#### **HYPFRAILFRGIC**

## Paintings that Capture Our Ever-Changing Perceptions of Boyhood

Enrique Martínez Celaya distills how the concept of "the boy" changes with judgement and time, just as painting itself is linked to materials and history.

Kealey Boyd



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Unwilled" (2008), oil and wax on canvas (all images courtesy Robischon Gallery)

DENVER — It's hard to pin down what is happening in the frame of Enrique Martínez Celaya's paintings. In *The Boy: Witness and Marker*, 2003–2018 at Robischon Gallery, Martínez Celaya distills how the concept of "the boy" changes with judgement and time, just as painting itself is linked to materials and history. In his exhibition essay, Martínez Celaya shares that when the boy leaves his artworks for a time, the land or sea takes his place, a detail which encouraged me to consider what is at stake in the artist's images.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, (left to right), "The Relic and the Pure" (2013-2015), "The Nesting" (2016), "The Rain" (2017)

Martínez Celaya's paintings are like wordless poems, inverting and twisting meaning in profound and playful ways. In our conversation, he identified a long list of poets he reads, among them Robert Frost.

Frost's first commercially published book of poems was titled *A Boy's Will* and, in 1942, he published a collection titled *A Witness Tree*. Generally, the poems within *A Boy's Will* explore a person's movement through an external world — how the landscape feels, smells, and sounds — while *A Witness Tree* engages complex internal human dramas.

Frost described the wings of a butterfly ("The Tuft of Flowers"), the pages in an open book ("A Cloud Shadow"), and the surface of water in the wind ("A Line-Storm Song") all as a "flutter." Rather than argue Frost is in need of a thesaurus, I would suggest it is the movement that evokes an image in the mind, rather than the actual thing moving. Extending the possibilities of a sensation is also what interests Martínez Celaya, such as when he presents one more creature that flutters in "The Relic and the Pure" (2013–2015), where a boy rests on the belly of a ray rather than a raptor. A hint or a gesture



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Prince" (2015)

can shift everything within Martínez Celaya's frame. A young boy stretching from a branch possesses an impossibly long torso in "The Prince" (2015). His rubbery adolescent body, with one protruding shoulder blade that bends the sky, conveys an anxiety that extends beyond what is literally depicted.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Sword" (2012)

In Frost's A Witness Tree the wood does not bend; it marks and supports its space firmly like "an iron spine," despite the passage of time or maybe as a product of it. The permanence of the tree as witness in Martínez Celaya's paintings is countered by the ever-changing boy — both primary signifiers in his work. Capturing the

vicissitudes of time is one of the ways in which Martínez Celaya creates uncertainty. In "The Holy" (2009) and "The Sword" (2012) bright colors whisper from the edge of the canvas, buried under darker pigments, like a memory. The flowering field persists in the fray of "The Sword," beckoning the viewer to imagine its life before it was cut down and burned black. When Frost describes the land in "The Quest of the Purple-Fringed," he notes "the chill of the meadow underfoot" despite the sun overhead. The reader can recall how it feels when soil covets the cool night air well into daytime. Martínez Celaya's scorched land prickles while slumbering, teasing us with the image of how the green plants' limber stems previously swayed.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Wager" (2018), oil and wax on canvas, "The Traveler" (2016), tar, straw and wood

Martínez Celaya's nervous layers of paint mimic the slippage of time as the boy pulls way from childhood in increments too minor to see until the transition is complete. In "The Wager" (2018) Martínez Celaya confessed painting the torso of the boy several dozen times, seeking the form that it "should be," not one that mimics a young boy in a photo, but a body at an age both eager and fearful.

The meanings of Martínez Celaya's images are not fixed or immediately clear. In this way, he says, "paintings manifest

the doubts of the viewer as much as the artist." It is imperative, he argues, to press on those anxieties to engage people in art.

Enrique Martínez Celaya's The Boy: Witness and Marker, 2003-2018 continues at Robischon Gallery, (1740 Wazee Street, Denver) through March 9.

#### ART SHOW



#### **ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA**

This Los Angeles-based painter and sculptor creates brooding works that are as enigmatic as they are compelling and beautiful.

BY LIZ BROWN

The image is simple—a bird in flight and a burst of black and orange flames—but it lingers in complicated ways. There's an electric jolt from the ball of fire, and then, as the eye takes in the desolate black field behind it, a haunting emptiness sets in. At once voluptuous and bleak, Enrique Martínez Celaya's wall-size *The Burning (Mandelshtam)* could technically be called a landscape painting—but it feels more like a premonition. You don't know whether to be excited or scared.

Martínez Celaya's work—in addition to painting, he also creates sculptures and installations—draws on easily recognizable images and scenes, which the artist renders in ways that make them appear strange and uncanny: In The Guest, a colorfully dressed matador stands incongruously alone on a tree stump against a stark mountain range. In The Treasure of the Patient, a life-size bronze sculpture of a young boy inhabits a giant birdcage; the holes cut out of his torso house the nests of five live Australian doves. "I am interested in creating certain experiences, certain scenes, and then undermining them," Martínez Celaya says in his spacious studio in Los Angeles's Culver City, "so that the notion of representation—how trustworthy this image is—becomes unstable."

In recent years, he has created a series of paintings inspired by the singers Adele and Freddie Mercury, the artist Edvard Munch, and his own children. Although the faces are recognizable, Martínez Celaya doesn't consider himself a portraitist or even a figurative painter. "Mostly, I create the figures, objects, and landscapes in my work from memory. The work is really not about the figures," he says. "They are references, points of entry more connected to issues of memory and representation and metaphor." Indeed, each face is partially a reflection of himself.

He works in what he calls environments, or cycles, creating multiple pieces simultaneously. He's currently developing one around the idea of "another shore," an investigation of arrivals and departures, for an upcoming show at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. He has other exhibitions lined up in Berlin, Stockholm, and Porto Cervo, Italy.



LEFT: The Bloom, for the Wilderness, 2015, oil and wax on canvas. BELOW: The Invisible, 2015, bronze sculpture in metal basin with water.





It's tempting to draw a link between the artist's biography and the atmosphere of dislocation in his work. Born in Cuba in 1964, Martínez Celaya emigrated with his family to Spain when he was seven, and then again to Puerto Rico when he was 13.

But he is quick to cite influences beyond his transient childhood, such as his grandfather's austere Catholicism, distinct from the flamboyant ritual so often associated with the religion, as well as the mystical tradition of American authors like Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. His background in math and science, including doctoral training in quantum electronics, also contributes to the rigorous level of technical experimentation in his practice. For a room-size 2004 installation titled *Schneebett*, he constructed a

refrigeration system within an unmade bronze bed, creating a thick layer of white frost that seemed to take the place of sheets and blankets.

"He has an encyclopedic curiosity, which is very rare these days," says Klaus Ottmann, who recently curated an exhibition at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., which paired Martínez Celaya's *The First Kierkegaard* with several paintings by the American Romantic Albert Pinkham Ryder, who died in 1917. While the two artists evoke a similar moodiness, it turns out there are other resonances as well: Martínez Celaya

often paints with tar, accounting for the viscous density of his blacks, and Ryder favored bitumen, a tar-like substance.

Ottmann also likens the spiritual dimension in Martínez Celaya's art to the way that Catholicism informed Yves Klein's work and to how Mark Rothko drew from Jewish mysticism in his paintings. In terms of formal references, Miami collector and philanthropist Jorge Pérez sees Martínez Celaya in the mold of Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, but notes that it's simply not possible to pin this artist down. "He is not static," Pérez says. "He is always growing."



# artspeak

March 19, 2017



Enrique Martinez Celaya

The Gypsy Camp Jack Shainman Gallery New York, 513 West 20th Street

Cuban-born and Los Angeles-based artist Enrique Martinez Celaya returns New York for his second solo exhibition with Jack Shainman Gallery. The paintings Martinez Celaya created in the last two years continue his quest for alternative realm through otherworldly and ephemeral depictions of humans and nature. Artspeak editor

Osman Can Yerebakan interviewed the artist about *The Gypsy Camp* that will remain on view until April 22nd at the gallery's 20th street location.

Osman Can Yerebakan: In a previous interview, you talked about the influence of studio life in your work. You said that your studio needs to be better than yourself, so it can teach you how to be better. Was studio life influential in this body of work here?

Enrique Martinez Celaya: My studio life was very influential because I worked in two different studios for this exhibition, one was a studio that I have in Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and the other one is in L.A where I live. I worked in both studios and the work came together in the L.A. studio. I don't consider studio as a factory as many artists do, but to me it is a mixture between a laboratory and a monastery that has a certain pressure on me to create and make work that I otherwise wouldn't be making. I didn't have an assistant in New Hampshire so there I did everything myself and I had help in my other studio. Having two different ways of working effected my work.



Enrique Martinez Celaya, The Hunter, 2016 oil and wax on canvas ©Enrique Martinez Celaya.

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

O.C.Y.: Some of the paintings give the impression that a human being was just there, but we missed that person This feeling of abandonment is also brought up in the press release. What do these setting without humans mean?

E.M.C.: I never heard anybody say that before, but actually this is a very accurate way of interpreting the work. It always seems to me that there are pointers to that absence in my work. Sometimes we are looking at aftermath of an incident or sometimes things are waiting to happen. That absence also has anthological questions about existence and one's relation to the nature and the surrounding. If you look at *The Folktale* painting, for example, something happened a while ago and now things are calm once again. The feeling of having arrived too late to a circumstance and having missed something is very important to me.

O.C.Y.: The paintings' ethereal and ghostly nature presents your figures almost like ghosts, but they don't know they are dead. How much life do you attribute to your figures? In The Unloved painting, the child looks almost dead while standing next to the snowman. Although it is clearly very cold, he is not wearing anything to protect himself as if he didn't feel the cold.

E.M.C.: I think in some ways the work hovers around remembrance and memory. If we are talking about memory, we can accept that all figures are ghosts; nothing is there anymore. It is one's transposition to another circumstance. The landscape itself inhabits me as a ghost, as well. Although the viewer is looking at a scene, I am putting constant reminders like unfinished edges or text to empathize that this is a painting, not a scene. In that sense, I don't think my work is representational. When people say this work is figurative, I am always shocked.



Enrique Martinez Celaya, The Folktale, 2017 oil and wax on canvas ©Enrique Martinez Celaya. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

O.C.Y.: You say that your paintings are not windows to another world, but they are all that there is. You want to viewer to focus on the frozen moment in time and not be concerned about the narrative. But on the other hand, some of your paintings imply certain backup stories, like the man holding the fish he potentially just caught. How do you create that balance between narrative fluidity and character depth?

E.M.C.: I spent two and half years to complete *The Little Paradise* painting and it was mostly to create that balance to give an elusive impression. In *The Last Harvest*, in which a man is holding the fish he just caught, I tried to keep the narrative at bay, maneuvering around without fully revealing it. There are pointers to a story through little fragments, but I hope that fragment, rather than being connected to a larger narrative, is in itself a crystallized moment. The same way with our lives and how we remember the past. Sometimes, certain moments are disconnected from a full continuum and that one moment becomes very bright. Similar to how Proust depicted remembrance and years of memory with one bite of a madeleine.

#### O.C.Y.: Where does the title Gypsy Camp come from?

E.M.C.: I have had interest in the idea of being nomadic, not just in terms of moving around the space but also around time. But in recent years I have been interested in all these promises we make to ourselves about how tomorrow will be different or better. This has a certain denial of the present, but also hopefulness about the future. I did an exhibition called *Empires* which was about launching yourself into

somewhere new and different. *Gypsy Camp* is not about not settling. In a settlement, you decide to live at a place for a certain period of time or at least hope to be able to do so. Here though you know from the onset that your stay is temporary. There exists a transitional nomadic existence to find a place to stop, observe the surrounding, and then move on.

O.C.Y.: Writing is an important element in your work as it can be seen in some of the paintings here. Could you talk about that?

E.M.C.: For twenty years or so, I have been highly influenced by writers and philosophers in my work. I painted some of them as well. I have been particularly interested in poetry, and I consider most paintings as poems in a metaphorical sense. People sometimes find surrealist references in my work, but in reality that is not the case. They are juxtapositions of different fragments similar to poetry to reach another meaning. When I look at all the paintings here, I see different components of a poetry book. I am constantly finding measurements and influences in poems. Czesław Miłosz's soul is everywhere in these works, for example. I don't mean in terms of the content, but a certain aspiration. Additionally, I am writing myself and the writing you see in these paintings come from my own writing. I am however not interested in confessional work; my intention is not to tell my own story. I am not interested in my own memories, either, but instead I try to understand what memories mean in terms of continuity of time, regrets, and what we leave behind. That is why I describe my work as philosophical rather than psychological, because I try to understand the foundations of an experience.

#### GalleriesNow.net

March 22, 2017

#### **Jack Shainman Gallery, West 20th St**

513 West 20th St NY 10011 www.jackshainman.com
Open: 10am-6pm Tue-Sat

#### Enrique Martínez Celaya: The Gypsy Camp

Enrique Martínez Celaya's second solo exhibition at the gallery. With this new body of work, the artist inquires notions of ambition, loss, redemption, and the nature of painting.

Many of the paintings offer scenes of disrupted journeys or the aftermath of significant episodes: stairs abandoned in fields, snow globes as souvenirs from elsewhere, tattoos that historicize the body, a glass house lost in a cluster of firs, apples frozen and rotting in the tree, and the underlying structure of columns left unfinished. These moments of abandonment and failure also contain the seed of possibility and renewal whose hopefulness echoes the artist's informed but non-cynical approach to art in general and to painting in particular. In *The Folktale* (2017), marble stairs are isolated in a grassy clearing; they don't appear to lead anywhere and a fire burns in the distance, but colorful wildflowers sprout, birds flutter, and sunlight ripples suggesting hope and rebirth.

Nature is a theme throughout Martínez Celaya's work. Trees recur often as stoic markers of the passage of time. Shelters are also a motif, signaling human presence amidst the rawness of the elements. *The Accountant* (2016) unites the manmade with its environment. The dwelling is rendered in clear glass or possibly ice, bringing attention to its mechanism of support and to the way it distorts its surroundings, encouraging the viewer to reflect not only on the image, but on the intellectual processes that underlie the work of art and the experience of looking itself.

In this sense, the juxtaposition of sometimes disparate references—for example, roses and rebar—evokes a poetic quality, yet resists identification with any specific narrative. Rather, the works refer to their own making and particular emphasis is given to the canvas' surface and the physicality of paint; borders are left undefined, pigment smeared. Martínez Celaya, describing the ineffable quality of his work, stresses

presence over referent: "The conviction of the scenes is put in question by the way the paint doesn't reach the edges. This quality of the edges also problematizes the 'framing' of the world suggested by the paintings—my paintings are not windows to a world but all that there is."

Enrique Martínez Celaya has exhibited extensively throughout the United States and internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include presentations at the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C., Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts, Birmingham, Alabama, SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico, and the Hood Art Museum, Dartmouth College, where he is this year's Roth Distinguished Scholar.

Martínez Celaya's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; the Museum of Fine Art Houston; the Denver Art Museum; the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden; and the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, Germany, among others.

He has received many awards including the National Artist Award from the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, the Montgomery Fellowship at Dartmouth College, the California Community Foundation Fellowship, J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for Visual Arts, a Knight Foundation Grant, and the Young Talent Award from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Formally trained in science as well as art, Martínez Celaya studied Applied & Engineering Physics at Cornell University and pursued a Ph.D. in Quantum Electronics at the University of California, Berkeley. He later received a Skowhegan Fellowship to attend the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Maine and earned a Master of Fine Arts with the department's highest distinction from the University of California, Santa Barbara

Martínez Celaya is the author of many publications including *Work and Documents:* 1990-2015 published by Radius, *Collected Writings and Interviews* 1990-2010 published by the University of Nebraska Press, *On Art and Mindfulness* copublished by Whale & Star Press and the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, October, published by Cinubia, and the artist book *Guide*, which was later serialized by the magazine *Works & Conversations*.



