

# J A S O N   H A A M

Nora Maité Nieves: Temple of the Seas

Press Release

Location: 73, Seongbuk-ro 31-gil, Seongbuk-gu, Seoul, 02879, Korea

Date: May 19, 2022 – July 12, 2022

Jason Haam is pleased to present *Nora Maité Nieves: Temple of the Seas*, the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Featuring richly textured paintings and totemic wall sculptures, the show explores themes of identity and belonging, as well as the histories of places that we knowingly or unknowingly carry with us throughout our lives. The title of the exhibition, *Temple of the Seas*, serves as a metaphorical thesis for this new body of work, which simultaneously references the artist's native homeland, the island of Puerto Rico, and the sacredness and safety of a single place within a complicated and evolving environment.

There is an inherent and immediate physicality to Nieves's work, evidenced by the richly textured and tactile surfaces and edges of her brightly colored canvases, which often include a variety of media, including acrylic, flashe, and modeling paste. Drawing inspiration from architecture encountered both in Puerto Rico and New York City, where the artist currently resides, Nieves acts as a connector between worlds, combining fragments of decorative elements from her Caribbean roots—a ubiquitous modernist concrete block design, tile floor patterning from a past residence—with those from the urban landscape she now encounters on a daily basis.

In a sense, Nieves is actively engaged in her own process of world-building, with her worked and contoured surfaces operating as topographical maps of new physical and psychological states. "La Bahía"—which depicts an undulating blue bubble separated from a raked field of green, flanked by emblems at cardinal points—visually references the scenic and bustling San Juan Bay that borders the artist's childhood home in downtown Old San Juan. "Touching the Moon" features a sweeping leaf-like tendril, this time stretching from one territory to another across a sea of blue frottaged canvas. Nieves creates the surface marks by layering treated segments of textured panels underneath the canvas and then rubbing pigment on the surface, leaving ghostly residues of pieces that previously haunted the artist's studio. Just as these works are formed from shadows of paintings, alluding to a reality that has been recreated, Nieves gestures toward our ability to build on past personal experience to forge new identities.

The piece that perhaps best represents this marriage of fundamental dualities—old and new, land and sea, self and other—is "Transitional Land". With its massive circular form and inverse coloration, the three-panel piece echoes the Chinese Yin Yang symbol, itself a sign of how seemingly oppositional elements can in fact be interdependent. Fittingly, in the center of these swirling forces, Nieves has placed a lone square, an island floating at its heart.