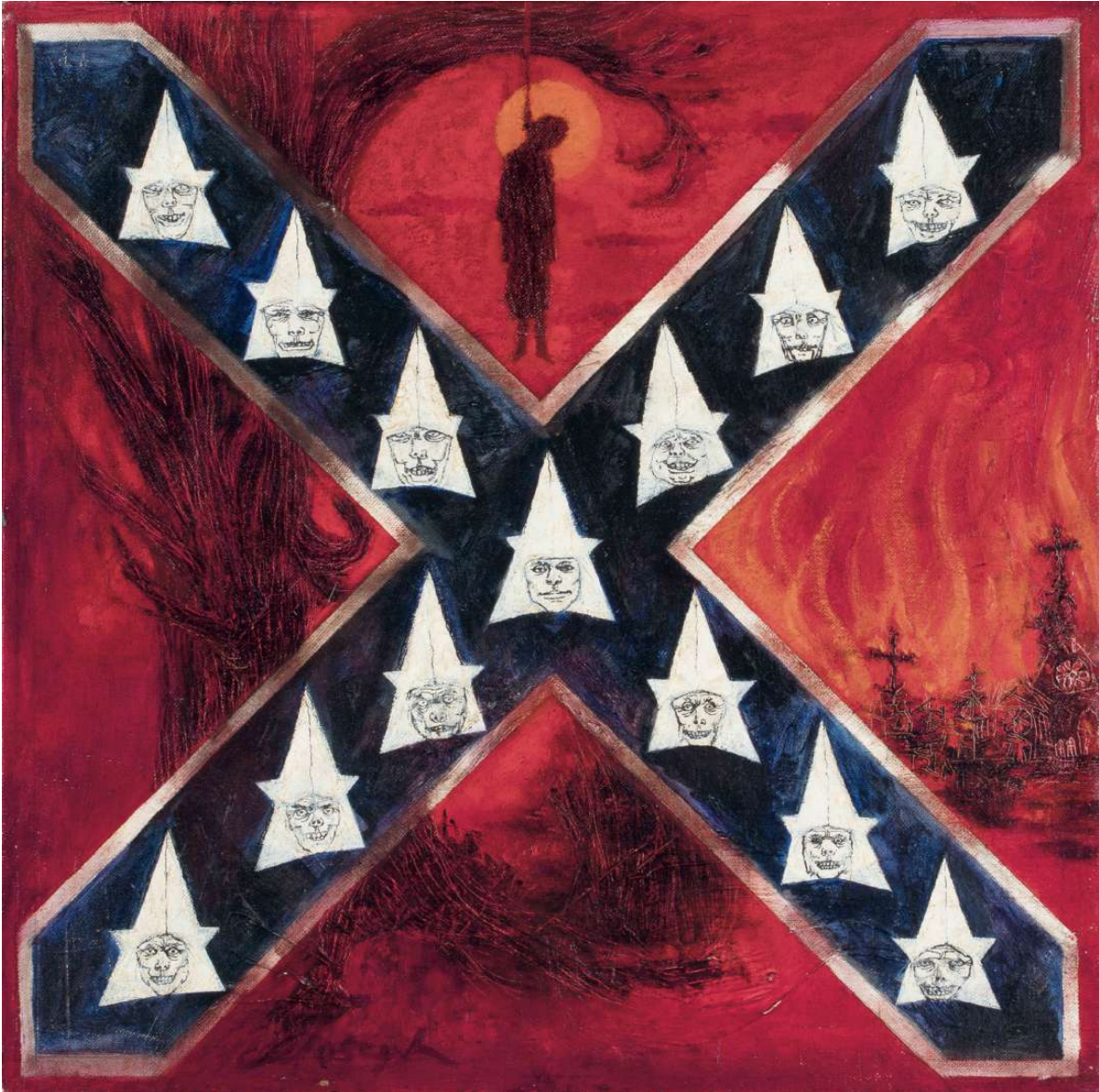


# Akim Monet Fine Arts, LLC



**Cliff JOSEPH (b. 1922)**

*Southern Comfort*

Oil on board in original artist's frame

16 x 16 in (40.64 x 40.64 cm)

