

October 07, 2018

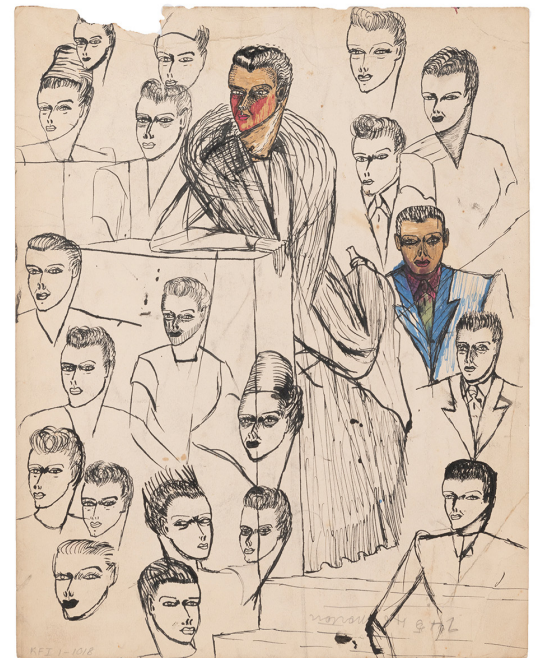
INSTITUTE 193 (1B) + ARTIST ST. EOM

If you are a long-time reader of our Journal, you might be familiar with Phillip March Jones and Institute 193. Phillip is a friend and collaborator who founded the non-profit gallery, venue, and publishing house, Institute193 located in Lexington, Kentucky. He is also an artist, photographer, and author—and most recently opened a collaborative project space in New York’s East Village called Institute 193 (1B).

The space debuts with an inaugural exhibition featuring the work of Eddie Owens Martin, curated by Annie Moye and Michael McFalls. If you are in the New York area, visit Institute 193 (1B) until November 3rd to see this show in person. We share curator Annie Moye’s write up about the life and work of Eddie Martin aka “St. EOM” below.

Eddie Owens Martin, who later in life referred to himself as St. EOM, once told his friend Fred Fussell that when he lay down to go to bed at night, “the back of my head is like a cinemascope screen.” “When I get up,” he continued, “that’s what I [paint].” In fact, a lot of St. EOM’s works are like Hollywood dreams remembered, recalled, and reimagined. He received his first vision in 1935 during an illness while visiting his mother’s farm, and it was of a man “like some kind of god, with arms big around as watermelons.” The giant Pasaquoyan, as St. EOM called him, asked him to follow his spirit, which the new saint agreed to do, and from then on, St. EOM’s dancing and posing figures were all given a Pasaquoyan “twist.”

After hitchhiking his way from the rural southwest Georgia town of Buena Vista to New York City at the age of 14 in 1922, St. EOM had his eyes open for opportunities to learn about people and cultures. He spent much of his time in museums and institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the New York Public Library. Of course, during the thirty years he lived in the city, he was also looking to learn about himself. He told his biographer Tom Patterson, “For a while after I first got to New York, I was confused in my mind ‘bout whether I should be on the gay side or on the other side, and I had that complex about this manliness stuff that they try to lay on you in this society.” EOM’s struggle with his own identity is clearly reflected in his works of the time. Much like Henry Darger’s Vivian Girls, St. EOM’s city-slicker Pasaquoyans are non-binary, constantly blurring the line between masculine and feminine.

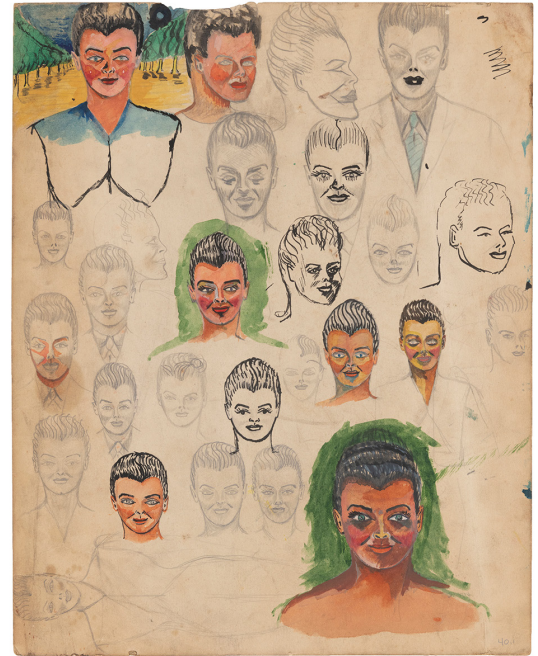


Eddie Owens Martin Untitled, n.d., Watercolor and pen on paper, 14 x 11.25 inches

