

WHITFIELD LOVELL

By Gary Dauphin, pg 169

Phillips Collection

October 8, 2016 – January 8, 2017

Curated by Elsa Smithgall

The black men and women in Whitfield Lovell's ongoing series "Kin"—each rendered on cream paper in velvety monochrome conté crayon and paired with gnomic found objects—seem not so much rescued from anonymity as discharged from a bureaucratic purgatory. For nearly twenty years, Lovell has worked from discarded early-twentieth-century ID cards, passports, and mug shots—from any black-and-white portrait at risk of haphazard defacement by stapler, really.—and his figurative kin are frozen in time, at sites of fraught systemic and organizational intake. The resulting objects are at turns stately, heartbreaking, opaque, and lovingly intimate. At the Phillips, twenty-odd pieces from "Kin," 2008-, will be paired with some dozen of the artist's signature large-scale tableaux in an exhibition that crosses scales and media as well as source materials: The aspirational poses of larger works based on vintage studio photography sit opposite the visual spectrum from the "Kin" series' institutional points of departure. A major monograph with contributions by the curator and others will accompany the show. After all, what's a family album without something to have and to hold?