

Images available upon request

Denver Art Museum Presents First Major Museum Exhibition Dedicated to Jordan Casteel

Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze features new works that showcase the power of contemporary portraiture

DENVER – May 14, 2018 – The Denver Art Museum (DAM) is proud to announce *Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze*, an exhibition of about 30 paintings by Denver-born artist Jordan Casteel, who is now based in Harlem, New York. This presentation represents Casteel's first major museum exhibition, and provides audiences with a first look at new work by one of the most acclaimed emerging artists working today. The exhibition showcases Casteel's large-scale portraits that depict the black subjects who drive her practice. *Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze*, will be on view Feb. 2, 2019 through May 26, 2019, in the Gallagher Gallery of the Hamilton Building at the DAM.

"It is an honor to present Jordan Casteel's first solo museum exhibition in her hometown and to share the power of her canvases with local audiences and visitors to our city," said Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the DAM. "Casteel's stories of individuals are based on personal experience, revealing the importance of human connection in our lives and elevating our everyday interactions through portraiture."

Organized and curated by Rebecca R. Hart, Vicki and Kent Logan Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the DAM, *Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze* will feature larger-than-life portraits that depict individuals from her immediate community. The exhibition will bring together a body of work made from 2014 to 2018, revealing Casteel's evolving practice and a shift in subject matter ranging from cityscapes and subway scenes to women and local business owners. Her early series, *Visible Man* (2013-2014) and

Brothers (2015), portray family and close friends and include



details that deepen our understanding of the subjects through elements such as furnishings, personal belongings and place.

"The intent of the paintings from my early works is to expose my vision of black men as a sister, daughter, friend and lover," said Casteel. "That perspective is one full of empathy and love. I see the humanity and, in turn, I want audiences to engage with them as fathers, sons, brothers, cousins—as individuals with their own unique stories to share."

Casteel's 2017 series, *Nights in Harlem*, focuses on



expanding her close circle of subjects through an investigation of light and color by engaging members of the Harlem community at night. Casteel's approach to identifying subjects involves walking around her neighborhood and taking photographs. By transforming these images into portraits, Casteel reveals individuals and surroundings that often go unnoticed.

A recent work titled *Benyam* (2018), spotlighting the shift of Casteel's subject matter, features a matriarch in a family-operated Ethiopian restaurant that Casteel frequents. Depicted in a moment of leisure, their casual poses and riveting gazes suggest the warm hospitality and familial atmosphere they share with customers. Casteel exudes a confidence about this as she comments, "[They] offered their spirits for a painting."

"Casteel has the power to capture our attention by posing her sitters so that they often look you directly in the eye, leading to deeper understandings of the intent behind the artwork," said Hart. "By titling the exhibition *Returning the Gaze*, we acknowledge the levels of engagement within Casteel's art: she gazes at the subjects, who often look out at the viewer with inviting eyes, which then prompts us to think about the sitter and consider the empathy that the artist has for the people that she paints."

Debuting on Free First Saturday, Feb. 2, 2019, *Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze* will be free for all museumgoers

to see on opening day. The exhibition will be included in general admission throughout its run and free for youth 18 and under. A fully illustrated exhibition catalog, Casteel's first solo publication, will be available in The Shop at the Denver Art Museum and [online](#) by spring of 2019. The fully illustrated catalog will feature a lead essay by DAM curator Rebecca R. Hart and new scholarship addressing portraiture, brotherhood, visibility and place by scholars Isolde Brielmaier, Greg Tate and Elizabeth Alexander.

EXHIBITION SPONSORS

Jordan Casteel: Returning the Gaze is organized by the Denver Art Museum. It is presented with generous support from Merle C. Chambers, Vicki and Kent Logan, Judi and Joe Wagner, the donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign and the citizens who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by *5280 Magazine*, CBS4, Comcast Spotlight and *The Denver Post*.

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THE DENVER ART MUSEUM

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Image 1: Jordan Casteel, *Benyam*, 2018. Oil on canvas; 90 x 78 in. Komal Shah & Gaurav Garg Collection. Image courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York ©Jordan Casteel

Image 2: Jordan Casteel, *Cowboy E, Sean Cross, and Og Jabar*, 2017. Oil on canvas; 90 x 78 in. Collection of Barbara and Michael Gamson. Image courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York © Jordan Casteel