



DAVID SHROBE

DAVID SHROBE

Born 1974, New York

Lives and works in New York

Education

- 2014 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Madison, Maine
- 2013 MFA, Painting, Hunter College, New York
- 2009 BFA, Painting, Hunter College, New York

Solo Exhibitions

- 2020 *Walk the Air*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
- 2019 *Picture-Makers*, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York
- 2018 *Somewhere In Between*, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco
Daily Navigation, Thierry Goldberg, Miami
- 2017 *Homegrown*, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York
- 2016 *Meta-Modes*, Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, New York
- 2015 *Graphic Mythologies*, Russ Berrie Pavilion, New York
- 2006 *Shrobe Lights*, Danny Simmons' Corridor Gallery, New York

Group Exhibitions

- 2020 *Black Voices/Black Microcosm*, CFHILL, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2019 *Embody*, Madeville Gallery, Union College, Schenectady, New York
Untitled, Miami Beach (with Steve Turner)
Punch LA, Jeffrey Deitch, Los Angeles
Snow Day, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York
- 2018 *To Dream Avant-Garde*, Hammond Harkins Galleries, Columbus, Ohio
Punch, Jeffrey Deitch, New York
Summertime..., Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco
Harlem Perspectives, Faction Art Projects, New York
Aesthetics of Matter, Volta 2018, New York
- 2017 *Bronx Calling: Fourth AIM Biennial*, Bronx Museum of the Arts
Harlem Postcards Summer 2017, Studio Museum in Harlem
Uptown, Wallach Art Gallery, Lenfest Center of the Arts, New York
- 2015 *Intersecting Imaginaries*, No Longer Empty Lab, New York
- 2014 *Distrust That Particular Flavor*, Bitforms Gallery, New York
- 2013 *Three*, RFA Gallery, New York
- 2011 *Spirit of Community*, Dwyer Cultural Center, New York
- 2009 *Pulse*, Taller Boricua at Julio Burgos Cultural Center, New York
- 2003 *Aspects of Urban Life*, Rush Arts Gallery, New York

Grants, Residencies and Awards

- 2017 Artist in the Marketplace, Bronx Museum of the Arts
- 2016 Fountainhead Residency, Miami
- 2015 Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling Artist-in-Residence, New York
- 2014 Artist Teaching Fellow at Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York
- 2013 Kossak Travel Grant For Painters, Paris

Bibliography

- 2020 Grayson, Emma. "David Shrobe Repurposes Detritus to Reimagine History," *Art of Choice*, August 21
- 2019 Jovanovic, Rozalia. "Artist David Shrobe Creates His Own World Through Found Objects," *Galerie Magazine*, May 24
- 2018 Sharp, Sarah Rose. "What It Means to Dream Avant-Garde," *Hyperallergic*, November 9
Shrobe, David. "One Piece: Celestial Pose," *Bomb*, October 23

- Collymore, Nan. "Decoding Black Materiality," *C&*, October 12
- Roth, David M. "David Shrobe @ Jenkins Johnson," *Square Cylinder*, October 10
- 2017 Frank, Priscilla. "Fourth Generation Harlem Artist Challenges What It Means To Be An American," *HuffPost*, February 21
- Rodney, Seph. "Mocking Materialism with Collage," *Hyperallergic*, February 14
- Sargent, Antwaun. "An Artist Transforms Debris into Sculptures of Home and History," *VICE*, February 1
- 2016 Wright, Peter "Souleo". "Up on Sugar Hill: Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling Looks to Neighborhood's Black History," *HuffPost*, February 29
- 2011 Mays, Jeff. "Harlem Artist Beautifies Construction Side With Mural," *DNAInfo*

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

STEVE TURNER



David Shrobe: *Walk the Air*
July 25–August 29, 2020

Steve Turner is pleased to present *Walk the Air*, a solo exhibition by New York-based David Shrobe that features new assemblage paintings that were made in the last several months. During that time Shrobe has found solemnity and inspiration from his family and the Black Lives Matter movement. The works are mostly made from repurposed everyday materials sourced from his Harlem neighborhood; Shrobe disassembled furniture, separated wood from fabric and recombined them as supports for and elements in his paintings.

Many of Shrobe's works bear a relationship to early daguerreian portrait photography, especially the early images of Frederick Douglass. By combining found and repurposed materials with the photographic history of African Americans, Shrobe produces new narratives that feel intimate and personal without being anchored to a specific time or place. Shrobe explains that *Walk the Air* alludes to the African American folkloric secret language of flight. In these works, he more sharply focuses on his family and the sanctity of that bond during a time of pain, tumult and struggle. This is evident in *At A Crossroads*, where a mother, father and infant child contemplate the direction they will take while finding solace in each other.

David Shrobe (b. 1974, New York) earned a BFA and an MFA in painting from Hunter College, New York before attending Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has had solo exhibitions at Thierry Goldberg, New York; Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco; The Sugar Hill Children's Museum, New York and has had work included in numerous group shows including those at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles and New York; Mandeville Gallery, Union College, New York; Bronx Museum and the Studio Museum in Harlem. This is his first exhibition at Steve Turner.



