COMMEMORATIVE CLOUD

New Museum Kids Menu provides families with activities to learn about contemporary art and ideas at home.

Artist Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955 Birmingham, AL), whose work is included in “Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America,” creates realistic depictions of everyday moments in Black people’s lives, and inserts them into white and European-dominant art historical narratives as a way to counter stereotypes about Black people historically and today. Marshall created the Mementos series, which includes the painting Souvenir IV, to honor Black people who contributed to the Black liberation and civil rights movements of the 1960s, but who are often overlooked. The large-scale paintings in Mementos incorporate glitter, posters, and household kitsch. The paintings were inspired by popular, commemorative souvenirs honoring John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, all of whom were assassinated in the 1960s.

“So, I tried to figure out a way to do that in a way that it honored both my father and the historical figures who were assassinated at the time, but also to expand the pantheon of people who were commemorated beyond the ones who were represented in the popular commemorative souvenirs that were made at the time. So that banner with King, and the two Kennedys, everybody saw a variation of that banner and it manifested in a lot of other forms... But there were other people who died between 1959 and 1970, which are the years that bracket the 60s, whose contributions to the decade were equally as important, but they didn't receive the same kind of popular commemoration... So, it was a way of expanding the pantheon, so that the idea of commemoration wasn't just located within the three most popular, most well-recognized, but to make people understand that this moment was momentous on a lot of occasions because... the struggle was more expansive.”

– Kerry James Marshall
To learn more about Kerry James Marshall's paintings celebrating Black life, watch this video or listen to an interview with him.

Kerry James Marshall in conversation with Massimiliano Gioni, Edlis Neeson Artistic Director of the New Museum

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- memento: an object kept as a reminder of a person or event
- commemorate: celebrate (an event, a person, or a situation) by doing or building something
- palette: a thin board that a painter holds or mixes paints on, or the set of colors put on the palette

START WITH THE ART: KERRY JAMES MARSHALL, SOUVENIR IV, 1998
• Do you recognize any of the faces or names in the painting? Are you familiar with any of these people and their contributions to American history and culture?
• How would you describe the color palette? Is it dull or bright?
• How do you feel when you see these colors?
• How would you describe the setting where the painting takes place?
• Why do you think the artist put portraits of people’s faces in clouds? How might this relate to commemorating people who have died?

LOOK AROUND

• Marshall’s *Mementos* series commemorates artists, musicians, and activists who contributed to the social movements of the 1960s. Can you think of an artist, activist, or musician you find inspiring? This can include people you know and who are part of your community, or people from pop culture or history.
• Do you have photographs of the person you admire, or can you find images of them online?

MAKE ART

Let’s make a portrait of someone we admire, remember, and look up to inside the shape of a cloud. Who would you like to commemorate or honor? This person can be a politician, activist, artist, musician, family member, teacher, sibling, friend, or other community member.

MATERIALS

• Paper
• Drawing supplies: markers, pens, pencils
• Cotton balls or tissue
• Glue
• Large piece of sturdy paper or cardboard
• Scissors
• Optional: a computer and printer to source images
• Optional: hole punch and string/yarn
MAKING

1. Choose a person you would like to commemorate.
2. Take the sturdy paper or cardboard and draw an outline in the shape of a cloud.
3. Using scissors, cut out the cloud shape.
4. Either draw a picture or print photographs of the person you would like to commemorate, making sure they will fit inside the cloud.
5. Trim the pictures and glue them onto the cloud, leaving space around the portrait.
6. Use drawing supplies to add colors that reflect your mood or how you feel about the person.
7. Attach the cotton balls or tissue with glue to the negative space around the portrait.
8. Continue attaching cotton balls/tissues until the shape looks like a cloud.
9. Once dry, punch a hole into the cloud, loop the string through the hole and knot it closed so that you can hang the cloud where you and others can see it.

REFLECTION

- Why did you choose the figure you represented? How would you describe their contributions or importance to you, your community, to history or large numbers of people?
- What colors did you choose and why? How do those colors impact your commemoration?
- How does it feel to see this person’s image in your home? Does it help you remember more about them and your relationship to them and their work?