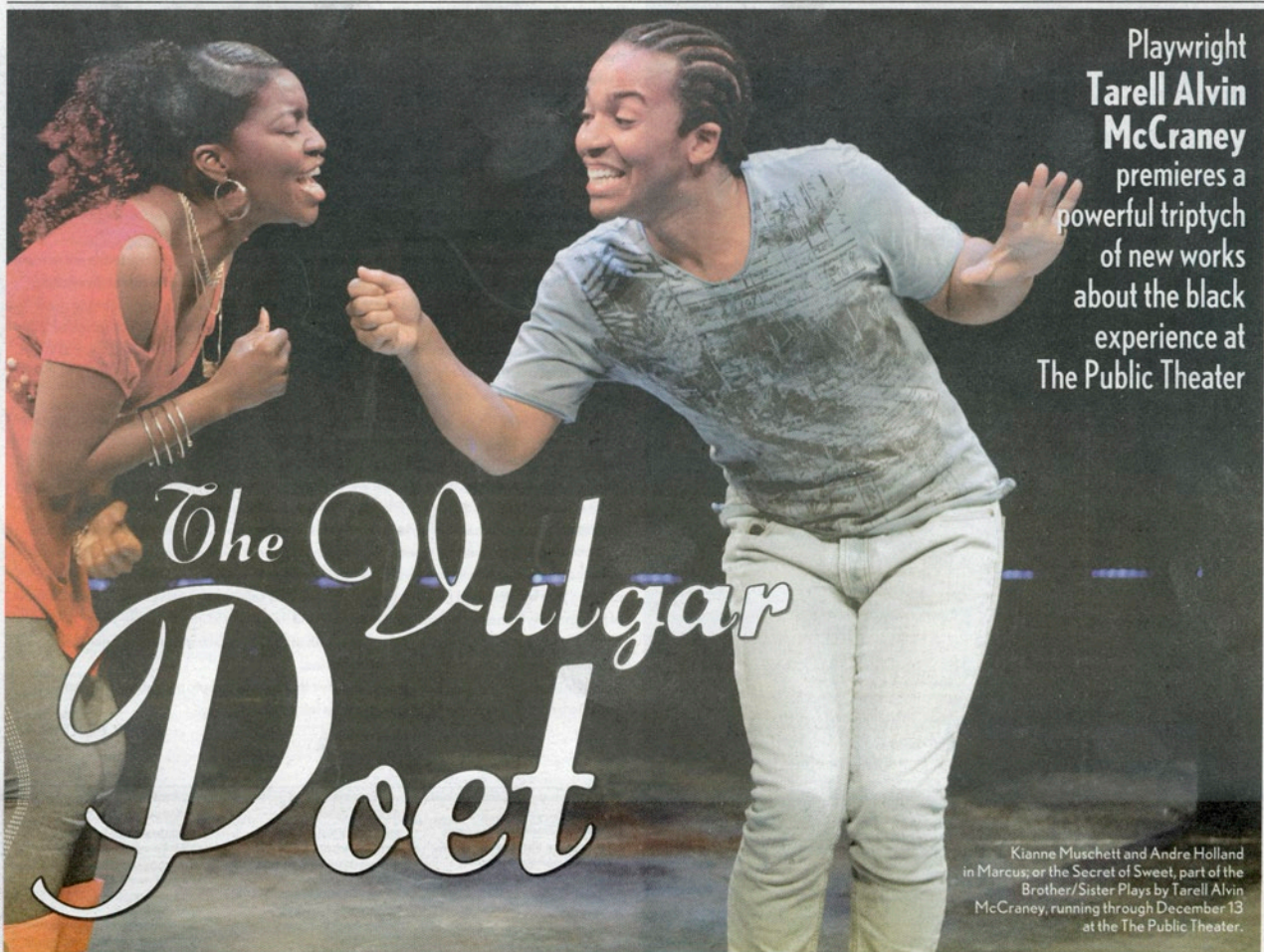




Playwright
**Tarell Alvin
McCraney**
premieres a
powerful triptych
of new works
about the black
experience at
The Public Theater



The Vulgar Poet

Kianne Muschett and Andre Holland
in *Marcus*, or the *Secret of Sweet*, part of the
Brother/Sister Plays by Tarell Alvin
McCraney, running through December 13
at the The Public Theater.

