

Whitfield Lovell

DC MOORE GALLERY

535 West 22nd Street, 2nd Floor

May 4–June 17

In what has already proven to be a remarkable few seasons of black figuration—such as Henry Taylor at the Whitney Biennial or Kerry James Marshall at the Met Breuer—this exhibition of thirty-one large-scale works on paper by Whitfield Lovell is disarming and quietly powerful. The artist is well established: Born in 1959, he is part of a generation of artists that came up somewhere between the polemics of the Black Arts Movement and the turn toward greater inclusion in the art world during the 1990s. Accordingly, the images here, made between 1987 and 1998, seem out of step with a lot of work being made right now that deals with questions of the African diaspora.



Whitfield Lovell, *Grandmother*, 1988, oil stick and charcoal on paper, 38 x 50".

And yet dislocations of diaspora seems to be the subject at the heart of this show, in which Lovell traces literal family trees; depicts partial, bound, or lacerated bodies; and reiterates his long-standing interest in portraiture. Taken together, there is a rhizomatic logic at play connecting the works, but also a Byzantine quality that runs throughout—most depict talismanic forms such as floating hands or rusticated medallions amid fields of rich, gemlike tones. At nearly six feet tall, the profile in *AI*, 1990, or the likeness adorned with wings in *Grandmother*, 1988, take on hagiographic dimensions.

And while Lovell seems to plumb the more obscure depths of personal memory and allegorical references drawn from his travels, any individual piece resonates on its own. His command of oil stick and charcoal coaxes elegiac subtlety from his figures. Looking at them, it's easy to get swept away.

— Ian Bourland