

Rush More: The Monolithic Mural
A Study of Contemporary Celebrity in Chicago Public Art

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Introduction

Three blocks from Lake Michigan, two blocks from the Chicago Athletic Association, and one block from Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* in Millennium Park is Kerry James Marshall's mural: *Rush More* (fig. 2). Curiously located on the western façade of the Chicago Cultural Center, the 132-foot by 100-foot work hides among service entrances and garages only accessible from Garland Court.¹ Illuminating the concrete alleyway, the mural depicts a Chicago park-scape in which five trees have been carved with the faces of twenty women who shaped cultural heritage in the city.

Rush More was conceptualized in 2017 as part of a joint effort between Murals of Acceptance (MoA) and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE).² MoA is a non-profit organization that seeks to encourage social tolerance through art.³ DCASE is a branch of city government that manages artistic vitality in Chicago.⁴ Together, these entities recruited Marshall, secured a location, supervised execution, and publicized the final product.

In this thesis, I examine the genesis of Kerry James Marshall's mural *Rush More* in the context of MoA and DCASE. I consider relevant visual materials such as planning designs and paintings along with written materials such as legal contracts, policy briefs and newspaper articles. I argue that these two institutions conceived *Rush More* to monumentalize the celebrity of Kerry James Marshall as a proxy for resolving racial inequity within, and achieving international recognition for, the city of Chicago. Simultaneously, I put forth a multi-disciplinary

¹ Jeff Zimmermann, "Artwork Proposal – 305" (Correspondence, Chicago, 2017), 1.

² Miriam Di Nunzio, "Kerry James Marshall to Create Massive Mural for Cultural Center," Chicago Sun-Times, September 21, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/entertainment/kerry-james-marshall-to-created-massive-mural-for-cultural-center/>.

³ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.muralsofacceptance.org/whoweare/>.

⁴ "Cultural Affairs and Special Events," City of Chicago: Cultural Affairs and Special Events, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca.html>.

approach for reviewing contemporary art in the public sphere that treats the work of art as a social intervention. This approach starts with historical context, moves to organizational analysis, then transitions to legal documents, and finally ends with close looking at the work of art.

The Historical Moment

To begin, I will assess the historical context that created the conditions of possibility for *Rush More*. Looking to Chicago in the year 2017, racism endures in many forms: individual, institutional, structural, and systemic.⁵ While racial and ethnic groups are neither biological nor permanent, these constructed categories have been used to organize social relations within the city. As delineated by a policy study published by the University of Illinois at Chicago, the largest racial and ethnic groups are Blacks, Latinx and whites. Each comprises approximately one-third of the city's population. Thus, capturing the essence of life during this time is, in many ways, attempting to document a tale of three cities.⁶

Within each racial and ethnic group, a diversity of experiences exists. Nonetheless, many contemporary challenges faced by Chicago residents are largely due to the long-term consequences of widespread discrimination that began in the early 20th Century. From 1916 to 1970, the demographics of the population transformed significantly.⁷ Chicago attracted over 500,000 African Americans who were moving from the rural South to the urban North.⁸ During this time, known as the Great Migration, the city's population of African Americans multiplied

⁵ Kasey Henricks et al., *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago Report*, report, Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago (Chicago, IL: Institute for Race and Public Policy, 2017), 14.

⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁷ Kate Walz et al., *A City Fragmented: How Race, Power and Aldermanic Prerogative Shape Chicago's Neighborhoods*, report, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance (Chicago, IL: Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, 2018), 9.

⁸ Ibid, 9.

twentyfold. Concurrently, Mexicans migrated to Chicago in smaller numbers, in search of industrial and agricultural employment due to the Mexican Revolution.⁹ To retaliate against these waves of immigrants, white communities devised political barriers that staved off integration. Many of these formal practices were outlawed with the enactment of the Federal Fair Housing Act in 1968.¹⁰ However, discrimination has perpetuated in ever more insidious ways, by targeting populations with little political and economic capital. Most often, these populations are Black and Latinx populations.¹¹

Disparity along racial and ethnic lines can be demonstrated through detailed accounts of housing, economics, and justice. While these categories are inextricably linked, I will discuss each as an individual factor that contributes to a broader understanding of racism. In regards to housing, fifty years after the Federal Fair Housing Act, Chicago remains geographically segregated by race and ethnicity. Initially shaped by historical housing policies, neighborhood segregation has been exacerbated by discriminatory real estate and lending practices.¹² One example is the two-tiered lending markets that led Black and Latinx households to mortgages with high interest rates, ballooning payment schedules and increased fees. Compounded, these factors amplified the effects of the mid-2000s housing collapse. Many communities of color were devastated. In combination with economic restructuring and uneven urban development, the aftermath of the Great Recession left countless Black and Latinx residents unable to afford housing, with departure from the city being their only available recourse.¹³

⁹ Kasey Henricks et al., *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago Report*, 7.

¹⁰ Kate Walz et al., *A City Fragmented: How Race, Power and Aldermanic Prerogative Shape Chicago's Neighborhoods*, 16.

¹¹ Kasey Henricks et al., *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago Report*, 8.

¹² *Ibid*, 13.

¹³ *Ibid*, 9.

In regards to economics, income inequality continues to rise. Over the past half-century, the city transitioned from a predominately industrial economy to a service-based economy. This shift translated into widespread substitution of semiskilled manufacturing jobs with fewer yet higher paying jobs in the service industry.¹⁴ Contemporary statistics reveal the race and ethnic backgrounds of impacted individuals. White unemployment rate hovers around five percent, whereas Latinx unemployment is approximately ten percent and Black unemployment rate is double. As such, ten percent of white families live below the poverty line, in comparison to twenty five percent and thirty percent of Latinx and Black families, respectively. These consequential income disparities indicate the prevalence of discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity.¹⁵

Presently, both housing and economic discrimination occur in a manner that is ostensibly detached from local government. Judicial discrimination, on the contrary, is intimately and publicly affiliated with the City of Chicago and the Mayor Rahm Emanuel. For decades, Black and Latinx residents voiced concerns regarding the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) racist practices.¹⁶ These complaints were ignored until the release of a graphic dashboard camera video showing a white Chicago police officer, Jason Van Dyke, fatally shooting a Black teenager, Laquan McDonald, along a street in 2014. Citywide protests erupted immediately after, calling for heightened transparency and strict governmental oversight. These events were publicized across the United States, degrading the city's reputation on a national platform¹⁷.

¹⁴ Kate Walz et al., *A City Fragmented: How Race, Power and Aldermanic Prerogative Shape Chicago's Neighborhoods*, 12.

¹⁵ Kasey Henricks et al., *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago Report*, 1.

¹⁶ Ibid, 74.

¹⁷ Monica Davey and Mitch Smith, "Chicago Police Dept. Plagued by Systemic Racism, Task Force Finds," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2016, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/14/us/chicago-police-dept-plagued-by-systemic-racism-task-force-finds.html>.

In response, Mayor Emanuel created a racially diverse task force to evaluate CPD. The task force collected substantial evidence demonstrating that enforcement practices disproportionately effected, and often showed little respect for, Black and Latinx community members.¹⁸ For example, seventy-four percent of people killed or injured by Chicago police officers in the last eight years were Black.¹⁹ Just in the year 2014, seventy-two percent of people stopped by CPD were Black, and seventeen percent were Latinx.²⁰ In light of such findings, the task force endorsed complaints made against the institution, confirming the following: “CPD’s own data gives validity to the widely held belief the police have no regard for the sanctity of life when it comes to people of color.”²¹ Such findings elucidated the discriminatory conduct directed toward communities of color, thereby emboldening distrust in the City of Chicago amid local and national narratives.

McCarthy’s Grassroots Solution to Systemic Racial Inequality

Attuned to this pervasive inequality, Chicago-native Kevin McCarthy sought to mobilize the arts as a solution. He recognized that, “In today’s current civil rights climate, it seems many great groups of people are being discriminated against, marginalized and even hated.”²² Inspired to take action, McCarthy founded a non-profit organization titled Murals of Acceptance (MoA). The non-profit organization pays tribute to McCarthy’s late friend Alexis Arquette, an actress who increased transgender visibility in popular culture. In collaboration “with the best fine artists

¹⁸ *Recommendations for Reform: Restoring Trust Between the Chicago Police and the Communities They Serve*, report, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Police Accountability Task Force Report (Chicago, IL: City of Chicago, 2016), <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2801130/Chicago-Police-Accountability-Task-Force-Report.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Recommendations for Reform: Restoring Trust Between the Chicago Police and the Communities They Serve*, report, Chicago Police Department, Chicago Police Accountability Task Force Report, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid*, 8.