1965

Signed, dated and titled on the verso

PROVENANCE

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## LITERATURE

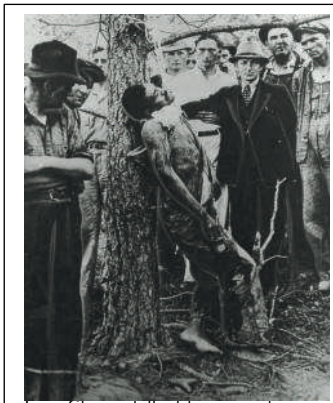
Stromberg, Robert, "Artist Finds Black Beautiful," *The Jersey Journal*, 8 Jan. 1969  
Pegg, Thom et al., "Cliff Joseph: Artist and Activist," *Tyler Fine Art*, 2018, p. 27, illustrated in color

## EXHIBITED

*Of Mice and Men*, October 5 - December 5, 2020, Popcorn Gallery Akim Monet Fine Arts, Los Angeles

## NOTES

It has been debated whether depictions of lynchings in art create or exacerbate racial hatred. Editors of *The Crisis* (Feb, 1937) discussed readers' letters in response to a published picture of the lynching of Lint Shaw at Royston, Georgia (April, 1936), and the general opinion of the readers was that it



Lint Shaw, killed by a mob near Royston, Georgia, April 28, 1936, eight hours before he was to go on trial for attempted assault; NYPL.

did. The magazine's stance was the opposite, declaring, "very often the sheer horror of lynching serves to rouse ordinarily lethargic people into action."<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *The Afro-American* regularly illustrated both photographs and cartoons of lynchings using various strategies to denounce the crime.

The prominent imagery in *Southern Comfort*, however, is not the lynching, but the central abstract compositional element in the foreground, namely the cross of the Confederate flag and the hooded icons substituting for stars. The flag depicted by Cliff Joseph is the Second National Flag of the Confederacy, also known as the Stainless Banner, used from May of 1863- March of 1865. This flag is square, with a red field, a wide blue saltire (St. Andrew's Cross), bordered in white and thirteen mullets, or five-pointed stars representing the number of Confederate states.

The perpetrators of this crime have no power as individuals without the support of institutional racism, symbolized by the Confederate flag. Their faces are cartoon ghouls, owning no human identity. Anonymity is vital to their success and that is maintained only by the tolerance of institutional racism. People do not fear "Joe" or "Bob"; they fear faceless symbols that appear to be greater than human, and those symbols, such as a flag or a white triangular hood have only the power which is allowed them—thus, the "comfort" alluded to in the title is a sham.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> "Do Lynching Pictures Create Race Hatred?" Editorial. *The Crisis*, February 1937. v. 44, no.2: 61

