

compressed into single images, simultaneities that condensed moments and movements into one. Laval's garden was haunted by the ghosts of its own recent past.

Back in 2016, Laval spoke in an interview of having “wanted to present [her] work in relation to architecture” to create immersive experiences, which she'd already been doing with video and sound in dedicated exhibition spaces. But the humble architecture of an urban garden, the vicissitudes of weather, the sky's changing light, and the richness of the still photographic image turned out to be sufficient means for her to construct a gorgeous and sometimes slightly eerie playground for perception. That she titled the presentation “The Great Escape” offered a delicious irony: At a time when even walking out of the house might have seemed fraught with peril, she'd made an ecstatic getaway to her own backyard.

—Barry Schwabsky

Michelangelo Lovelace

FORT GANESVOORT

The vulnerable are vital across twenty-two drawings by Cleveland-based artist Michelangelo Lovelace, who has worked as a nursing-home aide for more than three decades while maintaining a dedicated studio practice. The works in this online presentation for Fort Gansevoort, made between 1993 and 2008, felt especially resonant when viewed during the pandemic, which has disproportionately affected people of color and the elderly. The artist reminds us that our responsibility to one another has never been more urgent.

Lovelace's portraits, mostly done in either ink or marker on paper, bring warmth and humanity to the fore. Everything is readable in the faces of his subjects, and many of the works are titled after them, such as *Eddie Ragland*, 1996; *Mr. William Angel*, 1993; and *Gladys Smith*, 1993. The artist's hand is multivalent, capturing a range of personalities and features. Because of this, each picture seems as though it's speaking several languages at once. The artist creates a visual vernacular of caring, a silent form of storytelling that begs to be heard. *Residents in the Day Room on the Fifth Floor*, 1993, features eight scribbly figures gathered in a rec room, facing different directions. A television is on but it feels like an afterthought, the person on-screen merely a faceless blur. The casual and somewhat sleepy dynamic of the group is striking, recalling the convivial boredom of being with family for too long. Nonetheless, Lovelace uses a cheery palette and jaunty lines to enliven the moment.



Michelangelo Lovelace, *Residents in the Day Room on the Fifth Floor*, 1993, marker on paper, 18 × 23 3/4".

Several of Lovelace's senescent models are in repose—in recliners, on couches, or in hospital beds. But the artist captures his subjects' personalities and moods through tender scrutiny. He is able to reveal much about a sitter by the way he renders an expression in the eyes or the lines on someone's face. One exception to the full-frontal portraits was *Untitled*, 2008, a drawing of a man in a wheelchair from behind. He gazes into a dense cityscape from a window through which big-box stores, such as Best Buy and Home Depot, are visible in the distance. This melancholy work is a contrast to Lovelace's more colorful and buoyant paintings, which often capture the fervor of life in a metropolis. From this subject's vantage point, the momentum of the city seems far removed, quiet.

Earlier this year Lovelace fell ill and was hospitalized, eventually undergoing surgery for pancreatic cancer. It is now the artist's turn to accept care—after all, we must heal ourselves so that we may heal others. As Audre Lorde writes of her own reckoning with illness in her 1980 memoir, *The Cancer Journals*, “I do live. The bee flies. There must be some way to integrate death into living, neither ignoring it nor giving in to it.” Lovelace once stated that art saved his life. Yet it's clear that his art has also saved the lives of others by preserving the memories of those who have passed. We need this kind of solicitude in order to contend with infirmity, our own and that of the collective body. Lovelace's work in our precarious present is a “balm in Gilead,” as the old spiritual goes, “to make the wounded whole.” It is for everyone's sake that he continues to thrive.

