

LEE JAFFE
HISTORY REVISITED



NOHRA HAIME GALLERY

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October 21 – December 11, 2021

*cover: PORTRAIT OF JOHN BROWN AND NAT TURNER, 1983
oil and varnish on canvas with wood, rope and gallows
144.09 x 179.92 in. 366 x 457 cm.*

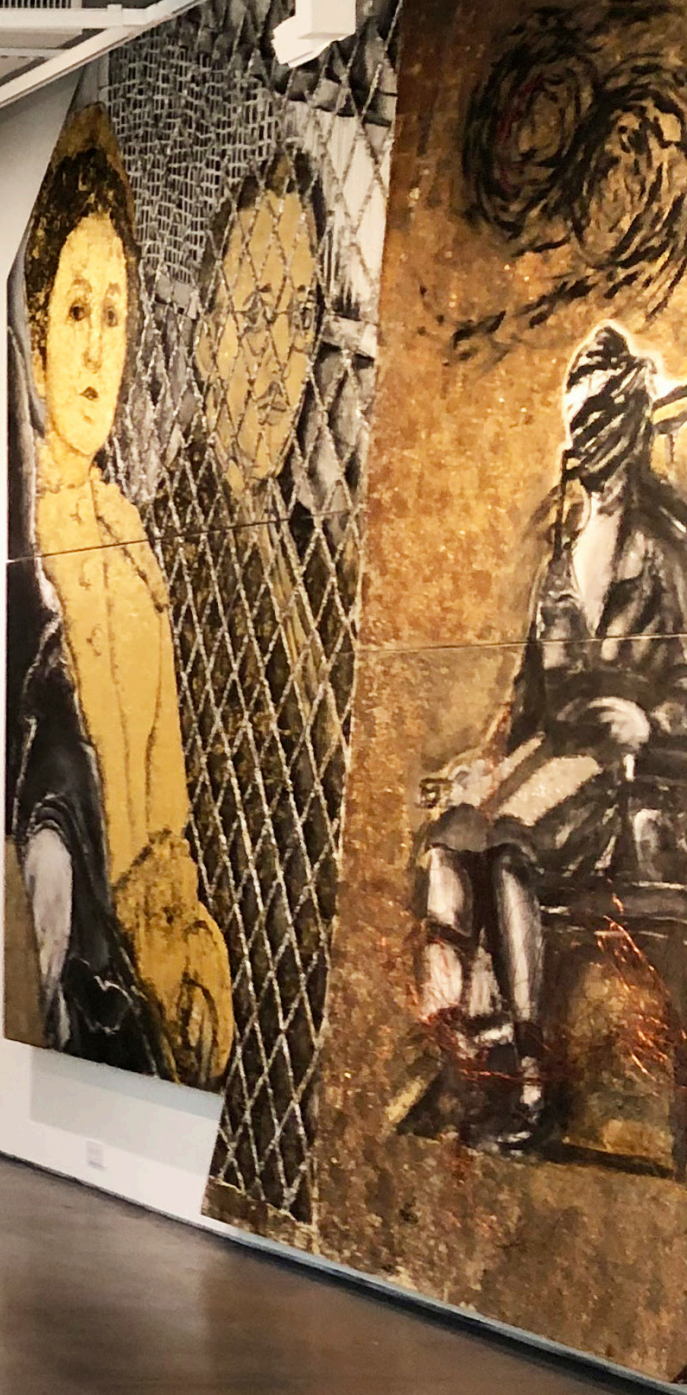
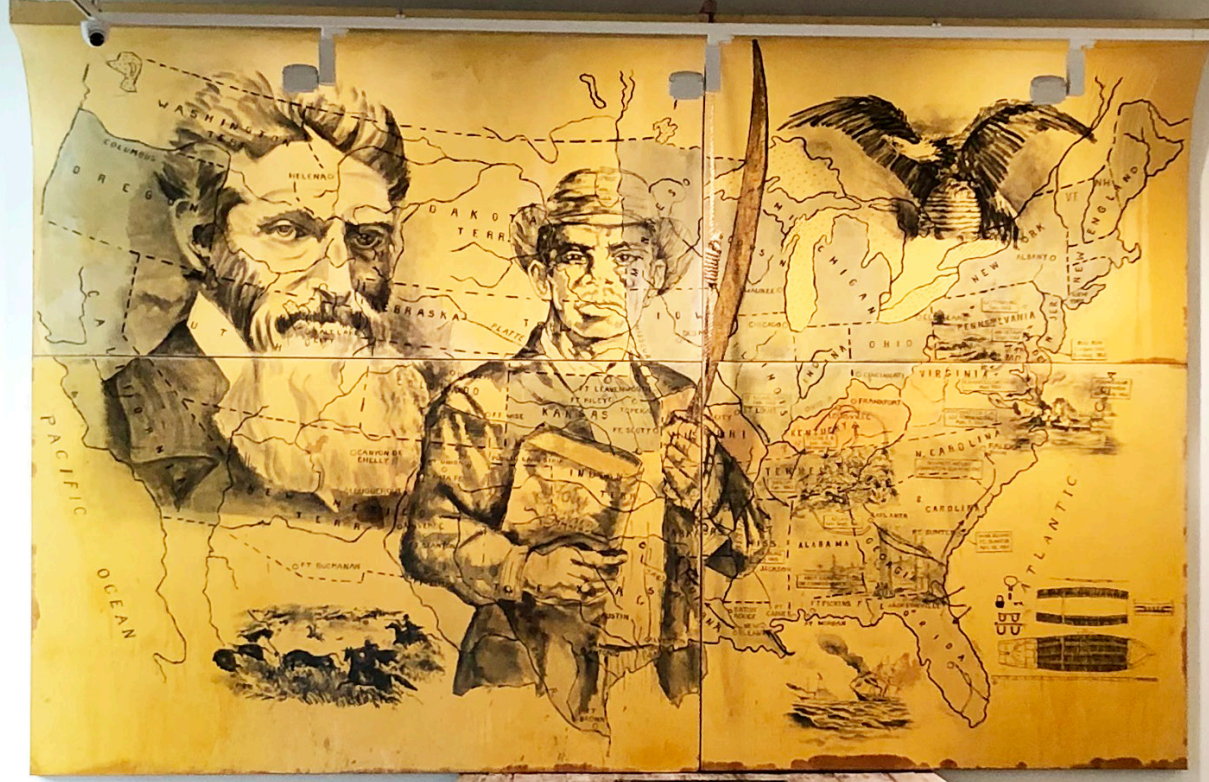
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LEE JAFFE: HISTORY REVISITED

