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Ellsworth Ausby: Somewhere in Space

Paintings from the 1960s and 70s

Eric Firestone Gallery

40 Great Jones St.

New York, NY

Science fiction author Octavia Butler wrote, “There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns.” In this epigram Butler captured the ethos of Afrofuturism, a movement in which Ausby found a space to create art that explored “infinite possibilities of two-dimensional space.” The arrangement of the artwork is part of the art itself; the work makes use of both space and time.

The Eric Firestone Gallery in New York City is painted white from floor to ceiling, allowing the bright colors of Ausby’s work to fill the space. The paintings are minimal in texture; had they been placed against a different colored wall they might not have created the effect of being in a new world, one where the colorful patterns command the entirety of the observer’s attention.

Afrofuturist musician and composer Sun Ra was a strong influence on Ausby's work. The two were connected through African aesthetic and heritage and explored how the historically established Black image can be imagined through art. The totemic painting *Totemconstruction* (1970) exemplifies Africanist symbolism, while the unstretched canvas painting *Ancestral Spirit*

(1969) incorporates that same symbolism into grooves of bright, monochromatic colors depicting a deconstructed body. Though both are metaphors, Ausby's horizontal format paintings take a more minimalist approach to his vision.

Ausby imagines alternative futures for black bodies without defining a linear future. Ausby's painting *Passing Through* (1970) demonstrates this nonlinear conception of time in a vividly colored plane. *Sunrise Sunset* (1974) shows two half circles on opposite corners over a golden canvas. A simple white horizon line divides the two. Both half circles are casting the same golden light. The observer shouldn't assume that the painting depicts the sun we see every day, but explore the idea that the existence of a new sun is more important than where it rises and sets.