ROBERT COLESCOTT

FIGURING HISTORY

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

MICKALENE THOMAS

FEB 15 – MAY 13 2018

#FiguringHistory
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SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PREMIERES MAJOR NEW EXHIBITION FEATURING ROBERT COLESCOTT, KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, AND MICKALENE THOMAS

Opening February 2018, Figuring History explores the work of three American artists redefining contemporary history painting.

SEATTLE, WA – The Seattle Art Museum presents Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas (February 15–May 13, 2018), a new exhibition organized by SAM featuring three leading American artists from three generations whose work redefines history painting in a contemporary context. The large-scale paintings on view are distinctive in style, subject matter, and in the historic moments they reference, but collectively they critique and redefine mainstream narratives of history and representation. In their portrayals, these artists provide testimony centered on Black experience.

The genre of history painting occupies a privileged place in the history of European art. Beginning in the Renaissance with representations of mythological, religious, and literary themes, the most famous artists of the time were commissioned to commemorate pivotal historical events that defined national identities. These large-scale works, done in the grand style, were displayed in ceremonial venues and celebrated the ruling class. Colescott, Marshall, and Thomas all lay claim to the history of the genre, but with a poignant retelling of American history from a Black perspective, giving prominence to histories and individuals that have been erased or suppressed.

The exhibition features loans from several institutions and collections, as well as works from SAM’s collection, including the recently acquired Les Demoiselles d’Alabama: Vestidas (1985) by Colescott. In addition, Mickalene Thomas plans to make new works specifically for the exhibition.

“We are thrilled to bring together the extraordinary work of Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, and Mickalene Thomas at the Seattle Art Museum,” says Kimerly Rorschach, SAM’s Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. “The urgent themes of Figuring History reflect the museum’s mission to be a place where exciting and challenging questions—even of our own institution—can be asked.”
“Figuring History opens a door into a labyrinth of questions,” says Catharina Manchanda, SAM’s Jon & Mary Shirley Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art. “Who writes history, who is present in its accounts—but also how do we square, reassess, and go forth with the artistic, social, and political histories that we have all inherited? These artists and their work speak about the past as much as the present.”

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Seattle Art Museum will publish a full-color exhibition catalogue, also titled Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas. It will feature an introduction by Catharina Manchanda, essays by art historians Lowery Stokes Sims and Jacqueline Francis, and interviews with Kerry James Marshall and Mickalene Thomas.

**ROBERT COLESCOTT (1925-2009)**

Born in Oakland, California, Robert Colescott witnessed the Great Depression in his early years and later served in the Army during World War II. Several years of studies and teachings in France and Egypt following the war gave him an outside perspective and critical edge on the racial conflicts in the United States. The cartoon-like aesthetic of his earlier works take to task celebrated milestones in the history of painting from Van Eyck to Picasso. A decade later, he applies his boldly expressive style to stories that weave the fate of ordinary individuals into the fabric of stories weighed down by the colonial past.

He poses his subjects as observers, agents, and narrators of an incomplete history, in need of revision.

**KERRY JAMES MARSHALL (b. 1955)**

Kerry James Marshall was born in Birmingham, Alabama; he and his family moved to the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in 1963, a formative time and place for the artist, who now lives and works in Chicago. Marshall’s commanding portraits and tableaux combine familiar representational forms, such as the portrait of the artist or the academic life-drawing class, with political references that frame deeply probing historical narratives.

**MICKALENE THOMAS (b. 1971)**
Mickalene Thomas’ monumental portraits and nudes of women recall the odalisques and muses familiar from a long line of European art history. Her figures do not lend themselves to passive consumption but are powerful agents who confront us. Material culture and the aesthetics of ornamentation play a central role in her work as she inflects and reimagines Matisse’s arabesques and quasi-cubist spaces through the aesthetics of contemporary fashion and style. The power dynamics shift profoundly as Thomas negotiates gender and sexuality through a contemporary female gaze.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

The exhibition is organized by the Seattle Art Museum.

