

# Marco Brambilla

English



Pérez Art Museum Miami



## Marco Brambilla: *Heaven's Gate*

*Heaven's Gate* by Marco Brambilla (b. 1960, Milan; lives in London) is a monumental video tableau within which the viewer levitates through a lush cinematic landscape of collaged film samples collected from iconic Hollywood images. Embracing the luminous qualities of cinema pageantry, the piece both celebrates the collective storytelling consciousness and satirizes its saturated glamour. The history of the world is retold as a silver screen spectacle in the style of Cecil B. DeMille and Walt Disney, taking snapshots and flashes of history to playfully reconfigure the evolution of human civilization. By appropriating the language and imagery of the Hollywood epic, *Heaven's Gate* confronts the viewer with a glossy reflection of humanity's perpetual quest for material gain.

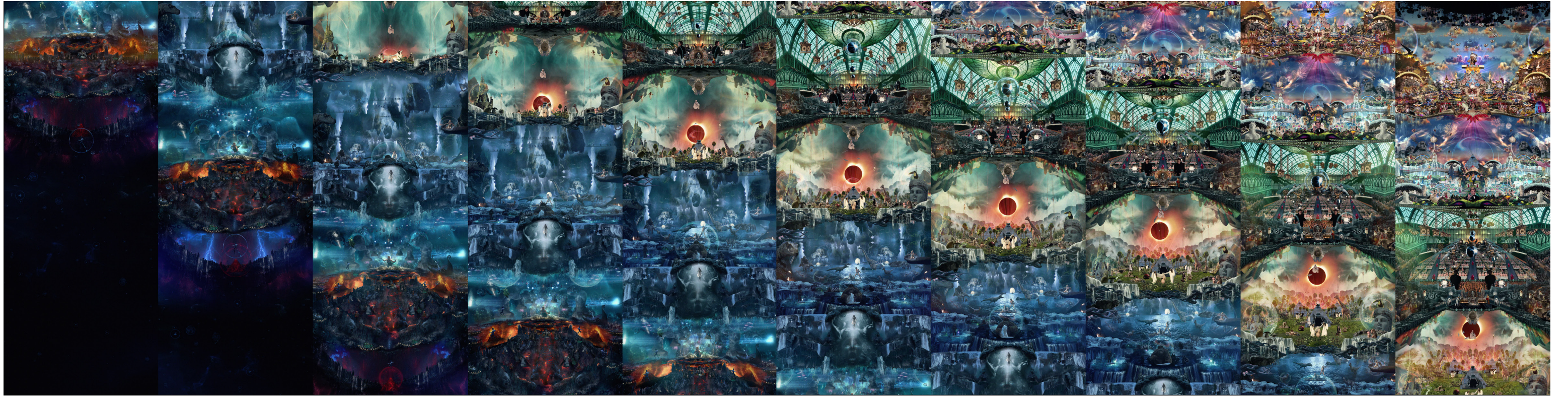
Emerging from a dark celestial plane, the viewer floats among the first stars of creation, the beginning of the universe. These stars morph into human bodies, then explode into droplets of amniotic fluid that flood together to form a vast sea. Led out of the water, the eye drifts upward into a series of seven allegorical Renaissance-like landscapes, populated by the most recognizable cinematic figures of our age, each level

representing another frame of our existence: primordial lava fields, an Edenic garden of angels and animals, prehistoric forests, a grim industrial interior, palaces of consumption, and finally the heavenly cosmos of self-actualized celebrity domination. The work finishes with a dramatic explosion and blackout, a striking reminder of the unsustainability of this endless barrage of images.

