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For Immediate Release:

RAW

Javier Arce • Samantha Bittman • Willie Cole • JOHN-DRUE • Sean Gannon • Huê Thi Hoffmaster
Ces McCully • Acacia Marable • Jason Middlebrook • Jackie Milad • Lily Morris • Armando Nin
Ryan Scails • Elaine Stocki • Kelly Tapia-Chuning • Paul Waters • Jamele Wright, Sr.

Eric Firestone Gallery
40 Great Jones Street | New York, NY 10012
July 18 – August 30, 2024
Opening Reception: Thursday, July 18, 6:00–8:00PM

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce *RAW*: a wide-ranging group exhibition of 17 contemporary, inter-generational and multinational artists. The exhibition addresses the theme of rawness in an expansive manner. Some work is painted on unprimed linen or canvas. Other works use raw materials from nature, or incorporate materials of consumer culture without masking their original appearance. Still others utilize the raw geometric building blocks of abstraction, or stylized forms that express specific cultural understandings.

Found materials are the backbone of works by Willie Cole and Jamele Wright, Sr. Willie Cole (b. 1955) has long used consumer items such as high heeled shoes and irons in mixed media sculptures that allude to West African masks and sacred figurative sculptures.

His sculpture *Malindy* is constructed out of found acoustic guitar parts, becoming an abstracted, stylized figure. Jamele Wright, Sr. (b. 1970) creates 3-dimensional textile abstractions that engage with the Black American vernacular experience. His wall-mounted works utilize found materials, Georgia red clay, and Dutch Wax cloth to create a dialogue between family, tradition, and the spiritual and material relationship between Africa and the South.

Geometry runs through the work of Ces McCully, Samantha Bittman, and Acacia Marable. Ces McCully (b. 1982), an Australian artist now based in Southern France, uses interconnected geometric shapes to create her mask-like paintings. They seamlessly incorporate acrylic wool weaving within their surfaces. The resulting works are both hard and soft, masculine and feminine: meditations on



Kelly Tapia-Chuning | *Origin Mother* | 2024
dismantled serape, maguey/agave fiber
hand-dyed with indigo, copper nails
63 x 71 in.

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Acacia Marable | *Color Plains #5* | 2023
oil and wire on sisal dartboard
17 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 2 in.

divisions within society. **Samantha Bittman** (b. 1982) also combines weaving and painting: applying acrylic over handwoven textiles. She explores binaries; the relationship between the handcrafted and the digital is a hallmark of her work. She exploits the optical effects of high value contrast, complementary hues, and small-scale patterning. **Acacia Marable** (b. 1988) paints on dart boards: adding oil paint and wire to the sisal surfaces which have their own inherent geometry. The broad areas of color become a way to investigate racial experiences, and the dart board a symbol used to explore ideas of perfection and violence.

Raw, unprimed linen is integral in the work of **Elaine Stocki**, **Lily Morris**, and **Hue Thi Hoffmaster**. **Elaine Stocki** (b. 1979) stains and saturates raw linen, velvet, and denim with pigment, stitching together studio scraps that have been washed and bleached. Evoking feminist art histories in their approach, paint pools across divided

areas of linen, concentrating in organic patterns. **Lily Morris's** (b. 1987) *Mother* is a hyper-realist depiction of a ship's mast, painted in grisaille on raw linen. The drama stems from the point of view: looking at the enormous mast from below, and the startling disconnect between a detailed rendering and the withholding of color. **Huê Thi Hoffmaster** (b. 1982) creates calligraphic thicket of paint across his unprimed canvases. He depicts flower forms, although they are also stand-ins for figuration. His work oscillates between abstraction and representation, Eastern and Western painting traditions.

Jason Middlebrook and **Javier Arce** both incorporate untreated wood, sourced from their environments. After relocating from Brooklyn to Columbia County in upstate New York, **Jason Middlebrook** (b. 1966) began sourcing milled indigenous trees – curly maple, oak, walnut, elm and ash. Adding gestures of acrylic paint to the vertical, sculptural slabs, he leaves the natural grain of wood visible, positioning himself and his interventions as that of a visitor in a long natural history. **Javier Arce's** (b. 1973) oil paintings depict vivid natural scenes of trees and blooming wildflowers. His canvases are stretched on irregular repurposed untreated wood sourced from the artist's countryside environment in Cantabria, Spain.

Armando Nin (b. 1986) "paints" with soot from a candle's flame which he manipulates to form

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trails of smoky circles across his compositions. He is inspired by the directness and immediacy of Italian Renaissance fresco painting, in which artists applied pigments onto wet plaster, and worked on ceilings while lying down. Nin also works in this position, suspending his canvases and holding the candle underneath. Decades earlier, artist **Paul Waters** (b. 1936) adopted a unique technique of cut canvas collage. Painted silhouettes suggesting primordial forms and imaginary animals are arranged and collaged onto canvas supports in rhythmic patterns. Waters exclusively used his hands and fingers to apply paint, rather than brushes. The paintings reflect his interest in African art, indigenous traditions, children's books, and a playful, intuitive form of communication.

Sean Gannon and **John-Drue** both utilize raw and direct images and characters in their work. **Sean Gannon** (b. 1993) who is Chicago-based, connects to the humor of the Chicago Imagists, and also incorporates sculptural elements in his work. A recent series both depicts rope but also extends actual rope off the painting's edges and into the room. **John-Drue** (b. 1986) creates molds of gold pans using industrial materials like reinforced glass fibers, gypsum cement, and polymer additives. On these surfaces he depicts archetypal and cartoon characters which function as commentary on societal issues and consumer culture.

Kelly Tapia-Chuning, **Jackie Millad**, and **Ryan Scalis** are each involved with issues of decolonization in their work, and, in this sense, unveiling a more raw and honest understanding of history. **Jackie Millad's** (b. 1975) *Undoing* series contends with the history of the British occupation of Egypt, and specifically the practice of unraveling looted mummified human remains. **Kelly Tapia-Chuning** (b. 1997) is a mixed Xicana artist of Indigenous descent. Her recent body of work appropriates Mexican serapes, which in the post-revolutionary period were symbolic of homogenous national identity. The artist deconstructs these textiles



Sean Gannon | *The Handcuff* | 2024
acrylic on canvas, framed in walnut
with two attached found objects (Malina Rope)
120 x 26 x 3 1/2 in.

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by removing areas of weft, a process which she sees as an act of decolonization. The resulting cloth, made thinner and more fragile, is stretched out on the wall. **Ryan Scails** (b. 1987) uses fiber and found materials in his sculptural installations to comment on pre-colonial technologies, vernacular tools, and physical labor.

The exhibition incorporates a spectrum of different perspectives, with artists speaking from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and aesthetic approaches. It is bound by an emotional force that stems from a direct approach to artmaking.

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For further information, contact: press@ericfirestonegallery.com