

PAUL BONOKOLLIE

ASTRAL ATLAS



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

November 30, 2023 - January 31, 2024

ASTRAL ATLAS

Astral Atlas is a large series of works that uses a variety of mediums to create an immersive and transformative experience for the audience, exploring themes of spirituality and mysticism. This exhibition is a site for connection and through the artist's non-profit Bonokollie Foundation Inc, *Astral Atlas* seeks to raise awareness for the needs of the Liberian people and provide a means for positive cultural exchange.

PAUL BONOKOLLIE

Astral Atlas is a body of work created by **Paul Bonokollie** over the past two years that uses many diverse mediums of art to tell a story of exploration, transformation, and illumination. Through the use of music, video, oil painting, drawing, sculpture, performance, and installation, *Astral Atlas* creates an immersive experience where each individual may take their own journey through the artwork, expanding the horizons of their mind, and raising consciousness to a higher potential. A collection of large pen and charcoal drawings on unstretched canvas express the innermost dimensions of the psyche and hold within them eternal wisdom that has been lost to the ages. A series of photographs document Paul's journeys through Liberia, Africa in April of 2022, showing the loving connection of family, a deep reverence for the culture, as well as detailing the ongoing effects of climate change, political conflict and the continuous exploitation of the land and people of the nation. Paul's art is centered in compassion and as the founder of the non-profit Bonokollie Foundation Inc; Paul seeks to raise awareness for the struggling communities in Liberia, build a bridge of support and positive cultural exchange, as well as inspire all people towards peace, mindfulness, and liberation. There is an ever-present theme of mysticism in Paul's work and the striving towards unity with the ultimate reality; the meditative engagement with the work becomes the medium for this internal journey, a guide for the sympathetic audience, and the goal reached.

Paul Bonokollie is a Chicago born artist working in oil painting, drawing, photography, music, video, and installation. Through a harmony of these elements, Paul creates immersive experiences that guide the viewer into profound moments of contemplation, meditation, and spiritual awakening. As the founder of the non-profit Bonokollie Foundation, Paul engages in cultural exchange and uses his art to shine a light on the urgent needs of his community in Liberia, Africa.

Websites: www.paulbonokollie.com, www.bonokolliefoundation.org

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/paulbonokollie/>



Ancestors, Present and Future, 2023, oil on canvas, 24" x 40"



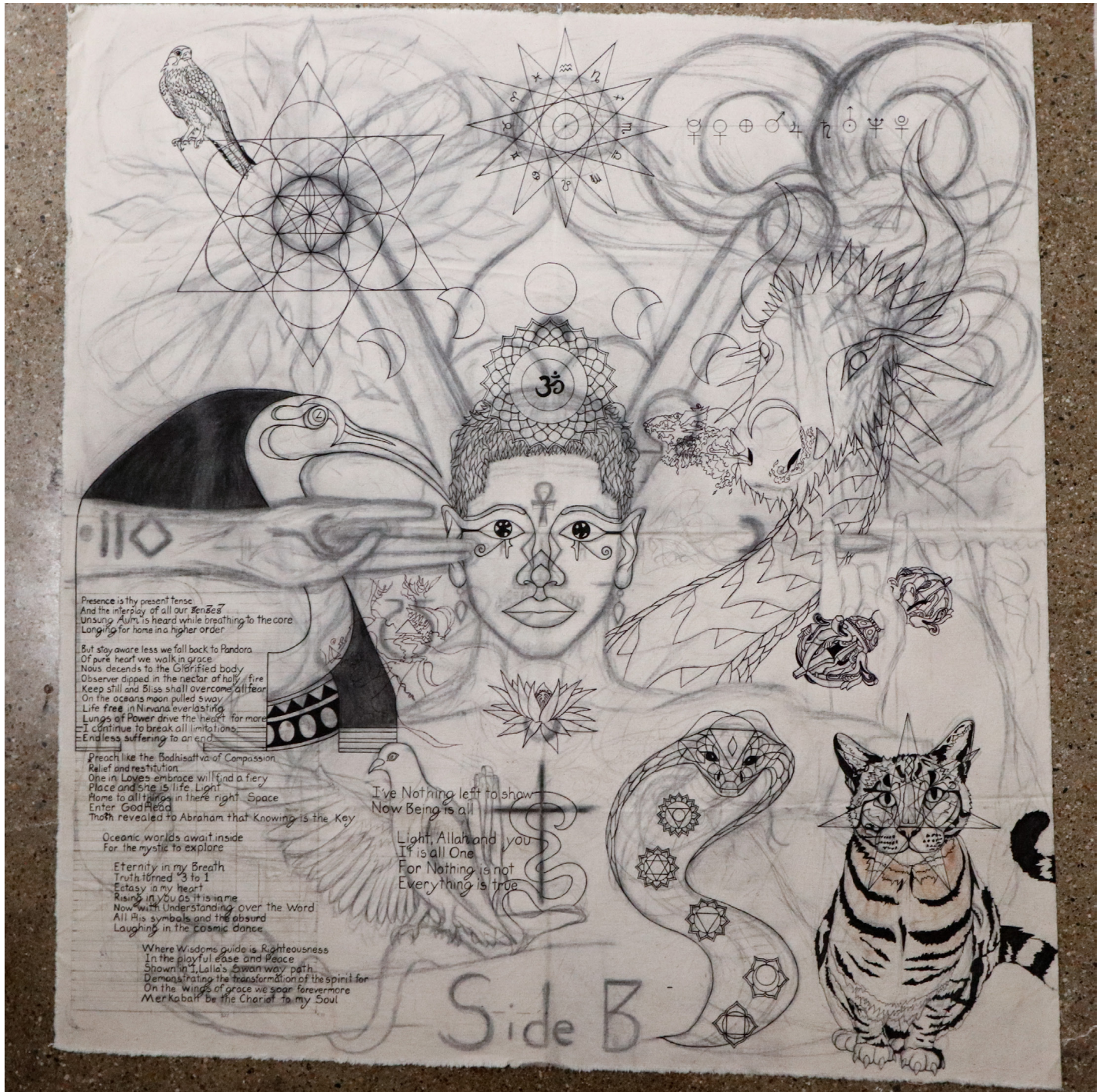
Soul Talisman, 2023, ink on skateboard, 8" x 32"



