

DOCENT DATES

January 5

Marla Berns on African Masks (via Zoom)

January 19

Eik Kahng on Van Gogh exhibit (in auditorium pending approval)

January 26

Recruitment Open House 3 PM

February 2

Eik Kahng on Van Gogh exhibit (in auditorium pending approval)

TBD

February 16

March 2

March 16

April 6

May 4

May 18



Kerry James Marshall was born in 1955 in Alabama, grew up in Watts and currently resides in Chicago. His belief that the presence of a black person in the field of art is “undeniable” and “indispensable” and “non-negotiable” has proven true with retrospectives of his work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and at the Los Angeles MOCA in 2017. His work has since soared into multi-million dollar sales while his vision continues to expand.

Submitted by Ricki Morse

A Message from Patsy

“I’m not telling you to make the world better, because I don’t think that progress is necessarily part of the package. I’m just telling you to live in it. Not just to endure it, not just to suffer it, not just to pass through it, but to live in it. To look at it. To try to get the picture. To live recklessly. To take chances. To make your own work and take pride in it. To seize the moment. And if you ask me why you should bother to do that, I could tell you that the grave’s a fine and private place, but none I think do there embrace. Nor do they sing there, or write, or argue, or see the tidal bore on the Amazon, or touch their children. And that’s what there is to do and get it while you can and good luck at it.”

Those words come from a commencement speech given at UC Riverside by celebrated author, Joan Didion in 1975. Joan Didion died on December 23rd. Hers might not be the voice you think of to take us into the new year but she has often been the voice inside my head, cool, qualifying, perversely life affirming. The perfect sentence, and then a better one to follow; a fierce, curious, calculated, elegiac voice.

As we begin 2022, a time we imagined when all would return to a normal we each remember differently, we find we are still unsure; unsure of protocols, best practices, how to be with people or without them. We are on unstable ground and if anyone knew how to balance on instability it was Joan. So I offer her words and her particular brand of “apocalyptic optimism” as a reminder that instability—possible disaster—is the underlayment of our very ground. We are made for thriving in the places in between, the space from stone to stone. We are Californians. Joan said:

*I think people who grew up in California have more tolerance for apocalyptic notions. However, mixed up with this tolerance for apocalyptic notions in which the world is going to end dramatically is **this belief that the world can't help but get better and better**. It's really hard for me to believe that everything doesn't improve, because thinking like that was just so much a part of being in California.*

We believe in this “better”, and making it so is what we do. Art, teaching, supporting each other, widening the circle, opening the door, “looking at it” doing it. So allow me to start this year with embracing uncertainty not as a challenge but as the organic, effluvial beginning of joy; as life. May it never be drained of wonder.

Patsy

From our **President**
Patty Santiago,



Dear Docents,

I hope that all of you were able to enjoy the holidays with family and friends. A new year is upon us and we look forward with much excitement to the long awaited opening of the Van Gogh exhibition in February. Eik Khang will be presenting two lectures to the Docent Council on “Through Vincent’s Eyes: Van Gogh and His Sources” in January and February.

I also wanted to share with you a webinar from the National Docent Symposium, entitled “The Evolving Docent Connecting with Audiences and Creating Value in an Ever-Changing World”. Although the incident at the Art Institute of Chicago (where their volunteer Docent Council was recently completely eliminated) was never directly mentioned, it was clear from the questions and title that the purpose of the webinar was related to addressing that issue. There were three docent participants from the West and East Coasts and Canada. Although all three were from very different museums and geographic locations, their answers to the questions were fairly consistent.

The questions posed concerned:

The evolution of tour strategies and practices and how they have changed over time;

The significant changes and challenges that docents and museums are currently facing;

The skills that are most important for docents to have;

Opportunities and challenges – What's next?

In summary, the three main issues that surfaced were:

How to best serve new and challenging populations;

How to provide role models for changing demographics;

How to effectively incorporate technology into touring;

The three docent participants repeatedly spoke about the need for adaptability, flexibility and responding to change for both institutions and docents as we navigate cultural and demographic shifts. If you wish to view the webinar, it can be found on the National Docent Symposium website; [https://](https://www.nationaldocents.org/about-us/insight-from-the-council/the-evolving-docent-connecting-with-audiences-and-creating-value-in-an-ever-changing-world)

www.nationaldocents.org/about-us/insight-from-the-council/the-evolving-docent-connecting-with-audiences-and-creating-value-in-an-ever-changing-world.