—Charity Coleman

Jessica Wilson

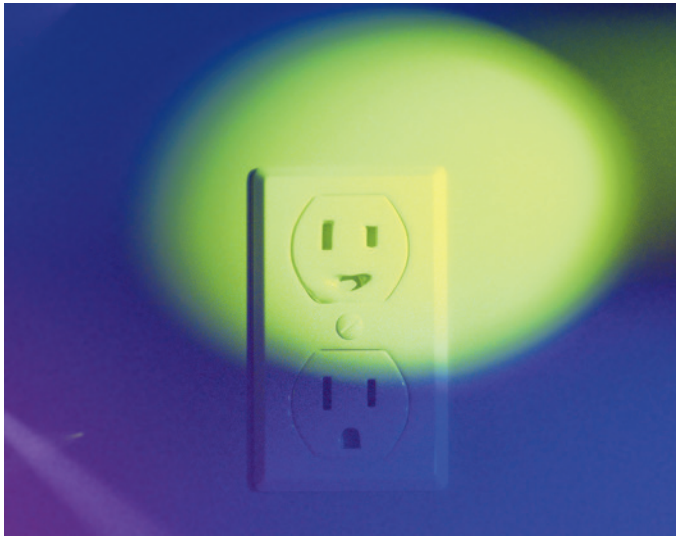
PAGE (NYC)

An entire genre of quarantine art reflecting on the experience of isolation emerged this past summer. Jessica Wilson's *Not Normally at Rest*, 2020—a suite of animated videos starring an anthropomorphized duplex wall outlet in a nondescript apartment—tapped into a shared sense of anxiety among those of us still trapped at home. The title alone could be imagined as a defensive response to the question *How are you?*—a charged greeting we've heard over and over again in the last several months via text messages and Zoom calls, mandatory check-ins, online classes, work meetings, pessimistic political discussions, and, of course, remote therapy sessions. (Health services being offered in this way have become part of the pandemic's new normal. They are not, however, universally accessible, especially in the insurance-starved United States.)

In four short videos, each between two and four minutes long, Wilson reimagines the stacked electrical outlets as part of a dialectical pairing: The top one plays the role of analyst, while the one beneath is the analysand. With rudimentary CGI effects, an individual outlet's trio of plug holes make for a convincing visage. The duo's speech sounds like computerized noise and calls to mind a contemporary version of the unintelligible teachers' voices from the animated *Peanuts* cartoons. In every episode, the unhappy patient, its face contorted in pain, describes a bad dream, to which the therapist always responds in relatively soothing tones. And after every chat, the patient's expression settles back into the standard design of a power outlet that, in this state, looks like an unnervingly wide-eyed or even shell-shocked face—a projection of trauma neatly displaced from artist to object to viewer.

No one really wants to hear about other people's dreams. Wilson knows this and opts for oblique verbal and pictorial absurdism over a laboriously plotted narrative. The approach gives the analysand's sketchy, frenetic nightmares emotional power. In the first video (*Part 1*),

Jessica Wilson,
Not Normally at Rest
(Part 3, *the Musical*),
2020, video, color,
sound, 3 minutes
48 seconds. From
the four-part suite
Not Normally at Rest.



a membranous, pale-pink childproofing plug clamps down over the bottom outlet's face—as the analyst comforts its patient, we're presented with a dark vision of tangled, writhing power cords. *Part 3*, subtitled *the musical*, adds to this dreamscape a spotlight, a crimson theater curtain, and a chorus line of dancing Ethernet cables. The final chapter of Wilson's mini drama is the most elaborate and feels like a really bad acid trip, topped off by a soundtrack with wah-wah guitar. Against a backdrop of colorful patterns, the troubled outlet imagines itself and its doctor double becoming unfastened from the wall and multiplying by the hundreds as the clones cascade into a dejected heap.

While psychoanalysis has fallen out of mainstream favor, it is frequently used to dissect art and remains quite popular within cinematic discourse. Wilson's surreal videos take pleasurable little detours through several filmic genres—one can see bits of the slasher style or moments that feel cribbed from a Busby Berkeley musical. These videos, however, aren't cutesy meditations on loneliness. Nor are they blunt statements about the global mental health crisis, which has been exacerbated by the deaths and disappearing opportunities caused by Covid-19. Wilson uses her characters to underscore the tenuousness of our mediated connections, which can be exhausting to maintain, even though most of us are barely going anywhere.