For the first time since 1984, multi-disciplinary artist Lee Jaffe will exhibit HISTORY REVISITED a series of large-scale mixed media artworks addressing the sharp edges of American history. Born in the Bronx in 1950, Jaffe grew up with his Jewish family during the social tumult of the Civil Rights and decolonizing movements around the globe in the 1960s. Jaffe's command over composition derives from his extensive training as a conceptual visual artist but also guided by a broader commitment towards social justice. As a filmmaker in the 1970s and 80s, Jaffe collaborated with revolutionary artists Gordon Matta-Clark (Chile) and Hélio Oiticica (Brazil). Jaffe is perhaps most recognized for his ubiquitous photo portraiture of popular culture and music figures such as reggae pioneers Bob Marley and Peter Tosh and visual artist Jean-Michel Basquiat whose collaborative work titled Portrait of Cinque is included in the exhibition.

Initially exhibited at Peter Bonnier Gallery in 1984, Jaffe describes the impetus of the series, "At the time of its creation in 1983, I felt an intense need to retell these stories that have been skewed, or largely untold. By combining painting, drawing, sculptural and natural elements, as well as archival documents and photography, I could unearth the contradictions of American history, bone by bone, bill by dollar bill." For example, in Portrait of Sacco and Vanzetti, Jaffe applies animal material, namely fish scales, and bones, against an encasement of gold leaf and decadence. Furthermore, Jaffe uses greenbacks to undermine its value in Portrait of George Washington. In The Life and Times of Sally Hemmings, Jaffe uses the dollar bill to underscore how Trans-Atlantic slavery produced America's wealth but also to reassert the story of Sally Hemmings, a Black woman enslaved and coerced into pregnancy by Thomas Jefferson.

According to Leslie Garrett, gallery director, "It is uncanny how relevant Lee Jaffe's artwork is today. We are excited that these works created nearly forty years ago will now be viewed in the context of today when these very questions around race, violence and power remain embittered and unanswered." In Portrait of John Brown and Nat Turner, Jaffe reconstructs a map of the United States and wooden gallows to foreground the violent consequences of insurrection and rebellion. In HISTORY REVISITED, Jaffe reminds viewers that history is always in the making, and for the taking.