In the spirit of adaptability, flexibility and responding to change, the SBMA Docent Council Board has recently taken up the issue of the dress code as currently defined in the bylaws. There is widespread agreement that the dress code should be part of the Standing Rules, rather than a part of the bylaws. In addition, there is a desire to add some flexibility to the code as it is currently written. I will be sharing with you for your approval our revision in the near future. Happy New Year to all! ■

Patty

From our **Student Teams Co-chairs**
Teda Pilcher and Irene Stone



What a great start we had this fall, renewing student touring with over 400 students, including 120 in December. Our touring docents showed warmth, enthusiasm, and enduring flexibility in providing engaging experiences for student from second grade to college, classes as small as eight to groups over 50. All comments by teachers and chaperones were positive, with plans for return trips. Thank you to



all of you, and your team leaders, as well as Rachel and

Elena for making this fall such a smooth reentry to our docent roles.

We are now planning for student tours for the Van Gogh exhibition. Regularly scheduled Van Gogh student tours will be offered every Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00- 10:45 and 10:30-11:15, beginning March 1st. Teachers are already signing up. More information will be coming soon.

Meanwhile, Happy New Year and best wishes for good health, peace, and joy in the new year! ■

Teda and Irene

From our **Membership Chair**
Pattie Firestone



Happy 2022! Email or Text Pattie Firestone my Research Hours and my Public Touring Hours every month or two. ■

Pattie

Pattie.Firestone@gmail.com, 301-520-5775 (mobile)

From our **Adult Teams Co-chairs**
Laura DePaoli and Denise Klassen



Thank you to all of our docents who toured in 2021. A very happy and productive New Year to all!

Have you seen our new photography exhibition *The Constructed Photograph*? It replaced *Facing Forward* and went up without much notice, but is a must see. The Todd Gray collage "Purnima", John Divola's wonderful "D24 Run Sequence", from "Dogs Chasing My Car in the



Dessert and Kuni Sugiura's "Hoppings I" photogram are among the works in the show. There's something for everyone!

As Through Vincent's Eyes: Van Gogh and His Sources is installed during January and February the galleries that will house that exhibition will gradually be closed and we will have to adjust our tours accordingly. Docents touring Highlights in the first half of 2022 should plan to tour mostly in Ludington Court, and the Asian, Contemporary and Photography galleries from February to June. Please arrive 15 minutes early to sweep for tour attendees and to make sure you know which galleries are available for touring.

November touring stats are as follows:

Happy Holidays to all! ■
Laura & Denise

	Adult Tour Totals	Highlights	Facing Forward	Meet Me at the Museum	Ten Talks
No. Tours	34	16	12	5	1
No. Attendees	191	92	51	44	4
Ave Attendance	6	6	4	9	4

Holiday Party

From VP Karen Howsam

The Holiday Party on December 13 was a big hit! Thank you, Josie and Ed Martin for hosting the festive event in such a beautiful home and garden—the patios were a perfect setting with the rain holding off until 5:00 pm. Sweets and savories made a festive sight on the tables, docents arriving with delicacies in hand.

A special thank-you goes to Rachel Heidenry for sending out such a beautiful invitation, to Steve Hiatt, our favorite sustainer, for his well-honed bartending skills, to Denise Klassen for her spectacular flower arrangements, and to Loree Gold for sticking around for the diligent clean up that restored Josie's home to its prior peaceful state. On to 2022!

