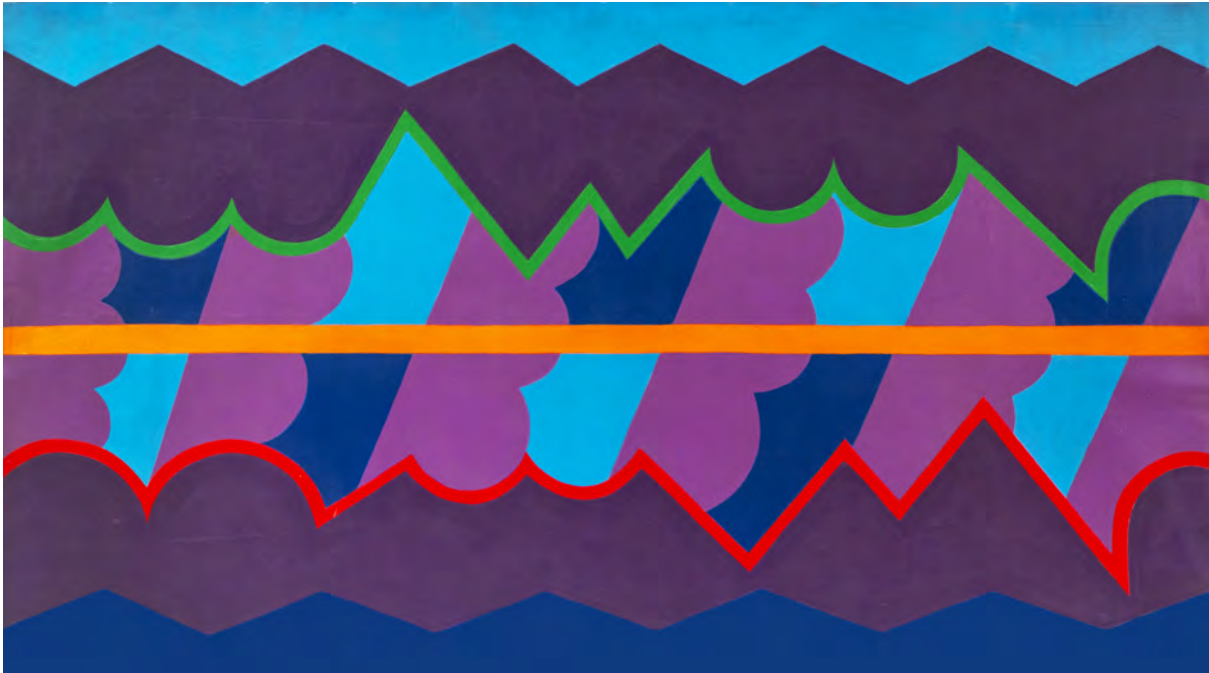


# eric firestone gallery

## Ellsworth Ausby: Somewhere in Space Paintings from the 1960s and 70s

Eric Firestone Gallery  
40 Great Jones St. | New York, NY  
September 10 - October 30, 2021



Ellsworth Ausby | Passing Through | 1970 | acrylic on canvas | 71 1/2h x 131w in

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce “Ellsworth Ausby: Somewhere in Space,” paintings from the 1960s and 70s. The exhibition opens Friday September 10, and will be on view through October 30, 2021.

Ellsworth Ausby (1942 - 2011) was a significant African American artist whose works were concerned with exploring the “infinite possibilities of two-dimensional space.” He experimented with supports and surfaces, creating multi-part shaped canvas constructions arranged directly on the wall. His work is connected to Afrofuturism and the music of visionary Sun Ra. Above all, Ausby, was dedicated to reflecting a deeply rooted African aesthetic and cultural heritage. He wrote, “It is a fact that the Black image ‘is’ and has always been established.”

#### EAST HAMPTON

4 NEWTOWN LANE  
EAST HAMPTON, NY 11937  
631.604.2386  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

#### NEW YORK CITY

40 GREAT JONES STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012  
646.998.3727  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

# eric firestone gallery



Ellsworth Ausby, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture,  
© Tuesday Publications, Inc., 1970 | photo © Doug Harris

Born in Portsmouth, Virginia, Ausby moved to New York City to attend the School of Visual Arts and the Pratt Institute. The work in the exhibition will span the decade between 1969-79, showing Ausby's artistic development from totemic paintings with a metaphorical Africanist symbolism, to the more minimalist, multi-part unstretched canvases.

