

A lone white figure sits enthroned at the threshold of Raúl de Nieves' *As Far As UUU Take Me*. With imposing vestments recalling tawdry wares in a window display, it exudes an air of ambiguity between nightlife effigy and bardo intermediary.

Its title, "The Shadow," lends suspicion to its beckoning gesture toward trials of excess, debauchery and self-undoing. It governs a realm of paradox — a chaotic universe of fragile ephemeral forms, and a cosmic order under which conflicting realities harmoniously coexist.

The figure heralds various stages of integration translated through imagery: the quantum, the rudimentary, and the absolute.

Seven square panels executed in color field preside over the gallery wall. A human mask emerges from each, a persona — at once spatially prominent and tonally vague. Comprised of beads arranged in meticulous patterns of copy-machine facsimile, they intone a rhythmic pulse for elementary stages of awareness. Here the process of identity begins to take form, emblems of probability to be incorporated and combined into the self. As the primal components of matter, they exist as states of being still unrealized.

It is the agency of excited states whereby such underlying fields are systemized as particles. This process finds realization in a succession of seven correlating sculptures. As the precious stone absorbs and sustains a planetary force, their crystalline substance resonates with the talismanic quality of its energetic impulse of origin. Each is dedicated to a particular "strength" intrinsic to nature and the human psyche - sexuality, sanctuary, madness.

In their contorted spirals, de Nieves merges fantasy and will with the frenzied resourcefulness of childhood. Their anamorphic growths attract jeweled insects and uncharted expressions of color. The masks are now doubled in a state of coronation, signifying the malleability of perceived identity forged in inevitable cycles of euphoria and comedown.

In a series of accompanying drawings, time is invoked as the natural principle of both growth and decay. By fusing with the spatial dimensions, time is the essential component for manifestation. Space is the principle whereby existence can be both contemplated and transcended.

Ascending skyward, a stained glass window encompasses the entirety of the gallery ceiling. Its scale is intended as an extension beyond the confines of the material continuum and the limiting notions of the self. The dramas of mortal existence form the periphery of a constellation of spheres linked

by interconnections both atomic and expressionistic. It aspires to a cohesive unity encapsulated in the symbolism the number zero. The ancient glyph of the ouroboros multiplies itself, a transmutation toward the domain of the infinite.

As the grandeur subsides, the constrictions of time reassert their dominance. And the narrow passage of egress demands a second visitation with "The Shadow." Its visage to be deliberated with renewed perceptions of idolatry, aspiration, and neglect.

- Micki Pellerano

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