

# Double Scoop

## WE GOT TO PLAY THE SAINTS OF LAS VEGAS

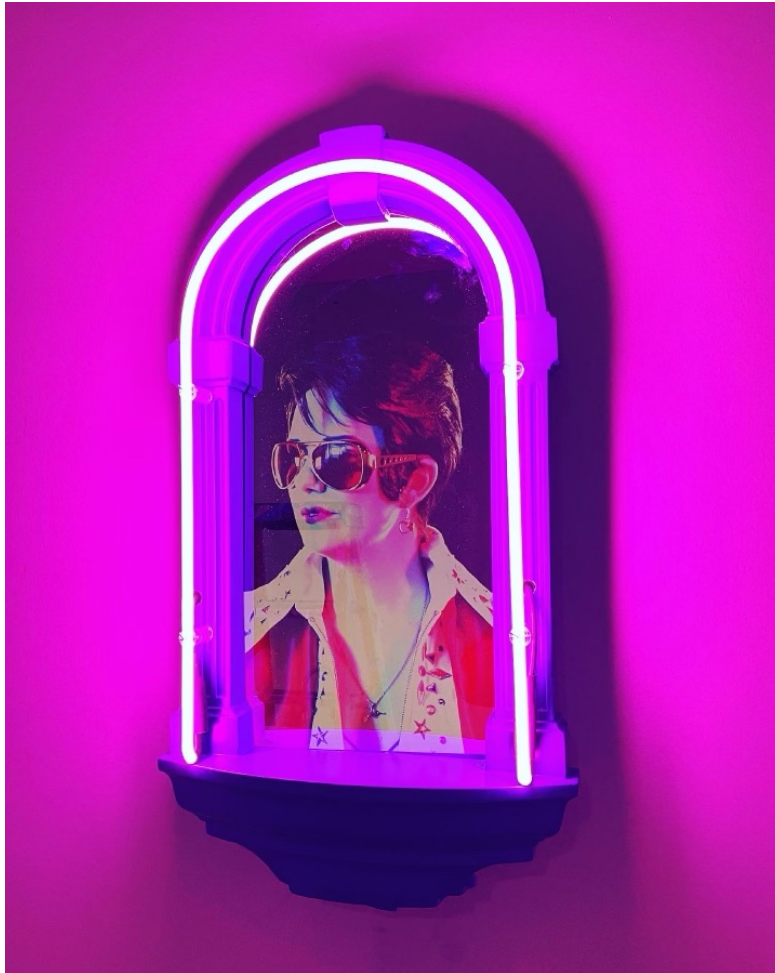
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Photo: Courtesy the Neon Museum

I met Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, an artist from Brooklyn, on a mild afternoon at the Neon Museum to talk about his residency there. We spent a few hours conversing about Las Vegas, its history, and its art. At the end of our conversation he asked me to model for him as one of the city's patron saints, Vegas Vic. I found the idea of performing as Vic hilarious, myself being much rounder and browner than our city's cowboy mascot.



Heidi Rider, pictured here as an Elvis hologram, is one of several Las Vegas artists who modeled for the project.  
Photo: Courtesy Gabriel Barcia-Colombo

In iconography, Las Vegas is an easy city to convey. A few neon signs, some white tigers, a showgirl or two, a deck of playing cards and—voilà—you have effectively conveyed Las Vegas. Understanding it, on the other hand, its place within the zeitgeist, is another measure of complexity. Gabe’s desire to capture Las Vegas in a digital format and transliterate it into electronic space seemed daunting, especially for a visitor. The tourist eye is so often inaccurate. Still, I was interested in watching him try.

A few weeks later, I found myself on a rotating pedestal under bright light wearing an undersized cowboy hat and yellow plaid shirt, cigarette smoke stinging my eye. From behind the camera, Gabe gently and thoughtfully gave directions for my performance, which lasted somewhere near an hour. During the entire experience, Gabe struck me as calming, kind, patient, and exacting—but flexible enough for improvisation. It was one of the more enjoyable modeling experiences I’ve ever had. I knew I would be turned into a hologram—a fact that I couldn’t quite grasp.



Photo: Courtesy the Neon Museum

The exhibition, *Simulations of the Sacred*, opened a week or so after my session with Gabe. It really is gorgeous work. Holy Roller the Slot-machine-come-orical gives out randomized phrases, which oscillate from absurd to profound, each yank of the one-armed bandit paying out in strange perceptions. Two neon sculptures, “Temptation in Paradise Pink” and “Relic,” act as clever quips at our compulsive digital interface. The Nicho boxes, (three-dimensional shadow boxes traditionally serving as altars to loved ones or honoring patron saints part of postcolonial Latin American religious tradition) contain the holograms, and here I am confronted with myself—or a version of myself, a confused, agitated interpretation of Vegas Vic, animated in the space a saint should occupy.

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Thankfully, I'm not alone, Gabe has managed to pull dozens of notable Las Vegas creatives and activists into the show, as icons, as saints, revealing our diversity and intensity. Developing an intimate portrait not only of this city as an idea, but of the people working towards what the idea of Las Vegas as a city will be in times to come, a community trapped in amber as animations. For someone who's spent so little time in the city, Barcia-Colombo has produced an insightful interpretation of a place so easily misinterpreted.

In the act of recordkeeping, human beings have, in the last decades, drifted further and further from the material. We as a species are braced against some great threshold, between the realm we have known for millennia of places and things, atoms and void, and this new electric reality of binary pixels, and ever collapsing digital frontiers. We writhe in strange solipsism, a part of neither realm completely. Barcia-Colombo is an anthropologist of this moment. His work incorporates the finest aspects of trendy phrases like "immersive" and "meta," forcing such terms to live up to their potential. In "Simulations of the Sacred," the artist has captured the liminality of our era, and found in Las Vegas, and its people a most suitable of subjects. I'm grateful to have been one of them.

The exhibition *Simulations of the Sacred* by Neon Museum Artist in Residence Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, is on view at the Juhl Las Vegas condo tower, 353 E. Bonneville Ave #181, through Feb. 26. Hours are noon to 6 pm or by appointment.

<https://www.doublescoop.art/we-got-to-play-the-saints-of-las-vegas/>