

# VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

## CHERI SAMBA

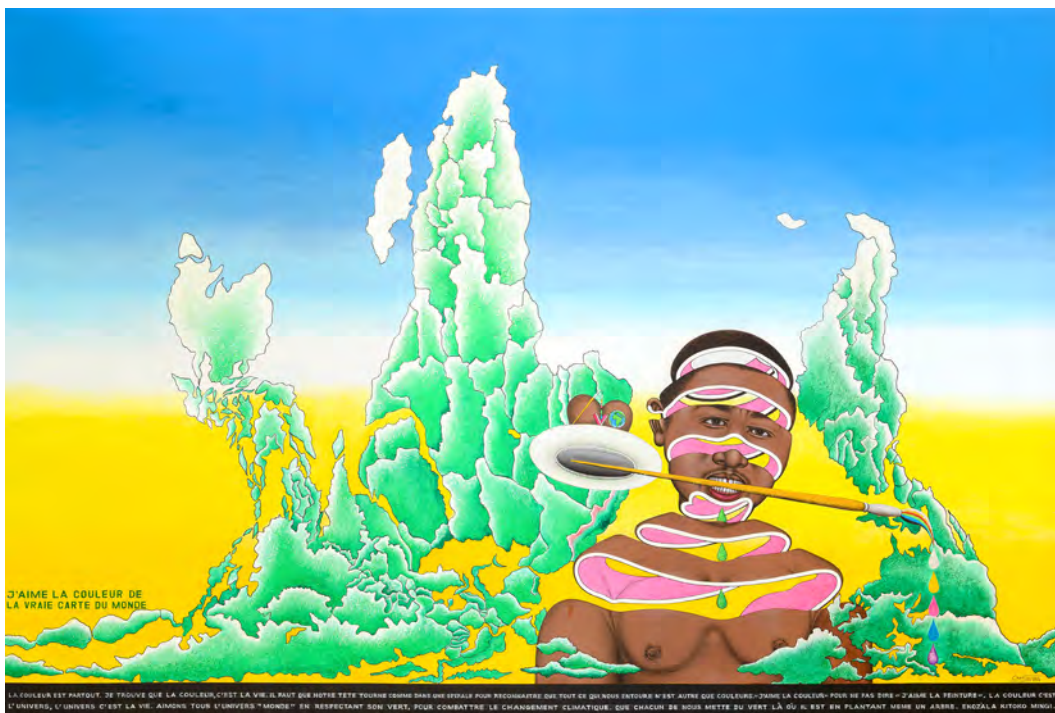
May 8 – June 15, 2024

Opening: Wednesday, May 8th, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Venus Over Manhattan

55 Great Jones Street

New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present a major solo exhibition of new and recent paintings by Chéri Samba, one of the preeminent artists at work in Africa today. Samba is a pivotal figure in the history of African contemporary art, celebrated for his vibrant and detailed paintings that depict everyday life in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as broader social, political, and economic issues facing his country, his continent, and the world. Born in 1956 in Kinto M’Vuila, DRC, Samba’s work transcends the local, and has garnered him international recognition, with his work held in major institutions around the world, including the Centre Pompidou, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Fondation Cartier. Following a retrospective of his work at the Musée Maillol in Paris, his exhibition at Venus Over Manhattan marks the artist’s first solo exhibition in New York City his 1991 exhibition with Anina Nosei. *Chéri Samba: [Title]* will be on view at 55 Great Jones Street from May 8th through June 22nd, 2024.

39 GREAT JONES ST  
NEW YORK, NY 10012

55 GREAT JONES ST  
NEW YORK, NY 10012

T +1 (212) 980-0700  
F +1 (212) 980-8861

WWW.VENUSOVERMANHATTAN.COM  
INFO@VENUSOVERMANHATTAN.COM



Chéri Samba grew up in Kinto M'Vuila, Democratic Republic of Congo, possessed of an entrepreneurial spirit and energetic creativity. As a teenager, he left home for the capital city of Kinshasa to pursue an artistic career. He found work as a billboard and advertisement painter, but was soon able to open his own studio where he made and exhibited his work. His experience as a commercial artist, paired with his childhood fascination with illustrated magazines and comic books, influenced his later practice, legible in his use of bright, flat colors, and his signature intermixing of image and text.

