

Artist Handout
Kerry James Marshall

Artist: Kerry James Marshall is an African American painter and illustrator. He lives and works out of Chicago. Well known in the states and abroad, Marshall became an outlier for Black Artist in the nineties. His work is very influenced by him growing up in South Central LA near the black panther party. His subject matter is drawn from African American pop culture and art history references. “Mastry,” Marshall’s first major retrospective in the United States, which opened in 2016 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago outed Marshall as a great artist, a virtuoso of landscape, portraiture, still-life, history painting, and other genres of the Western canon since the Renaissance.

World and Audience:

Marshall uses his experiences in the world as inspiration for his work. Marshall grew up during the time of the great migration and jim crow era. Many of his **themes** are about everyday life, culture, social justice, and events that are going on in the world.

Artwork:

“A striking aspect of Marshall’s paintings is the emphatically black skin tone of his figures—a development the artist says emerged from an investigation into the invisibility of Black people in America and the unnecessarily negative connotations associated with darkness.”

Marshall thought representation was important and wanted to see all kinds of

people represented in museums. “..his overriding ambition: to bring large-scale Black faces and Black bodies into places, such as museums, where their almost complete absence had troubled him since he was a child.”



Kerry James Marshall, The Lost Boys, acrylic and collage on canvas, 1993

“The Lost Boys” was built around a child who was killed by a police officer because he had a toy pistol that they mistook for a gun.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/08/09/the-epic-style-of-kerry-james-marshall>



Kerry James Marshall, School of Beauty, School of Culture, acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas, 2012

Structural frame:

How does the **composition** lead your eye around the frame?

How does **proportion** change the way the viewer interprets the work?

Subjective frame:

What does Marshall say about his identity through his work?

What are some things you can use to represent your identity in your own work?

Cultural frame:

How does Marshall show his identity through his work? How is the way Marshall portrays his identity different from how the media would?

Vocab:

Theme: an idea that recurs in artwork

Composition: the way that objects, colors, and shapes are placed within an artwork in order to draw attention or to lead the eye through the work.

Proportion: the size relationships that parts of an artwork have with one another.

Ideas for Artwork and Research:

Think about your own identity and things that represent who you are.

Research how other artists represent themselves in their own work.

Photograph, sketch, or draw some things that represent you. Think of how composition, color, and proportion convey these ideas to viewers.

Experiment with composition and cropping to make the image effective.

Amy Sherald



The Lesson on of the Falling Leaves, Oil on canvas, 2017

Amy Sherald is a contemporary African American Painter widely known for her portrait of Michelle Obama. Her work addresses issues of injustice and themes of Black culture. Sherald paints skin tones in a grayscale to comment on society identifying people by their skin color. She is also influenced by her experience living in Baltimore. This experience inspired her transition from her autobiographical paintings to work that addresses the poverty of people of color.

“I want people to be able to imagine life outside of the circumscribed stereotype, or identity that can be controlled by many circumstances such as your environment, your parents, your friends, your skin color, your class,”



Kerry James Marshall, Untitled, Acrylic on PVC panel, 2009

Compare and contrast:

How are Marshall's and Sheralds painting the same? How are they different?

What do the paintings say about identity?

How do they do this?

How do the artists use color to convey meaning? How does the composition of the paintings affect the viewer?