

CRISTIN TIERNEY

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

DREAD SCOTT | "GODDAM"



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Written by Simran Tuteja

In the 20th century, Nina Simone performed protest songs named Mississippi Goddam, and Four Women. Drawing inspiration from the songs, Dread Scott's *Goddam* consisting of four pieces namely, *Goddam*, *Four Women*, *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free*, and *Pirate Jenny* has been on exhibition since April 28, 2023 and will run till June 24, 2023 at Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York. Simone's songs capture the bitter truth of the society, that is, white supremacy and patriarchy have been dictating the world for the longest time and still affect us massively. Even though decades have passed, these songs are still relevant to this day and Scott manages to portray that skillfully and artistically via screen print on canvas.

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Nina Simone responded to the murders of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers in Mississippi and the Baptist church bombing in Alabama with the song Mississippi Goddam. The song criticizes the state allowing crime against Black communities to take place. Dread Scott uses a photograph of the US Capitol overlapped by outlines of Florida, Texas, Minnesota and Georgia as the background with the word "GODDAM!" printed over the images in red. In recent events, these states stand out when it comes to hate crimes against Black people, women and the LGBTQIA+ community. Scott utilizes his art to connect to an audience willing to listen to his commentary on American politics through an artistic lens.

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Scott based Pirate Jenny, a piece central to the exhibition, on the song Pirate Jenny. In his interpretation of the song, Jenny is a black waitress or barista and her persecutor is the police. On the right side of the canvas, the artist uses a black and white photograph of a waitress with a gold background superimposed with drawings of pirates with sabers warding off a police car. On the left side, he uses a saturated blood red background on top of photographs from a Black Lives Matter demonstration with a police car on fire. He invites the audience to ponder whether the protestors are the modern day pirates who have taken to the streets because a barista (modern-day Jenny) was disrespected.

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The artist brings forward the problems of discrimination the society is still facing till date. Through *Goddam*, Scott unabashedly points out how white supremacy is becoming more apparent in our everyday lives. In our politics, in our media, any media which Americans consume is opening up to political commentary. He indulges the audience by presenting the truth of the past that still haunts our present and asks them to acknowledge the injustice faced by the Black, female and LGBTQIA+ communities. He holds a mirror up to our society and asks the audience how much has changed since Nina Simone's protest songs era.

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Dread Scott has been encouraging his audience to question the ideals of American society for three decades. His work was outlawed by the US Senate in 1989 and President Bush called it 'disgraceful' because of the way Scott used the American flag. He burned flags on the steps of the Capitol hence becoming a part of a Supreme Court case. His works have been exhibited at MoMA/PS1, Whitney Museum, Brooklyn Museum and many more. He was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Frieze Impact Prize and a Purchase Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2021. The same year, his NFT White Male for Sale was named one of the defining artworks of the year by ARTnews. His studio is in Brooklyn, New York.