

Andrew LaMar Hopkins

New Orleans Créoles in Paris Honey

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Following his introductory group show at MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique in 2021, painter extraordinaire Andrew LaMar Hopkins – a.k.a. Désirée Joséphine Duplantier, his drag alter ego – is returning solo with six recent miniatures: yet another occasion for the citizens of light to snatch a glimpse at the little-told if not forgotten history of early 19th century New Orleans Creoles, whom he has dedicated his lifework to. While the definition has shifted over the years, the term *créole* originally referred to the people born in colonial Louisiana under both French and Spanish rule, no matter their lineage or skin color. After the territory's 1803 purchase by the United States, this category got further narrowed down to the former French one of *les gens de couleur libres* – from then on, an independent group of mixed-race Americans with European, West-African, and Amerindian ancestry: namely, descending altogether from the settler, the enslaved and the indigenous.

In the subsequent decades, New Orleans Creoles went on to enjoy quite a life as shopkeepers, artisans or landowners, some of them counting among the wealthiest free persons of color in the country. For example, the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau has been a recurrent historical figure in Hopkins' paintings. That being said, their self-created identity at the crossroads of so many others kept entertaining strong ties with France: they typically spoke the language, traveled back and forth to the old world and showed off their prosperity with the latest Parisian fashion, be it fancy clothing or neoclassical furniture. Louisiana Creole culture experienced its golden age in the first half of the 19th century before the American Civil War broke out and imposed its Manichean, black-and-white racial view instead. Thereon 'too white to be black, too black to be white,' to quote late professor, filmmaker and poet Maurice M. Martinez' 2017 book *Black Creole*, they saw their group marginalized, their assets eroded, as their rights challenged.

A native of Mobile, Alabama – the adjacent state – and a longtime resident of New Orleans, Hopkins hasn't only set out to unearth and celebrate its foregone yet still vibrant Creole culture. He has

also discovered that he was part of it himself, descending on his father's side from a French navy man – Nicolas Baudin from Tours. The latter received a Louisiana land grant in 1710, and the offspring of his many sons and slaves eventually inherited the plantation. Not unlike his free ancestors of color, the self-taught artist is striving to be his best self, embodying the very way of life he wishes to resurrect. A dandy since always, he has developed from a young age an insatiable thirst for antebellum history, architecture and decorative crafts, which led him to open at 20 an antiques shop in town. While he now collects for his own pleasure and visits France many times a year to prowl flea markets, he has put this passion at the service of his art. Executed with a dazzling attention to detail, his genre paintings unfold in exquisitely gilded frames and a faux naïve style the perhaps not so lost folklore of New Orleans Creoles, which he fantasizes and personifies to perfection.

A retrospective of his work is currently held at the Louisiana State Museum of New Orleans, from November 22, 2022 to September 30, 2023.

- Violaine Boutet de Monvel

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Creole Venus washes up to the shores of La Nouvelle Orléans, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 40.5 x 50.8 cm / 16 x 20 inches

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Creole Sweethearts, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 30 x 40.5 cm / 12 x 16 inches

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Louisiana Creole Garden Party, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 71 x 30 cm / 14 x 11 inches

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Bienvenue à La Maison, Back from the Battle of New Orleans, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 30 x 40.5 cm / 12 x 16 inches

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A Creole of color in the latest Parisian fashions of 1828, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 71 x 30 cm / 14 x 11 inches

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A Visit to the Creole Bed Chamber, 2022
 Acrylic on canvas
 35.5 x 45.7 cm / 14 x 18 inches

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Andrew LaMar Hopkins was born in 1977 in Mobile, AL, USA; he lives and works in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Andrew LaMar Hopkins paints meticulous, lush, minute depictions of 19th-century interior scenes and architectural set pieces based on the histories of free Creole people in New Orleans, the city he has called home for over a decade. Growing up in Alabama, Hopkins was particularly fixated on the Southern Creole culture to which his family is linked, and which the Civil War largely erased; Hopkins can trace his lineage to a major Creole family, descended from Nicolas Baudin, a Frenchman who received a Louisiana land grant in 1710. Drawing from this history and his expertise as an antiquarian, Hopkins carefully researches the architecture, material culture, and daily life of Creole populations in Southern cities circa 1830. Self-taught, Hopkins' pictorial compositions visually recall the paintings of Clementine Hunter, Grandma Moses, and Horace Pippin. Rendering interiors and exteriors with exquisite detail, and depicting both free Creoles of color and white Creoles, Hopkins deconstructs and reimagines an idealized antebellum history of Southern port cities—often injecting overtly homosocial scenarios or obvert references to queer culture, that excavate the often repressed histories of LGBTQ people in the antebellum south. Likewise, these queer characters echo Hopkins own biography and his parallel practice as a drag queen: his alter ego, Désirée Joséphine Duplantier, is a retro grande dame from New Orleans.

Violaine Boutet de Monvel

Violaine Boutet de Monvel is a researcher, art writer and translator from Paris. She is the author of monographs and exhibition catalogues on several artists (Grégory Chatonsky, Benjamin Sabatier, Pierre Ardouvin, Jan Fabre, etc.), as well as many articles in art magazines (*ArtReview*, *Frieze*, *Aperture*, etc.). She currently teaches at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, where she has undertaken a PhD on video art and artificial intelligence.