Special exhibitions at SAM are made possible by donors to

SAM FUND FOR SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS


ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Robert Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM’s desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM’s downtown expansion celebrate their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM’s collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures and time periods.
FIGURING HISTORY: ROBERT COLESSCOTT, KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, MICKALENE THOMAS OPENS AT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM FEBRUARY 15

Three generations of contemporary American artists offer bold perspectives on Black culture and representation

Dynamic lineup of public programs includes Marshall and Thomas in conversation at a free opening celebration

SEATTLE, WA – The Seattle Art Museum presents Figuring History: Robert Colescott, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas (February 15–May 13, 2018), bringing together for the first time three leading American artists from three different generations whose work challenges a Western painting tradition that historically erases or misrepresents people of color. While each artist’s paintings are distinctive in style, subject matter, and the historic moments they reference, collectively they critique and redefine mainstream narratives of history and representation. At the heart of these artists’ portrayals are material and cultural histories centered on Black experiences and perspectives.

Organized by the Seattle Art Museum, the exhibition comprises 25 large-scale paintings on loan from institutions and collections across the country. It features a work from SAM’s collection—the recently acquired Les Demoiselles d’Alabama: Vestidas (1985) by Robert Colescott—as well as three paintings made by Mickalene Thomas specifically for the exhibition. She also presents a staged “living room” installation that visitors can interact with and sit in.

The living artists, Kerry James Marshall and Mickalene Thomas, will appear in conversation about their artistic practices at a free opening celebration.

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Art Beyond Sight and docent tours, as well as programs for educators and school groups, will be held in conjunction with the exhibition in addition to the following public and family programs. Details are subject to change; additional programs or events may be added. For the most up-to-date information, go to visitsam.org/figuringhistory.

Thu Feb 15
Figuring History: Community Celebration
5–9 pm
Seattle Art Museum

The whole community is invited to this free, family-friendly opening celebration featuring music, performances, art-making, an artist talk, and more.
Thu Feb 15
**SAM Talks: Kerry James Marshall and Mickalene Thomas**
7-8 pm
Seattle Art Museum
As part of the opening celebration, *Figuring History* artists Kerry James Marshall and Mickalene Thomas appear in conversation about their artistic practices.

Wed Feb 28
**Complex Exchange: Figuring Black Futures Today**
7-9 pm
Northwest African American Museum
Presented in partnership with the Northwest African American Museum, Complex Exchange pairs Seattle community members from varying disciplines in a series of conversations related to issues of race, power, politics, and representation inspired by exhibitions on view at both institutions. Sponsored by Starbucks Coffee Company.

Thu Mar 1, Apr 5, May 3
**Drop-In Studio: Creating History**
6:30–7 pm
Seattle Art Museum
Visit SAM on First Thursdays for a free drop-in art-making session inspired by *Figuring History* and led by local artists.

Fri Mar 2
**First Friday Lecture: Catharina Manchanda**
11 am–noon
Seattle Art Museum
Join Catharina Manchanda, Jon and Mary Shirley Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, as she discusses *Figuring History*.

Sat Mar 10
**Family Fun Workshop: Home Is Where the Art Is**
10 am–12:30 pm
Seattle Art Museum
What makes a house a home? Reflect on images of home in *Figuring History* and create a diorama of your special place. For ages 3-6 and caregivers. Presented by Delta Air Lines and Target. Sponsored by RealNetworks Foundation.

Sat Mar 24
**Family Fun Workshop: Poses and Postures**
Seattle Art Museum
10 am–12:30 pm
Explore images in *Figuring History* and get an introduction to figure drawing. For ages 6-10 and caregivers. Presented by Delta Air Lines and Target. Sponsored by RealNetworks Foundation.

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Fri Mar 30
**SAM Remix**
8 pm–midnight
Seattle Art Museum
#SAMRemix returns, jam-packed with eclectic performances, tours, dancing, creating, and exploring SAM’s collection and special exhibitions. Revive at Remix, a lively late-night out inspired by Figuring History. Remix is sponsored by Delta Air Lines and Starbucks Coffee Company. Media sponsors are The Stranger and KEXP 90.3 FM.

**Sat Apr 7**  
**Family Fun Workshop: All That Glitters**  
10 am–12:30 pm  
Seattle Art Museum  
Roll up your sleeves and get arty with unconventional materials to create a mixed-media masterpiece inspired by Figuring History. For ages 3-6 and caregivers.  
Presented by Delta Air Lines and Target. Sponsored by RealNetworks Foundation.