Walk the Air. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



Walk the Air. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



Walk the Air. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



Walk the Air. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2020



Black Voices/Black Microcosm. Installation view, CFHILL, Stockholm, Sweden, 2020



Picture-Makers. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2019



Picture-Makers. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2019



Picture-Makers. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2019



Picture-Makers. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2019



Snow Day. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2019



Somewhere In Between. Installation view, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, 2018



Somewhere In Between. Installation view, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, 2018



Somewhere In Between. Installation view, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, 2018



Somewhere In Between. Installation view, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, San Francisco, 2018



Daily Navigation. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg, Miami, 2018



Daily Navigation. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg, Miami, 2018



Daily Navigation. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg, Miami, 2018



Daily Navigation. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg, Miami, 2018



Homegrown. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2017



Homegrown. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2017



Homegrown. Installation view, Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, 2017



Meta-Modes. Installation view, Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling, New York, 2016
Photo courtesy of Tim Lee

SELECTED WORKS



At A Crossroads, 2020

Oil, acrylic and graphite on paper, steel, wood, flocking, wool tweed, faux suede, vinyl, fabric, linen and bookbinding cloth mounted on carved wood

77 x 55 x 2 inches (195.6 x 139.7 x 5.1 cm)



Cloaked, 2020

Oil and acrylic on canvas and paper, wood, wool tweed, canvas fabric and gold leaf frame molding
mounted on carved wood

50 x 44 x 3 1/2 inches (127 x 111.8 x 8.9 cm)



Doubling, 2020

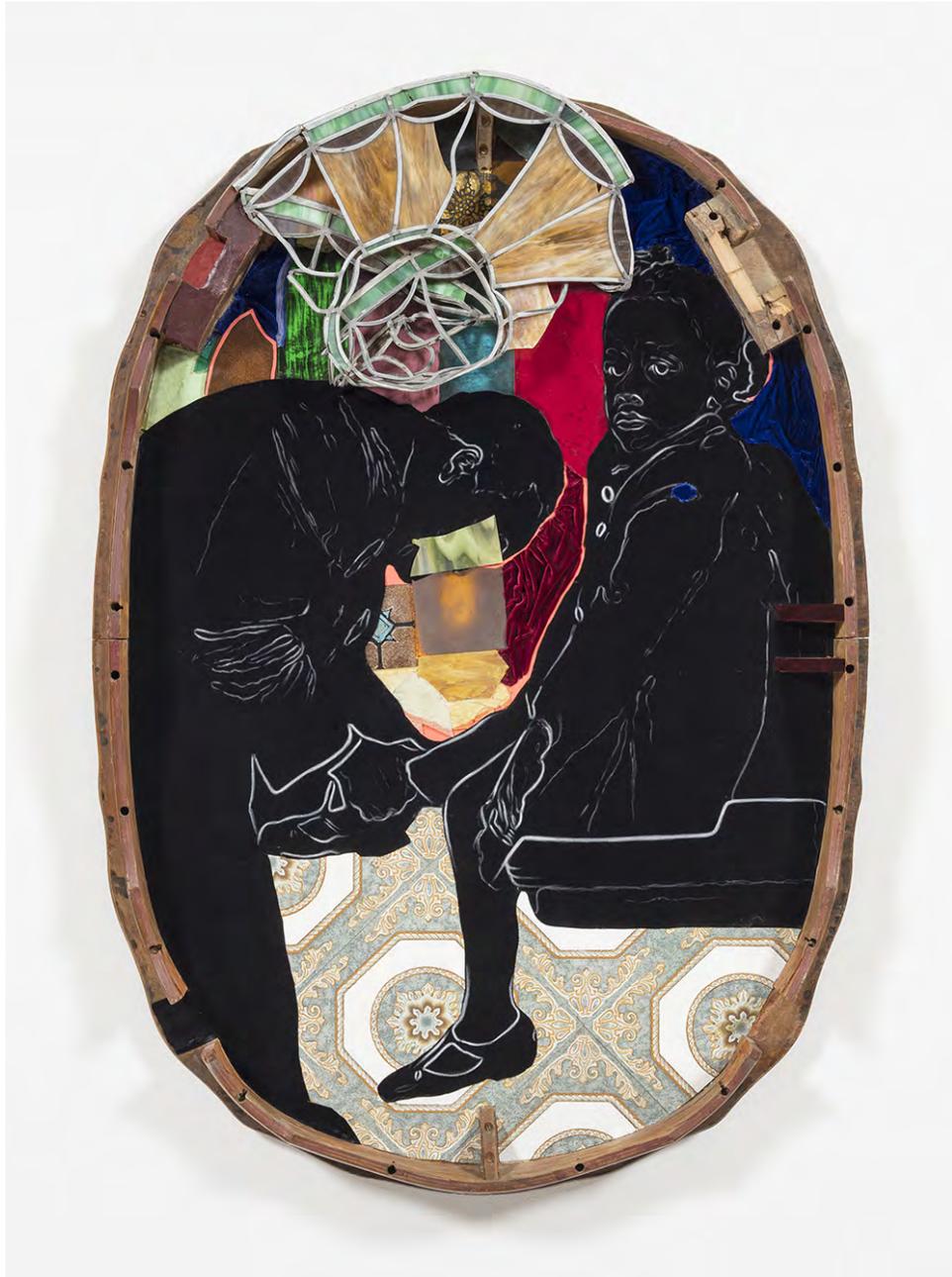
Acrylic, ink, flocking, fabric, and paper on canvas in wood artist made frame behind glass
43 x 39 x 3 1/2 inches (109.2 x 99.1 x 8.9 cm)



My Corner, 2020

Oil on paper and canvas, acrylic on flocking, linen, suede and leather mounted on wood panel and set in found wood frame

63 x 38 x 2 inches (160 x 96.5 x 5.1 cm)



Sanctuary, 2020

Oil on vinyl tiles, acrylic on flocking, leaded stained glass, wood, leather, velvet and bookbinding cloth mounted on wood table top

60 x 43 x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (152.4 x 109.2 x 11.4 cm)



Shaded by Trees, 2020

Acrylic, ink and African print fabric on canvas in gold leaf wood frame behind glass
34 x 27 x 2 inches (86.4 x 68.6 x 5.1 cm)



