

# FAMILY STYLE



Allison Janae Hamilton, *Celestine (Florida Storm)*, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

## STARGAZING: THE ARTIST ALLISON JANAЕ HAMILTON LOOKS SKYWARDS IN “CELESTINE” AT MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

BY ANNABEL KEENAN  
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Land has always been central to the work of [Allison Janae Hamilton](#). Taking up landscape as her lens, the artist considers the ways in which the natural world bears witness to history, foregrounding social, political, and environmental justice, especially in relation to Black women and the rural South. In “[Celestine](#),” Hamilton’s second solo show with [Marianne Boesky Gallery](#) in New York, which features new film, painting, and sculpture, the artist shifts her gaze from the earth to the sky, expanding the scope of her focus to encompass not just our world, but also the cosmos that has been humankind’s eternal companion.

Florida has made for a versatile artistic reference point in Hamilton’s practice, and in “*Celestine*” she cites the Sunshine State specifically as a way to center and uplift Black women who’ve called it home. In *Celestine (Florida Storm)*, 2025, a film featuring a night sky, Hamilton includes the voice of Candice Hoyes, a New York-based soprano singer and songwriter originally from Florida. In another work, *BRILLIANT SKY (For Mary Ann Carroll)*, 2025, Hamilton pays homage to Mary Ann Carroll, the only woman in a group of Black American landscape painters active between the 1950s and ‘80s known as the Florida Highwaymen. The piece, a mirror with the words “brilliant sky” etched into the surface five times, features gilded snakes, some of which are eating their own tails, a symbol of a never-ending cycle of destruction and rebirth known as the

ouroboros, a common motif in Hamilton's work. Joining these in the show are plaster casts of the hands of Hamilton's friends and family. In this light, she explains, "the voices and experiences of Black Floridian women are prominent both conceptually and formally within this vertical and celestial landscape."



Allison Janae Hamilton, *BRILLIANT SKY (For Mary Ann Carroll)*, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

"Celestine" also features bronze works that reimagine Hamilton's older sculptures of antique fencing masks that the artist embellished with objects like antlers or flowers. These masks often appear in her practice in the form of wall-sculptures as well as worn by the people in her photographs and films, in this way transforming the pieces into new characters that evoke ancestral spirits and mythic creatures. Hamilton first became interested in masks after finding a vintage photograph of African-American soldiers adorned with the protective equipment during a round of fencing. For "Celestine," Hamilton took the masks off the wall and installed them on vertical posts, allowing the viewer to see both the outward appearance and the backside, which would normally only be visible to the wearer, as if the visitor too could adapt a different character.

Centering the sky in "Celestine," Hamilton returns to early explorations of the theme that she initially began in "Pitch," her first museum solo exhibition, which opened in 2018 at MASS MoCA. "I've been feeling for a while that I wanted to explore a vertical landscape, and figuring out what might be meaningful when we look upwards to the sky or burrow deeper into the earth, its histories, and its resources and economies," Hamilton says. "By looking and thinking vertically, we can consider the relationships between experiences of mining, working with, and laboring upon the earth, to more abstract or ethereal themes offered by the sky, and particularly by the celestial." For "Pitch," she explored the celestial in relation to the sky itself, creating abstract drawings of constellations on wood.



Allison Janae Hamilton, *Deborah*, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

“I was thinking about turpentine workers in Northern Florida who worked from ‘can’t to can’t’—from the time you can’t see in the morning to the time you can’t see at night,” she explains. “In other words, their only moments of time away from the harsh labor conditions in the turpentine woods were under the cover of the night sky.”

