

## FEELS ART PROMPTS



Kerry James Marshall (American, b. 1945), *Untitled*, 2008, oil on PVC panel, 2008.233.

**F for FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** (About 2 minutes.)

What stands out to you? What do you notice about the artist's face?  
The hairstyle? The pose? What do you notice about the palette?  
The background?

**E for EXAMINE DETAILS:** (5 Minutes)

How would you describe the artist's features? What do you notice about the forehead? Do they remind you of anything?  
How does Marshall paint the artist's left hand?  
Why do you think the palette is so large? What is the most important color in the painting? How do we know? What is the artist wearing?  
What details does Marshall include about the background?

**E for EXPLORE RESPONSES:** Why do you think Marshall called this portrait "Untitled?" Why do you think Marshall included the details on the artist's forehead? How does the scale of the palette and the placement of the brush in the color black affect your understanding of the image? How would you describe the artist's clothing, and how does it affect your impression of the figure? How do the rectangles behind the figure affect the portrait? Why do you think Marshall included them?

**L for LEARN ABOUT CONTEXT:** (10-15 minutes. Feel free to write your responses or discuss them with others.)  
Marshall, a professor at the University of Illinois and a MacArthur Foundation Fellow, has written about his efforts to address the lack of portraits of black artists. *Untitled* belongs to a series of painting Marshall created of female and male artists, often shown with enormous palettes.

In the history of art, figures painted looking directly at us or head on usually appear in paintings of supernatural deities, Christ or the Virgin Mary, or for royal leaders. In ancient Egypt, portraits of royal figures posed head on and carved out of dark stones like obsidian over 4,500 years ago convey their power in fashioning images from a material that was rare and valued for its aesthetic properties.

**S for SHARE YOUR FEELINGS:** (15 Minutes or more. Feel free to write or discuss with others.)

Marshall's *Untitled* was inspired by Langston Hughes's 1926 essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," published in *The Nation*. Hughes celebrated black culture in contrast to the prevalent white aesthetic in popular culture. Hughes wrote in his essay:

"But to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering, "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful?" [We] younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves."

How do you feel standing in front of Marshall's image of an artist?

How does the placement of Marshall's painting in this gallery affect your experience of *Untitled*?

When you think of a Superhero, what does that person look like? How would you portray yourself as a Superhero?

What pose, clothing, objects, and surroundings would you choose?

How do images around us shape our concepts of beauty?

## FEELS ART PROMPTS

Please help us to improve the FEELS Art Prompts as we develop new ways for museum visitors to use the collections to explore their own feelings and cultivate a greater sense of well-being. Please complete and return this page. Feel free to add any additional comments on the back. Thank you for sharing your responses as we continue to refine the FEELS Prompts. (About 5-10 minutes.)

1) Have you ever visited a museum before today? Please circle one: YES NO

How many times per year do you visit a museum?

Number of times: 1-2 3-5 6-10 Your own estimated number of visits:

Please circle responses to the following statements:

2) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to consider Marshall's *Untitled* in relation to my own experiences or responses.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Please provide any further thoughts or comments:

3) The FEELS Prompts offered me a way to explore an emotional connection to the work of art.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

4) The FEELS Prompts inspired reflection of my own memories or experiences.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

5) The FEELS Prompts inspired me to engage with other students in the gallery.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

6) The FEELS Prompts inspired a greater sense of self-reflection.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

7) The FEELS Prompts enabled me to recall experiences of interest to me.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

8) The FEELS Prompts created a greater sense of confidence in exploring my responses to art:

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

9) The quote from Langston Hughes enhanced the FEELS Prompts:

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

Further thoughts or comments:

10) I would tell a friend to use the FEELS Prompts when in the museum.

Agree Strongly Agree Disagree Disagree Strongly

11) What did you find most interesting about the FEELS Prompts? What did you enjoy least?

12) What would have made the FEELS Prompts better? (Feel free to use the back of the page.)

If you'd like to learn more about the FEELS Art Prompts project, please reach out to: Elliot Bostwick Davis, Ph.D., at [elliott\\_davis@harvard.edu](mailto:elliott_davis@harvard.edu). Thank you for your input!

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