
The Burning Heart of the Universe

Marita Muukkonen

Arts Council of Finland, journalist
Helsinki, June 2000

The exhibition *Péndulos de luna blanca: del principio al principio* reveals impressions of Finland. The sculptures depict the time when Heriberto Nieves was just getting to know this new and unfamiliar land. The first sensations come through as exotic and interesting, with a hidden sensuality that gradually creeps out and seduces the viewer: An infatuation with Finland was just beginning. Yet as the passion burned and ever lingered, still he tried to find the right place to settle down. Was it in Puerto Rico or in Finland, where his lover resides? Feelings swung back and forth like the pendulum in the artwork *Péndulo de Luna* while he sought his inner balance, as all human beings continuously do. In this exhibition Nieves' artworks are not only focusing on the vast universe around us but most importantly on the universe inside us. The moon, stars and planets projected onto the pendulum lead viewers to the center of their inner cosmos.



General view.

It is we who are standing at the burning heart of the universe: that's the statement the Caribbean artist makes in this exhibition. One of the most impressive pieces in this exhibition is *Aurora Borealis*, created together with Eduardo Moras and Tony González-Walker. In this work Nieves is combining three important things in a unique way: space, light and form. These three elements merge into one, forming an all-embracing whole taking us to the burning heart of the universe. Human beings interpret and evaluate the surrounding world from the present, from physical standpoints, whether they are in San Juan, Helsinki or Paris. Everyday occurrences, places and people in the near distance are seen most clearly, on the largest scale. Helsinki hardly exists from the perspective of San Juan, until a reason for its existence appears. The maps of our minds are created time after time.

In his work, Nieves frequently uses round forms such as moons to suggest the constant, natural cycles of life as a metaphor for cyclic time, continuous change and new beginnings, like the passage of the days, the monthly progression of the moon, the fresh beginnings in human lives. The passing of time is a beautiful process, adding new layers of experience to our existence. We reach the new beginnings, we are about to renew ourselves. One method of renewal for Nieves was to live in Finland, the country of his lover.

To Nieves, Finland was initially a country where the midnight sun shone all night long, never sleeping for three whole months. But soon the night returned, and the dark winter cold enveloped the land, a smooth embrace of inky blackness, returning like a long-absent lover. Nieves usually creates artwork, which attracts the viewer with its vibrant colours, capturing the gaze and holding it tightly. In this exhibition he has reinvented his style; the full white moon is illuminating the sculptures with a nocturnal glow.

"I found myself in Finland", says Nieves. "In its peace I settled down and listened to myself and found the inner balance, the new beginning. I'm a new man who was born again in Finland." His eyes sparkle with the promises of the future. "Now my moons have their voice." And they do.

Strong masculine arrows roam on the surfaces of the 130 boxes in the self-portrait *Constelación Fecundada*, as travelers rove the surface of the Earth. Like his arrows, human beings are constantly wandering the cosmic universe, stopping for a while then traveling on. The plethora of arrows, recalling the virility of the Roman gods also points to not-so hidden

theme of homoeroticism. The passion in Nieves's work shows not only his love for life, but also the affection he holds for his boyfriend. In the self-portrait Nieves shares all his experience, his inner universe with the audience, making us think over our own burning universes - to touch the cosmic. The artist has spoken.
