→ P.15
Joe Overstreet, *Loisaida Third Street*, 1991
Oil and mixed media on canvas, 54 x 43 in.

← P.15
Johannes Vermeer, *Mistress and Maid*, ca. 1664–67
Oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 31 in.
The Frick Collection, New York
Photo: Joseph Coscia Jr.

REVIEW

Joe Overstreet, *To the North Star*

William Corwin

If one is theoretically minded, a painter's canvas–taught fabric on a wooden frame–is a fine metaphor for freedom (the art) and tension (the support). Overstreet very aptly and thoughtfully embraced this metaphor, and we see the artist's progression extricating the mechanics of painting, from the Euro-centric format of the rectangle on the wall into a malleable and moveable feast that embodied what he envisioned as African, South American, and overall indigenous traditions. *Ungawa – Black Power* (1968) and *Blue Balls* (1969) are lively, earth-toned, and gently figurative invocations to spiritual entities. The more abstract of the two, *Blue Balls*, is a pair of mirrored avian forms connected by a length of mop or broom handle, in a gritty gesture of resourcefulness. But these works seem orthogonally trapped by their stretchers and Overstreet hits his stride in the "Flight Patterns" series: the circular flight radar matrix is applied to a loose rectangular canvas pulled tight by sturdy cords. While the tension is far more palpable here than it would be in a stretched canvas, it is temporary; once released, either notionally or in fact, the fabric becomes eminently transportable. This was something that appealed to Overstreet (as well as other artists working concurrently: Gilliam, Phelan, Saret, Miyamoto, etc.). *The Beginning of Love* (1971) is pure color and no longer even referentially a square. It's still in tension though, symbolic perhaps of the notion that the struggle will never be over. ■

Eric Firestone Gallery, NoHo, 40 Great Jones St., New York, NY 10012. Nov 5, 2025–Jan 24, 2026.

REVIEW

INSIDE THE PEARL I (Preface): A Speculative Optical Analysis

Matilda Berke

In Johannes Vermeer's *Mistress and Maid* (c. 1667), on display at the Frick, the artist suspends a teardrop-shaped pearl from its owner's ear. While this jewel was likely synthetic, Vermeer makes it look real. Its specific iridescence mimics the genuine article, organically composed of thin, overlapping sheets of nacre (mother-of-pearl): microscopic platelets bound around a foreign irritant. In its provocative globular gleam shines a capsular representation of its mistress's status in her contemporary economy of objects.

A few steps away, J.M.W. Turner's *Cologne, the Arrival of a Packet-Boat: Evening* (1826) presents a commercial port scene framed by laborers and the skeleton of a defunct fishing apparatus–the cost of industry, and what gets left behind. There is no visible horizon, only a softly rounded shoreline. The viewer's perspective floats improbably above the water's reflective surface: diaphanous films of diluted oils cast over primer as pale as the pearl. Different parts of the day illogically coexist in this mercantile fantasia. An ambiguous suffusion of light emerges as Turner layers iterative sketches of his landscape into a final image: a kind of gemlike palimpsest. We peer through its nacreous transparencies as if into a snow globe, observing the transitional flows of money and time.

From a distance, Vermeer's mistress's matching necklace appears as solid as her position. Up close, it's barely there–a series of spherical arrangements of light, a compressed portrait of absence and presence–a phase change, a paradigm shift. The individual orbs drift between lustrous materiality and convex suggestion: here, in embryo, I see the accretive lens of capital through which Turner would render the world over two centuries later, accelerating away into ever farther futures. ■

The Frick Collection, 1 E 70th St., New York, NY 10021