

ARTIST: OVERSTREET, JOE (1934-)

PRINT: JUSTICE, FAITH, HOPE AND PEACE 20th Century American
COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST – *this means the original is with the artist*

Date: 1969

Size: 12 ½ x 27 1/8 inches total

Medium: Unknown

You would think with the man still being alive we could find a ton of information – not so. I have contacted the University of California which is where he still teaches and thought I could find biographical information. They left me with “the artist wants to express himself in his art.” I have googled and searched but there is not much about him.

Joe Overstreet was born in Conehatta, Mississippi, and moved to California when he was a boy. In the early 1950's, he lived and worked in Berkeley and San Francisco. In 1955, he worked for Walt Disney in Los Angeles, drawing the characters in animated films. You would think this would be a dream job. Who has ever seen a Disney movie or been to a Disney park? It would seem to be ideal working in the background for Disney but it was very stressful for Overstreet. He had to draw animation – the same thing over and over with just a hint of change. There was not a lot of free expression. So he felt stifled.

After only 2 years he moved to New York City in 1957 where he designed displays for windows. He also studied art while living there. The window displays were very important for the stores to be original and never the same so you can see why Overstreet would like this opportunity.

Overstreet is now teaching at the University of California. His latest paintings are large, very colorful canvases shaped with rope or wooden stretchers. His designs are based on magical geometric patterns and African and Native American symbols.

Of his paintings he says, "My paintings don't let the onlooker glance over them, but rather take them deeply into them and let them out - many times by different routes. These trips are taken sometimes subtly and sometimes suddenly. I want my paintings to have an eye-catching 'melody' to them - where the viewer can see patterns with changes in color, design and space. When the viewer is away from the paintings, they will get flashes of the paintings that linger in the mind like that of a tune or melody of a song that catches up on people's ear and mind."

I think a lot of 5th graders know the optical illusions that are in the world. Many are at the science center in St. Louis. Those optical illusions use basic designs that you stare at for a period of time and then glance away to yet see another design. That is what he is trying to explain in his quote listed in the above paragraph.

In 1969 Joe Overstreet was 35 years old. I think it is important to understand what was going on in the world of an artist to sometimes give us an understanding and appreciation of the art work. So to give you an idea of what was going on in America here are facts that surrounded Joe Overstreet:

■Richard Nixon became our president.

■Astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the Moon and uttered the immortal words "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

■The Vietnam War was occurring. The opposition to the war continued to increase with more and more attending anti war demonstrations and demanding that the US withdrew from Vietnam.

■The music came from groups including the Doors, Led Zeppelin, Janis Joplin and the Beatles and the most famous music festival of modern times "WOODSTOCK" took place on a New York Farm on August 15th to August 17th.

■Fashions reflected the anti war sentiment with military jackets adorned with peace signs, and other trends including long unkempt wild hair and headbands showed the feelings of anti establishment felt by the youth.

PRINT - The idea for this large four-panel painting, came to Overstreet while standing by the Fountain of Temperance, Charity, Faith and Hope at a peace rally in New York City's Thompkin's Square Park. There is a fountain in Washington DC, San Francisco. The fountains were designed and commissioned by a dentist in a belief that easy access to cool drinking water would keep people from consuming alcoholic beverages. (temperance means restraint or moderation).

*I do not know if you want to share why the fountains were commissioned, but I wanted to share the information with all of you. You could say that the fountains were placed in bigger cities so many people on the streets had access to clean drinking water. Your call!

This is the fountain in New York which inspired the print. Now is the time to speculate and assume. Joe Overstreet was just at a peace rally and walks along and sees this fountain.



And from that inspiration Joe Overstreet created our print today which is **Justice, Faith, Hope and Peace.**



This is one print made of 4 panels. Each panel means something on its own, but together forms one idea. Before we talk about what we see I want to talk about the brain and the power of persuasion. You may look at this print and see something – remember what you first see. Because when I ask others what they see, you may be able to see it – but will you keep your first thoughts or will you think like them. When we refer to this and what we see – be specific as to Panel 1, Panel 2, Panel 3 and Panel 4 – so everyone knows.