Smooove Sailing, 2020

Oil, acrylic and ink on canvas, stained glass, tin, canvas, leather, silk and bookbinding cloth mounted on wood table top

36 x 36 x 2 inches (91.4 x 91.4 x 5.1 cm)



The Lucky One, 2020

Oil, acrylic, charcoal and ink on paper, flocking, nylon and wallpaper mounted on paper in found painted wood frame behind glass

20 ¹/₂ x 16 ¹/₂ x 3 inches (52.1 x 41.9 x 7.6 cm)



Transitions, 2020

Oil, acrylic and ink on canvas and paper, red sandpaper, flocking, vinyl and photo print on canvas in found wood frame with gold leaf behind glass
40 x 30 x 2 inches (101.6 x 76.2 x 5.1 cm)



Walk the Air, 2020

Oil, acrylic, ink, steel, tin, gold leaf, wood, canvas, bookbinding cloth, sandpaper, faux leather and plastic merchandise bag mounted on wood

63 ¹/₂ x 48 ¹/₂ x 1 ³/₄ inches (161.3 x 123.2 x 4.4 cm)



Baptized by the Sound of Horns, 2019

Oil, acrylic, ink, graphite, charcoal, gold leaf, metal, wood, rubber, vinyl, flocking, canvas, tiles, fabric and mixed media

107 x 82 x 4 inches (271.8 x 208.3 x 10.2 cm)



Center-Stage, 2019

Oil, acrylic, charcoal, flocking, steel, wood, canvas, leather, fabric and mixed media
62 x 60 x 4 inches (157.5 x 152.4 x 10.2 cm)



Detach, 2019

Oil, acrylic, ink, acrylic polymer, fabric, foam and sandpaper on canvas in wood frame
34 x 27 inches (86.4 x 68.6 cm)



Spirited Winged Angels, 2019

Oil, acrylic, charcoal, graphite, metal, wood, leather, fabric, tiles, bookbinding cloth, vinyl and mixed media

64 x 59 x 7 inches (162.6 x 149.9 x 17.8 cm)



Temporal Traveler 1, 2019

Acrylic, ink, charcoal and fabric on canvas in gold leaf wood frame with rope behind glass
34 x 27 x 3 inches (86.4 x 68.6 x 7.6 cm)



Temporal Traveler 2, 2019

Oil, acrylic, ink, charcoal, paper, fabric and silver leaf on canvas in wood frame with gold leaf behind glass

34 x 27 x 2 inches (86.4 x 68.6 x 5.1 cm)



Anointed, 2018

Oil, acrylic, graphite, paper, wood, fabric, and mixed media

64 x 47 ¹/₂ x 4 inches (162.6 x 120.7 x 10.2 cm)



Double Jointed, 2017

Oil on canvas mounted to linoleum and wood flooring, graphite, fabric, vinyl, and wood
67 x 57 x 5 inches (170.2 x 144.8 x 12.7 cm)

SELECTED PRESS

DAVID SHROBE REPURPOSES DETRITUS TO REIMAGINE HISTORY

Emma Grayson | August 21, 2020



At A Crossroads. 2020, oil, acrylic and graphite on paper and canvas, steel, wood, flocking, wool tweed, faux suede, vinyl, fabric, linen and bookbinding cloth mounted on carved wood, 77 x 55 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Embodying the heart of Harlem is New York-based artist, David Shrobe. Not only capturing his artistry using unique materials – think old fabrics versus acrylic paint, or household goods versus traditional epoxy resin – Shrobe houses his work within upcycled frames, which inspire him nearly as much as the idea behind the work itself. The frame becomes an integral part of the overall work, making the viewing experience even more arresting in person. Read on to hear how he sources these materials, how living and working in Harlem influences his work, and what a day in the studio might look like. Be sure to check out his current show [HERE](#) at Steve Turner Gallery in LA for more of his work!

Tell us about yourself? Where are you from and when did art first enter your life?

I was born, and grew up in New York City. The arts in one form or another have pretty much always been a

part of my life, being raised in an apartment where my father, a jazz pianist, held jam sessions in our living room and my mother, who is a classically trained singer, often sang throughout our home. I kept a sketch book and loved to draw since around age 12, and was soon after thrown down, as graffiti writers would say, with my first graffiti crew where most of my friends were old school writers and club kids, which had a major influence on the art I made for many years. Painting later became my main concentration and I decided to pursue my formal training at Hunter College where I earned my BFA and MFA in Painting.

What historical movements have influenced your art the most?

Some of the historical movements that have, and continue to, inform my work are movements of resistance, rebellion, and revolution; to name a few, the Haitian Revolution, the US antislavery and civil rights movements. I'm particularly drawn to uncharted historical moments. Portraiture in classical painting, engravings and etchings especially 15th through 18th century, and early photography are also influences, such as Daguerrean portrait photography by early African American photographers, which was a movement in its own right. The current uprising for justice and equality, calling for the end of systemic racism and police brutality against black people has been extremely influential in my recent body of work currently on view.

Why is the framing of your work nearly as important as the work itself?

I think that framing, especially in the oval frames I use is a way to play with the history of portraiture and the concept of time, using them to suggest portals into imagined futures. In more recent works, the found objects become framing elements that contribute to the narrative of a work. For example, with a vintage framed mirror, I removed the glass, and used the remainder solely as a frame. What does that tell the viewer about the figure depicted within that frame? What narrative begins to emerge through the gaze of the subject or with the viewer? Is the viewer looking at a reflection of themselves as they would in a traditional mirror, or is the image reflected back completely new capturing the life of another? I'm interested in the physical space the work occupies. The work bleeds out past the canvas or wood and into the frame and beyond where the narrative continues.