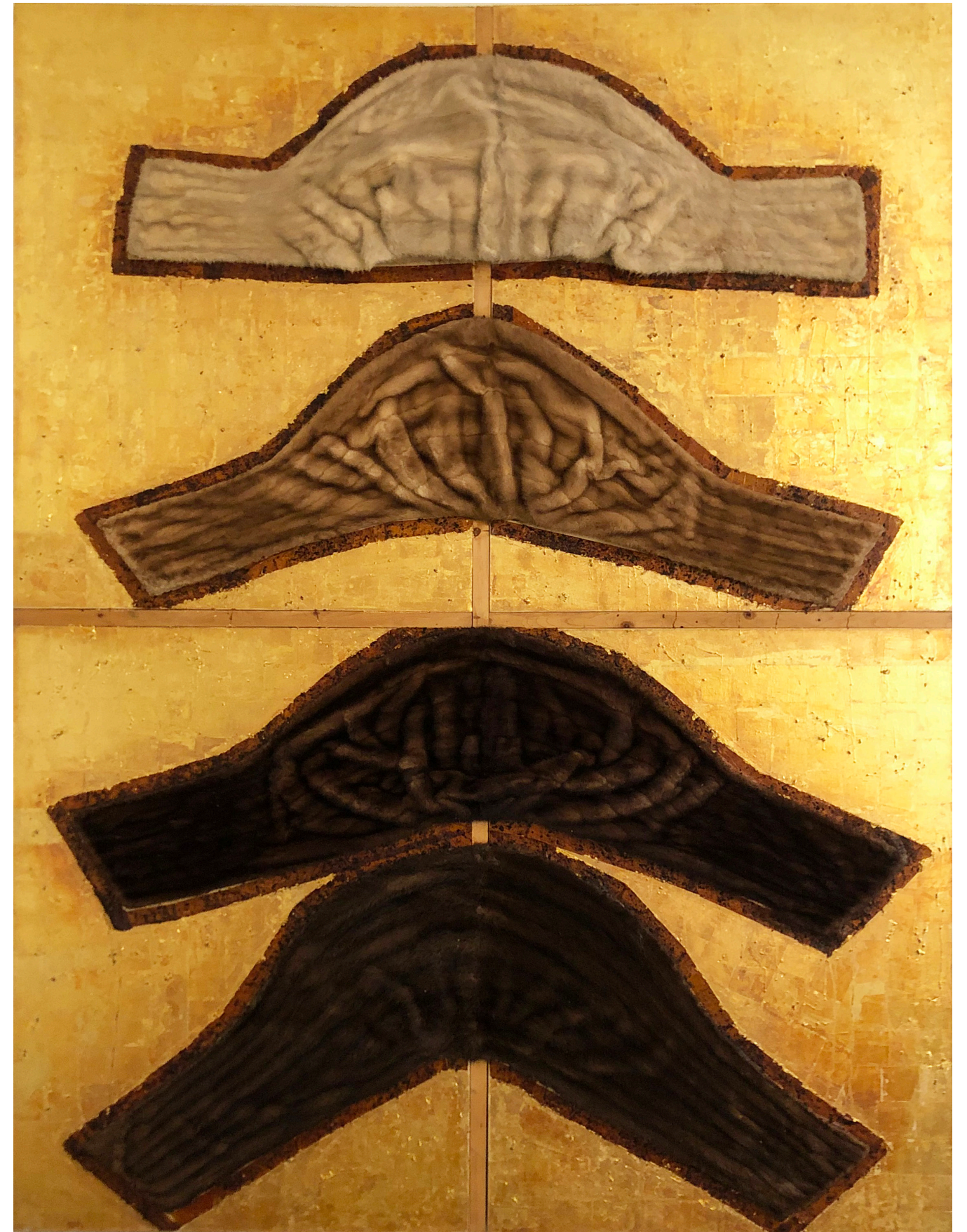
Lee Jaffe's paintings are very big; they are bold and blunt, boarding precariously on the grandiose. Impressive in size, they are even more so for their startling ingenuousness, sentimental eccentricity, and gentle, almost touching rendering of details. Obsessed with historical time, Jaffe parades his artifacts and images—maps, portraits, illustrations lifted from history books, etc.—in billboard like fashion, embedding them within and across an array of strange and funky surfaces. These surfaces also include such things as coyote and muskrat pelts, flypaper, turkey feathers, corrugated iron, and tar, not to mention a vulgarly lavish play of gold, silver and aluminum leaf. Jaffe is reluctant, however, to manipulate these materials: there is scarcely a patch of paint anywhere on the canvases (sprinkled dry pigment is the more common technique), and his work is in face singularly without transformations. Its assembly is based instead on the mechanics of montage, with matter and images combined in their pure exteriority. In a sense, each of Jaffe's paintings functions as an impacted diorama:

no more illusionary or stenographic space, no more dependency on a gaze to complete the work, just a literal presentation of the facts—a host of metonymical paraphernalia collaged on large multipartite canvas structures. Portrait of John Brown and at Turner consists of real gallows (with a working platform, cross brace and noose) and a 10-by-14-foot canvas surface, on which appear the drawn figures of the two abolitionist martyrs superimposed over a Civil War map of the United States. Like nearly all the other 16 works in this show, this piece is intended as a portrait not only of historical figures, but of a historical mechanism—one which, like the gallows here or the electric chair (evoked by strands of wire) in Eclipse Portrait of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, permits power to articulate itself directly onto bodies. But the notion of "mechanism" is not exhausted by such depicted furniture:

