

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS
1-2 WARNER YARD
LONDON EC1R 5EY
TEL: +44 (0)207 837 5991
WWW.HOLLYBUSHGARDENS.CO.UK

CONDO LONDON 2025 **HOSTING GORDON ROBICHAUX, NEW YORK**

JANET OLIVIA HENRY AND CYNTHIA HAWKINS

Preview: Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 January, 12-6 pm
Exhibition: 18 January - 1 March 2025

Hollybush Gardens is pleased to host Gordon Robichaux for Condo London 2025, with an exhibition that brings together new and early sculptures by Janet Olivia Henry alongside paintings and works on paper by Cynthia Hawkins. The show celebrates the artists' long-standing friendship that began in the 1970s at Just Above Midtown (JAM), the trailblazing New York gallery founded by activist and filmmaker Linda Goode Bryant, which foregrounded African American artists and artists of colour. Open from 1974 to 1986, JAM was both a gallery and self-described laboratory for artists, an environment that allowed for risk, experimentation and collaboration; as curator Thelma Golden recently described it, 'A utopia that we are trying to reach again in all these different manifestations of Black space.'¹

The exhibition includes two of Henry's *Juju Box* sculptures: *Aviary Juju Box* (1978) and *Juju Box (Self-Portrait)* (2020), which can be arranged and presented in various configurations. The works comprise a container - a cookie tin and a Perspex box - which Henry carefully packed with miniatures, trinkets, and personal effects according to a colour scheme, theme, or to the specific person to whom the box is dedicated. The *Juju Boxes* are inspired by Henry's life-long engagement with collecting dolls and miniatures, and her relationship to Juju - an African and Afro-diasporic spiritual tradition in which objects are associated with magical powers. She explains, 'My work, it's social commentary. What I found is that American culture had been replicated in miniature' and 'with the Juju boxes, anyone could create their own magic - whatever paradise or fantasy a person desires.'

Since the late 1970s, Henry has developed fictional characters and narratives using dolls, miniatures, and a wide range of processes - photography, beading, quilting, and her own writing - to explore storytelling and play as liberatory practices to critique gender, race, and class. Her series of *Lariat* soft sculptures are assemblages of colour copier enlargements and excerpts of her own writing printed on paper, which she sewed into clear vinyl and stuffed with batting (Poly-Fil, shredded US currency, and metallic cellophane). These elements are strung together on lengths of knotted cord punctuated with clusters of charms and beads to create talismans dedicated to the characters in Henry's narratives. Among them, *Mrs White Protestant Male (WPM)* (1994), which incorporates printed images of a doll and miniature accessories that Henry altered and styled as an archetype of power and privilege, and recent works *BIFURCATE* (1983-2023), *JANUS* (2024), and *BINARY* (2024) - that combine clusters of colourful beads and printed lines of dialogue between the characters who populate Henry's stories.

Cynthia and Janet at JAM on 57th Street (2024) is a new work created for this exhibition and is the most recent of Henry's ongoing diorama constructions, which she began in the late 1970s. The series includes her seminal work *The Studio Visit* (1983), which features a Black doll, which Henry modified into a representation of herself, and a white doll - a curator - visiting the artist in her studio. Henry's new diorama features two female black dolls that stand in for Hawkins and Henry, situated among office furniture, and two transparent plastic figures, within a room constructed with Lego-like building blocks. The work memorialises the occasion of Henry and Hawkins' introduction at JAM, their five decades of friendship and mutual respect, and the importance of JAM as a supportive space that provided community and creative freedom.

¹ Thelma Golden, 'A Conversation between Linda Goode Bryant and Thelma Golden', *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2022), 19.

Hawkins has investigated the potential of abstract painting since the 1970s. Her process-oriented practice embraces the improvisational, whilst simultaneously creating a systemised space for her continually evolving vocabulary. The artist's early works charted the development of a symbolic language through the introduction of sequences of shapes and signs that are, as she has written, 'strung together to imply a sentence or a passage of text'. Two works on paper (*A Meditations* and *B): Meditations* (1991) develop from her series of paintings *Creed of Athanasius and the Temple Curtain* (1991), which explore organic geometry through their depiction individual circular and triangular forms, rendered in contrasting tones that fill the picture plane. *Out of Water, By Water* (1993) is also an extension of this series and features a cluster of blue and purple circular and elliptical forms which vibrate within a dark, rectangular space, and reference Hawkins' interest in stellar configurations.