My Corner, 2020, oil on paper and canvas, acrylic on flocking, linen, suede and leather mounted on wood panel and set in found wood frame, 63 x 38 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Where do you source your materials?

My studio is currently housed in an apartment that has been in my family for nearly a century in central Harlem. Some of the materials are family heirlooms that have been handed down generations, such as pieces of quilts and fabric, while others come directly from architectural elements from the home such as doorknobs, window molding or damaged fixtures and such. But I seem to find the most interesting objects from the surrounding neighborhood, sometimes they're directly outside the building and I feel like they find me. Right now, being in the midst of a pandemic, I've been using more of the found materials I've collected over the years. There's so much beauty and power inherent in them, and they have many of their own stories to tell; they just need a little care and minor tweaking, but not too much that they lose their sense of soul or character.

Has your work always taken on the style it currently embodies?

Not at all, the work keeps changing and evolving. I think it has to for me to stay engaged and excited about making new work. My first painting was a small portrait of my two sisters but later the work became more abstract. During my MFA work, I was making these massive oil paintings on canvas and large transfers. Later they became more like painting constructions and arrangements made up of fragments to create the whole. And now I've found myself somewhat back where I began, working with portraits but now they've expanded to include more mixed media and various fabrics, metals, wood and furniture parts.

How do you start a work?

They often start with the found material that informs the direction the work takes. It's about responding to the things I find which takes the work to unexpected places. My process is very intuitive, and I'm always looking for a kind of satisfaction or resolution. I have to surprise myself during the process of a new project or I feel as if the work isn't doing something new enough for me. I also use my own photography as the impetus for some of the works or images sourced from an archive of imagery I've been building since undergrad.

What is a day in the studio like for you?

When I walk in the studio, I always make some tea, usually green. I don't always dive right in and pick up where I left off the previous day. I like to let things happen naturally when I can. Some days, I spend the morning simply responding to emails or reading, or catching up on an unrelated task like cleaning the studio, and then I randomly glance up at what I was working on the day before, and am moved to jump right back in. My work is guided by what the painting or work calls for at any given moment, which for the most part is very intuitive. I also often arrive at the studio with a song in my head that I then need to play aloud. This song can sometimes set the mood for the day and help me find my way back into a work or even inform it. This week it was a song by Michael Kiwanuka. The connection I have to both music and painting is pretty cathartic and a palpable part of my practice. I begin many works while they are laying on the studio floor, and sort of dancing around them feeding off their energy and to the sound around me which at times can guide my next move.

Does your work aim to tell a narrative?

Yes and no; there are many layers that contribute to the narrative of my work. There is the narrative I am sometimes intending to convey and then there is the narrative the combined materials are communicating. Even the objects I reuse tell their own story, and in the process of making a work, through my manipulation and reinterpretation of the material, many connections and relationships and even histories begin to emerge in the manifestation of painting. I think the action of reinterpreting the found material itself is just as powerful as what the work may convey.

You were the first artist-in-residence at Sugar Hill Children's Museum. Why do you think it is important to expose children to art at an early age?

This residency was a very special experience at what I would consider a very unique museum. As an act of social justice, the museum incorporated a teaching component into the residency that involved making contemporary art accessible to children. There is a preschool connected to the museum where I was able to teach art to and collaborate on projects with the young children during my residency. Most of the children were 4 or 5 years old. Children at this age are beginning to see themselves as part of the world around them, and it's such a ripe age for discovery; they are so eager to experiment and absorb everything. Teaching children that it is ok to experiment and express themselves freely as they see fit is crucial to their identity formation. Art allows them to learn this lesson very early on without judgment. I learned a lot about myself during this residency working with

the children, especially as I was about to enter fatherhood at that time. The icing on the cake was that the museum is housed in Harlem, near where I had been living for many years and in a community to which I feel a deep connection.



Cloaked, 2020, oil and acrylic on canvas and paper, wood, wool tweed, canvas fabric and gold leaf frame molding mounted on carved wood, 50 x 44 x 3 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

What do you have coming up next?

I currently have a solo show up in LA at Steve Turner Gallery Los Angeles that runs through August 29th, 2020. I'm also participating in a group show in Rome, Italy with an exciting small group of artists opening this upcoming fall at Galleria Anna Marra.

At the end of every interview, we like to ask you to give us an artist or a few artists to recommend for us to check out. Who would you suggest?

Patrick Quarm, Aaron Fowler, Sasha Gordon, and Enrico Riley.

David Shrobe: *Somewhere in Between*
Decoding Black Materiality

David Shrobe is an artist's artist, he is garnering interest from fellow contemporaries, Ebony. G Patterson, Nina Abney Chanel and Nick Cave, with the latter two making recent purchases. His first solo show on the West Coast is being held at Jenkins Johnson Gallery in San Francisco. In his exhibition *Somewhere in Between* he dissects objects that have previously lived in a specifically Black domestic setting and grants them new life.

BY NAN COLLYMORE | October 12, 2018



David Shrobe, *Portal*, 2017, mixed media, 42 x 38 x 7 in. Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery.

Karen Jenkins-Johnson and David Shrobe's discerning curation of *Somewhere in Between* begins with the brilliant placing of *Portal* (2017). The stand-out abstraction of portions of furniture, paper and fabric eliding together in a maelstrom of noisy clashes is placed in the entrance to her downtown San Francisco art space.