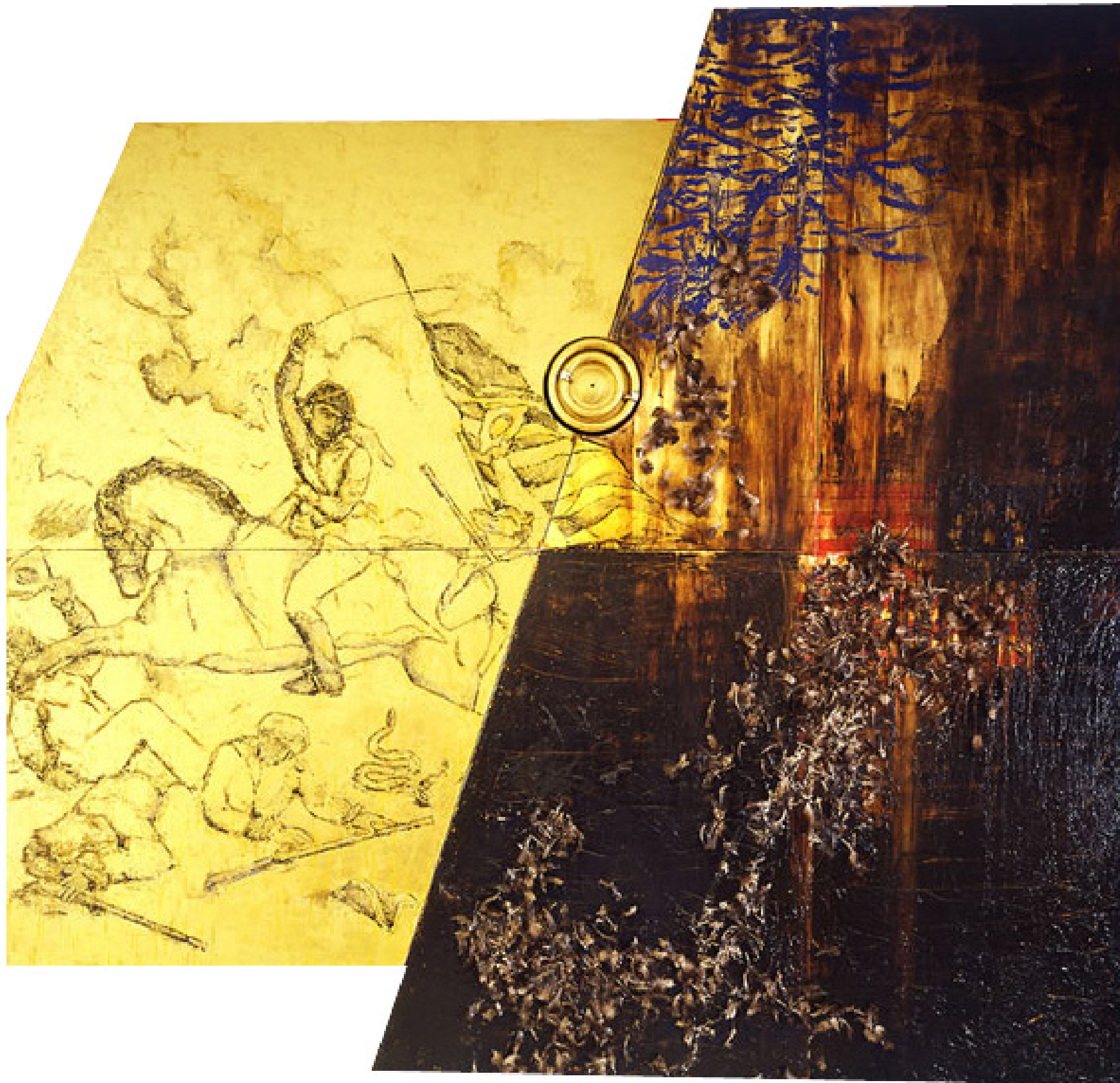
in each case the works are completed with various diagrams and notations. In the Turner/Brown portrait, there is the expansive Civil War map with campaigns recorded with arrows and important events with date and place tags. The presentation here is straightforward history book style, but with a slight twist: the phenomenon of war is shown to mesh indistinguishably with its local contact points, here the personal lives of two men. The crossbeams which form the work's chassis go farther still to literalize this connection, evidencing Emerson's prediction that Brown's execution would "make the gallows glorious like the cross."