²² “Who We Are,” Murals of Acceptance.

alive today,” MoA makes “monuments that preach acceptance, love, and equality to everyone who sees them, and put[s] them in places where everyone would.”²³ Its mission is admirable, yet alarmingly simple.

As demonstrated by these naïve platitudes, McCarthy ascribes significant agency to the artistic object. His argumentation presumes that, “art speaks a universal language that does not discriminate... it is one of the most elemental languages of our species. And like love, art has the power of opening.”²⁴ Commonly adopted and espoused by neoliberal pacifists, this cluster of ideas pertaining to art’s capacity fails to acknowledge that such premises have been vehemently contested in art historical and sociological dialogues that concern the social sphere.²⁵ Practically applying this theoretical understanding of art to MoA, McCarthy believes that he can erect a mural that will challenge dominant social paradigms, unambiguously communicate a singular message to a diverse public, and motivate greater social action. Necessarily, he trusts that neither personal experiences nor physical locations will influence the manner viewers receive the mural. This naïve optimism and indifference to social context, as we will see, would have significant consequences for the production of *Rush More*.

After founding MoA, McCarthy searched for an artist to create the first mural and catalyze the project. He determined Kerry James Marshall “would be the perfect first artist.”²⁶ Marshall is an inspired chronicler of the African American experience whose artistic project has been strongly influenced by his upbringing. Raised at the epicenter of pivotal flashpoints of the Civil Rights, Marshall confirmed, “You can’t be born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and grow up in South Central [Los Angeles] near the Black Panthers headquarters, and not feel like

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Who We Are,” Murals of Acceptance.

²⁵ O.K. Werckmeister. “Marx on Ideology and Art.” *New Literary History* 4, no. 3 (1973): 501-19.

²⁶ “Who We Are,” Murals of Acceptance.

you've got some kind of social responsibility.”²⁷ He started taking art classes as a teenager, and continued at Otis College of Arts and Design.

While pursuing his Bachelors of Fine Arts in the late 1970s, Marshall was supremely influenced by Charles White.²⁸ White was a master draftsman and activist; however, to simply describe him as such understates his impact on post-modern and contemporary African American artists. White launched his artistic career as a teenage staff artist for the Chicago-based National Negro Congress that fought for Black liberation. After studying at the School of the Art Institute, he worked as a state affiliate for the Works Progress Administration.²⁹ From the 1960s until his death, White taught at Otis College. He became the “effective dean of figure drawing” during a time when multimedia artistic practices sought to dismantle “traditional, humanist craft.”³⁰ All the while, he produced figurative works that rendered African Americans with dignity. To make such work, especially during the Civil Rights era, was a political act. Underpinning White’s projects was the notion that every “artist must bear a social responsibility. He must be accountable for the context of his work. And that work should reflect a deep, abiding concern for humanity.”³¹ His dedication to creating political, historically engaged works inspired many Black artists including David Hammons and Timothy Washington. Only Marshall embraced both White’s artistic philosophy and representational style.³²

²⁷ "Alumnus Kerry James Marshall," Otis College of Art and Design, August 11, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.otis.edu/fine-arts/spotlight/alumnus-kerry-james-marshall>.

²⁸ Sarah Kelly Oehler and Esther Adler, *Charles White: A Retrospective* (Chicago, IL: Art Institute of Chicago, 2018). 5.

²⁹ Richard A. Courage, "Charles White and the Black Chicago Renaissance," *The International Review of African American Art*, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://iraaa.museum.hamptonu.edu/page/Charles-White-and-the-Black-Chicago-Renaissance>.

³⁰ Kerry James Marshall, "A Black Artist Named White." *The Paris Review*. May 31, 2018. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/05/31/a-black-artist-named-white/>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

We can note visual similarities between White's *Sound of Silence* (fig. 3) and Marshall's *The Actor Hezekiah Washington as Julian Carlton Taliesen Murderer of Frank Lloyd Wright Family* (fig. 4) that attest to White's influence and ideological alignment with Marshall. *Sound of Silence* is a lithograph that features an African American man centered against an abstract background. The stark contrast between the man's frizzy Afro and the uniform, pink rectangle behind him draws attention to his delicate individual hairs, misshapen from the mushroom shape. While a mysterious source of light illuminates the left side of his face, shadows shroud the right. This contrast allows White to employ varying shades of brown that showcase the stunning nuance of Black corporeal form. Under concerned eyebrows, his peaceful gaze meets that of the viewer. With a neutral expression and lips pressed lightly together, the man outstretches his two hands causing his cream blazer to bunch near the elbows.

In regards to subject matter and composition, Marshall's painting, *The Actor Hezekiah Washington*, is quite similar. In *The Actor Hezekiah Washington*, an African-American man stands against an azure gradient inscribed with linear patterning and decorated with yellow, green and red circles that recall the colors of the Pan-African flag. Lips lightly pursed together, this man looks to the left. His shoulders hunch over his large torso and relaxed hands. Unlike the man in White's lithograph, Marshall painted his subject's skin in unnatural shades of jet-black. Both White and Marshall position the Black subject against an abstract background, dedicating heightened attention to the figural representation of the figure. The men are depicted with elegance and authority, stimulating an emotional force that drives the composition. Within each work, the artist's labor and technical prowess is palpable. Inspired by White, Marshall has developed his own socially engaged artistic practice.

Recently, Marshall's body of work toured the nation in a thirty-five-year career retrospective titled *Mastry*.³³ This major monographic exhibition featured seventy-two paintings that, using Houston Baker's words, perform the "deformation of mastery" while asserting the "mastery of form."³⁴ To do so, Marshall's landscapes and portraits inscribe the Black figure within a Western canon of paintings. His characteristically jet-black figures possess an estranged and de-familiarized quality that plays upon Blackness as a signifier. In these works, the color black exists as an abstract notion of color as well as concrete reality that has historically been used to construct racial identities. His figures capture Blackness in a beautifully dignified manner that challenge both stereotypical representations of Black people as well as the relative absence of Black figures in a museum context.³⁵ Within the exhibition, works were organized in chronological order that allowed viewers to trace the development of Marshall as a painter in conversation with nationally evolving attitudes towards race.³⁶ Many publications deemed *Mastry* an exhibition that redressed the near complete absence of Black figures painted by Black artists in art museums across the United States.³⁷ While this exhibition was surely monumental, I believe this to be an overstatement of one traveling exhibition's accomplishments contextualized within the longer history of discriminatory museum practices. *Mastry* opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago in April of 2016, traveled to The Met Breuer in New York in October of 2016 and closed at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles in July of 2017.³⁸

³³ Kerry James Marshall et al., *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry* (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2016). 3.

³⁴ Kobena Mercer, "Kerry James Marshall: The Painter of Afro-Modern Life," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 24 (June 2010): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1086/655931.pdf>, 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁶ Kerry James Marshall et al., *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*, 9.

³⁷ "Kerry James Marshall: Mastry," Met Museum, October 24, 2016, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2016/kerry-james-marshall>.

³⁸ Kerry James Marshall et al., *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*. 3.

While on view at the MCA in 2016, *Mastry* caught McCarthy's attention and served as his introduction to Marshall.³⁹ For an individual interested in harnessing the power of an object to incite social change, ironically, McCarthy paid little attention to the artworks themselves. Rather, he felt moved by Marshall's biography. Narrating his experience of encountering the exhibition, McCarthy said, "Standing in those galleries surrounded by the genius of Kerry James Marshall was overwhelming."⁴⁰ In this quote, McCarthy attributes his affective response not to the paintings, but to Marshall. This acknowledgment squares nicely with the romantic idea of the genius. For Marshall, his personal goal is mastery, or becoming the singular artistic genius.⁴¹ Although such notion of artistic genius has been removed from the center of museological discourse since the late 20th Century, Marshall views his own mastery as a powerful tool that can encourage inclusion within the world of high arts.⁴² The problem with McCarthy's claim is that he credits the artistic genius, in lieu of the artworks, as the source of his emotional reaction. As such, McCarthy places himself at odds with the mission of his own organization: a non-profit that intends to utilize visual and material culture to encourage acceptance.⁴³ Not once does McCarthy consider the diversity of artworks within *Mastry* that each raises distinct, yet complimentary, conceptions of the Black identity. Nonetheless, McCarthy goes on to further praise Marshall, saying that he is "a civil rights leader through his art."⁴⁴ By raising the discourse of rights, McCarthy evokes the image of influential leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Harriet Tubman who worked to ensure the ability of all members of society to participate in civil and political life. He credits Marshall with employing art as a media to incite social change of the

³⁹ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

⁴⁰ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

⁴¹ Kerry James Marshall et al., *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*. 6.

⁴² Ibid, 15.