David Shrobe's interest in everyday objects that he encounters in his New York neighborhood is a way of initiating a discourse on re-assembling and decoding Black

materiality. The portraits he builds are a nod to the work of Betye Saar and Noah Purifoy, both artists who grew out of the 1960's/70's LA art movement. His work, however, brings his East Coast perspective to the wall. In New York he is in a constant dance with his own practice as a painter, sculptor and mixed-media artist, using charcoal, oil, flocking and metallic paint as ways to reinterpret found materials from the city. In a brief conversation I had with Shrobe, he spoke about his process: "Even when I'm painting, I am working in a collage logic (...) A lot of my images become hybridized, drawing from Black Diaspora and African cultures—I am considering potential futures". His background in fashion and his knowledge of textiles has helped him move his practice towards a more playful approach to materiality.



David Shrobe, Adams Express, 2018, oil, charcoal, ink and mixed media on paper, 15.5 X 13. Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery

One of the most engaging facets of Shrobe's current exhibition is its tenderness towards the subjects portrayed in each work. Pulling together materials that have previously been used in a domestic setting—like fabric and furniture—Shrobe is referencing artists like Saar or Lynda Benglis who have used assemblage and collage to critique the limitations experienced by underrepresented artists, specifically women. Consciously collecting, breaking, and re-instating the material into a new form, Shrobe is employing artistic gestures often seen in women's art strategies that are essential in exploring the terrain of subjectivity in everyday life. The portraits appear as almost cyborgian, constructs of *objets trouvés* assembled in a way to confront the way we perceive human/non-human (machine or animal) interaction, challenging the racialized ways of seeing the black and brown body as animalistic and the white body as neutral, or rather: normal.

Shrobe works in a very intuitive way and his use of family heirlooms, both fabric and furniture, are integral parts to his practice. “I work in the space where three generations of my family lived before me,” he says. “My great aunt still gives me pieces of quilt blocks from a technique that has been passed down along generations. I work in a similar way to how the patchwork is constructed and arrive at a new narrative through the various juxtapositions of material”.

The use of high lacquer on wood contrasted with the exposed grain tells us of a broken narrative in *Keeper of Secrets*, one of making good of a material created from neighborhood leftovers. The purple paint and black flocking are references to royalty and a reflection on 17th and 18th century portraiture as well as depictions of “Saints, Knights and African nobility, often painted with haloes above their heads”.

Shrobe is exploring how we navigate our worlds through a methodology of dislocation. And it is in this dislocation that he performs his style of making work from a series of manufactured objects that have previously lived in a specifically Black domestic setting. One of the strengths in his work lies in the autobiography and wider biography of his local community attached to certain pieces like *Spoon Fed*, *Night Vision* and *Adams Express* (2018), but also in the gestures to human form that make us connect with the portraits and the subjects behind them more deeply. The politics that surface in *Knelt* are inspired by Colin Kaepernick. Shrobe uses his story to rethink what patriotism means in 2018, and he is “challenging the notions of what it means to belong to one’s country, challenging ideas of nationalism”.

The smaller watercolor studies with their iridescent tonality and splashes of glitter have a heavenly appeal; compressed, subtle portraits of subjects in quietude. These works on paper are placed out of sight from the main gallery, a decision made by Jenkins-Johnson and Shrobe because of the height of the ceiling, creating a more intimate experience for the viewer. The works appear like a secret part of Shrobe’s self and one is prompted to return to them again and again because they are such engaging moments of thoughtful and artistic precision and a possible portal into the mind of this astute and profound artist.



David Shrobe, *Night Vision*, 2018. Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery.



David Shrobe.
PHOTO: MAXIM RYAZANSKY

Artist David Shrobe Creates His Own World Through Found Objects The trending artist uses local materials to reference historical moments

BY ROZALIA JOVANOVIC | MAY 24, 2019

Wooden picture-frame moldings and the arm of a chair are just two of the materials David Shrobe has used in his colorful and jarring mixed-media works. “The neighborhood where my studio was located was notorious for throwing out headboards,” says Shrobe of *Baptized by the Sound of Horns* (2019), a piece that features a man posed like a figure in a Renaissance painting, with lush velvet fabric and black-and-white linoleum floor tiles, and that was the centerpiece of Jenkins Johnson Gallery’s booth at New York’s Armory Show this past March. “I’ve been looking for the right headboard to use for years.”



David Shrobe, *Cross-Over*, 2018.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND
JENKINS JOHNSON GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

Galerie

While his materials are locally sourced and make reference to slavery and the Great Migration—the period from 1916 to 1970, when millions of African-American families relocated from the South to Harlem and other cities in the North, Midwest, and West—his works connect to a broader lineage. “I think about the way I can find an object and through my manipulation it can be in service to something new, almost that I didn’t plan,” he says.



Shrobe was the inaugural artist in residence at the Sugar Hill Children’s Museum in 2015 and was accepted into the Artist in the Marketplace program at the Bronx Museum in 2017. He’s had solo shows at Thierry Goldberg Gallery and Jenkins Johnson and was in the much-discussed show “Punch,” curated by artist Nina Chanel Abney at Jeffrey Deitch Gallery last summer. “He’s creating his own world,” says Jenkins Johnson director Tess Schwab. “And you’re not sure if it’s past or current.”

David Shrobe, *Baptized by the Sound of Horns*, 2019.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JENKINS JOHNSON
GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

A version of this article first appeared in print in our 2019 Summer issue under the headline “State of the Art.”

