

Artist Steve Locke gets first major exhibition at Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston

Colette Greenstein July 25th, 2013



Steve Locke's exhibit, there is no one left to blame, will be on display at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston from July 31 to Oct. 27. Admission is free 5-9 p.m. on Thursday nights. (Photo: Liza Voll)

Contemporary artist Steve Locke presents his first major museum exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston beginning July 31. When asked about his 20-year-long artistic career the 50-year-old artist says, "I'm hitting my stride in my practice."

Born in Cleveland in 1963, Locke grew up in Detroit. His dad worked for Chrysler and his mother was a housewife. His mother was a huge influence on his life, and often took him to the Detroit Institute of Art.



Author: Liza Voll

Locke in the studio. "I'm very lucky to do this and have the means to do it." Locke is an associate professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

He spoke about his parents a bit wistfully. "I really miss my parents and they would have enjoyed seeing me having this kind of success," he said. "Their child did something that they never had the chance to do."

Locke, who now lives and works in Hyde Park, is also an associate professor of art education at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design and holds both a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts from the college.

In 2008, Locke was an artist-in-residence at Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia. He has also taught at Emmanuel College in Boston and the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester. In 2009, he was awarded with the LEF Foundation Contemporary Work Fund Grant and won the Art Matters Foundation Award in 2007.

The ICA has described Locke's paintings as "evoking a range of references —from the myth of Medusa to historical traumas such as the French Revolution or the lynching of African Americans to current anxieties about terrorism, war and torture."

His works have been displayed as part of both solo and group exhibits in and around Boston and Cambridge, as well as in São Paulo, Brasil; Basel, Switzerland and in Beijing.

The Banner recently spoke with Locke about his upcoming ICA exhibit and what it means to him

You've been painting for 20 years. Does it seem like two decades have passed?

No, it doesn't seem like it. It really doesn't. It doesn't feel like a lot of time. When I think about it, it feels as exciting as when it started. I feel very confident about my artwork.

How did you get started?

I grew up in Detroit. The Detroit Institute of the Art has one of the best collections in the world. It was called the "Paris of the West." I sort of grew up in the museum. I didn't know I could be an artist. I liked going to the museum. It was one of my favorite things to do. I didn't start to think about being an artist until well in my 20s. It wasn't practical. Like most people I was focused on making a living. I never thought of it as career.

Do you think you've finally hit your stride as an artist?

Yes. As you get older there's no one to tell you what to do. You've become the author of your life. I'm very lucky to do this and have the means to do it.

The exhibition at the ICA later this month is your first major museum exhibition. Are you excited? Nervous? How do you prepare for something like this?

I'm not really nervous about the show or the work. I want the work to be seen in the best possible light. That's the great thing with having a great institution behind you. They have the resources. I feel like my vision is really solid. What I'm excited about is that it's a museum show. Some artists never have a museum show.

Do most artists strive to have a museum exhibition?

I'm just as shocked that this is happening. I just knew I wanted to make art. I feel very fortunate that people want to see the work. In 2005 Kathleen Bitetti (a Boston curator) gave me a shot and believed in my work. I never expected it. I feel very fortunate. If I had planned it, it would have happened a lot earlier.

How do we go about exposing art to those who may not have access?

It's not so much finding it outside of yourself. It's about finding it inside of yourself. William Morris (who was an English textile designer, artist and writer in the 1800s) taught us that art is a part of our everyday lives. Even the way you arrange the food on your plate, how you arrange the plate — that can be a level of your artistic self. We can start looking at how art comes into our lives.

Is there a takeaway from the exhibit?

When I'm making my work, it's very profound. The paintings have their own lives. It's really not about me. I try not to get involved in that.

Has teaching at Mass Art influenced your work in any way? Spurred any creativity?

Absolutely! Young artists are the elixir of life. It's really exciting working with them. You get to watch them and see their discoveries as they come into their own.

Steve Locke's first solo museum exhibition, there is no one left to blame, featuring 12 new works — including a "constellation" of paintings, paintings affixed to sculptural supports and a neon work bearing the show's title — is on view at The Institute of Contemporary Art/ Boston from July 31 to Oct. 27. The ICA is located at 100 Northern Avenue in Boston.