

Kerry James Marshall

The Histories

September 18, 2026 - January 24, 2027



The Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is presenting the first exhibition in France devoted to the American artist Kerry James Marshall (born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama, United States), from September 18, 2026 to January 24, 2027.

Originated by the Royal Academy of Arts in London in collaboration with the Kunsthhaus in Zurich, the exhibition *Kerry James Marshall: The Histories* features seventy works, including eight new paintings made especially for the exhibition.

Considered one of the most influential contemporary painters, Kerry James Marshall is known for his large-scale compositions that centre Black people, frequently elevating the everyday to the epic. By inserting Black figures into art historical archetypes, the artist invites the viewer to witness the undeniable power of presence. Kerry James Marshall addresses themes including the Middle Passage and the legacies of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, without directly depicting violence or alienation. His work draws inspiration from both the Western art historical canon and other pop cultural forms of visual expression, especially nineteenth-century French painting, contemporary culture, Afro-futurism, comic books, and science fiction.

Organized with the artist's support, the exhibition covers over four decades of his career. It brings together many bodies of his work, with primarily paintings, as well as examples of the artist's prints, drawings and sculpture, from museums and private collections across North America and Europe.

In paying tribute to the work of Kerry James Marshall, the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is continuing its series of pioneering monographic exhibitions in France devoted to Black American artists, notably Kara Walker (2007) and Jean-Michel Basquiat (2010).

PRESS RELEASE

Director

Fabrice Hergott

Curator

Mark Godfrey, independant curator
assisted by Emma Nordberg
Kelly-Christina Grant, scientific advisor

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Kerry James Marshall
School of Beauty, School of Culture
2012
Collection Birmingham Museum of Art,
Alabama, acquis grâce aux fonds octroyés par
Elizabeth (Bibby) Smith, Collectors Circle for
Contemporary Art, Jane Comer, Sankofa Society
et des fonds régionaux
© Kerry James Marshall
Courtesy de l'artiste et Jack Shainman Gallery,
New York
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Practical information

Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris
11 Avenue du Président Wilson
75116 Paris
Tel. +33 1 53 67 40 00
www.mam.paris.fr

Open Tuesday through Sunday 10am
to 6pm

Late hours on Thursday until 9:30 p.m.

Cultural activities Information and bookings

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Ticketing

Regular admission : €17
Reduced admission : €15
Combined ticket including the
Simone Fattal exhibition: €20 / €18

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Kerry James Marshall works in series and cycles, as reflected in the exhibition's chronological-thematic arrangement, which showcases eleven groups of works made between 1980 and the present.

Exhibition sequence

The exhibition opens with the artist's early mature works, created in the 1980s, including *Invisible Man* (1986), inspired by Ralph Ellison's eponymous novel (1952). This section establishes Kerry James Marshall's concern with depicting Black figures, while also raising questions about representation in art history and who and what has been excluded. The artist's radical approach—using a range of black pigments mixed with other colors—affects the viewer's perception of his figures.

The second gallery displays large canvases dealing with the history of the "Middle Passage," an expression designating the journey of captured Africans across the Atlantic to be sold as slaves.

The exhibition continues with a presentation of monumental works illustrating scenes of contemporary life in settings ranging from hair and beauty salons to parks and outdoor spaces. Referencing artists such as Édouard Manet, Gustave Caillebotte, Georges Seurat, and other painters of modern life, Marshall offers a corrective to the absence of large scale images portraying the everyday experience of Black people in the history of Western art.

The series *Souvenirs* (from 1997 to 1998) takes as its point of departure the American Civil Rights movement; the *Vignette* paintings (from 2003 to 2014) depict Black couples in a style that draws from rococo paintings as well as American greeting cards.

One of the major works in the exhibition is *Wake*, an accumulative sculpture created in 2003 and enhanced with new medallions each time it is exhibited.

One section groups together imaginary portraits of historical Black figures, such as Scipio Moorhead and Harriet Tubman, examining the way historical portraits can be created in the absence of archives and previous portrayals of individuals.

The last galleries follow the development of Kerry James Marshall's artistic practice, as he reinterprets iconic works of classical Western painting. The 2000s through 2020s underscore the artist's longstanding interest in the artistic disciplines taught in art schools. One of the major pieces is *The Academy* (2012), in which a male model posing for a life drawing class holds up his fist in the Black Power salute.

The exhibition concludes with a new series of works. These eight paintings explore lesser acknowledged episodes in African history. Several focus on the transatlantic slave trade, pointing to on the role played by some Africans in the sale of enslaved people to European merchants.

Exhibition catalogue

Celebrating nearly a half-century of Kerry James Marshall's oeuvre, the exhibition catalogue, published in French by Paris Musées and in English by the Royal Academy of Arts, London, is the most thorough publication on the artist to date. The catalogue published by Paris Musées is also the first publication in French devoted to him. It includes reproductions of all the works in the exhibition and brings together a study by Mark Godfrey, along with six essays by Aria Dean, Darby English, Madeleine Grynsztejn, Cathérine Hug, Nikita Sena Quarshie, and Rebecca Zorach, in addition to an extensive interview between Kerry James Marshall and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh.

Organized by the Royal Academy of Arts, in collaboration with the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris / Paris Musées and the Kunsthhaus Zurich, the exhibition was held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, from September 2025 to January 18, 2026, and is currently on view at the Kunsthhaus Zurich until August 16, 2026.