

# *Los Angeles*

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**History, Diversity, Design**



**LACMA | Evenings for Educators | December 6, 2011**

# Los Angeles: History, Diversity, Design

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Los Angeles is many things to many people. It is a city of diversity, from its demographics to its politics to its architecture. From its earliest days as an arid pueblo to its current incarnation as a major metropolis, the city is constantly evolving. Fueled by its temperate climate, relative youth, and major industries – film and, until recently, aerospace – it is often idealized as a place for growth, innovation, and unlimited possibilities.

This resource traces the history of mid-century L.A. as seen through works of art dating

from 1930 to 1965 and beyond. It serves as a complement to the series of exhibitions hosted by LACMA as part of Pacific Standard Time, an unprecedented collaboration of cultural institutions across Southern California celebrating the birth of the L.A. art scene. Visit the following exhibitions or [www.lacma.org](http://www.lacma.org) to learn more about the multifaceted history of art in L.A. Share the following images with your students and use or adapt the discussion questions to your students' diverse needs and learning styles.

***California Design, 1930–1965: "Living in a Modern Way"***  
October 1, 2011 – June 3, 2012

The first major study of California midcentury modern design. With more than 300 objects – furniture, ceramics, metalwork, fashion and textiles, and industrial and graphic design – the exhibition examines the state's role in shaping the material culture of the entire country.

***Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987***  
September 4, 2011 – December 4, 2011

The first retrospective to present the wide-ranging work of the Chicano performance and conceptual art group Asco. Asco (1972–1987) began as a tight-knit core group of artists from East Los Angeles composed of Harry Gamboa Jr., Gronk, Willie Herrón, and Patssi Valdez. Taking their name from the forceful Spanish word for disgust and nausea, Asco used performance, public art, and multi-media to respond to social and political turbulence in Los Angeles and beyond.

***Edward Kienholz: Five Car Stud 1969–1972, Revisited***  
September 4, 2011 – January 15, 2012

Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* (1969–72) is a powerful work that depicts the hatred many white Americans expressed toward racial minorities and interracial partnerships in the not-too-distant-past; it stands as Kienholz's major civil rights work.

***Maria Nordman Filmroom: Smoke, 1967–Present***  
September 4, 2011 – January 15, 2012

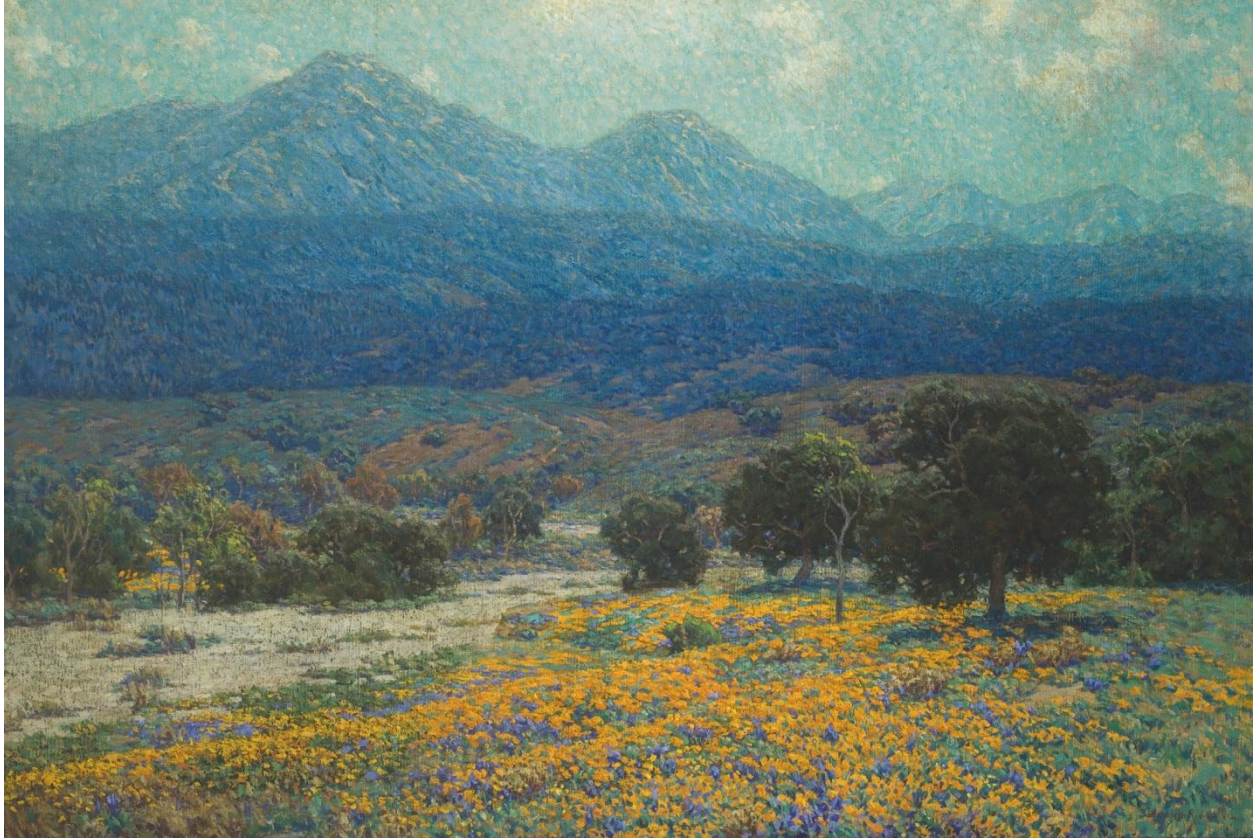
Film Room: *Smoke* is a project intertwining film and architecture. It comprises a double projection in a room that has two adjacent chambers separated by a wall, screening the two films simultaneously.

