

# FORT GANSEVOORT

F L A U N T

## MICHELANGELO LOVELACE'S "NIGHTSHIFT" VIA FORT GANSEVOORT

BY MATTHEW BEDARD MAY 28, 2020



Michelangelo Lovelace 2008 *Untitled*, Ink on paper. 8.5 x 11 inches.

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For our elderly population, it's been a heartbreaking, biased, and alienating few months, and the road ahead looks rocky. As the country "gets back to normal" what does this mean for our older, vulnerable communities? Will an already often lonely and forgotten population be pushed further to the margins? Or will we see an increase in mindfulness and resourcefulness as it relates to them and their place in society? Like many things we're currently witnessing in the wake of COVID-19, it will probably boil down to economic status, regional reactivity, and race.

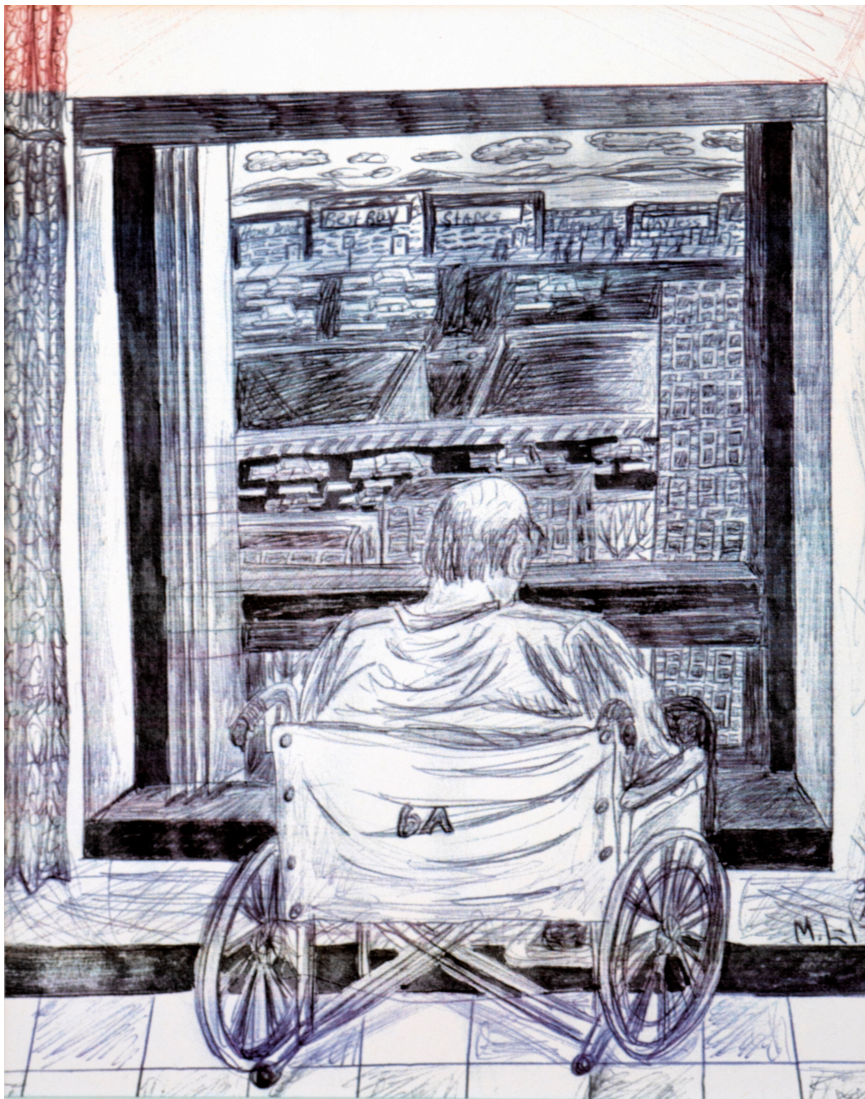
One social intersection that has risen to extreme attention is that of the nursing home or elderly care center, be it a site of potential transmission or vulnerability. Enter contemporary artist, Michael Lovelace(b: 1960), who has worked for over 30 years as a nurse's aide in Cleveland, OH, and today sees Fort Gansevoort present *Nightshift* , an online exhibition that will show through mid-July.





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Generally known for his paintings of crime and urban tension, created from afar, this intimate series of artworks instead threads the scenes Lovelace has observed, from the common areas and bedsides of the characters he's cared for, into compelling and sincere impressions of this storied and complex demographic. Resultantly, the subject matter in the 22 artworks in *Nightshift*, curated in collaboration with artist John Ahearn and part of Fort Gansevoort's ongoing digital exhibition series, SEEING THROUGH YOU, connotes a touching stoicism and elegance, an enduring quietude, time-tested will and disposition that could perhaps only amass after decades upon decades on planet Earth.



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We had the opportunity to speak with Lovelace on the eve of the exhibition, and his remarks on this moment in time, on these unique individuals who could be said to exist in a permanent state of quarantine, are worth holding to the heart as we figure out our next steps forward, as a country, but also as individuals who are all destined for the same unknowable end.

**The representation of our older population in the media has been dramatically influenced in recent months. What do your artworks represent that the media perhaps hasn't?**

My drawings represent identity. These are people who are put away as if they no longer have use, and I'd rather identify these people as human beings who had lives, careers, and vibrant families. Hopefully it's not just the elderly that people will see, but individuals that had a purpose in life.





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**You've worked and cared for the elderly now for 30 years. What are the sentiments you're observing as Covid-19 has unfolded?**

The coronavirus has exposed what the public has taken for granted. Sometimes people are housed in ways that take the individuality away from them, and are housed in a petri dish, making them subject to anything. Because I worked for 30 years as a nurse's aide, I understand that nursing homes are overworked, understaffed, and there are a lot of people that don't receive adequate care because there's not enough help. Whether it be home care, private duty or nursing homes, that was one of the main complaints when I was working. Coronavirus is helping to expose that.



**Your work is anchored in human subject matter, but these particular pieces also integrate technology, health systems, science. Describe your artist relationship with this non-human, yet life supporting equipment?**

Science can't be beat. It has led to so many breakthroughs and now we have more choices. The disparity in health care continues, whether you're rich or poor, no matter your zip code. Up until the virus, we didn't have too many conversations about how science and technology save lives, not unless you were in a situation where your own life was in jeopardy. Now, there is more of a conversation surrounding life support systems because of coronavirus victims.

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## What is beautiful about aging?

You get to see yourself mature and see life evolve. I can remember being little, and all we had was a black and white TV. Now, we've got flat screens. For me, personally, I would have been dead already, but technology has allowed me to have a surgery to remove cancer and give me more time on earth. Artistically, this time allows me to create.