

Artist Profile – Whitfield Lovell

b. 1959 Bronx, NY; lives and works in New York City

Starting in high school, Lovell began pursuing his interest in art by taking a variety of extracurricular classes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art High School Program, the Whitney Museum Art Resources Center, the New York State Summer School for the Arts, and the Cooper Union Saturday Program. When Lovell was eighteen, he travelled to Spain with Manhattanville College to study painting and sculpture at El Museo del Prado in Madrid, it was here that he decided he would become a painter.

Lovell's college studies were interspersed with travel, he spent a year at Maryland Institute College of Art before travelling to France, Germany, Italy, England, Austria, and the Netherlands with the American Institute for Foreign Study. After his travels, Lovell attended Parsons School of Design and later the Cooper Union School of Art where he graduated from in 1981. After Graduating, Lovell travelled to Egypt, Nigeria, and the Republic of Benin, West Africa. In 1985, Lovell attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture where he shifted his style to become more personal by using old photographs as well as monochromatic. Lastly, Lovell attended New York University in 1989 where he took part in their graduate program in Venice, Italy.

Lovell is best known for his drawings that depict African-American individuals (men and women) from the first half of the twentieth century. In more recent works, he pairs these drawings with found objects collected at flea markets and antique shops. The objects are meant to make viewers feel some relationship between the subject and the object, making them personal items instead of found objects that speak to the person's history and personality. These portraits are different than his previous works because instead of using studio portraits as a reference, Lovell is using mug shots, passport photos, and ID photos to create a unique depiction of his subjects. Lovell draws his subjects on wood panels that can be a standard portrait size, life size, or the shape of a coin.

Lovell's work focuses on the theme of timelessness, his goal is to show how life exists synchronically by representing one moment in time; a diachronic image. The inspiration behind Lovell's drawings is the gray area in history between slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, there is little visual evidence of ordinary African Americans except for the photographs left behind which Lovell uses as references. Lovell is trying to answer the question: how can art reckon with that which is effaced from history?

Although Lovell is best known for these drawings, he also does installation work that focuses on cultural traditions. His installation works are known to include some of his drawings as well as speak to slavery. Many installations create a new environment for visitors to experience, including swamp land with trees and water and a living room with furniture. Lovell has received numerous awards, including the MacArthur Fellows Program, the Richard C. Diebenkorn Fellowship, and the New York State Council on the Arts Grant.

Examples of Lovell's work include *Kin XX (Be My Knife) (1)*; an example of pairing a found object with his portraiture, *Kith and Kin (2)*; showing Lovell combining his drawings with installation, and *Sanctuary: The Great Dismal Swamp (3)*; Lovell's installation relating to slavery.



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