

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

BRAD KAHLHAMER: BOWERY NATION: BIRDS ARE TALKING

Opening: Tuesday, May 13th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present ***Bowery Nation: Birds Are Talking***, **Brad Kahlhamer's** first solo exhibition with the gallery since joining the program last year. On view from May 13th, the presentation debuts a new body of work created primarily at his winter studio in Mesa, Arizona—and exhibited publicly here for the first time—including eight large-scale paintings on bedsheets, a newly conceived “Supercatcher” sculpture, and a large work on paper. Together, these works map a deeply personal cosmology that draws upon Indigenous storytelling, punk aesthetics, Abstract Expressionism, and the raw textures of New York City street culture.

In *Bowery Nation: Birds Are Talking*, the works on sleep linens capture lush visual improvisations that fuse references to Plains Indian winter counts, pop-cultural graphics, and the radical openness of Manhattan's post-punk scene. Kahlhamer was initially drawn to painting on bedsheets for their portability and responsiveness to varied mediums, seeing parallels to Lakota winter counts—historic pictorial calendars painted on hides or cloth. Much like winter counts, these paintings feature no fixed beginning or end point, instead offering a dreamlike tapestry of figures, symbols, and vignettes.

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The exhibition builds upon the foundation set by Kahlhamer's acclaimed 2024 presentation at Independent 20th Century—named a 'Best Booth' by ARTNews magazine—which spotlighted pivotal works from the 1990s that crystallized his concept of the "third place," merging Indigenous heritage, German American upbringing, and downtown New York counterculture. Kahlhamer's exhibition at Venus also precedes his inclusion in "Terraphilia," a major group exhibition opening in July at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, organized in collaboration with TBA21–Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary."

The largest work in the current exhibition, *Mesa, 6:00 AM* (2024), is a sprawling composition that Kahlhamer began outdoors in the Arizona desert, folding and transporting it in his carry-on luggage as he moved between several locations—including a residency at Civitella Ranieri in Italy—before completing it in his Bushwick studio. Populated by birds, human figures, and ringed winter-count structures, the painting balances gestural abstraction with cartoon-like precision. As Kahlhamer observes, "every successful image has three registers—three line-weights, three intensities," a layered approach that establishes non-linear narratives of movement, myth, and personal history. In this sense, the visual layering of his images mirrors the conceptual layering of identities within his notion of the "third place."

Born in Tucson, Arizona, and adopted by German American parents, Kahlhamer has long interrogated questions of identity and belonging. His paintings, drawings, sculptures, and installations navigate lived experience, collective memory, and economic storytelling honed at the Topps Company of Red Hook, where he worked as an art director alongside Art Spiegelman in new product development.

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Several of the new paintings, such as *Superstition Ranch Market, 6:51* (2025), incorporate skeins of paint, coffee stains, and folds accrued during nomadic travels between the deserts of Arizona and Kahlhamer's Brooklyn studio. He likens his unstretched surfaces to "dream sheets," capable of absorbing the layered traces of movement, memory, and encounters across diverse geographies; each mark—whether intentional or accidental—becomes a compositional opportunity. Their vivid colors evoke the watery, chance-driven staining of painters like Sam Gilliam or Helen Frankenthaler, while the bold outlines, and episodic imagery reflect a collision of influences—from the line work and panel sequencing of graphic novels to the geometry of Navajo blankets. The paintings tend to radiate outward from a central figure, with secondary characters, symbolic motifs, and vibrant borders reminiscent of Pendleton blankets—though Kahlhamer intentionally "glitches" these references to explore the complexities of contemporary Indigenous identity.

Extending this visual ethos into three dimensions, the exhibition features a new hanging sculpture titled *Mesa AZ + NYC Dreamcatcher* (2025) from Kahlhamer's ongoing series of "Supercatchers." The work reimagines the dreamcatcher motif using bent-wire, bells, jingles, and found materials that clank and shimmer in response to ambient movement. In it, the artist has translated the spiritual connotations of traditional dream catchers into the industrial vernacular of downtown New York. Kahlhamer's work also situates itself within the lineage of bent-wire sculpture, recalling Alexander Calder's mobiles while forging an aesthetic consistent with his notion of the "third place" that merges Native tradition, punk's DIY ethos, and postwar abstraction.

In addition to these new bedsheet paintings and sculpture, the exhibition includes *Birds Are Talking* (2025), a monumental work on paper in watercolor, ink, and coffee stain. Condensing Kahlhamer's long-standing fascinations—Plains Indian iconography, autobiography, cartoon panels, and improvised mark-making—this drawing's layered wash and fluid line highlight the artist's belief in creativity as a form of "narrative mapping."

Across paintings, sculpture, and works on paper, Kahlhamer continuously navigates and reframes his own cultural inheritance. While referencing historical forms like ledger drawings or dream catchers, he acknowledges how these symbols have been distorted through colonial histories and mass-market appropriation. His practice maintains a forward-looking stance, inventing a future out of the raw material of ancestral memory and hard-won subcultural aesthetics. *Bowery Nation: Birds Are Talking* embodies that spirit: a nomadic, searching, and deeply personal visual language attuned to the complexities of contemporary life, even as it reactivates the spiritual and cultural networks of the past.

ABOUT BRAD KAHLHAMER

Brad Kahlhamer (b. 1956, Tucson, AZ) is a multidisciplinary artist who creates monumental paintings and intricate sculptures. His creative practice reflects the multitudinous nature of his personal identity. Kahlhamer is of indigenous descent, adopted by German parents, and came of

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age in the bustling world of the 1980s and '90s New York art scene. At once an acute draftsman and an underground punk musician, Kahlhamer straddles many creative stratospheres. Kahlhamer's work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at Galerie Sophie Scheidecker, Paris; Garth Greenan Gallery, New York; Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson; and the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale. His work is held in the permanent collections of many public institutions including the Denver Art Museum, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among many others. He currently lives and works between New York City, NY, and Mesa, AZ.

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 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 and geographies, with the aim of expanding the scope of artists celebrated by global institutions, diverse audiences, and the art market at large.

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

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39 Great Jones Street
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GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
11:00 am – 6:00 pm

PRESS CONTACT

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IMAGE CREDITS

Mesa 6:00 AM, 2024. Acrylic, ink, pencil on bedsheet; 118 × 109 ½ in (299.7 × 278.1 cm)

Mesa AZ + NYC Dreamcatcher 2025. Mixed media, wire and bells; 93 × 53 ½ × 6 in (236.2 × 135.9 × 15.2 cm)

Pima Air + Space, 2025. Acrylic, ink, pencil on bedsheet; 69 ¼ × 53 ½ in (175.9 × 135.9 cm)

All images of works by Brad Kahlhamer, courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.