—Wendy Vogel

EAST HAMPTON, NEW YORK

“The Circus Has Been Cancelled”

HARPER'S BOOKS

The circus has been cancelled, but no one seems to have told the jaunty group of weirdos posing at the center of the Genieve Figgis painting from which this exhibition takes its name. The giddy performers—a natty bug-eyed Kabuki demon wearing a top hat and toting a fuchsia parasol, a tiny woman in a ball gown, a lion, a yeti, and a topless green-skinned go-go dancer among them—look ready to put on a show. Aside from this small cohort, the cavernous big-top tent they occupy is empty, and the windows appear to have bars. Figgis has a knack for making the ghoulish, soupy goblins and half-melted aristos that inhabit her canvases feel eerily familiar, despite their fanciful distortions. In this moment of pandemic limbo, as we wait for the day when we can finally ditch our face masks, dine indoors, and work from anywhere but home, these ostensibly oblivious prisoners could be us, delusionally optimistic

that life will someday be the same. But if the public rituals we once enjoyed are gone for good, Figgis seems to ask, then what, exactly, are we monsters, freaks, and narcissists supposed to do with ourselves without an audience?

Answers came in the form of a stellar suite of paintings by Scott Kahn—another standout in this psychic carnival of a show, which also included work by Hernan Bas, Cecily Brown, and Sue Williams. Kahn, who has been translating ambiguous emotional and psychological states into quietly surreal landscapes and interiors for decades, offered insights into how we might endure and even appreciate a lonelier world. In *Kitchen Table*, 2020, a small oil-on-panel not much larger than a sheet of stationery, the eponymous piece of furniture occupies the center of the composition, as though we were standing above it, about to sit down. The surrounding room is composed of a starry night sky instead of walls, ceiling, and floor. Two nondescript double-hung windows floating in this galactic expanse occupy the upper corners of the picture. Each one incongruously frames a different view: A cluster of gray storm clouds gathers in one, while blue skies fill the other, as though two separate days were simultaneously visible from our seat at the table. A full moon hangs between the windows, and our plate, an identically sized, glossy-blue disk, tilts up from its place mat, as though it, too, were a celestial body belonging to its own domestic orbit. Kahn constructs the kitchen as a cosmic center—a vantage point from which we can witness minutes, months, and years as they blur together over



Hernan Bas,
The Revelation in
the Rambles, 2020,
acrylic on linen,
72 × 60". From
“The Circus Has
Been Cancelled.”

several other paintings were more ominous: Clawlike shadows overtake an empty lawn in *Azaleas*, while a series of stark, concentric doorways frame a closed door with no knob in *The Poet's Room*, both 2020. A sense of anticipation and potential and airs of hope and dread exist in each of Kahn's panels, complementing the uncertainty of the current moment. In *Oasis*, 2001, a painting that recalls the works of both René Magritte and Remedios Varo, a room sparsely furnished with an easel, a simple desk, and a chair hovers above a brooding, cloud-streaked sky and navy ocean furrowed with white-capped waves. But the painting's title suggests that this setting—an artist's studio equipped with the bare essentials—is a refuge, a mental shelter from the storm. The subtle features and conditions of our more intimate spaces may be all that we can expect to dependably experience these days—but such environs, Kahn reassures us, are well worth exploring.

The other paintings in the show—libidinous cartoony canvases by Williams, and loose, Picasso- and Degas-inspired watercolors depicting artists and their models by Brown—related more obliquely, if at all, to the themes of anticlimax and aborted public spectacle implied by the show's title. *The Revelation in the Rambles*, 2020, a large acrylic-on-linen by the reliably great Bas, however, captured this pervasive sense of suspended animation and its consequences. In it, a young man crouches in a marshy tangle of roots before a spiderweb containing the words YOU ARE UNRAVELING. That may be true, but Bas seems to suggest that we are weaving new stories even as an old way of life comes apart.

—Zoë Lescaze