Be merry,
Karen

Photos by Steve Hiatt



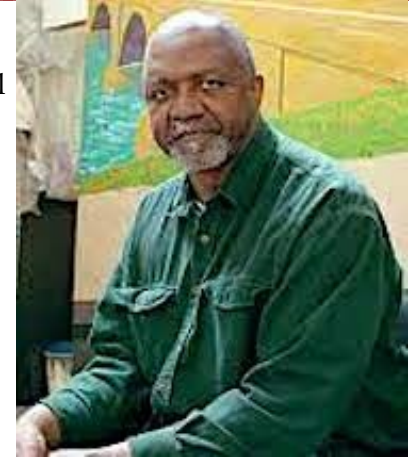
Van Gogh, *Tarascon Stagecoach*, October 1888

Forrest Kirk: The Abstract Reimagining of Kerry James Marshall's Heritage

By Ricki Morse



On January 10, 2022, Forrest Kirk's huge painting, *Farewell to the Flesh* will be hung above the stairwell in the Park Entrance lobby. Painted in 2020, this newly acquired work embodies the vibrancy and social relevance of today's LA art world and reflects the influence of Kerry James Marshall, a Chicago artist and art professor, a major influence on Kirk's work. Thus we get a double gift, the opportunity to study Kirk's work in our own house and his connection to the skyrocketing career of Marshall, a current star of international art auctions.



Kerry James Marshall in his Chicago studio in 2018.

Kerry James Marshall

Our cover image this month is Marshall's *Untitled*, 2014, a black couple sitting in a club, with the exuberant air and truly black skin which characterizes his work. Marshall remembers deciding as a teen ager that he would paint exclusively black people, believing that change comes about through cumulative small, ordinary moments, and he dedicated himself to providing those moments.

Born in Georgia in 1955, he emigrated with his family to Los Angeles and spent his childhood amidst the violent conflicts of Watts, surrounded by his traditional supportive family. Unlike the often splintered black



families of Watts, Marshall's father was a skilled artisan who had taught himself the intricacies of Swiss watch repair and took advantage of the city to acquire elegant broken watches which he was able to rebuild to their former beauty and function, thus providing his family with stable lives. The artist who emerged was an unusual man, courtly, an artist and scholar, seeing joy in his people rather than suffering, finding new visions of being black in America—"to refine blackness as a non-negotiable symbol of power."

Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Studio)*, 2014, acrylic on PVC panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art. This work commemorates Marshall's seventh grade visit to his mentor's studio and the realization that art could be his life's work.

A Portrait of the Artist as A Shadow of His Former Self (8"x 61/2") was painted when he



Kerry James Marshall, *Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of his Former Self*, 1978, egg tempera on paper, LACMA.

was 25 after he had graduated from Otis Art Institute. The blackness of the artist's skin was achieved through a mixture of three black paints made from different materials mixed into an old Dutch recipe for egg tempera. The result is a complex, glowing, multi-hued surface. Marshall was inspired by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) which he had read in high school. This black man becomes visible—an ironic, jaunty grin marking his individuality. Marshall says that this little painting changed the course of his life. He had been working in mixed media abstract collages of black life but now moved directly into figurative painting, as well as expanding into abstraction, which he continues today. The tiny *Portrait* resurfaced in a 2017 LACMA exhibition, the gift of a local collector. In 1984 Steven Lebowitz, had purchase it in a Culver City gallery for \$850, gifting it to the museum in 2016.

Carroll Dunham reviewed the exhibition for *Artforum* and wrote, "This little jewel claimed a territory in which abstract formal values, intensity of facture, and personal symbolism collide, while different notions of blackness, as subject, condition, and material reality, are conflated. Over the course of the next decade, Marshall, with increasing confidence, deployed similar images embedded in a field of personally and culturally



Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled (Underpainting)*, 2018, acrylic and collage on PVC panel in artist's frame, Glenstone Museum. See artist as boy in background.



Kehinde Wiley, *Equestrian Portrait of Prince Tommaso of Savoy-Carignan*, 2015, oil on canvas, Collection of Dennis and Jeanne Masel. Exhibited SBMA March 2019 to March 2020.

symbolic icons that gradually matured into a more narrative form of inquiry.” I would amend the final statement to “a more narrative form of revelation.” Marshall is able to create in his viewer his experience of being black and fully present in the world.

The image (previous page) is subtitled “Underpainting,” referencing a usually brown initial layer of paint providing warmth to the color added later. In the Renaissance it was burnt umber, which is what Marshall uses here. We see twin images, nearly reflections of one another, of black children, tour guides and visitors in galleries extending into the distance.

