

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kerry James Marshall

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Marshall, Kerry James, 1955-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 4, 2001
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2001
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:41:42).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Painter Kerry James Marshall (1955 - ) is best known for his stylized, large-scale paintings. His celebrated series, "The Garden Project", critiqued low-income housing projects whose names denoted an idyllic Eden-like world, camouflaging the poverty and violence within. Marshall was named the recipient of the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" grant and is currently an art professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Marshall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 4, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2001_046
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born October 17, 1955, in Birmingham, Alabama, Kerry James Marshall realized that he wanted to be an artist at a very early age. Inspired by pictures in a book, Marshall decided he wanted to be a visual artist.

Themes and ideas present in Marshall's work reflect the complex web of personal and social issues that have been instrumental in molding his life. When Marshall was eight, his family moved to the Watts community in Los Angeles, California. As the epicenter of intense struggle for civil rights, including a riot in 1965 and a confrontation between city police officers and the Black Panthers, Watts and its imagery have dramatically influenced the form and content of Marshall's work. His celebrated series, "The Garden Project", critiqued low-income housing projects whose names denoted an idyllic Eden-like world, camouflaging the poverty and violence within.

Marshall received his training from the incomparable Charles White while enrolled at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. Best known for his stylized, large-scale paintings depicting the beauty and complexity of African American life, Marshall also designs sculpture and has served as a production designer for such films as *Daughters of the Dust* (1989) and the *Hendrix Project* (1991).

With ground-breaking shows at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin and the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City, Marshall's childhood dreams have been realized. He recently was named the recipient of the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" grant and his work has become incorporated into the permanent collections of many museums across the nation. Marshall is currently an art professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kerry James Marshall was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on January 4, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Painter Kerry James Marshall (1955 - ) is best known for his stylized, large-scale paintings. His celebrated series, "The Garden Project", critiqued low-income housing projects whose names denoted an idyllic Eden-like world, camouflaging the poverty and violence within. Marshall was named the recipient of the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" grant and is currently an art professor at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

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# Restrictions

## Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

## Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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# Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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# Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Marshall, Kerry James, 1955-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Marshall, Kerry James, 1955---Interviews

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African American painters--Interviews

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Birmingham (Ala.)--Social life and customs

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Catholic schools--Alabama

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Sibling rivalry

---

Los Angeles (Calif.)--Social conditions

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Los Angeles (Calif.)--Race relations

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White, Charles, 1918-1979

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Mentoring in the arts--United States

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Watts Riot, Los Angeles, Calif., 1965

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Otis Art Institute

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African American art--20th century

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Painting--Technique

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Painting--Psychological aspects

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Universities and colleges--Faculty--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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**Occupations:**

Painter

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**HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers

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**Administrative Information**

**Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview

release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

## Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, January 4, 2001. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:14 ?

Kerry James Marshall describes his parents' backgrounds, and recalls his father's inherent mechanical ability. Marshall shares vivid memories from his childhood growing up in Ensley, a suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. He later discusses the advantages and some disadvantages of living near members of his extended family as a child. Lastly, Marshall talks about his early childhood education at a local Catholic school, and credits it with establishing his career aspirations.

African American painters--Interviews.

Birmingham (Ala.)--Social life and customs.

Catholic schools--Alabama.

Sibling rivalry.

Los Angeles (Calif.)--Social conditions.

Los Angeles (Calif.)--Race relations.

White, Charles, 1918-1979.

Mentoring in the arts--United States.

Watts Riot, Los Angeles, Calif., 1965.

Otis Art Institute.

African American art--20th century.

Painting--Technique.

Painting--Psychological aspects.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_002, TRT:

0:31:15 ?

Kerry James Marshall discusses having artistic aspirations at an early age. He then talks about his sibling rivalry with his older brother and the family's subsequent move from Alabama to California. Marshall then shares a story about an incident that changed his relationship with his brother. He then recalls the neighborhood differences between Watts and South Central Los Angeles. Lastly Marshall fondly remembers an elementary school teacher who nurtured his interest in art.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_003, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Kerry James Marshall talks briefly about his parents' attempts to keep the family shielded from racial strife while growing up in Watts. Marshall then discusses his early commitment to art and his attitudes towards education as a youth. He then explains his parents' personal ambitions and their tie-in to his artistic pursuits. Marshall then recalls his recreational activities outside of school. Lastly, Marshall discusses his youthful fascination with the artwork of Charles White and his subsequent friendship with him as a young man.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Kerry James Marshall briefly talks about his obsessive personality as a child in relation to stealing art imagery from library books, a fact he acknowledges not being proud of. Marshall then describes the series of coincidences that led him to residing in Chicago. He then recalls his mentor/mentee relationship with the artist Charles White. He then vividly details his recollections of the Watts Riots of 1965. Lastly, Marshall describes his experiences at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Kerry James Marshall comments on ever-changing aesthetics in the art world and the acceptance of the black artist within an art historical context. Marshall then traces the development of his artwork from his teenage years through the present day. Lastly, Marshall details his concepts and artistic techniques in relation to his body of work over the last ten years.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Kerry James Marshall details highlights and the gradual rise of his artistic career from the late 1970s to the present. He recounts pivotal moments that helped him cultivate his artistic style, and talks about his various teaching assignments. Lastly, Marshall describes 1995 as a critical year towards being recognized and as an artist in high demand.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_007, TRT: 0:26:45 ?

Kerry James Marshall discusses how he felt he's truly arrived as a serious artist. Marshall then talks about his university teaching position and his contributions to higher education. He then comments on the struggles of being an African American artist and the importance of art. Lastly, Marshall considers his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Kerry James Marshall, Section A2001\_046\_001\_008, TRT: 0:10:35 ?

Kerry James Marshall shares personal photographs.