

# Non-Fiction

## at The Underground Museum

Saturday, February 4, 2017, at 12 p.m.

The Underground Museum, Arlington Heights

### KNOW BEFORE YOUR VISIT

- Artist Noah Davis (1983–2015) wanted every L.A. resident to be able to see and engage with contemporary art and ideas. He staged a series of exhibitions in Arlington Heights storefronts, out of which grew The Underground Museum, which borrows art from MOCA's permanent collection and displays it in South L.A.
- *Non-Fiction*, the second collaboration between MOCA and The Underground Museum, includes work by some of the most prominent visual artists working today, including Kerry James Marshall and Kara Walker.
- Through multiple mediums, styles, and voices, *Non-Fiction* explores the complex experiences of black embodiment in American society.

### THE UNDERGROUND MUSEUM

Founded by the late artist Noah Davis (1983–2015) along with his wife, the artist Karon Davis, The Underground Museum in Arlington Heights is dedicated to ensuring that contemporary art and ideas are accessible to all L.A. residents. In 2015, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) and The Underground Museum launched a multiyear collaboration to display works from MOCA's esteemed collection in exhibitions designed by Noah Davis at The Underground Museum. *Non-fiction* is the second iteration of this collaboration. The first collaboration between MOCA and The Underground Museum featured work by the South African artist William Kentridge.

### NON-FICTION

*Non-Fiction* explores the black body and its relationship to history through the work of artists Theaster Gates, Robert Gober, David Hammons, Deana Lawson, Kerry James Marshall, Marion Palfi, Henry Taylor, and Kara Walker. *Non-Fiction* specifically interrogates the violences perpetrated on black citizens by both police and civilians, while also offering images of beautiful, powerful, and graceful black bodies—on the streets, in love, and in movement. *Non-Fiction* suggests a reality—both in art and in life—that is shaped through coexisting vantage points of hate, love, birth, death, race, resistance, perseverance, religion, and ancestry. *Non-fiction* is Noah Davis's love letter to the victims of racial violence, and the families that endured.

### ARTISTS INCLUDE

**THEASTER GATES** (b. 1973), a Chicago-based social-practice artist whose work merges art and urban planning. Gates organized public art for Chicago's public-transit system, directs the University of Chicago's Arts and Public Life Initiative, and is the founder and artistic director of the Rebuild Foundation, a nonprofit that works to develop affordable cultural spaces in under-resourced communities. The sculptor/urban planner's works continually expand notions of what visual art can be.

**ROBERT GOBER** (b. 1954), a sculptor who became famous in the 1980s for his sculptures of simple everyday objects like sinks, playpens, and doors, and later began making room-sized environments. Gober's sculptures of fragments of the human body speak to both eroticism and mortality, themes that can be tied to the artist's involvement in AIDS activism.

**DAVID HAMMONS** (b. 1943), known for artworks that relate to the civil rights and Black Power movements. Part of a group of African American artists and jazz musicians active in L.A. in the 1970s, he later settled in New York. Often using found materials and bringing art to non-art-world audiences in public places, Hammons connected the concerns of minimalism and post-minimalism to the concerns of black life in America.

**DEANA LAWSON** (b. 1979), a photographer known for her carefully composed images of intimate scenes. Lawson draws from western and African portraiture traditions to create images that examine, in the artist's words, "the body's ability to channel personal and social histories."

**KERRY JAMES MARSHALL** (b. 1955), whom the *New York Times* calls "one of the greatest history painters of our time." A representational and figurative painter during an era when neither artistic strategy has been much in style, Marshall committed from an early age to painting black figures and inserting black bodies into art history.

**MARION PALFI** (1907–1978), a Berlin-born social documentary photographer who sought social justice through art and emigrated to New York in 1940. Through her project *Great American Artists of Minority Groups and Democracy at Work*, Palfi met poet Langston Hughes, who would later say, "A Palfi photograph brings us face to face with hidden realities that its surface only causes us to begin to explore."

**HENRY TAYLOR** (b. 1958), a Los Angeles-based painter, sculptor, and installation artist. Known for his portraits, Taylor has said, "I paint everyone, or I try to."

**KARA WALKER** (b. 1969), one of the most important artists of our time. Walker is famous for her large-scale silhouettes exploring race, sexuality, and violence in American history. These intense black-on-white works force viewers to confront the connections between the era of slavery and the present day. In 2014, Walker's first large-scale public work was presented in Brooklyn's former Domino Sugar Factory. The massive, sugar-coated figure of a woman bore a title that exemplifies Walker's politic and aesthetic: "A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant."