***Mural Remix: Sandra de la Loza***  
October 15, 2011 – January 22, 2012

Sandra de la Loza presents a visual 'mashup' by sampling obscure and forgotten details in murals produced during the 1970s. Taking the role of a performative archivist, she extracts and manipulates archival material to create a multi-media installation that provides a constantly shifting view of Chicano muralism.

# Southern California: Midcentury History

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Granville Redmond (United States, 1871–1935)  
*California Poppy Field*, c. 1926  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Raymond Griffith, 40.7  
Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Throughout most of the twentieth century, California symbolized the good life in America. Thanks to carefully crafted booster images (images that perpetuated popular perceptions) — like the landscape above by Los Angeles painter Granville Redmond — California was considered a place of excitement, leisure,

and abundant health. The thriving economy of the 1920s led to extraordinary population growth. New residents flocked to urban areas, dramatically altering the landscape and changing forever the image of the state as a bucolic Eden of relatively uninhabited mountains, deserts, and shorelines.



Dario De Julio (1916–2010, active Los Angeles)  
*Red Circle* orange crate label for McDermont Fruit Company, Riverside, c. 1938  
 Offset lithography, LACMA, Decorative Arts and Design Council Fund, M.2010.118.1  
 Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Once an exotic treat, California citrus was an American staple by the 1930s, thanks to advances in shipping and refrigeration. California fruit growers affixed appealing labels to their crates to ensure that oranges and lemons were inextricably associated with the state in the minds of consumers. While early labels showed images of pastoral bounty, in the 1920s and 1930s many companies hired professional commercial artists to design energetic abstractions, reminding buyers that accessible citrus was a modern convenience.

- What is produced in California today? Brainstorm a list of California-based products such as agricultural items, technology, architecture, furnishings, or fashion. Have students research ads for these products. Next, students will select one product and design an advertising label. What message do they want to communicate about the product? What design choices will they make—color, line, shape, pattern, words or phrases—to best deliver that message?



Spence Air Photos (Los Angeles, c. 1918–71)  
*View of Wilshire and Fairfax, Los Angeles, 1922*  
Gelatin silver print  
LACMA, Decorative Arts and Design Deaccession Fund, M.2010.32.1  
© Spence Air Photos

**Past and Present** – Compare and contrast the photograph above and on the following page. Do a Google “earth” map search for the intersection of Wilshire and Fairfax today and compare and contrast contemporary views with these archival images. What has changed in nearly one hundred years? What remains the same?



