

Eamon Ore-Giron: Non Plus Ultra

When I began the *Infinite Regress* series in 2015, I was initially drawn to the color gold for its formal qualities. Over time, I have become increasingly interested in the significance and history of gold itself, including the symbolism and value ascribed to the precious metal and the ways in which the desire for it has shaped our world. I identify with how my ancestors in Peru originally conceived of the material, attributing to it a ritualistic use and value. I am also aware of gold's troubled past, which is defined by an extractive violence wrought by colonial powers. With all of this in mind, when selecting works for this exhibition I decided to include a Coclé necklace from Panama (ca. 1200–1500); a Spanish *escudo* coin made of Peruvian gold (1715); and a commemorative reproduction of the Last Spike, the ceremonial gold spike driven by Leland Stanford connecting the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. These objects embody gold's complicated history in the Western Hemisphere. In bringing them together with the artworks in the exhibition, I am interested in how we might acknowledge this history—as well as the ways it continues to manifest in the present—and, in doing so, reimagine the value of gold.

As part of this reimagining, I have created a suite of new paintings, the first works in a new *Black Medallion* series. While these incorporate motifs of the *Infinite Regress* paintings, they propose an alternative to the earlier series' celebration of gold. When listening recently to hip-hop group De La Soul's 1989 album *3 Feet High and Rising*, I was struck by the lyric "Black medallions, no gold." The suggestion of replacing a traditional symbol of wealth and might with something else—something that honors the culture and values of a community outside of the dominant power structure—resonated deeply with me. In my practice, I pull from diverse art histories and am interested in giving the artistic legacies of the Global South a new prominence, reasserting their worth by placing them alongside those of the Western canon. In the same vein, with the *Black Medallion* works, I am proposing a new value system, one that prioritizes the color black, and blackness itself, in place of gold. I am asking, "What are the implications and possibilities of making that shift, even on an aesthetic level?" As a means of further exploring this question and the power of black, I have placed my new paintings in dialogue with works in the Anderson Collection by Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Martin Puryear, and Ellsworth Kelly in which black features prominently.

A response to the phrase "Plus ultra America" stamped on the Spanish *escudo*, the title of this exhibition—*Non Plus Ultra*—reinforces the reimagining I am suggesting. "Plus ultra," or "further beyond," was adopted by Spain in the sixteenth century as a motto reflecting their colonialist and imperial endeavors, which were driven in large part by a search for gold. ("Plus ultra" remains Spain's national motto.) I am invoking the words "non plus ultra," or "beyond here no further," as a rejection of colonial legacies and the value systems that support it. If we rethink its value, can gold be liberated from its past?

—Eamon Ore-Giron, Stanford Presidential Visiting Artist

Eamon Ore-Giron: Non Plus Ultra is on view through February 20, 2022.

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