

# VENUS

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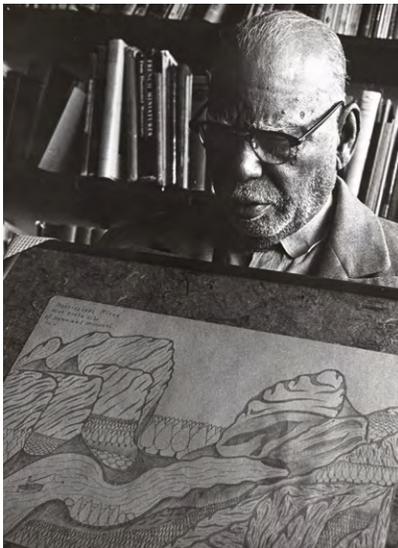
## MANHATTAN

Press Release

### Joseph Elmer Yoakum

Opening: Thursday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 - 8:00 pm  
September 9 - October 2, 2021

Venus Over Manhattan  
120 East 65<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10065



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present an exhibition of works by **Joseph Elmer Yoakum**, the self-taught Chicago artist whose works inspired a generation of artists. This exhibition is timed to coincide with **“Joseph E. Yoakum: What I Saw,”** an unprecedented retrospective of Yoakum’s work that will travel from the **Art Institute of Chicago** to the **Museum of Modern Art**, and the **Menil Collection**. In 2019, the gallery mounted the first solo exhibition of Yoakum’s work in New York in more than thirty years, which featured nearly seventy drawings. This exhibition marks the gallery’s third solo presentation of Yoakum’s work.

Yoakum’s use of color, dynamic articulation of perspective, and figurative geometry draws out the spiritual nature of landscapes and turn their geography into compelling images. His imaginative use of line and expressive renderings of the natural world captivated artists of younger generations, who found in Yoakum a modern-day Henri Rousseau, a talent at once natural and visionary. This exhibition features some thirty works that showcase the unique blend of the cartographic and the fantastical in Yoakum’s practice.

Yoakum’s works are notable for their unusual geometries, dynamic use of line, and evocative, soft colors. The highly suggestive nature of the artist’s drawings situates them firmly in the space of imagination, despite being inspired by the artist’s travels and his lifelong quest for new vistas and grand landscapes. Many works reference

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real places, such as the Mt. Vesuvius or Mana Kea in Hawaii, yet the artist made his drawings in Chicago late in his life, when he no longer traveled as he did in his youth. Visually, the works bear out the potency of this ambiguity between fact and fiction—Yoakum uses line to clarify features of a landscape, but he also lends the places he depicts a dream-like quality.

The tension between geographic reference and myth-making in Yoakum's works has tended to parallel the mystery surrounding Yoakum's biography. A man of established African-American and Native American ancestry, he tended to bend facts about his background to suit his personal inclinations—for instance, identifying himself as a Navajo rather than with the Cherokee roots that were proven parts of his heritage. Despite being a self-taught artist who started making art quite late in his life, Yoakum's life was suffused with an artistry, even prior to his time spent drawing, that colored the way he presented himself to peers and supporters. This self-mythologized persona was arguably an ideal testing ground and mode of development for his sense of imagination and creativity.

The force of Yoakum's work unburdened the purity of his self-taught status from any association with lack of skill. Yoakum was a highly original artist as well as a story-teller with a developed sense of narrative and expressive flair. From *La Conchita* in 1995, artist Roger Brown wrote a letter to curator Mark Pascale stating "I believe this man's work had the same effect on all of us as Rousseau must have had on Picasso and the others of his generation. How could someone with no training just start making art that was so superior to most of the art of the day done by trained artists?" The answer seems to lie in Yoakum's willingness to bend reality to his purposes, and his extraordinary gift for drawing out novelty and fantasy within established territories.

### Venus Over Manhattan

120 East 65<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10065

### Gallery hours:

Tuesday - Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

*To ensure the safety of staff and visitors, masks and social distancing will be required in accordance with public guidelines.*

### Press contact

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For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at [info@venusovermanhattan.com](mailto:info@venusovermanhattan.com)

### Image credits:

Joseph Elmer Yoakum, *Goldhopiggan of Hardangerviddo Glacier near Dombas Norway N.E.E.*, 1963. Private Collection. Courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.

Joseph Elmer Yoakum with *Mississippi River near north side of Hannibal Missouri*, c. late 1960. Unidentified photographer. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Whitney B. Halstead Papers. Courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.

Joseph Elmer Yoakum, *Mt. Lizard Head in San Juan Mtn Range near Silverton Colorado*, 1970. Private Collection. Courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.

Joseph Elmer Yoakum, *Mt. Huerta near Juraz Mexico*, c. 1970. Private Collection. Courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.