⁴³ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

like. This interpretation is very different than the way Marshall perceives his own project. In contrast, Marshall aims to confront art institutions. He seeks to address the absence of African American artists in such institutions by populating museums with images of African Americans by African Americans. For Marshall, images are essential because a fuller version of art history is at stake.⁴⁵ These ideological discrepancies illuminated by McCarthy's reaction to *Mastry* affirms that he was fixated on Marshall as an individual agent for change, instead of his artworks as catalysts for social progress.

Considering McCarthy's disinterest in material works, his desire to hire Marshall as the first artist to design a mural for MoA is questionable. Perhaps McCarthy assumed that if Marshall accepted the role of designer, he would utilize the opportunity and space to create a monument aligned with his greater project on race. Consequently, this work would advocate for equality in the realm of art, thereby partially accomplishing MoA's goal of encouraging equality. However, it could also be possible that McCarthy anticipated any work created by Marshall would take on a political hue because of his identity. Historically, art created by African American artists have been subjected to highly discriminatory modes of engagement on the basis of the artist's identity.

In "The Art World: Being Outside," Harold Rosenberg discusses the challenges Black artists have faced when their identity has been placed at the forefront of the discourse. He writes that, "on one hand, [a Black artist] is moved to end his segregation and reconcile himself to the ways of life of the majority; but the other, he is aware that the qualities that make him what he is are contingent on his separated states." Many Black artists have considered concealing their own identities in order to assure that their works will be evaluated on the basis of aesthetic form,

⁴⁵ Kerry James Marshall et al., *Kerry James Marshall: Mastry*. 23.

without reference to race. This is because racialized aesthetics such as “Black art” only created by “Black artists” assert a unified collective experience for all members of the minority group, when there often is no collective experience. Sometimes, prioritizing the presumed collective experience has prevented curators from examining a work for its artistic value. One example of this was the exhibit titled “Two Centuries of Black American Art” that took place at the Brooklyn Museum.⁴⁶ During this exhibition, hundreds of items created by “Black” artists across geographic and temporal space were on display for the public. The underlying purpose of the exhibition was to bring about changes in the situations of Black people in America. Although their unity was based upon a supposed common history that was presumed to permeate into their produced work, Rosenberg believes there are no objective components that create “blackness” in art.⁴⁷ Considering similar subject matter and techniques to create art are oftentimes the same between minority and non-minority artists, there is no intrinsic blackness in art nor a type of black aesthetics.

Building on these questions of black aesthetics, Darby English’s monograph *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* offers a complementary perspective to Rosenberg’s critical account. English argues that the aesthetic notion of blackness is grounded outside of the “work itself and beyond the profound intentions of the artist.”⁴⁸ Using William Pope.L and Kara Walker as case studies, English demonstrates that viewers are the agents that define the purported racial character of an artwork. This practice happens because these viewers apply limited focus to the object itself. Accepting defined black aesthetics can perpetuate static conceptions of black American culture despite the ever-evolving sociopolitical formations with Black America. As

⁴⁶ Harold Rosenberg. “The Art World: Being Outside.” *The New Yorker*. 22 August 1977. P.83.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Darby English. *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: MIT Press, 2010. 15.

such, English encourages viewers to seek meaning in a work through rigorous, object-based debate by acknowledging metaphors, pictures and persons rather than simply asserting the term “black culture” or “black aesthetic” to a work of art by an artist whose skin happens to be black.

Applying this idea to McCarthy, it is apparent that he is consumed with Marshall as a figure in lieu of the artistic works he creates. What is unique about Marshall’s situation is that unlike other artists who conceal their identities, he has prided himself on capturing a Black experience through his art that is uniquely accessible to him as a Black artist. Nonetheless, his work still requires rigorous aesthetic inspection. It cannot be assumed that his projects will always convey the Black experience in the same way, or that a singular Black aesthetic or image even exists. In his exhibition “One True Thing: Meditations on Black Aesthetics”, Marshall challenges this exact idea of a unified notion of Black aesthetics through experimental mixed media interrogations.⁴⁹

The Celebrity Catapults the City to Fame

To recruit Marshall for the MoA project, McCarthy pitched his idea to DCASE. Known as the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, DCASE is a branch of city government that oversees thousands of artistic programs across all fifty of Chicago’s wards.⁵⁰ This branch is particularly important because it manages hundreds of public art works scattered around the city that contribute to Chicago’s nickname as “A Museum without Walls.”⁵¹ DCASE prides itself on supporting a collection that spans from the Works Progress Administration murals, to

⁴⁹Kerry James Marshall, Elizabeth A. T. Smith, and Tricia Van Eck, *One True Thing: Meditations on Black Aesthetics* (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003).

⁵⁰ "Cultural Affairs and Special Events," City of Chicago: Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

⁵¹ Jeff Huebner, "Nice Works If You Can Find Them," Chicago Reader, April 08, 1999. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/nice-works-if-you-can-find-them/Content?oid=898887>.

community art, to postwar modernist sculptures. While the entity boasts cultural sophistication, its involvement with public art dates only to the late 1970s.⁵²

During the 1960s to early 1970s, the federal government partnered with private corporations to commission contemporary art created by celebrity artists for the city of Chicago. This trend began with the untitled sculpture colloquially called “The Chicago Picasso.”⁵³ It was commissioned by the architects of the Richard J. Daley Center in 1963, and funded by the Woods Charitable Fund, the Chauncey and Marion Deering McCormick Foundation and the Field Foundation of Illinois.⁵⁴ Although Picasso was offered payment, he refused. He desired to gift his work to Chicago, instead. The resulting cubist work once was an object of ridicule and spite. Presently, “The Chicago Picasso” serves as an object of civic pride. Following “The Chicago Picasso,” more celebrity pieces were commissioned for plazas and lobbies in the Loop, Chicago’s central business district. Such works were created by Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall, Jean Dubuffet, Sol Lewitt and Joan Miro, to name a few.⁵⁵ These pieces were termed “plop art” sculptures: abstract shapes created with industrial materials haphazardly plopped with very little regard for the surrounding environment.⁵⁶

Between the years 1976 and 1978, the Chicago city government became increasingly involved with public art. In 1976, Alderman Dick Simpson collaborated with the Chicago Artists’ Coalition (CAC) to request public funding for an arts campaign through a proposed percent-for-art program.⁵⁷ Simpson and the CAC faced challenges convincing the public that

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rebecca Zorach, "Art & Soul: An Experimental Friendship between the Street and a Museum," *Art Journal Open*, September 16, 2015, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://artjournal.collegeart.org/?p=2104>.

⁵⁴ Rebecca Zorach, "Fireplug, Flower, Baboon: The Democratic Thing in Late 1960s Chicago". 49.

⁵⁵ United States, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, *City of Chicago, City of Chicago*, by Rahm Emanuel, Thomas Dyja, and Mark Kelly, 2017, , <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/dca/yopa/publicartplan17.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Jeff Huebner, "Nice Works If You Can Find Them."

⁵⁷ Jeff Huebner, "Nice Works If You Can Find Them."

visual artworks could function as civic assets. “It was not an easy thing,” said founding member of the CAC, Robert Kameczura. “We were running against a lot of aldermen who didn’t know what the hell you were talking about. ‘Art? What’s that?’ You really had to educate these people. It was uphill, one step at a time.”⁵⁸ Throughout 1977, Kameczura, Simpson and other CAC members advocated for a percent-for-art program by circulating petitions and raising funds. Simpson noted that the public felt more inclined to fund works created by international celebrity artists because their preexisting authority in the realm of high arts imbued their creations with an intrinsic value. Nonetheless, Simpson and the CAC members envisioned a “broad-based democratic kind of thing” in which local artists could also receive funding to further develop their artistic practices and contribute to their respective neighborhoods.⁵⁹ In early 1978, the campaign compromised, and drafted guidelines for a percent-for-art program, specifically mandating that “one percent of the construction costs for any public building built for or by the City of Chicago... shall be set aside for the purchase of art works to be located in or at such buildings.” Either international or domestic artists could create purchased artworks, as long as the distribution between them remained equal. The percent-for-art program became incorporated as Chapter 26: Percent-for-Art Program of the Municipal Code on April 5, 1978.⁶⁰

Since its incorporation, the Percent-for-Art Program evolved from a simple financial ordinance to a broader reaching program called the Chicago Public Art Program in the late 1990s.⁶¹ In order to facilitate this expansion, Municipal Code was amended to increase the budget from 1 percent of construction costs to 1.33 percent of construction costs. With more funding,

⁵⁸ Jeff Huebner, “Nice Works If You Can Find Them.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the Chicago Public Art Program operates as an independent branch of DCASE.⁶² It adheres to “standard museum policies, like Association of American Museums’ regulatory and conservation methods.”⁶³ Correspondingly, administrators working for the Chicago Public Art Program hired curators and conservationists to uphold museum practices.⁶⁴ Simultaneously, the program invested in technical infrastructure to track upwards of five hundred public pieces across parks, plazas, libraries, Chicago Transit Authority stations, community centers and police stations.⁶⁵ These actions attest to the notion that public art has been a growing concern for government officials within the city of Chicago.

