

HOWARD YEZERSKI GALLERY

JANUARY 10, 2003 **ARTS** THE BOSTON PHOENIX

BY CHRISTOPHER MILLIS

light in January

"Amanda Means: Glow"

At the Howard Yezerski
Gallery, 14 Newbury Street,
through February 11.

TO GET A SENSE of what depth looks like in a contemporary photography exhibit, visit the Howard Yezerski Gallery. Amanda Means photographs light bulbs and only light bulbs. Their shapes — one series is round, one elliptical — don't change; the direct, head-on perspective doesn't change;

and the format — oversized for the most part, measuring in, unframed, at about two square feet — doesn't change. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the wattage doesn't change. Yet within these confines, Means creates an arresting and playful sense of variety. The moods shift, the textures vary, the colors contract and expand, and with those exquisitely orchestrated changes, the very meaning of each frame appears unique.

Frequently I felt I was looking not at light bulbs at all but at human heads. I'd see a pair of lips whose filament wiggled horizontally, or I'd discern ears whose shadows rose in two symmetrical lines on either side of the bulb. I was soon convinced that the implied human form was at some level deliberate. After all, Means could have shot any shape of fluorescent or incandescent bulb, and yet it's hard to imagine being as mesmerized by the exaggerated form of bulbs used for recessed lighting or make-up mirrors or halogen lamps.

Another pleasure of this work is the atavistic delight in rediscovering the almost living nature of harnessed electricity, as Means celebrates the inexplicability of



LIGHT BULB 00056C: *Amanda Means's bulbs suggest the human form as they delight in the living nature of harnessed electricity.*

what we take for granted. In *Light Bulb 2 (CP)*, the diffuse white light emanates from the center of a darkened, almost black bulb, whereas in *Light Bulb 5 (CP)*, the pitch-black background corresponds with all but the center of the luminous orb — the light, what little exists, looks like vapor rising from a pit.

In her color photographs, Means achieves an expected emotional range, from light-hearted to ominous. *Light Bulb 0002C*, with its indigo helmet and neck, could be the back of a performer's head in Blue Man Group. *Light Bulb 00017C*, with its black sphere and super-luminous guts against a deep vermilion background, suggests an infrared image of an alien's cranium.