

Scott Covert: The Dead Supreme

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By Guest Writer



Scott Covert, *The Dead Supreme*. Installation images from Situations Gallery and Fierman Gallery, NYC on view Oct 19th to Dec 10th, 2017. Image courtesy of the artist and Situations Gallery and Fierman Gallery, NYC.

Scott Covert is a New York legend. Crisscrossing the country in his van for the past 32 years, he transmutes graveyards into art studios. Covert's surfaces are a combination of rich, abstract underpaintings and grave rubbings layered with oil sticks. The subject matter celebrates a cacophony of cultural icons, and taken together, the subjects are astonishingly varied – from Frederick Douglass to Andrew Cunanan to The Ramones to Mickey Mantle to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Each painting is a carefully orchestrated performative act in which Covert conducts a highly ritualized version of printmaking. One canvas, titled *All the Edies*, features seven Ediths (Metzger, Sedgwick, Piaf, Gorme, Head, Big and Little Bouvier-Beale) alongside Jackson Pollack's engraved autograph. Of course, all of them aren't buried in the same place. The work emphasizes the underlying action beneath a single composition — Covert is willing to travel great distances for his life's work.



Scott Covert, *All the Edies*, n.d., Acrylic and oil stick on canvas, 32 x 30" (81.3 x 76.2 cm). Images courtesy of the artist and Situations Gallery and Fierman Gallery, NYC.

Covert's flown to Moscow to kneel before Nikita Khrushchev's Cyrillic script and The Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris to score Oscar Wilde. He's taken a grave rubbing in Hollywood for Holly Woodlawn, driven to Cherry Valley, NY for Candy Darling, and then to Peekskill for Jackie Curtis. Covert refers to this particular work as the "holy trinity" of Andy Warhol's Superstars. Exhibited on the SITUATIONS side of the exhibition, *The Holy Trinity Plus One*, highlights the connections forged by individuals during their lifetimes. However, in other instances, Covert meditates on a single individual. Bold, red Helvetica, spelling out 'Houdini' a hundred times, does tricks for the eye. Stripes of 'Thelonious Monk' fill a large canvas in the way Monk's improvisations once filled smokey jazz venues.

Covert's nature is experimental. In a work such as *LA Summer*, letters are so profoundly stratified it's hard to pull out all of the names — Buster Keaton, George Burns, Walt Disney, Bela Lugosi, Sammy Davis Jr, Errol Flynn, John Ritter, and Brittany Murphy all vie for the

spotlight once again. These moments invite a search through acrylic washes for deeper meaning amongst the stars. Yet, memory has a purpose. The ability to remember the past and the power of recalling to mind previously learned names, facts, and impressions gives us the capability to learn and adapt from previous experiences, as well as to build relationships.



Scott Covert, Holy Trinity Plus One, n.d., Acrylic and oil stick on canvas, 32 x 32" (81.3 x 81.3 cm). Images courtesy of the artist and Situations Gallery and Fierman Gallery, NYC.

Sometimes the foggy attributes of a work test memory and act as a riddle. Names can be so densely layered that the obstruction of the epithets is also matched by the obscurity of the involved relationships. For example, the vagueness of *Family Affair*, seen in FIERMAN Gallery, opens room for speculation. Pairing *The Clutters* (the family immortalized in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) with *The Royal Family of Magic* emphasizes the power of iconicity in the work. On the most base level, a whole life is reduced to a font, but when these icons are conjured by a viewer, meaning, however obscure, presents itself and life prevails.



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Currently, nineteen of Covert's canvases are on view in a two-gallery solo show with SITUATIONS and FIERMAN at 127 Henry Street in the Chinatown neighborhood of New York City. The exhibition continues through December 10, 2017. Additionally, several of Covert's earlier works can be seen at the Museum of Modern Art in the *Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Village, 1978–1983* exhibition which opened on Oct 31st and closes on April 1, 2018.

In the MoMA show, a gold-painted skull from 1981 graces a small pedestal flanked by Klaus Nomi's acrylic raincoat and Keith Haring's *Cabinet Door for Joey Arias*. Located in the basement of a Polish Church at 57 St. Marks Place, Club 57 (1978–83) began as a no-budget venue for music and film exhibitions, and quickly took pride of place in a constellation of counter-cultural venues in downtown New York fueled by low rents, the Reagan presidency, and the desire to experiment with new modes of art, performance, fashion, music, and exhibition. Throughout this formative period, Covert was immersed in the ferment of downtown bohemian spheres. He continues to embody this iconoclastic spirit through his nomadic existence and by the transcendent nature of his work.



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Writing by David Liam Sanderson, photos courtesy the artist, SITUATIONS and FIERMAN Galleries, NYC.

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