In the context of DCASE’s Strategic Plan for 2013 to 2016, the Chicago Public Art Program plays a critical role in fulfilling Mayor Emanuel’s goal of “achiev[ing] global prominence for Chicago’s arts and culture.”⁶⁶ The Strategic Plan links the term “global prominence”⁶⁷ to “reputation as a world-class city,”⁶⁸ and “international recognition.”⁶⁹ These abstracted ideas are not simply referring to unquantifiable fame and status for the city of Chicago. Rather, worldwide notoriety is necessary step to financially take advantage of international visitors, who are “a top opportunity for growth, as they spend more, stay longer,

⁶² Mayor's Office, "Mayor Emanuel Announces New Public Art in All 50 Wards as Part of the Year of Public Art," City of Chicago: Mayor Emanuel Announces New Public Art in All 50 Wards as Part of the Year of Public Art, June 22, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2017/june/50x50Art.html.

⁶³ Jeff Huebner, "Nice Works If You Can Find Them."

⁶⁴ Adebukola Bodunrin, "DCASE Studio Artist and Curatorial Residency," DCASE Studio Curatorial Residency, November 07, 2014, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://www.adebukolabodunrin.com/blog/2014/11/6/dc-case-studio-artist-and-curatorial-residency>.

⁶⁵ "Chicago Public Art Program - Percent For Art Guidelines," City of Chicago: Chicago Public Art Program - Percent For Art Guidelines, , accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/public_art_program.html.

⁶⁶ United States, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, City of Chicago, *Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016* (Chicago, IL: City of Chicago, 2012). 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 29.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 30.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 29.

and travel farther from home.”⁷⁰ As such, the Strategic Plan proposes multiple courses of action that hinge upon marketing. For example, the plan advises that DCASE “increase international media coverage about Chicago arts and culture,” and “increase international journalists visiting Chicago to cover arts and culture.”⁷¹ Furthermore, the Strategic Plan recommends that DCASE “promote Chicago artists via public awards ceremony or annual celebration in international marketing,” and “develop new festivals that represent Chicago’s cultural brand and can generate international prominence.”⁷² DCASE acted upon these suggestions through the Chicago Public Art Program.

The Year of Public Art was one such initiative hosted by DCASE’s Chicago Public Art Program in 2017. Commemorating the 50th anniversary of “The Picasso” in Daley Plaza and the Wall of Respect, once on 43rd and Langley, the Year of Public Art sought to bring “meaning and pride to Chicago.”⁷³ It included a variety of events and programs, including a 50 x 50 Neighborhood Arts Project, a Public Arts Youth Corps, and Public Arts Festival. In total, the Year of Public Art was a \$4 million dollar investment, funded predominantly by DCASE and the Terra Foundation for American Arts.⁷⁴ Of this, \$1 million dollars financed the 50 x 50 Neighborhood Arts Project, an initiative in which dozens of local artists were commissioned to create works in all fifty wards that demonstrates the character of each neighborhood.⁷⁵ According to the Chicago Tribune, Mayor Emanuel said that the city is full of talented artists, and this

⁷⁰ United States, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, City of Chicago, *Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016* (Chicago, IL: City of Chicago, 2012), 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷³ "2017 Year of Public Art July - December Brochure," City of Chicago: 2017 Year of Public Art July-December Brochure, accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/yopa/yopa4.html. 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

project will allow them to “share their work with the world.”⁷⁶ In the 10th Ward, Chicago-based artist Jeff Zimmermann created a mural in collaboration with SkyArt. SkyArt is an organization that uses free visual arts programming as a vehicle to teach youth how to communicate effectively and think creatively. The work, titled *Sky Art Mural* (fig. 5) is thematically and stylistically similar to other projects in Zimmermann’s oeuvre.⁷⁷ He is known for self-proclaimed “large scale murals featuring painted images of contemporary pop culture and sensitively rendered portraits.”⁷⁸ Accordingly, the mural features three hyper-realistic heads floating on a brick background painted white, amid geometric shapes and an enlarged LifeSaver candy. *Sky Art Mural* was not marketed by DCASE as an individual work of art. Rather, all works were united under the title 50 x 50 Neighborhood Arts Project and Year of Public Art, and promoted as a testament to the program’s scope. Aligned with Mayor Emanuel’s goals, Year of Public Art events and programs garnered local praise through the Chicago Tribune⁷⁹ and Sun Times⁸⁰ as well as international attention through Artforum⁸¹ for the endeavor’s extensive reach. As a whole, the Year of Public Art helped brand Chicago as a diverse city with an abundance of cultural vitality, thereby upholding Mayor Emanuel’s mission stated in DCASE’s Strategic Plan.

⁷⁶ Mayor's Office, "Mayor Emanuel Announces New Public Art in All 50 Wards as Part of the Year of Public Art," City of Chicago: Mayor Emanuel Announces New Public Art in All 50 Wards as Part of the Year of Public Art, June 22, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2017/june/50x50Art.html.

⁷⁷ United States, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, City of Chicago, Year of Public Art Catalogue, by Tricia Van Eck (Chicago, IL: City of Chicago), 67.

⁷⁸ Jeff Zimmermann, "'Everything,'" by Jeff Zimmermann," Jeff Zimmermann, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://www.jeffzimmermann.com/everything-by-jeff-zimmermann>.

⁷⁹ Blair Kamin, "Public Art Appears - and Disappears - in Year Celebrating Its Impact on City," Chicago Tribune, July 01, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/ct-public-art-kamin-met-0702-20170630-column.html>.

⁸⁰ Rachel Hinton, "More 'inclusive and Inspiring' Public Art Expected with City's Plan," Chicago Sun-Times, October 31, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/more-inclusive-and-inspiring-public-art-expected-with-citys-plan/>.

⁸¹ "Chicago Launches \$1 Million Initiative to Create Public Art," Chicago Launches \$1 Million Initiative to Create Public Art - Artforum International, June 29, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.artforum.com/news/chicago-launches-1-million-initiative-to-create-public-art-69306>.

In light of the Year of Public Art and the Strategic Plan, DCASE became very interested in MoA and McCarthy's proposal to commission a mural in Chicago from Kerry James Marshall. Not only is Marshall an internationally recognized artist, he also lives in Chicago. Specifically, he lives in Bronzeville, a neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. During the Great Migration, Bronzeville was home to over 78,000 people; however, the population has since dramatically declined to approximately 24,000 people. An area once known as the "Black Metropolis" because of the high concentration of African-American owned businesses drastically changed.⁸² With a median income of approximately \$29,000, almost sixty percent of the total population lives below the poverty line. In interviews, Marshall has described his neighborhood as reflecting the terror of citywide segregation. He said, "A little girl was shot on the corner once... A boy was killed in that block by another kid... Someone from that CHA building shot into our house..." Despite these incidents, Marshall has no intention of departing from Bronzeville. He exclaimed, "I wanted to be in a neighborhood where kids knew somebody who was trying to do something."⁸³ Although he can financially afford to leave the area, Marshall hopes that his success will inspire the neighborhood children to pursue their own aspirations.⁸⁴ It is this type of intimate relationship with the city, upon which DCASE seeks to capitalize. By creating a mural for the Chicago, Marshall would assist DCASE increase global media coverage about Chicago arts and culture in two ways. Firstly, he would serve as an example of the exquisite talent that resides in the city. Secondly, his work would automatically garner international attention because of preexisting celebrity status. Recognizing these potential

⁸² "Bronzeville Neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois (IL), 60653 Detailed Profile," Bronzeville Neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois (IL), accessed April 08, 2019, <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Bronzeville-Chicago-IL.html>.

⁸³ Wyatt Mason, "Kerry James Marshall Is Shifting the Color of Art History," The New York Times, October 17, 2016, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/17/t-magazine/kerry-james-marshall-artist.html>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

benefits for his own department, DCASE Curator Nathan Mason agreed to contact Marshall on behalf of McCarthy.⁸⁵

After a series of conversations, Mason, McCarthy and Marshall came to an actionable agreement. Mason would provide a location for the mural, McCarthy would secure funding for the mural, and Marshall would design the mural (fig. 10), to be executed by a muralist hired by DCASE. Terms of their agreement were delineated in a series of contracts I have been able to examine through the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. These contracts are written evidence that prove the process of creating the mural prioritizes Kerry James Marshall as celebrity artist.