Spence Air Photos (Los Angeles, c. 1918–71)  
View of Wilshire and Fairfax, Los Angeles, 1929; printed 1930  
Gelatin silver print  
LACMA, Decorative Arts and Design Deaccession Fund, M.2010.32.2  
© Spence Air Photos

As these aerial views of Los Angeles demonstrate, millions of new denizens flocked to the state's urban areas in the 1920s. The boom in migration created increased need for housing and furnishings. Buildings and their contents started to be designed and built in modern ways and in modern styles.

- **Mapping Your City**—Think of a major intersection in your community. Compare what exists there today with what you know about your community's history and landscape. (View archival photos in the photo database at the Los Angeles Public Library, [www.lapl.org](http://www.lapl.org).) Then reimagine today's intersection and what it might look like in the future. Draw your prediction of your community in the year 2111!



Millard Sheets (United States, 1907–1989)  
*Angel's Flight*, 1931  
Oil on canvas, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Maitland, 32.17  
© Millard Sheets Estate, Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Millard Sheets, a passionate observer of the culture and landscape of Southern California, painted this image of downtown Los Angeles during the Great Depression. The patterns and bright colors emphasize the vibrant rhythms of this neighborhood rather than the struggles of the era.

- Imagine yourself as one of the figures in this scene. Is there a particular figure you would choose to be and why? What might you see, hear, smell, taste or touch?



Millard Sheets (United States, 1907–1989), *Screen*, probably 1930s,  
Oil on canvas on board, Purchased with funds provided by the American Art Council Fund,  
the Decorative Arts and Design Council Fund, and Barbara and Michael Brickman, M.2009.63  
© Millard Sheets Estate. Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

While best known as California's foremost regionalist painter, Millard Sheets was also a hugely influential teacher and tireless promoter of decorative arts. From 1931 to 1957 he organized exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Fair that introduced broad audiences to local art, design, and craft. This screen functioned as a room divider,

embodying his conviction that art should be incorporated directly into architecture. His ideals about integration were later expressed in California's Home Savings and Loans banks, for which he designed not only the buildings but also the entire decorative schemes, including sculpture, stained glass, mosaics, and murals.



# Los Angeles Design

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Installation view of *California Design 1930–1965: Living in a Modern Way*, October 1, 2011–June 3, 2012  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

From 1930 to 1965, residents of Los Angeles experienced several unprecedented historical events such as the Depression and World War II, which significantly changed how people lived. During this period, California became the country’s most important center for progressive architecture and furnishings. Artists’ and designers’ imaginative applications of war-developed materials and production methods applied to peacetime uses significantly altered the way people lived. By the onset of World War II, the area’s newly developed homes and their furnishings were characterized by a particular kind of modernism rooted in California culture and conditions.

By examining the material culture of the city during this period—architecture, furnishings, fashion—as well as works on paper and photographs, we can learn more about the Angelenos who furnished modern homes and read magazines that provided models for “living in a modern way.” What do these objects tell us about California history and technology? About Los Angeles as a site for creativity, innovation, and individuality?



"What Makes the California Look," *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*, October 21, 1951, cover  
 Selected and arranged by Richard B. Petterson (1910–1996, active Claremont, California)  
 Collection of Gerard O'Brian, Copyright © 1951, Los Angeles Times.  
 Reprinted with permission. Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

"What Makes the California Look"? asked the *Los Angeles Times*, a question so pressing that it was posed on the cover of the newspaper's "Home" magazine for October 21, 1951. Because the objects photographed for the cover answered the question so well, they (or ones almost interchangeable) have been located and reassembled

at LACMA (see the installation view on the previous page). As the caption for the cover declared: "In this abstract arrangement are the glowing color, originality of treatment and simplicity of design that typify the California look."



Charles Eames (1907–1978, active Venice, California)  
 Ray Eames (1912–1988, active Venice, California)  
 Herman Miller Furniture Company (Zeeland, Michigan,  
 1923–present), DAX (dining model), 1948–50, LACMA,  
 purchased with funds provided by Alice and Nahum Lainer  
 M.2010.13, © 2011 Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com);  
 © Herman Miller, Inc.  
 Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA



Hendrik Van Keppel (1914–1988, active Los Angeles and  
 Beverly Hills), Van Keppel-Green (Beverly Hills, 1939–early 1970s)  
*Lounge Chair and Ottoman*, designed c. 1939; made c. 1959  
 Enameled steel, cotton cord (replaced), LACMA  
 Gift of Dan Steen in memory of Taylor Green, AC1998.31.1-.2  
 Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

The *Los Angeles Times* display, arranged by ceramist and Scripps College professor Richard Petterson, exemplifies the central role of exhibitions as well as the media in promoting California design. Many of the handmade pieces had been exhibited at the 1951 Los Angeles County Fair and included in the exhibition *California Crafts*, which toured the country in 1951 and 1952. Both handwork by silversmith Allan Adler and industrial design such as the Eames fiberglass chair (above left) and the Van Keppel-Green steel and cotton cord lounge chair (above right) were displayed internationally as part of *Design for Use, USA*.

