

NEW EDITION

## *Mitchell Squire: Gladiators*

By Susan Tallman

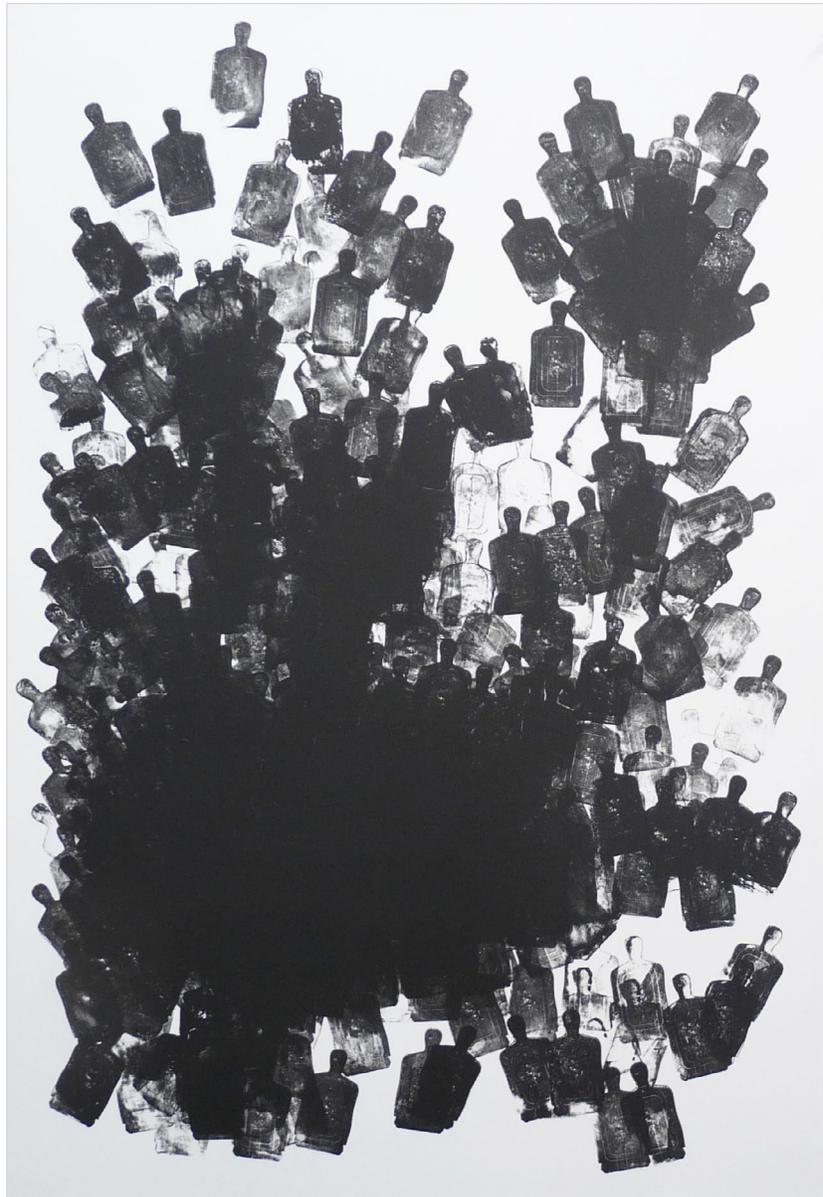
### *Gladiators* (2013)

Lithograph, 44 x 30 inches. Edition of 44. Printed by Maurice Sanchez at Derrière L'Etoile Studios, New York. Published by World House Editions, Middlebury, CT. \$2500.

**B**lack, white and gray, the image of Mitchell Squire's *Gladiators* (2013) is built from a single shape, irregularly repeated like a rubber stamp in the hands of a toddler. The shapes flock and separate over the sheet of paper, accumulate in an impenetrable cloud in one part then scatter off at the edges into free-floating, individual iterations. There is a Johnsian elegance to it: the way the black gives way to gray and the porous quality of the inking, which allows some impressions of the shape to register as little more than ghostly outlines, while others appear solid, and still others are animated by eruptions of white spots.

The shape itself is curious: a slope-shouldered rectangle with a knob at the top, it has the arbitrary, dinged perimeter of a found object, but what? A bottle perhaps? (Some show the concentric incised lines sported by certain colognes.) One of those oversized wooden spatulas used for slinging pizzas in and out of the oven? One has to get close and look carefully to realize that these are targets—not Johnsian concentric circles, but the shooting range-human torso kind: the knob is a head, the slope shoulders are in fact shoulders, and the peppering of light at the center, where the white paper peeps through the ink in constellations, are bullet holes.

This realization changes everything: the black cloud becomes a black crowd, which becomes a morgue. What had seemed a formal conceit—



Mitchell Squire, *Gladiators* (2013).

one area of indiscriminately merged marks; another where each form is something in its own right—acquires

social connotations: the anonymous mass of darkness continues to suggest something unknowable and danger-

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ous, while the individual targets now look like victims. The fact that the one is made up of the other demands consideration. Given that this is America, where black people are ten times more likely to be shot to death than white people, the ink color would appear to be more than an aesthetic choice.<sup>1</sup>

Squire, who frequently employs found objects in his sculpture, video and installations, has worked with shooting-range targets before. *Untitled I-4* (2005) used “bulk law enforcement targets”—dense pads of human-sized sheets of paper, framed and hung on the wall. From a distance they have the elegance of a scroll painting but up close they are viscerally violent, the centers blown to smithereens. *Gladiators* is less abrupt in its trip from seduction to dread, but makes its point just as powerfully. ■

1. Dan Keating, “Gun Deaths Shaped By Race in America,” *The Washington Post*, 22 March 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/feature/wp/2013/03/22/gun-deaths-shaped-by-race-in-america/>.