In the contract between Mason and McCarthy, MoA offers to provide a financial grant to DCASE in exchange for the Chicago Cultural Center façade as the site for the mural. To fund the work, MoA agreed to “provide a grant in an amount not to exceed \$187,000.000 to the City... acting through its Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.”⁸⁶ McCarthy raised this money by mobilizing his personal network. He reached out to Alexis’ sister, Patricia Arquette. Patricia is a Hollywood actress worth \$24 million dollars with a vested concern in her late sister as well as a passion for promoting acceptance.⁸⁷ Sharing these interests with McCarthy, she pledged to donate to MoA. In 2016, Arquette hosted a celebrity banquet called Dinner for Equality with Marc Benioff, the CEO of Salesforce, Silicon Valley’s cloud computing service.⁸⁸ He is worth \$6.6 billion dollars.⁸⁹ Following the dinner, Arquette leveraged this connection to

⁸⁵ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

⁸⁶ *Grant Agreement Between the City of Chicago and Murals of Acceptance*. December 1, 2017. By and Between the City of Chicago, acting through its Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Murals of Acceptance, a California non-for-profit corporation (MOA), Chicago, Illinois. 1.

⁸⁷ “Patricia Arquette Net Worth.” Celebrity Net Worth, December 14, 2010. <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/actors/patricia-arquette/>.

⁸⁸ “Forbes: Dinner for Equality.” 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/pictures/gihg45jmk/the-dinner-for-equality-2/#7379a0dc3499>

⁸⁹ “Marc Benioff Net Worth.” Celebrity Net Worth, December 20, 2018. <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/entrepreneur/marc-benioff/>.

acquire additional funds. Collectively, Arquette and Benioff contributed \$200,000 to MoA.⁹⁰ In gifting MoA wall space on the Chicago Cultural Center, DCASE reaffirmed the connection between Marshall and the city. Marshall had his “very first exhibition” at the Chicago Cultural Center in 1992.⁹¹ He showcased *Terra Incognita*, one of the first large-format history paintings in his oeuvre.⁹² By granting Marshall a permanent place on the Chicago Cultural Center, DCASE establishes a narrative in which the city appears to have supported Marshall from his humble origins through his career to stardom. Publicizing the longevity of this relationship tokenizes Marshall to create the appearance that perhaps the Chicago Cultural Center has foresight into progressive cultural production.

DCASE designates Marshall as designer and muralist Jeff Zimmermann as executioner, so as to maintain public proximity to the celebrity artist while simultaneously easing Marshall’s private responsibilities for his benefit. Correspondingly, the legal terms of these agreements reinforce the outward appearance of a relationship between DCASE and Marshall thereby increasing the reputation of Chicago, at Zimmermann’s expense. With regards to stated responsibilities, Marshall was required to “deliver the Design for Artwork (fig. 10) no later than August 28, 2017 to the following location: Public Art Office, 78 E. Washington, Chicago, IL 60602... a unique and original product of the Artists’ creative efforts.”⁹³ In contrast, Zimmermann was tasked with utilizing the design to produce “1 mural of artwork [sic.] created by the artist Kerry James Marshall provided by the Chicago Cultural Center... the Artwork

⁹⁰ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

⁹¹ Steve Johnson, "Giant Mural by Kerry James Marshall Honors Chicago Women of Culture," Chicago Tribune, December 07, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ent-kerry-james-marshall-mural-unveiled-chicago-1204-story.html>.

⁹² "How the '90s Shaped Kerry James Marshall's Meteoric Rise," Phillips, November 9, 2018, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.phillips.com/article/38297600/how-the-90s-shaped-kerry-james-marshall-s-meteoric-rise>.

⁹³ *Agreement for the Commission of Design for Artwork*. September 12, 2017. Between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Kerry James Marshall (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 1.

production will take approximately 8 weeks.”⁹⁴ Zimmermann’s personal style starkly contrasts that of Marshall. While Zimmermann traditionally renders commercial objects or “hyper-realistic” faces against white backgrounds using highly saturated colors, Marshall often utilizes perspectival flattening with matte paints to depict Black figures in domestic and social settings.⁹⁵ Despite visual differences, there exists thematic congruence. Zimmermann creates giant portraits of individuals traditionally excluded from public narratives to subvert the notion of “newsworthiness” held by corporate and entertainment culture.⁹⁶ Marshall appropriates grand artistic gestures from historical movements by painting Black figures in to confront racial stereotypes in the Western canon. Both artists challenge systemic inequalities within visual culture by painting often-unrepresented figures on a large scale. Nonetheless, Zimmermann was obliged to abandon his own style to properly complete this project. He used pouncing as a technique to ensure that he accurately rendered the original design, and “blow it up as faithful to the small painting” as he could.⁹⁷ This technique lent itself nicely to concealing Zimmermann’s own artistic identity to best uphold the design proposed by Marshall. Thus, DCASE could proudly claim a Marshall mural without burdening Marshall with the responsibility of daily laboring on scaffolding for upwards of fourteen hours.⁹⁸

This dynamic between Marshall and Zimmermann continues in the copyright section. In both contracts, Marshall is acknowledged as “Artist” and copyright owner. As such, documents

⁹⁴ *Agreement for the Commission of Artwork for the Chicago Cultural Center*. September 6, 2017. Agreement for the commission of Artwork entered by and between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Jeff Zimmermann (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 32.

⁹⁵ Jeff Zimmermann, “Everything,” by Jeff Zimmermann,” Jeff Zimmermann.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Interview with Jeff Zimmermann.” Telephone interview by author. January 24, 2019.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

dictate the terms and conditions for publicity that pertain to exclusively Marshall. For example, Section F. *Publicity* in Zimmermann's contract states the following:

“The City shall have the right to use KJM's name, likeness and biographical information in connection with the display or reproduction and distribution of the artwork including all advertising and promotional materials regarding City or the Commission...”⁹⁹

As evidenced by this section, the City does not want the same right to Zimmermann's name as it does Marshall's name. Furthermore, DCASE is not obliged to mention Zimmermann in publications or press releases. Once again, these legal structures allow DCASE to obscure Zimmermann and present the mural as a public manifestation of a relationship with Marshall. Embedded within this contract, DCASE has assured that there are numerous opportunities for advertising, and therefore capitalizing on, their relationship with Marshall. In Marshall's Section 2.8 *Rights to Design*, the contract states:

“The Artist shall grant to the City, and to City's agents, authorized contractors and assigns, an unlimited, irrevocable, royalty-free, perpetual, worldwide license to reproduce, prepare derivative works of, and make use of the Design for Artwork (or portions thereof)...”¹⁰⁰

Viewed in such a way, this quote demonstrates little regard for the work itself. It attests to the notion that the city views the work of art in a utilitarian way. The end product's potential for distribution supersedes its process of creation. Because DCASE has the rights to both Marshall's

⁹⁹ *Agreement for the Commission of Artwork for the Chicago Cultural Center*. September 6, 2017. Agreement for the commission of Artwork entered by and between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Jeff Zimmermann (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Agreement for the Commission of Design for Artwork*. September 12, 2017. Between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Kerry James Marshall (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 13.

name and design, it has the liberty to internationally publicize the mural as a joint endeavor that will help the city's reputation and fulfill the Strategic Plan's intended goals.

Aligned with the responsibilities and copyright procedures, funding protocol strengthens DCASE's public relationship with Marshall and not Zimmermann. The source of Marshall's \$1.00 honorary payment comes from the "Public Art Annual Administration Fund".¹⁰¹ In lieu of financial compensation, his generosity and benevolence was rewarded with a priceless 5th Star of Chicago Honor. This award was announced on August 27th, 2017, the same day that the plan for the mural was announced. As detailed in a widespread press release issued by DCASE, the 5th Star of Chicago honors "legendary Chicago artists and cultural institutions with live performance and video tributes." The Honor only dates back to 2014.¹⁰² Such timing is conspicuously close to the release of the Strategic Plan, and functions to monumentalize Marshall as a celebrity artist with strong ties to Chicago. Contrarily, Zimmermann did not receive such recognition. His labor was fully financially compensated for \$167,861.000. He received "102,111.000 upon execution of the contract, \$32,875.00 upon midpoint of fabrication of the Artwork" and finally "\$32,875.00 upon completion of the Artwork."¹⁰³ The source of funds for payments is the "Murals of Acceptance donation."¹⁰⁴ Designating MoA as the source for funding creates distance between Zimmerman and DCASE. Compensation in the form of installments reduces Zimmermann to physical labor, vastly different than the romantic notion of Marshall's genius. The financial

¹⁰¹ *Agreement for the Commission of Design for Artwork*. September 12, 2017. Between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Kerry James Marshall (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 3.