March 23, 2017

#### **Enrique Martínez Celaya "The Gypsy Camp"**

Jack Shainman Gallery



Jack Shainman Gallery presents Enrique Martínez Celaya's second solo exhibition at the gallery. With this new body of work, the artist inquires notions of ambition, loss, redemption, and the nature of painting.

Many of the paintings offer scenes of disrupted journeys or the aftermath of significant episodes: stairs abandoned in fields, snow globes as souvenirs from elsewhere, tattoos that historicize the body, a glass house lost in a cluster of firs, apples frozen and rotting in the tree, and the underlying structure of columns left unfinished. These moments of abandonment and failure also contain the seed of possibility and renewal whose hopefulness echoes the artist's informed but non-cynical approach to art in general and to painting in particular. In The Folktale (2017), marble stairs are isolated in a grassy clearing; they don't appear to lead anywhere and a fire burns in the distance, but colorful wildflowers sprout, birds flutter, and sunlight ripples suggesting hope and rebirth.

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Concurrently on view at our 24th Street space is The Past is Present, a group exhibition featuring Brad Kahlhamer, Turiya Magadlela, and Hank Willis Thomas. Upcoming exhibitions at the gallery include Becky Suss at 513 West 20th Street and Gehard Demetz at 524 West 24th Street opening April 27th and on view through June 3rd.



March 28, 2017

#### In the Gallery with Enrique Martínez Celaya

Reflecting on Cuban identity, near-misses in painting, and reading Gabriel García Márquez



Enrique Martinez Celaya, The Folktale, 2017 Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Earlier this month, *Enrique Martínez Celaya: The Gypsy Camp* opened at Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea. In a wide-ranging conversation in the gallery (edited for length), the artist talked about the challenges of painting, why his work isn't really figurative, and a possible project in Havana.

Are these new paintings? And did you make them with this particular space in mind?

I always make a new body of work for each exhibition. I create a model [of the space] early on, and I begin to work with that particular space. Of course, changes are done at the last minute.



From left, The Nesting, 2016; The Brave, 2016; and The Last Harvest, 2017, by Enrique Martínez Celaya Photo: Cuban Art News

These three works are joined together by having the image of the boys. But what's happening in addition is the question of the scene and what it is, what the patches are. Even that movement around of the text problematizes the reading of the paintings as scenes. But by encountering them one after another, you have the opportunity to see something that exists beyond each individual work.

A sort of a narrative, but very elliptical.

It is. Because they are recognizable images of the landscape and the figure, the tendency is for people to want to think of it as narrative and figurative. I myself never do.

You don't think of them as figurative?

No, no. They may include figures but they're not defined by them. I think of the work as an inquiry. The philosophical and emotional concerns that I'm after have this reference to images—to these figures, or to the stairs. But in the next body of work, it might be language, or something else.

This one [*The Folktale*, pictured above] has stairs that are painted in a particular way, like fake marble. And birds. But that in itself is not the [end goal] of the work.

I think of this as an exploration that is very interested in what a painting is. Conceptually, how a painting is held and captured. Like how the edges of the painting are incomplete. How something like this gets introduced into a scene and problematizes the sense of this as a vista into a certain world.



Detail of Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Folktale, 2017 Photo: Cuban Art News

And how there are all these other pieces of information, reminding you constantly of the undermining of the painting as a construction—whether it's the drips or the markings. I've tried to approach authenticity from this point of view.



Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

For instance, a painting like this starts with an image of my mother as a 16-year-old, as a young woman. And it has this carousel. When people talk about the work, they will talk about those two things.

The painting took two and a half years to make. Because what I am trying to do is create these tensions and balances that allow this painting to exist as a painting.

Take the composition. Even though my paintings change all the time, this one didn't change very much. I wanted this thing here [gestures to the lower right of the canvas] to give a sense of light, but also a sense of paint. The fact that this is a tunnel that goes into space, but also I want to flatten it out—to not lose the picture plane.



Detail of Enrique Martinez Celaya, The Little Paradise, 2016 Photo: Cuban Art News

So the balance of those forces, and painting and repainting that face to come to terms with everything that is happening emotionally to that painting will take years. And ultimately, that's what I think defines a painting.

But the tendency, when somebody comes to it, and reads it as a figurative painting, is to imagine the story between the girl and the carousel.

But everything else that's happening—the gross treatment of that [the area of wall by figure's shoulder] and the funkiness of that paint, and the lack of satisfaction of that rendering there, or the painting of her head and the correction—those near-misses, all of that is the energy and the activity of the paint. Those things are really what I find the challenges of painting to be, and that make the whole process exciting for me.



A painting like this one, for instance, had completely different images when I started it—which I needed, to get a certain investment of direction into what the painting was doing. At the end, here's where it is after a year and a half of work, painting and repainting it.

So the figure is holding a large...vase?

It's actually holding a very crudely painted jewel—a jewel the way a child might remember a jewel. There's something about paint moving and trying to articulate the sense of objects—I'm interested in that failed illusion.



In other ways, the paintings create a certain thing and then it's undermined. That's very much at the heart of what I'm trying to do.

I think it's partly because I was trained as a scientist as well as an artist. When you go to do a scientific experiment, you don't know the answer beforehand.

What does your Cuban heritage or your Cuban identity have to do with your art?

It is an important question that has not been given enough space in the critical writings that have been done on my work. Because either people assume that it's obvious, because I'm Cuban, or they say, these are Nordic-looking paintings and they completely forget about it.

I was in Cuba until I was seven. And the sense that permeated my life after we left Cuba was the sense of a world that existed only in memory, from that moment on. That existed only as references, and the regret and the longing that came with all those memories.

I think that had a profound influence on me. But I found more resonance in continental philosophy, Nordic writers, the American transcendental tradition. I was finding more resonance with my own interiority and the way I was.



From left, Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Unloved, 2016, and The Wellspring, 2016. Photo: Cuban Art News

Even in my teenage years, my paintings did not look very Latin. But I think [it is reflected in] some of the concern with the nomadic quality of existence, like a gypsy camp—the title of this show—and this sense of displacement that exists in the work. How we contend with regret, and so on.

I think there's a lot of Cuban inheritance in that. But the artistic traditions I'm connected to are more Nordic and more American-European. That provides a complicated sense of what kind of Cuban I am as an artist. But undoubtedly, it is there. When I think of my mother as subject matter, for instance, it's difficult not to think of Cuba—this 16-year-old girl launching herself into this tunnel of what was to come. And I think that's a typical Cuban story.

There are many different kinds of Cubans. My grandfather was from southern Spain, so he was one of these Cubans who were very stern and quiet and silent—very different from the flamboyant Cuban that is stereotypically seen as Ricky Ricardo [from the 1950s television series *I Love Lucy*] or something like that.

Some of the severity and austerity in some of my paintings, which people attribute to Nordic tradition—there's a Spanish part of the tradition, Velázquez and people like that,

that are some of the most stern painters in the European tradition. The Catholic compression of emotion.



Those things are in my work but people don't understand the connections.

Until very recently, of the 40-something museums that own my work in the US, only one was bought by a Latin American curator. It was always European or American curators. Even though, as we were saying, so many of these things are connected [in my work].

#### *In what way?*

When people ask me about the connection between Latin American art and mine, I have very little to say about the visual arts, but I have tremendous connection with the literary tradition.

In my teenage years, even though I was painting all the time, I was reading literature more than anything. The Latin American boom—Cortazar, Vargas Llosa, and poets like César Vallejo and Nicholas Guillen—that was how my artistic sensibility got shaped. It was really through writers. It still is—I relate to writers more.

García Márquez, I read his books before they were popular. Especially *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba*—books like that were fundamental in my relationship to many things. Not so much the visual part of it. But that's cooked in—all this stuff is all cooked in [to my work].



Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Hunter, 2016 Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

#### Have you been back to Cuba?

Only when I was 15, on a brief visit to see my grandfather. But I would like to go. In fact, yesterday, there was somebody here who has been trying to get me to do a project in Havana.

I'm considering doing it. I'm excited about it. It will be an interesting thing to come back to Cuba in that way.

Enrique Martínez Celaya: The Gypsy Camp runs through April 22 at Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea.

## ARTNEWS

ARTISTS - HABITAT

#### L.A. HABITAT: ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA

BY Katherine McMahon POSTED 05/06/16 2:54 PM

L.A. Habitat is a weekly series that visits with 16 artists in their workspaces around the city.

This week's studio: Enrique Martínez Celaya; Culver City, Los

Angeles. Enrique Martínez Celaya was born in Cuba in 1964 and raised in Spain and Puerto Rico. "Being an undergrad on the East Coast, I hated all the Californians who boasted so much about their state," said Celaya, in his studio in Los Angeles late last year. He initially headed west to pursue a master's in quantum electronics at UC Berkeley. "When I came here," he said, "I understood why so many people were into it."



Enrique Martínez Celaya in his Culver City studio. ©KATHERINE MCMAHON

Celaya's sprawling studio, which he has inhabited since 2014, is situated on a nondescript street in Culver City. "It's a city where you can be very public or very private. It's nearly impossible not to be seen in New York if you don't want to be seen. But in L.A., you can disappear or be completely in the middle of everything."

Celaya's career trajectory is somewhat unusual. In addition to making paintings and sculptures, which frequently incorporate slightly surreal figures and depictions of the natural world, he is also an author and trained physicist, having originally attended college to study applied and engineering physics at Cornell. "I always have a couple of things going on at once. I like the variety, everything kind of informs each other," he said. He continues to turn to literature and science for inspiration, and explained that he sees an unbalanced relationship between art and other disciplines. "Despite the market success of the art world in the past 20 years, it's completely irrelevant to any other field of engagement in terms of knowledge," he said. "The art world has become a sort of satellite, only interesting to itself." In addition to his prolific artistic output, Celaya maintains Whale & Star Press, a publisher of art, poetry, and critical theory that he founded in 1998.

Celaya is currently exhibiting work at <u>LongHouse Reserve</u>, in East Hampton, New York, and this summer will teach at <u>Anderson Ranch Arts Center</u> in Aspen, Colorado. He will be participating in the Roth Fellowship at Dartmouth University, in Hanover, New Hampshire, from August 2016 through June 2017. Below, a look around his studio.















#### ARTS | EAST HAMPTON

### Back to a Changing Garden

Art and nature dance under the same sky at LongHouse Reserve, a 16-acre property.

IT'S A SPECIAL YEAR for Jack Lenor Larsen. At age 89, he is celebrating the 25th jubilee of LongHouse Reserve, his 16-acre sculpture garden in East Hampton.

ART REVIEW

The estate's sandy dunes, wooded glens, and walking paths — burst-ing this time of year with daffodils, crocuses, tulips and Eurasian fritillaria keep almost casual com-JOYCE pany with works of modern

and contemporary art. The sculptures are all so deftly placed within the landscape that it is difficult to imagine them fitting elsewhere.

Mr. Larsen, a renowned textile designer, author and art collector, shares his garden with the public. "I wanted LongHouse to introduce people to an alternative lifestyle, to encourage them to be inventive and nonconformist," he said.

Rotating exhibitions reinvigorate Long-House's collection, which incorporates items on permanent display or on loan by artists like Dale Chihuly, Willem de Koo-ning, Buckminster Fuller, Kiki Smith and Lynda Benglis.

The 2016 exhibition, "Rites of Spring," brings contemporary form to centuries of mythic celebrations that welcome rebirth and renewal. Sandro Botticelli's grand painting "Primavera" (c. 1482), in which Venus presides over three graces, comes to mind. But where Botticelli embedded nature in art, the eight artists newly featured at LongHouse embed art in nature.

Take the lithe stainless steel limbs of "Six Lines in a T II" (1964-79), by George Rickey (1907-2002), a treelike sculpture that is set in LongHouse's Peter's Pond. "Six Lines" stands tall, as if protecting a seasonal family of delicate lilies and lotus plants. Its intersecting arms gently sway and churn in prevailing winds — whatever it takes to court the splendid nearby cherry tree that is currently abloom with sensuous pink blossoms.

Then there is Venus incarnate — a pair of 16-foot-high, black-stockinged legs leaping across the wooded Kreye Canyon. Larry Rivers (1923-2002), who created "Legs" (1969), aptly conveys Venus's daunting sexual power, unlike Botticelli's demure goddess of love and renewal.

An especially poignant allegorical work by Russian-born artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov sits within an open, sun-drenched grassy knoll. "The Arch of Life" (2016) is modest compared with this renowned couple's more monumental installations. Yet five figures set upon an arch carry the full weight of their vision of pathos and resilience: An egg hatches a human head; a vulnerable youth shows bravado as he crawls on hands and knees wearing a lion mask; a third figure bearing a light-filled box on his back represents hope through adversity; and a fourth torso, sorrowfully draped over two sides of a wall, suggests the universal plight of those unable to survive. The final figure, surrounded by the weight of his agony, is in a state of collapse.

Another symbolically figurative work, "The Invisible" (2015), a bronze by Enrique Martinez Ceyala, portrays a crying boy standing, hands clenched, in "Black Mirror," a square pool designed by Mr. Larsen. Though figurative works tend to spark narratives, this one, tied to loss and the fragility of youth, weds art to nature as









TOP, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARKO REMEC, LEFT, AND WENDY VAN DEUSEN, ABOVE, PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MAMA

Clockwise from top left: Marko Remec's "Would That I Wish For (Tall Totem)"; George Rickey's "Six Lines in a T II," in Peter's Pond; Larry Rivers's "Legs"; and Ilya and Emilia Kabakov's "The Arch of Life."

a boy's tears continuously drip into the

This mythic constancy prevails in Jun Kaneko's "Untitled," an installation of five dangos (a word that means "dumplings' in Japanese). These monolithic ceramic works, softly molded geometric forms set within a graveled court, are shiny constructions that sport abstract painted patterns reminiscent of minimal painting and postmodern design. Marko Remec's "Would That I Wish For

(Tall Totem)" (2016) interprets the totem pole as a monumental urban pillar. Rising 20 feet from a depression within Grey Garden, it consists of a utility pole covered with industrial semi-dome mirrors that reflect a glut of visual stimuli - on this

The reserve is intended to inspire invention and nonconformist living.

day, the limbs of budding trees and the flash of a red fox sauntering by. The mirrors also reflect paranoia of covert surveillance and an obsessive-compulsive need to evehall all one can about the behavior of others. In this respect, Remec's work bows to the culture of narcissism, inviting viewers to take multiple selfies and exponentially replicate them online.

Finally there is Neil Noland's "Green RE: Genesis/Lake Eden/Black Mountain" (1986), a steel accordion-pleated sculpture. It sits quietly where it can bask in the whims of sun and shadow, coaxing us to slow down, to look at a single work of art from different angles, and to have in this frenzied world what Mr. Larsen wishes for us: a chance, for a moment, to live a nonconformist life.

LongHouse Reserve sculpture garden and landscape art center, with its exhibition "Rites of Spring," is open to the public through Oct. 8 on Wednesdays and Saturdays, from 2 to 5 p.m. In July and August, it is open Wednesdays through Saturdays, from 2 to 5 p.m. 133 Hands Creek Road, East Hampton. Admission: \$10; seniors, \$8; high school and college students with ID, free. Information: 631-329-3568; longhouse.org Pener, Degen. "In the Studio with Enrique Martínez Celaya." Cultured Magazine. August 2016.

## PRIVATE LIVES

Three exhibitions showcase painter Enrique Martínez Celaya's moody new portraits that explore his subjects' inner condition.