David Shrobe @ Jenkins Johnson

OCTOBER 10, 2018

by **David M. Roth**



Detail: Night Vision, 2018, oil, acrylic, graphite, paper, canvas, vinyl, fabric, 60 x 49 x 2 inches

Hybrid identity —in particular African-American identity — is the subject of David Shrobe's aptly named debut exhibition, *Somewhere in Between*, at Jenkins Johnson to October 27. It consists of collages and wall-mounted assemblages made from swatches of painted canvas, strips of veneer and vinyl, clothing, stitched fabric, photo transfers and in one notable instance, a chunk of architectural molding, cut to resemble an enormous Victorian-era women's hat. It crowns one of the show's signature pieces, *Spoon Fed*, making the elegant construction so top heavy, it looks as if it could bowl over its female subject. She's seated on a faux rocker made of scrap furniture and embossed tin - the kind that covers the ceilings of many New York lofts.

Shrobe uses these materials to define, embellish and obscure figures and faces. Eyes, one of the few body parts in this modular oeuvre that he doesn't create through abstract means, provide the show's only solid link to concrete corporeality. Nevertheless, his pictures read as formal portraits. His subjects strike regal poses and oftentimes appear in round frames, indicating an attempt on the artist's part to confer dignity on people who in

real life may have had little. Cloaked in layers that literally seal their lips and render them mute, they are, to borrow a line from Jimi Hendrix's *Voodoo Chile*, “a million miles away, and at the same time right here in your picture frame.”

Spoon Fed, 2018, oil, acrylic, charcoal, fabric, wood, metal, and mixed media, 71 x 50 x 3 inches

Speaking in codes — visually, verbally, musically, sartorially — has been a consistent hallmark of African-American life since Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas as slaves 400 years ago. It was (and still is) a survival strategy, arguably more necessary now than at anytime since the Civil Rights era. Shrobe, whose family has occupied the same Harlem building since 1925, is well versed in such strategies, and the virtuosity he displays when fashioning found materials into pictures reflects that background. He gathers them from his immediate neighborhood and from relatives like his 99-year-old great aunt Lucille from whom he gleans quilt blocks, made with a technique that, he says “has been handed down through generations in my family.” But, unlike his forbearers who most likely made quilts out of economic necessity, Shrobe’s employment of their methods constitutes a distinct aesthetic and conceptual choice informed by education: he earned an MFA in painting at Hunter College and was awarded a fellowship at the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture.

His pictures posit a kind of Antebellum Postmodernism, one in which men and women, swathed in mismatched, makeshift “garments,” appear as tangible apparitions, sending out veiled messages about their psychological makeup and their place in a fictive social hierarchy. In it, high and low mix seamlessly, sometimes to otherworldly effect. As a result, decoding his pictures can be something of an anthropological exercise, one in which art-historical arrows point backwards and forwards: to contemporaries like Michelene Thomas, Titus Kaphar and Wangechi Mutu; to Robert Rauschenberg and Romare Beardon; and, most insistently, to painting and to Picasso, who pulled liberally from African tribal art in his early cubist paintings and sculptures.



Spoon Fed, 2018, oil, acrylic, charcoal, fabric, wood, metal, and mixed media, 71 x 50 x 3 inches



Cross-Over, 2018, acrylic and ink on canvas, 34 x 27 inches

Shrobe's works also exhibit strong links to Dada. Some, like *Cross-Over*, a stunning juxtaposition of dissimilar elements, would look right at home in the Cabaret Voltaire (circa 1916) or equally comfortable standing next to Kurt Schwitters' or Hannah Höch's collages. In this, bits of red, purple and black fabric conjoin to form an elegant robe, atop which rests a face half-hidden by a carnival mask made of dotted triangles. The head is enclosed at the top by lighter stains that coalesce to form a helmet, reminiscent of the one worn by the self-proclaimed extraterrestrial jazz musician Sun Ra and those fashioned more recently by Ellen Gallagher.

Stranger still is the Cyclops-like visage seen in *Side Eye*, one of several a riveting small works on paper. Another is *Adams Express*, named for the shipping company that transported a Virginia slave, Henry "Box" Brown, in a coffin-like container to Philadelphia, a freedom journey that lasted 27 hours and threatened his life. In Shrobe's portrait, Brown wears a voluminous red-and-silver tinged Afro; it covers his head like a penumbral cloud with colors bleeding down into the face. Beneath it hovers a suit jacket. It's a bare snippet, probably derived from the same photo on which the portrait is based, but the transfer of it to paper gives off the vaporous look of a fossil imprint. Shrobe is a painter of exceptional skill, and that ability informs everything he does.

Many artists attempt to summon ghosts. Few manage it as effectively as Shrobe. The drape of a Hawaiian shirt in *Knelt*, for example — a mere piece of crumpled rayon — wondrously evokes a man's arm. It bursts from the shoulder of a vest, the latter conjured from spare strokes of white paint on black fabric.

Here it's worth recalling something James Baldwin once said about the topic Shrobe's art so adroitly addresses. "Identity," the author wrote, "would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self: in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which one's nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes."

David Shrobe demonstrates exactly that kind of power.

Fourth-Generation Harlem Artist Challenges What It Means To Be An American

In his exhibition “Homegrown,” David Shrobe chops up and rearranges the traditions of portraiture.

By Priscilla Frank | February 21, 2017



THIERRY GOLDBERG GALLERY

David Shrobe, “Guerrilla Tactics,” 2017, acrylic, graphite, spray paint, tiles, wood, plastic, frame molding, and mixed media, 64 x 59 x 4 inches

In artist David Shrobe’s multimedia work “Guerrilla Tactics,” the edge of a gold picture frame knocks up against a curved slice of mosaic nestled near an emerald-colored plastic crate. A triangular slab of shopping cart hovers atop them. They’re materials you might find piled high in your attic or garage, and pay them little heed.