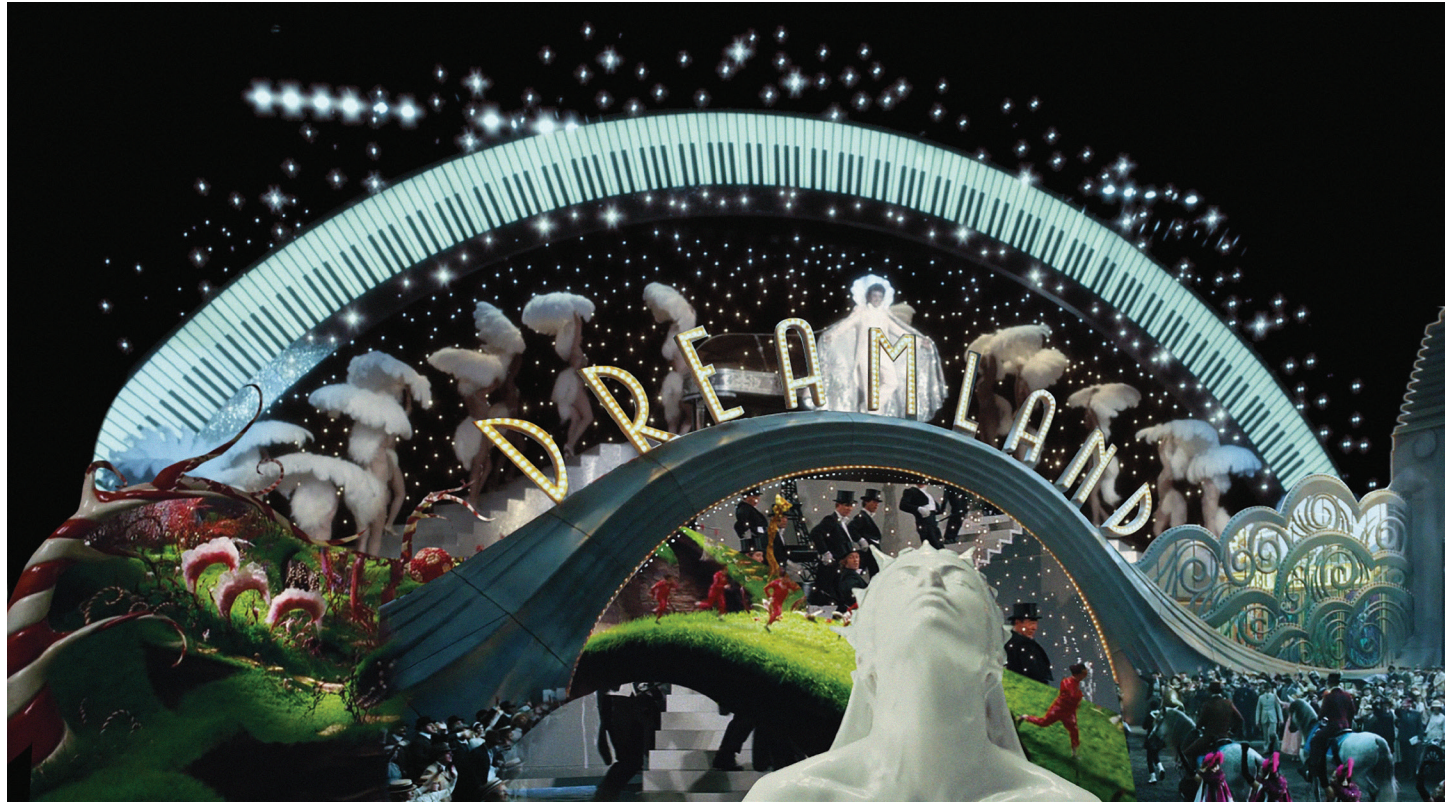
Dante's *Inferno*, with its ever-widening circles of hell inhabited by people who rejected spiritual values, may come to mind while taking Brambilla's metaphorical journey. Yet, it is much closer in form to Dante's lesser-known *Paradiso*, in which the narrator ascends upward, meeting "blessed souls" along the way. But instead of King Solomon and Thomas Aquinas, the blessed souls of *Heaven's Gate* are Audrey Hepburn, Scarlett Johansson, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Christopher Walken. Rather than ending with Dante's cosmic constellations, the evolutionary ascension ends in the suffocating perfection of the dream factory, a reflection of society's aspiration toward unchecked social and material accumulation.











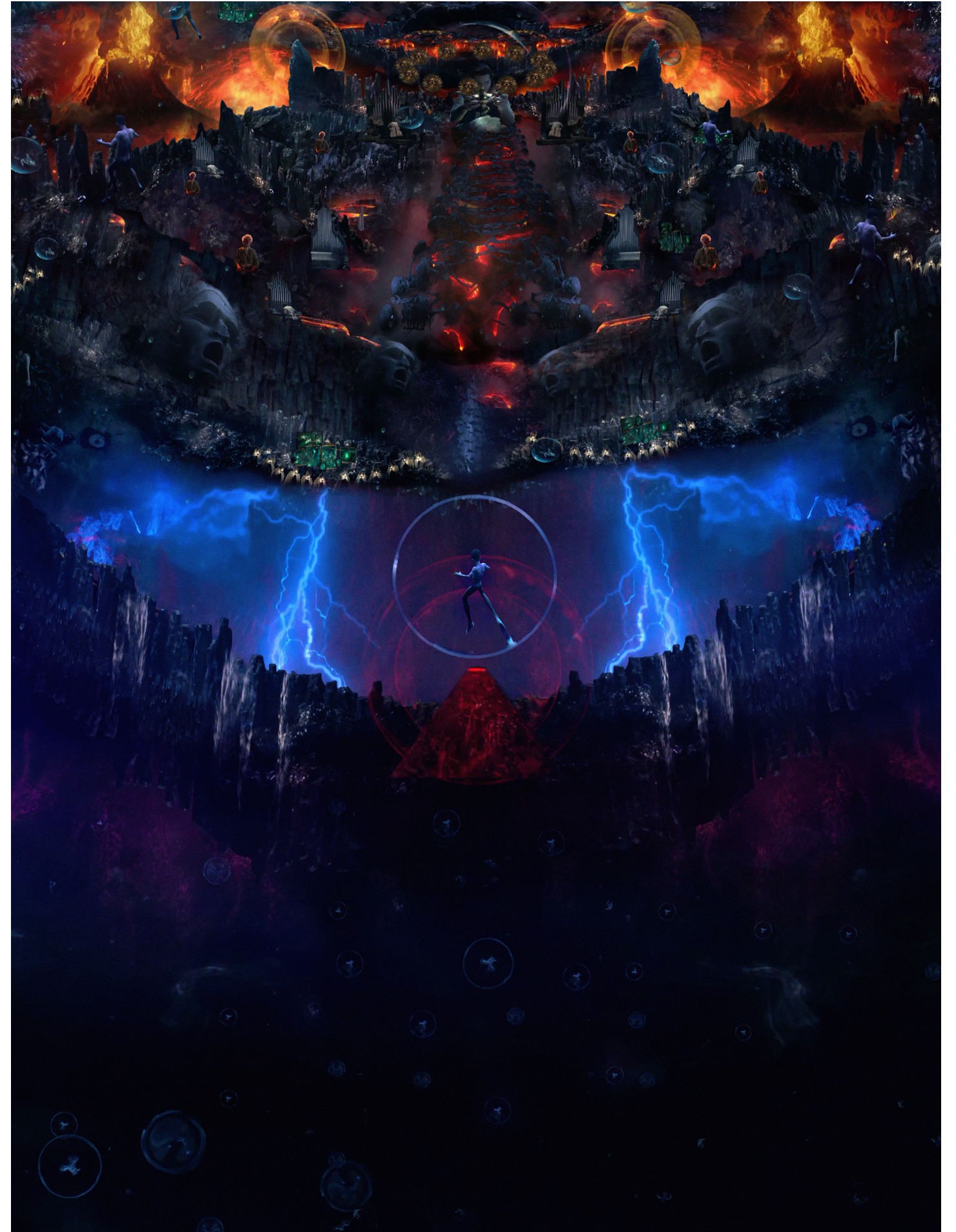
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The visual references in *Heaven's Gate* are derived from Hollywood's golden age: an era of relative innocence, when films allowed for an escape from the reality of war and the Great Depression. The work reappropriates the language of pop culture to depict the tensions present in religion, industry, and celebrity: ascension and fall, innocence and experience, vanity and pageantry, sexuality and awakening, simplicity and excess. Through this absorbing work of digital psychedelia, Brambilla highlights the sensory overload of today's compendium of popular culture to engulf the viewer's senses with a hyper-saturation of imagery almost impossible to sustain.

