

Intervening Discomfort:
Reimagined Curation of Pieces in *Beautiful, Vivid, Self-contained*

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Hill Art Foundation
April 18th, 2023



Walter Price, *Discomfort*, 2022. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed. Collection of
David Lewis and Anne Ackerley, New York.

Placed on the fourth floor of the Hill Art Foundation, *Discomfort* is directly across from the bronze statue *Strigil Bearer* by the Italian sculptor, Andrea Riccio. It is a statement on tradition versus modernity, conveyed through imagery, historical context, and color scheme.

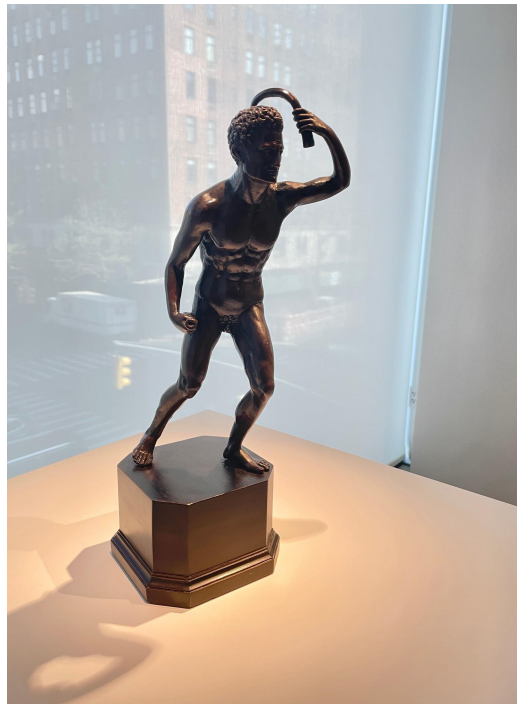
Discomfort by Walter Price uses the alarming nature of the color red paired with the scattered layering of the many entities containing body parts, varying faces, chairs, and other objects giving the audience an unsettled sensation. Many images can be spotted on the canvas, for example, a menagerie of deformed furniture under a strange red crescent moon. In the middle of the canvas, contour silhouettes of men can be seen, cut off at the neck or shoulders. They are seemingly floating among the array of furniture. It's a combination of familiar objects like furniture one would see in a home paired with abstract painterly strokes; two completely unlike objects juxtaposed to provoke an unsettled feeling. Price is known for precisely this, as his goal is to make the audience feel comfortable with the uncomfortable.¹

Discomfort is reminiscent of injury, the scraping of the skin, and disfiguration. These ideas are provoked by the grainy textures in the paint strokes and furthered by the reds, browns,

¹ “Pearl Lines by Walter Price – dancing with whiteness”, Enuma Okoro, Financial Times, April 24 2021

and yellows that resemble excrement and blood. Despite this, when looking closely and under specific lighting, viewers can observe a sheen of glitter coating the canvas. Price uses this to convey the idea of welcoming discomfort. Though the contents of his composition are unusual, Price uses glitter to package *Discomfort* in an attractive exterior to invite viewers to further examine the artwork.

Evidently, from the name of the sculpture, the athlete is “bearing,” rather than holding the strigil. This specific wording is utilized in creating and setting a determined tone. The athlete



Andrea Riccio, *Strigil Bearer*, cast circa 1515–20. Bronze, 12 3/4 × 5 7/8 × 5 7/8 inches (32.4 × 14.9 × 14.9 cm).

Photo: *Angela Lin, New York.*

stands with one leg forward in a swift and tenacious movement. It is as if he is facing an opponent and is charging with the strigil in hand as a weapon. In ancient Greece, strigils were used by athletes to remove dust and sweat from their bodies. Depictions of athletes using strigils were common subjects in antiquity and the Renaissance. Perhaps the best-known antique example of this theme is *The Vatican Apoxyomenos*—Apoxyomenos meaning “The Scraper”—by the Greek sculptor Lysippos. Riccio references this statue with bronze casting rather than carving marble. Using bronze is significant because, in ancient times, strigils were commonly made of bronze. A key difference between the two statues is the athlete’s stance and

the different uses of the strigil. The action of “bearing” is usually paired with the use of a weapon, creating a double meaning in the strigil. The *Strigil Bearer* is bearing his “weapon,” while also standing in a position that insinuates a conflict.

With these ideas in mind, the juxtaposition of *Discomfort* and *Strigil Bearer* is a play on tradition versus the new. The Price painting resembles grime on the wall while the *Strigil Bearer* is attempting to cleanse it. Riccio’s Renaissance statue is representative of tradition, old-fashioned practices of thinking and art. It is this era of art that often is pitted against modern art, especially art made by people of color such as Price. He describes his process as learning to dance with whiteness, referring to the white-dominated art industry that his works strive to defy.² It is interesting to have Riccio’s traditional artwork in a combative stance against Price’s painting that breaks from tradition, especially with the presence of the strigil, almost as if the Strigil Bearer aims to cleanse the symbolic “grime” of modern art that *Discomfort* symbolizes.

The two pieces are hidden behind a hallway, which allows audiences to walk into the room from around the corner as if stumbling onto the pairing. Since the strigil cleanses the skin of all its impurities, it is placed in front of *Discomfort*, a piece that resembles scraped skin. This metaphor of cleansing wounds conveys that the *Strigil Bearer* is faced off against *Discomfort* in conflict and the works recognize each other as enemies. When juxtaposed, they create a complete narrative. The audience in this sense has two choices: they can choose to feel uncomfortable or face their discomfort head-on like the *Strigil Bearer*. Alongside this, viewers are also invited to ruminate on how Price’s work is challenged by old-fashioned notions of thinking. Overall, the juxtaposition within this curation is to encourage open-mindedness, whether it is to assist with overcoming conflicts or, to be more accepting of the new, no matter how much it can cause discomfort at first glance.

² “Pearl Lines by Walter Price – dancing with whiteness”, Enuma Okoro, Financial Times, April 24, 2021.