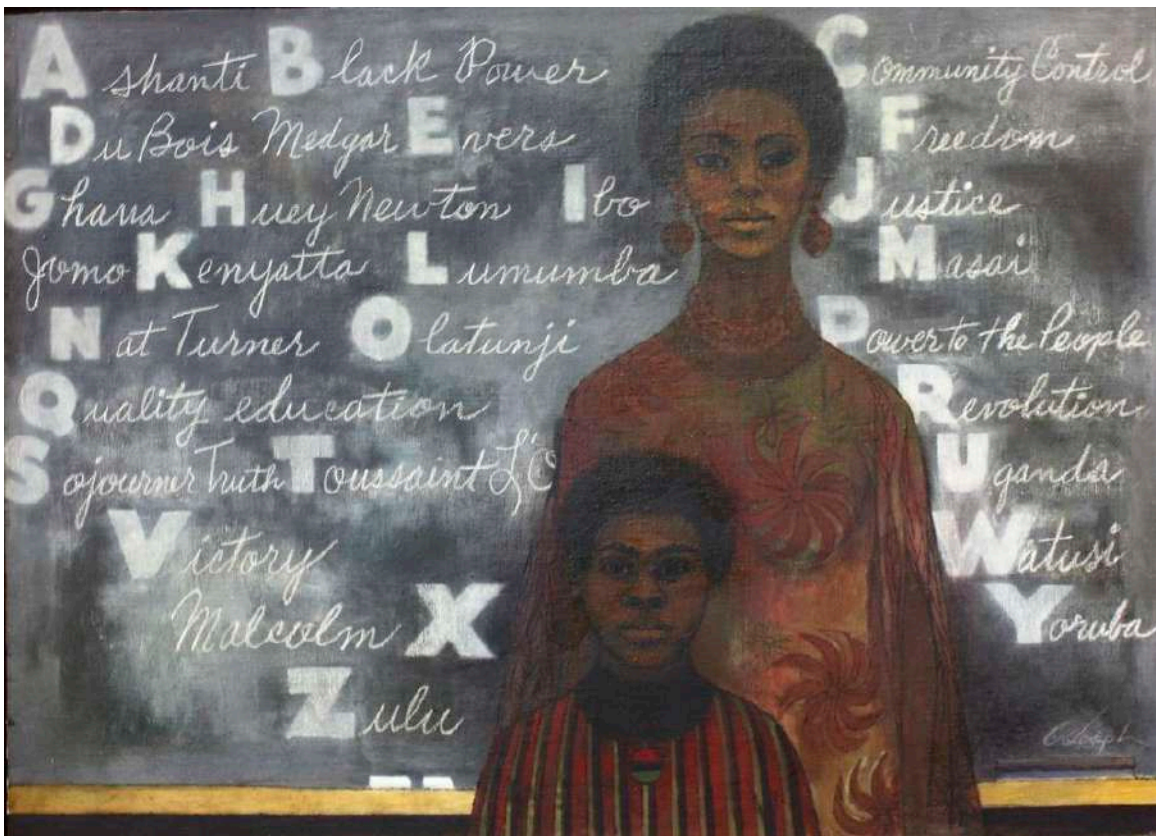
<sup>2</sup> Pegg, Thom et al., "Cliff Joseph: Artist and Activist," *Tyler Fine Art*, 2018, p. 26

"My art is a confrontation. Among the many realities of art expression, this remains the most constant purpose of my aesthetic. It is, of course, a social art, based on my 'gut' perceptions of our worldly conditions; but it draws upon each viewer to confront himself in consideration of his role in affecting those conditions."

Cliff Joseph

A work by Cliff Joseph was recently featured in the acclaimed exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963-1983*, which travelled in 2018 to London's Tate Modern; the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, AR; The Brooklyn Museum, and in 2019 to the Broad Museum in Los Angeles. In the words of the overview from the iteration at The Broad:

*Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963-1983* shines a bright light on the vital contribution of Black artists made over two decades, beginning in 1963 at the height of the civil rights movement. *Soul of a Nation* explores how social justice movements, as well as stylistic evolutions in visual art (such as Minimalism and abstraction), were powerfully expressed in the work of artists including Romare Bearden, David Hammons, Barkley Hendricks, Cliff Joseph, Noah Purifoy, Martin Puryear, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Alma Thomas, Charles White, and William T. Williams.<sup>1</sup>



Cliff JOSEPH, "Blackboard," 1969 - oil on canvas, 66 x 91 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in (167,6 x 232,16 cm). Courtesy Aaron Galleries, Glenview, Ill  
On view at the Broad, Los Angeles from March 23 to September 1, 2019.

