Lune de La Zare

The portrayal of dying as a work of art

by Arslohgo

Arslohgo, „Lune de La Zare“, Digital Composition, 5940 × 4200 Pixels, CMYK, 300 ppi.

There are images that look back at you, and there are images that stubbornly refuse to. Arslohgo's "Lune de La zare" belongs decisively to the second kind. At the heart of the composition looms a face so large the picture plane can barely contain it—a Bowie whose eyes are bound beneath a strip of white cloth, two dark buttons staring out where pupils should be. This is the Bowie of the Lazarus video from 2016, that final, spectral performance in which a dying man choreographed his own death. Lifted out of its narrative sequence and inflated to monumental scale, the figure becomes a mask that sees nothing and knows everything.

The blindfold is the dramaturgical key to the picture. It refuses the eye contact that ordinarily forms between portrait and viewer, and imposes on the image the asymmetrical hierarchy reserved for the mystical: we see, but we are not seen—or rather, we are seen by some other, sightless authority. Bowie's blind mask calls up a long line of iconographic ancestors, from the Veil of Veronica to the blindfolded Synagoga of medieval cathedral portals. It is the gesture of liturgy itself: the veiling of the face before the holy or the dying.

Set into this monumental head, almost like a relic in its niche, appears a second, smaller Bowie—the same man in the slender form, his diagonal stripes marking him at once as prisoner, Pierrot, and creature of the stage. Bowie within Bowie, a Russian-doll nesting of the self. The figure becomes a reliquary of its own appearances. This nesting is more than a formal trick: it asserts that an artist's "I" is built of all the prior selves it has internalized, swallowed, and never quite shed.

In the lower-left quadrant, small enough to be missed, rests a third incarnation: the androgynous Bowie from the cover of *The Man Who Sold the World*—the 1970 album that pictured him reclining in a flowing dress on a chaise longue and that redrew the gender lines of pop music for good. In Arslohgo's composition, he lets a playing card slip from his hand, an eight whose form already evokes the symbol for infinity. Fate, gamble, eternal return. The Man Who Sold the World placed his bet—and the last card falls now, nearly fifty years later, in the face of his blind double.

The title frames this assembly of selves through a linguistic metamorphosis. "Lazarus," the biblical figure raised from the dead and namesake of Bowie's last great song, becomes in the French ear "La zare"—the tsarina. A double migration takes place: from English to French, from masculine to feminine, from the sacred to the courtly. Lazarus, the one who rises, becomes a sovereign queen. And the moon, *la lune*, is bestowed on her like a crown. It is telling that no moon appears in the picture itself: the moon is not depicted but *attributed*—something the tsarina possesses, the territory her rule defines. The image is not the moon, but what unfolds beneath it.

Formally, Arslohgo works in a vocabulary that feels almost analog. The figures are not crisply cut from their backgrounds but rubbed into the smoke of the clouds, seeming to exhale from them and be swallowed by them in the same breath. The tonality—a muted slate gray shot through with subterranean petroleum blue—recalls the salt prints of the early nineteenth century or the photograms of a Heinrich Kühn. This photographic aura, which permits both

grain and softness at once, lifts the work clear of the digital slickness that swallows so many pop tributes of our moment. It is not a poster. It is a shroud.

What Arslohgo accomplishes is the translation of a biographical fact—Bowie staged his own dying as a work of art—into a properly pictorial question: How do you show someone who has already gone, without merely putting him on display? The picture's answer: through veiling, through nesting, through displacement into another language and another gender. The blind giant at the center is not Bowie. He is the mask Bowie passed through to become something else—the tsarina beneath an unseen moon.

The work is strongest where it undercuts its own devotion. Those who love Bowie will recognize Bowie. Those who don't will see a blindfolded figure, a Byzantine Christ, a Pierrot, a sphinx whose gaze has been bound shut. Precisely this double encoding—at once a pop relic and a timeless allegory—lifts "Lune de La zare" beyond the genre of the musician homage. It is an image about seeing that is no longer necessary, because the essential has long since been known.

Medium: Digital Composition