The exhibition *Non-Fiction* (March 20, 2016–April 30, 2017) will be accompanied by ongoing programs including a summer film series, artist talks, meditation sessions in The Underground Museum's Purple Garden, and other events.

## DEFINITIONS

**FIGURATIVE ART:** Art that realistically represents objects from the real world, especially the human figure (as opposed to abstract art).

**FOUND MATERIALS:** Objects that are normally considered something other than art but that are deemed by an artist to have aesthetic, or artistic, value. The concept of the found object (or *objet trouvé*) in art was popularized by French avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), whose *Fountain* (1917), a signed and dated urinal, is recognized as one of the pivotal pieces of twentieth-century art. Numerous artists have employed found materials in their work, including Picasso, Damien Hirst, and Noah Purifoy.

**SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY:** Photography that chronicles events or environments with an aim to draw attention to social issues. Notable practitioners include Dorothea Lange and Sebastiao Salgado.

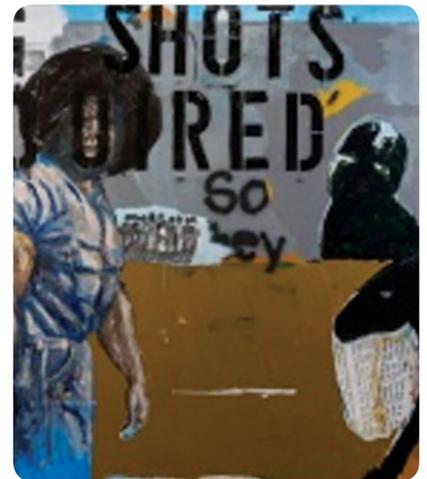
**SOCIAL PRACTICE:** An artistic medium that focuses on community interaction and social issues. Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses, through which artists restored a group of Houston houses to be used as art spaces for visiting artists and homes for single mothers, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles's decades-long collaborations, involving performance art and documentation, with the New York City Department of Sanitation give a sense of the range of works that fall under "social practice."

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Several of the artists in this exhibition are known for challenging and expanding ideas of what art is. Did you see anything in *Non-Fiction* that expanded your definition of visual art?
- "You can't be born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and grow up in South Central [Los Angeles] near the Black Panthers headquarters," Kerry James Marshall has said, "and not feel like you've got some kind of social responsibility. You can't move to Watts in 1963 and not speak about it. That determined a lot of where my work was going to go..." How do you think identity and history shape art?



Kara Walker, *The Means to an End...A Shadow Drama in Five Acts*, 1995



Henry Taylor, *Warning shots not required*, 2011



David Hammons, *In the Hood (Gray)*, 2016

- Do you think, as Deana Lawson does, that the body channels both personal and social histories? Why or why not?
- David Hammons once said, “I’ve never, ever liked art,” but that he made art because art is about symbols and “outrageously magical things happen when you mess around with a symbol.” Did you see any symbols being messed with in the exhibition? Can you think of examples of magical, or transformative, things happening through the creative use of symbols?

## IF YOU LIKED *NON-FICTION*, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

- Films, artist talks, and other events surrounding the exhibition:  
<http://theunderground-museum.org>
- Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*, the first major Marshall retrospective in the United States, at MOCA Grand Avenue, March 12 to July 3, 2017
- Citizen* by Claudia Rankine
- Exhibitions and workshops at the William Grant Still Arts Center: [wgsac.wordpress.com](http://wgsac.wordpress.com)
- Art + Practice, an exhibition space founded by artist Mark Bradford that brings museum-quality exhibitions and lectures to Leimert Park: [www.artandpractice.org](http://www.artandpractice.org)
- A Vision for Black Lives: <https://policy.m4bl.org>

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Librarian **STACY WILLIAMS** has selected the following books to help you learn more about today’s event.

*Henry Taylor* (2014)

By Henry Taylor

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6537.T39 A4 2014

*Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* (2016)

By Kerry James Marshall

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: ND237.M24623 A4 2016

*L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints* (2011)

By David Hammons

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6538.N5L26 2011

*Now Dig This: Art & Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980* (2011)

By Kellie Jones

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6538.N5J666 2011

*Pictures from Another Time* (2002)

By Kara Walker

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6537 .W324A4 2002x

*Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor* (2014)

By The Museum of Modern Art

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6537.G56 A4 2014

*Suffer Little Children* (1952)

By Marion Palfi

Special Collections/Doheny Memorial Library: HQ792.U5 P3 1952

*Theaster Gates: My Labor is My Protest* (2012)

By Theaster Gates

Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N6537.G377 A4 2012b

*Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People* (2014)

By Thomas Allen Harris

Leavey Library: LVYDVD8560

