



Midnight at the Oasis, 1996-2022, wax, oil pastel, and acrylic on muslin, 79 x 82 inches

SCOTT COVERT

THE DEAD SUPREME NEW YORK

October 13 – November 11, 2023

Opening Reception: Friday, October 13, 6–8 pm

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of paintings and drawings by Scott Covert entitled *THE DEAD SUPREME NEW YORK*. For nearly four decades, Covert has traveled around the world making gravestone rubbings on canvas which he layers one on top of another into expressionistic paintings. His colorful compositions frequently contain multiple epitaphs and names, of individuals both famous and infamous, which he gathers from cemeteries in vastly disparate locations. Equal parts earnest homage, collection of celebrity ephemera, subversive performance art, and travel diary, Covert's Monument Paintings "are about being there, making the visit", he explains, "Each mark of color on the canvas represents a lifetime".

Covert got his professional start as an artist and actor living in Downtown New York in the 1970s and 80s. It was there that his friend Cookie Mueller saw an early iteration on paper of a

gravestone rubbing—it was that of former Supreme Florence Ballard—and assured Covert that he should pursue the endeavor further. The development of this body of work coincided with the AIDS crisis when many of Covert’s community (including Mueller) passed away from the disease. It was during this time that Covert, living in the Chelsea Hotel, began working on canvas, thereby assuring his project would be more enduring. Carrying his folded canvas from one cemetery to another, he would use multi-colored oil pastels for the rubbings; his friend, Rene Ricard, remarked that Covert was essentially creating a printing press at each location. Back at the studio, he added acrylic paint and sometimes glitter.

Paintings frequently take a number of years to complete, as Covert makes multiple trips in order to gather all of the rubbings he deems essential. He curates the selection of names within each composition based on both formal concerns and topical commonalities. For example, writers Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and James Baldwin are all bedfellows in his *Midnight at the Oasis*, 1996-2022. Sometimes a canvas includes just a single name, numerous times, like Philip Guston, Andy Warhol, Frank Sinatra (along with his memorable epitaph, “The best is yet to come”). Other times, Covert combines names because the fonts or scale just seem to make sense together visually.

Covert’s pilgrimages to gravesites are often clandestine and undertaken quickly in order to complete a rubbing which, more often than not, is an unsanctioned activity. Some names are easier to access than others; Oscar Wilde, for example, was a particularly difficult name to obtain (although Covert managed to do it), and the gravestone is now encased in glass to forever prevent interaction. Traveling to remote locations and working surreptitiously, Covert also tends to hit numerous sites on his gathering missions. “I’m a great long-distance driver”, he writes, “I can go 14 hours straight, pull over at a rest stop for a few hours of sleep and keep going”. The spirit of performative endurance and punk rock action which permeates the project is nicely captured in a short documentary film by Lex Niarchos entitled *Scott Covert: Up Until Now, ca. 1990–2022* which will also be on view during the exhibition.

Scott Covert (b. 1954, Edison, NJ) lives in New York, NY and works internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include Studio Voltaire, London, England (2023); Parker Gallery, Los Angeles (2023); NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Fort Lauderdale, FL (2022); F Gallery, Houston, TX (2020). Select group exhibitions include *Basquiat x Warhol. Painting 4 Hands*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France (2023); *Brigid Berlin: The Heaviest*, Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York, NY (2023); *Agosto Machado: The Forbidden City*, Gordon Robichaux, New York, NY (2022); *Frederick Douglass: Embers of Freedom*, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA (2019); and *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978-1983*, curated by Ron Magliozzi and Sophie Cavoulacos with Ann Magnuson, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2017). His work is included in the collection of NSU Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, FL. This will be his first solo exhibition at the Gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 11am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.