

ARTnews

Devin Troy Strother Will Transform Marlborough Chelsea Into a Basketball Court This Saturday

By Dan Duray
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Devin Troy Strother, *just a bunch of niggas in space reedited (tell that nigga jordan, he made a mess trying to be gerhard richter)*, 2014, automotive paint, acrylic, and painted paper on birch panel, 96 x 72 x 2 in.

On Saturday Marlborough Chelsea will open “Space Jam,” a show of new work by Devin Troy Strother that includes painting, sculpture, and a pretty ambitious basketball court installation.

“I’m not really a big basketball fan at all,” Strother said over the phone. “I’m not someone who goes to Knicks games or Lakers games or anything like that. It’s more about the weird aesthetics they appropriate to present graphics to you, and the way the courts look. In aerial views they look like geometric paintings.”

The show’s title references a few things—the 1996 Michael Jordan movie, which Strother watched recently with one of his nephews, but also to the idea of jamming together various influences (one painting’s title: *Devin Troy Strother x Rob Pruitt x Cory Arcangel x Walead Beshty x A Sad Face x 9 Michael Jordans*). Outer space is a theme of the show, too, since a *2001: A Space Odyssey*-esque

monolith dominates his basketball court. (Stanley Kubrick's dimensions for the monolith, Strother noted, were 9 feet by 4 feet by 1 foot, not so far from a basketball player's.)

It's also a reference to the fact that Marlborough only approached him about the show in September. It's not always easy to fill a space! "This is definitely the shortest amount of time I've had to do a solo show," Strother said. "But I do like working under that pressure, trying to generate something for the viewer that's engaging."

Michael Jordan has a large role in the show, naturally, usually streaking across the surface of paintings. "He flew past so many of those cultural bounds because he was so good at playing basketball. I don't know that there's any black figure who's been able to penetrate culture as much as he did. Which is funny because he just played basketball," Strother said.

Sculptures include bronzed basketballs, and bronzed Styrofoam cups, the kind one might drink lean from, or the kind a player might drink Gatorade out of on the bench.

"The main star of *Space Jam* is a black guy, but I tried to use someone who was this entity that was beyond a black person," Strother said. "So what I wanted was to go beyond the show, a presentation of what I've been thinking about." Going beyond the gallery, for example, by transforming it into a basketball court, and in other places a locker room or a movie theater. He basically strove, he said, not to talk about race. Or strove not even to have to talk about not wanting to talk about race.

"I'm not sure how successful I am with the articulating of that," he said. "I guess that's why I keep making stuff."