

# Basic Detail Report

**Title: Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Date: 2002

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3f22e

Medium: Etching and aquatint with chine colle

Description: As one of the most important leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and a pivotal figure in modern American history, Martin Luther King Jr.'s face is iconized and appropriated throughout popular culture. When you think of Dr. King, what first comes to mind? This etching and aquatint by John Woodrow Wilson offers a different, less familiar representation of King than we are used to seeing and requires us to take a second look. Wilson draws us in to King's darkly shaded head, which contrasts the rest of the unadorned image. His slightly tilted head and deep blackened eyes force us, the viewer, to decipher King's expression. What emotions does he evoke? Perhaps you see sadness, exhaustion, patience, reflection, or tranquility—all human emotions we may not normally associate with the civil rights leader. With his familiar features less delineated and his body oversimplified, why might Wilson want us to view King in this way? Wilson, an African American lithographer, sculptor, and painter, portrayed Martin Luther King Jr. recurrently throughout his career. This lithograph is based on studies Wilson drew for a memorial that was commissioned by Congress for the U.S. Capitol building in 1985. Wilson was selected out of 200 interested artists and his bronze bust of King became the first representation of an African American in the Capitol Rotunda. He told the Boston Globe, "It alienated me. I never felt part of it. But when I delivered the sculpture, that changed. I felt, a piece of me is in that building." Wilson was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts in 1922. Both of his parents emigrated to the U.S. from Guyana. Growing up during the Great Depression, Wilson was very aware of social themes and racial inequalities that surrounded him. His interest in these themes grew as he pursued his art career into the mid-twentieth century, when he felt more motivated by the vulnerability of his social position as a Black artist. This motivation led him to integrate his creativity with his passion for politics and social justice. His personal experiences and travels around the world reinforced his charge to advance social goals with his art. Wilson took inspiration from King's efforts in the fight against racism to create art that has the potential to transform us.

Dimensions: 29 x 27 1/4 in.