

Kerry James Marshall

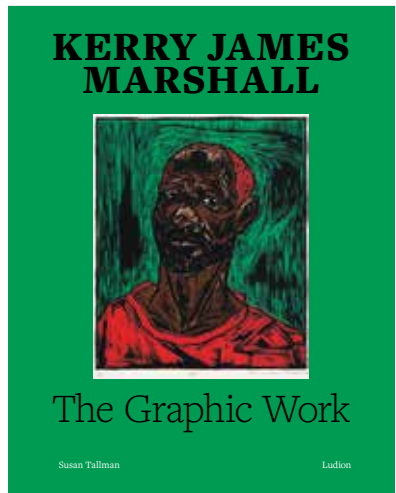
The Graphic Work, 1976–2023

SUSAN TALLMAN

Kerry James Marshall is een van Noord-Amerika's belangrijkste hedendaagse kunstenaars en wordt geroemd om zijn werk dat de ondervertegenwoordiging van de zwarte figuur in de Westerse beeldcultuur aankaart.

Marshall staat vooral bekend als schilder, maar heeft tijdens zijn carrière ook een uitgebreid grafisch oeuvre geproduceerd, dat nauwelijks gedocumenteerd is. In zijn jeugd leerde hij tekenen en schilderen, maar verdiepte hij zich ook in grafische druktechnieken. Over die jonge zelf, ergens midden de twintig, herinnert hij zich nu: 'Ik kon schilderen in eitempera (...) Ik was goed in grafiek. Ik maakte houtsneden, etsen en aquatinten. Ik kende al die technieken.' Het merendeel van zijn grafiek is niet door professionele drukkers gemaakt, maar door Kerry James Marshall zelf, alleen, in zijn atelier. Zijn prenten gaan van beelden ter grootte van een ansichtkaart tot de meterlange, twaalf panelen tellende houtsnede *Untitled* (1998–99) en talloze varianten van zijn nog steeds lopende magnum opus *The Rythm Mastr*.

Hoewel sommige prenten opgenomen zijn in belangrijke museumcollecties, is een groot aantal slechts te vinden in privécollecties of in het archief van de kunstenaar, en dus onbekend bij het publiek. Deze oevrecatalogus biedt voor de eerste keer een volledig overzicht van het grafische oeuvre van Kerry James Marshall. Auteur Susan Tallman beschrijft elk werk in detail en gaat in haar inleidend essay dieper in op de rol van grafiek en drukprocessen in Marshalls oeuvre als geheel.



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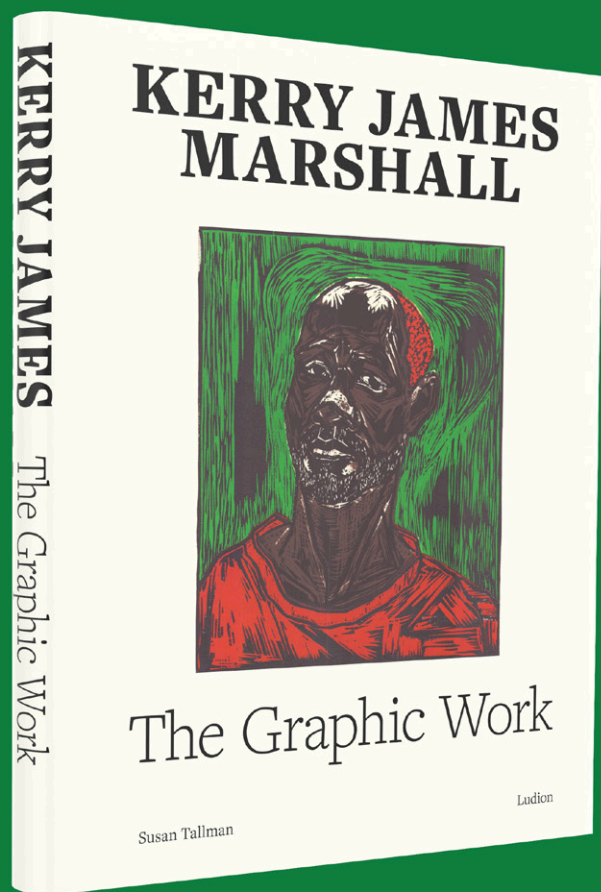
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A catalog raisonné offering the first public account of Kerry James Marshall's graphic work

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

The Graphic Work

Susan Tallman

published by Ludion

One of the most important American contemporary artists, Kerry James Marshall is known for artworks that address the 'crisis of under-representation' of the black figure in the pictorial traditions of the Western world, from museums to comic books. His work has been widely celebrated in major museum retrospectives such as *Kerry James Marshall: Painting and Other Stuff* (Antwerp, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Madrid) in 2014 and *Mastry* (Chicago, New York, Los Angeles) in 2017, and through numerous awards, including a MacArthur Fellowship in 1997. Best known as a painter, Marshall has throughout his career also produced a vast graphic oeuvre that has been seldom seen and rarely documented. An assiduous worker, he spent his youth acquiring time-honored skills of art—drawing and painting, but also wood engraving and printing. By his mid-twenties, he recalls, 'I could paint in egg tempera.... I was good at printmaking. I could do woodcuts, etchings, aquatints. I knew all of those techniques.' Most of his prints have been produced not in professional print workshops, but by the artist, working alone in his studio. They range from images the size of postcards to his 50-foot-long, 12 panel woodcut *Untitled* (1998–99), to iterations of his ongoing magnum opus, *Rythm Mastr*. And while some have entered prominent museum collections, many exist only in private collections or the artist's archive and are unknown to the public. This catalog raisonné offers the first public account of these important works and the first in-depth study of the role of printed images and print processes in Marshall's work as a whole.

