

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

American, born Birmingham, AL, 1955

May 15, 2001, 2003

Color screenprint on paper, 27 × 22 1/2 inches

Gift of Kay Deaux, 2019.7

Kerry James Marshall has devoted much of his artistic practice to reimagining art history by incorporating Black subjects into the art historical canon. Marshall is best known for his bold, figurative approach to depicting scenes of everyday African American life on a grand scale—picnics, campouts, lively barbershops and beauty salons, urban housing, and domestic scenes.

May 15, 2001 is unusual for Marshall in both its subject matter and formal approach. The title refers to the date of an auction of modern and contemporary art. Adopting the visual vocabulary of a grocery store flyer, Marshall has arranged the names of famous artists alongside images of their work and sale prices. Jeff Koons, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, and Jean-Michel Basquiat are fully legible, but the partial names of artists Ellen Gallag[h]er, Martin Puryear, Isamu Noguchi, and Gerhard Richter can be inferred by consulting Sotheby's auction records from May 15, 2001. The artists and prices shown in the print correspond to the actual sales figures of that day. The works of the white male artists—Warhol, Pollock, Koons, Richter, and Lichtenstein—all fetched notably higher sums than the works by artists of color—Gallagher, Puryear, Noguchi, Basquiat. By simply including the actual sale prices, Marshall obliquely points to the rampant commercialization of the art world and its attendant racial and gender disparities. And yet, other subtleties abound. By including the Koons sculpture of Michael Jackson and his pet monkey Bubbles among the highest-grossing artworks on the print, Marshall alludes to the complexities of race and appropriation in creative practices. In fact, the entire composition refers to a Warhol trope of appropriating advertising copy to imply a critique of consumerism writ large. Ostensibly straightforward, Marshall's assessment of the art market demands a closer look.

—Elliot J. Reichert '10, Art History

Curator of Special Projects, The Block Museum of Art, 2013–15

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