FORT GANSEVOORT

Michelangelo Lovelace
The Land
Paintings from 1994 - 2016

Opening On:
Thursday, May 3, 6 – 8 PM
May 3 – June 16, 2018

Fort Gansevoort presents *The Land*, the first solo exhibition in New York City featuring the work of Cleveland, Ohio-based artist Michelangelo Lovelace, spanning from 1994 to the present. The exhibition, opening on May 3rd, is comprised of a lifetime's work depicting the inner city of Cleveland. Lovelace's main concern is to portray the many goings-on that Cleveland's lively inner city is composed of, a subject close to Lovelace's heart but also one from which he cannot escape.

Through Lovelace's eyes, painting acts as the sole alternative to what he refers to as the "street life". He instead paints this life that would otherwise be his destined path; one filled with crime, drugs and poverty. Through crude renderings, vibrant colors and outlandish compositions, he brings these subjects to the canvas. Painting from memory, he obscures depth of field, evoking a child-like innocence in his approach of often-explicit subject matter.

Lovelace paints street scenes that fill the frame from left to right with storefront windows and blue skies above, reminiscent of Edward Hopper's paintings of the same subject matter. Yet, rather than the serene unoccupied streets of Hopper's America, Lovelace fills his scenes from top to bottom with movement and caricatures of people from his neighborhood. In an effort to fill a void he found in art history, Lovelace inserts people of color into the language of American painting. What was first a form of escape evolved into a platform for representation. Lovelace invites his viewers to both face the issues at hand in these communities and celebrate their vibrancies. Though Lovelace's main concern is his hometown of Cleveland, he depicts subject matter familiar to any American inner city neighborhood through portrayal of both celebratory moments and a cycle of violence and poverty. In his piece titled, *Dancing In The Streets* Lovelace shows crowds gathering in the streets to rejoice nationwide over the election of President Obama, the first black president to be elected in the United States. In *Trigger Happy*, Lovelace reflects on a history of police brutality in the United States. Though painted in 1998, this piece, like many of his others, is all the more relevant and emblematic today.

In a single frame, Lovelace illustrates both ends of the spectrum that defines his practice in the piece titled, *Standing At The Fork In The Road At Temptation and Salvation*. Often in his work, a division between two paths can be seen; one good, one evil. Temptation is found around every corner, and in this case the idea is even reflected in the shaded street's name. Meanwhile the contrasting street, known as Salvation, bares a sun so bright that each figure casts a dark full-length shadow, perhaps in memory of the path they scarcely avoided. Using the billboards found in these streets as his soapboxes, Lovelace broadcasts his views for public consumption. Below, brick storefronts are covered by an assortment of advertisements for strip clubs above signs for barbershops that neighbor catholic churches. Each of these characteristics adds to the dichotomy by which Lovelace defines Cleveland and, more broadly, visually defines American inner city neighborhoods.

Michelangelo Lovelace was born in 1960 in Cleveland, Ohio where he continues to live and work. He has been presented in solo exhibitions at Springfield Museum of Art in Ohio, Cleveland School of the Arts, Progressive Insurance Corporate Headquarters, and the University of 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, the Progressive Art Collection, and Springfield Museum of Art.