

Gerald Lovell

all that I have

January 22 - February 20, 2021

“Is there a space of free expression for Black portrait painters and their subjects? A place where they are free from the concerns and canons of Western painting? A space where there are no heroes, protestors or reasons to justify presence? A space where everyday life is of value because it is lived? These questions seem to preoccupy the painter Gerald Lovell’s canvases.”

- Antwuan Sargent



P·P·O·W is pleased to present *all that I have*, Gerald Lovell’s first solo exhibition in New York City. Garnering immediate recognition for his candid approach and heavily impastoed canvases, Lovell began painting at the age of 22 after dropping out of the graphic design program at the University of West Georgia. Frustrated by the codified, academic methods ingrained in formal arts education, Lovell utilized YouTube tutorials, his background in photography, and his tightknit, Atlanta-based community of creatives to drive his burgeoning painting practice. An avid photographer, Lovell’s interest in vernacular photography stems from a childhood in Chicago spent looking through his grandmother’s photo albums. Lovell explains “My grandmother has these huge photo albums. They’re so big and detailed. She is the sole keeper of these images that document my family lineage. I grew up looking at them and they made me deeply connected to saving moments, moments that I have with people. When I started painting these were the moments I wanted to represent. I find them powerful. Painting is a grand way of continuing to document these deep moments.”

For Lovell, painting is an act of biography. Combining flat and impressionistic painting with thick daubs of impasto, Lovell’s monumental portraits depict loving scenes often lost to the abyss of memory. As critic and curator Antwuan Sargent notes in his accompanying catalogue essay, works such as *Park Date*, 2020, of two twenty-something Black lovers tenderly embracing against a tree; *The Night on the Roof*, 2020, of a few girlfriends posing cheerfully, and perhaps slightly tipsy, in the small hours of a dark evening; and *Troy in the Hills*, 2020, of a young black male arrestingly slumping over a mailbox, refuse the notion that all Black figures put down on canvas are somehow political representations because they have gone unseen, invisible to official histories, but not each other. Informed by his deep commitment to fostering alternative community narratives, Lovell imbues his subjects with the psychical apparatuses of social agency and self-determinative power while revealing individualistic details that lay their essential humanity bare.

In *all that I have*, Lovell continually directs the viewer to the skin, building a fleshy materiality which becomes a site of formal confrontation and social intervention, inscribing on the surface a real reflection of the sitter’s identity that is foremost about illuminating acts of repose in spaces of intimacy. Following in the lineage of artists such as Kerry James Marshall, Alice Neel and Kehinde Wiley, Lovell captures the lived experience of both the artist and sitter in order to preserve, honor, and make visible the collective experience of contemporary Black millennial life beyond the gaze of dominant culture.

Born in Chicago to Puerto Rican and African American parents, Gerald Lovell (b. 1992) has been featured in exhibitions at P·P·O·W, New York; Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; The Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture, Charlotte, NC; Houston Museum of African American Culture, Houston, TX; The Gallery | Wish, Atlanta, GA; the Hammonds House Museum, Atlanta, GA; Mason Fine Art, Atlanta, GA; and Swim Gallery, Los Angeles, CA.



The Night on the Roof, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins./182.9 x 152.4 cm

Gerald Lovell: Transitional Moments
Antwaun Sargent

Is there a space of free expression for Black portrait painters and their subjects? A place where they are free from the concerns and canons of Western painting? A space where there are no heroes, protestors or reasons to justify presence? A space where everyday life is of value because it is lived? These questions seem to preoccupy the painter Gerald Lovell's canvases. The self-taught artist paints fleeting, easy to forget moments, up close. Loving scenes that occur in split seconds that are often lost to the abyss of memory. Episodes that are so candid that the people who make them often have to be told of their importance because they made those who witnessed them understand them better, love them harder. They are, what Lovell calls, poetic "transitional moments,"¹ like Park Date (2020), of two twentysomething Black lovers tenderly embracing against a tree; The Night on the Roof (2020), of a few girlfriends posing cheerfully, and perhaps slightly tipsy, in the small hours of a dark evening; and Troy in the Hills (2020), of a young black male arrestingly slumping over a mailbox. They all refuse the notion that all Black figures put down on canvas are somehow political representations because they have gone unseen, invisible to official histories, but not each other.