BY CHRISTOPHER WALLENBERG
Tarell Alvin McCraney is one of the most thrilling new voices in theater right now. But if you haven't heard of him, you're not alone. The African-American writer just celebrated his 29th birthday and is only a few years out from the Yale School of Drama. He has just a handful of produced plays so far but, considering the buzz his work has generated over the past couple of years, it won't be long before the rest of the world—outside of New York and London—discovers this ambitious young talent.

Although *Wig Out!*, his play about drag balls in Harlem and the colorful culture that surrounds them, became a minor hit at the Vineyard Theatre last winter, this fall marks a watershed moment in the young writer's career, as his lyrical trilogy, presented under the umbrella rubric, *The Brother/Sister Plays*, has its world premiere at the Public Theater, following a run at the McCarter Theater in New Jersey last spring.

The triptych explores themes of identity, regret and freedom versus family responsibility. It fuses the mythologies and rituals of West

Africa's Yoruba culture with the harsh realities of the inner-city projects. McCraney's plays are deeply poetic and visceral in their staging. Presented in two parts, the trilogy is currently in previews at the Public and will have its official premiere Nov. 17.

Despite McCraney's relative youth, his work has earned rapturous praise among theater cognoscenti, capturing London's Evening Standard Award for most promising playwright as well as a NEA Outstanding New American Play award and *The New York Times* outstanding playwright award.

With such lofty expectations, questions about whether the hype will eclipse McCraney's creative output have already surfaced. The playwright, however, says there's simply no time to ponder these doubts. "I hope this doesn't sound arrogant, but I literally don't have time to think about any of that," McCraney said recently, before heading off to rehearsals. "But I'm glad that I don't have time to think too much about that. It's much better that I'm just sort of working myself into a nosebleed."

Marking Modernism

Over the last decade, Hollis Taggart has focused on early American Modernism with a series of impressive exhibitions on the likes of Alfred Maurer, Arnold Friedman, Stuart Davis and Arthur Carles. "Marking Modernism" represents a culmination of sorts, with a handsome installation of some 30 paintings by Maurer, Carles and Manierre Dawson.

America's avant-garde art may not have had global repercussions until after World War II, but the exhibition shows some of our countrymen pursuing radical experiments from the very dawn of modernism. Turning away from his early success in a Whistlerian style, Alfred Maurer (1868-1932) explored Fauvist and then Cubist idioms. Several early landscapes dated between 1906 and 1918 reveal his potent palette, with brilliantly colored trees nailing down the spacious arabesques of arcing hills. Cubist paintings from around 1930—all angles and prismatic hues—include two vivid still lifes and a strangely melancholic double portrait.

Several brushy, abstracted canvases from the '30s by Arthur Carles (1882-1952) anticipate, in romantic form, the epic rawness of Abstract Expressionism. One especially vibrant canvas catches a reclining nude in delicious swirls of off-whites among emerald greens and ultramarine blues. But I found myself repeatedly drawn to several tiny sketches, dating from between 1905



"Blue Boy" by Manierre Dawson

to 1912, whose hues glow with the exuberant rigor of Fauve-period Matisse; one powerfully catches sunlight cascading across bushes, rimming their shadowed blue-green cores with vivid highlights.

The stylized flowers in a sprightly 1906 still life by Dawson (1887-1969) have an appealing, almost mystical simplicity. But the artist shortly turned to abstracted compositions of swirling, zigzagging arabesques that count among the world's very first abstract paintings. Several such paintings at Hollis Taggart suggest, to varying degrees, human figures; "Blue Boy" (1912) captures the shimmer of Gainsborough's famous portrait in a tapestry of darting blue-green and sienna fragments. To my eye, Dawson's evenness of color and rhythm make them less plastically vigorous than Maurer's or Carles', but they poignantly predict Ab-Ex's all-over, abstract attack.

Why are these painters not better known today? Perhaps because their work was so far ahead of its own time, and yet—a real liability after Ab-Ex's ascendancy—still indebted to European traditions. As it happens, each artist's productive life was also curtailed by circumstance: Maurer's suicide at age 64, Carles' debilitating stroke at 59 and Dawson's preoccupation with farming after 1914. We can only wonder what their unfettered careers might have produced. (John Goodrich)

Marking Modernism, through Nov. 14. Hollis Taggart Galleries, 958 Madison Ave. (betw. E. 75th & E. 76th Sts.), 212-628-4000.