**BY DEGEN PENER** 



The Sparrow, 2016

A commandingly large, disarmingly enigmatic portrait of the singer Adele hangs inside Enrique Martínez Celaya's studio in Culver City, California. The oiland-wax painting looks across the space at an assembly of other personages. some recognizable (T. S. Eliot, Boris Pasternak, Ernest Hemingway, Freddie Mercury), some not (including two of the artist's young children). It's the first time that Martínez Celaya-who'll show selections of these works in three exhibitions this year—has dedicated an entire series to portraiture. His aim, though, isn't to indelibly capture the subjects, who aren't even named in the titles of the pieces. Regarding the Adele work—which is called The Sparrow and depicts her in a black floral dress---Martínez Celaya says, "I like her power and I am interested in the contrast between that power and the vulnerability of her face and body. But it isn't Adele that ultimately concerns me. The painting is more an incursion into the dynamics of talent, power, fear and insecurity than a portrait. It is an exploration of an inner condition." Throughout his career—celebrated this year with the new Radius Books monograph "Martínez Celaya: Work and Documents 1990-2015"the Cuban-born artist has brought such humanistic approaches to all of his work, shunning, for the most part, both formalism and the cool detachment displayed by many artists.

Martínez Celaya's studio is one of L.A.'s more enormous ones, filling story building. Two rooms are devoted to active paintings and sculptur artist works on many pieces at once, moving from canvas to canvas, with and other elements sometimes "bouncing around" from piece to piece, room is where he engages with works on paper. And the cavernous entry of past works of his own that currently inspire him, such as a broodingly dark of the artist Leon Golub, a friend, with text above his head that reads, "Leo I miss so much."

With his new pieces, Martínez Celaya, a former physicist who left act to become an artist in the early '90s, is taking a temporary break from the elaborate installations that have garnered him major attention over the including Schneebett, a frozen two-room environment inspired by Beet death presented at the Berliner Philharmonie. His portraits—on exhibit that London's Parafin (through July 9), Aspen's Baldwin Gallery (through July Barcelona's Joan Prats (in October)—by contrast, have the intimate for conversation with an interesting band of spiritual confidentes whom M Celaya characterizes as mostly outsiders. "They all made their life a bet, that their work would be something."

# MODERNPAINTERS APRIL 2015





Seated in an antique lime-green brocade slipper chair across from a vintage birdcage filled with spice finches and a rainbow-colored Lady Gouldian, in the corner of what might be considered the lounge of his sprawling new 16,000-square-foot studioequipped with its own outdoor citrus-and-sculpture garden that backs up to Culver City's hilly Holy Cross Cemetery—Enrique Martínez Celaya is holding forth on the role of memory in his work.

For the past two decades, the Cuban-born, Los Angeles-based artist, now 50, has been mining the deepwater deposits of the psyche—invoking everything from his days growing up in the beach town of Caimito, Cuba, to his studies in physics to transfigurations of his father folded into a portrait of a shore-strolling, Pinocchio-nosed Robinson Jeffers. Each work is layered with its own set of vagaries and incongruities beneath a bedrock of literary, psychological, philosophical, musical, and scientific theory. So it comes as a bit of a shock when he says, "Nobody has ever asked me about my first memory, and I don't think I have ever said anything about it."

It was December of 1967, Martínez Celaya's family was still living in Castro's Cuba, and he noticed a bruise on his right leg. Confused by the mark, he asked his mother what had happened; at the same moment, she noticed he had opened a closet in her bedroom and discovered his present for the Christian feast day of Three Kings. This discovery, however slight, presented <mark>the opportu</mark>nity for an alternate reality.

"After the revolution, there were not too many <mark>chances to bu</mark>y toys, so the Three Kings was a big deal," says Martínez Celaya, who is dressed in his studio uniform of black T-shirt, black jeans, black paint-spattered work boots, and a light salt-and-pepper scruff on his face. In a hushed and measured tone, he explains how the dearth of toys on the island led to lines rivaling those for food, and his parents would take turns waiting on these queues for up to six days. One year, his mother was first and secured a little horse sled, but on this holiday the present was a rolling plastic rabbit, which Martínez Celaya spied as he opened the closet.

"As I'm looking at it, it's coming to me that I had this bruise," he recalls of the discoloration, the result of a spanking he'd received from his father two days prior. "I said, 'Mom, what is this?' And my mom, realizing the opportunity, says, 'You were hit there by the Three Kings for looking at your toy.' Crazy logic to a kid in that moment kind of makes sense. The closet closes, everything goes back to normal again, but in a part of your brain something doesn't add up. It's such a weird memory, and I'm sure there are others before it, but that one wiped everything else out."

The punishment-reward slipstream of childhood can be a tricky navigation, especially through four decades of hindsight. But Martínez Celaya's deft handling of these enlightening failures of memory and those in his own fraught, wanderlusting personal journey-from Cuba to Spain to Puerto Rico to America—has led to some of the more enigmatic paintings, sculptures, installations, and writings by any artist of the past quarter century.

"There's an extraordinary sweep of intellectual curiosity lying at the base of the work," says Peter Goulds, founder of L.A. Louver gallery, where on April 9 Martínez Celaya will open his first solo show since returning to the city. For Goulds, Martínez Celaya's decision to establish this new base around his nuclear and studio family—after spending a decade traveling the globe and working in and around Miami—will no doubt refresh and broaden the practice on many levels.

"Each new place helped me confront something, but there is also a return, an ending that is also a beginning," says Martínez Celaya, who lived in the city on and off between the early '90s and the early aughts. "It is an important time for my work and for L.A., so it seems right."

If it's anything like his Florida sojourn, this second Angeleno chapter for Martínez Celaya will be exciting to watch. Over the past decade, he executed a series of provocative solo shows at, among other venues, the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia; Site Santa Fe; and the Miami Art Museum. He's also earned spots in the collections of high-level trustees the world over, as well as the permanent collections of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Stockholm's Moderna Museet.

Littered with a cast of now-familiar characters, often portrayed in a hazy glow, the artist's quasi-mystical oil-and-wax paintings (all of which start with poetic, rigorous, and oftentimes academic writings) feature lost and crippled boys (crying, carousing, and collapsing), blustery seascapes, stark winter forests, sun-blanched beaches, angels (embracing both darkness and light), docks, portals, boats (beached, tarred and feathered, and storm-beaten), birds (humming and caged), gemstones, bridges, suitcases (painted with starry night scenes in the middle of still lifes, or as sculptural fountains modeled after his mother's refugee luggage). There are deer, dogs, beds (of death

and slumber), storms (rendered in blood, tar, and oil), reflections, light and water (in every imaginable form, from painted waves to literal pools), that are inspired by everything from Paul Celan's poetry and the paintings of Albert Pinkham Ryder to Heidegger's philosophies on art and the final days of Beethoven. This last inspiration Martínez Celaya examined in his first video, *The Master*, 2010, starring himself as the composer, and earlier in an orchestral presentation and a haunting refrigerated deathbed that grew frost—and drew lines of visitors—at the Berliner Philharmonie in 2004.

Despite Martínez Celaya's long list of professorships, his practice doesn't hinge on references to some narrow iconographic tradition, however overt or subtle they may be. He doesn't abide knowing winks at art historical in-jokes, peacocking intellectualism, or philosophical tells; he paints them out, even if that means editing jaw-dropping vistas or beatific figures (for him, some paintings can be "too beautiful") under multiple layers of oil. And even after years of work, he might eventually resign a piece, never to be shown, to his two-story archive, which previously functioned as a series of bedrooms for a webcam porn operation that inhabited the building before the artist got his hands on it. In the past eight months, Martínez Celaya and his team transformed this cavernous sex workers' space into a gleaming white mini-museum with two 22-foot-high studios (each with its own neighboring gallery space) on the main floor. Upstairs, there are conference rooms, a gallery devoted to works on paper (think loose portraits of heroes like the poet Marina Tsvetaeva and a hatless Joseph Beuys), as well as a drawing room. He even built out an inviting entryway library stocked with books and gifts from other artists and writers, not to mention the catalogue of works published by his own imprint, Whale & Star.

"His books are amazing," says Jack Shainman, who will

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Enrique Martínez Celaya, 2015.

Martínez Celaya at work on "The Portrait Series" in his Miami studio in 2013.



turn both of his New York spaces over to Martínez Celaya for his first solo show with the gallery, in September. "The writing is extraordinary. He expresses himself so well." In addition to the artist's own collected writings (including those from his old blog, Bad Time for Poetry), Whale & Star has published an illustrated edition of Charles Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du mal along with monographs for Colorado-based painter Mary Conover and one of his favorite bands, Cowboy Junkies, who played to a crowd of 700 for the late-January inauguration of the studio space.

orn in Havana to a schoolteacher mother and a jack-of-all-trades father, Martínez Celaya grew up in the Mayabegue town of Nueva Paz while spending lots of time in Los Palos, where his grandparents had a palatial home. "It was kind of what you'd imagine from a García Márquez description, these grand places that are decaying and peeling paint because nobody will fix them," says Martínez

Celaya. "I was alone a lot with my grandparents, and there was a little desk I had where I did all these little watercolors.'

After the family moved to Puerto Rico, Martínez Celaya's parents sent him to apprentice with this "very severe, old-school" painter in the town of Hato Rev. His parents had a small business near the man's messy studio, where Martínez Celaya copied Old Masters and did commissioned portraiture for a local clientele. "I would get a piece of charcoal and paper and just do the same thing over again and again."

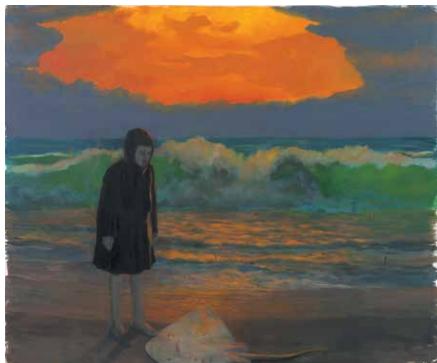
A revelation came to the 12-year-old apprentice after he drew the same bottle of Chianti 100 times. "I realized there was something profound revealed by the experience of putting charcoal on paper and in the effort of understanding what was in front of me," says Martínez Celaya. "Drawing, and by extension, art, became less of a vessel in which I put stuff and more of an experience to be unveiled." Furthermore, the studio, he says, 'wasn't separated from life in any way. I remember drawing clouds in pastel and we walked outside and my teacher hits me in the back of the head and says, 'Those are clouds!' It was this crazy old Spanish way of teaching you things."

Though he never stopped painting and drawing, he designed and built a laser in high school. "Science was more realistic, and it was a fascinating endeavor," he says. "Art was more internal, more private." He left Puerto Rico to study applied and engineering physics at Cornell and quantum electronics as a grad student at the University of California, Berkeley. This scientific baptism by fire may have helped demystify the natural world, but it couldn't answer the bigger philosophical questions that haunted Martínez Celaya after he left the lab at night.

These questions still haunt him three decades on. In his rear studio, he shows me two works in progress; he'll exhibit 8 to 10 at the upcoming Louver show. Pointing to a large painting of a bird inside a cage surrounded by a wintry landscape, he translates some Spanish writing painted into the bottom foreground: "In some place is left the word, building possibilities and revising, always revising."

"Texts have always been a part of the work, but not on the paintings," says Martínez Celaya, who also made a black landscape, The Maker's Fountain, 2014, with a brown leather suitcase watering ghostly thistles above the words "Your Kingdom Around You." Though he's been crafting dense texts (including a reimagining of the Grimm fairy tale *The Juniper Tree*) that deal with notions of identity and place—and the poems of Robert Frost, Tomas Tranströmer, and Harry Martinson that examine these same concepts—for the Louver show, Martínez Celaya insists that a clarity of purpose and seamlessness in the new studio have allowed him to "get out into the paintings before I even clarify what I'm doing on paper," he says. Turning around, he walks toward another

# or philosophical te doesn't abide in-jokes



The Education and wax on canvas, 7 x 8 ft.

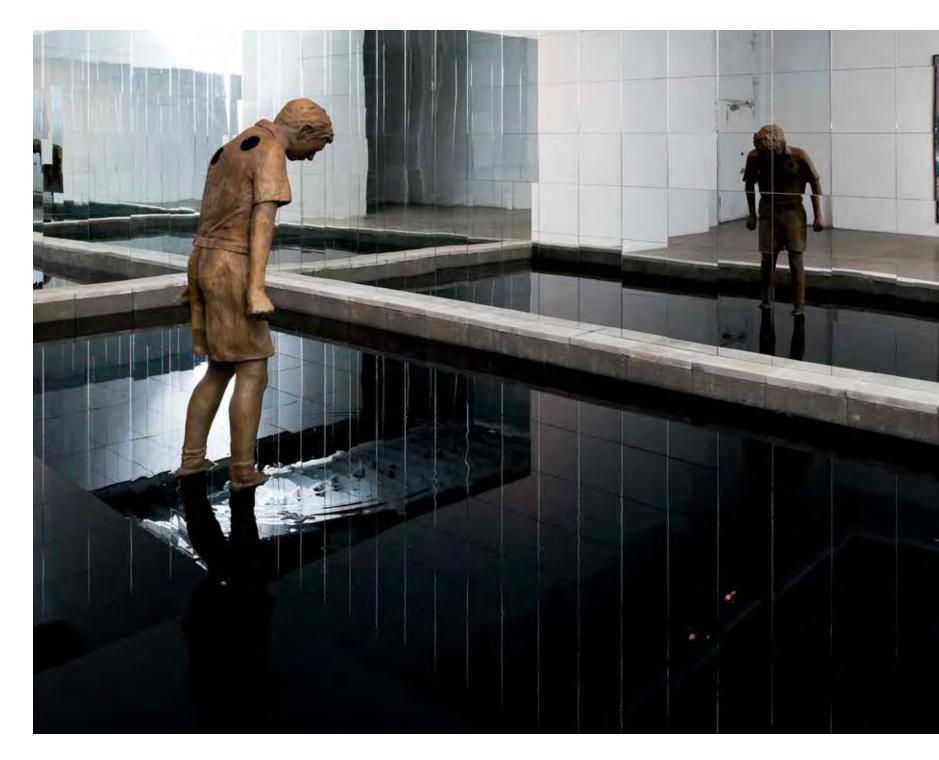
painting of a bird that features one of his gemlike voids. They also appear in a painting of a candle in the adjoining room.

He demands I view these works, all of which are still untitled, in a certain order. There is a dark landscape with a foreboding bridge over a murky river, another piece with a whimsical pastel carousel seen through the end of a dark tunnel that shifts perspective in a hallucinatory fashion, a three-yearold painting of an apparitional boy holding a serpent against a pink background, and another of a large alpine mountain with a beefeater toy that has been crammed into its craggy folds.

If anything, Martínez Celaya's art—especially this new work—is an attempt to visually capture those charged interstitial spaces found in poetry, where two seemingly opposed images are rammed up against one another in a fashion that might first appear surprising but upon further inspection opens up a new dialogue and worldview. The beefeater, for example, was modeled after a present he'd bought for his son in London, but considering the toy-deprived years of his Cuban childhood, the mountain seems to tease out metaphors of longing and desire. Though it's not apparent that this juxtaposition is working just yet, if he collapses the depth in the right way, the painting will focus on what the artist calls a "third point."

"It's really like the two images are inseparable even though they're incongruous because there's a truth they're both pointing to. But you never would have put them together," explains Martínez Celaya. At Louver he might also install his bronze of a boy crying into a pool surrounded by mirrors, which he previously showed at Miami's Fredric Snitzer Gallery with a painting, The Remembered, 2013, featuring a dark angel fallen into an icy surf in the mirror's reflection. While the visual connections between these new works may appear loose. and perhaps tenuous, they seem to be working toward a unified vision that would crumble were he to pull any work from the mix—even this serpent boy that he unwrapped from the archives to "disrupt" the visual flow in the studio.