*Blackboard* from 1969 "is Joseph's conception of what American Schools should be, as opposed to what they actually are, for the Black child. A gentle and lovely Black woman stands behind a Black child, and the alphabet of the Black Revolution is scrawled on the blackboard..."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Broad, Los Angeles - Retrieved from web: September 16, 2020, <https://www.thebroad.org/soul-of-a-nation-timeline>  
2 Fine, Elsa Honig. *The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Whereas Cliff Joseph's concern is education in *Blackboard* from 1969, it seems that he is responding to the violent events of 1965 in *Southern Comfort* from the same date. The Broad Museum offers a telling chronology of this troubled year:

## 1965

### Malcolm X Assassination

On February 21st, Malcolm X was assassinated while delivering a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City. Malcolm X had expressed the impatience and frustration many people felt toward the civil rights campaign. His call for a principle of self-determination, Black pride, collective action, and a restored communication with Africa laid the intellectual framework for the Black Power movement.

### Black Arts Movement (BAM)

BAM, a group of politically motivated artists, poets, writers, actors, and musicians, came out of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School founded by Amiri Baraka in Harlem. Described as the aesthetic sister to the Black Power movement, BAM featured artists and writers who sought to produce a revolutionary consciousness by creating work that promoted African heritage, Black heroes, liberation, and freedom.

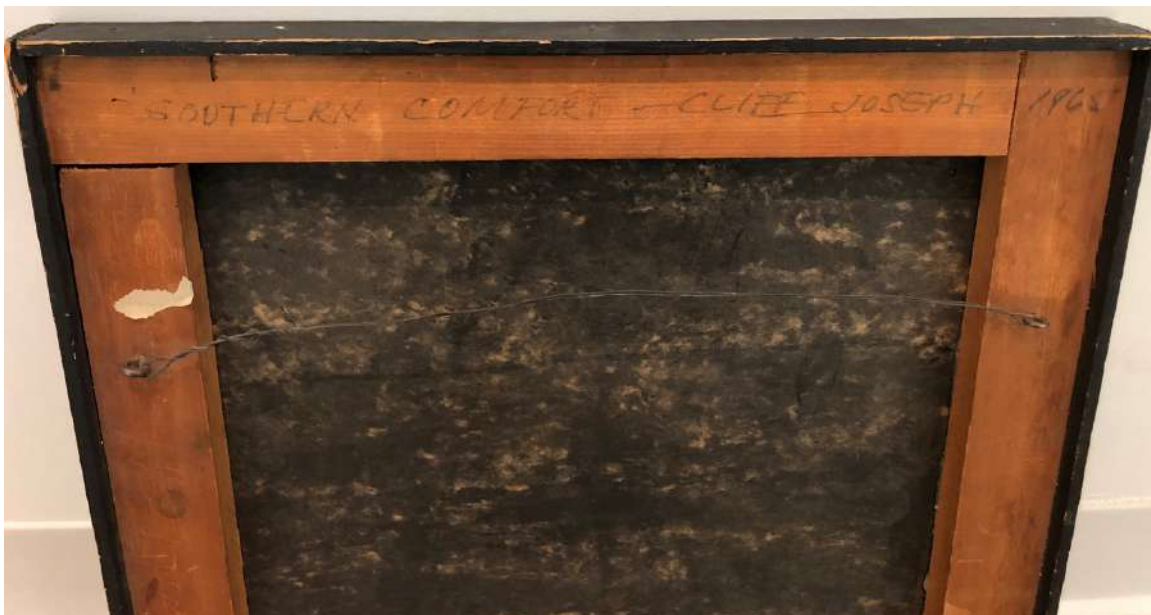
### Selma Marches and the Voting Rights Act

The fifty-four-mile Selma-to-Montgomery March for voting rights occurred March 21st through 25th, reaching the capitol with 25,000 demonstrators. In previous weeks, demonstrators had attempted to march twice, but were stopped by police, once so violently that the day was dubbed "Bloody Sunday." On August 6th, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, designed to curb legal barriers that prevented Black citizens from voting.