Susan Tallman is a critic and art historian, who has written extensively on contemporary art, the history of prints, and other aspects of art and culture. A regular contributor to *New York Review of Books*, she has authored and co-authored many books and museum catalogues, most recently *No Plan At All: How the Danish Printshop of Niels Borch Jensen Redefined Artists Prints for the Contemporary World* (2021) and *The American Dream: Pop to the Present* (2017). In 2011 she co-founded the journal *Art in Print* and served as its Editor-in-Chief until its closure in 2019.

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KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

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1 Brother, 1975

Woodcut printed in black on Japanese paper
Image 2 is a relief 2.4 x 1.1 cm
Image 3 is a relief 2.4 x 1.1 cm
Editions: unnumbered or limited by the artist
© 1975, 2022
Art and Architecture Library
University of Toronto

Marshall's earliest surviving print was made for a public speaking class he took during his first semester at Los Angeles City College. "We had to do a speech that demonstrated something, and I demonstrated how to do a woodcut," he explains. He had never taken a class in printmaking, but he had read up on the technique and, as an aspiring illustrator, had studied the wood engraving technique of the artist Fritz Koenig.

In wood engraving, which uses the harder end grain rather than the softer plank side of the wood, the cutting is often done with thin lines that print as white within larger silhouette forms that print black. In the more common method of woodcut, by contrast, artists often carve away broad areas to leave among black lines standing.

Brother was cut using a found piece of standard lumber (its narrow width concealed the back of the head), but employs wood-engraving techniques—silhouetted black forms, articulated and modeled with white highlights to within—with simplification. Marshall printed it without a press, rubbing the back of sheets of paper laid over the inked block. For the purposes of demonstration, he marked the print as 1/8, but did not bother to print the full edition.

The importance of this print as the artist is evident in his decision to include it in the 2024 exhibition *Painting and Other Stuff* organized by the Museum van Hedelandse Kunst (Museum), which traveled to the Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

Illustration:
Kerry James Marshall, *Painting and Other Stuff*, 2024
© 2024 Kerry James Marshall
All rights reserved. Printed and bound in the United States of America
Kerry James Marshall, *Brother*, 1975
© 1975, 2022 Kerry James Marshall
and King's College London with the artist's
Charles Green (London: Phaidon, 2022)



12 Nat, 1982

Woodcut from two prints of head
and torso printed in black ink
Size: 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (24 x 31 cm)
Edition: 1/100

Woodcut print made by the artist
Size: 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (24 x 31 cm)
Edition: 1/100

This woodcut follows Marshall's breakthrough printing on paper. Portents of the Artist as a Shadow of his Former Self (1980), in which he first solved his satisfaction problem of printing Blackness as both an optical property and a cultural content. Like *Portrait of the artist*, the print is dominated by a single head and composed in shades of black disrupted by white teeth and eyes. But where the head in *Portrait of the artist* wears a sunny, blanking, (overcast) like the child, (sunny James Joyce), the one in *Nat* is topped with an oval halo.

Between head and the halo, a horizontal streak can be seen, marking the edge of one of the two printing blocks; the head is printed in a cool shade of black, while the area around the head is printed in a warm black.

Clipping magazine pictures for collages while at Otis and after, Marshall noticed "you cut out these squares of black color, but they were all different colors, red black, green black, temperance started to make a difference." These distinctions might be missed when the snippets are separated, but when they are placed adjacent to one another, they create visual depth, as well as a voluntary conceptual adjustment about how "black" means. He has spoken about the impact of reading Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, with its famous description of Black existence:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a ghost like the ones who haunted Edgar Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie crooks. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquidity—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

Combining subtly different hues of black with the bright white borrowed from the 1960s horror film *It*, Sardinian, Marshall toiled with the old job of Black people being invisible in the dark unless smiling or wide-eyed.

Printing the wooden head with a halo and the title *Nat*, Marshall identifies the subject as the slave rebellion leader Nat Turner (1800–1831), who will become a recurrent figure in Marshall's work. Born into slavery, the preacher and devout Turner understood himself to be an agent of God's kingdom when he gathered followers and embarked on a brief, violent campaign to free the enslaved. After Turner was captured and sentenced to death, he was asked if he regretted his actions, and answered: "Was Christ not crucified?" Turner is a complicated figure: he beheaded his mother with an axe, and the victims of his insurrection included women and children, but as Marshall observes, European art is peppered with heroic, noble-looking—Hulth and Holofornes, David and Goliath—in the cause of freeing the oppressed.



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29 Satisfied Man, 2015

Woodcut, 14 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (37 x 26 cm)
Size: 14 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (37 x 26 cm)
Edition: 1/100

Woodcut print made by the artist
Size: 14 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (37 x 26 cm)
Edition: 1/100

"You can't underestimate the value of a figure in a picture that seems self-satisfied," Marshall has observed. In *Satisfied Man* and *Horizontal Group*, this woodcut gives visually dramatic life to a figure who appears relaxed and sociable. Marshall printed the edition himself, taking the block heavily and rubbing the back of the paper sheet with a brush. "I prefer printing my own prints," he explains. "Because I can get as much ink on there as I want to. I like the tactile quality of the prints. Somebody who grumbles with a figure is printing; they try to see the least amount of ink they can. I want MORE ink. I want my ink to stand up. That's why I choose relief prints. I'm not a big relief fan."



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