¹⁰² "Fifth Star Honors - 2017 Rising Star Honor Roll," City of Chicago: Fifth Star Honors - 2017 Rising Star Honor Roll, accessed April 08, 2019, https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/fifthstar/fifth_star.html.

¹⁰³ *Agreement for the Commission of Artwork for the Chicago Cultural Center*. September 6, 2017. Agreement for the commission of Artwork entered by and between the City of Chicago, Illinois, acting by and through the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Jeff Zimmermann (the Artist), Chicago, Illinois. 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

portion of the legal contract corroborates the aforementioned findings, demonstrating that the commission attempts to celebrate Marshall with global prominence as DCASE's desired result.

While these agreements strongly defend the rights of involved artists and institutional entities, they do little to protect the material work itself. According to the "Grant Agreement Between the City of Chicago and Murals of Acceptance," the city only plans to "retain and publicly display the Artwork for a period of 10 years."¹⁰⁵ To correspond with this intention, Zimmermann applied a light layer of exterior varnish that is only meant to provide minimal protection. If the monument to peace and acceptance truly was created only "to inspire people everywhere in the world," its short life is quite curious.¹⁰⁶ Unless, the monument is not the material work, but rather, Kerry James Marshall as "one of our nation's most acclaimed and important artists," according to DCASE Commissioner Mark Kelly. The legacy of Marshall will live on through his design, copyright images, biographical paraphernalia, 5th Star Honor, etc.

Rush More is not the first time the city of Chicago looked to profit off the celebrity status of Kerry James Marshall. In 1995, Marshall created a mural titled *Knowledge and Wonder* (fig. 11) for West Garfield Park's Legler Branch Public Library. The ten-foot by twenty-three-foot mural depicts a dozen black figures gazing and pointing at oversized books that floated through an astral sky.¹⁰⁷ While the figures are distinguished by differing apparel, their Black skin unites them. Marshall claims that the "Blackness is non-negotiable... it's also unequivocal – they are black – that's the thing I mean for people to identify immediately. They are black to demonstrate

¹⁰⁵ *Grant Agreement Between the City of Chicago and Murals of Acceptance*. December 1, 2017. By and Between the City of Chicago, acting through its Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) and Murals of Acceptance, a California non-for-profit corporation (MOA), Chicago, Illinois. 7.

¹⁰⁶ "Who We Are," Murals of Acceptance.

¹⁰⁷ Jason Daley, "Chicago Cancels Sale of Kerry James Marshall's 'Knowledge and Wonder'," *Smithsonian.com*, November 07, 2018, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/chicago-cancels-sale-important-piece-african-american-public-art-180970737/>.

that Blackness can have complexity. Depth. Richness.”¹⁰⁸ Situated in a neighborhood where forty-four percent of the population is African American, the work meant to encourage a predominantly Black viewership to see themselves as proud and curious readers. Marshall was paid \$10,000 by Chicago’s Percent for Art ordinance to create the piece. In September of 2018, Mayor Emanuel attempted to sell the mural through Christie’s. He intended to earmark the estimated \$10 million to \$15 million dollar proceeds to expand library services on the West Side of Chicago, as an “investment in the city.” Marshall responded to such actions with disdain. He told *Artnews* “the City of Big Shoulders has wrung every bit of value they could from the fruits of my labor.” Although this example contrasts *Rush More, Knowledge and Wonder* is an example in which the City of Chicago attempted to profit off Marshall’s recent rise to fame in an effort to benefit the institution, at the expense of the artist.

The Mural Contextualized in Marshall’s Oeuvre

Thus far, a significant portion of this thesis has examined institutional histories, documents and resources external to *Rush More*. I employed this method of analysis in an effort to understand why and how MoA and DCASE monumentalize Marshall as a proxy to resolve racial inequality within, and achieve international recognition for, the city of Chicago. Now, I will turn to inward to inspect the mural in the context of Marshall’s oeuvre. Inspired by Petra Frank-Witt’s use of time-honored art historical methods to support her main claim in “Moving the Outside Inside,” I will pair visual evidence with Marshall’s quotations.¹⁰⁹ In this section, I argue that the external

¹⁰⁸ Wyatt Mason, "Kerry James Marshall Is Shifting the Color of Art History," *The New York Times*, October 17, 2016, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/17/t-magazine/kerry-james-marshall-artist.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Petra Frank-Witt. “Kerry James Marshall: Moving the Outside Inside.” *Third Text*, vol. 30, no. 5-6. (2016).

narrative put forth by MoA and DCASE is reinforced by pluralistic and celebratory visual elements within *Rush More*.

When conceptualizing the mural, Marshall first considered the site. Miwon Kwon defined the meaning of site specificity in her book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. She claims that by positioning a work of art in a particular space, the artist creates an inextricable relationship between the work and its site. According to one radical understanding of site-specificity, removing the work from this space is destroying the work itself.¹¹⁰ These ideas resonate with *Rush More*. Upon discovering that DCASE donated the western façade of the Chicago Cultural Center, Marshall noted that, “There is a lot of history associated with the Cultural Center... From [*Rush More*’s] inception, [the work] always had something to do with the acquisition of knowledge and the experience of culture and history.”¹¹¹

The Chicago Cultural Center has been an integral support for local civic life since its inception. Originally, it was conceived to become the Chicago Public Library, home to over 8,000 books donated by British authors following the Great Chicago Fire’s destruction of private libraries in 1871.¹¹² To finance its construction, the City Council imposed a 1% tax on all Chicagoans. The new library was built, both symbolically and literally, to belong to the people of Chicago. Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge as designed it as a three-story, U-shaped structure made of limestone. In October 1897, the doors of the Chicago Public Library first opened. Inside, the grand staircase lined with green-veined Vermont and Knoxville pink marble led to a thirty-eight

¹¹⁰ Miwon Kwon. *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002. Pg. 73. This doctrine is not Kwon’s own, but of artist Richard Serra. Kwon endorses it (38) and at other places, seems to deny its generality, like when speaking of traveling site-specific works, 31.

¹¹¹ Interview with Kerry James Marshall." Telephone interview by author. January 10, 2019.

¹¹² Iker Gil, The Continuous Reinvention of Chicago's "Palace of the People" – Chicago Architecture Biennial, August 10, 2017, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/blog/chicago-cultural-center/>.

foot dome made of Tiffany Favrile glass.¹¹³ The ornate interior served as a material demonstration of the cultural ambition and quality that Chicago could offer. Despite such distinctive qualities, the building faced threats of demolition during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was saved by an eight-year preservation campaign; however, as a compromise, the building underwent renovation led by Holabird and Root. The renovation in 1977 yielded changes in both the structure and purpose of the building.¹¹⁴ From a structural perspective, the building's original U-shape was filled by a limestone service entrance and large set of windows that opened on to Garland Court (fig. 6). With this transformation, the building underwent a series of name changes from the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center to simply the Chicago Cultural Center. Simultaneously, all of the books were removed from the building and replaced with a wide variety of free cultural programs such as concerts, art exhibits, and dance classes. In this capacity, the Chicago Cultural Center maintains its legacy as an epicenter for intellectual curiosity and cultural development commonly referred to as the "Palace of the People."¹¹⁵

Such a rich history constitutes a seemingly ideal location for a monument; however, the location is riddled with contradictions. *Rush More* is located on the western façade of the Chicago Cultural Center that was constructed as the building's service entrance during the 1977 renovations. It can only be accessed from Garland Court, a narrow alleyway lined with corporate garages. Shrouded in the shadows of tall corporate offices, parked automobiles flank both the proximate and distant sidewalks. Orange traffic cones and One-Way street signs dot the alleyway. Contextualized within this cement megalopolis, *Rush More* offers a contrasting reprieve. Marshall was intently focused on resolving the architectural and spatial problem. He

¹¹³ Iker Gil, The Continuous Reinvention of Chicago's "Palace of the People" – Chicago Architecture Biennial.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

noted, “High walls of concrete and steel on both sides. I was trying to think of a way of opening the space up... What I settled on was something that would open it up to a kind of green space so that the wall would disappear and that you would end up with a type of vista.”¹¹⁶ In accordance with this vision, Marshall designed a radiant solar orb that presides at the top of the 132-foot by 100-foot wall and casts sunbeams across the façade. Growing from the sidewalk to the sky are five trees carved with the faces of twenty women, and topped with vegetation. Eight red cardinals speckle the foliage, flitting with a white ribbon that lists the names of the twenty women depicted below. Marshall combined the ideas of the Chicago Cultural Center’s historical legacy with the environmental conditions in Garland Court to create a natural Mount Rushmore that commemorates twenty diverse women who have contributed to developing the cultural landscape of Chicago.

