

## Notes on *Untitled (Double Cryogenic)* by Armando Rascon copyright 2023

**Synopsis:** *Untitled (Double Cryogenic)* is one of several works that are part of a larger project entitled **DECAY and RESURRECTION** –completed in my Folsom Street studio in San Francisco California between the years 1984 thru 1988.

In *Untitled (Double Cryogenic)* representation of a male / female couple frozen at death could suggest the requirement by the science community to create a time-capsule of a human couple that could survive epic catastrophe and be brought back to life when all mankind has expired as an antidote to human extinction. Additional readings could be sought from the work, including the Adam and Eve model represented in the Bible. However, the work is untitled to allow the viewer his or her interpretation given the larger context of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome spreading through Gay America at the time that I was consumed by my first activist body of work **Decay and Resurrection**.

**Description:** The project was largely informed by the immediate impact of the AIDS epidemic upon a more than sizeable portion of the gay community living in San Francisco during those specific years. 1981-1988. President Reagan refused to use the word 'AIDS' during the first five years of the pandemic and was preempted by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop who produced a report on AIDS in 1986 and later sent a Congressionally mandated update to every American household via the mail in 1988. As an AIDS activist, I was blessed to have the support of numerous friends in the movement both in San Francisco as well as in New York City: chief among these was my dear friend artist Felix Gonzales-Torres with whom I took great pride to include in a group show that I curated **Corporate Crime/Malicious Mischief** and that took place at INSTALLATION Gallery, San Diego in 1987 and MEDIA and my gallery TERRAIN, in 1988. Visiting Felix's studio in the Village in New York during his studio time and for social visits reinforced my project **DECAY and RESURRECTION** in my continuing affinity with the post-picture generation of artists (a number of which were also friends), that were keen on conceptual formats for the production of 'photography' away from the camera to produce their work: Felix preferred stat-cameras to Nikons, for example, and gifted me one of the works from his Photostat series **Untitled (1987)** --which I later presented as a gift to the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in honor of my mother Maria Herrera Rascon.

**Conceptual basis of DECAY and RESURRECTION:** for **DECAY and RESURRECTION**, my point of departure as a conceptual artist was to produce a body of work that would remain true to the basic-most tenets of painting as a known format in the history of art. However, the intentionality of the project was conceptual in nature in that my ultimate goal was to reduce any trace of the human hand (the 'painterly') and to push forward already existing images purloined from a range of indices such as advertising or educational manuals. The works would consist of canvas stretched faithfully on constructed stretcher bars, with lead white grounds –same as indicated by the old masters! However, the selected imagery would be purloined from instructional manuals such as guides for figurative painting (the two figures in **Untitled (Double Cryogenic)** or the standing child figure in **Domine Mundi** or in the works containing schematic illustrations such as the Jarvik mechanical heart (**Semper Fidelis**), an moth **Untitled (insect with gamma particles)**, or else a suited businessman / male figure with brief case **AlphaOmega** and others. My aim was to create meaning conceptually, not as an expressive action but rather an intellectual one.

Additionally, the only other tangible painterly factor consistent in this body of work are the 'graphite grounds' within which the images lay: here again, I would suffuse the works with a painterly element via use of the Americana action-painter vernacular made famous by Jackson Pollock in his drip paintings. All of the works in DECAY and RESURRECTION live on grounds that remain 'activated' with movement of graphite/paint that were rather the result of forces of wind and trajectories of a human swing of the arm –more native to performance art than to the expressive-making of the action painters in the Fifties. By invoking Jackson Pollock, I tie my birth in December 1956 to Jackson's death in August 1956 as close enough a transmigrational window to suggest a spiritual connection –Pollock sought to invoke spiritual meaning in his art through use of the unconscious gesture....others call this 'expressive-making'. For **DECAY and RESURRECTION** my aim was to freeze the American moment of 1984 thru 1988 as represented in the Social, and to render the project a conceptual body of work rather than a series of paintings.

One of the works produced for this project is **Untitled (ring vortex)** a work on three panels: 1. a wreath; 2. three male figures swirling in the air to form a circle. 3. A ring vortex.

*The project was the subject of a National Endowment for the Arts Grant in Painting in 1987. The two jurors for the NEA panel were Ross Bleckner and Charles Garabedian.*