### Watts Rebellion



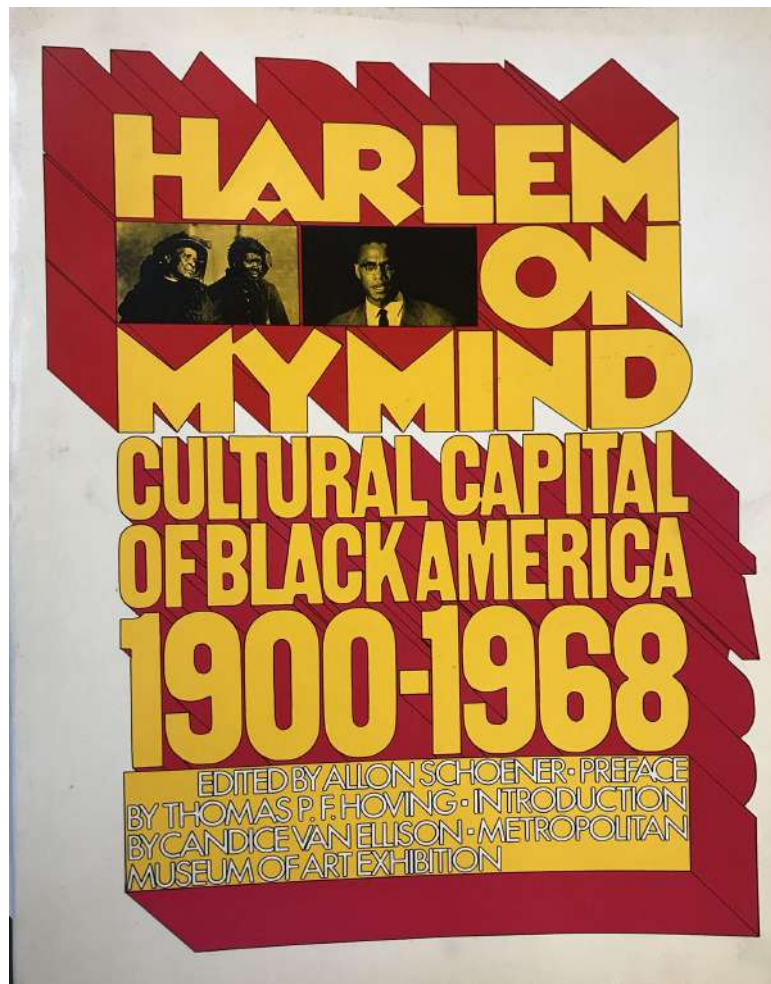
In August, a dispute between a police officer and a motorist turned into six days of civil unrest, resulting in thirty-four deaths, thousands of injuries, and \$40 million in property damages. Around this time, some artists in Los Angeles were working in assemblage, a technique that involves combining found materials. After the rebellion, Noah Purifoy with other artists created the exhibition *66 Signs of Neon*, which consisted of sixty-six individual assemblages made from the wreckage. The show traveled to nine venues between 1966 and 1969.



On the heels of this eventful decade, the protest group BECC (Black Emergency Cultural Coalition), which included artists Benny Andrews, Cliff Joseph, and Faith Ringgold, formed in response to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exclusion of Black artists in their show *Harlem on mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900-1968*. Due to pressure from the BECC, the Whitney Museum of American Art rushed to open *Contemporary Black Artists in America* in 1971. The curator's hasty efforts led to the removal of work by twenty-four artists, and seven abstract artists signed a petition citing the show's tokenism and lack of research.<sup>1</sup>