This tense middle zone, he claims, has been the real space in which his exhibitions achieve success. Such was the case for his epic breakthrough installation, The Pearl, which engulfed Site Santa Fe during the summer and fall of 2013. This sprawling 12,000-square-foot piece was a response to the loneliness of hotel rooms, the dynamics of judging kitsch, the writings of Frost and Jeffers, and Beuys's seven-room *Block* Beuys installation at Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, Germany. Ultimately, though, it was most successful through



its deep exploration of the artist's own biography.

"I think he really wanted to connect with audiences on a personal level because he hadn't so much in the past. He was revealing more than he ever had," says Site Santa Fe director Irene Hofmann. "It had this very surprising theatrical quality to it. I love that so much of what he does isn't in fashion. It's a different kind of work, not easily understandable."

The piece unfolded over the entirety of the institution with numerous paintings, including two of a boy on a dock in Caimito opposite a boy in a field feeding a hummingbird; a wooden home with stars cut into the roof (surrounded by sheets with stars cut into them); a crude ceramic sculpture of a German shepherd (next to a painting of the dog); a tarred-and-feathered rowboat (and a black oil painting of a boy navigating dark squalls in said boat); a soft musical composition by the artist playing from a shortwave radio covered with porcelain birds (with paintings of said birds in a neighboring room); and running water pumping like a lifeline between every room via plastic tubes draped over burnt pine trees; a bronze statue of a boy festooned with gems crying into a series of pine-needle-covered beds (a nod to his childhood home); and a lit pond guarded by a fox sculpture overlooking a set of plastic lungs breathing—on a respirator that floated atop the man-made pool.

There were no wall texts, no labels, and visitors were meant to follow the water flow "through this journey into his mind," says Hofmann, adding, "What draws me to his work is what's uncomfortable about it. It can be emotional, psychological, and that's not where I tend to gravitate, and yet I want to find out more about what is going on. What is it?"

For Martínez Celaya, the answers can be found in how his work addresses the very real concerns of heart, ethics, and moral certitude. They're the same concepts and character traits that compelled him to publish his 2003 earth-scorching resignation letter from his associate professorship at Pomona College ("I think it would be better not to have art in universities if all we can encourage is dilettantism"), not to mention diatribes on the unprecedented mushrooming of museums in the United States ("At the moment, [museums] seem to want it all: the fantastic buildings, generous gifts, authority, populism, peer consensus, fame, importance, and legacy. Greatness, however, does not seem to be in their list of desires"); and the notion that artists should aspire to be prophets instead of profiteers ("To be a prophet, an





CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Burning As It Were A Lamp, 2014. Bronze sculpture, cement block, mirrors, and painting.

Cowboy Junkies performing at the inauguration of the artist's Los Angeles studio, January 2015

The Cascade, 2013. Bronze sculpture, five steel beds, fiberglass, pine needles metal washbasin and dishes



artist doesn't need God but clarity of purpose, character, and attention...there is no better time than now to respond to the call").

"It's not morality. Moral certitude is a very specific kind of clarity where you have a compass that is so accurate that wherever you're thrown, that compass will immediately rectify you," says Martínez Celaya. In his estimate, Lucian Freud, the early work of Anselm Kiefer, and the entirety of Leonard Cohen's oeuvre provide such compasses.

Cohen, however, may offer the most illuminating example of the type of artist—or should we say prophet—Martínez Celaya hopes to be. For years the two had been corresponding and trading books, and Cohen's daughter actually attended the new studio's inauguration party. Cohen couldn't make it, but the two had met once by chance in 2006 after Martínez Celaya sent a proposal to the songwriter about publishing a book of his drawings to accompany Cohen's poems. He'd sent the proposal on a Friday and that Saturday spotted the songwriter walking in Pacific Palisades. Like a crazed "teenage Beatles fan" he jumped out of his car, followed Cohen into a bookstore, and approached him from behind. "I'm thinking this guy is going to think I'm a stalker because I'd just sent him this proposal yesterday," says

Martínez Celaya, continuing, "He turns around and the fucking aura off this guy, the glow, and he gives me a compliment, that he liked my work. I got totally derailed and started acting stupid, and I walked out of there and was like, 'Fuck, I didn't say any of the things I wish I had said.' But the point is that the guy was what you'd hope the guy who made that work was. And I will make the argument that it's very hard to make that work and not be that guy. The question in this studio is: Am I that guy?"

He admits that he may not be that guy just yet, or ever, and that it will probably take him another 20 years to be a "great painter." Then again, true prophets are typically the most unassuming, self-effacing characters, not those hiding behind a false mystique carefully cultivated via social media or a slick network of blue-chip dealers.

"To me, it comes back to heart," he says. "The reason a guy like Leonard Cohen offers himself and doesn't talk about himself is because at the heart of this, at the center of this guy, there is such largeness, he doesn't have to try and convince me."

After observing Martínez Celaya work through a very vulnerable, transitional period, one might easily draw those same conclusions about him. MP

#### **HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE**

#### You'll Never Make Authentic Art If You Aim To Please

And other words of indelible wisdom from artist and physicist E

nrique Martinez Celaya.



Posted: 10/02/2015 07:06 AM EDT | Edited: 16 minutes ago



So you want to be an artist. Not just someone who is good at painting, drawing, sculpting, but someone who truly understands things as they are, and communicates these most elusive truths to others through a quietly unforgettable image. Right?

Such an exalted goal comes with some inevitable associated intentions: my work should be smart, sophisticated, unique, profound. Do you recognize these expectations? Are you familiar with the way they rest on your shoulders and fog up your vision? Close your eyes, envision them, capture them, and watch them dissolve. To be an authentic artist, at least according to Enrique Martínez Celaya, the first step is latching onto artificial desires and letting them go.



THE LAND, 2015 NEEDLEPOINT AND VELVET TRIM ON MUSLIN 32 X 27 INCHES

Martínez Celaya was born in Havana, Cuba, to a schoolteacher mother and a "jack-of-all-trades" father. As a child, he relocated with his family first to Spain and then Puerto Rico. At the age of 12, while serving as an apprentice to a painter, Martínez Celaya had an acute realization about the power of creative expression.

"I realized there was something profound [in] the experience of putting charcoal on paper and in the effort of understanding what was in front of me," he explained to Blouin ArtInfo.

"Drawing, and by extension, art, became less of a vessel in which I put stuff, and more of an experience to be unveiled."

In high school, Martínez Celaya stumbled upon another vehicle for comprehending the nebulous world around him: science. He studied applied engineering and physics at Cornell University and later received a masters Quantum Electronics at the University of California. Martínez Celaya was fascinated by physics; however, he eventually felt its scientific language fell short of addressing the deepest of life's mysteries. So he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture and University of California, Santa Barbara, where he received an MFA in painting.



THE BELIEVER,2015SAND17 1/2 X 11 X 10 INCHES

Today Martínez Celaya lives and works in Los Angeles, creating multimedia portals into mythical realms brimming with genuine emotion. The oil-and-wax paintings often feature moonlit castles and fluorescent ocean waves, star-sprinkled night skies and isolated cabins. Men young and old serve as protagonists, often represented as lost boys or eternal dreamers.

Though the content may sound overly whimsical, Martínez Celaya's work inevitably addresses the dark reasons humans turn to such fancy in the first place. "People invent fairytales to escape the life they're in or to try to make sense of it," he said in an interview with Bomb Magazine. "When life is unbearable in some manner, you invent another life, a better life. Or maybe, a clearer life."

Beyond the whimsy, Martínez Celaya's work is accessible. Despite the fact that nearly all of his works are born first from texts, and address a number of philosophical and psychological questions, they're never densely packed with references or inside jokes. There are no winks, no wise cracks.

In honor of his current joint exhibitions at Jack Shainman Gallery, "Empires: Sea" and "Empires: Land," I reached out to Martínez Celaya to discuss his recipe for making honest art.



What motivated you to devote your latest exhibitions to the land and the sea?

I wanted to create an exhibition that touched on the empires we gain as well as those we lose. Not the historical empires -- this is not an examination of politics or history --but the empires of the everyday. Hopes. Illusions. Resignations. Compromises.

Empires make me think of journeys, of setting out on campaigns driven by need, lack, love, or illusion, and journeys make me think of land and sea. Land points to where one is as well as where one hopes or fears to go. The sea is both the means by which one goes somewhere and also the mystery and the promise that incite the journey.

Were there specific works of literature or philosophy you were reading that contributed to the themes of these shows?

Although literature and philosophy are important to my working process, and I return to them daily, there is no specific book that contributed to the ideas in this work. However, it is appropriate to say I find echoes of many authors and philosophers in the confrontations and journeys suggested by "Empires," such as [Robinson] Jeffers, [Leo] Tolstoy, [Boris] Pasternak, and [Arthur] Schopenhauer.

What role does myth play in this exhibition, especially in relation to history and memory?

I am interested in the way myths map and clarify [...] the dynamics of life, hopes, and losses, so it would not be wrong to describe the disjointed narrative of "Empires" as a remnant of a myth.



THE CASTLE, 2011 OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS 78 X 60 INCHES (FRAMED)

In an interview with Bomb Magazine you said "the work always begins with writing." What role did writing play in this exhibit and how did the paintings evolve from them?

At first "Empires" seems to be an assembly of paintings, sculptures and works on paper, but I see them as part of a broader thought that includes writings. It is this broader thought that provides the emotional and intellectual framework from which the work emerges. Sometimes it is easier to recognize and to explore this broader thought through writing, so while constructing the exhibitions at Jack Shainman I wrote short pieces that took the form of philosophical reflections, fictional accounts, and writings that resemble poems.

Did your knowledge of physics play a role in the works in the show? How do you see the relationship between art and science?

Physics and art -- at least as I think of it -- are ways to understand the world and also ways to find one's place within that understanding. They are both concerned with truth, with the inner workings of nature, though art also offers insights into our interior life and the choices we make.



THE RELIC AND THE PURE, 2013-2015OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS

The show features your work in a variety of different media. What compelled you to work with so many different techniques and materials?

Formally there are differences between media, and I am interested in those differences, especially those differences related to qualities like distance and reference more than materials or traditions. I move between different strategies, media, scale, and ways of conceiving a work, partly because they unconceal different things and partly because I am kept away from becoming too familiar with a way of working. Of course, this in itself is a way of working, so sooner or later I might do things another way.

How would you describe the story being told through these two exhibitions?

If there is a story, it is one assembled from fragments and ruins, and it is a story that moves in time, or maybe more accurately, that folds different moments in time onto one another. It is not casual; in fact, the effects often precede the causes. It is a story of hope and the price paid for it; of the trade we make of the present we know (sort of) and the future yet to be; of desperation and endings.

Can you talk about the importance of accessibility in your work, as well as if and how you work to keep your works in a language legible to all?

The themes, topics and images in my work are relatively familiar and because the exhibitions consist ostensibly of objects like paintings, sculptures and works on paper, they also seem familiar. The complexities and lack of familiarity become apparent when the work is considered for a while. At that point, it becomes less accessible. The apparent familiarity of the images, for instance, dissolves when we notice their conviction as scenes is undermined by the way they are painted, something that is difficult to see in reproductions.

At times the work seems personal and thus, inaccessible, but it is not personal in the sense it is not built around private secrets. I am interested in universal aspects of life which are inherently mysterious, out of reach, and that is partly why the work resists sound bites and quick analyses.



THE EMPIRE, 2015 OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS 78 X 100 INCHES

How do you go about rendering authentic emotion in a painting?

The path to authenticity must include its own negation -- the inauthentic, the lie. The way to truth is to shed false sophistication, the badge of intelligence, and the need to please, and even then most of what we do lacks heart and authenticity.

What role do you think art plays in the contemporary age?

Besides its increasing role as a favored commodity and rising asset, art plays a very small role in society. I think the majority of people could care less about what artists are doing, and, to a large extent, artists and those in the arts have a lot to do with it.

What role do you wish it would play?

I am of two minds about this. On the one hand, it would be good if art took the guiding role currently attributed to religion, but for that, the world, not just art, would have to change. On the other hand, maybe it is right that art operates on the fringes.

Enrique Martínez Celaya's shows run until October 24, 2015 at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. "Empires: Sea" is on view at 20th Street. "Empires: Land" is on view at 24th Street.



THE BLOOM, FOR THE WILDERNESS, 2015OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS74 3/4 X 101 3/4 X 2 1/2 INCHES (FRAMED)



THE GIVE AND TAKE OF LONELINESS, 2014OIL AND WAX ON CANVAS26 X 28 3/4 X 2 INCHES (FRAMED)



# Enrique Martínez Celaya: 'Empires: Sea' and 'Empires: Land'

Added by Scott Stiffler on September 16, 2015.



"The Bloom, for the Wilderness" (2015. Oil and wax on canvas. 74 3/4 x 101; 3/4 x 2 1/2 inches, framed). ©Enrique Martínez Celaya. Courtesy the artist & Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

### BY STEPHANIE BUHMANN | Enrique Martínez Celaya: 'Empires: Sea' and 'Empires: Land'

Enrique Martínez Celaya's two-part exhibition aims to create a complex experience that is simultaneously visceral and elusive. Blending reality, fantasy and memory to create a world that is both semi-autobiographical and universally applicable, the artist's oeuvre spans a large variety of media.



Enrique Martínez Celaya: "Empires: Land" (installation view). At Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 W. 24th St. Courtesy the artist & Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

The two installations ("Sea" and "Land") reflect as much, featuring new paintings, sculptures, needlepoint and poetry. Together, these diverse components inform a dedicated search for authenticity and a sense of belonging, while remaining conscious of the fact that self-knowledge is limited. In this particular exhibition, land serves as a metaphor for what is known, has been discovered, declared, and generally feels familiar.



Enrique Martínez Celaya: "Empires: Sea" (installation view). At Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W. 20th St. Courtesy the artist & Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

In contrast, the sea is employed to address the mysterious, great unknown at our fingertips. Though this ambitious project marks his first solo show with Jack Shainman Gallery, Los Angeles-based Martínez Celaya has shown his work extensively, including at the Hood Art Museum and The State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Through Oct. 24 at Jack Shainman Gallery. "Empires: Sea" is at 513 W. 20th St. "Empires: Land" is at 524 W. 24th St. (both locations, btw. 10th & 11th Aves.). Hours: Tues.—Sat., 10 a.m.—6 p.m. Call 212-645-1701. Visit jackshainman.com.



### The top 10 NYC gallery exhibitions in September

Check out our art critic's picks for the best shows in the coming month at some of New York City's best galleries

By Howard Halle Posted: Friday September 4 2015

#### **Gallery exhibitions in September**



#### **Enrique Martínez Celaya, "Empires: Sea"**

The work of this Cuban-born artist has a touch of magical realism about it. Dreamlike landscapes inhabited by spectral figures suggest a present being invaded by memories of the past. The two-space show is split between themes of land and sea and the liminal boundary—the shore—separating the two.



#### **NEWS**

## Back to school: top six gallery shows in New York this week

From Anne Truitt to Christian Marclay, these are the exhibitions you won't want to miss

by CHARLOTTE BURNS , PAC POBRIC  $\mid$  8 September 2015



Enrique Martínez Celaya's The Relic and the Pure, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

After a summer respite, commercial art galleries in New York are preparing for the start of a busy new season. Numerous galleries will host openings this week, but six shows in particular are worth seeing. Here, The Art Newspaper's New York editorial staff presents a preview of what to look out for this fall.

