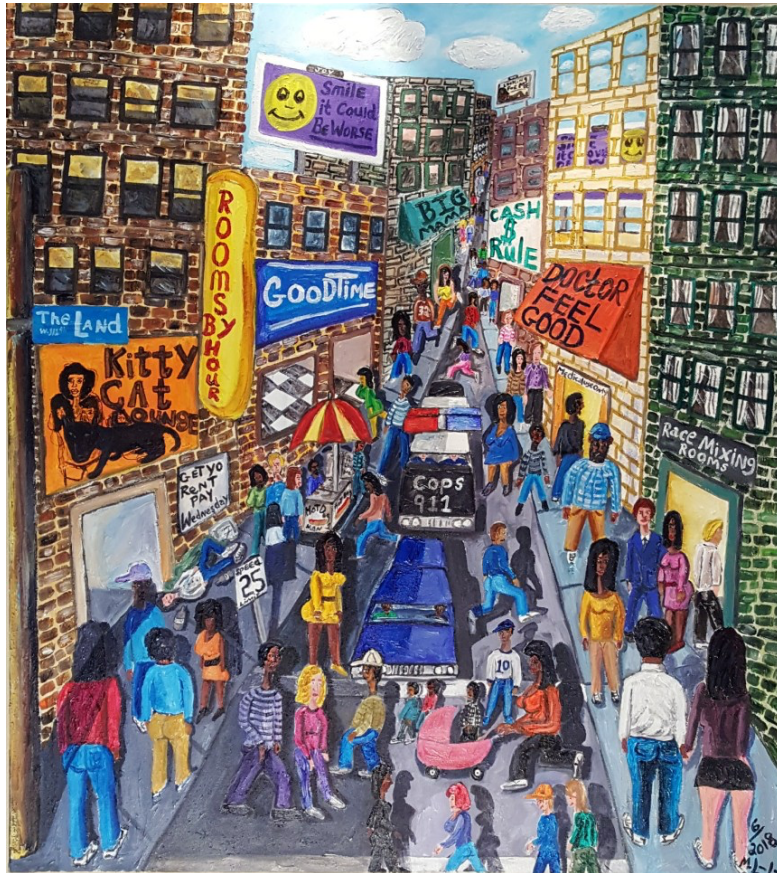


FORT GANSEVOORT

CAN JOURNAL

Jimi Izrael - Fall 2019



Street Lingo, 2018

After 40 years making art, Cleveland-based Michaelangelo Lovelace is finding an audience nationwide. In 2018 Fort Gansevoort Gallery in New York presented his solo exhibition, The Land. In Fall 2019 the gallery will present his work in a solo show at Art Expo Chicago. Lovelace credits a 2013 Creative Workforce Fellowship, the Maria Neil Art Project, and winning the Cleveland Art Prize in 2015 as having given him a boost along the way. —Ed.

Painter Michaelangelo Lovelace paints what he knows—the truth. Known to a few in Cleveland, his work is catching eyes nationally and abroad. Here, he talks about selling his first painting, talking sex with the late Reverend Albert Wagner, Beyoncé’s mom and how God got him an agent.

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JIMI IZRAEL: You're from Cleveland, yeah?

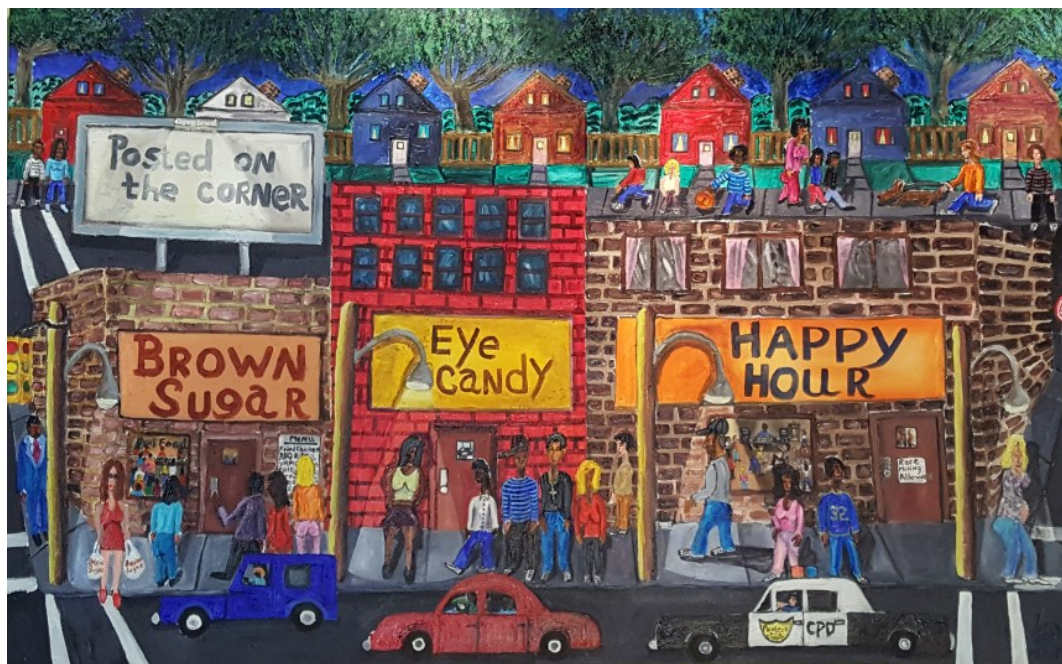
MICHAELANGELO LOVELACE: Born and raised. Lived in the King Kennedy Projects, Garden Valley Projects. We moved around.