Early in his career, Ausby was included in several significant museum exhibitions of African-American art: *New Black Artists* (1969), Brooklyn Museum of Art; *Afro-American Artists*, New York and Boston (1970), Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; *Some American History* (1970), commissioned by the Menil Foundation and organized by Larry Rivers for the Rice University Institute of the Arts, Houston; and *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1971), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Ausby's paintings of the late 1960s combine stylized biomorphic and figurative elements with geometric shapes and patterning.

Ausby's first solo exhibition, of totemic paintings with vividly colored planes, was held in 1970 at the Cinque Gallery, New York. Cinque was founded in 1969 by Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, and Norman Lewis to exhibit the work of both new and established African-American artists. The gallery was named after Joseph Cinqué, the leader of the Amistad slave ship mutiny of the 1830s.

In 1972, the Peale House Galleries of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts staged a two-person exhibition with Ausby and James Phillips. By this time, Ausby was making unstretched canvases that were attached directly to the wall. These works utilize high keyed color and suggest sonic patterns and rhythms; the titles are based on 1970s Black colloquial vernacular. In these horizontal format paintings, a central band with a dynamic groove-like pattern of shapes and colors moves through a monochromatic ground.

## EAST HAMPTON

4 NEWTOWN LANE  
EAST HAMPTON, NY 11937  
631.604.2386  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

## NEW YORK CITY

40 GREAT JONES STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012  
646.998.3727  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

# eric firestone gallery

In 1977, Ausby traveled to Nigeria where he participated in the African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). In an interview with La Verne Cody Gittens, Ausby stated, “My generation is reidentifying with this African ancestry and African past. My travels there, and what I realized I was interested in doing, has been very much connected with traditional African art approaches like clothing design, use of color, polyrhythms in music, as well as patterns in textiles... When I was in Nigeria exhibiting, the art scholars and professors at the universities felt at home with my images.”

Ausby was employed in the late 1970s by the Cultural Council Foundation as an artist under the CETA program to bring arts programming and projects to underserved communities. From 1978-79 Ausby received CETA artist grants that allowed him to create major public works. One of these was *InnerSpace/OuterSpace*, a multimedia performance piece conceived and directed by Ausby that included dance, poetry, music, and drama, accompanied by lights and slides of Ausby’s paintings and sculpture. It was performed at the Museum of Natural History, New York.



Ellsworth Ausby | Untitled | 1969  
acrylic on canvas | 89 1/2h x 41 1/2w in

In this period, Ausby developed the paintings he titled “Space Odyssey,” reflecting his connection to Sun Ra, and his interest in exploring how painting, and the relationships between forms, exists in and informs its environment. Ausby developed a vocabulary of geometric forms: triangles and horizontal bands, organized like minimalist punctuation that suggest rhythms and movement through time and space. The first “Space Odyssey” polyptych was exhibited in the major 1980 survey “Afro-American Abstraction,” at P.S.1, curated by April Kingsley. Over the next several years, Ausby would continue to develop works with that title, expanding into three dimensions with triangular relief elements that extend off the canvases’ surfaces. He would also begin to mix substances like sawdust into his pigments to engage paint’s textural qualities.

## EAST HAMPTON

4 NEWTOWN LANE  
EAST HAMPTON, NY 11937  
631.604.2386  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

## NEW YORK CITY

40 GREAT JONES STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012  
646.998.3727  
EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM

# eric firestone gallery

In 2005 Ausby was commissioned by the MTA to design the stained-glass mural *Space Odyssey* at the Marcy Avenue subway station in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Ausby taught painting at the School of Visual Arts from 1979 until his death in 2011. He was married to artist Jamillah Jennings. His work is represented in the Menil Collection, Houston, TX; and The Saint Louis Art Museum, MO.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of public programs and a fully illustrated catalogue.



Ellsworth Ausby | Untitled | 1971-72 | acrylic on canvas | 72h x 104w in

## ELLSWORTH AUSBY: SOMEWHERE IN SPACE

Will be on view through October 30, 2021

Eric Firestone Gallery | 40 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012

For further information and images, contact: [press@ericfirestonegallery.com](mailto:press@ericfirestonegallery.com)

### EAST HAMPTON

4 NEWTOWN LANE  
EAST HAMPTON, NY 11937  
631.604.2386  
[EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM](mailto:EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM)

### NEW YORK CITY

40 GREAT JONES STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012  
646.998.3727  
[EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM](mailto:EFG@ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM)

[ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM](http://ERICFIRESTONEGALLERY.COM)