

eric firestone gallery

Art|Basel

Miami Beach

**Joe Overstreet | Booth S6
December 6-9, 2018**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Joe Overstreet | Untitled | 1970 | acrylic on canvas | 84 x 88 inches

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce its participation in the Survey Section of **Art Basel Miami Beach** with a solo installation of 1960s and 70s work by **Joe Overstreet**. For Overstreet, painting is a point from which to take off. Using the fundamental vocabulary of geometric abstraction, Overstreet has turned flat paintings into monumental installations. His abstractions are embedded with content. They metaphorically acknowledge the historical realities of African American experience, and celebrate change and hope, with work about ascendancy.

From his shaped canvas constructions of the 1960s that reference protest and the civil rights era, Overstreet moved, in the 1970s, to his "Flight Pattern" series: paintings tethered with ropes to the ceiling, wall and floor, which pay tribute to nomadic cultures and structures. In 1973, he experimented with alternate supports, stretching canvas over electrical conduit to make convex paintings shaped like airplane wings or shields. Overstreet defined art as "a coming together of expression, cultures crossing." The presentation will include work that highlights this idea, and his experimentation with materials and means.

Overstreet was born in rural Mississippi - an area mostly populated by African Americans and Choctaw Native Americans. Like many African American families who were part of the Great Migration, Overstreet's early life was nomadic, and his early exposure was to Black and Native American rural culture. In the 1950s, Overstreet studied at the California School of Fine Arts (San Francisco) and California College of Arts and Crafts (Oakland). He began his career in the Bay Area, and was a fixture of the Beat scene. Sargent Johnson, a sculptor and painter, who became a mentor, was an adherent of the philosophy of Alain Locke - the "father of the Harlem Renaissance." Locke advocated that African-American artists look to their ancestral legacy for aesthetic sources and inspiration.

By the mid-1960s, Overstreet began breaking away from the rectangle of the stretcher and from the narrative of Western art history. He made intricately shaped stretchers, painting in patterns drawn from Aztec, Benin, and Egyptian cultures. Overstreet said, "I was beginning to look at my art in a different light, not as protest, but as a statement about people...By 1970 I had broken free from notions that paintings had to be on the wall in rectangular shapes." The painting *North Star* (1968), a shaped canvas construction which will be on view, moved Overstreet to look toward and consider using the ceiling. In *Spirituals*, and along the *Underground Railroad*, escaped slaves were advised to follow the North Star.



Joe Overstreet | Institute for the Arts | Rice University | 1972

In his early "Flight Pattern" paintings, Overstreet began using the flat imagery of the circular mandala. He was interested in Tantric yoga, as well as the Navajo rituals of sand painting that inspired Pollock. He was also part of an avant-garde dialogue, exploring the relationship between painting and object. The painting "Screaming Hell" has not been on view since a seminal solo exhibition in 1972 in Houston, Texas, which was catalyzed by art patrons Dominique and John de Menil, as part of their efforts to de-segregate the art world, Rice University, and effect social change in troubled Houston neighborhoods.

Overstreet is also recognized as a significant arts community organizer. In 1973, he and his partner Corrine Jennings established Kenkeleba House on East 2nd Street, a studio building and gallery that has presented innumerable exhibitions of work by artists of color. Overstreet's work was central in watershed museum exhibitions of African American artists in the late 1960s and 70s. He was the subject of museum exhibitions at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, and the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ (both 1996).

This year, in the *New York Times*, Roberta Smith wrote of Overstreet, "I look forward to seeing these exuberant, groundbreaking creations becoming standard in museums and new art histories."

Overstreet's work from this period is currently on view at the **Brooklyn Museum**, New York, in the traveling exhibition organized by the Tate Modern, "**Soul of a Nation**." Two monumental paintings are also currently on view for the first time since 1972 at the newly reopened **Menil Collection**, Houston, Texas.

Art Basel Miami Beach | Opening Hours:

Wednesday, December 5, 2018, 11am to 8pm
(Private View, by invitation Only)

Thursday, December 6, 2018, 11am to 3pm
Vernissage (by invitation only)

Public Days:

Thursday, December 6, 2018, 3pm to 8pm
Friday, December 7, 2018, 12 noon to 8pm
Saturday, December 8, 2018, 12 noon to 8pm
Sunday, December 9, 2018, 12 noon to 6pm

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