



498. **HOUSE OF FIRE**
1981
James Rosenquist
American, born 1933

499. **BONFIRE**
2013–15
Lisa Yuskavage
American, born 1962

500. (pages 516–17)
UNTITLED (STUDIO)
2014
Kerry James Marshall
American, born 1955





499.
BONFIRE
2013–15

Lisa Yuskavage
American, born 1962

Oil on linen;
each 82 × 66 ½ × 1 ½ in.
(208,3 × 168,9 × 3,8 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Purchase,
Anonymous Gift, 2015 (2015.457a, b)

Lisa Yuskavage belongs to a generation of painters who came of age in the 1990s, after the “death of painting” had been declared in response to post-1960s developments, including the emergence of new media. Her figurative imagery synthesizes the high and the low—from the old-master tradition to *Penthouse* photography—and exploits their contradictions. Undercurrents of sex and violence infuse this diptych, which depicts an otherworldly realm evocative of the nightmarish visions of Hieronymus Bosch and Goya. The scene is framed by twinned female nudes who, in the artist’s words, “appear like a Rorschach mirror of one another.”

Yuskavage described this work as a “mise-en-scène where the main protagonist is color.” In her paintings, which often lack a clear narrative, color functions as a carrier of meaning. The high-keyed emerald hue that dominates this canvas features in her recent work; it connotes both nature and artifice. (Green, Yuskavage has noted, “is always ominous.”) The artist’s nonnaturalistic approach to color is informed by a modeling technique known as *cangiantismo*, widely used by sixteenth-century Mannerist painters, in which shifts of hue were used to model form. In her art, Yuskavage plays on the capacity of this effect to conjure supernaturally or psychologically charged scenarios.



500.
UNTITLED (STUDIO)
2014

Kerry James Marshall
American, born 1955

Acrylic on two PVC panels;
overall 83 ⅞ in. × 9 ft. 11 ¼ in.
(211,6 × 302,9 cm)

Purchase, The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Foundation Gift, Acquisitions Fund and The Metropolitan Museum of Art Multicultural Audience Development Initiative Gift, 2015 (2015.366)

Since the 1980s, Kerry James Marshall has been referencing and subverting the canon of western European art in his work. He depicts the African-American experience across a range of genres, often alluding to familiar works from art history. He paints his figures an emphatic black, a practice he began in 1980 with the first work in his *Invisible Man* series, inspired by Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel of the same name. Marshall has explained, “The blackness of my figures is supposed to be unequivocal, absolute, and unmediated. They are a response to the tendency in the culture to privilege lightness.”

This work belongs to a group of fourteen paintings, first exhibited in 2014, which address ideas about looking, seeing, and being seen. The subject—an artist in her studio—conjures a range of art-historical precedents: the placement of the nude model in the background evokes the figure of the artist behind his easel in Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), while the obvious artifice of the tableau—down to the Lowel Tota floodlight—may allude to Gustave Courbet’s 1855 painting of his atelier (Musée d’Orsay, Paris). Marshall’s studio scene also incorporates elements from different genres: the skull (next to a half-eaten cupcake) on the cluttered table recalls the Baroque *vanitas* still life, and the view through the studio window introduces an element of landscape, while the nude male model is a nod to the academic tradition.

In keeping with Marshall’s usual approach, the large scale of the image aligns it with the Western tradition of history painting. This is a deliberate statement on the artist’s part: “I’m making a declaration that the subject is worthy of that kind of monumental treatment. Too often if you look back through the history of representation and you take the work of African-American artists, the work is on such a modest scale that it becomes sort of inconsequential.”