

## ‘How We Perceive the Past Has a Great Bearing on How We Live Now’: Art Historian James Meyer on Why the 1960s Won’t Fade Away

In his new book, the curator and historian suggests that some eras produce memories that cannot be forgotten.

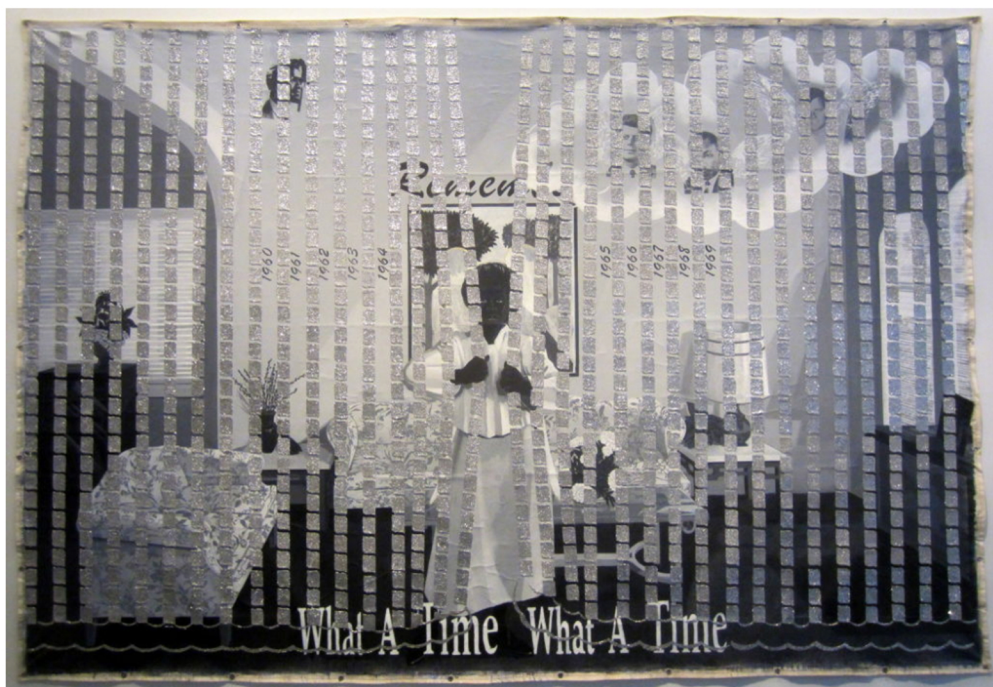
Pac Pobric, January 15, 2020

### What would you describe as the greatest challenge of the book?

Figuring out the topic itself. What I am writing about? What is the “’60s return?” How do you define it? How do you understand that history is not static, that it impacts later periods or bleeds into them?

My earlier work—my books on Minimalism and my exhibition on the history of the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles and New York—reflected a structuralist understanding of history as a set of discursive, economic, and institutional conditions specific to their time. This book understands the “long” ‘60s—the period stretching from the mid-‘50s to the mid-‘70s—as over and not over, a past that is not “past.”

Nietzsche, in his essay “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life,” proposes that history is a dynamic force. It can be a chain that binds us to the past, and a model of emulation. How we perceive the past has a great bearing on how we live now. As he says, we need to strike a balance between remembering and forgetting. It is vitally important to remember, yet not to the degree that we get stuck in the past. I discuss Kerry James Marshall’s paintings about Civil Rights-era memory, the *Souvenirs*, along these lines.



Kerry James Marshall, *Memento V* (2003). Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri. © Kerry James Marshall. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.