

Kerry James Marshall: Garden of Delights

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM ST. LOUIS / MAY 24-JULY 7, 2013



Cover: *Garden of Delights* (detail), 2013. Mixed media. Courtesy the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Koplin Del Rio Gallery, Culver City, California; **Interior:** *Black Artist (Studio View)*, 2002. Ink-jet print on paper, 45 x 50 inches. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; **Back cover:** *First* (detail), 2003. Ink-Jet print on paper mounted on laminated acrylic. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



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Kerry James Marshall is one of the most distinctive and definitive artists of the past twenty years, working in a variety of mediums to address historical, social, and experiential aspects of African-American life and culture. Marshall employs a broad range of styles and compositional strategies, often within traditional visual formats, to critically engage topical issues. His vibrant color palette and dynamic graphics provocatively contrast with the gravity of the subjects and situations represented in his work.

Garden of Delights explores the tension between the everyday, domestic situations of African Americans and the ongoing political challenges and realities that inform their lives. This elaborate synthetic garden, featuring a trellis, flagstones, and flowers, includes a variety of historical and contemporary images that range from the more positive and personal—a photograph of Marshall's wife gardening or a portrait of his kindergarten teacher, for example—to more disturbing images such as one of smiling Chicago police officers taking away the body of murdered Black Panther Fred Hampton. The sculptural installation is complemented by two framed photographs, one featuring a surveillance-style view of Chicago's Malcolm X College through trees and bushes and another of an urban garage painted the red, black, and green colors of the Pan-African flag. These colors reappear in the flagstones of the garden, suggesting the extension of their expression of black liberation from their introduction in the 1920s into the present day. Marshall's evocation of a spectrum of African-American lived experience—from empty Flamin' Hot Cheetos bags left on the street and young couples in love to more troubling and unsettling episodes—demonstrates the complexity and necessity of creating a comprehensive and nuanced representation of Black American life.

Gardens have played a significant role in previous works by Marshall, including *Watts 1963* (1995), a painting that will be on view at the Saint Louis Art Museum when it opens its new Modern and Contemporary Wing on June 29, 2013. In this and other works of that period, Marshall highlights the frequency with which "Gardens" or "Green" were used to name low-income housing projects, confronting the unsettling discrepancy between the names' positive connotation and the harsh realities of life in these residential areas. In *Garden of Delights*, Marshall develops these ideas from a different angle, creating a sculptural garden within which to frame various aspects of African-American life, history, and identity.

Kerry James Marshall: Garden of Delights is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Dominic Molon, Chief Curator.

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Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955, Birmingham, Alabama) lives and works in Chicago. His work will be the subject of a major solo exhibition at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Belgium, and the exhibition *In the Tower: Kerry James Marshall*, at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. later this year. Marshall is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, an NEA Visual Art Fellowship, and many other awards. He has had previous one-person exhibitions at the Vienna Secession (2012); the Vancouver Art Gallery (2010); the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2008); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2003); and the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago (1998).

The Front Room

Running parallel to the Main Galleries, the Front Room operates at a different rhythm, featuring focused exhibitions of work by well-known and emerging artists.