Art in America, March 1984 by Sanford Kwinter

“In the world that receives Lee Jaffe’s art there can be few discrepancies about mainframes of meaning. Regardless of whether black, brown, blue or green eyes fall upon Silver Skins, Four Seasons, or paintings like Venus Fly Trap, the conclusions will be similar. Our shared environment has revealed its finite limits. Material wealth can no longer be indexed against what one is able to reap from the earth. We have all become aware of the delicacy of our habitat. Regardless of where we have come from, and what our personal cultural heritage defines in each of us, the thematic conclusions we reach through Jaffe’s multiply oriented aesthetic are unanimous. The idea is attainable, operating beyond the constraints of any one language, beyond “literacy” in any single tradition.” p. 39



VENUS FLY TRAP, 1983
gold leaf, oil on canvas, mink
112 x 86 in. 284.5 x 218.4 cm.



BENEDICT ARNOLD AT THE BATTLE OF SARATOGA, 1983
gold leaf tar, turkey feathers, oil and bathroom light fixture on canvas
149.61 x 149.61 in. 380 x 380 cm.



PORTRAIT OF SACCO AND VANZETTI, 1983
gold leaf, bronze powder, fish scales, fish bones, shoes, encaustic and oil on canvas
140 x 136 in. 335.6 x 345.4 cm.



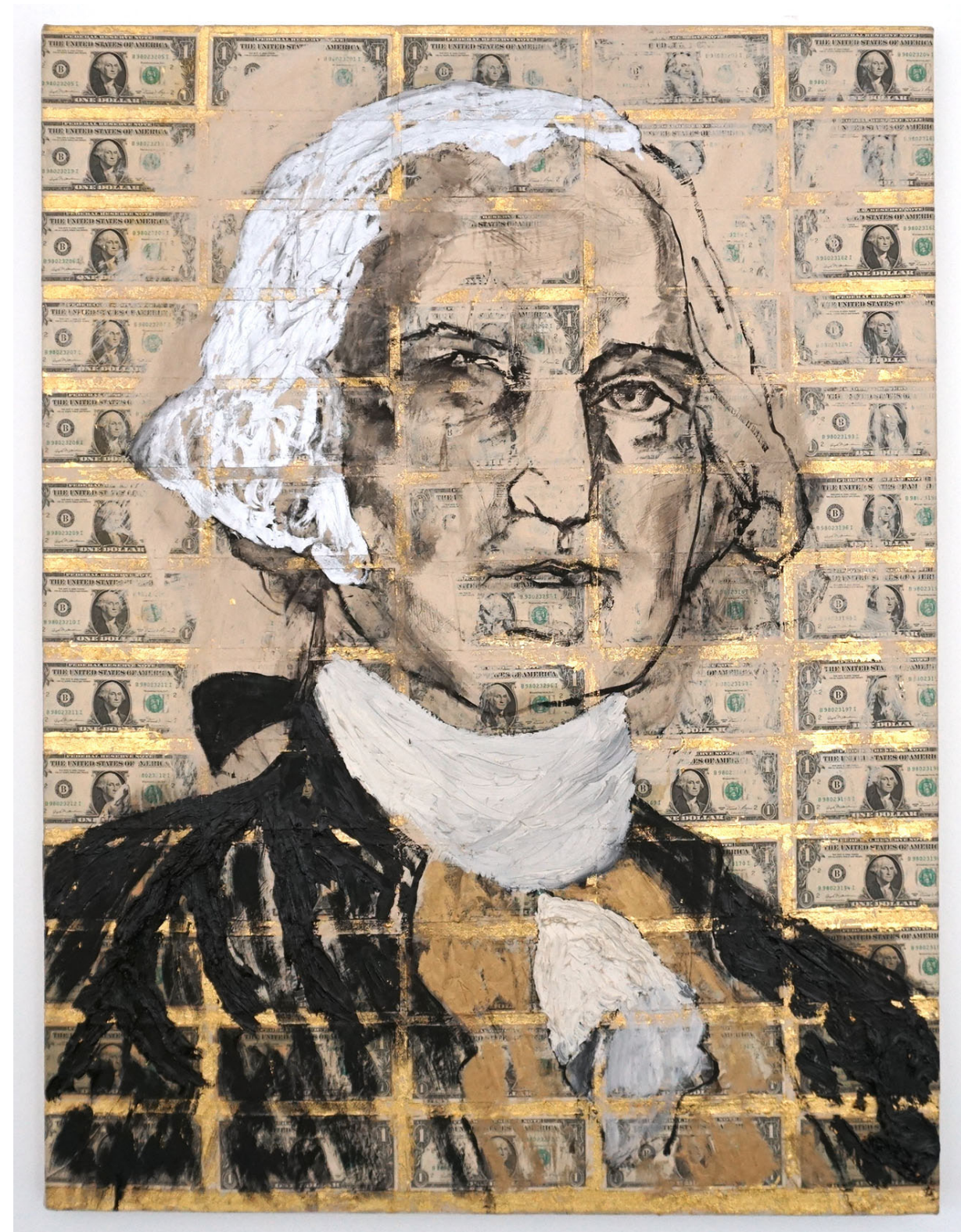
PORTRAIT OF JOHN BROWN AND NAT TURNER, 1983
oil and varnish on canvas with wood, rope and gallows
144.09 x 179.92 in. 366 x 457 cm.