Quil, 2020
oil on wood
48 x 36 ins. / 121.9 x 91.4 cm

For Lovell, painting is an “act of biography,”² a recording of his own life. His impulse to record everyday moments is inspired by coming of age during the rise of social media, a period that encouraged him to take photographs of everything. His interest in photography is also rooted in a Chicago childhood spent looking through his family’s photo albums. They contained tiny images of insignificance, family milestones and portraits of people he has lost, like his father, Gerald Lovell Kennedy Sr. When he taught himself to paint from watching YouTube tutorials and taking informal lessons from his roommate, the painter Jurell Cayetano, he was drawn to those vernacular photographs:

My grandmother has these huge photo albums. They’re so big and detailed. She is the sole keeper of these images that document my family lineage. I grew up looking at them and they made me deeply connected to saving moments, moments that I have with people. When I started painting these were the moments I wanted to represent. I find them powerful. Painting is a grand way of continuing to document these deep moments. Honestly, with all my work there’s a reference to these moments I share with people. The portraits aren’t just of people from a meet and greet. These are all scenarios in which we’re living.³

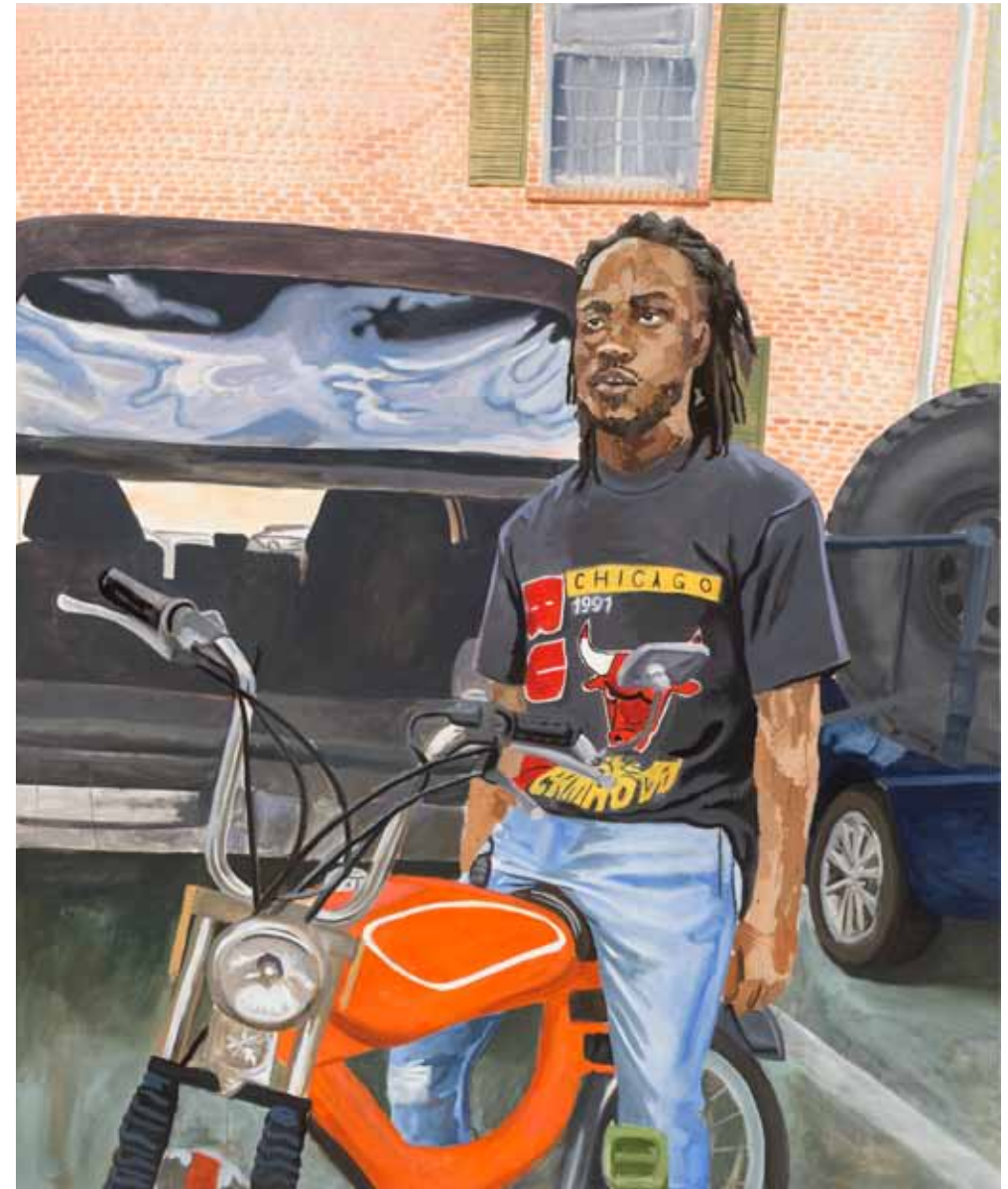
Lovell’s interest in documenting mundane Black life refuses the battles over representation that have produced an exceedingly moral Black figure that is distant from the possibility of a basic fallibility and full humanness. And yet Lovell’s intimate images direct our eyes to his sitters’ skin, utilizing an impasto technique in the tradition of post-impressionism. The sculptural strokes give the shades of brown, coffee and tawny, russet and wheat, of the figures skin a thick, textured emphasis that suggest emotion and movement. It has a labored presence, a layered aliveness, that would be tempting to read as political but it’s a play with the surface of the body that refuses to tie identity to stereotypical understandings of skin color. Examining the artist’s images such as Self-Portrait X (2020) or Quil (2020), it is the use of scale, texture and the juxtaposition between the contrasting application of paint that emphasizes Lovell’s efforts to center an alternative,

