

Textured Takes on Classical Portraiture: A Review of David Shrobe at moniquemeloche

BY VASIA RIGOU | FEBRUARY 15, 2024



David Shrobe, "Mother," 2023, acrylic, suede, charcoal on paper, and reverse side of found mirror frame, 24" x 20" x 2"/Photo: David Shrobe and moniquemeloche

"Natural Sovereignty" gives classical portraiture an unexpected twist. Oil, acrylic and silk fabric, suede, flocking on canvas, charcoal on paper, and deconstructed furniture are all parts of David Shrobe's work, often mounted on wood tabletops, ornate foil frames, or the reverse side of found mirrors. His materials hold historical and cultural significance, and his subjects—found in family members, strangers on the streets of his neighborhood in Harlem, art historical references, literary sources, as well as online archives—are vibrant, colorful and multilayered, much like the work itself.

Essentially a deep dive into family life, heritage and identity among BIPOC communities, the exhibition brings race, memory and materiality together—a nudge to stop, think and consider the rich tapestry of experiences that inform our contemporary understanding of Blackness. Shrobe uses his own family photos as a departure point. His work involves intricate assemblage, collage, drawing and painting, and his figures, found in familiar domestic settings like homes and gardens or in casual gatherings with friends, straddle the boundary between the real and the fantastical, navigating the delicate balance between the tangible and the imagined. Vivid colors, swirling backgrounds, and a diverse combination of patterns and textures infuse his work with



deep cultural resonance, celebrating the resilience and vitality inherent in BIPOC communities.

David Shrobe, "Pure Light Energy (Nature Within)," 2023, oil and acrylic on canvas mounted on panel with ornate foil frame, 30" x 27"/Photo: David Shrobe and moniquemeloche

Shrobe's work is as formally motivated as it is political—it places people of color within historical and art historical narratives, thereby reimagining and reclaiming their stories in the face of systemic injustices. Importantly, the exhibition goes beyond merely celebrating Black heritage and culture; it actively confronts and broadens the conventional boundaries of portraiture, using it as a means of exploring

identity. By acting as a conduit between past and present, it fosters a conversation between historical and contemporary perspectives, reevaluating history to make it relevant today. "Natural Sovereignty" is about looking beyond the surface.

"David Shrobe: Natural Sovereignty" is on view at [moniquemeloche](https://moniquemeloche.com), 451 North Paulina, through March 16.



David Shrobe, "Transition Mode," 2023, oil, acrylic, charcoal, faux plant, silk, wool, printed paper, suede, linen, leather, painted canvas, on carved joined wood panels, 71" x 58" x 2"/Photo: David Shrobe and moniquemeloche