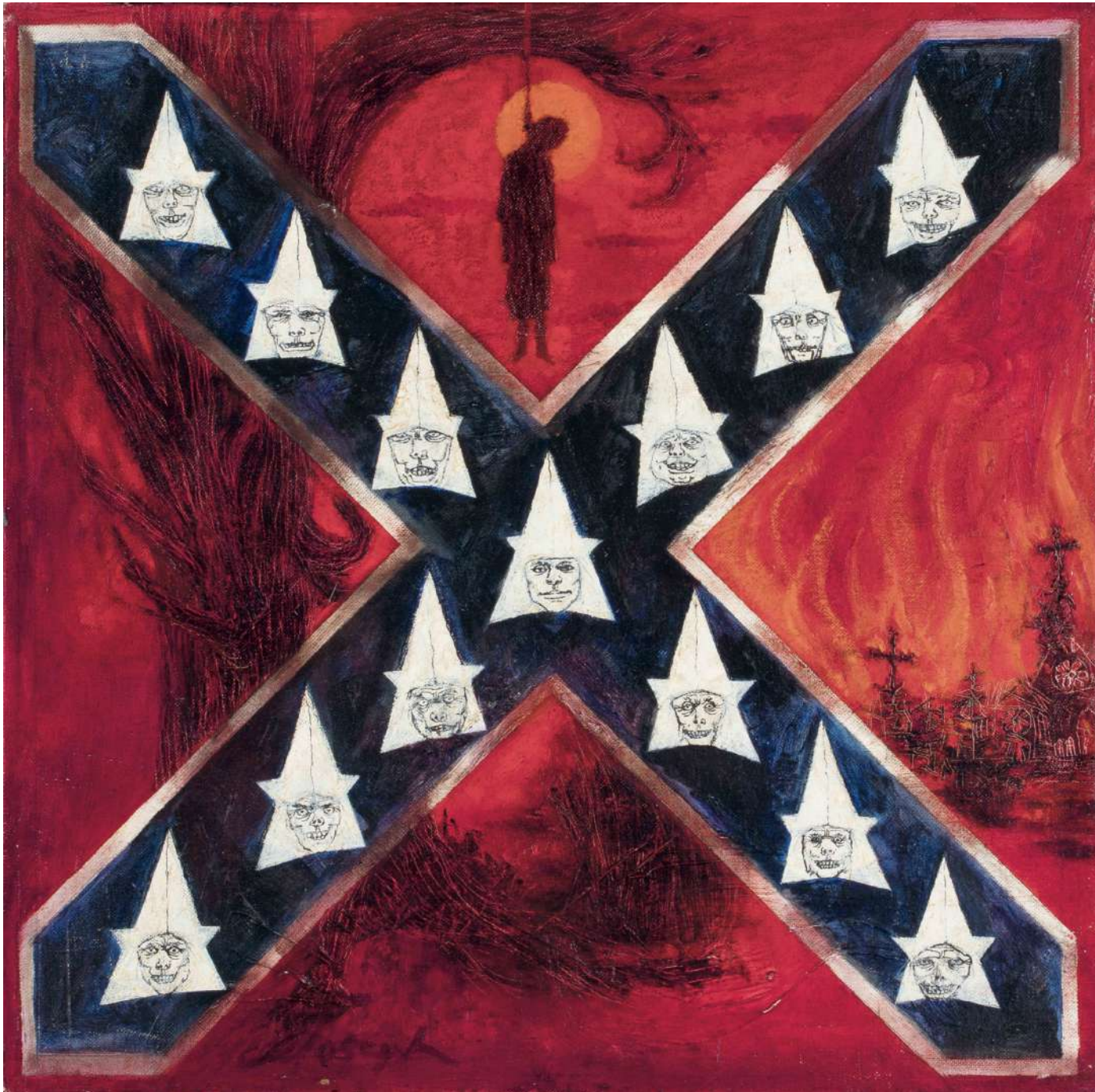
In the words of Cliff Joseph:

*Well, the Coalition began with the black artists' protests of the Metropolitan Museum's "Harlem on My Mind" show, which occurred sometime between 1968 and 1969. At that time, Allon Schoener of the New York State Council was in charge of setting up the "Harlem on My Mind" exhibit. We had several protests about the way the show was set up. One of the things we were in protest against was the fact that Mr. Schoener chose not to use the talents and expertise of any of the members of the black community - artists, art experts, leaders - to help in setting up the show. One other omission was the fact that there were no black painters or black sculptors included in the exhibit. This was especially hard to understand since the show was supposedly set up for the purpose of showing to the public the cultural contributions that had been made by members of the black community.*<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>The Broad, Los Angeles - Retrieved from web: September 16, 2020, <https://www.thebroad.org/soul-of-a-nation-timeline>

<sup>2</sup>Doloris Holmes interview with Cliff Joseph for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1972.



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