Rush More is not the first time that Marshall has engaged with the notion of commemoration. In 1998, the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago held an exhibition of Marshall’s work titled *Mementos*. In this show, Marshall paid tribute to political activists and innocent victims who lost their lives during the Civil Right Movement by gifting them an aura of heroic legitimacy.¹¹⁷ To examine the manner in which *Rush More* functions as a commemorative artwork, I will compare the mural with *Souvenir I* (fig. 7), a history painting from Marshall’s exhibition that depicts an angelic pantheon of African-American cultural and political figures that died between 1959 and 1979.¹¹⁸

In *Souvenir I*, internal relations within the composition establish a context for memorialization and inform particular treatments of the memorialized. The painting is set within

¹¹⁶ Steve Johnson, "Giant Mural by Kerry James Marshall Honors Chicago Women of Culture," Chicago Tribune.

¹¹⁷ Kerry James Marshall, Richard J. Powell, Susanne Ghez, Will Alexander, Cheryl I. Harris, and Hamza Walker. *Kerry James Marshall, Mementos*. Chicago: Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1998.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

a furnished, African American home. Light green and yellow pastel walls enclose the living room. Decorative ceramics fill a transparent dresser located in the back left corner. Near the center of the room, a marble table with golden claws supports a vase of flowers. Hunched over the vase, a woman painted in black with golden wings stares back toward the viewer.

Considering Black history is often omitted from public commemoration and Black interior spaces are rarely depicted in visual culture, this work takes on a political quality. Mounted on the right wall of the living room hangs a black, rectangular Civil Rights memorial banner. The banner features images of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. Their faces are painted in fleshy tones. To alleviate potential confusion, images of their faces are paired with written names and dates of their deaths. Below, the words “We Mourn Our Loss” appear printed in a gothic print. A cumulus white cloud outlined with a radiant golden ring surrounds the banner. The tapestry functions to signal the context of the Civil Rights movement, and dictate the respectful emotion with which a viewer should approach the work. Such direct clues inculcate reverence within the commemorative setting.

Another network of commemorative figures floats above the domestic sphere of *Souvenir*. I. Marshall firmly categorized and organized these people in relation to each other, and to the Civil Rights memorial banner below. The figures are individualized yet united. Each face has been screen printed onto the unframed canvas, employing the colors of salmon or periwinkle to mark the faces with a stereotyped indication of gender. Screen-printing imbues some of the faces with a light, ethereal quality that makes distinguishing the race or ethnicity of the figures challenging. Their identities can be determined relationally. Proximate placement and overlapping angelic wings attached to the shoulders of each figure help to designate five separate groupings. These divisions demarcate the incident of death. For example, the first group from

the right is Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, two Black Panther members killed by the Chicago Police in their sleep in 1969. The second group from the left features a group of girls printed in salmon. From left to right, the group consists of Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley. These four girls were killed in the 16th Street church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963.¹¹⁹ Contrasting the thick cumulus cloud, a thin, transparent cloud speckled with gold encapsulates these groups of floating, nameless figures. The words, “In Memory of” painted in delicate gold script rest below the cloud. These features invite comparison with the fleshy, clearly demarcated figures in the Civil Rights banner. Viewers are encouraged to ask questions about the act of commemoration: What is the difference between the fleshy, permanent figures on the Civil Rights banner and the ephemeral angels floating in the cloud above? Who is or is not publicly commemorated, and for what reasons? How do the legacies of certain deaths impact the private, domestic sphere? *Souvenir I* provokes an interrogation of the social mechanisms and networks that contribute to a broader understanding of commemoration and public memory.

Applying these concepts to *Rush More*, the mural is seemingly removed from the politically charged imagery that provokes questions of commemoration. Instead, it depicts twenty female faces that have been carved into trees and harmoniously united, situated within a utopian Chicago park-scape. The five carved trees appear to have similar trunk patterning and shape to the White Oak tree, the Illinois state tree (fig. 8). Trunks of the White Oak tree are tall and thin, speckled with oblong bark pieces. The White Oak tree can be found throughout the state. As depicted in *Rush More*, these trees have luscious emerald leaves and extensive branches. Because the White Oak tree can live for up to four hundred years, these trees have

¹¹⁹ Seattle Art Museum Curatorial Team, "Souvenir I," Figuring History, accessed April 08, 2019, <http://figuringhistory.site.seattleartmuseum.org/kerry-james-marshall/souvenir-i/>.

become staples of Midwestern life for both settlers and wildlife alike. According to Marshall, “You can carve into the [*Rush More*] tree without killing it.”¹²⁰ Similarly, settlers would use the wood because it was easy to carve. Within the White Oak foliage, eight red cardinals flit between branches (fig. 9). The cardinal is the Illinois state bird (fig. 12). The male form of this type of bird can be identified by its bright red breast, pointed crest on its head and black band around the eyes. Chosen in 1929, the cardinal was selected because it can live in Chicago all year and survive in forests, parks and suburban areas.¹²¹ Behind the trees and birds, Marshall painted iconic Chicago buildings such as the Sears Tower and the Hancock Building in contrasting shades of blue. By including and enlarging such Chicago-specific imagery, Marshall appears to celebrate the strength of the city while simultaneously invigorating the dreary Garland Court with a bright and effervescent landscape.

Marshall establishes a visual hierarchy within *Rush More* by depicting the twenty women with heightened detail to direct the viewer’s attention. In the mural, each face belongs to a woman who founded or ran an important cultural institution in Chicago. Marshall desired to “not only honor what the [Chicago Cultural Center] building stands for but also the women who were so central to helping develop a lot of organizations in Chicago that continue that kind of work.”¹²² Some trees feature prominent figures that have experienced national or international recognition for Chicago-based efforts, like Oprah Winfrey, morning talk show icon, or Maggie Daley, the First Lady of Chicago and Chair of Chicago’s youth art institution titled Gallery 37. Other trees depict women with intimate ties to Marshall and local connections to the city. Examples include Susanne Ghez, Director of the Renaissance Society during Marshall’s *Mementos* exhibition, and

¹²⁰ “Interview with Kerry James Marshall.” Telephone interview by author. January 10, 2019.

¹²¹ “State Symbols,” State Symbols, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/About/StateSymbols.aspx>.

¹²² “Interview with Kerry James Marshall.” Telephone interview by author. January 10, 2019.

Cheryl Lynn Bruce, Marshall's wife and Founder of Dearborn Homes Youth Drama Workshop.¹²³

The faces have a sculptural aspect to them. Appearing as though they have been carved in the round, each face tilts in a different direction thereby establishing depth within the composition. Contrasting gazes inhibit the viewer's ability to make eye contact with the women. Painted to appear as carvings, the faces are rendered with cosmetic contouring, which emphasizes different hairstyles and individualizing accessories. For example, Gwendolyn Brooks wears glasses and Maggie Daley has a swooped pixie cut (fig. 13).

For an artist who often makes a political point to depict Black Americans literally through the color black, with little to no variation in skin tone, it is curious that Marshall here chooses a wood hue for all the women. Perhaps Marshall is attempting to imagine a context in which race is not predominant. Or rather, identity is not a matter of skin tone. The celebration of female cultural influencers from diverse background not only brings together individuals in a harmonious fashion that satisfies the mission advocated by Murals of Acceptance, but it also is an image that DCASE can promote to the larger international public to increase its reputation. Vastly different than Marshall's other projects such as *Many Mansions*, this work celebrates the glory of Chicago.

Marshall does not expect viewers to know who all these women are. Rather, he offers viewers a white ribbon for context. Hovering above the tree trunks is a white ribbon that showcases the ordered names, all written in large capital letters. The names, thinly lettered in black on white, sometimes upside down, at a considerable height above the faces and not closely correlated with their respective persons, are challenging to read. His goal is for viewers to "look

¹²³ Kori Rumore and Steve Johnson. "Meet the 20 Trailblazing Women in Kerry James Marshall's Massive New Mural." Chicago Tribune. December 12, 2017. Accessed March 09, 2019. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-kerry-james-marshall-rushmore-mural-women-htmlstory.html>.

at the women whose names are not in close proximity to their image and figure out how to link those names on the banner.”¹²⁴ The ribbon (fig. 13) is an opportunity for engagement, clarifying potential questions and offering viewers an entry point from which they can learn more if so desired. Extrapolating this notion to learn more about Marshall’s beliefs on public art, *Rush More* does not simply function as entertainment. Instead, the work is an invitation for people to learn about the individuals who shaped the culture and the city at large.