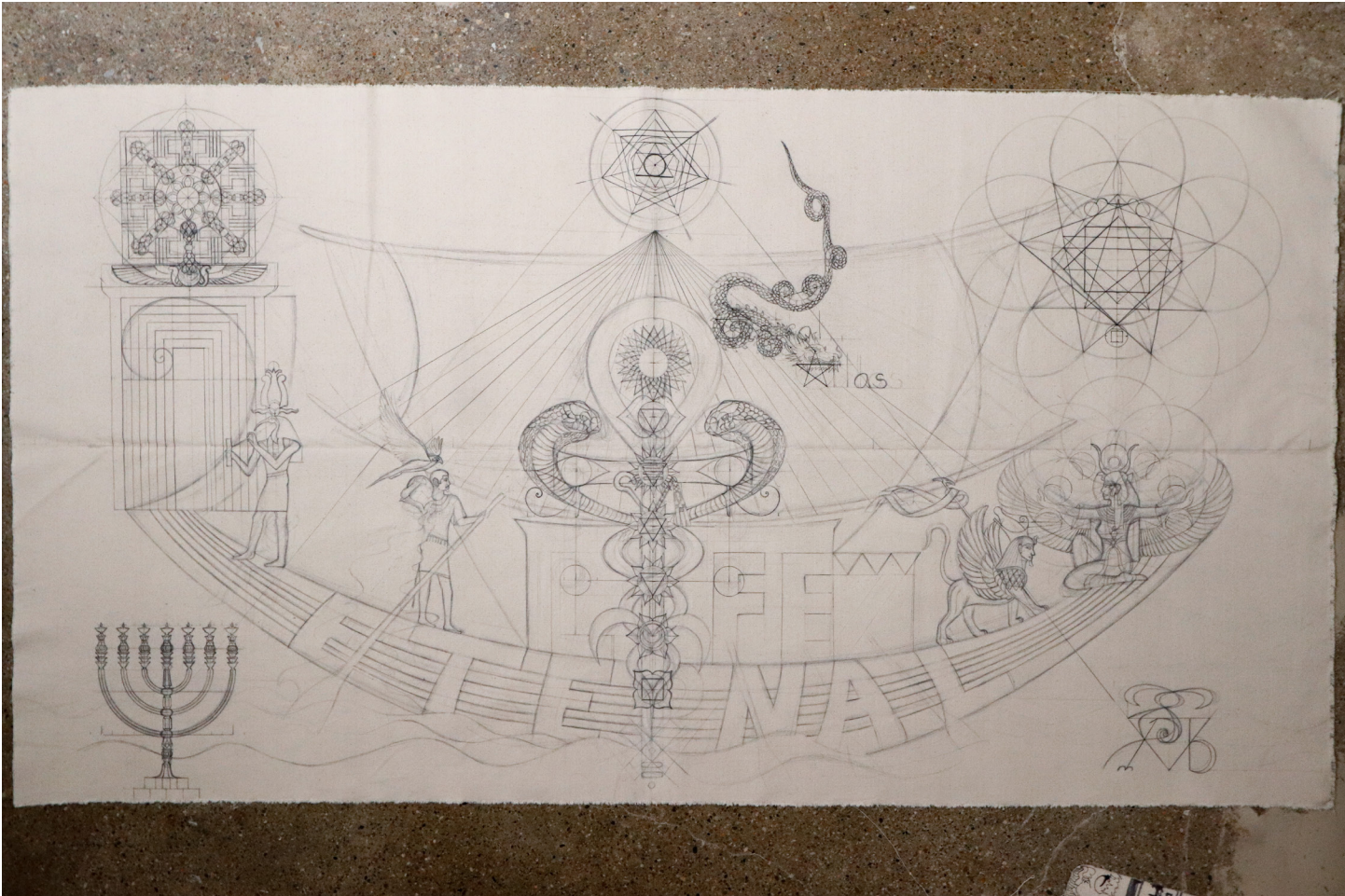
Breath of Life, 2023, ink on skateboard, 8" x 32"



