

Who I AM.: Revolutionizing life in the former home of Esek Hopkins

Anthony "AM." Andrade's (they/them) work entails activism and awareness through communal art and creativity. Andrade is co-director of **The Haus of Glitter** Dance Company & Performance Lab. They also manage The Haus of Glitter Liberation Garden and Record Label as part of a two-year artist "parkist" residency at the Esek Hopkins Homestead and Park where Andrade and their family are "living, healing and reimagining."



Andrade's work centers on community through a BIPOC / queer lens. They constantly work to break down walls and re-think how our society, plagued by white supremacy, is shaped. "We center self care and rest around what we do due to the gravity of our work," Andrade said. "Care is at the center of everything we do. We make sure people are fed, rested and hydrated, and we offer massages and meditations to get everyone in the right frame of mind."

Andrade's creative and artistic journey began at age 5 when they started piano lessons. This progressed into hip-hop dance in high school, which ushered in a love for music production.

"I was born an artist. I didn't really have a choice," Andrade said. "My great grandfather passed down the tradition of music. He was semi-well-known in the Cape Verde islands. Playing piano definitely brought me to the space of knowing what flow is and of course learning more about music. Hip-hop has been a space for me that I see a lot of things through. Even with pop culture or music from other countries, so many inspirations and ideas are rooted in hip-hop. Styles of expression within it such as Crumping, Tutting, Graffiti, and music production were my only ways to express myself in a space that was comfortable for me, which is pretty backwards for a lot of people.

"Nowadays I'm into the ballroom scene, which is really pretty much the queer hip-hop scene. I'm a sample-based music producer, so Vogue music speaks to me."

Ballroom, or Ball Culture involves events or "Balls" where primarily BIPOC and Latinx performers living in houses (or groups of people living together in community) compete in categories such as dancing or modeling. Events are fun and energetic, and folks typically go home with performance trophies.

Ballroom encompass many different forms of expression, so I asked Andrade if they prefer one form of expression over another. "I absolutely do not prefer one medium over another. Although I am considered the musician in The Haus of Glitter and am currently writing the album for our next production."



The production, named *The Historical Fantasy of Esek Hopkins*, is an activist dance opera that will premiere with PRONK and PVDFest 2021 on September 9. “It’s a performance ritual that centers on one Black woman on the slave ship *Sally*, which Esek Hopkins commanded. As we’re representing the story as BIPOC artists in this space, which he (a rich white slave owner) built and occupied, the elements take you on a journey as to what it was like for us to physically arrive here. We’re living and healing in and with this space, and shifting the energy of this physical house to queer liberation. It also allows a space for people of color to be seen. It’s empowering for all people, but really centers people of color.”

The Haus of Glitter is in the midst of a two-year residency at the nationally preserved Esek Hopkins house in Providence. They have made the space into a production, fashion and art house and they are re-imagining the homestead and park, transforming the space into a creative work environment that centers queer and feminist BIPOC. When asked what it feels like on a day-to-day basis to live in the same space occupied by someone such as Hopkins as well as the enslaved people he kept, Andrade took a deep breath before explaining:

“The energy here is very heavy. There’s an initiative to remove Esek Hopkins’ name from the local school, which is filled with Black and brown youth, and to remove the Esek Hopkins’ statue, sitting on a 7-foot pedestal paid for by the City. Then there’s the house we live in. It begs the question why, for all the horrible things he did to slaves (and even British soldiers), so bad in fact, that he was fired by George Washington, he is glorified today. He was put in power as commander in chief for a short amount of time and it lives as an example of how a white man in power can pour money into preserving his legacy and put up statues of himself and no one questions it. We are trying to get people to think as

a city why this place has been preserved the way it has been. Can we shift it toward community healing? This is what the center of this project is. It feels like the walls are speaking to us and ancestors are speaking through us in this work. I feel the motivation of the lineage of people behind me pushing me.”

Moving into the house has opened up many possibilities and meaningful ventures for The Haus of Glitter Dance Company and their work. Examples of this include the Liberation Garden, which was created at the beginning of COVID. Through the Creative Health Worker Fellowship from the City of Providence Andrade brought together doctors, environmentalists and other experts to figure out how to implement safe outdoor programming for youth in an attempt to see how Earth work and art can find an intersection.

“We study how we got to where we are in Providence, why this particular street has the worst air quality in the city, and learn about ancient planting techniques and herbs used by Indigenous people. This is the same land that was used to feed the Hopkins family, and we can only imagine the enslaved Black people working here. So to do this work because I want to and set up this space for young Black and brown people to harness and shift the energy in the same earth feels really good.”

Andrade also works at AS220 Youth as a program manager, overseeing classes and working with young artists on projects such as Future Worlds. This year, in collaboration with PRONK, they’re creating an installation-immersive runway in the Liberation Garden with large scale lights, murals and paintings. He also began The Haus of Glitter Record Label, which aims to center and uplift queer and BIPOC musicians who are just starting out in their music careers.

“We’re being more paid attention to since we have a white frame around us, living in a nationally preserved historic home. This is also a layer of my Black experience in this white space. It feels like people care more about us now due to our proximity of whiteness. Sometimes it feels good to leave the space and not be surrounded by so many reminders of how someone who looked like me sitting in this seat 200 years would have been experiencing. It’s not only a healing and liberating space, but also equally painful for my Black body to sleep here. It brings a whole new level of meaning to this activist work.”

When asked about the uniqueness of Providence and how they feel about this work happening in this city Andrade explained that their thoughts on this have changed over the past year.

“There are cities like Chicago that put a lot of money into their arts culture. This is also the case in Providence, but what makes it so special here is that we’re so small and tight-knit. I feel more collaboration than competition here.”

Andrade also believes the individuals who make up the city and are in position to make change are pivotal in making a uniquely positive experience for many marginalized groups.

“I’m able to work alongside officials and figures who I’ve always looked up to towards common goals. Providence released a 10-year cultural plan that focuses on artists of different ages, colors, backgrounds, etc... so that people who work in related fields have opportunities to thrive.

“We think a lot about legacy work and how to carry on our traditions. I didn’t have a sense of community with dance until I met the people in my house as well as my mentors and stumbled into a sense of community and carrying of these traditions. ‘Positive brain washing,’ as we call it, involves

helping people decolonize individualist thinking.”

The idea of legacy itself, community and collaborative work is most important to Andrade. They don't aim to leave anything behind personally, but more look to leave a legacy of community.

“I want people to think of ‘We’ when they think of me. Moving away from individualism and stepping into collective thinking is important. I get feedback all the time on my breath practice bringing a sense of tradition, which is something we lack in American culture. The way I step into everything I do, especially with youth and with my house, is bringing a sense of tradition and ritual by doing something over and over again. These rituals help us feel separated from the constant grief of colonization, which each and every one of us suffer from in some way.”

The Historical Fantasy of Esek Hopkins is set to premiere with PRONK and PVDfest 2021 on September 9th. Its own legacy will continue as a physical album, graphic novel, coloring book and as a performance ritual in schools and historically preserved places across the country. Anthony also has meditative sound offerings on Spotify through the link in their Instagram bio @am.period. For more info, go to hausofglitter.org or follow them @theglittergoddesses.