Pasaquan’s director, Michael McFalls, sees this sexual ambiguity as a reflection of St. EOM’s interest in the visual culture of the roaring ‘20s and the jazz age of the ‘40s and ‘50s. Indeed, St. EOM often visited (or worked in) the bars that were frequented by movie stars and jazz legends of New York, and he re-imagined the people he met in those spaces as Pasaquoyans. As Fussell notes, too, not only was St. EOM studying works in museums, but he was also looking at fashion magazines, movies of the time, and books about Hollywood’s stars. The Pasaquoyans have broad, sharp shoulders, presumably from the popular shoulder pads of the time, and their outfits are angular and brightly colored, their shapes idealized and heroic. In true Pasaquoyan style, however, female bodies in these works may be given masculine facial features—and vice versa. Again, as Darger’s *Vivian Girls* look almost like dolls, so do Pasaquoyans look like mannequins whose faces are replicated on an assembly line.

As a male prostitute and hustler, St. EOM also created images that reflect his complicated fantasies about class. As interested as St. EOM was in the glam and movie stars of the period, he was also reflecting on his own relationship with that distant, idealized world in both his art and his life. Drag queens he met in Union Square and on 42nd Street — performers like Tillie the Toiler, “Gloria Swanson,” and “Greta Garbo” — are depicted in his drawings as high-fashion individuals of the late-night scene, and EOM himself worked his “Cream and Peach” powder and bleached-blond hair in an attempt to attract the “Maltese husbands” who would fund his city shenanigans.

While most people are familiar with St. EOM’s largest work of art, the seven-acre visionary art environment outside of Buena Vista, Georgia, called Pasaquan, lesser known are his brilliant — and almost compulsively drawn and painted — works on paper. The inaugural show at (1B), Institute 193’s brand new New York space on the Lower East Side, features a collection of these never-before-exhibited works that depict figures who are a mixture of both the real characters St. EOM met during his time in New York City and the futuristic, utopian, and gender-fluid Pasaquoyans he encountered in visions and in dreams. They are post-vision and pre-Pasaquan — Pasaquoyans in the city, as the show title has it — crafted during a time when St. EOM’s own identity was in flux. Primarily created between 1935 and 1957, these works showcase St. EOM’s talents as a fashion designer and represent his ambitions as an artist.



Eddie Owens Martin, *Untitled*, n.d., Watercolor and graphite on paper, 14 x 11.25 inches

Eddie Owens Martin
Pasaquoyan in the City: Fashioning a Southern Saint

Curated by Annie Moyer and Michael McFalls
September 26 – November 3, 2018

Institute 193 (1B)
292 East Third Street, 1B New York, New York 10009

About the author:

A native of Lumpkin, GA, Annie Moye received her Master's degree in American Studies in 2012 from Kennesaw State University and is currently enrolled in Georgia State University's Public History PhD program. In 2016, she was elected the chair of the Pasaquan Preservation Society and has since overseen the art environment's grand re-opening after a two-year restoration project by the Kohler Foundation Inc., the successful debut of a Pasaquoyan opera, and the planning of an arts and music festival to be held on site at Pasaquan this November 10. Moye lives in Smyrna, GA, with her husband, Craig Watson, and three cats: Fiona Apple Maggart, Joan Mitchell, and Elizabeth Bishop.

Lead image:

Left: Installation view of Pasaquoyan in the City: Fashioning a Southern Saint at Institute 193 (1B), New York; right: Eddie Owens Martin Untitled, n.d., Watercolor and pen on paper, 14 x 11.25 inches

All images courtesy of Institute 193 and the Columbus State University Foundation.