

For immediate release

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

Look See

11 October – 22 November 2014

Private view: Friday 10 October, 6 – 8 PM

Press preview with the artist: Friday 10 October, 10 AM

Special public event: Saturday 11 October, 11 AM

Kerry James Marshall in conversation with Angela Choon, Senior Partner at David Zwirner



Untitled (Club Couple), 2014
Acrylic on PVC panel
59 5/8 x 59 5/8 inches (151.5 x 151.5 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Kerry James Marshall. On view at the London gallery, this is the artist's first solo show in the city since his 2005 presentation at the Camden Arts Centre. It is concurrent with the travelling exhibition *Kerry James Marshall: Painting and Other Stuff*, currently on view at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (both through 26 October 2014).

With a career spanning almost three decades, Marshall is well known for his paintings depicting actual and imagined events from African-American history. His complex and multilayered portrayals of youths, interiors, nudes, housing estate gardens, land- and seascapes synthesize different traditions and genres, while seeking to counter stereotypical representations of black people in society. Engaging with issues of identity and individualism, he frequently depicts his figures in an extreme opaque, black colour, which stylizes their appearance while being a literal and rhetorical reference to the term black and its diametric opposition to the white "mainstream." With art history today acknowledged as having been written from the perspective of white Western artists, Marshall assimilates the

limitations and contradictions inherent in its styles, subjects, and chronologies, creating highly personalised works that appear recognisable and unfamiliar at the same time.

Marshall also produces drawings in the style of comic strips, as well as sculptural installations, photography, and video. Like his paintings, these works accumulate various stylistic influences to address the historiography of black art, while at the same time drawing attention to the fact that they are not inherently partisan because their subjects are black.

For his first show with David Zwirner, Marshall will present new paintings that collectively examine notions of observing, witnessing, and exhibiting. While central to the relationship between viewer and artwork, these overarching concepts are typically steeped in conventions that render them passive acts. Yet, Marshall's works subtly defy genre expectations and invite idiosyncratic, often ambiguous interpretations. Entitled *Look See*, the exhibition takes its point of departure in the etymological difference between looking and seeing, which embodies varying degrees of attentiveness. While "looking" is generally understood to be a removed, detached action, "seeing" involves perception and making connections between elements.

Works on view depict a series of characters amid ornate backdrops and dressed in outfits designed specifically for the paintings over a period of several years. Many emphasize the idea of display, such as *Untitled (Crowning Moment)*, Marshall's portrait of a young woman wearing an elaborate headband—based on a news photograph of a contestant putting on the winning crown at a beauty pageant—and *Untitled (Beach Towel)* in which the reclining female in a garden setting looks past the viewer to a camera not visible in the composition. In *Untitled (Club Couple)*, a smiling couple poses blatantly as the male figure implicates the viewer in his plans by showing a small box with an engagement ring behind his girlfriend's back. The exhibitionism inherent

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in such paintings—putting oneself on view—echoes the notion of pure presentation that runs throughout the artist's new works. Marshall's characters offer themselves to be looked at or are actively engaged with looking at something, including themselves.

Untitled (Mirror Girl), correspondingly, can only be seen in a mirror, where she appears to pose for her own enjoyment. In *Untitled (Pink Towel)*, no indication is given to the identity of the woman, nude except for a towel that she holds up to casually cover her body. Looking straight at the viewer, her tilted head and pearl earring can be seen to imbue the everyday scene with an art-historical reference to Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer's well-known portrait *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (c. 1665).

In the large-scale *Untitled (Studio)*, Marshall depicts the process of a model having her portrait painted. The messy paints smattered across the table, floor, and even the resting dog further offer a metaphor for the staged nature of each of the works. The sense of fabrication is underscored by the unconventional clothing worn by most of the characters, created for the series as for a play or a movie. Yet while their peculiar combination of realism and fiction can be seen to connect the works conceptually—and also defines an immediacy rarely found in contemporary painting—each retains a singularity that seems to suggest that nothing has come before it. In *Untitled (Blot)*, a single abstract canvas, also on a large scale, underscores the delicate link between representation and the real world more generally. As with Marshall's wider oeuvre, fabrication here becomes linked to the realisation that the history of art as we know it is itself a construction of particular cultural and political perspectives, and always open to reinvention.

A fully illustrated publication is forthcoming by David Zwirner Books featuring essays by art critic Robert Storr and curator Hamza Walker.

Kerry James Marshall was born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama. He studied at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, earning his B.F.A. in 1978 and an honorary doctorate in 1999.

Marshall has exhibited widely throughout Europe and the United States since the late 1970s and early 1980s. His work is currently the subject of a major survey entitled *Kerry James Marshall: Painting and Other Stuff*. Marking the most comprehensive presentation of his work to date, the exhibition was first on view in 2013 at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen in Antwerp, before travelling to the Kunsthall Charlottenborg in Copenhagen earlier this year. The show is co-hosted by two venues in Spain, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (both through 26 October 2014).

Other prominent institutions which have presented recent solo shows include the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2013); Secession, Vienna (2012); Vancouver Art Gallery (2010); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2009); and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2008). Previous travelling solo exhibitions include those organised by the Camden Arts Centre, London (2005), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2003), and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1998).

In 2014, Marshall was the recipient of the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, an award given annually by the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. In 2013, he was one of seven new appointees named to President Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. Other prestigious awards include a 1997 grant from the MacArthur Foundation and a 1991 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Museum collections which hold works by the artist include the Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Marshall lives and works in Chicago.

In addition to David Zwirner, the artist is represented by Jack Shainman Gallery in New York and Koplín Del Río in Los Angeles.

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