Living and working in the cultural center of a newly independent DRC, Samba and his peers Pierre Bodo and Moké fostered a new mode of artistic production, inflected with social commentary, which they called “popular painting.” The intention of popular painting was to make art of the people and for the people, in ways that spoke directly and clearly about contemporary issues. In *L'Intelligence Aveugle (Blind Intelligence)*, a father stands on the bank of a wide river with his son, who asks him questions about the “discovery” of the mouth of the Congo River. Questions of history, indigeneity, and the ongoing legacy of colonization are central concerns for Samba’s work in a post-colonial nation; *L'intelligence Aveugle* enjoins its viewers to question received narratives, and to consider questions of “discovery” and “ownership” with fresh, childlike eyes.

Following a decade of exhibitions in Kinshasa, Samba first received international in 1989 when his work featured prominently in “Magiciens de la Terre,” a major group exhibition at the Centre Pompidou that sought to bring overlooked international artists to the forefront of the global stage. Samba’s work received wide acclaim, and it was through this exhibition that he met Jean Pigozzi, who holds the world’s premiere collection of African contemporary art, and a key patron of Samba’s work. Following this exhibition, Samba quickly rose to prominence internationally: his work was featured in solo exhibitions at the



ICA London, the Wadsworth Atheneum, and MAMCO, Genève, and he participated in group presentations at Tate Modern, the MFA Houston, and the ICA Philadelphia. In 2007, Robert Storr featured Samba's work in the Venice Biennale, and in 2019, the Museum of Modern Art featured his work in an exhibition titled "Inner and Outer Space," alongside work by his peers including Moké and Bodys Isek Kingelez.

Despite international attention, Samba has never shied from making work which highlights thorny social and political issues. He has made paintings regarding post-colonial Congolese identity, the AIDS crisis, September 11th, and international issues of water scarcity, among many other topics. In *J'aime la couleur de la vraie carte du monde*, Samba engages many of his signature tropes and symbols. The painting features a man whose body swirls in a thin ribbon of flesh, the outside of which is highly realistic, and the inside of which is hot pink, dripping the many colors of the rainbow. Across the painting's lower margin, Samba inscribes: "Color is the universe, the universe is life. Let each of us put green where it is by planting a tree." Samba connects the world of painting and color to the physical world of social progress, mounting a forceful argument for the actionable and political effects of art.

At the heart of Samba's practice lies a deep commitment to engaging with his audience. He believes that, by intermingling text among his imagery, he is able to slow down his viewer and more effectively transmit his message. Samba's paintings provide a critical ex-amination of socio-political situations, tackling gritty problems with a canny mix of sincerity and wit. Working at the vanguard of contemporary art—both in

Africa and around the world—Samba’s paintings are a powerful catalyst for dialogue, prompting their viewers to question, to reflect, and ultimately, to act.

## ABOUT CHERI SAMBA

Chéri Samba (b. 1956, Kinto M’Vuila, Democratic Republic of Congo), lives and works between Kinshasa, DRC, and Paris, France. Samba’s work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at Musée Maillol, Paris; Centre Pompidou, Metz; Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain, Paris; Kunstverein-Braunschweig; and MAMCO, Geneva. His work features frequently in major group exhibitions around the world, including recent presentations at Musée National Picasso, Paris; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art, Cape town; and the Fondation LVMH, Paris. In 2007, Samba’s work was included in the Venice Biennale, curated by Robert Storr. His work is held in the permanent collections of numerous public institutions, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; CAAC –The Pigozzi Collection, Geneva; Fondation Cartier pour l’Art Contemporain, Paris; Fondation LVMH, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; and Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art, Capetown, among many others.

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

## VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

39 Great Jones Street  
New York, NY 10012  
55 Great Jones Street  
New York, NY 10012

## GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday  
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

## PRESS CONTACT

Andrea Schwan  
Andrea Schwan, Inc.  
[info@andreaschwan.com](mailto:info@andreaschwan.com)  
+1 (917) 371-5023

## IMAGE CREDITS

*J’aime la couleur de la vraie carte du monde*, 2016  
Chéri Samba photographed in 1973.  
Chéri Samba outside of his studio in Kinshasa, 1987.  
*La femme à la page*, 2022

All images of works by Chéri Samba, courtesy the artist, Magnin-A, Paris, and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.