#### **Enrique Martínez Celaya at Jack Shainman**

Regret, yearning and hope flavour the work of **Enrique Martínez Celaya**, who is due to present a new body of work this week in two concurrent exhibitions at **Jack Shainman**'s Manhattan galleries (10 September-24 October). The shows, Empires: Sea and Empires: Land, comprise work in a variety of media including painting, sculpture, needlepoint, and installation. Writings by the artist are included too. Martínez Celaya's work—which is in institutional collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of Art—has been characterised by a sense of stillness and poetry, and this exhibition promises more, thankfully, of the same.



### Update: Concrete Cuba in London, Los Carpinteros in Mexico, Lavastida in Miami, Bruguera at Yale

Published: September 01, 2015



Enrique Martínez Celaya, *The Relic and the Pure*, 2013 Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

**Martínez Celaya in New York.** Enrique Martínez Celaya opens his first solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery. The two-part exhibition, *Empires: Sea* and *Empires: Land* opens next Thursday, September 10, filling the gallery's two Chelsea spaces with paintings, sculpture, and installations. The opening runs 6–8 p.m. at both Shainman locations, where the show runs through October 24.



### enrique martinez celaya







For painter, sculptor, and erstwhile physicist Enrique Martinez Celaya, there's no place like home. Mostly because until his recent return to Los Angeles, he's never fully felt he had one. At least not since leaving his native Cuba at age seven, followed by seven years in Spain and four in Puerto Rico, before decamping for college in New York and graduate studies in the Bay Area. This slow-motion wanderlust subsequently manifested not only in his frequent moves, but in his sense of self, Though apprenticed to a painter from age 12, it wasn't until his late 20s that he committed to a career as an artist. While still in high school he published papers on superconductivity. and invented and patented laser devices, so science was the "obvious" career path. But in the middle of a graduate degree in Quantum Electronics at Berkeley, he realized he was ignoring his science fellowship to paint all the time. "It was a very confusing year. I felt like a loser when I dropped out of the science program. But it turned out I wasn't confused, I was being guided toward something." He later attended Skowhegan and earned his MFA from UC Santa Barbara. In the mid-'90s he moved to LA for the first time. He lived in Venice, taught at Pomona and Claremont, made an international name for himself-and left.

"Twenty years ago, I came to LA. After a decade I left again because I needed to answer certain questions about my workon my own." he moved to a barrier island and his studio was an old bakery. He enjoyed being a bit of a castaway: the rich isolation paradise offers a literary man. "But it's a different time now; I want to be back in the world, part of the larger conversation. I missed California, the light, the air-it's the closest thing I have to a home. LA is a shifting place, a little bit crazy, with a sense of being unfinished which is vital and exciting." Based on the sheer ambition and scale of his new studio-with thousands of square feet of work, office, and exhibition space, it's more of a compound, really, at the edge of an industrial park abutting bucolic cemetery grounds—he clearly plans on staying.

His first show since returning, this spring's "Lone Star" at LA Louver, offered a powerful iteration of the awkward, romantic, atmospheric, haute-naive style of narrative symbolism he is known for The paintings and sculptures harvested the artist's favored ontological terrain of country roads, violent sunsets, songbirds, prismatic dawns, sentinel trees, and the adolescent boy whose storyline he has been tracing for years. In addition to appearing in several canvases, a bronze sculpture of the boy stood in a loch of shallow water—the accumulation of his tears. Seeds at the water's edge sprouted green shoots before long. In an outdoor space, the boy shared a wire cage shared with five living birds. Back inside, a single bird occupied a cage lined with philosophical treatises. These birds were "stand-ins," as Celaya saw them, "for some kind of spirit, an animated energy that is hard to measure."

"Enrique keeps birds in all his studios," notes LA Louver's Peter Goulds. "I think he always has." Celaya's grandfather kept birds, as well, back in Cuba, so it's a memory he associates both with early childhood and the dark time that came after. Adds Goulds, "Going back at least to his 2013 SITE Santa Fe show, Enrique has been increasingly interested in these kinds of immersive and holistic designed environments,

involving the viewer, exploring themes of freedom, loss, loneliness, and flight. In light of all that, how could we do the show without the birds?"

Celaya is already preparing his next show, opening in September at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery. Tentatively titled "EMPIRES," the show is divided between two installations, Land and Sea. Celaya posits the sea as something to embark upon, like the unknown or the subconscious; while the land is where one define one's territory, one's Self. One of his favorite books is "The Great Secret" by Maurice Maeterlinck—a revered if haphazard history of the world's occult religions, from 1922. In his introduction, Maeterlinck describes his writings as "the impressions of a candid traveler who has traversed [his subjects] as one seeking to observe rather than as a believer." One imagines Celaya writing the same. And in fact, he is a prolific author and poet. His erudite web journal offers engaging exegeses of nearly all his projects. For instance, of "Lone Star" he writes, "On the evening of a turbulent day in my childhood I searched the night sky for something in myself that was adrift... Some mysteries, like the cosmos, are more apparent than others, but all things, as Maeterlinck wrote, are secret." And of "EMPIRES": "Not the type created by Cyrus or Alexander, though indirectly those too, but the other empires, the ones of everyday life. The ones built with the dust that settles on nightstands. Sometimes these stretch to the length of birds-in-hand and sometimes they reach to that elusive nursery of rainbows... Empires are always of tomorrow. Today, the wonders and frailties of the kingdom might be available for the wise to see, but the wise are busy with the next campaign."

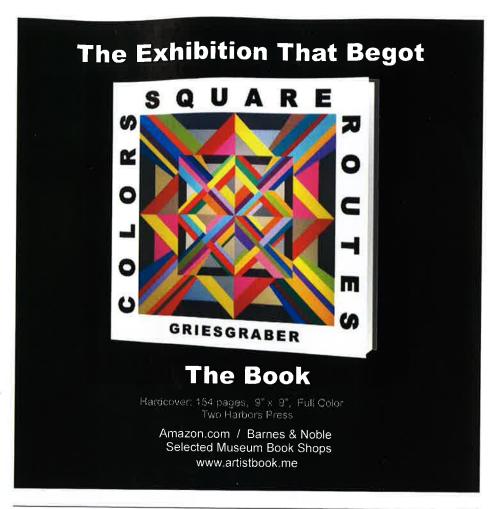
—SHANA NYS DAMBROT

"Enrique Martinez Celaya: Lone Star" was on view at LA Louver Gallery, in Los Angeles, from April 9 - May 16, 2015. www.lalouver.com

Celaya's new show, "EMPIRES," opens September 10, 2015, at Jack Shainman Gallery. in New York. www.jackshainman.com

PHOTO: RICHARD PATTERSON COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LA LOUVER

"THE TREASURE OF THE PATIENT," 2015 METAL, WIRE, BRONZE AND 5 BIRDS 84" x 48" x 61" PHOTO: COURTESY LA LOUVER





# Los Angeles



### Artist Enrique Martínez Celaya Comes Out of Hiding

After a self-imposed exile in Florida, the painter and sculptor returns to L.A., where his meteoric rise began

By: Ann Herold | July Issue

The paintings and sculptures of Enrique Martínez Celaya have a brooding, wintry quality, as if the artist had toiled in Bavaria and not the temperate climes of Los Angeles. Solitary figures cry, leafless birch branches bristle, a canary sings from atop a pair of human lungs. These pieces speak to Martínez Celaya's sense of loss—his family left Cuba soon after the revolution—and his loneliness as a poor immigrant in Spain during the 1970s.

His work resonates with possibility as well, "those states of life when there's equal sadness and hope," he says.



The Early Hunger, 2009, Oil and wax on canvas PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MODERNA MUSEET

A Cornell-educated physicist, Martínez Celaya was pursuing a doctorate at UC Berkeley in the '90s when he made his own quantum leap, shifting his studies to art and settling in L.A. He quickly became the city's preeminent new artist, the works from his Venice studio collected by such heavyweights as L.A.'s Larry and Susan Marx and Germany's Dieter Rosenkrantz. He worried, however, about what he saw as a city focused on cultivating celebrity. He also chafed at perceptions that his work, which is informed by Northern European poets and philosophers like Paul Celan and Søren Kierkegaard, didn't look like that of a Latino artist. In 2004, he moved to Florida, where he admittedly missed L.A. daily. Late last year he returned, buying an airy, two-story workspace in Culver City and a home in Brentwood. "There's an incredible quality of light here, and I would see it in the movies and long for it," Martínez Celaya, 51, says. "Today L.A. is a city that's defined by creative people. You can have conversations with them that you can't have anywhere else." (This summer he continues the creative discussion with a new book, *On Art and Mindfulness: Notes from the Anderson Ranch*, based on workshops he gave at Colorado's Anderson Ranch Arts Center.)

Martínez Celaya's most ambitious piece, the 2004 *Schneebett (SnowBed)*, is a multi-room installation in which a frost-covered bed rests near a woodscape sculpted from feathers and tar. It's a musing on the last days of Beethoven. Viewers hear the clanking of the cooling system along with the composer's final concertos (Beethoven, though deaf, experienced a profound ringing in his ears). Nowadays mortality is again on the artist's mind. His studio backs onto a Catholic cemetery. With each burial—more than a few are for slain gang members—he orders that all work come to a halt. "It's a reminder of the importance of life," he says.

### THE ASPENTIMES

By Andrew Travers

June 23, 2015

#### **Enrique Martinez Celaya's 'Notes From the Anderson Ranch'**



 $\label{lem:condition} Artist Enrique\ Martinez\ Celaya\ has\ written\ a\ book\ titled\ "On\ Art\ and\ Mindfulness:\ Notes\ from\ the\ Anderson\ Ranch."$ 

If You Go ...

Who: Enrique Marinez Celaya

Where: Anderson Ranch, Snowmass Village

When: Wednesday, June 24, 12:30 p.m.

Cost: Free

More info: Registration required at www.andersonranch.org

Enrique Martinez Celaya was born in Cuba and is based in Los Angeles, but the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass Village has been an artistic summer home for the painter during the past decade.

Over the course of nine summers of workshops and lectures at Anderson Ranch from 2005 to 2013, one of Celaya's attentive students transcribed his comments and criticism. Two years ago, she sent Celaya the transcripts, capturing a mix of prepared remarks, off-the-cuff comments and advice to artists during critiques, which Celaya has collected in a new book, "On Art and Mindfulness: Notes From the Anderson Ranch."

Celaya returns to the artist colony Wednesday for a talk that launches the nine-part Anderson Ranch Summer Series.

"I like the feeling of the ranch, the people here — it's really a love affair," said Celaya, who now serves on the board of the ranch. "There's an earnest quality to the whole thing."

The spirit of the summer on the ranch, when it hosts some 150 workshops and world-renowned figures such as Celaya alongside aspiring artist hobbyists, is a unique environment.

"If you want, you can fail there," Celaya said. "It's important to do that, to commit with the possibility of failure. There's something about the structure of Anderson Ranch that celebrates that and what it means to be an artist."

Celaya, 51, has worked in paint, sculpture and in immersive installations, often grappling with the collisions of man and nature, using philosophy as a touchstone for the work. In a review of his most recent show at L.A. Louver, the Los Angeles Times dubbed Celaya "not just fluent but eloquent in a broad range of media."

You can add writing to that range. "On Art and Mindfulness" reads more like spiritual philosophy than a transcribed series of art lectures. It doesn't resemble the often impenetrable, jargon-choked prose of artist statements.

Celaya, who studied applied physics at Cornell University and began doctoral studies in quantum electronics before pursuing art, looked to the popular physicist and author Richard Feynman as a model for how to talk about art.

"His point was that if you love science, you should be able to explain it to a young kid," he said. "The obfuscation in artist statement, some of that comes from a lack of clarity in the artist's head. I try to recognize that in myself and work on what I know and what I don't know — not that you ever know everything in the process of making art."

As his Anderson Ranch workshops began taking shape as a book, he was wary of sounding as if he did know everything. He wanted it to mirror the back-and-forth of tackling questions surrounding intent and practice with fellow artists.

"I didn't want it to be a book by a wise guru saying things," he said. "I wanted it to be the kinds of things an artist does in a workshop while contending with these questions."

How to work in the moment is the book's unifying theme. It's broken into eight sections on topics such as ethics, risk and failure, "Being an Artist" and "Art as Experience."

Each section is filled with short, aphoristic pieces of writing, some as short as one sentence, none longer than a paragraph, broken up by silhouettes of birds. For example: "Language can be used to build other things. Art cannot be used this way. It is an end in itself;" "The viewer completes the endeavor. There is no work of art without the viewer;" "Wide acclaim is not needed for something to be true."

The book reads like a "Tao Te Ching" for artists.

Celaya, for whom English is a second language, often looks to poets such as Robert Frost and Joseph Brodsky and novelists such as Herman Melville and Vladimir Nabokov for inspiration.

"Reading is a primary source for my work," he said. "I read philosophy and literature and that is the universe I see my work in, even though I'm a visual artist. ... Often when artists talk about writers, they're talking about them as source of content. I'm reading them for a moral stance in the world. If I read Hemingway, it's not so that I can put some fishing stories in my work."

For his public lecture Wednesday, Celaya is contending with some new questions raised by new artwork. He is in the process of finishing a new body of work, opening at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York this fall, which he said is heading in a different direction from his art from the last two decades.

"I'm not a guy coming in with all issues settled, sharing the success story of his journey," he said. "I'm in the middle of it and I want to convey some of that."

The Anderson Ranch Summer Series continues with Hank Willis Thomas (July 2), Arlene Schechet (July 9), Jennifer and David Stockman (July 15), Frank Stella (July 16), Lisa Philips, Trevor Pagien and Ryan Trecartin (July 21), Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch (July 23), Alec Soth (Aug. 13) and McArthur Binion (Aug. 13).

atravers@aspentimes.com

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# ARTSY

# Caged Canaries Give Way to a Haunting Narrative in Enrique Martínez Celaya's L.A. Exhibition

The great 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's book The World as Will and Representation can be read as a sort of artistic treatise. The book takes the position that humanity is driven by a dissatisfied will. It's an idea that isn't unique to artists, but can certainly be applied to them.

#### ARTSY EDITORIAL

MAY 8TH, 2015 7:46 PM







Installation view of "Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star," L.A. Louver, Los Angeles. Courtesy L.A. Louver and the artist.

Cuban-born, Los Angeles-based artist Enrique Martínez Celaya is known for his figurative, and often narrative, paintings and sculptures. Over four solo shows at L.A. Louver, he has created ambitious representative works that tackle a horner's nest of thoughts, through which he works on a daily basis in his studio. Scraps of paper fill up with notes, ideas, and concepts, which the artist then translates into lush canvases and installations. Martínez Celaya's creation is driven by the will to fill canvases, build, and craft sculptures.



Installation view of "Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star," L.A. Louver, Los Angeles. Courtesy L.A. Louver and the artist.



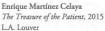
Enrique Martínez Celaya The Sigh, 2015 L.A. Louver



Enrique Martínez Celaya The Deeper Life, 2015 L.A. Louver

Martínez Celaya's new show, "Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star," points to Schopenhauer as a guiding force within the work. Two separate paintings depict the philosopher's childhood home, while the same form shows up again in one of the show's two installations as a sculpted birdcage with a live canary fluttering about inside.







Enrique Martínez Celaya The Prince, 2015 L.A. Louver

The other of the installations also features a birdcage, this one with a life size bronze sculpture of a boy inside that the birds may perch upon. This boy returns as a motif in other paintings. In one, he naps, using a stingray as a pillow. In another, the boy hangs from a tree branch.

In these paintings, a poetic sort of story starts to form—a tale of innocence and melancholy—that emits from the paintings to the viewer. But the story never really comes into focus, insofar as the signifiers never connect in a literal way. In this, "Lone Star" becomes a mysterious world of environments and scenes that haunt and bewilder as much as they are satisfyingly beautiful.