Jl: When did you discover your creative identity?

ML: I think I was going through elementary school at Mount Pleasant Elementary on Union and 116th. The teacher called for my mother to come up to the school because I wasn't paying attention in class; all I was doing was drawing. She told me later that the talent I got was from her father, who I'd never met—my grandfather. He'd wanted to be an artist, but he couldn't because he was living in Columbus, Georgia, at the time, and it was not something a black man in his environment could pursue.

Jl: In 1985, you ended up going to Cleveland Institute of Art, but you didn't graduate.

ML: Right. I had a teacher named Catherine Redmond and she took me to lunch, and I told her—because life happens, man—that I was getting ready to drop out of CIA. I'd done a lot of abstracts, but this was a turning point.



In the Midnight Hour, 2019

She said, “Just keep painting. No matter what you go through, use it as your subject matter.” And that’s what I did—started looking at my world around me and my life struggles, life ups and downs and things and painting about it. That’s when I started doing my Rodney King series, which was abstract, collage, pro-Black, “no peace, no justice”-type stuff.

Jl: When did you sell your first painting?

ML: I was walking down the street and this lady saw what I was carrying and was like, she said, “Oh, that’s very nice. Who did that?” I said, “That’s my first painting, dat, dat, dat, dat.” She said, “Oh, how much you sell it for?” \$50? She said, “Here.” She wrote me a check, took it right there and gave me \$50.

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Jl: When did Cleveland's fine art establishment discover you?

ML: [Filmmaker] Kahlil Pedizisai. It was a show at MOCA called *In Plain View* with Reverend Albert Wagner and Virgie Patton.

Jl: How did that go?

ML: Well, I met the Reverend Albert Wagner there. For thirteen years he was a friend, a mentor, a confidant. It's been about six, seven years now since he passed. He just was one of those persons that I could talk to that knew what I was going through personally. We talked about everything besides art and personal life, how to be a man, sexual prowess, because he went through it all. From [that show], I got a write-up, the review from Steve Litt—he was critical, but he was fair.

Jl: Do you feel a part of the Cleveland art scene?

ML: No. I just feel like an outsider.

Jl: How did you finally get representation?

ML: God brought it.

Jl: God just knocked on your door and said, "Hey nigga, check this shit out..."

ML: No, no—I donated one of my great paintings, *My Hometown*, to the Cleveland Museum of Art. He just happened to be looking for artists to represent.

Jl: "He," as in *God*?

ML: "He," as in Adam Shopkorn, the owner of Fort Gansevoort gallery in Lower Manhattan, New York. He had a friend at the museum.

Jl: Okay.

ML: He had went online, saw my painting and was curious. He got a message to me saying that he was coming to Cleveland to see more of my work. On that day I waited, then saw a white guy get out of an Uber Lincoln Continental out front of my house.

Jl: Young white dude or older white dude?

ML: Young white dude—younger than me. I said, "Show me some New York ID before I let you in my house."

Jl: That's what's up. Can't just let random white-hipster motherfuckers in your house—d'fuck is that?

ML: [laughs] Nah, I carded him. Then, I start showing him throughout the house, and we spent like four hours just looking through my art. He said, "I want you to come to New York and do a show at my gallery." My wife Shirley was like, "Yeah—tell him yeah! Tell him you gonna do it!" He hired a transporter, a guy with a truck to come pick up the work. We did the show?

Jl: How'd it go?

ML: Sold 25 *paintings* [makes DOLLA DOLLA BILL rub with his fingers]. Since then, I've been in a show in Los Angeles, just got invited to be in a benefit with Tina Knowles, Beyoncé Knowles' mother. Preparing for Expo Chicago. Sold work in Hong Kong. [BIG SMILE]

Jl: When's your next show in Cleveland?

ML: [shrugs] I don't know. Just waiting to see what happens.

Jl: Jesus—God got you a good fucking agent.

ML: See, what Adam told me that was different from anybody else had told me—he say, "There's about 500 billion people in the world. All you need is a million of them to like what you do. And if we can find that million that like what you do, you can probably retire."

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I was like, yeah. That sounds good.