The tradition of mirrored reflections extends back through the history of painting. We think of Velázquez. However, the color has not been added. Is this a painting which had not yet been imagined, or is it a work in process? The wall labels describe the figures on one side as American and the other as African American, but in spite of all the figurative activity, our attention is drawn repeatedly to the two walls dividing the scenes and to the narrow central slit of space extending into the distance, We even glimpse a painting in the distance, as if there is a far room where the galleries come together. The painting demands that we pause and observe, through the history of painting, the power of this separation. Does it record our world or are the two reflections of a single reality?

Forrest Kirk

The history of painting was the subject of the last painting by a black artist installed in our stairwell where Forrest Kirk’s painting will hang, The comparisons among the three artists, Kerry James Marshall, Kehinde Wiley and Forrest Kirk bring each into sharp focus. Wiley’s handsome black man in his everyday clothes rides the horse of a Renaissance Italian Prince, immortalized by the Flemish Baroque painter Anthony Van Dyck. Playing off the European tradition of royalty and privilege, Wiley confers these attributes to his rider and to himself as a gay man. Kerry James Marshall focuses instead on black life in a divided society, the black man’s identity arising not from white history but from the inherent nature of blackness, which he celebrates as a source of power.

Forrest Kirk, inspired by Marshall’s vision of individual black power arising from within, expresses himself through the raw power of paint, rendered through the abstract application of paint to canvas. He says that the paint knows where it needs to go. “There could be a figure here. I don’t know whether I’ll bring him out or not..” “The paint dictates the next stroke.” In Kirk we are engaged by a 21st c LA man who narrates his life as a series of accidents culminating in his commitment to become a great artist.

Born in San Diego in 1975 and currently working in Los Angeles, Forrest began drawing as a child and has never stopped--his course as varied as his city world. Introduced by his stepfather, who operated several undercover gambling operations, he early learned that the front door of a business was a blind. He named

Forrest Kirk, in his LA Studio, 2019





Forrest Kirk, *Assata*, 2021, acrylic, gorilla glue on canvas, Gavlak Gallery. Assata Shakur (b.1947) was godmother to Tupac Shakur, the famous rapper, and member of the Black Liberation Army. Escaped federal prison in 1979 and was granted asylum by Cu-

a 2021 exhibition in West Palm Beach “Blind Tiger” because the paintings reflect the checkered history of the city.

With his friends he became a skilled graffiti artist on the canal walls and underpasses of San Diego. He chose to attend Mission Bay High School in San Diego because it would provide him access to the ocean, not because it was the leading magnet school in the area. He chose LA State University because it was nearby, took the junior year abroad program to Paris, worked in a classical atelier there, met local artists dropped out of the university and stayed on in Paris, studying the rise of abstraction, and was particularly drawn to Gerhard Richter’s range of styles. By the time he returned to LA, his course was set--to develop new materials and directions for abstraction, which he called an “elite motif” using gorilla glue, bubble wrap, epoxy, impasto/scraped acrylic colors, imaging an evolved social order.

Farewell to the Flesh is a recent major work by Forrest Kirk which employs his “elite motif,” epoxy, gorilla glue and impasto-ed acrylic paint, scraped and retouched. The artist came to our museum to retouch the work just a few weeks ago. It is one of his series on relationship, the male and female facing one another, stripped of their skin, revealing blood, tissue and sinew. She wears an elaborate African hairstyle while his hunched shape and elongated jaw suggest a gorilla. The layers of meaning range from the history of the species to the intimacy of relationship, being not only naked but raw in one another’s presence. At the same moment they are separate creatures—emphasizing the unique individuality of each. Perhaps true relationship requires becoming this transparent to one another. Or is it the artist’s task to render this moment emotionally available to us? Decades earlier, fresh from two rounds of art school—one in East Germany, one in West—Gerhard Richter, Kirk’s early influence, had made a note to himself: “Pictures which are interpretable, and which contain a



Forrest Kirk, *Farewell to the Flesh*, 2020, mixed media on canvas, SBMA.

meaning, are bad pictures." A good picture "takes away our certainty, because it deprives a thing of its meaning and its name. It shows us the thing in all the manifold significance and infinite variety that preclude the emergence of any single meaning and view."

I can hardly wait to stand before *Farewell to the Flesh* and let it talk to me—and to share the conversation with all of you. ■

Bring on 2022!

Holiday Party photo in Josie's garden by Steve Hiatt



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