

AARON MICHAEL SKOLNICK
UNDER THE EYES OF A DRY MOUNTAIN
OCTOBER 13–NOVEMBER 27, 2022

“Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give them, when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts?”

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Men go back to the mountains, as they go back to sailing ships at sea, because in the mountains and on the sea they must face up.”

–Henry David Thoreau

“Perhaps home is not a place but an irrevocable condition.”

–James Baldwin

MARCH is pleased to announce the opening of *Under the Eyes of a Dry Mountain*, a solo exhibition of recent paintings by Aaron Michael Skolnick. Created primarily *en plein air*, this body of work depicts woodlands surrounding the artist’s home and studio in Old Chatham, New York.

Throughout his life, Skolnick has returned to the woods; they have served as solace, as a stage for self-reflection and distillation. Of late, he has spent hours in the forest surrounding his home, rolling a portable studio (easel, paint, brushes) across rocks, sticks, and mud to a place where he finds an opening in the tree line or some other focal point of interest. The resulting works are permeated by a sense of solitude, filled with traces of the artist’s private memories, and yet firmly rooted in the present.

Skolnick’s practice began as a highly conceptual exercise, over time easing into figurative explorations, positioning the male body as an ever-changing landscape in a series of documentative drawings. His subsequent erotic self-portraiture continued to explore place-making through articulation of the male body, but ultimately lead him away from the figure altogether. This passage through varying terrain has been gradual; at times it is contradictory. Regardless of the subject, Skolnick’s way of moving through the landscape is consistent, whether guiding us between trees or bodies, grass or hair, branches or limbs.

Under the Eyes of a Dry Mountain refers to the ten paintings in the south gallery, Skolnick’s most extensive *plein air* series to date. If home is an irrevocable condition, then it must have far more to do with how we find ourselves than where. This body of work is about a physical place as much as it is about a way of being, a state that Skolnick has returned to throughout his life regardless of age or geography. These works represent months of study and presence in what James Baldwin might have called a “condition.” They are an invitation, a proposition to spend some time—whether it be seconds or many minutes—simply being in this place and noticing what appears.

The paintings in the north gallery orbit this expression of belonging, straightforward yet brimming with clues. Folds of camouflage fabric echo the artist’s surroundings and allude to hidden identity, books readily present their titles, inviting us to make parallels and seek common ground. Nature serves as an autobiographical motif, offering beautiful scenes while humming with deeper implications. Discarded clothing left undisrupted serves as a trace, a sign that someone was here long before our arrival.

In some ways, this body of work is a return to the conceptual. In others, it intimates an ongoing reconciliation of the literal and the abstract. The duality dissolves as real, sensory scenes are imbued with unbreakable associations and memories. The challenges of Skolnick’s early life and the expansive philosophies of history and culture that delivered him intertwine, culminating in an environment created for respite, reminding us of our own irrevocable conditions. Here is a place for returning to oneself, a way of coming home or somewhere like it.

Aaron Michael Skolnick was born in 1989 in Erlanger, Kentucky and is currently based in Old Chatham, New York. He received a BFA from the University of Kentucky in 2012. His previous solo exhibitions include *To Drag the Earth with a Sleepy Rhythm* at Ochi Projects (Sun Valley, ID), *Between Two Suns* at MARCH (Taylor County, KY), *Your Voice Lying Gently In My Ear* at Institute 193 (1B) (New York, NY), *Feel It on Their Faith* at Incident Report (Hudson, NY), *A Landscape that I Know* at Fierman Gallery (New York, NY), *Running Where We Stand* at Glacier Gallery (Cincinnati, OH), and *Pick Me Up and Turn Me Round* at Institute 193 (Lexington, KY), among others.

Skolnick has also exhibited at September Gallery (Hudson, NY), United Artists Space (Los Angeles, CA), Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (Atlanta, GA), KMAC (Louisville, KY), and RARE Gallery (New York, NY). He has given guest lectures at the Speed Museum (Louisville, KY) and the University of Kentucky (Lexington, KY), and attended the Maple Terrace artist residency (Brooklyn, NY) in 2018. Skolnick received the Theophilia Joan Oexmann Original Art Award and the Merit Award of Excellence from the University of Kentucky in 2012. He has been represented by MARCH since 2020.