



The Red IX, 2021. Conte on paper with attached found object, 46 x 34 inches

WHITFIELD LOVELL

Le Rouge et Le Noir

OCTOBER 16 – DECEMBER 18, 2021

“Lovell’s work is pure visual poetry....

...It is a remarkable thing for a black visual artist working with black subjects to be able to slip away from easy politicization, from the narrowness of representation, and to reach toward the expression of black humanity. It is remarkable, also, to make the argument that Lovell makes so well with his work – that what is black is at once particular and universal, familiar, and unknowable.”

- Kevin Quashie

DC Moore is pleased to present *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, an exhibition of new work by Whitfield Lovell on view from October 16 – December 18, 2021.

Through his works and installations, Whitfield Lovell creates space for memory, metaphor, and emotional exploration that asks pressing questions about the past and present. By way of Lovell’s multi-sensory installation, the exhibition *Le Rouge et Le Noir* (The Red and the Black) unfolds throughout the gallery space as a journey of exploration. Hope and threat intertwine, and the symbolic use of color by the artist is powerful and evocative.

For his series *The Reds*, Lovell was inspired by the symbolism of the color red, which can evoke a range of meanings, from life and blood to courage, will, passion, and love. The assemblages in this series exude a resonant, complicated strength and vitality. His pairings of individuals, drawn reverently and with uncanny complexity, juxtaposed with vintage objects, which carry the history of their once daily use, allow Lovell to bring forth powerful, multi-faceted associations.

In the *Winteriesse* series, Lovell draws with silver conte on black paper, a body of work that he started when he was at the American Academy in Rome in 2019. The artist writes:

"In Rome, I felt I should be listening to Puccini and Verdi, but I found myself listening to Schubert. That was the mood I was in. I had recently had several deaths in my family, and so Schubert's "Winterreise," which means "winter's journey," was actually very close to my experience, because it's a song cycle with twenty-four songs, and about a man taking a journey through a snowstorm to run away from grief and loss of love. And so, this was completely where my head was, and it was winter and it was Rome, and so I did one drawing for each song, and then three more."

Eventually, Lovell encased objects with some of the drawings, allowing the objects and drawings to speak to one other and adding additional layers of implied meaning. Schubert's work, from 1827, is powerful and impassioned and the metaphorical journey to escape grief is parallel to the artists' own personal journey at the time.

Throughout his career, Lovell has often been inspired by music, poetry, and literature. In this exhibition, Stendahl's 1830 novel *Le Rouge et Le Noir* inspires, as does the song made famous by Nina Simone, *Ne Me Quitte Pas*. In Stendahl's writing, Lovell sees resonance with the plight of the young man who tries to rise above his station and is blocked by others as well as by his own passions. In Simone's song, written by Jacques Brel in 1959, *Ne Me Quitte Pas*, (*Don't Leave Me*) presents the promise of a renewed life, a new chance.

...Do not leave me
We have often seen
Rebound Fire
From the old volcano
That we thought too old
It is, it seems
Scorched lands
Giving more wheat
Than a better April
And when the evening comes
For a sky to blaze
Le Rouge et Le Noir, The Red and the Black
Were They Not Joined together?
Do not leave me
Do not leave me
Do not leave me.....

In the *Spell Suite*, the title of the series plays on both a reference to a sequence of pieces in dance or music, as well as the mesmerizing quality of a spell or enchantment. Being in a spell can connote a state of consciousness or spiritual or emotional transcendence. Nina Simone was known for her song *I Put a Spell on You* and in Lovell's *Spell Suite* the need for love and acceptance in this life is interwoven through the individual works.

In the final room of the exhibition, the artist presents an installation of red birds, evoking the feeling that red birds, such as cardinals, can be spiritual symbols, representing the freedom that all desire. Creating an immersive experience for the viewer, Lovell pairs the birds with the hymnal song *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, which was written during the Jim Crow era in 1900, and is now known as the Black National Anthem. Using several versions of the song, one from 1972, Lovell has us think about and reflect on the poignant optimism of the song.

The recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship Award in 2007, Whitfield Lovell has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, most recently *Inbox: Whitfield Lovell* at the Museum of Modern Art in 2017, *Whitfield Lovell: Kin Series & Related Works* at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC in 2016-17. The presentation was accompanied by a major monograph, *Whitfield Lovell: Kin*, published by Rizzoli. In 2023-2025 the American Federation of the Arts will be traveling a major museum exhibition *Whitfield Lovell: Passages*. Lovell's work is



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part of many public collections including the Brooklyn Museum, NY; High Museum of Art, Atlanta GA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Phillips Collection, DC; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, PA; Seattle Art Museum, WA; Studio Museum of Harlem, NY; New Orleans Museum of Art; LA, and many others.



DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open by appointment Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Sabeena Khosla at skhosla@dcmooregallery.com.