de-politicized, depictions of his peers, family and friends. “My work is really centered in creating honest depictions of the people I’m around,” he explains. “In doing that, I feel like I’m affirming them and their existence. I feel like I’m capturing moments of self-satisfaction. Being a Black creative, there’s a big emphasis on creating work that has social commentary. So it’s almost turning that on its head.”⁴

In the street scene *Yahteer and his moped* (2020), the Black male sitter, who is set to drive the vehicle, because of the color of his skin already has negative connotations that might charge the portrait, making it a statement about driving while Black. Yet, Lovell’s play with his skin, making it more visible and textured than his flat ordinary surroundings, questions the ways in which Black skin has been met with over reaction in routine circumstances. It is an intervention that seeks to rethink representations of Black skin, rerouting value toward the realities, traditions and gazes that elude stereotype, racial violence, erasure and mainstream narrative:

Originally when I began painting six years ago, I was not thinking about the history of painting and a lack of representation. I’m often told the way I create skin reminds people of scarification. I’ve gotten a lot of projections. Sometimes people saying the work itself is kind of grotesque. It’s self-documentation. It’s not just myself, but it’s also of the people that I’m around and these moments that I share with them. In *Self-Portrait X*, I was in the studio working and it was after a ten hour day, in April, and I just wanted to document that moment of isolation, capture a reflection of my mental state.⁵

Lovell is a part of a new generation of Black portraitists that includes Jordan Casteel, Toyin Ojih Odutola, Jennifer Packer and Amoako Bofofo, who are experimenting with the possibilities of capturing the figure through deliberate acts of disfiguration. Their representations are less about accurately rendering likeness as they are refiguring notions of beauty, desire and the way Black people see themselves to exceed white supremacist understandings of Blackness. They follow a lineage of Black portrait artists which includes painters Henry Taylor and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye,



Yahteer and his moped, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins./182.9 x 152.4 cm