#### -Maxwell Williams

"Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star" is on view at L.A. Louver, Apr. 9 – May 16, 2015.

Follow L.A. Louver on Artsy.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE







### Jack Shainman Gallery now represents Titus Kaphar and Enrique Martinez Celaya

May 7, 2014

Jack Shainman Gallery has announced that it is now representing Titus Kaphar and Enrique Martinez Celaya.

Titus Kaphar actively takes the styles and media used in the history of art and renders them contemporary through a process of cutting, folding, sculpting and mixing the work of Classical and Renaissance artists. Through this technique, he creates formal games and visual narratives, which take place between fiction and narration. Born in 1976 in Kalamazoo (Michigan), Kaphar currently lives and works between New York and Connecticut.

Enrique Martinez Celaya is a Cuban artist. Educated in physics and in art, his artistic practice currently manifests itself through painting, sculpture, photography and writing. His works form part of the collections of a host of prestigious institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

# ARTSCENE







Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Treasure of the Patient," 2015, metal, wire, bronze and 5 birds, 84 x 48 x 61," is currently on view at L.A. Louver.

In Enrique Martínez Celaya's work "The Invisible (or the Power of Forbearance)," a bronze sculpture of a young boy is standing in a water basin as tears are falling from his eyes merging with the bath of tears below him, leaving a gentle and moist sound behind, like water echoing of cave walls. In the dark room, where the sculpture stands, we see both him and ourselves reflected in the mirrors surrounding it, as if it's not merely the sadness of the boy we're looking at, but also our own. But why is he crying? Are his tears about loss, loneliness, his unfulfilled hopes and dreams, or is the boy a symbol for human desire, causing suffering and pain? The bronze boy can be seen once again at the end of the exhibition in "Lone Star,"

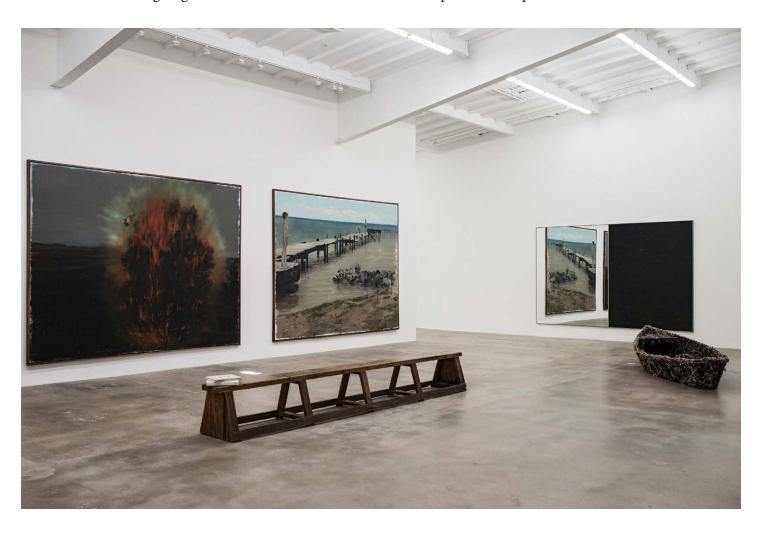
stretching over the two floors of the gallery. The piece titled "The Treasure of the Patient," based in the gallery's openair Skyroom, displays him caged in with holes in his chest from which real birds fly in and out, as if freedom is his cure, perhaps his freedom of desire. In between are a number of other works by the Cuban artist, who was brought up in Spain, which all seem to be part of his personal narrative. In "The Sigh", a large-scale oil and wax painting, a crooked tree along a fence stands against a background of a fiery sky. Its crown goes up in flames, suggesting another dark side of the human psyche, that of fear eating away at the soul (L.A. Louver Gallery, Venice).

Simone Kussatz





Nestled inside an industrial complex off a beaten path in Culver City, adjacent to lush sprawling grills hills of a cemetery lined with flowers from visiting loved ones, lies a sanctuary of artistic solace. A modest black plaque rests on the exterior brick wall with a crest bearing the profile of a whale rising above the surface of the ocean, while stars shine in the sky above. A single line beneath the signage reads "Studio Martínez Celaya." Once inside the space the cacophony of traffic, rush hour, and time is suspended and immediately forgotten. Books with faded dust jackets spanning decades and subject matter are catalogued and displayed behind glass and kept under lock and key. Often droning electronic music echoes off the cement floors and reverberates through the intricate space, making the studio feel like a living, breathing organism. After ten years in Miami, Enrique Martínez Celaya has returned to Los Angeles and has designed a studio space that rivals many galleries and houses work that spans his entire career to date. Systematically catalogued artworks documented with lined index cards demonstrate the breadth and depth of Martínez Celaya's practice. A pastel dated from 1977, when the artist was only thirteen years old is positioned next to another landscape created in 2009. Growing up as an apprentice to a painter, Martínez Celaya was advised to keep at least one piece of work for every series he created. Standing in the first viewing space, there is a palpable energy, whispers of an ongoing conversation between the works of the past and the present.



Moving further around the studio, one can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of order. The space is nearly spotless. If there is an emptiness on any wall it is temporarily filled with a rough rendering drawn on paper, indicating that a painting is in the process of being created. Cans of paint stained in suspended animation are deliberately aligned along the episode brick walls next to a tidy work station organized with brushes and palettes. Trained as a physicist as well an artist, Martínez Celaya is able to use both sides of his brain with equal rigor and imagination. He studied Applied & Engineering Physics at Cornell University and Quantum Electronics at the University of California, Berkeley. He then attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, and earned a Master of Fine Arts with the department's highest distinction from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Martínez Celaya conducts his studio with a strict worth ethic similar to a scientific lab. His laboratory is an incubator of prose, where his own writing, avid reading and decades of renderings on paper, watercolor and canvases come together to form a beautiful equation. I wait for the artist to arrive while seated on a couch in an area adjacent to the large painting area. The faint chirping of birds echoes from a nearby vintage birdcage. If only those birds could speak- as they get to witness Martínez Celaya day in and day out attending to his paintings with unwavering commitment.



#### A. Moret: What role does language play in the development of your work?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: In general I go back to Literature and Philosophy to sort out the nature of the questions I'm really asking, and then I go to my own writings. I'm thinking a lot about the relation between poetry and my work which has always existed and people have remarked on it, but I am more interested in taking it a step further than I have in the past. I'm not exactly sure what that means so I have been looking very attentively at a couple of poems that have interested me for a long time. I have also looked at Chinese and Japanese calligraphy and the relation between text and images. I have kept text in the paintings that I have done and sometimes that will appear in the work but always sort of on the side of the work.

A. Moret: I had the opportunity to view *The Portrait Project* that depict philosophers, poets, artists, musicians, writers and family members that have been influential to your artistic development. Is that a project that you hope to continue working on?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: It is. Originally when I first did it years back I never thought it would be something I would ever show because I did it for myself as companion pieces. I would rip my own watercolors, glue them back together and draw on that. The reason I was using my own watercolors was a pre-investment in the material itself. Now I would like to see them installed in their totality because they have a very specific feeling seeing them all together but I feel like I still have so much more to do with them, there are many people I want to have represented there. Many people who are important to me haven't made it to those portraits so I imagine it as an ongoing project, it may take forever.



### A. Moret: I was struck by the fact that you are so heavily invested in writing and scientific theories. In what ways has the scientific method shaped your evolution as an artist?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: When you go to a lab, you go there looking for truth and there are always other politics of Science, but essentially always looking for some sort of truth. You go there regardless of what is the interest of the larger community as you go there to do your experiment and seek better understanding of life. And I think that remains the reason why I come to the studio just like when I went to the lab. Whatever I am doing is ultimately directed towards a better understanding of things rather than producing for market so that's one legacy of art. I sort of go to somewhat of a systematic process and it doesn't mean that determines the outcome but it does mean that there is a need to sort of look at the material that I already have and go through a rigorous process of elimination of what is not important and I think all of that is quite similar to what I did as a scientist. Maybe the materials are a little different but the process is not that different.

### A. Moret: You had mentioned looking at calligraphy and that writing is hidden beneath your paintings. What does the writing look like?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: They are written as if they were written on a piece of paper, just bigger. The reason I have been looking at these texts on Chinese paintings is because the relationship between text and images is inseparable in a way that is not obvious in Western works. I feel that this relationship is very effective in these traditions in which its hard to know where the images end and writings begins, so I have been thinking about that just for my own understanding of how to compose these images. A lot of my work always has writing behind it and then painted over it so all of these have writing behind them. For instance with the Defender you will see there's a whole line of writing there where everything has been edited except "defender."

## A. Moret: It's quite rare to meet an artist who is just as engaged with writing and analytical thinking. There is a balance between your writing and art practice because the writing is hidden behind the painting. Was the writing always there?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: When I was a boy, my family had gone through all kinds of complexities and the way I dealt with that was through drawing, painting and writing not knowing that these were fields already pre-existing. My uncles were medical doctors but there was no sense of culture in my family that directed me to great examples of writing and painting. When I was a little boy I was given Tolstoy's short stories for children and it was illustrated. I did not understand that it was literature, I'm just reading these stories and looking at the illustrations and thinking this is the world. When it was my turn to do something I found words to be beautiful and wonderful things. When I was a teenager I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be a scientist, I wanted to be an artist but I couldn't collapse

that, all of them were interesting to me. I ended up becoming a scientist primarily because it seemed the right choice to make as a career but I kept writing, reading and painting just as much. Now today, most of the people who I look to and many of my friends are writers more than visual artists. I feel that it's time to bring the writing out from where it is in my head. I have all this relation to writing and I feel like it should exist in a more palpable way. But there's more to this story in my head than I have acknowledged. I have never known my mind where there have not been writing signs and art.

A. Moret: With the opening of Lone Star it marks your return to Los Angeles after living in Miami for ten years. Do you feel like your return has influenced the direction of your work?

Enrique Martínez Celaya: I left LA ten years ago feeling like I needed to be away for a while and now being back feels equally right. LA hasn't changed the direction of my work yet but I suspect it will. It's not so much because of LA but my own shift, returning back to this landscape. It's sort of a coming of age soft of speak, it sounds silly considering I am 50. It feels like the evolution process of this way of being that I have been investigating for the last 20 years is here now and I feel like this is the moment. So it's almost like the move back to LA is representative of the moment like I am in my head. And being back here is an important part of that moment, so the work that I will show will be something different and I think it's because I am different than I was.



# ARTILLERY

## KILLER

PICK OF THE WEEK

April 23, 2015

### Enrique Martinez Celaya

LA Louver

#### Eve Wood

Enrique Martinez Celaya is a visionary in the very best sense of the word. I would even go so far as to say his recent exhibition, "Lone Star" at LA Louver is a fierce evocation of humanity, despite the fact the show is mostly populated with birds, both painted and living; these small illusive creatures appear to represent, in Celaya's mind at least, the epitome of grace and mystery. The mostly large-scale paintings are rich and painterly, incorporating a range of warm tones that underline the humanistic qualities of the work as a whole. They appear to call us back to the unknowable, to the turbulent precariousness that is our human consciousness, yet all the while maintaining, or even sustaining an unwavering connection to the present.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Prince, 2015

#### LA Louver

45 North Venice Venice, CA 90291 show runs until May 16th, 2015

### **ART Là-bas**

#### THE VAST CHASM OF LIFE

on the "Lone Star" installation by Enrique Martínez Celaya

By: Douglas Messerli

Artist Enrique Martínez Celaya begins his newest installed environment, *Lone Star*, with an image of a tearful young male, surrounded with mirrors, his tears collecting into a pool of sorrow, banked and framed by a mound of what appears to be some kind vegetation, but apparently is made up of bird-seed. A typed flier that accompanies this show observes:

On the evening of a turbulent day in my childhood I searched the night sky for something in myself that was adrift and looking at those stars and at the abyss of nothingness between them, I felt both a piercing awareness of selfhood and an equally intense sense of self-negation. Although I had considered that dome of stars many times before, it had never seemed as relevant to who I was nor as distant from my life, but what struck me most was the awe and dread I sensed at facing the mystery of the vast hole above me.

The artist does not explain what triggered that day of such immense turbulence and poetic longing or at what age and in which country he experienced these sensations. Born in Cuba in 1964, Martínez Celaya was uprooted at the age of 8 when his family moved to Spain, only three years later forced to transfer again to Puerto Rico. Such vast shifts in cultural landscape might alone have set off the romantic-like wanderings of mind and self-reflection that dominate this artist's work. His intense feeling of isolation against the vastness of the universe is apparent once again in this beautifully realized show of interconnected works of art.

Art, for Martinez Celaya is obviously redeeming in the sense that Arthur Schopenhauer—one of the artist's constant touchstones—argues for it, as a way to escape the suffering and pain of the world through the sublimation of the self by enacting with the world rather than merely perceiving it. And that body of created art, as with Melville's heavily tattooed character Queequeg, becomes not just a body of work but a tracing upon the body itself of what one's life has meant, a "mystery"





"destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment" of the body of the artist himself, "and so be unsolved to the last."

If the sculpted boy can only cry in despair and wonderment, the other canvases and constructions of Martínez Celaya's new show, while representing the tensions inherent in life, proffer possibilities for transcending that childhood pain. The vast, startlingly blooming tree set against a desert-like landscape and billowing clouds of *The Sigh* (2015) might almost create that sensation in the viewer when he first catches it in his glance. What looks to be an empty bottle set against another autumnal landscape of The Ballad of What Is Yours (2015), reminds us also of Schopenhauer's Hamburg birthplace, an image which again appears upstairs in L. A. Louver gallery in *The Nursery*, a kind of childhood-inspired bird cage in which sits a brightly feathered bird, a stack of Schopenhauer's pages from his famed treatise The World as Will and Representation

sitting beside it, with a few pages of it also wittily lining the bottom of the cage itself.

In *The Border* (2015) we observe what appear to be birds but which might also be blackened cacti atop of block of crystalized ice, suggesting various notions of "borders": climatic (cold and warm), representational (birds or blooms of cacti), color (black and white), and temporal (day and night).

If the young boy of *The Invisible (or the Power of Forbearance)* of the first room is utterly disconsolate, in *The Prince* (2015) a similar adolescent stretches his hands upward to the leaves of a tree, hinting of athletic and sexual prowess, which is connected (again with the written material the artist has provided) with the image of a skate, which Martínez Celaya describes in poetic terms as "Water-ravens. Impatient. All eyes. / Slimy, like vaginas. Smelly, like sheets soaked in urine," and which upstairs in the gallery space he employs again in the image of a boy lying with his head upon the beast in *The Relic and the Pure* (2015).

Again and again throughout this narratively suggestive installation, birds appear in oil and wax in *The Grateful* (2015) and virtually in the sculptural internment of a caged child upon which five birds rest, *The Treasure of the Patient* (2015). Houses too are cages, the artist reminds us, and the world itself is glass. The birds, for this artist-poet, represent a new beginning, producing as they do a song (for Schopenhauer music was the greatest of the arts) that directs the mind and imagination away from the self-referential reflections of despair suffered by that troubled adolescent who suddenly discovered himself in the vast chasm of life.



# Los Angeles Times

ART REVIEW Leah Ollman

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2015



The Sigh, Courtesy of LA Louver

In the work of Enrique Martínez Celaya, the yearning, aching soul finds its form.