**Sat Apr 14**  
**Legendary Children**  
8-11 pm  
Seattle Art Museum  
Join us for a night of the beautiful, transgressive, and unique as we celebrate QTPOC communities. Featuring some of Seattle’s most talented queer artists, this event invites you to join in conversations sparked by Figuring History.

**Sat Apr 21**  
**Family Fun Workshop: Collage and Construct**  
10 am–12:30 pm  
Seattle Art Museum  
Step outside the box and construct your own 3-D sculpture inspired by materials you see in Figuring History. For ages 6-10 and caregivers.  
Presented by Delta Air Lines and Target. Sponsored by RealNetworks Foundation.

**Fri May 4**  
**Teen Night Out**  
7-10 pm  
Seattle Art Museum  
For teens by teens! Make the museum yours during this action-packed night for high school-age teens only. Inspired by Figuring History, this free event features DJs, teen art tours, and art-making led by local contemporary artists. Support for teen programs is provided by Hearst Foundations.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

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Special exhibitions at SAM are made possible by donors to

**SAM FUND FOR SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS**

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School of Beauty, School of Culture, 2012, Kerry James Marshall, acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas, 108 x 158 in., Birmingham Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth (Bibby) Smith, the Collectors Circle for Contemporary Art, Jane Comer, the Sankofa Society, and general acquisition funds, 2012.57, © Kerry James Marshall.
Tamika sur une chaise longue avec Monet, 2012, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 108 x 144 x 2 in., Sydney & Walda Besthoff, Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, © Mickalene Thomas.

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Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future: Matthew Henson and the Quest for the North Pole, 1986, Robert Colescott, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 114 in., Albritton Collection, Dallas, Texas, © 2017 Estate of Robert Colescott / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo: Fernando Rojas.

School of Beauty, School of Culture, 2012, Kerry James Marshall, acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas, 108 x 158 in., Birmingham Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by Elizabeth (Bibby) Smith, the Collectors Circle for Contemporary Art, Jane Comer, the Sankofa Society, and general acquisition funds, 2012.57, © Kerry James Marshall.


Vignette #2.75, 2008, Kerry James Marshall, acrylic on PVC panel, 73 ¼ x 61 in., The Art Institute of Chicago, Through prior gift of Adeline Yates; Benjamin Argile Memorial, Cyrus Hall McCormick, Alfred and May Tiefenbrincker Memorial, Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Prize, Pauline Palmer Prize, Broadus James Clarke Memorial, Norman Wait Harris Prize, William H. Bartels Prize, Joyce Van Pilsen, Laura T. Magnuson Acquisition, Ann M. Vielehr Prize, and Ada S. Garrett Prize funds; Flora Mayer Witkowsky Award for American Art; Boles C. and Hyacinth G. Drechney and Mr. and Mrs. J.F. Brower Prize funds; The Municipal Art League Prize for Portraiture; Marjorie and Louis Susman, Martin B. Cahn Prize, and Elisabeth Mathews funds, 2008.481.4, © Kerry James Marshall, The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY.

Le déjeuner sur l’herbe: Les trois femmes noires, 2010, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, 120 x 288 x 2 in., The Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann Collection, Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, © Mickalene Thomas.

Monet’s salle à manger jaune, 2012, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 108 x 144 x 2 in., Brooklyn Museum, Augustus Healy Fund, 2012.73a-b, Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, © Mickalene Thomas.
**Tamika sur une chaise longue avec Monet**, 2012, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 108 x 144 x 2 in., Sydney & Walda Besthoff, Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, © Mickalene Thomas.

**Portrait of Maya #10**, 2017, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones and acrylic paint on canvas mounted wood panel, 96 x 84 in., Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris - Brussels, © Mickalene Thomas.

**Racquel: Come to Me**, 2017, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, oil, glitter, and oil stick on wood panel, 108 x 84 x 2 in., Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong, © Mickalene Thomas.

**Resist**, 2017, Mickalene Thomas, rhinestones, acrylic, gold leaf, and oil stick on canvas mounted on wood panel, 84 x 108 x 2 in., © Mickalene Thomas.