

## ARTS &amp; THEATRE

# Wander and wonder at Attas' artistic retrospective

BY ELLEN FISCHER  
Columnist

Aric Attas' retrospective exhibition of photographs, video and recorded sound succeeds in transforming Raw Space, Vero's downtown alternative cultural venue, into a retreat for the seeker of transcendence. "I want to create a sense of floating and moving through space with my art," says Attas.

On view through April 30, "Ancient/Future: Exploring the Wonders of the Universe" includes color digital photos from his current A Glimpse of Infinity series. There are also photos from 2013's Seeking the Light, as well as a video and soundscape completed in 2015. And there are camera-less photograms on paper and metal plates from Attas' 1996 graduate school thesis show and his 1997

Quantum Fluctuations series

Throughout his fine-art career, Attas has continuously returned to the same source for inspiration, one that comingles the waters of physics and metaphysics, filtered through the mysticism of Kabbalah. The study of any one of those disciplines does not necessarily exclude the other two; all try to or make sense of the world, and humanity's place in it.

The resulting artworks do not compel the viewer's attention. Instead, they quietly invite it. Attas considers his work to be meditative rather than descriptive in nature. Rather than being a wall on which images are drawn, each artwork is a door through which the spiritual pilgrim can pass into a limitless realm.

Attas "very much" uses the images he produces as targets for his own meditative journey. On display is an airy blue 40-by-60-inch photo from his Seeking the Light series; that work was his meditative go-to place during a difficult course of medical treatments he underwent five years ago.

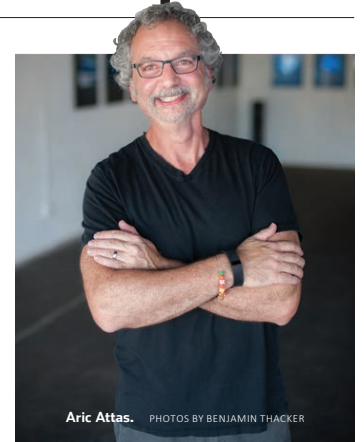
He mentions the large canvases of painter Mark Rothko as inspiration for the shifting, amorphous colors Attas used in Seeking the Light. He admits to a tad of envy of the painter, whose largest paintings, some 7 feet tall and nearly 6 feet wide, overwhelm not only their viewers' sense of scale, but also their emotional composure. For some, tears are a natural response to the Rothko experience.

The non-subject matter of Attas' photographs is as boundless as that of Rothko's canvases; Attas' work plays hard to get.

It is not just their smaller size; after all, in art as in love, size doesn't matter to the devotee. If Rothko's largest works were painted to be seen in that modern temple of art – the museum gallery – Attas' work is sized to the intimate sanctuary of the home.

The emotional problem with photo prints is that their slick surfaces – the result of glossy paper or being shown under glass – tend to add an intellectual coolness to their presentation. That reflective layer makes of them artifacts to be dutifully viewed rather than instigators of experience. It is a form of crystal gazing: you can remotely experience what is going on, but you cannot jump into the action.

The strong imagery of Attas' latest series, A Glimpse of Infinity, does overcome the potentially distracting gloss of their surfaces. Digitally printed on aluminum substrates, the sharply-focused pictures seem to be glimpses of



starry sky seen through the oculus of a space age dome. Conversely, they also resemble gem-like planets – blue with the promise of life-sustaining atmosphere – surrounded by a regimented nimbus of stars. Varying subtly from one to the next throughout the series, the imagery was inspired by the idea of the mandala, says Attas.

A mandala (the Sanskrit word for "circle") is a painting that represents the universe in Hindu and some Buddhist religious practices. In meditation, gazing upon the concentric lines and repeating patterns and colors of a mandala can help a practitioner focus on something other than the disruptions and worries of everyday life.

The 16 photos in Glimpse of Infinity measure 30 inches by 20 inches; they are hung in a straight line on the south and east walls of the gallery. A second series of these prints in a 6-by-4-inch format is arranged in a spiral configuration in the gallery's southwest corner.

Attas says that his fascination with scientific cosmology began in boyhood, when his imagination took flight by means of an astronaut action figure. His spiritual search for meaning in the universe was kindled by his grandparents, Holocaust survivors who practiced the Scriptural prayers and rituals of Judaism.

As for photography, Attas got hooked during seventh grade, in a summer-school program. At that time photography involved learning darkroom skills, including how to develop film and paper prints with chemicals. Watching an image exposed onto sensitized paper magically appear in the developer tray was a revelation to Attas. Although he subsequently earned a B.S. with honors in psychology, he turned to commercial photography to make a living after graduation. Six years later, he entered graduate school for the study of photography as a fine art, graduating in

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**March 17** Brevard Symphony Orchestra: *Gaelic Symphony* (Amy Beach), *Irish Tune from County Derry* (Grainger), *Violin Concerto* (Dvorak)

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1996 with a master's degree from Hartford Art School in Connecticut.

The current exhibition contains works from Attas' graduate thesis show, "Ions in the Ether." Based on photograms (camera-less prints made in the darkroom by selectively exposing sensitized paper to light and developing it in chemicals), these include framed photogram prints on paper and free-standing constructions featuring small photoengraved rectangles of zinc and copper. Of the latter, one is displayed float-mounted in a shadow-box frame, while two other others are presented atop pedestals.

As photographic objects, the pedestal-mounted works have great appeal. The undecipherable imagery on the plates were deeply etched in an acid bath, and the bas reliefs on the front of the plates are only part of their dimensionality. One of the pedestals bears two etched plates that rest within two empty beakers, a reference to their transformation through immersion in nitric acid. The other pedestal holds a copper plate mounted under a glass dome. The destructive action of the



acid, selectively stopped by a resistant coating, left two crescent-shaped holes in the plate, each rimmed with lacey eye lashes of copper.

The mesmerizing quality of those two exhibits will cause you to sidle around their pedestals for a better look at of the plates in all their 3-D glory, from their etched faces and industrially-coated backs to their corporeal thickness.

A group of photograms on silver foil-surfaced photographic paper in the show represents the artist's 1977 series, "Quantum Fluctuations." The largest resembles a geodesic dome made of spider web and stars. The imagery was created in the darkroom by exposing the



shadowy lines of an object place on sensitized paper with a flashlight's beam.

*Raw Space is located at 1795 Old Dixie Highway in Vero Beach. The exhibition is open to the public from Wednesday through Friday from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., and on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., through April 30. Additionally, Attas will give an artist talk there at 6:30 p.m. Thursday April 26. ■*

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