazzling pandemonium of its design.

James Castle's delicate collage spells out his own alphabetic system, linking it to the making of words and sounds by adding the elusive though phonetically pleasing caption "*Purse ! Discusses.*" In conjunction with the Collectors Committee purchase, the James Castle Collection and Archive also donated another of his alphabetic drawings—one composed of uppercase letters on one side and lowercase on the other, with both simultaneously visible owing to the paper's transparency. The work thus conveys the sense that viewers are looking at a palimpsest, with earlier faint traces of writing.

Al Taylor aestheticized everything from bicycle rims to pet stains—and words were no exception. In the drawing *Fairly Mean / Mean Fairly*, he graphed a two-word phrase (and its inversion) by plotting the distance between its component letters and flanking the graph's lines with swaths of black wash. While Taylor parsed the phrases "fairly mean" and "mean fairly," he likewise examined their potential for visual expression.

Art Spiegelman paid homage to early comic-strip characters and their creators in the lithograph *Lead Pipe Sunday #2*. Spiegelman depicted a forbidding landscape populated with cast-off characters: Chester Gould's Dick Tracy, Frederick Opper's Happy Hooligan, and E. C. Segar's Popeye. Spiegelman also inserted one of Philip Guston's one-eyed lima-bean heads—a nod to that celebrated artist's debt to cartoonists and a comment on the ambiguous distinction between high and low art.

Collectors Committee

The Collectors Committee has made possible the acquisition of more than 300 works of art since the committee was formed in 1975. Approximately half of these acquisitions have been works by living artists. Founding benefactor Paul Mellon asked Ruth Carter

Stevenson, chair of the Gallery's board of trustees from 1993 to 1997, to be the first chair of the Collectors Committee. Denise Saul and Barry Berkus, both major collectors of 20th-century art, are the current co-chairs of the Collectors Committee. Berkus, who resides in Santa Barbara, is the founder and president of B3 Architects and Berkus Design Studio. Saul, a New York resident, is active in cultural organizations and is a teacher.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>).

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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