

VENUS MANHATTAN

Press Release

Créolité: Andrew LaMar Hopkins

Curated by Alison M. Gingeras

October 7 – November 6, 2020

Opening: Wednesday, October 7th, 2:00 - 6:00 pm

Venus Over Manhattan

120 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10065



(New York, NY) – On October 7, 2020, **Venus Over Manhattan** will inaugurate its new gallery space at **120 East 65th Street** by opening an exhibition of new paintings by **Andrew LaMar Hopkins**, curated by **Alison M. Gingeras**. Entitled **Créolité**, the artist's first solo gallery exhibition in New York features more than fifteen works, including new portraits, miniatures, and the artist's signature architectural tableaux, that all relate to the complexity of Creole identities and the antebellum history of the Gulf States in the American South.

Créolité will be on view at Venus through November 6th. The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated publication featuring important archival images selected by **Andrew LaMar Hopkins**, an introductory essay by **Alison M. Gingeras**, and an extended interview with the artist.

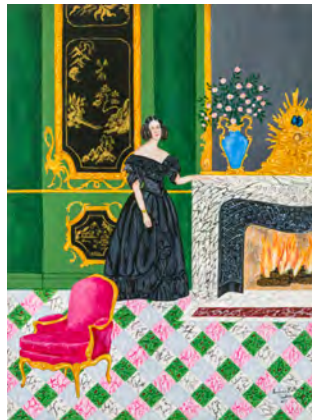
To fully appreciate the artistic project of Andrew LaMar Hopkins, one must begin with the term *créolité*, first deployed in the 1980s by a group of Francophone literary theorists from the Caribbean who embraced "creoleness" as an empowered postcolonial identity. Advanced by such writers as Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant, *créolité* challenged the essentializing ideas of "Négritude" that had emerged in the 1940s as a route to unifying the Black diaspora through common links to African culture. *Créolité* instead embraced the rich cultural, linguistic, and racial entwining of African with other cultures that occurred in the Americas across

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centuries. As Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant wrote in their poetic 1990 manifesto *In Praise of Creoleness (Éloge de la Créolité)*, “[n]either Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves to Creoles. For us this will be a state of mind, or, rather, a state of vigilance, or, better still, a sort of mental envelope within which we will build our world, in full awareness of the world.” Using this notion as a jumping off point, Andrew LaMar Hopkins similarly constructs his own visual world of *créolité* through his lush depictions of 19th century life in New Orleans and its environs.

Echoing the ideas of the literary movement, Hopkins’ *créolité* celebrates the cultural mixing of European, African, and mixed race peoples’ lives and material cultures, and asserts his own pictorial universe based on the histories of Creoles living in the South.



Hopkins paints meticulous and lush depictions of quotidian life in antebellum New Orleans, paying particular attention to the lives of people to whom his own personal history is linked. Born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1977, the artist traces his lineage to a major Creole family descended from Nicolas Baudin, a Frenchman who received a Louisiana land grant in 1710. Largely erased by the Civil War, and subsequently underrepresented in the official historical record of the South, the complex histories of Creole cultures along the Gulf Coast are Hopkins’ central subjects. Informed by rigorous research and personal experience, his paintings project a uniquely focused historical imagination. As Hopkins explains, “When I walk around the French Quarter of New Orleans, I’m inspired by looking at the beautiful architecture of a street scene with buildings from the early 19th century and I let my imagination run: ‘What would this block look like 200 years ago?’”

Drawing upon his family’s history and his expertise as an antiquarian, Hopkins carefully researches the architecture, material culture, and daily life of Creole people circa 1830, in cities including New Orleans, Savannah, and Mobile. In numerous paintings on view in *Créolité* the distinctive elements of antebellum architecture create the compositional structure, even overshadowing Hopkins’ human subjects. In *Creole Elegance* (2020), a fashionably dressed free woman of color poses gracefully in a doorway in the French Quarter. Here, Hopkins’ fine-haired brush lavishly renders each and every brick of a façade with the same attention to detail found in *The Baroness Micaela Almonester de Pontalba in the Hôtel de Pontalba* (2019), with its equally extravagant rendering of the subject’s gown and the gilded mirror, marble mantle, and elaborately patterned floor of her surroundings. Hopkins layers this fastidious devotion to authentic historical representation with a frank acknowledgement of how Creole culture upset the binary distinctions inherent to racial hierarchies of the early 19th century. Such luxuriant scenes as *Creole Child Prodigies* (2020) transcend their period details by foregrounding the complex racial dynamics fostered through the legacy of colonization in Louisiana, where “Creole” was initially a non-racial

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term used to designate anyone born in the former French territory of Louisiana, whether Caucasian European, sub-Saharan African, Indigenous American, or any intermingling thereof. Defying more draconian conceptions of racial hierarchy, Hopkins' pictorial utopia relishes the possibilities latent in Creole diversity, while also acknowledging the hierarchies of free people of color and slaves.

A self-taught artist, Hopkins' self-professed "Creole" paintings elicit comparisons to the work of Clementine Hunter, Grandma Moses, and Horace Pippin. Rendering scenes in exquisite detail, depicting both free Creoles of color and white Creoles, he deconstructs and reimagines an idealized antebellum history of Southern port cities, often injecting overtly homosocial scenarios or references to queer culture. While the occasional Creole dandy or erotic male nude might appear anachronistic in Hopkins' period depictions, they excavate the often-repressed histories of LGBTQ people in the antebellum South. Likewise, his queer characters echo Hopkins' own biography and his parallel practice as a drag queen. Hopkins' alter ego, Désirée Joséphine Duplantier, is a retro *grande dame* from New Orleans, and the subject of one of the artist's most riveting portraits on view at Venus.

Over the past months, Hopkins has established a studio in Savannah, Georgia, where he has completed a number of new works on view in Créolité at Venus. Among these, *Tiffany Christ* (2005-20) is an opulent rendering of a devotional icon embellished and amplified through Hopkins' recollections of his own Catholic upbringing within the Creole tradition.

Also on view is a suite of miniature portraits Hopkins has created in his new studio in Savannah over the course of the pandemic. Recalling pre-photographic 19th century *memento mori*, this series of miniatures traces the lineage of François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), a Haitian general and prominent leader of the Haitian Revolution. Louverture's life story is deeply entwined with Creole identity and has endured as a touchstone for generations of historians, writers, and artists. Hopkins' homage to Louverture adds to a rich tradition of depictions that includes portraits by Jacob Lawrence and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

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120 East 65th Street
New York, NY 10065

Gallery hours:

Tuesday - Saturday, 10 am - 6 pm

To ensure the health and safety of staff and visitors, masks and social distancing will be required in accordance with public guidelines. Maximum of six people admitted at a time.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at info@venusovermanhattan.com

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Andrew LaMar Hopkins, *A Beautiful Day in Faubourg Tremé*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas board; 16 x 20 in (40.6 x 50.8 cm)

Andrew LaMar Hopkins, *Creole Tranquility*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas board; 14 x 11 in (35.6 x 27.9 cm)

Andrew LaMar Hopkins, *Self Portrait of the Artist as Désirée*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas; 12 x 12 in (30.5 x 30.5 cm)

Andrew LaMar Hopkins, *The Baroness Micoela Almonester de Pontalba in the Hôtel de Pontalba*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas board; 16 x 12 in (40.6 x 30.5 cm)

Andrew LaMar Hopkins, *Neptune's Bathroom*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas board; 12 x 12 in (30.5 x 30.5 cm)