

For Immediate Release

Minnesota Street Project Foundation Presents  
Adrian L. Burrell: *Venus Blues*

OCTOBER 7 – NOVEMBER 18, 2023



Adrian L. Burrell, *Cyclical Symphony*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

**San Francisco, CA (July 20, 2023)** The Minnesota Street Project Foundation (MSP Foundation) announces *Venus Blues*, an atmospheric multimedia exhibition from award-winning multi-disciplinary artist **Adrian L. Burrell**, running **October 7–November 18, 2023** at 1201 Minnesota Street.

Born and raised in Oakland, Burrell explores in *Venus Blues* the idea of history as a living phenomenon in the face of duress and erasure. The exhibition highlights Burrell’s large-scale sculptures and life-sized photographs created specifically for the exhibition, as well as the debut of a new iteration of the artist’s ongoing film project, *The Saints Step in Kongo Time*.

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Curated by Dr. Tiffany E. Barber and presented with the generous support of the Paul L. Wattis Foundation, *Venus Blues* will be the first exhibition to utilize the entire MSP Foundation space at 1201 Minnesota Street since its May 2023 debut, including both its 17,000 sq. ft. interior and 3,000 sq. ft. state-of-the-art screening gallery. Accompanying the installation will be live performances, community programs, and film projections that oscillate between the found and the fictional, that together spotlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage and family legacies in the afterlife of slavery.

*Venus Blues* honors the mysteries of the past and the powerful matriarchs — the Venuses — at the center of Burrell’s extended family. Rather than the classical image of white Western beauty or mythological figures, the women in *Venus Blues* embody the effects of loss and rupture that issue from being systematically torn from family, home, and country. The artist’s female ancestors — known and unknown, living and dead — fill the space, surfacing and resurfacing in family photographs, in pools of water, in haunting monologues, in subtle tremors, and on screens. The color blue also recurs as a material and conceptual motif vis-à-vis light rays, sound, and the sobering testimonies of the artist’s subjects. Burrell’s kind of blue represents a liminal space between day and night, between consciousness and unconsciousness. In the Black Atlantic tradition, this is a space where memories, dreams, and spirits interact. Notes Dr. Barber, “Through Burrell’s unique mode of visual storytelling, he reimagines his family’s ongoing search for abolition and liberation across generations and geographies. In so doing, he creates environments that function as roadmaps for building new worlds.”

One of the main arteries of *Venus Blues* is a site-specific installation inspired by Burrell’s 2016 photograph of La Maison des Esclaves, or the House of Slaves, and its now-iconic Door of No Return. A contemporary memorial believed to mark the final departure point for enslaved Africans, the Door of No Return in Senegal has become a symbol of redress and reverse migration for travelers of African descent searching to reconnect with bloodlines from which they were severed as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. New portraits of various Venuses, hung and wheat-pasted throughout the space, and letters from Burrell’s family members punctuate the artist’s rendition of this important site of memory. Sugarcane as a material and plantation cash crop also recurs throughout the exhibition, comprising mounds and barriers that act as portals for Burrell’s muses. God rays emanating from skylights and gel-covered windows resembling stained glass saturate the raw warehouse space in ethereal washes of light and color. A new iteration of the artist’s ongoing film project, *The Saints Step in Kongo Time*, will also premiere as part of *Venus Blues*. Featuring never-before-seen footage, the film will be on view in 1201 Minnesota Street’s state-of-the-art screening gallery.

Taken together, the works in *Venus Blues* coalesce a different knowledge system that stems from Black radical feminist theorizing. Burrell draws on Saidiya Hartman’s “Venus in Two Acts,” Robin D. G. Kelley’s “freedom dreams,” Christina Sharpe’s

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“wake work,” and Vanessa Agard-Jones “going to ground” to chart a path to Black liberation.

“Ultimately,” notes Dr. Barber, “*Venus Blues* asks visitors to reflect on individual and collective practices of mourning and re-memory. Each exhibition element simultaneously conjures melancholic longing, the passage of time, and aspects of the natural and supernatural world — the sky, the ocean, ghostly apparitions, and more. In so doing, *Venus Blues* heeds Black feminist calls to sit and stand with the dead, to go to ground as a form of wake work. Tracing the artist’s roots from Jim Crow Louisiana to modern-day Oakland to Senegal and back again, the exhibition animates rituals of healing as well as visions for a future that is perpetually unsettled and in motion. Amid cycles of catastrophe, Burrell creates space for collective storytelling as a means for survival and care.”

A series of associated public programs and events will be announced in September. A press preview event is scheduled for the evening of Thursday, October 5; an official invitation is forthcoming later this summer.

*Venus Blues* is presented by the Minnesota Street Project Foundation. Funding for *Venus Blues* was made possible thanks to support from the Paul L. Wattis Foundation.

**About the Artist**

Adrian L. Burrell is a third-generation Oakland, California storyteller whose work across photography, film, site-specific installation, sculpture, and experimental media examines issues of race, class, and intergenerational dynamics. He holds a BFA in film from San Francisco Art Institute and an MFA in Documentary Film and Video from Stanford University’s Department of Art & Art History. In 2021 SFMOMA acquired his photography series, *It’s After the End of the World, Don’t You Know That Yet?*, for their permanent collection. His work has been featured at SXSW (2013), Photoville in New York City (2020), Pingyao International Photography Festival in China (2020), BlackStar Film Festival in Philadelphia (Winner of Best Documentary Short, 2022), Pop-Up Magazine (2022), and The New Yorker (2022). A United States Marine Corps veteran, Burrell received the 2019 San Francisco Camerawork Juror’s Choice Award and was a 2021–2022 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Creative Cohort fellow. He has completed artist residencies at Stanford’s Institute for Diversity in the Arts, SFFILM, and Black Rock Senegal. Burrell is currently developing his first feature film, *Cousins*, which won the 2022 SFFILM Rainin Grant.

**About the Curator**

Dr. Tiffany E. Barber is a prize-winning, internationally recognized scholar, curator, and critic whose writing and expert commentary appears in top-tier academic journals, popular media outlets, and award-winning documentaries. Spanning abstraction, dance, fashion, feminism, film, and the ethics of representation, her

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work focuses on artists of the Black diaspora working in the United States and the broader Atlantic world. Her latest curatorial project, a virtual, multimedia exhibition for Google Arts and Culture, examines the value of Afrofuturism in times of crisis. Currently Assistant Professor of African American Art at UCLA as well as curator-in-residence at the Delaware Contemporary, Dr. Barber is the recipient of the Smithsonian's 2022 National Portrait Gallery Director's Essay Prize.

**About the Minnesota Street Project Foundation**

Established in 2019, the Minnesota Street Project Foundation's mission is rooted in our unwavering dedication to the visual arts in every facet. We operate on the belief that the future of philanthropic support for the arts requires an alternative model. By providing space and infrastructure for the creation and exhibition of the contemporary arts we generate sustainable support for the Bay Area arts communities. Our programming enables new arts initiatives, collaborations, public exhibitions, and capacity building grants.

Located in San Francisco, the Project's three-city block contemporary arts campus comprises Minnesota Street Project Foundation, Minnesota Street Project, and Minnesota Street Project Art Services. Minnesota Street Project Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) organization (EIN: 83-3859484). For more information, visit [minnesotastreetproject.org](https://minnesotastreetproject.org)

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