

# FORT GANSEVOORT



## MICHELANGELO LOVELACE

### *Repression, Rage, and Resistance: Rodney King Revisited*

An online exhibition in collaboration with Charles Moore

February 9, 2023 - March 11, 2023

Beginning February 9, 2023 Fort Gansevoort will present *Repression, Rage, and Resistance: Rodney King Revisited*, a solo online exhibition of the late Michelangelo Lovelace presented in collaboration with art historian, writer, and curator Charles Moore.

In April of 1992, a year after Rodney King was brutally beaten by four police officers, Michelangelo Lovelace moved from his hometown of Cleveland to live and work in Los Angeles. Soon after his arrival, the acquittal of the accused LAPD officers was announced, leading to widespread riots across the city, and extensive news coverage across the country. Although Lovelace remained in Los Angeles for only a few short months, his experience of the city during this historic period of upheaval, left a lasting impression on his psyche and artistic production.

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Upon his return to Cleveland in July of 1992, Lovelace embarked on a body of work in response to the race riots that he witnessed. Over the course of two years, the artist completed at least twenty paintings which he referred to as his “Rodney King series.” As a unifying visual element, Lovelace used the unusual material of imitation brick panel for the substrate of the mixed-media paintings. Over this surface, he applied spray paint, enamel paint, and collaged printed paper. Stylistically, the works palpably express the urgency of their maker. The entire surface of each painting is covered in an accumulation of found images, words, and spray-paint. The bright colors and density of the compositions feels purposely disorienting and chaotic. With the incorporation of newspaper clippings, the series functions as a form of documentation, while the gestural markings manifest as pure uncensored visual expression.

In a handwritten creation statement about the series, Lovelace wrote: “I wanted to express the anger that as a black male I felt see[ing] another black man being beaten in the streets of America by the police. I was trying to express Black pride, Black unity, and Black anger for the American justice system. And the way us black male[s] have been treated by the so-called justice system.”

The series is both an homage to a particular victim of a hate crime, as well as an invocation against systemic racial injustice. With the appearance of unedited rawness, Lovelace’s paintings characterize his interpretation of “Black experience” in terms of pride and accomplishment as much as by strife.

The Rodney King paintings also reference a wide range of high and low art historical influences from the vernacular of graffiti tagging, to Edvard Munch’s famous painting *The Scream*. In the painting *Eracism* (1992), Lovelace utilizes the exaggerated expression of Munch’s iconic figure to highlight the emotional intensity of the historical events to which the series alludes. The figure additionally stands in as a symbolic witness to violence.

In *Black Holocaust* (1992), one of the more painterly compositions in the series, Lovelace invokes the spirit of abstract expressionism, highlighting the materiality of his process. The use of the imitation brick material in this work reinforces the tactile nature of the painted surface. In the middle of the painting, a large passage of pooling orange paint conjures images of bloodshed. Rather than depicting swastikas, as the title might suggest, this composition features stenciled images of crosses. With the insertion of this symbol, Lovelace subtly associates the death of Christ with Rodney King’s own secular martyrdom.

With bold lettering and undulating spray-painted lines, *No Justice No Peace* (1993), along with many others works in the series, references the urban canvas of city walls used by taggers as a form of social disruption and insertion of self into a cosmopolitan environment. Scrawled across the right side of the composition, the painted words “No Justice No Peace” echo the title and evoke the staccato incantations often chanted at civil rights demonstrations. On the left side of the canvas, the words “Stop Police Brutality and Racism” resonate with similar urgency as a direct address to the viewer. Accompanying the text, Lovelace incorporated newspaper clippings containing graphic imagery of rioting and police violence and headlines related to the Rodney King beating. In one clipping, the cropped image focuses on the face of a Black man behind a chain-link fence who holds up his hands to form the letters “L” and “A.” Reminiscent of gang signs, his hand gestures, along with his somber facial expression, signifies a city in turmoil.

Considering the countless unarmed Black lives that continue to be taken at the hands of police, Lovelace’s Rodney King series continues to resonate with a poignant relevancy.

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## **About the artist:**

*Michelangelo Lovelace (1960-2021) lived and worked in Cleveland, Ohio for most of his career. The subject matter of his art ranges from quotidian scenes of city life, to policing, poverty, war, and personal investigations of Black Identity. His work has been presented in solo exhibitions at Springfield Museum of Art in Ohio, Cleveland School of the Arts, Progressive Insurance Corporate Headquarters, and University of Illinois at Chicago. He has been included in group exhibitions at MOCA Cleveland, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, the Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Case Western Reserves University. Lovelace won the Cleveland Arts Prize Mid-Career Artist in 2015 and multiple Ohio Arts Council Individual Artist Grants for Painting. His work is included in the permanent collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art in Ohio, Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa, JP Morgan Chase Art Collection in New York, Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in North Carolina, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri, Springfield Museum of Art in Ohio, and other institutions.*

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## **Caption and courtesy information:**

Michelangelo Lovelace

*Eracism*

1992

Mixed media on wood panel

47.75 x 50.5 inches

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