The exhibition includes two large-scale paintings from Hawkins' new series *Wander/Wonder: Maps Necessary for a Walk in 4D* (2024), alongside two smaller works on paper *A Priori Map R II* and *A Priori Map S II* (2023), from a series which precedes the new paintings. The works are inspired by Marshall Island stick charts, made from wooden strips and cowrie shells, which represent a system of mapping ocean swells and wind patterns. The charts were studied by inhabitants of the Marshall Islands prior to voyages on the Pacific Ocean, a form of cartography reliant on memory and bodily navigation. The *Wander/Wonder* paintings also refer directly to a series of drawings the artist made for a sculpture titled *A Walk in 4D* (1979), based on the journey from her Upper West Side apartment to the 86th Street subway station in New York. Hawkins situated this walk in the fourth dimension: space-time, as she perceived it in that moment, elevating the path at a forty-five degree angle. She writes: 'Lately I've been using my own history of work to make new work.'² The title of the series speaks to one's movement through time and the world.

Hawkins and Henry were both included in the recent survey exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2023). *Six Decades*, Henry's most comprehensive exhibition to date, was presented at Gordon Robichaux, New York from November-December 2024.

Hawkins has a solo exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York from 27 March-3 May 2025, and Hollybush Gardens will present her first UK solo show in autumn 2025. In 2024, BOMB published an Oral History with Hawkins and *Art Notes, Art, a new* publication that records her work and the Black New York gallery scene of the 1970s and 1980s, published by CARA in December 2024, is available from the gallery.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Cynthia Hawkins (b. 1950, Queens, New York) has exhibited widely in New York and the United States throughout her career. She has presented one-person exhibitions at Just Above Midtown, New York (1981); Frances Wolfson Art Gallery, Miami (1986); Cinque Gallery, New York (1989); Queens College Art Center (1997); Buffalo Museum of Science, Buffalo (2009); STARS, Los Angeles (2022); and Ortuzar Projects, New York (2023). She was included in the survey exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022). Hawkins' work is in numerous public collections, including the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; Kenkeleba Gallery, New York; the La Grange Art Museum, Georgia; and the U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC. She has received numerous awards, including the Helen Frankenthaler Award for Painting (2023); the Black Metropolis Research Consortium Fellowship (2009); The Herbert and Irene Wheeler Foundation Grant (1995); and the Brooklyn Museum Art School Scholarship (1972). CARA presented Hawkins with its annual Legacy Award in October 2024. She received her doctorate in American Studies from the University of Buffalo, SUNY, with a dissertation titled, 'African American Agency and the Art Object, 1868-1917', and until recently was the gallery director and curator at the Bertha V.B. Lederer Gallery, SUNY Geneseo, New York.

Janet Olivia Henry (b. 1947, East Harlem, New York) is an artist and educator who lives and works in Queens, New York. Henry was educated at the School of Visual Arts and the Fashion Institute of Technology, and received a fellowship in education from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In partnership with Linda Goode Bryant, Henry designed and produced *Black Currant*, a magazine that highlighted the experimental work of artists who were showcased by Just Above Midtown (JAM). She was a member of the Women's Action Coalition (WAC), a feminist open alliance that sought to address issues of women's rights through direct action, participated in WAC's drum core and currently co-leads a Project EATS drumming group. Henry is a life-long educator and has worked at the New York State Council on the Arts, the Studio Museum in Harlem's education department, the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, the Lower Eastside Girls Club, Children's Art Carnival, and the Brooklyn Heights Montessori School.

² Cynthia Hawkins, 'An Oral History with Cynthia Hawkins by Julia Trotta, BOMB Magazine, July 2024, bombmagazine.org/articles/2024/07/02/an-oral-history-with-cynthia-hawkins-by-julia-trotta/

Henry's work is held in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York and The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and has been reviewed and featured in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Hyperallergic*, *ARTnews*, and *Smithsonian Magazine*, among others.

Henry has exhibited widely in New York and the United States throughout her career and has presented one-person exhibitions and installations at numerous commercial and non-profit spaces including Gordon Robichaux, New York (2024); STARS, Los Angeles (2024); P·P·O·W Gallery, New York (2002); Cedar Crest College, Allentown, PA, curated by Cynthia Hawkins (2003); Lower Eastside Girls Club Community Gallery, New York (2004); John Jay College, New York (1998); Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY (1995); Pulse Art, New York (1995); Seventh Second Photo Gallery, New York (1992); Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, NY (1990); Public Art Fund, New York (1988); Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1983); Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York (1982); Basement Workshop, New York (1981); and The Exhibitions Gallery, Jamaica, NY (1978). Henry's work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions including *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022); *The Dialectics of Isolation*, curated by Kazuko, Ana Mendieta and Zarina, A.I.R. Gallery, New York (1981); and at the New Museum, New York; Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Newark Museum, New Jersey; and Artists Space, New York.

For press enquiries and further information, please contact:
grace@hollybushgardens.co.uk

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 11am - 6pm or by appointment.