

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

ELIZABETH COLOMBA

Opening: Tuesday, April 15th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm
39 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present **Elizabeth Colomba**, the artist's debut solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition provides a comprehensive look at Colomba's distinctive approach to figurative painting, featuring a selection of new and recent paintings and works on paper—most of which have never been shown publicly.

Opening on April 15th the exhibition foregrounds Colomba's engagement with historical, mythological, and allegorical subjects, centering Black women as protagonists in painterly traditions from which they have long been excluded. The show coincides with the ongoing

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN



installation of Colomba's *Armelle* (1997) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art—one of several recent prominent showcases of her work, which also include a cover for *The New Yorker* and a permanent commission for the Park Avenue Armory's entrance hall. In conjunction with the exhibition, *Venus Over Manhattan* will publish a richly illustrated catalogue featuring a new conversation between Colomba and the artist Wangechi Mutu.

Colomba's work serves as a critical intervention into the Western art historical canon. Employing the aesthetic conventions of Old Master painting, she centers Black women in her compositions, portraying them with dignity and self-possession. Influenced by Renaissance and Baroque traditions, her meticulous technique supports a fearless revisionism that insists on Black representation across historical and symbolic registers. "Beauty is democratic—it shouldn't be a privilege to enjoy beauty," Colomba has said.

The exhibition at *Venus Over Manhattan* builds on Colomba's recent museum presentations—"Elizabeth Colomba: Mythologies" at the Portland Museum of Art in 2023 and "Elizabeth Colomba: Repainting the Story" at the Princeton University Art Museum in 2022—and spans multiple thematic groupings. The presentation includes paintings from the artist's *History* series, honoring Black women who profoundly shaped American social and political life; single portraits from her *Mythology* and *Allegory* series, reimagining goddesses, heroines, and archetypes; and new works from her *Orientalism* series, a pointed interrogation of nineteenth-century academic painting.

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN



The newest painting featured in the exhibition emerges from Colomba's *Tarot* series, where she reimagines specific Major Arcana cards replete with newfound iconography that fuse both Western and Afro-Caribbean vocabularies. *The Magician* (2025) features a regal Black woman in a richly appointed interior, wearing a tiara inscribed with the infinity symbol. Amidst symbolic references—a pentacle on a serving tray; the self-devouring serpent of the magician's necklace—the painting positions her subject as an empowered conduit of mysterious forces.

Colomba's interest in occult symbolism reflects her broader vision of Black women as sovereign participants in their own mythologies. This perspective continues through her *History* series, which centers Black women of the past whose accomplishments, heroism, or notoriety are often excluded from conventional narratives. *Fisk Jubilee* (2024) honors the famed a cappella singers who brought the musical traditions of African American spirituals to mainstream audiences, performing for leaders such as President Ulysses S. Grant and Queen Victoria. *Mary Ellen Pleasant* (2024) pays tribute to the legendary abolitionist and entrepreneur often called the "Mother of Human Rights in California," depicting her amid symbols of her financial acumen and radical influence. These paintings insist upon the significance of women like Pleasant not as footnotes to history, but as defining agents of political, personal, and cultural freedom.

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

This exhibition marks the public debut of Colomba's ongoing *Orientalism* series, begun in 2022, which examines the European tradition of exoticizing the "East" while either excluding Black figures or relegating them to subordinate positions. Paintings such as *Orientalism — Plate 3* (2024) reframe the aesthetic trappings of nineteenth century Orientalist painting, centering Black women in scenes that challenge colonial fantasies.

Colomba also explores allegory, mythology, and the feminine sacred as channels for envisioning Black female subjectivity. Notable in this vein is her *Four Seasons* suite—*Spring* (2018), *Summer* (2012), *Fall* (2012), and *Winter* (2012-18)—which collectively reclaim the classic Western tradition of personifying seasons. The series traces the life of a Black woman, with each painting embodying a season and a stage of life. The figures convey a palpable sense of self-awareness and presence, whether evoking the adolescent innocence of *Spring*, barefoot among roses and modeled on the artist's niece, or the contemplative wisdom of *Winter*, inspired by Colomba's own mother.

Taken together, Colomba's paintings present a critical vehicle through which to examine portraiture's role in shaping identity, creating environments that honor her subject's presence in and through culture. Repositioning her figures across epochs and mythic registers, Colomba redefines not only how Black people have been conditioned to be seen, but also how Black people have been conditioned to reflect upon themselves.

ABOUT ELIZABETH COLOMBA

Elizabeth Colomba was born in Épinay-sur-Seine, France, to parents of Martinican descent. She attended the Estienne School of Art and the École nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. Colomba's work has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at the Portland Museum of Art (Portland, ME), and the Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ). Her work frequently features in group presentations both stateside and abroad, including recent exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA); the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (Philadelphia, PA), and the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) (San Francisco, CA), among others. Her work has been featured on the cover of *The New Yorker* (2022), and in *Vogue* (2023). Her work is held in the permanent collections of numerous institutions around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY); the Studio Museum in Harlem (New York, NY); the Portland Museum of Art (Portland, ME); and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Art (Philadelphia, PA), the Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ), and the Park Avenue Armory (New York, NY), among others. Elizabeth Colomba lives and works in New York.

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

ABOUT VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Venus Over Manhattan is dedicated to illuminating the work of a diverse range of historical and contemporary artists through dynamic rotating exhibitions and scholarly publications. Since it was founded by Adam Lindemann in 2012, the gallery has been responsible for revitalizing and establishing commercial, scholarly, and public interest for artists such as Peter Saul, Richard Mayhew, and Joan Brown. Today, the gallery operates from 39 Great Jones Street in the heart of downtown New York City. Its distinct exhibitions program, which has recently featured works by Brad Kahlhamer, Chéri Samba, and Keiichi Tanaami, attracts a broad spectrum of collectors, curators, writers, and arts enthusiasts. As art world trends continue to shift, Venus Over Manhattan remains steadfast in its focus on the discovery of artists across generations, geographies, and cultures and to expanding the depth of artists celebrated across global institutions, by audiences, and within the art market.

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

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

39 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

PRESS CONTACT

Dan Duray
+1 (203) 520-0619
dan@nothingobstacle.com

IMAGE CREDITS

1. Detail of *The Magician*, 2025
2. *Mary Ellen Pleasant*, 2024
3. *Fisk Jubilee*, 2024
4. *Study for Orientalism – Plate 2*, 2024
5. *Study for Antiope*, 2024

Images of all works by Elizabeth Colomba: courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.