- Student as Designer – Work with a partner, or “client,” to design a chair. Interview the person about his or her preferences. 1) Where will the chair be used? 2) What will it be used for? 3) What will the chair need? 4) What colors, shapes, and motifs would the client like incorporated into the design? Now that you know your client’s needs, it is time for you, the artist, to create the design. Be sure to take your client’s feedback into consideration. Use sheets of card stock and paper-sculpting techniques such as folding, scoring, and curling to create a basic form. Then organize and apply patterns of color and motifs to design the surfaces of the chair.



Harrison McIntosh (b. 1914, active Claremont, California)  
*Covered Jar*, 1961, Stoneware  
Collection of Forrest L. Merrill. © Harrison McIntosh  
Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA



Arline Fisch (b. 1931, active San Diego, California)  
*Peacock Tail Necklace*, 1962, Silver, enamel  
LACMA, Gift of Arline Fisch in honor of Dr. Jae Carmichael  
© Arline Fisch, photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA



Don Smith (1918–1972, active San Francisco, California), L. Anton Maix Fabrics (established 1948)

*"Fish Fair" Textile*, c. 1953, Screenprinted linen

Purchased with funds provided by the Costume and Textiles Deaccession Fund  
and the Decorative Arts and Design Deaccession Fund, M.2009.54.5

© Don Smith Estate, courtesy Judy Smith de Barros, Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

# Watts Towers

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Sanford H. Roth (United States, 1906–1962)  
*Simon Rodia/Watts Towers*, c. 1950  
35mm negative  
Beulah Roth Bequest, PhA.1993.9.24.17  
Roth Artist Portraits Department  
© 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Although not active in the modern-design community, Italian immigrant Simon Rodia, who lived most of his adult years in the Watts district of L.A., blurred the boundaries between art and everyday life in his extraordinary sculpture, *Watts Towers*. Created out of concrete and appropriated objects, such as plates and bottles, this collection of seventeen interconnected structures, constructed between

1921 and 1954, form an iconic monument in the city of L.A. *Watts Towers* challenges traditional definitions of art and design (and traditional definitions of artists), and encourages us to see the artistic potential in everyday objects. Over the years, the landmark has become a magnet for artists and created a sense of pride within the community.



Sanford H. Roth (United States, 1906–1962)

*Simon Rodia/Watts Towers*, c. 1950

35mm negative

Beulah Roth Bequest, PhA.1993.9.4.9

Roth Artist Portraits Department

© 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

Photographer Sanford Roth (1906–1962) documented the Towers and Rodia in an extensive series of photographs, including the image above, and those on the previous and following pages.



Sanford H. Roth (United States, 1906–1962)

