



# APRIL BEY

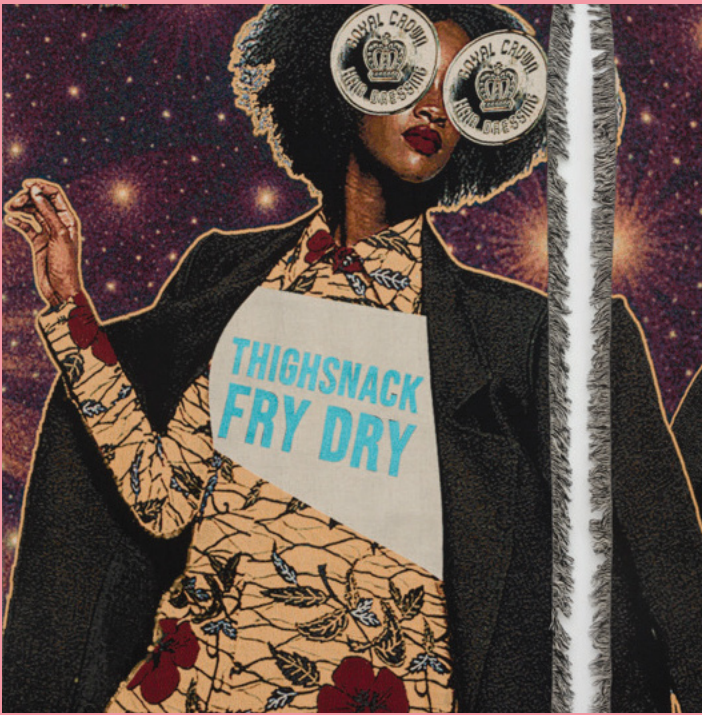
## ATLANTICA, THE GILDA REGION

Through February 4, 2024

### SPONSORS

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*April Bey: Atlantica, The Gilda Region* is organized by the California African American Museum (CAAM) in Los Angeles.



**APRIL BEY** is a Bahamian American interdisciplinary artist and educator based in Los Angeles. In *Atlantica, The Gilda Region*, Bey has created an immersive site-specific installation that combines artificial plants, video, music, photography, and oversized mixed-media paintings and textiles to transport visitors to the planet “Atlantica.” The artist positions herself as an alien from Atlantica, with a mission on Earth to observe and report as an undercover agent. This imagined world and Bey’s general interest in storytelling come from her father, who would relate childhood tales using alien narratives to illustrate how Black people were othered in the United States and The Bahamas.

The artist introduces Atlantica with an installation in two separate spaces: The Portal Room and The Gilda Region. The Portal Room is a chamber designed to slow time and transform space in order to condition visitors for transition into Atlantica. Its dim, humid environment is filled with plants and illuminated with magenta lighting. Bey enhances this tropical scene with music by Super Mama Djombo, an African band from Guinea-Bissau, popular in the 1970s and 1980s.

Now primed to experience Atlantica, visitors enter the exhibition’s second space, The Gilda Region. Its title refers to *The Gilda Stories*, a novel by speculative fiction writer Jewelle Gomez about the adventures of an immortal Black lesbian vampire. Using the book as a point of departure, Bey develops this mythological realm into a visually stunning universe of multifaceted locales and characters that include some of her real friends from around the world.

The models featured in Bey’s large paintings and hanging tapestries are influencers and artists, such as Myjah Moon (*A Whole Me?!*, 2021); Wanlov the Kubolor (*Enjoyment*, 2021); Astra Marie Varnado, aka Funky Chunky, and Jervae (*DUNE*, 2021); The Cowgirls of Color (*When Your Limit is the Sky, I’m on Another Planet and You Just Fly*, 2021) among others. Bey combines her skill in graphic design, sewing, digital manipulation, and text, adorning the portraits with sequins, glitter, and fabric messages. The paintings and woven textiles often incorporate collaged images of brands with colonial overtones and aesthetics, including Royal Crown, a hairdressing product marketed to Black people. According to Bey, Atlanticans come down to Earth to collect material manifestations of colonialism, recycle them, and turn them into something beautiful with no monetary value. Atlanticans shun capitalism and instead practice a sharing economy, where everyone’s needs are met.

The Gilda Region also includes works that portray the landscapes and scenery of Atlantica. In *Poulet Wing War Memorial Park*, 2021, Bey creates a humorous monument to the only war fought on Atlantica, which was conducted between two factions with different views about chicken wings (*poulet* is French for chicken) and concluded peacefully. The background setting alludes to real Namibian deserts and is also inspired by the arid planet Arrakis from the science-fiction novel series *Dune*. Other Atlantican spaces include lush forests and urban structures, such as a colonial-style museum in *I Remember My Skin Had Ash Like Pompei*, 2021. These works reappropriate a colonial Bahamian past dealing with the absurdities and historical amnesia of tourist-oriented cultural sites, as well as their impact on communities.

The sights of Atlantica continue with *One Thigh Snack Fry Dry Please*, 2021, a tapestry presenting one of the planet’s “girl bands” dressed in colorful Chinese knockoffs of African prints. In Bey’s narrative, the band only shows up to perform concerts when attendees are ready and in the mood. The title of the work refers to Bamboo Shack, a real fast-food restaurant in The Bahamas, and Bey’s favorite food that she used to order in her youth. It also connects metaphorically to her transformation from a shy child, ashamed to raise her voice amid the restaurant’s chaotic environment, to a confident woman capable of clearly shouting out her order.

Throughout *Atlantica, The Gilda Region*, Bey integrates technology with tradition, satire, and genuine self-love. In contrast to the racial oppression and exploitation rampant on Earth, Atlantica offers a beautiful diasporic world in which Black people thrive and flourish. In Bey’s invented world, people enjoy sustainable, symbiotic relationships with nature and each other, and are free to express themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

–Mar Hollingsworth, former visual arts curator, CAAM