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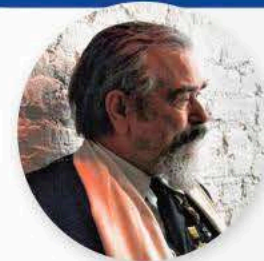
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## Eye-catcher

Joe Coleman's new Nolita gallery exhibit demands your concentration  
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Art by Halim Flowers



LOVE IS THE VACCINE  
HALIM A. FLOWERS



PHOTO BY BOB KRASNER

Joe Coleman with his latest work, "The Sorcerer's Mirror at 100 Seconds to Midnight", which took him five years to complete

# Staring back

Joe Coleman's '100 Seconds to Midnight' at Nolita gallery demands your attention to detail

BY BOB KRASNER

It's easy to get lost in Joe Coleman's world. His latest show, "100 Seconds to Midnight" at the Andrew Edlin Gallery in Nolita has only four pieces, but they are dense, fascinating works that demand your extended concentration (and possibly a magnifying glass — happily provided by the gallery).

Produced using a single-hair paintbrush and jeweler's goggles, the creations are a deep dive into Coleman's mind and the state of the planet and society.

"The Sorcerer's Mirror at 100 Seconds to Midnight," the main artwork in the show, took him five years to complete. It changed as the

world changed, with the election of Donald Trump and COVID specifically affecting the direction of the completed piece.

"The painting tells me when it is finished," he had notably declared in a previous interview. In this case that didn't happen until he had worked in numerous quotes and images with references to black holes, ancient civilizations, COVID, his parents, love, nuclear annihilation, hope, serenity, Trump, terrorists, global warming, the Doomsday Clock, his wife Whitney Ward and himself.

The act of putting his image into his work is not one of ego but the result of his view of existence.

"I've said this before," he begins,

"but in a way every single painting that I do is a self-portrait anyway. Because I'm the only one that I really know exists. I'm experiencing this so called world — this so called reality — from inside this vehicle of flesh and bone. The only true view of life that I can have is a self-portrait."

Coleman goes on to describe his methods, making the results even more impressive: "I don't sketch it out, I don't preconceive what the painting is. It tells me what it wants. Maybe it's my subconscious communicating with me, I don't know. When it's done I don't necessarily analyze it, but I learn about myself from it."

It's not surprising that the art-

ist spends the better part of each week — a regime of five days a week, eight hours a day — painting while listening to music (which can be anything from rockabilly, classical, jazz, blues, or country), chatting with Whitney while he works and even thinking about the paintings on the days away from the studio, which keeps him pretty much immersed in his art.

What is surprising is that Coleman has no problem letting the work go as soon as a piece is complete.

"I like them to leave as soon as I'm done with them," he admits. "We don't have kids and they are kind of like my children — and I want my children to get out of the house. I want them to go and communicate with the world and have their own life. Whitney, on the other hand, has a hard time giving them up."

Although Coleman works in an extremely small, detailed manner that might bring to mind those rare paintings that have been made on the head of a pin, he's not interested

in the act as an attempt at attention.

"I'm more after the ritual and the drama found in religious art," Coleman explains, mentioning influences such as Bosch, Bruegel, the Flemish Primitives, and Van Eyck. "I'm not sure that I believe in God — I'm not saying there isn't a god, but I'm not sure. There's something about faith — not necessarily faith in god, but just getting up in the morning is an act of faith. It's something about the passion end of the minute painting that has to do with the attempt at putting down something spiritual. I'm after an act of devotion, a sacrificial amount of time given to my work."

As for what people take away from his paintings, Coleman muses that he "can't control what people see or think about them and I don't need to. But it doesn't really matter. It's not important. The work itself is its own thing outside of me."

Joe Coleman: *100 Seconds to Midnight* runs through March 18. Gallery info is here: [edlingallery.com/exhibitions/joe-coleman-100-seconds-to-midnight](http://edlingallery.com/exhibitions/joe-coleman-100-seconds-to-midnight)