*Simon Rodia/Watts Towers*, c. 1950

35mm negative

Beulah Roth Bequest, PhA.1993.9.26.27

Roth Artist Portraits Department

© 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA





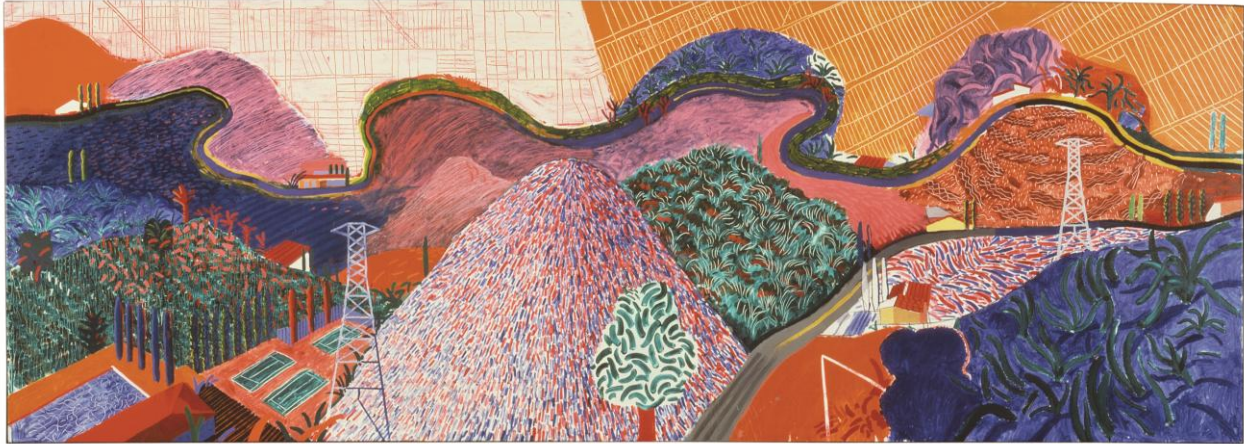
Simon Rodia (Italy, active United States, 1879–1965)  
*Watts Towers* (detail)  
Photo by Staci Steinberger, 2010

Thanks to the work of early preservationists, the *Watts Towers* are now owned by the State of California and managed by the City of Los Angeles. Collectively, it is a National Historic Landmark and one of the most widely recognized works to come out of Southern California in the last century. LACMA recently partnered with the City of L.A.'s Department of

Cultural Affairs to work toward the preservation of this landmark work of art. Throughout 2011 LACMA's Conservation Center is developing a comprehensive plan for the long-term preservation of the *Towers*. Visit [www.lacma.org/art/watts-towers](http://www.lacma.org/art/watts-towers) for clips of conservation scientists at work on this precision-demanding undertaking.

# Los Angeles Diversity

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David Hockney (England, active United States, b. 1937)

*Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, 1980

Acrylic on canvas

LACMA, Purchased with funds provided by the F. Patrick Burns Bequest, M.83.35

© 2011 David Hockney, photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

The city of Los Angeles has long attracted artists, architects, and designers. Many émigrés came to the region in the late 1930s and early 1940s for various reasons, but most were fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe. While the influence of these émigrés was enormous, designers and arts patrons native to the state, as well as transplants from other parts of the country, also were key figures in shaping California modern. Still others, like British artist David Hockney were intrigued by the laid-back lifestyle of Southern California. Hockney settled here in the 1960s. His iconic painting of Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles is pictured above.

In 1962 California surpassed New York as the country's most populous state, and by 1967 it had the world's sixth-largest economy. However, regional and national events shook

the idealism of the state. Opposition to the Vietnam War and the escalating struggle for civil rights were by no means unique to California, but the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (1964–65) and the Watts riots in 1965 were galvanizing events that resonated throughout the country. They reinforced the belief that California was a microcosm of the nation and cast doubt on the future of both.

These traumas contributed to the growth of a counterculture sensibility that would profoundly affect California modernism. The counterculture belief in the primacy of individual expression eroded the designer-craftsman ideal of improving furnishings for middle-class consumption. Ecological and social justice issues seriously challenged the very idea of consumerism and unbridled growth.

