



Moss Arts Center exhibitions feature works from artists Craig Drennen and Steve Locke

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By Sandra Bland

Works from two prominent artists are on display in Virginia for the very first time. The Moss Arts Center's fall exhibitions feature two solo shows — Craig Drennen's "[First Acts, Scene 2](#)," a collection of paintings, mixed-media installation, and video inspired by an obscure Shakespeare work, and Steve Locke's "[the daily practice of painting](#)," consisting of 114 portraits Locke painted over the course of a year.

The exhibitions open with a reception on Thursday, Oct. 13, from 5-7 p.m. in the Moss Arts Center's Grand Lobby, located at 190 Alumni Mall in Blacksburg. Drennen will give an artist talk on Friday, Oct. 14, at 2 p.m. in the Cube. The talk also will be available via livestream on the Moss Arts Center website. The galleries and all related events are free and open the public.

"I'm excited to share some insight into these parallel exhibitions," said Brian Holcombe, Moss Arts Center curator. "Besides a shared commitment to expanding the field of painting through a critical look at painting's history, Craig and Steve's friendship is an example of the importance of community in any artist's career. Often, the only encouragement and critical dialogue artists receive is from each other and their circle of friends. Although this type of support tends to be difficult to perceive, it's a vital part of the development of artists' work and of the evolution of art history. I couldn't pass up this opportunity to bring them together for the first time at the Moss Arts Center."



A selection from Steve Locke's "the daily practice of painting" (2019-2020), egg tempera and oil emulsion on Claybord, 114 6- by 6-inch panels. Photo courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York.

Steve Locke

“the daily practice of painting”

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery and Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery

Comprised of 114 portraits made in 2019 and 2020, “the daily practice of painting” is part of Locke's exploration of relationships among men and their gaze. Painted mostly in gouache on 6- by 6-inch Claybord, each square panel features a centered solitary head seen from the shoulders up. Bright hues prevail in these intimate scaled portraits, which contain a multitude of male expressions. Sometimes with eyes closed and tongues out, Locke's men go against the idealized male portraiture. Presented horizontally in a single line below eye level, the viewer looks down to return their gaze, compounding their vulnerability.

Different from the floating heads waiting to be caught by the viewer in Locke's 2012 series, “you don't deserve me,” the men depicted in “the daily practice of painting” engage the viewer with shoulders squared and grounded. Spaced tightly together, the portraits appear episodic and suggest everyday and first-person accounts. Perhaps their purpose is similar to what Locke describes about his earlier series, “when you're a boy” (2005-present). “But in addition to being a record of seeing,” Locke wrote in his artist statement, “they function as notes to myself about a particular person or encounter. They document something about the men I have seen ... that I find compelling.”

The exhibition is a daily affirmation to Locke's belief in everyday work. In his series statement, Locke wrote, “I have never believed in inspiration or safety as a condition for work or for anything else.” He concluded, “No one asked me to make them and no one needs them. They are the work I do every day.”

Locke was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and raised in Detroit. He lives and works in Brooklyn. In 2022, he was awarded the Rappaport Prize by deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum and received the Guggenheim Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in 2020. His solo exhibitions have been featured at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, among others. He has had gallery exhibitions with yours mine & ours, Samsøñ, LaMontagne Gallery, Gallery Kayafas, and Mendes Wood and attended residencies with the City of Boston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the MacDowell Colony, and Skowhegan. Locke is a recipient of grants from Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and Art Matters Foundation. His work has been reviewed in Artforum, Art in America, the Boston Globe, and The New Yorker. Locke is a professor of fine arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Visiting the galleries

The center's galleries are open on Wednesday-Friday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., and Saturday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. The exhibitions will be on view through Saturday, Dec. 17.

Parking is available in the North End Parking Garage on Turner Street. When not staffed for a special event, visitors may park in the garage by taking a ticket at entry and paying with Visa or Mastercard upon exit. Virginia Tech has also partnered with [ParkMobile](#) to provide a convenient, contactless electronic payment option for parking, which may be used at any parking meter, campus parking space, or lot with standard F/S, C/G, or R parking.

If you are an individual with a disability and desire an accommodation, please contact Jamie Wiggert at least 10 days prior to the event at 540-231-5300 or email wiggertj@vt.edu during regular business hours.