Consider "The Invisible (or The Power of Forbearance)," an installation in the artist's deeply penetrating show at L.A. Louver. A single bare bulb hangs in the small side gallery, directly over the life-size bronze figure of a boy whose body is beginning to stretch in height but not yet fill out. The emergent incongruities of his physical form alone signal transition, the rugged beauty of becoming. He stands in shallow, dark water, his hands fisted at his sides, his head bent downward. Drops fall steadily from his eyes. His tears are as continuous as his loneliness seems infinite, the mirrored walls enclosing him in endless solitude. The boy's inky double in the water, at once reflection and shadow, wavers from the falling tears and never stills.

"The Invisible" feels like a private memorial, an occasion to commemorate threshold, loss, painful growth. It is one of several pieces in the show that reference personal markers in space or time.

In "The Sigh," an immense, stunning painting in oil and wax, a juniper tree engulfed in flames stands beside a long dirt path through an expansive plain. "This is where I made my stand," Martínez Celaya has written in simple cursive across the dun-colored earth.

He titles another, smaller painting of a campfire in stark wilderness "The Compass." Figures in Martínez Celaya's work, echoing the artist's own history of displacement, are always in the process of orienting themselves, externally and internally.

The show, "Lone Star," fills both floors of the gallery, as well as the small Skyroom upstairs. All of the sculptures and paintings, except for one, date from this year. Martínez Celaya, recently resettled in L.A., is not just fluent but eloquent in a broad range of media, including sound. The tender musicality of the falling tears in "The Invisible" intensifies the work's poignancy and vividness.

In two other searing pieces, the flutter and song of live birds play crucial roles. Every material, every resource poetry, literature, music—serves as another navigational tool.

Here, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer is a touchstone. The narrow, tower-like form of his childhood home in what was then Danzig, stands as a translucent, icy beacon in one painting, and as the shape of a birdcage in the installation "The Nursery." A single, coral-hued canary flits about like a restless heart within the human-scaled cage. Enlarged pages of Schopenhauer's "The World as Will and Representation" (1818), stacked alongside, describe how knowledge, as well as internal disposition, can deliver us from the miserable pressure of the will, the constant agitation of wanting.

Nature's beauty can be a catalyst for such private reckoning, as can work like Martínez Celaya's. Grand yet intimate, it runs the risk of sentimentality but deliberately stops short: Those pages of Schopenhauer's also line the birdcage.



April 8, 2015

### Trippin' with Enrique Martínez Celaya

Edward Goldman recommends delving into the raw, organic, and dense works that will be on display in the upcoming Enrique Martínez Celaya exhibition at LA Louver gallery.

It's rather unusual for me to talk about an exhibition that hasn't officially opened yet. But over the last few months, I had several visits with Enrique Martínez Celaya in his new Culver City studio, and watched him working on the paintings and sculptures for his upcoming show at LA Louver gallery. Titled "Lone Star," the show opens this coming Thursday, and we are all invited to attend the evening reception (7-9pm).



Enrique Martínez Celaya in his studio, 2015 Photograph courtesy LA Louver Gallery

It's a rare case that both floors of LA Louver gallery are dedicated to show the works of one single artist, but dramatic, mysterious, and haunting artworks by Enrique do need a lot of room to breathe. Besides, he is a very prolific artist, and to give us a proper experience of his mind and vision, the gallery chose to give visitors a particularly close encounter with his art.



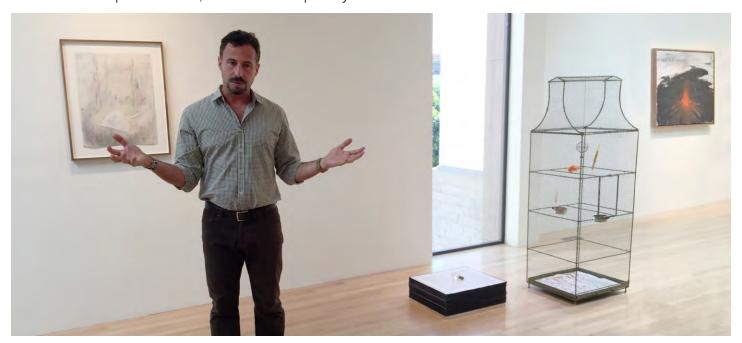
Installation view of "Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star" Exhibition at LA Louver Gallery, April 9–May 16, 2015

Enrique's monumental paintings and drawings are difficult to describe or to explain; one needs to slow down and stand still in front of them to be able to hear their voices. None of these works attempt to please; perfection is not the artist's goal. We see his energetic, free brushstrokes, and the impression we get from them is not of carefully detailed and completed images, but of raw and spontaneous storytelling. And it is up to us viewers to step into and finish these stories.



Enrique Martínez Celaya in front of "The Mediation," 2015 Chip board, canvas, charcoal

Last Saturday, when Enrique was finalizing the installation of his show, he invited me to drop by for a walk through. I brought along a small group of art aficionados and we had a ball. The artist told us about Cuba, where he was born and which his family left when he was still a child. Enrique spent most of his childhood in Spain and Puerto Rico. Then, upon settling in the United States, he started studying Applied & Engineering Physics at Cornell University, and pursued a degree in Quantum Electronics at UC Berkeley. But eventually, he woke up and smelled the coffee, or as I should probably say, he woke to the smell of paint fumes, which subsequently led him to UC Santa Barbara for his MFA.



Enrique Martínez Celaya in front of various works "Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star" Exhibition at LA Louver Gallery

In spite of multiple gallery and museum shows here in the United States and in Europe, Enrique — after 10 years of living in Miami —returned with his family to LA, once again reminding us that this city of ours has truly become a cultural magnet, attracting many important artists to work and live here. The current exhibition is Enrique's fourth with LA Louver gallery, and it is probably the most autobiographical so far.





Enrique Martínez Celaya
(L) "The Relic and Pure," 2015, Oil and wax on canvas
(R) "The Prince, 2015," Oil and wax on canvas
Photographs courtesy LA Louver Gallery

The painting of a young boy swinging off a tree branch, or another painting of the same boy napping, with his head resting on a stingray, are not necessarily portraits of the young artist, but nevertheless act as windows into his world. In conversation with Enrique, you often hear him mention fairy tales by the Brother's Grimm; he also speaks about Melville's Moby Dick. And though I am not completely up to speed in following his remarks about Schopenhauer's philosophy, I am delighted to learn from Enrique about his love for Doctor Zhivago by Boris Pasternak, the Russian writer who got a Nobel Prize for this novel in 1958, but did not leave the Soviet Union to accept the prize for fear of not being allowed to return home.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Treasure of the Patient," 2015 Metal, wire, bronze, and 5 birds

Entering a small, dark gallery room with walls covered with mirrors, one sees a life-size bronze sculpture of the boy standing in a pool of water. You hear the sound of the boy's tears slowly hitting the water at his feet. Don't ask for whom the boy cries, he cries for thee. And, of course, it is impossible to ignore the live birds inside large cages; they tweet and chirp and, on occasion, unceremoniously leave drops of you-know-what while perched atop Enrique Martínez Celaya's bronze sculptures.

All photographs by Edward Goldman unless otherwise noted.

### **HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE**



Edward Goldman

### Trippin' With Enrique Martínez Celaya

Posted: 04/07/2015 6:32 pm EDT Updated: 04/07/2015 7:59 pm EDT

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Enrique Martinez Celaya in his studio, 2015. Photograph courtesy LA Louver Gallery

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Installation view, "Enrique Martinez Celaya: Lone Star." Exhibition at LA Louver Gallery. April 9, 2014 - May 16, 2015.

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Enrique Martinez Celaya in front of various works. "Enrique Martinez Celaya: Lone Star." Exhibition at LA Louver Gallery.

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Enrique Martinez Celaya.

(L) The Relic and Pure, 2015. Oil and wax on canvas.

(R) The Prince, 2015. Oil and wax on canvas.

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Edward Goldman (http://www.edwardgoldman.com) is an art critic and the host of Art Talk, a program on art and culture for NPR affi liate KCRW 89.9 FM. To listen to the complete show and hear Edward's charming Russi an accent, click\_here (http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/art-talk/trippin-w ithenrique-martinez-celaya) .

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2015



"Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star"

Courtesy of LA Louver

"Enrique Martínez Celaya: Lone Star" is easily one of the most anticipated shows of the season, featuring major new works by a prodigal superstar. His refined and poetic take on a raw, almost folk-art style brings in elements of moving symbolism and narrative, as well as expressive abstract textures generating awkward, emotional gestures and hypnotic pictorial spaces. After an L.A. homecoming and studio-warming party starring Cowboy Junkies — with whom Martínez Celaya collaborated on album art for *The Nomad Series* — he's ready to debut the hangar-scaled fruits of his most recent labors in painting, sculpture, writing and installation, occupying the entirety of L.A. Louver's first- and second-floor outdoor and indoor spaces.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice; Thu., April 9, 7-9 p.m.; free. Exhibition continues Tue.-Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m., through May 16. (310) 822-4955, lalouver.com.

—Shana Nys Dambrot

### Enrique Martínez Celaya by Saul Ostrow

The Miami-based artist discusses exile, violence, philosophy, and literature.



Burning As It Were A Lamp, 2014. Bronze sculpture, cement block, mirrors and painting, dimensions variable.

Courtesy of Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami. Photo by: Frank Casale.

Enrique Martinez and I met for lunch in New York—he was in town, from Miami, on business. Our conversation covered such topics as literature, travel, theory, and so forth, and by the end of the afternoon had come to constitute a type of audition, or a form speed date. When I got home I looked at a book of his work; at first there seemed to be something off. Given our conversation the work was not what I had expected—it appeared to be sincere, somewhat naive and sentimental in both subject matter and style. Consequently, I decided I wanted to talk to him more, I wanted to know how his interest in literature and theory connected to his works. Given I was going to be in Miami for the art fairs, I arranged to do an interview with him. The day before we were to speak, I went to his newly built studio to see the work, which in person revealed itself to be much more complex both aesthetically and psychologically. When we sat down to talk, the subject was his concern for sentiment, nostalgia, and melancholia as devious means for positing existential questions.

Saul Ostrow I thought we could talk about two things: first, the themes your works address. Despite difference in style and imagery, they seem to be primarily focused on pain, loss, implied violence, and death. Let's talk about these subjects. The other thing I'm curious about is, given our initial conversation over lunch in New York, how you think your interest in theory and criticism is manifested in your work?

Enrique Martínez Celaya When I was younger I always felt that I was missing what was most important about things. I didn't understand the world very well. So I turned to philosophy and literature to make sense of things. My interest in philosophy and theory came partly out of deficiency, of not knowing enough. And partly the result of being raised as an exile. We were migrants in Spain, so philosophy and literature were useful anchors, ways to make sense of what was happening.

Over the years, literature and philosophy have remained a presence in my work, and my interest in theory rises from them, but my goal is not to make the work appear intellectual or to be part of a sophisticated joke. I am trying to use this stuff, but whether it is an ontological preoccupation or some other philosophical concern, they must somehow be internalized into the narrative. In my lectures and writings, I try to make sure the language I use is accessible even though the ideas might not be. I come to this situation from my experience with physics and philosophy, so many of the questions that people take to be very difficult do not seem very difficult to me. On the other hand, some of the questions that are deemed trivial to many, seem difficult to me. For instance: How do we make choices and how do we live with the consequences?

SO How do you make choices? In your work you make stylistic shifts—do you see style as a philosophical issue, or is it more practical, simply the notion that one chooses the appropriate style for a given subject? And then how does the question of aesthetics weigh on this?

EMC That's a very good and fair question. Marsden Hartley insisted on remaining an amateur, never a professional, and I like that. Whenever I'm starting a new body of work, I like to pretend it's my first. Although it is ultimately impossible, I try not to build on whatever knowledge or expertise I had from before. I'm trying to be an anti-expert. That's why you see these stylistic and conceptual shifts. I want to resist the tendency in contemporary art to become a product-maker. So given that I know more about painting than about video, I might take on video, or I might take on a way to work in sculpture I've never tried before so that the lack of familiarity could be revealed in the work as inarticulateness, directness, and maybe also secrecy.

SO I'm curious about this: Do you start by saying I'd like to explore this aesthetic and then figure a subject for it, or does the narrative come first? I know it's a very formalist question, but I'm always interested in how the artist comes to decide what something is going to look like?

EMC The work always begins with writing. I write not to find content but to sort out where I am standing, so that by the time I get to draw or paint, I have an understanding of the conceptual and emotional relation I have, or I am seeking, with the work. If I've just done a show of paintings, I start thinking what else is there. I look to see if those previous paintings reveal certain problems, then I might start to think of a sculpture or a video. It's not a prescription, but I am often somehow reacting to what I've done before.

SO It sounds like the work is always incomplete, no one work seems to stand alone, and then you work in series, so no one series becomes extendable, but it becomes something to react to. Can you ever forget—begin afresh?

EMC We are all trapped by what we have done and the more we do, the more trapped we are. Our history is in no small way a prison, so I try to forget myself to the extent it is possible. My projects usually span two or three exhibitions, and after I am finished with one of them, I want to explore what else is there, what new paths seem worthwhile. I prefer to let go of something when it has become familiar, even if not completely understood and even when I know I will probably return to it at some point.



The Hours, 2012. Bronze, dimensions variable. Courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, California.

SO Do you see that as an analogy for the artist or as a condition of the artwork?

EMC As an artist and as a thinker, one can't avoid being oneself. You don't need to try to keep yourself in the work as a line of connection because it's always there. There is always a line—however obscure—connecting the activities and thoughts one has. We don't need to make much of an effort to create a continuous body of work because the continuity is already there.

SO Well I guess the subjectivity of the artist is always the subjectivity of the artist. But that's the studio perspective. Yet, when you put things into the world it appears like separate bodies of work, all stylistically different, so the continuity in the work is that sense of loss I mentioned before. Is that emotional source the consistency in your work? Is that the signature of you, the trace of your subjectivity?

EMC Maybe that's the way to understand it. Believing that continuity is a given, I try to discover new things with each work without worrying about style or intellectual allegiances. So it might be that what binds my work together is not a look or even a body of knowledge but rather the insistence the work must shine a light on the choices I'm making. In that sense, the central preoccupation of my work is the same that animated my first drawings as a kid: What is this life and how do I make sense of it?

SO Is that where the violence in the work comes from?

#### EMC Maybe.

SO Despite the sometimes banal style, the unicorn and the dog painting, for example, is incredibly violent, with the severed unicorn heads. It doesn't immediately strike one as violent—you stand there and look at it and you go, "This is a fairly, cool, dispassionate image!"—

EMC Violence is everywhere, and it often spurs fairytales and reinventions. People invent fairytales to escape the life they're in or to try to make sense of it. When life is unbearable in some manner, you invent another life, a better life. Or maybe, a clearer life.

So what does the unicorn signify? Does it point to the dreams of a teenage girl? Is it a wink to popular romantic culture? Or is it the cynical gesture of a bitter man? Maybe it's all of them, but maybe also a stand-in for hope in the face of overwhelming odds, or an ice cream gesture from someone used to digging up dirt. For me, what the unicorn points to is not really what one might think it points to.

**SO** Is it a type of double negative?

EMC What seems to be going on in my work is not usually what is going on.

SO I figured that out! [laughter]. The other day while looking at your book it came to me. I "got it." Part of it was with the book there's the lack of scale. I realized that these are large paintings not for the sake of being large paintings, and—I'm not using this as a negative term—they have a sort of vacuity, an emptiness.

EMC I don't think many people have picked up on the current of violence that runs under some of my work. When you see these paintings in reproduction, they seem very rendered, but when you get close, you notice there are translucent layers of wax and the image has been treated rather roughly. This roughness dismembers the conviction the image initially seems to possess. After looking at these paintings for a while they are not credible as scenes. The struggle between the dissolution of representational conviction and our desire to hold on to it is, in some ways, a violent as well as disconcerting aspect of the work. But this struggle never reproduces well, so you have to experience the paintings in real life.