EnTrance, 2022, ink, oil, and wine on canvas, 18" x 32"



GodHead Side B, 2023, ink and charcoal on canvas, 42" x 42"



Astral Atlas, 2023, ink on canvas, 40" x 60"



Sons of Man, 2022, digital photograph, 8" x 32"



Bonokollie Town, 2022, digital photograph, 8" x 32"



Bonokollie Tribe, 2022, digital photograph, 8" x 32"



Great Auntie, 2022, digital photograph, 8" x 32"

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL BONOKOLLIE

Conducted by Rachel Manlubatan

Rachel Manlubatan: Do you feel you express your relationship with your ancestors and culture differently when exploring different mediums? How did you first decide to experiment with various art forms?

Paul Bonokollie: In my piece, "Ancestors, Present and Future," I honor the history of the Liberian people through the depiction of traditional Poro masks, which are a part of a long history in West Africa of making masks to represent the individuality, creativity, and presence of a people. My connection with my ancestry is a living, breathing thing. It is the DNA that influences the very way I walk and dance, my tastes, and drives. I use my art as a way to connect with my ancestry and bring forth deep wisdom and beauty that I find. Through my exploration of different mediums, I find ever-new ways to connect with my ancestry. I hope to further this practice as I continue to learn from the craft traditions of Liberia.

RM: Can you describe your interest in using time as a common theme in your artwork? What do you want audiences to reflect on when interacting with your art?

PB: Our conception of Time generally seems to create boundaries, limitations, and deadlines. I challenge this concept through my art by connecting with the part of myself that is eternal and boundless. Through this connection I hope my audience can find a peace in the present moment that transcends time.

RM: How do you use specific color palettes, compositions, and patterns in your art to relate to the traditional practices of your ancestors? How do they relate to the spiritual dimensions of Egypt? How do they relate to the current needs of Liberia?

PB: My trip to Liberia in April 2022 was enriching in many ways, and the vibrance of the colors I experienced there made the city feel washed out and gray when I returned. My art was a way for me to bring a piece of the beauty of Liberia back home to Chicago. Colors also have a unique way of carrying the history of nations and cultures; even the red, white, and blue of the American and Liberian flag traces its origins to the divine kingship traditions of ancient Egypt. Green, yellow and red also have a deep significance for the African people, and the turquoise I use in the center of the work "Ancestors, Present and Future" is known through many cultures as a connection to Spirit.

RM: Can you share more about Bonokollie Foundation Inc. and how it influences your creative endeavors? How did your artistic style and goals transform when you decided to use your work to amplify the voices of the Liberian people?

PB: Bonokollie Foundation is my life's work, and my art has become the vehicle for the success of this project that is much larger than me. The name Bonokollie comes from the Kpelle language of Liberia. It translates to "Tribe of the Leopard". My father inherited over 30,000 acres of land from his grandfather, the paramount chief of the tribe. This land was once a safe haven for my family in the two civil wars that ravaged the country, but it has also continuously faced illegal miners who have stolen and pillaged from the land. The village has lost the use of the waterways that were once a source of clean water for the people there, because of the pollutants and heavy metals from the destructive mining practices that are common in the country. When our family was finally able to make the journey to our land, it became clear what our role was in fostering the peace and prosperity that is the right of all people, and developing

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

this land in a way that protects the wondrous natural rainforests and endangered species threatened by climate change and the systems of oppression and abuse that are a constant threat to the African people.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series and graphic design is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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C33 Gallery: 33 E. Ida B. Wells Dr., First Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.