

# FORT GANSEVOORT

## HYPERALLERGIC

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By Billy Anania

### Tender Pencil and Ink Drawings Pay Tribute to Nursing Home Residents

Michelangelo Lovelace made numerous drawings during his time as a nurse's aide, now on view in Fort Gansevoort's online show *Nightshift*.



Michelangelo Lovelace, "Untitled" (1993), marker on paper, 18 x 23.75 inches (all images courtesy Fort Gansevoort)

Michelangelo Lovelace's nursing home drawings hit differently these days. Maybe it's because I finally feel capable of processing what's happened over the past three months, or that there are still questions left unanswered. It is not a particularly morbid feeling, though — more a curiosity. Who are the people in these portraits? What are their stories? Lovelace leaves space for speculation, accentuating their personalities through furrowed brows, laugh lines, and heavy eyelids.

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Michelangelo Lovelace, "Untitled" (2008), ink on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches

The New York gallery Fort Gansevoort, with a location in LA, is currently hosting an online exhibition devoted to Lovelace's career as a nurse's aide in Cleveland, Ohio. Nightshift presents three pages of content: One with 22 drawings dating from the '90s to now, another with five curated works and excerpts of an interview with sculptor John Ahearn, who helped organize the show, and a third with a transcript of the full conversation between Ahearn and Lovelace. While this is not quite the same as wandering a gallery, there is a sort of tranquility in experiencing these tender, personal works from the comfort of home.



Michelangelo Lovelace, "Ms. D. James" (1993), ink on paper, 23.75 x 18 inches



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Lovelace translates his friendly rapport with these residents using only pencils, pens, and markers. The fiery glare of “Ms. D. James” (1993) comes to life through neon highlighting on her cardigan and surroundings. She was an early enthusiast of his artistic practice, so this spirited tribute feels appropriate. The stoic “Mrs. Hardwick” (1993), which Ahearn astutely compares to van Gogh’s “La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)” (1889), shows an Alzheimer’s patient who was prone to falling. She spent much of her time relaxing in a polka dot chair, and Lovelace sought to preserve her peaceful aura.



Michelangelo Lovelace, “Mrs. Hardwick” (1993),  
marker on paper, 23.75 x 18 inches

While actual dimensions vary, the drawings all appear around the same size on the gallery website. This works to the smaller pieces’ advantage, and it is fascinating to see how Lovelace arrives at each expression and posture. For instance, “Eddie Ragland” (1996) throws a sidelong glance with his head bent downward, cleverly directing viewers to the zigzagging stripes of his collared shirt. “James Speed” (1996) similarly uses sweeping dark curves to bring out the folds of his sweater. A small patch of blue hair among the black ink draws attention to each intersecting follicle.

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Michelangelo Lovelace, “James Speed” (1996), ink on paper, 11 x 8.5 inches

Three colorful day room scenes show a different kind of depth, with strokes of bright yellow marker setting the foreground for residents in common areas and long hallways. Ahearn likens these drawings to the wooden sculptures of Brazilian artist Aleijadinho, yet it is unclear exactly how they compare from the information provided. Really, they seem more in line with the artist’s own streetscapes.



Michelangelo Lovelace, “Residents in the Day Room on the Fifth Floor” (1993), marker on paper, 18 x 23.75 inches

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While Lovelace's most well-known paintings portray young people in urban settings, the drawings in *Nightshift* call attention to the oft-neglected facilities that have become hot spots of the COVID-19 outbreak. This exhibition feels timely for that reason, but also because the elderly deserve time in the spotlight. Nursing homes can feel lonesome, as Lovelace portrays in a drawing of a wheelchair-bound man gazing at a city skyline. But suffering is only one aspect of these vibrant communities.



Michelangelo Lovelace, "Untitled" (1993), marker on paper, 23.75 x 18 inches

*Nightshift* is on view online via [Fort Gansevoort](https://www.fortgansevoort.com) (5 Ninth Avenue, Meatpacking District, Manhattan) through July 9.