

# CRYSTAL BRIDGES

## MUSEUM *of* AMERICAN ART

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### Crystal Bridges Acquires Contemporary Works



Kerry James Marshall, *Our Town*, 1995. Acrylic and printed paper collage on canvas, 100" x 142" (254 x 360.7 cm).



Mary McCleary, *The Falcon Cannot Hear the Falconer*, 2008. Mixed media collage on paper, 39 1/2" x 50 3/4" (100.3 x 128.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Moody Gallery, Houston, Texas

**BENTONVILLE, Ark., February 24, 2010 -**

Works of art by two contemporary artists using mixed media to weave ambiguous suburban stories are the latest acquisitions announced by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art: Kerry James Marshall's *Our Town* (1995) and Mary McCleary's *The Falcon Cannot Hear the Falconer* (2008).

"Both Marshall and McCleary are creating compelling works that speak to contemporary life in late 20th/early 21st century America," said Chris Crosman, chief curator. "The idea of home is a recurring motif in American art that is explored in these and other works in our collection."

In *Our Town*, Kerry James Marshall presents a tidy vision of suburbia not unlike Thornton Wilder's 1938 play of the same title - apron-clad mother, cookie-cutter homes, two kids and their dog - and then undercuts it with the tense expressions and postures of the children in the foreground. Yellow ribbons are wrapped around most of the trees, suggesting war or other tragedy beyond the confines of the neighborhood. The carefully painted houses, clouds and a bright red ball coexist uneasily with graffiti-like scribbles and collaged squares of painted paper. Floating above the image, heralded by bluebirds bearing ribbons, the title of the work calls into

question who belongs in this American idyll.

*Our Town* will be included in *Kerry James Marshall*, a retrospective exhibition organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery that will be on view May 8, 2010 - January 10, 2011.

"Through his work, Kerry James Marshall considers the visibility of the black subject in Western art and culture," said Kathleen Bartels, director of the Vancouver Art Gallery and co-curator of the upcoming exhibition. "The social critique inherent in his paintings has a global consideration. We are very pleased to present the seminal *Our Town*."

Born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama and raised in South Central Los Angeles in an era marked by racial strife, Kerry James Marshall has explored the social and political experiences of African Americans throughout his career. Best-known for large-scale allegorical paintings, Marshall also works in sculpture, collage, photography, video and installation. He earned his bachelor of fine arts degree and received an honorary doctorate from the Otis Art Institute (now the Otis College of Art and Design) in Los Angeles. He has been honored with numerous solo exhibitions and was the recipient of the prestigious McArthur Foundation ("Genius") Fellowship in 1997. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, all in New York City; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among many others. He currently lives and works in Chicago.

Domestic disaster is explicit in Mary McCleary's *The Falcon Cannot Hear the Falconer*. A complex assemblage of electrical wire, twigs, paper and glitter painstakingly adhered to heavy paper represents a home engulfed in flames. A young man in the foreground, his face patterned with color, stares outward, confronting the viewer as a witness to the tragedy. The first two lines of William Butler Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* (1919) appear at the bottom of the collage and lend the work its title:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer*

When asked about the significance of the poem, Mary McCleary wrote: "I believe the poem speaks of man's deaf ear to his Maker. The adolescent boy in the foreground refers to the naïve fantasy of the primitive that has been a part of western thought since Romanticism. Does the face paint indicate the boy is a clown, a member of a tribe or both?"

Mary McCleary's visual stories are often inspired by literary, historical and biblical sources depicted in the present day. Based in Nacogdoches, Texas, she is Regent's Professor of Art Emeritus at Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas, where she taught from 1975 to 2005. She received her bachelor of fine arts degree in printmaking and drawing at Texas Christian University and her master of fine arts degree in graphics from the University of Oklahoma. Her work is in many public collections, including those of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the El Paso Museum of Art and the San Antonio Museum of Art.

## **About Crystal Bridges**

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art will present exceptional art, educational programs and community gatherings in a unique and welcoming setting. The museum takes its name from a nearby natural spring and the glass-and-wood building design by world-renowned architect Moshe Safdie. A series of pavilions nestled around two creek-fed ponds will house galleries, meeting and classroom spaces and a large auditorium. Sculpture and walking trails will link the museum's 100-acre park and gardens to downtown Bentonville, Arkansas.

Crystal Bridges will house a permanent collection of masterworks of American art that ranges from the colonial era to contemporary work. The museum also will display a changing array of special exhibitions featuring art from museums and collections throughout the region, the nation and abroad. For more information about Crystal Bridges, visit [www.crystalbridges.org](http://www.crystalbridges.org).