“This collapse of difference, in aesthetic terms, between the Self and its Others runs consistently through Jaffe’s art, allowing him to tackle selected themes in whatever media he feels will most potently speak to a wide audience. No theme, issue, or event ever finds singular resolution in Jaffe’s work. History is overturned as it yields previously undiscussed episodes that often lead to contradictory conclusions. Arnold at the Battle of Saratoga is one such typical reversal. In America, the name Benedict Arnold is synonymous with treachery: Arnold was an American general who, in the War of Independence, was accused of sympathizing and collaborating with the British. His name is forever blackened in history.

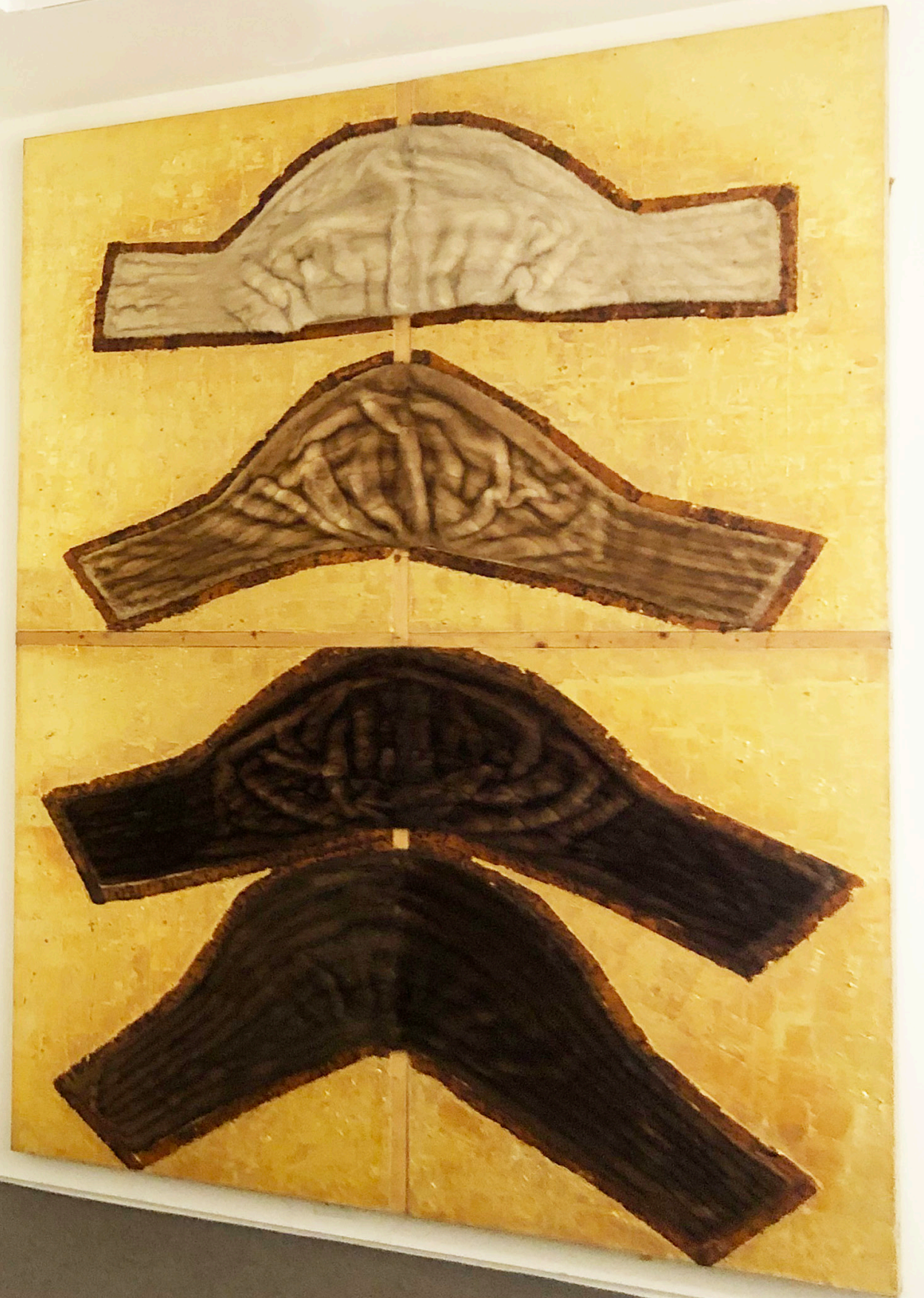
In Jaffe’s painting, the general is not depicted in a moment of betrayal, but is shown several years earlier, in the midst of a battle at Saratoga, New York. Brandishing his sword, looking backward to an assailant, the general gallops through a raging battlefield. This was his finest battle, one that George Washington and other American generals urged him not to wage – a battle against British forces in the depths of winter. Contrary to all expectation, Benedict Arnold demonstrated superb and superior ability as a strategist charismatically leading his troops and the American colonies, to a spectacular victory. Arnold’s triumph, illustrated in the left portion of the painting, is juxtaposed to his demise. The right side, which is slightly larger, is a turgid mixture of deep brown, tar and turkey feathers, approximating the darkness of his forever tarnished reputation. Underneath a flurry of turkey feathers a nearly unnoticed American Republican flag is visible, the flag which at one point Arnold was instrumental in bringing from dream to reality. Jaffe’s painting asserts that history is not a linear narrative: major events like nation-making do not happen without contradictions, without contributions by people we no longer wish to recognize or forgive.

