

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

NEW YORK | ASPEN

ALLISON JANA E HAMILTON

*A Romance of Paradise*

On View March 27 – April 24, 2021 | 507 West 24th Street, New York

Marianne Boesky Gallery is pleased to present *A Romance of Paradise*, Allison Janae Hamilton's inaugural solo exhibition with the gallery. For *A Romance of Paradise*, Hamilton will present new photographs, videos, and sculptural works that highlight the artist's ongoing exploration of interwoven themes such as environmental justice, folklore and mythologies, and the traditions of communities living in vulnerable landscapes within the rural American South. The title of the exhibition takes the original denotation of the word paradise, meaning "heaven," underscoring the myths of an Edenic southern landscape formed during the exploitative and violent southward expansion of the United States. *A Romance of Paradise* will be on view March 27 – April 24, 2021 at the gallery's 507 West 24th Street location in New York. Marking a major milestone at the gallery, *A Romance of Paradise* will be the first carbon-conscious exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery.

*A Romance of Paradise* is centered around the undeniable verity that the development of the United States was an expansion squarely rooted in the creation of narratives. In contrast to the West, which was viewed as an open range to be conquered and settled, the South was surrounded by optimistic legends of a rich, fertile landscape primed for cultivation. Some early explorers to southeast America maintained the view that the biblical Garden of Eden was literally located on the 35th parallel north, the length of which runs from New Bern, North Carolina, to Memphis, Tennessee. Within the works on view, Hamilton looks at the formation of these mythologies and the way in which brutal colonization of land and people have molded contemporary beliefs and current realities, such as the continued exploitation of land and resulting climate change crisis that often disproportionately impacts communities in the rural Black South. The artist deftly explores the often less visible yet resilient histories of the region, driven by her own connections to Kentucky, where she was born, to Florida, where she grew up, to rural Tennessee, the location of her maternal family's homestead. Hamilton weaves in these personal narratives with pressing contemporary issues, through her photography that combines the lush landscapes shot in rural Northern Florida with the complex lived experiences of its inhabitants, and sculptural works that evoke a land that is simultaneously idyllic, fragile, and haunted by its own history.

*A Romance of Paradise* will include recognized elements to the artist's work and new interpretations of recurring items and motifs. Hamilton's familiar fencing masks, adorned with gathered materials such as feathers and botanical designs, will be presented in a lighter color palette, contrasting the warriorlike appearance of the masks, as well as mixed media works from the artist's *Yard Signs* series. Additionally, new sculptures from Hamilton's *Creatures* series will be on view. The sculptures, taking forms of an alligator, white-tailed deer, and a rattlesnake – all found in her home region of North Florida, present visions of predator and prey in a delicate, white finish reminiscent of porcelain. Taken as a whole, the ethereal colors and textures create, at first glance, a heavenly, immersive landscape. However, upon closer examination, the snarling creatures and warlike masks interspersed in the space speak to an underlying violent depth.

"The works in *A Romance of Paradise* comprise a narrative ecosystem that is both tangible and mythic. The photographs, videos, and sculptures explore how historical myths used to justify violent expansion

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have contemporary implications affecting present-day landscapes and those living therein, not only in the American South but throughout the world at large.” said Allison Janae Hamilton

Many of the artworks in *A Romance of Paradise* draw from early African American nature writing, rituals of hoodoo and traditional healing modalities, botanical drawings, and contemporary lived experiences of communities navigating the distinct impacts of climate change within the South. By drawing together elements from these sources in her deeply personal, interdisciplinary practice, Hamilton interrogates how these histories and myths can give clues to present day experiences and the precarious implications of environmental exploitation on the future. In Hamilton’s photography, for instance, the artist imbeds friends, family, and herself as actors against the backdrop of Northern Florida, bringing together elements of landscape and portrait photography. Adorning her subjects with objects gathered from the environment and combining them with both timeless and contemporary symbolic gestures, Hamilton creates narrative portraits of the actors who are inextricably linked to and disruptors of an environment that collapses history, present, and future.

Shown together, the works in *A Romance of Paradise* explore how human intervention on the landscape over time has impacted the communities that inhabit it today, presenting an image that is contemporary yet ancient, captivating yet disturbing. Each element of the exhibition brings forth the rituals that work within and around these landscapes, demonstrating the continuation and precariousness of the notion of the American Eden.

Aligning with Hamilton’s interest in environmental justice, *A Romance of Paradise* will be the first carbon-conscious exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery. The gallery has expanded and prioritized its commitment to sustainability since the formation of its Green Initiative Committee in 2019. In addition to ongoing environmentally friendly practices with Galleries Commit, *A Romance of Paradise* will track carbon output throughout the planning and execution of the individual artworks and the exhibition as a whole and will account for carbon conservation in the cost of each work. At the end of the show, the gallery will make a donation, including for any unsold works, to permanent, old-growth forest conservation with [Galleries Commit x Art to Acres](#).

Timed to the opening of the exhibition, Allison Janae Hamilton will present her video work *Wacissa* (2019), for Times Square Arts’ ‘Midnight Moment’ from April 1 – 30, 2021. Midnight Moment is the world’s largest, longest-running digital art exhibition, synchronized on electronic billboards throughout Times Square nightly from 11:57pm to midnight. In *Wacissa*, the viewer is submerged in the undulating waters of rivers from Hamilton’s home region of North Florida. Recounting a deeply localized history, the film shows a river system wherein limestone was excavated by slave labor to bring cotton from Georgia through the Florida Panhandle to ships waiting in the Gulf of Mexico, exploring intertwined concepts of the coastal South, labor, and myths of paradise.

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**Allison Janae Hamilton** (b. 1984) was born in Kentucky, raised in Florida, and her maternal family's farm and homestead lies in the rural flatlands of western Tennessee. Hamilton's relationship with these locations forms the cornerstone of her artwork. Hamilton has exhibited her work at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Storm King Art Center, New Winsor, NY; the Studio Museum in Harlem, MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY; the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC; the Jewish Museum, New York, NY; Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain; the Brighton Photo Biennial, Brighton, UK; and the Istanbul Design Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey. Solo exhibitions of her work include *Pitch* at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), North Adams, MA (2018);

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*Passage* at Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, GA (2018); and *Wonder Room at Recess*, New York, NY (2017). She is the recipient of the Creative Capital Award and the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant, as well as wide range of residencies. Hamilton's work is in numerous private and public collections including the Studio Museum in Harlem and The Menil Collection. Hamilton received her PhD in American Studies from New York University and her MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University.

### **About Galleries Commit**

Galleries Commit is a worker-led collective committed to a climate-conscious, resilient, and equitable future for New York City galleries.

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