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Kerry James Marshall's First Solo Exhibition in Washington, DC, on View at the National Gallery of Art June 28–December 7, 2013



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

Washington, DC—This summer the National Gallery of Art hosts the city's first solo exhibition of the work of American artist Kerry James Marshall. On view from June 28 through December 7, 2013, *In the Tower: Kerry James Marshall* presents 10 paintings and more than 20 works on paper, affording a context for understanding the Gallery's own Marshall painting, *Great America* (1994), and its powerful imagery. As a group, these paintings evoke the Middle Passage of slave ships between West Africa and North America, and the themes of immigration, class mobility, and aspiration central to American life.

In the Tower: Kerry James Marshall marks the sixth in a series of Tower installations

focusing on developments in art since midcentury. The exhibition coincides with the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Gallery will also honor the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Fort Wagner this fall with the exhibition *Tell It with Pride: The 54th Massachusetts Regiment and Augustus Saint-Gaudens' "Shaw Memorial"* (September 15, 2013–January 19, 2014).

"Kerry James Marshall is one of the most exciting and celebrated painters currently working in the United States. His art is a reflection on African American history and the reverberations of the past in contemporary life," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "We are honored to host the first solo exhibition of his work in Washington, and we are grateful to lenders, both public and private, for parting with their works for several months."

Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

This exhibition is sponsored by Dr. Anita Blanchard and Martin Nesbitt and Cari and Michael Sacks. Additional support is provided by The Tower Project of the National Gallery of Art.

Exhibition Highlights

In the Tower: Kerry James Marshall was conceived following the 2011 purchase of *Great America* by the Gallery's Collectors Committee. This painting is the centerpiece of the exhibition, which brings together a sequence of related paintings and drawings to explore important themes and imagery woven throughout Marshall's work. *Great America* depicts two couples in a small boat exiting an amusement park Tunnel of Love ride. Named for an amusement park that Marshall visited as a child, this seemingly innocent scene of middle-class leisure is filled with troubling details, such as the appearance of ghosts in the dark tunnel, the bobbing head of a man in the water, and an abstract shape, painted in thick brushstrokes, pointing at a woman's head like a rifle.

Great America is one of several works by Marshall to depict human beings and water. The sailboat named *Wanderer* in *Voyager* (1992) recalls the last documented slave ship, which set sail from the Congo and landed in Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1858. In *Baptist* (1992), a figure treads water in the ocean between Africa and North America, while in *Plunge* (1992), a woman jumps into a pool identified as the Atlantic Ocean. A toy boat floats in the water; the flagstone patio and white picket fence locate the scene in a contemporary suburb. While the gate at the entrance to the pool is painted PRIVATE, it is unclear if the diver resides inside this private space—or has been excluded from it.

The enormous *The Gulf Stream* (2003) was inspired by Winslow Homer's famous painting of a black man on a shipwreck surrounded by sharks (1899, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). In contrast to Homer's doomed survivor, Marshall's middle-class family enjoys a leisurely sail on the open sea as gray clouds gather on the horizon.

In *Bang* (1994), an image of the Fourth of July, a girl holds up the American flag while two boys say the Pledge of Allegiance in a neighborhood of white clapboard houses and picket fences. Two doves hold up a Revolutionary War banner ("Resistance to tyranny is obedience to god"), while the text "We Are One" from the Great Seal of the United States is painted below. Yet the round-topped Weber grill emits a coil of black smoke, and a garden hose—suggestive of the water hoses used against the children who marched for civil rights in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963—encircles the girl like a snake.

In *Our Town* (1995), a boy rides a bicycle. A girl accompanied by a dog runs beside him as their mother waves farewell from a distance. The prosperous neighborhood of large houses and swimming pools is splattered with abstract brushstrokes and drips of paint.

Other paintings drawn from museum and private collections from around the United States include *Nat Turner with the Head of His Master* (2011), a painting in the old-master tradition of images of freedom fighters (including the Gallery's painting by Andrea del Castagno, *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1450/1455), and the maquettes

for Marshall's 2008 celebrated pair of frescoes at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that portray President Washington at Mount Vernon and President Jefferson at Monticello, respectively. The exhibition also includes more than 20 preparatory drawings for many of these works.

Kerry James Marshall

Born in 1955 in Birmingham, Kerry James Marshall moved with his family to Watts, Los Angeles, in 1963. He was educated at Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles and currently lives in Chicago. Marshall is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, an NEA Visual Art Fellowship, and many other awards. He has had one-person exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus; the Vancouver Art Gallery; the Renaissance Society in Chicago; and the Vienna Secession.

Exhibition Curator and Related Offerings

The exhibition curator is James Meyer, associate curator in the department of modern art at the National Gallery of Art.

A fully illustrated brochure featuring an interview with the artist will be available in the exhibition.

Meyer and Marshall will discuss the artist's work on Wednesday, June 26, at 3:30 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium. The event is free of charge and seating is available on a first-come, first-seated basis.

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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.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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