Through Shrobe’s practice, however, the domestic materials are chopped up, rearranged and reincarnated, forming an unlikely canvas. A ghostly figure hovers atop the amassed materials, his or her invisible face demarcated by a frilly collar and decadent cape. The image of old fashioned nobility is shoved up against the stuff of modern-day detritus, forming a hybrid image that’s hard to place, but harder to shake.

“I’ve been collecting objects from in and around my family’s home in Harlem for many years,” Shrobe, a fourth-generation Harlem resident, wrote in an email to The Huffington Post. “Sometimes they make it into a work, sometimes they sit in the studio for months or years before I find their purpose. I’m often drawn to things that speak to a sense of home, things that are commonplace in our communities. They say a lot about us, from social status to the things we consume and the environments we live in.”



THIERRY GOLDBERG GALLERY
 David Shrobe, “Ear to the Streets,” 2017, oil, graphite, spray paint, wood, frame moldings, silver leaf, and mixed media, 67 x 48 x 2 inches

In his exhibition “Homegrown,” which recently closed at Thierry Goldberg Gallery, Shrobe fuses his found materials into portraits that feel over-crowded and otherworldly. The artist responds to the elitist and exclusive tradition of classical portraiture with a visual display of texture, heterogeneity and abundance, offering an alternative to portraiture’s elitist roots and singular perspective.

With the show’s title, Shrobe hopes to address the current political climate, raising the question of who is deemed a “true American” and why. “It came from questioning ideas about our nationalism and what it means to belong to one’s country or home, and the ways I see that being challenged, both now and throughout history,” he said. “It also speaks to ideas about consumption and domesticity and having a connection to the materials I find.”

Shrobe invites these materials, including clocks and mirrors and doorknobs and ceiling tins, to speak for themselves, allowing viewers to connect to and identify with them as they please. Through literally slicing up traditions of portraiture and rebuilding them anew, he makes space for a new kind of identity, which embraces multiplicity down to its core.

“As a painter, I am always pushing my affinity for painting and interested in what painting can be and how it can function in this contemporary moment,” Shrobe said. “Collapsing divisions between past, present and future gives birth to fragmented portraits, mythological beings and hybridized forms who are not oriented to a specific time or place, but rather floating in a space of disquieting coexistence.”

Shrobe’s work, reminiscent of contemporary artist Titus Kaphar, offers a new model for representation, one that acknowledges the complexity and brokenness of its subjects. The images are especially resonant in this day and age, when complex and composite identities are under threat.

“For me,” Shrobe said, “it’s about asking questions through the materials I use and creating new meaning from the histories that are inherent in the images and objects I reposition and the art historical canon from which I borrow and bring into a new context — that of my own. To create spaces within which new forms and mixtures become indigenized; figures imbued with a sense of heroism and who embrace their humanity, while challenging what it means to be an American in these turbulent times.”



THIERRY GOLDBERG GALLERY
 David Shrobe, “Tight Ship,” 2016, oil, acrylic, wood, metal, frame moldings, doorknobs, silver leaf, and mixed media, 77 x 71.5 x 5.5 inches

Mocking Materialism with Collage

In his exhibition at Thierry Goldberg Gallery, David Shrobe uses the nonsensical and irrational as tonics for the relentless instrumentalization of what we purchase and consume.

Seph Rodney | February 14, 2017



Installation view, *David Shrobe: Homegrown* at Thierry Goldberg Gallery (all installation views courtesy Thierry Goldberg Gallery and all installation photos by Dan Bradica)

The first time I saw David Shrobe's work, it was in images online. My judgment was almost immediate: I thought the pieces were derivative, just amalgamated and ersatz versions of Yinka Shonibare, Wangechi Mutu, and *maybe* Nick Cave. Then a friend who's more familiar with Shrobe's work said I should nevertheless see the work in person. So I visited Thierry Goldberg Gallery for Shrobe's exhibition *Homegrown* and came to understand that his assemblages are really his own — not anyone else's, though there are visual, material, and strategic elements in his work that are evocative of other artists, like flavor notes I recognize for having tasted them before in other wines.

HYPERALLERGIC

Shrobe's odd, off-kilter assemblages often contain a figure in colonial period clothing (that's the Shonibare allusion), though their faces are almost always obscured. The first work I encountered, "Guerrilla Tactics" (2017), features a mixture of tiles, a broken rubber ball, plastic crates of different types, and remnants of wood frames. White paper has been cut to make a set of lips for the central figure, and the same sort of paper is shaped as a ring around his neck, with the design of a 16th-century ruffled collar drawn on top. (Using the paper as both substrate for the drawn image and part of the image itself also reminds me of Tschabalala Self, who has shown at the same gallery.) The result suggests a courtly figure made up of odds and ends, a faux monarch styled in the "fake it 'til you make it" ethos.

In other pieces, found materials figure more prominently, like the doorknobs and frame moldings of "Tight Ship" (2016) — the glass knobs set within metal brought me back to my childhood in the north Bronx — or the tablet that would normally be attached to the arm of a high school chair desk in "Tight Rope" (2015). These objects made me think of Cave's work, while the raw and slightly disturbing urgency of the figure bending backwards in "Tight Rope" also brought Mutu to mind.

But Shrobe is employing all these images and items to get at something deeper: the Dadaist tactic of mocking materialistic (in the sense of items indicative of social status) concerns, using the nonsensical and irrational as tonics for the relentless instrumentalization of what we purchase and consume to advertise the personas we want to project. In these collages, the who is often hidden. Look at "Protector of Mothers" (2015): it has a figure that's almost an urban traveler, with Nike shoes, a hand with dark skin, the ubiquitous backpack. But this figure wears a pre-modern white shirt with very wide sleeves and has a head that consists of an African mask seen in profile. More, the shadow it casts is a celestial being with a glowing sun for a head and a body made up of images of outer space pockmarked with galaxies and bright planetary bodies. Yes, Shrobe seems to be saying, we are made of star stuff, but we are holding that stuff together with spit and bailing wire and whatever else lies at hand.