With Jaffe, and his use of uncommon materials, the codified formats of tradition break down. The once illustrious and honored field of history painting, which attained its formulaic height in the neoclassical French Academy, has been completely undermined. Jaffe’s paintings of historical subject matter are revisionists, pictorial rewritings where the figures involved and the outcome of events they enact are conditioned by previously untold, often unknown, interpretations. This is entirely consistent with his agenda of narrating, of actually describing, situations of the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the innumerable others in our societies. Jaffe’s art denies biases, treating topics in all fields. Discursively, his work eludes championing the cause of any one people, any single minority or race. Rather, as an artist, he combs communal history for universal deficiencies, share interests that find specific applications.”

pp 39-40



GREEN GEORGE, 1984
oil, money, gold leaf on canvas
40 x 30 in. 101.6 x 76.2 cm.





THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SALLY HEMINGS, 1985
oil, encaustic, \$2 bills on barn wood
54 x 72 in. 137.2 x 182.9 cm.

“There is an unified focus upon elucidating topics lacking proper discussion, in need of a new orientation. The relentless theme of the Other and its importance for the acquisition of a soluble, justifiable identity recurs as central to his artistic discourse. By choosing his subject matter from what may initially appear as scattered sources, Jaffe’s works almost always have an application to all of us, regardless of where we have come from or who we are and how we have arid at definitions of our selves.”
p.40



ECLIPSE/ PORTRAIT OF ETHEL AND JULIUS ROSENBERG, 1983
Silver, Gold leaf, copper wire and oil on canvas
129 x 153 in. 327.7 x 388.6 cm.

“While the artist is one who must always work alone, it is through his audience that he acquires definition. Lee Jaffe, pursuing an aesthetic path of uncommon individuality, seeks to inaugurate modes of identity that each of us can partake of, however near or seemingly distant. The subject matter, the form that his art assumes, and the often curious resulting visual phenomena appear to be occasionally overwhelming – all combine to jolt us away from what we expect, from where we have come from, helping to lead us on to who we are.” P.45



Exhibition at Bonnier Gallery, 1985



LEE JAFFE

is an American artist, photographer, filmmaker, musician, and producer.

Born in Bronx, New York, 1950

Lives and works in New Jersey

EDUCATION

1965-69 BA Penn State University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021 Nohra Haime Gallery, New York

2019 Galerie Eva Presenhuber, New York

2016 ONO Contemporary Art, Bologna, Italy

2012 Dem Passwords, Hollywood, California

2005-06 M B Fine Art, Los Angeles, California

1994 Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin Ireland

1993 Institute of Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, Holland

1992 Moderna Museet, Stockholm Sweden

Institute of Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, Holland

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

Björneborgs Konstmuseum, Pori, Finland

1990-91 Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, California

Edward Thorden Gallery, Goteborg, Sweden

1990 Marc Jancou Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland

University of Missouri-Kansas City Gallery of Art, Missouri

1989 Kaj Forsblom Gallery, Helsinki, Finland

Galerie Grafiart, Turku, Finland

Georges Lavrov Galerie, Paris France

1988 L.A. Louver Gallery, Los Angeles, California

L.A. Louver Gallery, Los Angeles, California

Edward Thorden Gallery, Gotenborg, Sweden

1987 Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund, Sweden

1986 Burnett Miller Gallery, Los Angeles, California

Nicola Jacobs Gallery, London, England

1985 Lawrence Oliver Gallery, Philidelphia, Pennsylvania

Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund Sweden

Bette Stoler Gallery, New York, New York

1983 Bonnier Gallery, New York, New York

Main Gallery, Fine Arts Center, University of Rhode Island, Kingston Rhode Island

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 Black American Portraits, LA County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

2016 Galerie 206, Berlin, Germany

Helio Oitica and Lee jaffe: Information 1970/2016, Nara Roesler, Sao Paolo

1971 Museum of Modern Art, New York

1970 White Columns, New York

BOOKS

2013 Bob Marley & The Wailers: 1973-1976 by Lee Jaffe, Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini. Publisher: Camion Blanc (June 17, 2013). Language: French.