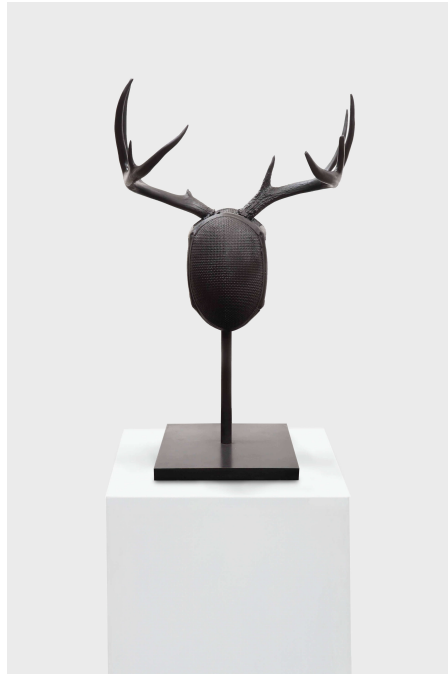
A form of forced labor, turpentine farming has a history rife with brutality. The material has been used for centuries for a range of purposes, including to fortify ships, and its farming became an integral part of the economy in the south from early colonization to the mid-twentieth century. Many workers were enslaved or impoverished and worked and lived in the turpentine camps where they were subjected to grueling hours and dangerous conditions, enduring exhausting physical labor. Turpentine is sticky and would inevitably end up on the skin of workers (so much so that North Carolina earned the nickname of the Tar Heel State). It is also highly flammable and toxic, causing nerve damage with prolonged exposure.



Allison Janae Hamilton, *Afternoon Constellation*, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

“Today, I’m still thinking about the turpentine workers in relation to the artworks in ‘Celestine,’ but I’m also thinking more broadly about the sky as a conduit of spirituality, ritual, communication, and connection,” she says. Using oil for her three paintings in the show, Hamilton offers a subtle nod to the turpentine industry, as the material is used to thin paint and expedite drying. In these works, she depicts skies in various hues—such as royal blue dotted with bright red crosses symbolizing the stars—images that pay homage to the turpentine workers and portray what they might have seen while looking upward.

References to the history of the South can be found throughout Hamilton’s practice. “My upbringing in Florida as well as my family roots in Tennessee and Kentucky are always threaded through each body of work,” she says. As exemplified in “Celestine,” Florida in particular makes frequent appearances. Like the sky, the state has different meanings for different people: While some might think of the verdant and alligator-filled Everglades, others imagine the beaches and ocean.



Allison Janae Hamilton, *Antler Mask in Bronze (Midnight)*, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

Florida is also at the forefront of climate issues, from rising sea levels to devastating weather events—additional themes central to Hamilton’s work. “I’m always thinking about issues of climate, particularly as it relates to environmental justice and the various ways people’s lives are impacted by climate-related disasters,” she says. “I try to disrupt the idea that climate change is solely a future-oriented issue, and instead explore its relationships to history and the present moment.”

Indeed, the world we live in today is scarred by the legacy of extractive practices—like turpentine farming—that exacerbate climate change. The past must be scrutinized to understand how we got here, and its lessons must be heeded to move toward a sustainable future. In her work, Hamilton considers how issues of climate change disproportionately impact different communities, and the generations of racist and biased policies and practices that caused these issues.



Allison Janae Hamilton, self portrait, 2025.  
Image courtesy of the artist.

Hamilton's climate activism extends beyond the conceptual side of her practice; her studio itself implements sustainable operations, including reducing waste and carbon emissions. She is also a founding member of Artists Commit, a collective promoting climate action among artists and partnering institutions. This commitment resonates with Marianne Boesky Gallery, which is a member of climate groups, including the worker-led Galleries Commit and the business-centric Gallery Climate Coalition. Additionally, through Galleries Commit, on all of its art-sales invoices since 2021, the gallery has included an optional \$35 "Climate Conscious Contribution," which funds Art into Acres, a non-profit that supports land conservation. If collectors opt-out, the gallery covers the contribution on their behalf. To date, Marianne Boesky Gallery has supported the conservation of more than 73,000 acres of land in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and the United States.

As constants throughout history, land and sky are apt tools to literally and metaphorically trace issues of climate change. While specifically paying homage to Black women of Florida and the turpentine farmers who contributed labor this country was built upon, Hamilton reminds us in "Celestine" that land and sky bear evidence of all who came before us and—despite its complexities—the world remains a wise and enduring companion.

*"Celestine" is on view until March 8, 2025, at Marianne Boesky Gallery at 509 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011.*