It's a welcome thing to find not only that my initial judgments were mistaken (so I have the opportunity to learn something new), but that Shrobe is an artist who's making collage that is alive, useful, and evocative of the complexity of our contemporary moment.



David Shrobe "Tight Rope" (2015), oil, stain, wood, metal, cardboard, and mixed media, 73 x 65 x 4 inches (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

An Artist Transforms Debris into Sculptures of Home and History

Scraps of metal, signage, and wood moldings are turned into powerful compositions about the experience of home.

By Antwaun Sargent | February 1, 2017



DAVID SHROBE, KNIGHT SHRINE, 2016, OIL, GRAPHITE, PENCIL, SPRAY PAINT, WOOD, METAL, AND MIXED MEDIA, 66 X 86 X 5 INCHES

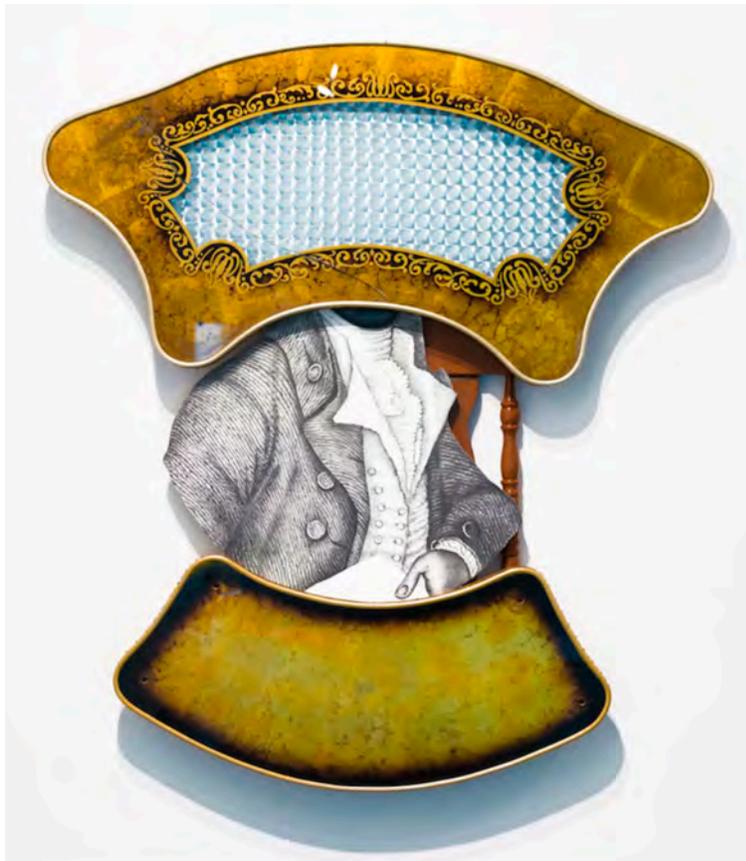
The things we keep at home can tell of varied experiences, symbolizing the politics of living. In David Shrobe's *Homegrown*, a new exhibition at Thierry Goldberg Gallery, the artist collects debris and turns it into art. The scraps of metal, signage, paper, wood moldings and tatters Shrobe found around his family's home in central Harlem and at other temporary residences have been transformed into assemblage sculptures and mixed-media paintings.

"*Homegrown* involves work I created during my recent residencies at the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling, and Fountainhead Residency in Miami, as well as a few newer works created in my studio which is housed in an apartment in Harlem that my great grandfather bought for our family in 1925," explains Shrobe to The Creators Project.

All three of the places have served as a home for the artist in different ways. The works in the exhibition are constructed from the found objects, ephemera, and remnants of the community to "communicate fragmented narratives" that map the artist's past and present "social landscape."

Shrobe's *Distant Relative*, a portrait of a female figure composed of tattered pieces of paper, speaks to the ways that materials help the artist explore concepts of lineage. "Appropriating imagery from multiple sources, and converging a range of media with formal techniques, allows me to manipulate and explore both content and form, and speaks to my multilayered approach to constructing an image or work, which you see in works such as *Tight Ship*, *Ethereal Plane*, and *Knight Shine*," explains Shrobe. *Tight Ship*, constructed in part from materials found in Harlem and his family home, alludes to the Great Migration, the period from 1910 to 1970 where African American families moved from the South to settle in places like Harlem. The piece also conjures the history of slavery in the Americas and the development of the African diaspora.

Shrobe's use of materials draws on a tradition of assemblage art commonly associated with David Hammons, Thornton Dial, Leonardo Drew, and the California assemblage artists John Outterbridge, Betye Saar, and Noah Purifoy. That generation of artists like Shrobe are defined by a black materiality. The significance of Purifoy's *Junk Dada*, and Shrobe's *Tight Ship*, is in the overlooked matter that show the way a people build, maintain, and sometimes rebuild their communities.



DAVID SHROBE, ETHEREAL PLANE, 2016, OIL, GRAPHITE, WOOD, METAL, AND MIXED MEDIA, 48 X 43 X 4 INCHES

"I'm interested in the remnants," explains the artist. "The leftovers; things left behind, and how through my manipulation they become in service to something else, something new that shifts and evolves their appearance and identity and might have the power to shift or evolve our perception of what we know or think we know." He says, "My will to combine the materials is driven by a need to reclaim and piece together meaning from the histories that are inherently found in the images and objects I revise, while challenging assumptions about our nationalism and the construction of the historical narrative."