

Seattle Art Museum Honors Titus Kaphar, Inaugural Fellowship Recipient, with a Solo Exhibition

SEATTLE, WA. - Contemporary artist Titus **kaphar** is the inaugural Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Fellow at the **Seattle Art Museum**. **kaphar** is featured in the first solo exhibition in SAM's Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Gallery through September 6, 2009.

The Seattle Art Museum's Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Fellowship is awarded bi-annually to an early career black (not necessarily African-American) artist – an individual who has been producing mature work for less than 10 years. The selected artist is honored with a one-person exhibition in SAM's Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Gallery and receives a \$10,000 award to further his or her artistic practice.

The Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Fellowship was created to provide inspiration for young artists and scholarship in the field of art history, especially as it pertains to the artistic and cultural life of black artists, both of which were important to Knight and Lawrence. Funding for the fellowship is provided by the Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence Endowment. In selecting artists to receive the fellowship, emphasis is placed on individuals whose original work reflects the Lawrences' concern for artistic excellence, education, mentorship and scholarship within the cultural contexts and value systems that informed their work and the work of other artists of color.

Future fellowship recipients will be nominated by a committee that includes outside visual art professionals, as well as SAM's own curatorial staff. A selection committee will then review the merits of the proposed award recipients, and choose the winning artist. **kaphar**, the inaugural fellow, was chosen by Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Adjunct Curator, Modern & Contemporary Art Department/ Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Programs and Michael Darling, Jon and Mary Shirley Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art.

"What an incredible gesture and legacy it is for artists to give the gift of resources to help another artist manifest their vision," said Jackson- Dumont.

Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1976, **kaphar** earned a BFA in painting from San Jose State University, with a minor in African-American studies, and an MFA in painting from Yale University in 2006. The following year he was an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. He has had exhibitions at the Yale University Art Gallery, Savannah College of Art and Design, the Provisions Library in Washington, DC, the Anno Domini Gallery in San Jose and the San Jose State University Gallery. Since receiving the Gwendolyn Knight/Jacob Lawrence Fellowship, **kaphar** has been tapped for Cuba's Havana Biennial.

kaphar's solo show at the Seattle Art Museum, *History in the Making*, features sixteen mixed media paintings. His works often begin as technically meticulous oil-on-canvas interpretations of European and American paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries. He then reconfigures these historic and well-known paintings in strategic ways, creating "alternative histories" and provoking dialogues about race and social issues, as well as art and representation. The completed works come to reflect what **kaphar** describes as "the first sentence in a longer paragraph that the viewer completes."

Many of the characters and scenes in **kaphar's** paintings are an amalgamation of many individuals (historical and contemporary). "In each piece, meaning is formed in the relationship between the historical image on the surface and the residue of the physical intervention," **kaphar** explained. "In many of my pieces, the appropriated painted image becomes the site where the intervention is performed."

"There is a sense that what I am doing is destroying these paintings but the reality is that I'm making them, me personally, with the intention to alter them and they are not complete until something has happened to them. But the copied paintings are just materials for me to work with," says **kaphar**.

As an MFA graduate of Yale University, **kaphar** spent time in the Yale University Art Gallery where he became enthralled by the importance of painting as a visual construction of history or perceived document of important moments and people. The process began as an investigation into art history. He studied artists and art works that were held up as iconic in his art history courses and questioned the visual treatment of black subjects in the works. He studied artists such as Trumbull, Eakins, Turner and Velasquez and paintings like George Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze. At the Seattle Art Museum, *History in the Making* will take place at the same time as *Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery* creating the rare opportunity for **kaphar** to directly demonstrate his interpretation of these historical narratives, which he sees as having other possible storylines.

Titus kaphar: *History in the Making* is curated by Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Adjunct Curator, Modern & Contemporary Art Department/Kayla Skinner Deputy Director of Education and Public Programs at SAM.