

The Purposes of Art and Michelangelo Lovelace: Art Saved My Life

When it comes to the discussion of art, it always comes down to what purpose does it serve? I've personally have considered its purpose or definition to be ever changing and to fit the narrative it needs to serve. This can range from many things such as Banksy's being political, loss and learning to love again with Gregory Sale's *Testing Waters* or creating a series based on connections with those who've become family beyond a blood connection like I have. To tie some of the readings into this, Clement Greenburg discusses modernist art as "*the start of a whole new epoch in art, marking a decisive break with all the customs and conventions of the past.*" Could you not consider this for every type of movement that existed for the last hundred years and beyond that? Look at Van Gough, during his lifetime his work was never though highly of, and he died a sick man in a mental hospital, and yet those paintings of his are highly regarded and beloved all these years later. For every major movement in the art field it has always gone against what was normalized, such as the religious only purpose in the medieval era to those who've created the works/were greats in their time during the renaissance or having all the weird stuff Fluxus was doing against what modern art was at the time, it's ever evolving and changing to reflect the current society in some manner.

Now you've wondered by now why this moron has just kept rambling about art and its definition, if anything I was leading into the main topic: Michelangelo Lovelace. I'll admit I've never heard of the man prior to this year but I got interested in his work due to the exhibition ASU is currently showcasing regarding Lovelace and his work. When I checked the description of the exhibition featured on the art museum's website, I felt hooked in and in a way, I connected with him. The description features his telling of how he got into art, being encouraged by a judge

who basically gave him another chance at life to pursue his art career instead of these other means of supporting his family. It goes on to describe that Lovelace developed his own style after learning some techniques and art history as it was a way he would be able to translate his life into an experience that could be shared with others. Lovelace once stated, *“I’m one of those people who say, ‘art saved my life,’ and it truly did.”* And it’s this message that resonated with me so much and felt that connection that made me want to engage with his work. I’d also like to admit that I don’t share much with his background, but I do share that sacrifice of providing for family over my own being at times and I can only imagine how that must’ve been for him. I think it’s also in the age of AI, the constant disregard for the arts, the current pains of the world and my own life experiences that make me just tell myself, “Art saved my life too”. I knew people who were like Lovelace in his younger years, doing different means to help provide for his family, and it was always mainly me that pushed me further to keep going in this field even if my work doesn’t show itself like I’d wish it to be. Just overall I find it so strange that I felt this connection to Lovelace and his work, but I think I needed it and I feel like it’s a shame I’ll never have a chance to properly thank him for it.

Exhibition Portion

During my visit to ASU art museum at the Tempe campus, almost immediately I felt drawn to Michelangelo Lovelace’s work. Seeing Lovelace’s explanation for the reasoning behind his work was fascinating, from once again exploring the early on of his career to his Rodney King series, I felt so taken in. I sat with each piece in the Rodney King series, noting ever detail I found myself before looking back at what Lovelace’s estate described alongside the work. What really stuck out with me was the portion of his work featured in gallery 2 (pardon me for forgetting what this portion was called). He way he illustrated the city life in Chicago and these