Made during the 2020 lockdown, *Heaven's Gate* also functions as a time capsule of that year, which was so dense with spectacle it could have come out of Hollywood's "dream factory," in which the strangeness of the news often trumped whatever drama Hollywood or reality TV might invent for our entertainment and distraction. It also functions as a form of self-reflection—the visceral experience of seeing these images rapidly changing within the space is a reminder of the time spent distracting oneself during a moment in history that is in many ways defined by what tools of distraction were available.

*Heaven's Gate* takes its title from the 1980 Michael Cimino period epic that became known for its excess, symbolizing the hubris and indulgence of Hollywood. The excessive production costs of Cimino's film bankrupted United Artists and effectively brought to an end the era of director as auteur, paving the way for the studio domination of the medium, which has continued to the present day. The same industry that created life-affirming escapist spectacles during the Great Depression and Second World War had become bloated and senseless. This work, one in a series dating back to 2008, with a haunting soundtrack that samples Sergei Prokofiev, hip-hop, Art of Noise, and others, is as open for interpretation as a dream rich with symbols from the collective unconscious.

Employing spectacle to illustrate the hollowness of it, *Heaven's Gate* enacts Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase, "the medium is the message," remarking on the sensory overload of today's rampant digital culture through its open-ended psychedelic journey of dark wonder.



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## Marco Brambilla: Heaven's Gate

### Marco Brambilla

b. 1960, Milan; lives in London

*Heaven's Gate*, 2021

8K color video, with sound, 8 min., 45 sec.

Courtesy the artist

*Marco Brambilla: Heaven's Gate* is organized by Franklin Sirmans, PAMM Director, with Maritza Lacayo, Curatorial Assistant and Publications Coordinator, in the Bank of America Gallery. This exhibition is presented with support from Ann Blackwell and Cornelius Bond. Ongoing support for PAMM's project galleries from Knight Foundation, and additional support from JW Marriott Marquis Miami, is gratefully acknowledged.

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## Biography

Marco Brambilla is no stranger to Hollywood, having directed the 1993 film *Demolition Man*, a sci-fi meditation on a dystopian future, perhaps one not unlike our own. Based in London, Brambilla's work has been internationally exhibited and is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; ARCO Foundation, Madrid; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. His work has been exhibited at the New Museum, New York; Seoul Mediacity Biennial; Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing; Borusan

Contemporary, Istanbul; and Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland. His retrospective took place at the Santa Monica Museum of Art. Brambilla has worked with Creative Time and Art Production Fund in New York to present public art installations, including *Nude Descending Staircase No.3* (2019) at Oculus WTC with Art Production Fund during Frieze New York. Brambilla is a recipient of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation award. His work has been featured at the Venice Film Festival and Sundance Film Festival, as well as Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland.

## Images

Cover, 2-3, 5-6 *Heaven's Gate*, 2021 (detail). 8K color video, with sound, 8 min., 45 sec.

1, 4 *Heaven's Gate*, 2021. 8K color video, with sound, 8 min., 45 sec.



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