2003 ONE LOVE, Life with Bob Marley and the Wailers, by Lee Jaffe, Roger Steffens. Publisher: W. W. Norton and Company; 1st edition (April 22, 2003)

1992 Cordially Yours, Lee Jaffe, by Rainer Crone and David Moos. Publisher: Moderna Museet (1992)

FILMS

1969-72

Mask Whisper

Parallel Fears (with Miguel Rio Branco)

Impact (with Vito Acconci)

Nine Ways of Dying

Brooklyn Bridge (with Gordon Matta-Clark)

Le Chien (Starring Rita Renior and Elizabeth Weiner)

The Life and Times of Luis Gonzaga

2009

Flow: For Love of Water (producer)

RECORDS

1977 Peter Tosh, Legalize it

1986 Joe Higgs, Family

1988 Joe Higgs, Blackman Know Yourself

1991 The Wailing Souls, All Over The World

1994 Morgan Heritage, Miracles

1994 Barrington Levy, Barrington

1999 Barrington Levy, Living Dangerously

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

The Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA

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"Basquiat and the Bayou," *Information + Aesthetic*, November 24, 2014

"Basquiat x Lee Jaffe, to open in Bologna," ANSA, Rome, Italy, May 3, 2016

"Bob Marley and the Wailers: NYC 1975 (Photo by Lee Jaffe)," *MarleyArkives*, July 23, 2012

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Derieux, Florence, "Lee Jaffe Eva Presenhuber / New York," *Flash Art*, August 15, 2019

Dollar, Steve, "Untangling the Myth of Basquiat," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2010

Dreisinger, Baz, "Peter Tosh: Reclaiming A Wailer," *NPR Music News*, July 9, 2011

Falk, Jan Christer, "Monumentalt & Intimt," *Tique*, August 1985

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Goldstein, Caroline, "Editors' Picks: 14 Events For Your Art Calendar This Week," *Debusck Gallery*, September 8, 2020

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Higbee, Ethan, "Lee Jaffe Speaks on Peter Tosh," *Boomshots Magazine*, September 20, 2012

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"Honor Mary Weatherford," *Gagosian News*, July 1, 2018

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"J.M. Basquiat @ Guggenheim, Bilbao," *Invasioni*, July 16, 2016

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Koslow, Jessica, "Lee Jaffe: On the Road With Jean-Michel Basquiat: 1983," *Campus Circle*, April 16, 2007

Kwinter, Sanford, "Lee Jaffee at Bonnier," *Art in America*, March 1984

"Lee Jaffe," *Alchetron*, February 2, 2018

"Lee Jaffe," *ReggaeTimes*, September 20, 2012

"Lee Jaffe-Cordially Yours, Blink Willie McTell: December 3, 1989-January 28, 1990," *University of Missouri-Kansas City Gallery of Art*, 1989

"Lee Jaffe @ Calabash," *Amexem Reggae*

"Lee Jaffe, Frank Stella: September 14 – October 8, 1988," *L.A. Louver Gallery*, Venice, CA, 1988

"Lee Jaffe 'Jean-Michel Basquiat' at Eva Presenhuber, New York," *Mousse Magazine*, 2019

"Lee Jaffe: November 7 – December 7, 1985," *Bette Stoler Gallery*, New York, 1985

"Lee Jaffe's photos in Basquiat on display in Bologna," *Rolling Stone*, March 15, 2017

Lippard, Lucy, "Totem," *The Village Voice*, February 6, 1984

Marks, Ben, "The Caged Passions of Lee Jaffe," *Artspace*, March/April 1991

McGreevy, Nora, "See Jean-Michel Basquiat Masterpieces Up Close in This Online Exhibition," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 27, 2020

McKenna, Kristine, "Ace is the Place for Lee Jaffe's Social Concerns," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1991

Morgan, Stuart, "Half-Light: The Paintings and Poetry of Lee Jaffe," *Artscribe*, September/October 1986

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"Nari Ward by Lee Jaffe," *Bomb Magazine*, September 15, 2015

"On The Road with Jean-Michel Basquiat: Lee Jaffe's Intimate Photos," *Whitewall*, July 25, 2019

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Sooke, Alastair, "Jean-Michel Basquiat: The life and work behind the legend," *BBC*, August 9, 2015

Spector, Nancy, "Territory of Desire," *Contemporanea*, Summer 1990

Steer, Emily, "The Artist Who Travelled the World with Basquiat," *Elephant Art*, July 15, 2019

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"Ten Things You Did Not Know About Peter Tosh," *PeterTosh.com*, April 16, 2015

"The Artist: Jean-Michel Basquiat," *Guggenheim Bilbao*

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