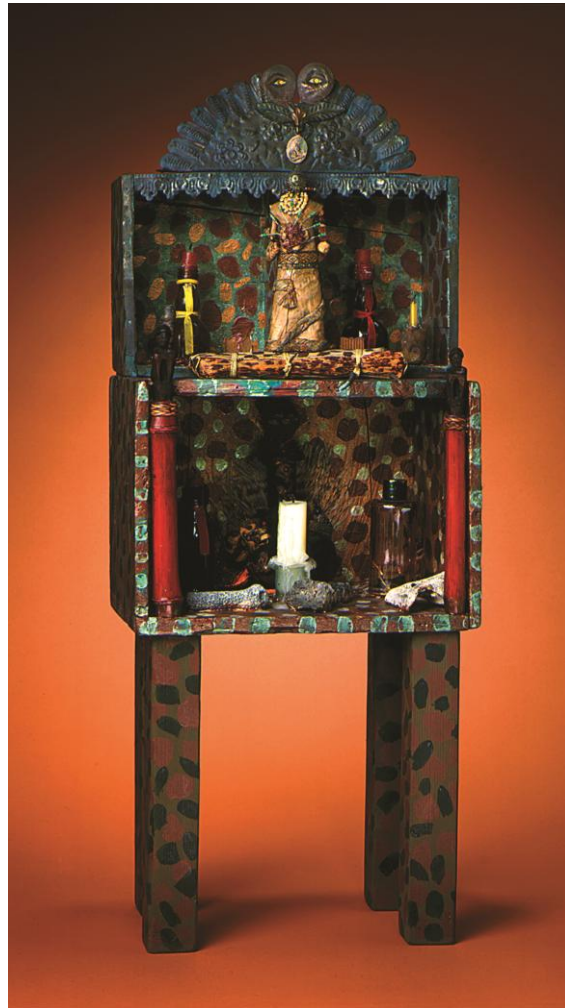


David Hammons (United States, b. 1943)  
*Injustice Case*, 1970  
Body print (margarine and powdered pigments) and American flag  
LACMA, Museum Acquisition Fund, M.71.7  
© David Hammons, photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

This is a life-size print of artist David Hammons's body, framed by a large American flag. The man appears silenced and restrained, a contradiction to the freedom symbolized by the flag. The title, *Injustice Case*, refers to the civil rights trial of Bobby Seale, one of the cofounders of the Black Panther Party and one of eight demonstrators on trial in the 1969 case known as the "Chicago Seven."

Born in Springfield, Illinois, David Hammons received his education as an artist in Los Angeles.

He first became known in the 1970s for his body prints. Hammons would cover himself with grease or margarine and press himself against illustration board. Next, he sprinkled powdered pigment (often chalk, charcoal, or another fine pigment) over the board where it would adhere to the grease, revealing a ghost-like print of the body. Hammons matted this particular print in an actual American flag as a life-size multi-media collage.



Betye Saar (United States, b. 1926)  
*Gris Gris Guardian*, 1990–1993  
Mixed media assemblage, LACMA, Purchased with funds provided by the Richard Florsheim Art Fund and the Modern and Contemporary Art Council, AC1996.162.1, © Betye Saar  
Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/LACMA

A native of Los Angeles, Betye Saar is of African American, Irish, and Native American descent. She was educated in Los Angeles and established herself as an artist in the 1960s and 1970s. Saar practices assemblage, or works of art that are created through the assembly of objects or fragments of objects that were not initially intended to be used as materials for art-making. Saar's work in this medium is inspired by a number of experiences and sources. As a child, she would visit her grandmother in Watts, just

a few blocks away from the site where Simon Rodia was constructing the *Watts Towers*.

- Discuss the different ways that we identify ourselves – by race, cultural heritage, gender, religion, residence, profession, activity, and so on. Which affiliations do you feel more connected to and why? How do you negotiate and balance these identities and the various ideals and beliefs of the different communities to which you belong?



Kerry James Marshall (United States, b. 1955)

*De Style*, 1993

Acrylic and collage on canvas

LACMA, Purchased with funds provided by Ruth and Jacob Bloom, AC 1993.76.1

© Kerry Marshall, Photo © 2011 Museum Associates/ LACMA

Born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama, Kerry James Marshall was eight years old when his family moved to Southern California. Marshall's work is naturally rooted in the geography of his upbringing, from the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 to the 1965 civil unrest in Watts. He says, "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 you've got some kind of social responsibility. You can't move to Watts in 1963 and not speak about it. That determined a lot of where my

work was going to go." Throughout his career he has created series about black life, the condition of public housing projects and the civil rights movement.

- What events or issues have influenced your life? Do these events have roots in history and the lives of your ancestors? What can you do today to affect change around these issues? What steps might you need to take to accomplish this? How might you explore these issues and your action in response to them in a work of art?

Pacific Standard Time is an unprecedented collaboration of more than sixty cultural institutions across Southern California, coming together to tell the story of the birth of the L.A. art scene. Initiated through grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time will take place for six months beginning in October 2011.



The exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and is sponsored by



Additional funding was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation, Debbie and Mark Attanasio, Martha and Bruce Karsh, and LACMA's Decorative Arts and Design Council.

Cover Image: 2011 © Museum Associates

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