

Embodied and Situated

Kerry James Marshall's Formulations of Blackness in the Garden Project Series

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

Kerry James Marshall's *Garden Project* paintings (1994-95) refer to the ways dual mechanisms of racialized subject production and racialized spatialization compound and work to define blackness as an invisible other within the urban landscape. Marshall engages multiple historical modes of painting to disrupt the visual field and refuse an easy legibility of public housing as a racialized space. Marshall investigates the intense ambiguity to the legacy of public housing projects in the history of black America.

Marshall's life experiences and artistic development in relation to black cultural and political history in America have informed the production of his artwork. The paintings emerged in the 1990s amidst the debates regarding the emergence of identity politics in the art world and the critical response to the controversial 1993 Whitney Biennial. The five *Garden Project* paintings are analyzed of them in relation to the historical traditions of painting. They are significant for their evocations of an embodied and situated blackness in the visualization of black figuration, and in relation to the historical circumstances of public housing in Chicago, its role in the history of black class mobility, and the ways that many representations of public housing have presented it as a charged symbol of societal regression despite the complexity of its history.