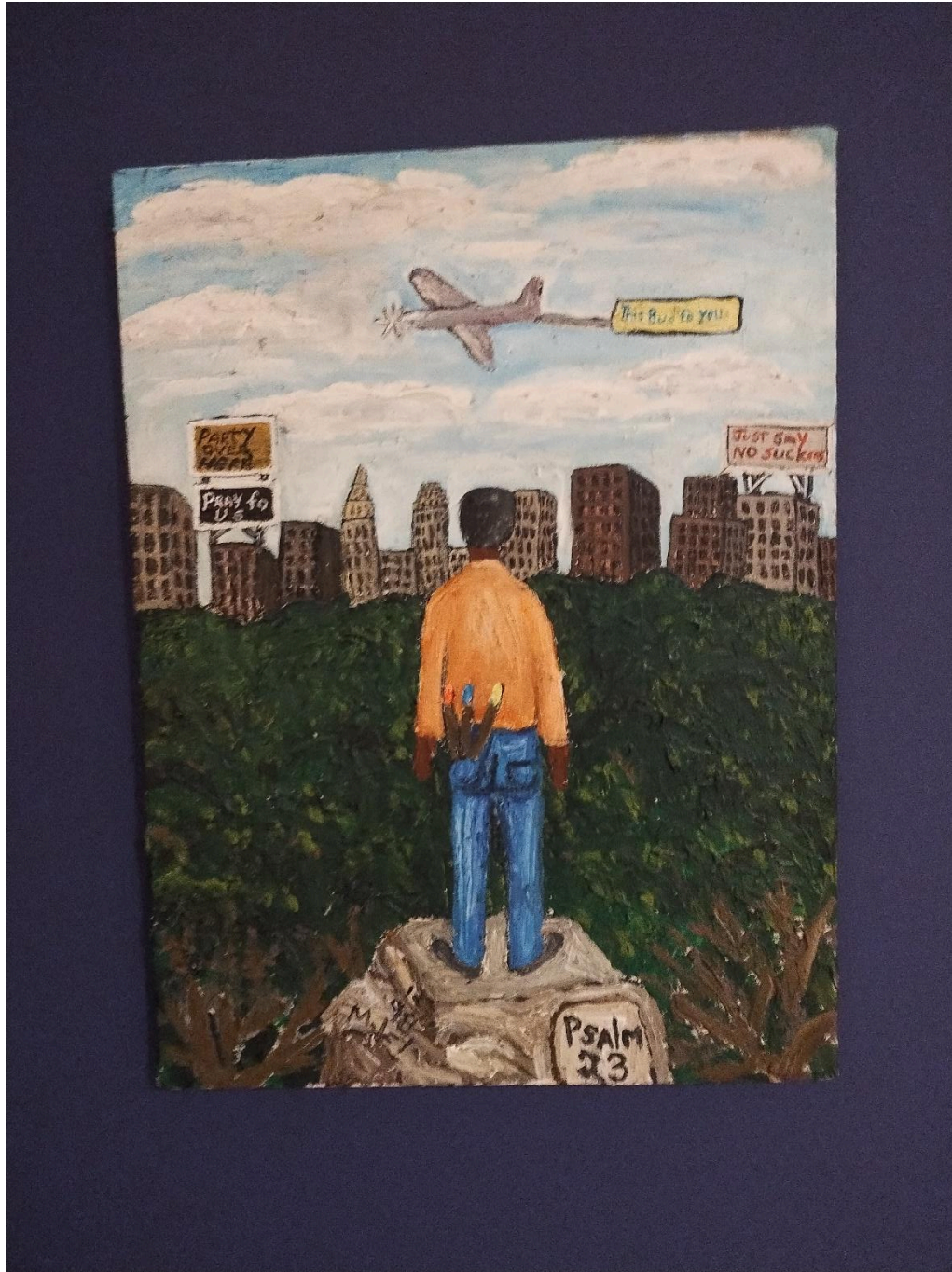
areas he grew up in, I found myself in those positions. *Old 40th and Hood* (illustrated as the first photo to follow) was one of the pieces where I told myself as I walked along the towering works, “*That’s literally like the plaza back where I grew up.*” It was simple reasoning but just seeing the early on brush work of his was fascinating to see his brush strokes and how prominent his style was already there. In Gallery 3, it showed artworks from various periods in Lovelace’s work such as from 1998 to 2020. In this final gallery area, you were shown how much more of an activist Lovelace was as he created work criticizing America’s war on terror following 9/11 to the racism that exists for black people with work showcasing the early on use of Black Lives Matter. You also see that Lovelace was also a religious man, with creating work of turning Adam and Eve into black people fist bumping God. The one that stuck out to me the most was *Trying to Survive in the Urban Jungle*, where Lovelace depicts himself in the inner city where in a community where life can be fast, poor, or short, it can be full of various difficulties and dangers. A key aspect in the work is Psalms 23 which states, “*The Lord is my Shepard*” with the following lines featured “*Even though I walk through the valley of shadow of death I will fear no evil; for you are with me.*” The Lovelace estate infers that Lovelace’s referral to the passage is that the faith of God can provide guidance in an intimidating environment, something that I found myself relating to as in a key period of my life I sought religious comfort in the terrible

neighborhood I grew up in.



Old 40th and Hood (1994)

Acrylic on canvas



Trying to Survive in the Urban Jungle (1998)

Acrylic on canvas