

## MICHAEL SCOTT: FOUND

DAVID RICHARD GALLERY  
544 SOUTH GUADALUPE STREET, SANTA FE

### IN THE PAST, MICHAEL SCOTT CREATED SEVERAL CYCLES OF SLYLY

humorous narrative paintings, all rendered with virtuosic technique in the style of Old Master portraiture, still life, and tableau paintings. There has often been an element of theatrical unveiling in his work, including painted curtains that have been drawn apart. This present show, *Found*, demonstrates a departure from using didactic narrative, and, in the artist's words, is intended "to pitch you out in time and space." There may still be an unveiling taking place, but the viewer takes on some responsibility and willingness to bear with uncertainty; to slip back and forth across a delicate threshold between the arbitrariness and the strictness of collaged images; images that suggest a dialogue about something that is not necessarily graspable in a literal way. The means for suggesting this journey, according to Scott, has been to present "porthole" ideas: layered forms and shapes (haloes, chains, wheels, crosses, eggs, eyes) that in one way

or another spur the intelligence, seed the intuition, and (hopefully) stimulate a pathway to the sublime.

Last winter, while Scott was walking the streets of San Miguel de Allende and Mexico City, he noted churches whose exterior walls were beautified by exquisitely decaying surfaces. Curious about the fact that the evolution of decay could speak such poetry and evoke vibrant, non-specified memories in a way that sterile, brand-new surfaces do not, Scott entered the churches and observed the communicants within. Repeatedly, he found people absorbed in prayer for long stretches of time, apparently in intense communion with images of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ. Scott began to question how the conversation with a higher power actually transpired. He wondered what the underpinnings of religious preoccupation actually are, but most especially, he asked, "Who is Mary after all?"

This wondering tied in with Scott's long-standing observation of a thriving mysticism and surrealism present in Latin American cultures in general. What is it that predisposes a people to line up on the street, paying for street corner mystics to dispense purifying rituals, replete with rings of fire and incantations? Gullibility and susceptibility, the ardent belief in form—are these human propensities a curse or a blessing? Scott recognizes that the yearning for communion and surrender that is implicit in formal acts of supplication is not to be despised. Efficacy of means, whatever it takes, is primary.

It is challenging and daring to propose the idea of "The Holy Mother Mary" as the driving concept behind a body of work. After all, just how far can most of us go with Mary, an idea already so overloaded with stale, limited concepts? At first glance, not very far at all. But once you take in the delicious pigments, the arabesques of rhythm, the fine and subtle relationships

of texture in these fiercely worked collaged paintings, and once you recognize the fusion of the decorative and representative functions of the paintings that Scott has made thoughtful efforts to tease out, the curious viewer has an opportunity to take it further. Of course that's true with any painting: it lives only through the person who is looking at it, attempting a dialogue and being willing to follow unknown leads. This is particularly true with this body of work, whose subject matter remains mysterious and undecided.

The ideas that surface for me in these complex paintings have small purchase in my own psyche. I think: Mary as Mother, as Virgin, as Lover (Mary Magdalene), and though this sounds like it could be an apt, if extremely streamlined, portrait of the feminine principle, I don't know where to go with it. However gorgeously conceived, these celestially kaleidoscopic dreamscapes are unavailable to me as vehicles that might inspire surrender. Though the instinct to establish some kind of vivid, abiding contact with our basic nature is fundamental to human life, our paths in this matter come to us randomly, and only sometimes through religion. Traditionally, God usually has rather definite intentions to do something—say, to produce a world for instance—and he may therefore be unnecessarily dramatic. On the other hand, the manifestations of what are loosely labeled as the feminine aspect tend to be more accidental and playful, or embryonic: it embellishes itself, puts on makeup; it expresses itself by demonstrating some sort of glamour, whatever it may be: passion, aggression, seduction, loving kindness, the sheer ferocity of life... attributes churning beneath the surface of things. Maybe that's what people will find so compelling about Mary in these paintings: her all-accommodating nature invites scrutiny, and if one happens to have the right temperament, she may awaken those mysterious capacities that direct us toward the eternally flawless.

Most remarkable is the luminosity that these hybrid works of art manifest. These intensely worked images on stainless steel are the fruition of intense labor and unique methodology—collaging, painting, grinding, carving, varnishing—that allow a radiance to ripple through, ever changing, according to one's state of mind and the quality of light. Their large format indicates that they are meant to be looked up to—ideally, surrendered to—and gazed at from different angles and distances. The full "pop" will not occur in a cursory glance; rather, fresh images and connections blossom over time and with patient communion.

—RINCHEN LHAMO



Michael Scott, *III*, mixed media on steel, 68" x 48", 2014