

# THE CURIOUS Uptowner

Get to know Hamilton Heights—and some of its most colorful characters—through the eyes of local artist Tom Sanford

June 26, 2018

Over the years, Hamilton Heights artist Tom Sanford has found plenty of inspiration in the residents of the Harlem enclave where he has lived since 2002. So when his friend Avi Gitler, owner of the local art gallery Gitler & \_\_, invited him to exhibit some recent work that would engage the neighborhood, an idea was born.

The show would feature a group of Sanford's portraits of the neighborhood, but the jumping off point would be a painting of Jose Rivera, a self-described local ["art observer"](#) who has shown up to practically every opening party at Gitler & \_\_, rain or shine. "We think he started coming for the free beer," says Sanford with a laugh.



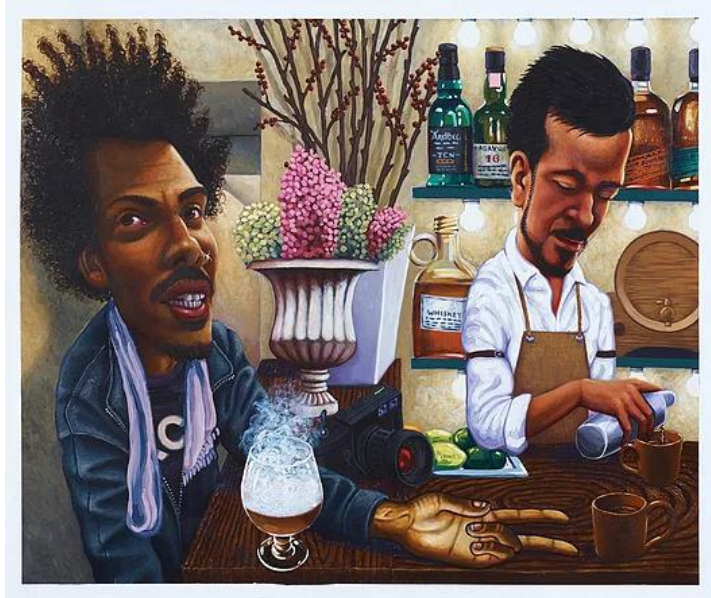
The result is "Have You Seen This Man?," an exhibit that's being promoted on the streets with flyers showing a tongue-in-cheek police sketch of Rivera. (That's Sanford, below, next to one.)



Calling the number on the leaflet leads to a recording of the exhibit's opening date and address (Thursday, June 28 from 6-9pm at Gitler & \_\_, 3629 Broadway) with Rivera warbling in the background. On Monday, Sanford [revealed](#) that Rivera, who is also a musician, would be performing at the opening.

The show's other canvases hail from Sanford's "Harlem Paintings" series, including a colorful portrait of fellow artist Stefen Reed in his studio at the Children's Art Carnival and a placard-carrying group of locals, including Sanford's wife, Alexandra, heading to the Women's March.

Neighborhood watering holes and coffee shops are another common motif in these paintings, providing a somewhat personal tour of Hamilton Heights: There's the Monkey Cup for lattes, ROKC for Tokyo-inspired craft cocktails, and Harlem Public for a casual bourbon or beer.



Although the bigger pieces sell for serious money, Sanford has created an affordable digital drawing specifically for the show (top image). Featuring more than two dozen

characters from the neighborhood standing in front of Gitler & \_\_, the 21" x 36" print is being offered at what Sanford calls the "Harlem price" of \$100. There will be 149 in all—a figure that marks the numbered street closest to the gallery.

And, yes, Rivera is hiding somewhere in the drawing. Think of it as the "Where's Waldo" of Hamilton Heights.