Such ideals are reaffirmed by the title of the piece. For Marshall, his titles often reveal the overarching aim of the project. One example of this is his exhibition *Mastry*. While the word recalls old traditional masters within the Western high arts canon, it has an insidious history as the title for owners of enslaved people in the United States. With the *e* removed, the spelling of *Mastry* recalls a Black vernacular. With *Rush More*, the name evokes the image of Mount Rushmore. In some ways, the mural challenges Mount Rushmore. In Mount Rushmore, the commemorated American male, white leaders that originally lived across various temporal scales; however, they were brought together in a background that is a-temporal, a solid grey rock. While this grey rock functions as a plane that can be inscribed with new meaning, it also implicitly recalls the whiteness, rigidity and strength of the four commemorated leaders. *Rush More* similarly depicts women from various temporal periods across industry verticals within a neutral background, thus adhering to comparable techniques of group portraiture.¹²⁵ *Rush More* differs in that memorializes women within the depiction of a forest. According to Marshall, forests have symbolic value. Forests are living entities that are always growing and expanding. Notably, there is a distinct gap between the words *Rush* and *More*. This space creates a slight

¹²⁴ "Interview with Kerry James Marshall." Telephone interview by author. January 10, 2019.

¹²⁵ James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz. *A Companion to Narrative Theory*. Williston, UNITED KINGDOM: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2008. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uchicago/detail.action?docID=243554>.

pause that imbues the saying with a kind of agency. Defined separately, “rush” signifies a kind of forward momentum, and “more” signifies an encouragement. Together, the viewers are called to action! The women featured in the piece generated artistic initiatives, many without government support, simply because they felt such programs were necessary. Accordingly, in the spirit of this activity as voiced by Marshall, we “should not settle! We should do more, act more.”¹²⁶ We do not need to wait for anyone to give us permission; the choice is ours and ours alone.

Conclusion

Rush More emerged from the collaborative efforts of Kerry James Marshall, Jeff Zimmermann, Murals of Acceptance and the Department of Cultural Affairs in 2017. Each individual and entity came to the work with contrasting intentions. In consideration of legal contracts, policy briefs and newspaper articles along with the work itself, the celebratory and pluralistic *Rush More* functions in a way that closely aligns with MoA’s desire to encourage social tolerance through art and DCASE’s interest in becoming an international city. Because it fulfills those roles while simultaneously putting forth Marshall’s own spirit of entrepreneurship, the celebrity of Kerry James Marshall prevails in this work.

¹²⁶ "Interview with Kerry James Marshall." Telephone interview by author. January 10, 2019.

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Fig. 1: Nancy Stone. *Kerry James Marshall adds details to Oprah Winfrey's face on Saturday, 2017. Acrylic on limestone. 130 ft by 132 ft. Rush More, Chicago Cultural Center.*
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Fig. 2: Claire Voon. *Photograph of mural Rush More*. 2017. Acrylic on limestone. 130 ft by 132 ft. Rush More, Chicago Cultural Center. <https://hyperallergic.com/418787/kerry-james-marshall-mural-chicago/>



Fig. 3: Charles White. *Sound of Silence*. 1978. Lithograph, 25 1/8 x 35 5/16" (63.8 x 89.7 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, Margaret Fisher Fund. The Charles White Archives. The Art Institute of Chicago

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Fig 4: Kerry James Marshall. The Actor Hezekiah Washington as Julian Carlton Taliesen Murderer of Frank Lloyd Wright Family, 2009. Acrylic on PVC panel. 30 7/8 × 24 7/8 × 1 7/8 in. (78.4 × 63.1 × 4.8 cm) Hudgins Family Collection, New York



Fig 5: Jeff Zimmermann. Sky Art Mural 2018. Acrylic on Brick. Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. Size unknown.



Fig 6: Iker Gil. Addition by Holabird and Root as seen from Garland Court. Chicago. 2017.
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Fig 7: Kerry James Marshall, *Souvenir I*, 1997. Acrylic, and collage and glitter on canvas 108 × 157 in. (274.3 × 398.8 cm) Collection Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Bernice and Kenneth Newberger Fund, 1997.73. Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago.



Fig. 8: Caroline Murray. White Oak Tree. 2013. Baskett Wildlife Research and Education Center. https://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/local/white-oak-decline-mysterious-to-foresters/article_b323f676-69d3-5802-8ff8-9e7454c6d452.html



Fig. 9: Jen Goellnitz. Cardinal. 2019. <https://www.thespruce.com/northern-cardinal-profile-387268>



Fig 10: Design for *Rush More* created by Kerry James Marshall, 2017.



Fig. 11: *Knowledge and Wonder* created by Kerry James Marshall, 1997. Daley, Jason. "Chicago Cancels Sale of Kerry James Marshall's 'Knowledge and Wonder'." Smithsonian.com. November 07, 2018. Accessed April 27, 2019. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/chicago-cancels-sale-important-piece-african-american-public-art-180970737/>.

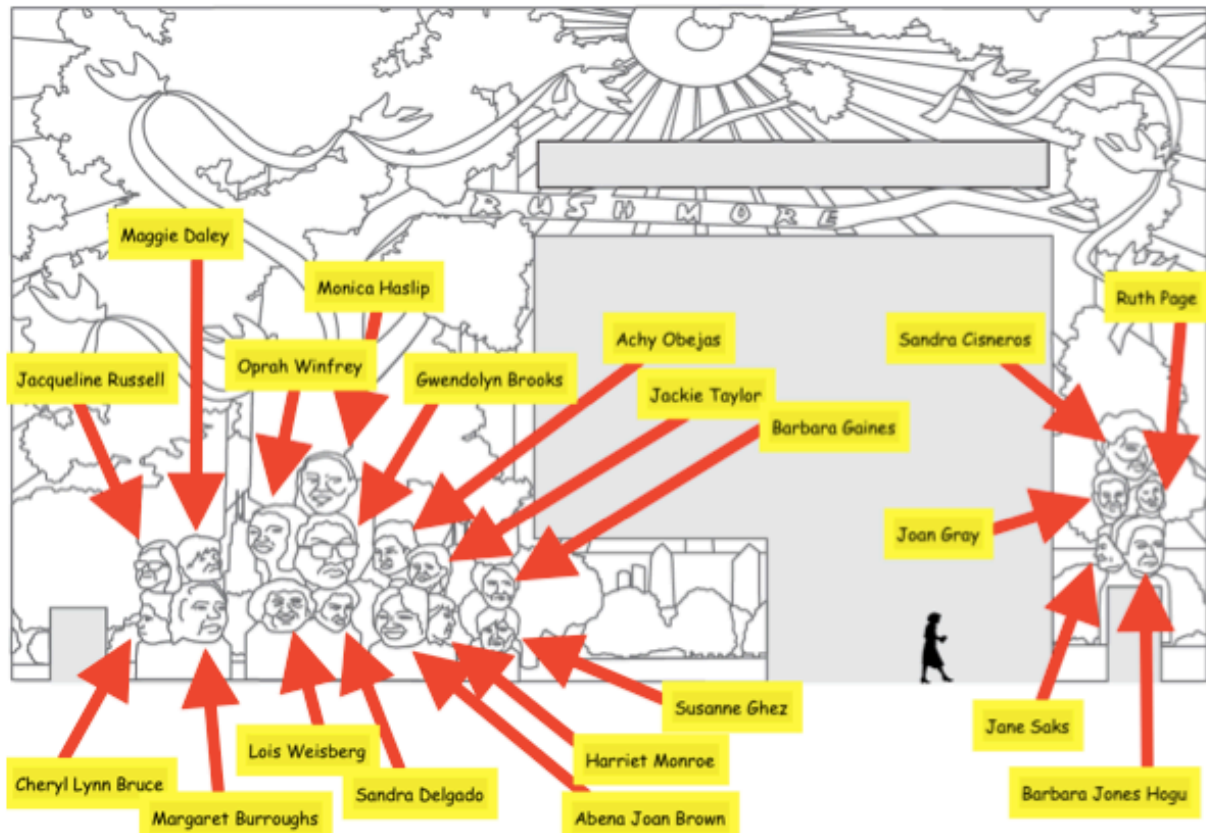


Fig. 12: Labels of faces, created by Kaesha Freyaldenhoven and inspired by Johnson, Kori Rumore and Steve. "Meet the 20 Trailblazing Women in Kerry James Marshall's Massive New Mural." [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-kerry-james-marshall-rushmore-mural-women-htmllstory.html). Accessed December 3, 2018. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-kerry-james-marshall-rushmore-mural-women-htmllstory.html>.



Fig. 13: Kaesha Freyaldenhoven. *Kerry James Marshall's Ribbon on Rush More*. 2017. Acrylic on limestone. 130 ft by 132 ft. Rush More, Chicago Cultural Center.