Rochelle, 2020

oil on panel

60 x 60 ins./152.4 x 152.4 cm

who are freshly wrestling control of the canvas from the histories, traditions and priorities of Western portraiture. Contemporarily, Kerry James Marshall's seminal 1980 work, A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self is a key touchstone for painters working in this mode of representation. The image made with the proto-classical medium egg tempera depicts the bust of a Black male rendered in shades of black. Importantly, the image was the beginning of Marshall's engagement with employing a range of blacks, from obsidian to charcoal and ebony, as what he has described as an "ideal" "that can demonstrate that there is nothing to be afraid of, nothing to run from, and that, in fact, a good deal of beauty that resides there."⁶

In Lovell's impasto images such as the closely cropped, passport style portrait Aidid (2020), a representation of a young Black male against a flat, warm baby blue backdrop, the skin is a site of formal confrontation and social intervention: the yellows, oranges, and purples that build into Aidid's brown skin is a way to inscribe on the surface a real reflection of his identity that is foremost about illuminating acts of repose in spaces of intimacy, that allow for Black existence. In images like Aidid and others such as Akeel (2020) and Rochelle (2020), Lovell's intervention is not only in terms of skin but also environmental. The large, photo-representational portraits are of the figures' busts before monochromatic backdrops instead of the streets or homes in which the sitters live. Their impasto appearance is heightened, their skin is what is worth recalling in the moment.

¹ Antwaun Sargent in conversation with the artist, December 2020.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Anna Nelson-Daniel, "Q&A: Gerald Lovell on his first solo show at Wish, his family and his inspirations," *ATLARTS.org*, March 15, 2019

⁵ Antwaun Sargent in conversation with the artist, December 2020.

⁶ Antwaun Sargent, "Kerry James Marshall's Mastry," *Interview.com*, April 22, 2016



Park Date, 2020

oil on panel

72 x 60 ins. / 182.9 x 152.4 cm

Gerald Lovell
all that I have

January 22 - February 20, 2021

Window Gallery



Gerald Lovell
Quil, 2020
oil on wood
48 x 36 ins.
121.9 x 91.4 cm

Gallery 1



Gerald Lovell
Logan and Tara, 2020
oil on panel
40 x 30 ins.
101.6 x 76.2 cm



Gerald Lovell
Yahteer and his moped, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Searcy, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Park Date, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Grace, 2021
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
The Night on the Roof, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Aleisha, 2021
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Troy in the Hills, 2020
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Autumn, 2021
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Day at the Court, 2021
oil on panel
72 x 60 ins.
182.9 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Self Portrait X, 2020
oil on panel
60 x 40 ins.
152.4 x 101.6 cm

Gallery 2



Gerald Lovell
Aidid, 2020
oil on panel
60 x 60 ins.
152.4 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Rochelle, 2020
oil on panel
60 x 60 ins.
152.4 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Akeel, 2020
oil on panel
60 x 60 ins.
152.4 x 152.4 cm



Gerald Lovell
Kiante, 2021
oil on panel
60 x 60 ins.
152.4 x 152.4 cm

Viewing Room



Carolee Schneemann
Eye Body Collage, 1963/2005-17
gelatin silver prints and acrylic on paper
38 x 140 ins.
96.5 x 355.6 cm



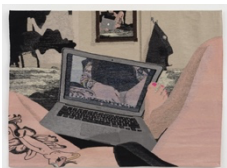
Martin Wong
Nocturne at Ridge Street and Stanton, 1987
acrylic on canvas
72 x 96 ins.
182.9 x 243.8 cm



Chiffon Thomas
Bound To Burden, 2020
plaster, leather, thread, paint, wood, charcoal
28 x 10 x 13 1/2 ins.
71.1 x 25.4 x 34.3 cm



Guadalupe Maravilla
EXVOTO Kambo, 2021
oil on tin, mixed media
31 x 31 x 3 1/2 ins.
78.7 x 78.7 x 8.9 cm



Erin M. Riley
Webcam 2, 2020
wool, cotton
72 x 100 ins.
182.9 x 254 cm



Clementine Keith-Roach
Enclosure, 2020
27 1/8 x 22 1/8 x 19 3/4 ins.
69 x 56 x 50 cm
terracotta vessel, jesmonite, steel thread, resin clay,
modelling paste, acrylic paint