First of this print is abstract. What does abstract art mean or can you give me an example? When I looked it up the definition was “internal form rather than a pictorial representation.” Now that is a great definition but if you do not understand the words in the definition – you cannot understand. The best way is to tell you an example: if I drew a tree and was exact in my picture, everyone would know that is a tree. But if I was abstract in my design I may draw a line or a simple shape and say this is a tree.

Color - what colors do you see?

Shapes – what shapes do you see?

Is there a shape in each panel? There is a circle in each panel – have you ever heard a circle has no end and no beginning?

What do you see in the panels?

The bright colors are placed to show the greatest color contrast and the patterns are arranged to give the feeling of movement. There is a yellow explosion around the diamonds on the end panels. The circles on the center panels bring the viewers eye around and inward. The painting has a magical feeling.

Does it help if I turn the print over, sideways, etc.?

The print is symmetrical. Very fancy word but what does it mean: *having the same value when measured in different directions.* Maybe showing them a shape in Panel 1 and showing them the adjoining shape in Panel 4 and so on.

To lead into this activity, discuss how many cultures are rich with tradition, including song, dance, storytelling, and art. Joe Overstreet loved African art as well as Native American art. Many cultures use symbols to communicate. Our alphabet is different looking than the Chinese alphabet and so on. Even written language is made up of series of symbols. Give examples of common symbols in our own culture and what they mean (ex. - peace symbol, heart, safety symbols, etc.).

Artists use designs with shapes and colors to design material for clothing, wallpaper, book covers and other things we use every day.

1. Give each student a word the day before the lesson. Have them look up the definition and get a synonym if possible.

Tomorrow you will be having *Get Smart with Art*.

For the project you have been assigned a word.

Take time to look it up in the dictionary and understand its meaning and a synonym.

Please bring this paper with you so you will remember your word.

Your word is: _____

2. Remember that even in my presentation the words may or may not have made sense but when it was shown in a picture you understood it better. In the case of abstract art – sometimes it makes sense, but sometimes it is not. You are coming up with a code or a symbol of what your word means. It can be with color, shape or a symbol you already know. It may not make sense to anyone but you – that is okay!
3. The original print was divided into 4 panels. Give them a panel (card stock paper). You have been commissioned by Joe Overstreet to keep the panels going. The students have to come up with a visual for your word. This is really difficult for some. Tell them to use the first thing they think of – don't think too hard. All assistants are to help make suggestions as necessary. (Ex.-parallel lines could represent friends, a circle-family, a star-success, etc.)

Have students use crayons or colored pencils and use black markers to outline. Create borders (solid lines dashed lines, crosshatch, etc.) Incorporate math skills by requiring a specific set of rows, columns, shapes. The entire panel needs to be colored.

Here are the some words to use and some hints

Wisdom: brain, light bulb, dictionary, owl

Love: heart

Forgiveness: teardrop, the word sorry

Beauty: many colors, many shapes, flowers, nature

Brilliant: brain, light bulb, dictionary

Knowledge: brain, light bulb, dictionary

Different: same lines, colors, shapes with one being different

Harmony: many colors and shapes together, music notes

Laughter: smile, mouth

Kindness: hand, hand holding the world

Thankful: prayer hands, kneeling

Human Race: hands around the world

Survive: finish line, island

Dignity: purple, gold crown

Accomplish: finish line, stop watch, steps

Friend: hands together, eyes looking at each other

Respect: eyes looking on

Inspire: cheering, pom pom, arrows pointing, teacher (apple)

Achieve: finish line, stop watch, steps

Encourage: cheering, pom pom, arrows pointing, teacher (apple)

Help: cheering, pom pom, arrows pointing, teacher (apple)

Improve: finish line, stop watch, steps

Pride: arms held high

Strength: muscle, shield, weights

Power: muscle, shield, weights

Feelings: tears and sunshine

Think: brain, light bulb, dictionary, owl

Confident: shoulders

Possibility: world, window

Original: many of the same with one different (all yellow smiley faces with no hair and one with many colors and hair).

Change: a circle with arrows pointing to another area with a triangle

Create: crayons, paintbrush, tools

Prosperity: purple, gold crown

Beautiful: lots of color, shapes and lines

Give: empty pocket, hands

Support: cheering, pom pom, arrows pointing, teacher (apple), hands holding the world