SO You know, as a critic I'm interested in the other content of work, not the narrative content but the actual content of the structure. Your compositional tendency is always this incredible frontal move, as if everything is being exposed. It's there for you and the longer you stand in front of it the more it withholds.

The only place where that seemingly doesn't happen is in the black paintings where you end up building it up to such a degree—where it just becomes a surface, where the narrative gets obliterated or tentative, as if it is going to disappear or you're going to end up with something that's almost just marks. That type of content, I find the equivalent of that fugitiveness in the sculpture, The Well, and there's something really scary about it. Those little holes, she's not crying from her eyes, it's the little holes.



The Well, 2013. Bronze, 152 x 65 x 59 in.

EMC Right, and the dismembered arms—

SO Similarly in the photographic works, the appropriated imagery, the still lives, the arrangements of objects like the German shepherd on the stand with the bowl of fruit—these works seem intent on undermining your seriousness!

EMC The fruit bowl that might belong to a lower middle class dining table and the ceramic German shepherd, or a jeweled elephant on a burnt table, are not approaching kitsch as Koons might approach it. What I find remarkable about some of these kitschy elements is that, although their "story" seems to be a given, you are left with a hole when you try to read it. Where the apparent given used to be, we find a pointer to nowhere in particular, but maybe it is only then, when the signified is not much more—or much less—than a cloudy hole, that this pointer becomes meaningful, and it is meaningful, in part, because it shows things as they are.

We live in a cynical age, a time of hollowness often pretending it is otherwise. So any hope of real emotional connection, of authenticity, now has to acknowledge that we are starting from a deficit, from a constructed emotional making that has been built by television, propaganda, politics, entertainment, etcetera. Part of that acknowledgement means working with some crumbling signifiers of emotion and then trying to actually build something genuine from these ruins. So when I take, for example, the elephant made of jewels, I start with a real reference. When I was growing up, my family and I used to sit around the table to make custom jewelry necklaces to be sold. But then I try to distance that reference from me because I am less interested in telling what happened to me than in understanding what was going on there. The attempt to make this little elephant out of jewels is a futile, and maybe ridiculous, art gesture. Unlike, say, Richard Serra for whom the heroic and the epic seems to be in solid footing, I come to the heroic and the epic with yearning as well as doubt. I like to work from holes, from deficits, so that something seems failed from the beginning, then seeing what happens with that.

SO Let's go back to the notion of the double negative, you work out of this reference and understand the loss and then the audience comes along and wants to see it as true sentiment.

**EMC** Usually.

SO Since you said you don't do any of this with a wink, how do you feel about that?

EMC Even though people tend to read these references at face value and think they know what they are looking at, the apparent sentiment of these elements is really a hole, an absence. The problems brought on by this misreading are necessary if we want to contend with things as they are. Maybe a Romantic artist could have fully trusted the epic narrative of the man in the landscape, but now I must acknowledge the futility of those dreams, the doubts, the problematic, the cynicism, while at the same time upholding the possibility of the epic itself. Doubts have to be in the forefront. It might be impossible to aim for the authentic gesture without accepting we are also aiming for its negation. Of course, we cannot wink while doing this, otherwise nothing of value can be created. We have to fully believe and fully not believe at the same time without collapsing the options to one or the other. Many are used to looking for that wink. That wink makes them feel comfortable. Part of the club. If a work does not wink and does not give people a hint of the intellectual allegiances of the artist, then it is likely to be dismissed as naive or lacking sentiment.

I am not suggesting that artists should be coy. What I'm saying is that the work has to exist with its inherent contradictions without the benefit of interpretations or disclaimers.

SO You know, it's funny talking about the modern condition or the contemporary condition, the question here seemingly is that there's an increasing desire for both nostalgia and sentiment. How do you understand that?

On the theory side do you understand your work as symptom of or a response to this or is it really the notion that it's yours?

EMC Maybe working with those dualities is the only way out of the disease of cynicism. The only path out of cynicism is right through the middle of it. When you immunize for a disease, you're sort of getting a gentler version of the disease so that your body can prepare to fight the more severe version. To say, "I don't have the disease," is not an answer, and to get the disease is really the end. So you have to get the disease a little bit, to find your way out of it.

SO If I understand what you're saying, your work functions as a form of defense?

EMC For me it is, partly, a defense.

SO Both for you and your audience.

EMC Well, certainly for me. I'm not sure it is that for the audience as well. Maybe I'm only accidentally an artist. I turn to this work out of my own needs, needs that come from a sense of my own deficiencies, deficiencies that have to do with numbness and carelessness. For most of us, life loses its radiance as we grow up. Then, we learn a few things and we begin to think we have seen it all before. This attitude makes everything seem opaque or dull. So how does one go about restoring the radiance of the world? I think the only way to do it is to acknowledge the opacity.

SO It's most indirect!

EMC Sometimes the indirect way is the best way, and indirectness often requires hiding the traces of how one got somewhere. Although I might talk with you about the critical framework of the work or offer a lecture that includes some philosophical ideas, in the work I try to bury all intellectual allegiances by making sure they are cooked into the work rather than sprinkled on top of it. I also try to consider how I talk about the work, and whether it is true or not, I prefer to deny any biographical references. Although this approach resists the type of thematic analyses that are popular among some curators, and it creates confusion and, at times, disdain, avoidance of the tidy story is important to fight the over-simplification of ideas and to keep the work unstable. It also helps in the effort to remain a moving target to others as well as to myself.

SO Is that strategic? In terms of you being able to continue to make work? Does this go back to becoming the amateur?

EMC I think in some ways it's both. The effort to remove or hide the natural connections that people want to make with the work is a strategy. But it is also a necessity if we are to avoid the deceitful comfort that comes from thinking we know the story, that we understand the sources. Everything that matters is secret. The best we can do is to create approximations. The kind of analytical confidence we sometimes see in the art world is dangerous. If you think you know, then you are likely to miss something important. If you think you don't know, you keep at it, you keep searching. I like to remain an anti-expert in myself to avoid the familiarity that comes with knowing what one is about. I try to digest whatever I read and if I find myself speaking in jargon, I feel I've failed. Any serious inquiry requires some semantic tools, but these can always be broken down into simple terms. If you can't do that, then it is likely you don't understand what you are talking about.

SO So there is a resistance to allowing the work to be "about" anything?

EMC In the way we usually mean "about anything," I guess that's true. But the work is something. Take, for instance, the suggestion brought about by the fact all my works have the article the in their title. That

specificity points to locations, and so one way to look at the work is as mappings. When I was a physicist, we often used the idea of conformal mapping, which is a coordinate transformation that allows a complicated or inconvenient problem in one space to be transposed to another space where it is easier to solve. In some ways, this use of mapping is similar to how I approach my work. The questions about life and identity that matter to me are difficult to approach and even to formulate. So I try to map them in a space where the forces at play are more apparent. The clarity gained by this mapping might then be applied to life itself.

SO Even though that world is mythic?

EMC Yes. In many ways myth is a way of making things clearer.

SO I guess I'm using myth here the way Claude Lévi-Strauss talks about living in a sort of "mythosphere"—we construct and then inhabit as if it is not of our own construction.

EMC Much of what we are is constructed—emotions, identity, context, relationships—but that construction is usually invisible. So you have to map it somewhere else to reveal the structure, and it is that structure that shows aspects of our, as well as the social, fabrication of reality.

SO A conversation that I recently had was all about that notion of "habit" and over-determinacy in that the law already announces the response to it. Is that what you're trying to avoid?

EMC It's part of what I'm trying to avoid. I'm especially trying to avoid confusing the reflection of the self-referential sign with truth. We often set out to discover something new, but what we find is the reflection of our own assumptions and prejudices, and, of course, they will always seem right. Recursive investigations are a dead end, and sometimes the only way out of their circularity is a rupture, and it almost doesn't matter how this rupture comes about. The urgency is not about getting it right but about getting out of the loop.

SO Is that the reason for the use of literature?

EMC Absolutely.

SO That's very anti-modernist, this notion of rejoining painting to literature.

EMC I tend to look at literature for its abstractions—its structures and moral stances—rather than as narrative sources. I read a poet like Harry Martinson to understand how one structures silence in relation to some epic tensions as well as how he navigates, or fails to navigate, work and life. I am currently studying Tolstoy's relationship between morals, life, and art. While this might sound abstract or detached, I am sure this study will surface in my work soon. So when I say literature influences my work, that's what I usually mean. It's rarely its narrative content.

SO If we're talking about the subject of a novel it's not the storyline. It's the slippage, it's the ordering of it. In regards to that, why Moby Dick?

EMC I like the ambition of this novel. Melville decides to write a book about a whale and right away this is a crazy gesture, and that's fascinating to me. Who makes the choice and why? What are the consequences of that choice? Then the novel itself, which is superficially a fishing story, below the surface is a moral story, and below that it is an existential struggle that reminds us Melville is writing at the same time as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. I am also very interested the American mystical tradition Melville taps into, which springs from the collision of puritanical mysticism and pragmatism with the monumentality of, and challenge presented by, the American landscape. This mysticism is under pressure or compression. It is repressed awe in an ambivalent

relation to the human scale and its needs. This distillation of mysticism is quite different than what happened in Europe. When I open Moby Dick I always find myself in a strange place, which is partly The Pequod, partly the whale, and partly that desk that took Melville down a crazy journey from which he never recovered.

SO You can't see yourself as Ishmael? Then we have Starbuck, who is the artist in the novel?

EMC Ishmael is too distant. It might be nice to be Starbuck, the conscience, but being an artist makes you closer to Ahab than to anyone else in the book.

Saul Ostrow is an independent critic, curator, and contributing editor for BOMB Magazine. In 2011, he founded Critical Practices Inc., an organization established to promote discourse and collaborative practices. Ostrow has also served as co-editor of Lusitania Press (1996–2004) and is the editor of the book series Critical Voices in Art, Theory, and Culture (1996–2006) published by Routledge, London. As a curator he has organized over 70 exhibition in the US and abroad. His critical writings have appeared in art magazines, journals, catalogues, and books in the US and Europe.



### ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA – THE SELF REGAINED



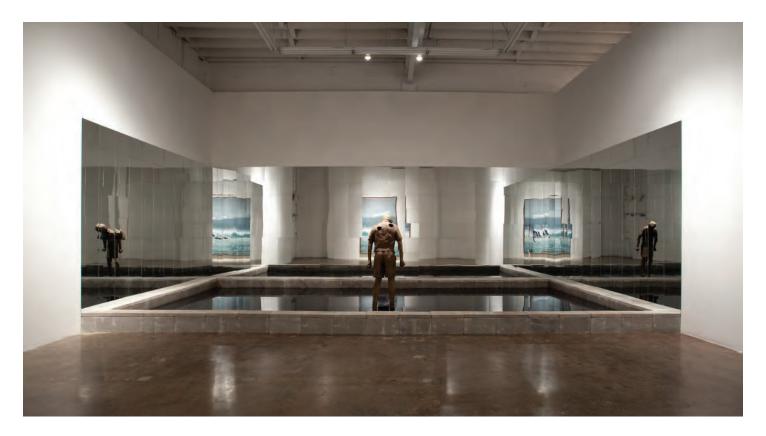
Today at the tip of so many and perplexing Wandering ears under the varying moon, I ask myself what whim of fate Made me so fearful of a glancing mirror.

- Mirrors, Jorge Luis Borges

Enrique Martínez Celaya, Burning As It Were A Lamp, bronze, mirrors, and concrete block, variable dimensions, 2013. Photo by Frank Casale © Fredric Snitzer Gallery

ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA took over Fredric Snitzer Gallery in November 2013 with his installation *Burning as it were a Lamp*. The installation created an environment that questioned identity, memories, and our relationship to loss. Enrique's poetic works transformed the white cube into a meditative space that morphed a feeling of isolation into a sense of hope.

The environment of *Burning as it were a Lamp* installed at the Fredric Snitzer Gallery in Miami consists of few elements: a painting on one wall, three other walls tiled with mirrors, and a bronze boy who stands in a pool of his own tears. The reflection of the pond is dark and faint while the one offered by the wall mirror is fractured, as if we were looking at facets of a world carelessly brought together. The boy has big circular holes cut out from his metal shell, water comes out of his eyes, and a valve is visible by his heel. Although we can only see him from the back, we discover his face in the mirror along with our own reflection and the reflection of the painting behind us; a mid-format vertical painting of a burnt angel crashing into the sea.

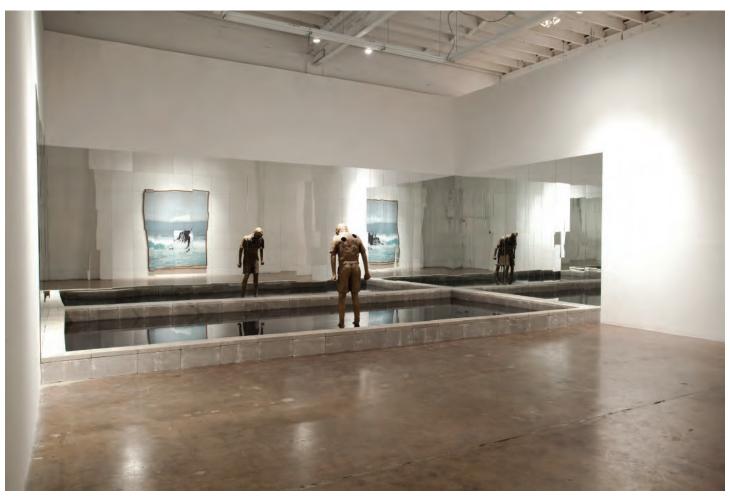


As we move, the relationship between these elements shift, and we shift with them. This change as well as the nature of the imagery makes it difficult for the visitor to establish a point of view free of contradiction. Take the boy, for instance, his holes and his valve suggest he is a metal conduit, nonetheless, we do not completely forget him as a boy. He is not lost to his own image, like Narcissus, but are his tears not vanity also in the end? And why does he weep? For his distance, we assume—for what will never be his. And so, although he is metallic—solid—he becomes absent.



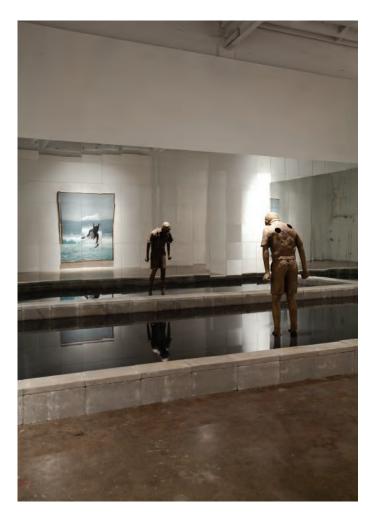


The painting of the burnt angel also invites contradiction and ambiguity. It has ambition and surrenders into clumsiness; it represents and destroys; it and hermetic; theatrical bombastic and mute. Can it really be more than an allegory of itself-more than a painting about the act of painting a fallen angel? And where are we in relation to this painting? Do we, like the ship in Auden's poem, have somewhere to get to and cannot be held back by those falling from the sky? Or is it that the vanishing of things like angels, memories, and who we used to be or thought ourselves to be, is drowned by images rustling in time?



As sources of, both, confusion and revelation of our place in the world, the mirror on the walls, the reflection on the floor, and the shifting point of view, seed the cloud of generative questions. The mirror suggests recognition of self, but it also invites misrecognition, lack of familiarity, and, ultimately, the assumption of a self that does not completely, or at all, fit who we feel ourselves to be. Are we that burnt, abandoned angel? Are we the boy? Are we the seer who can only inhabit this house of mirrors as a ghost?

To me, this world of repeated, intertwined, anachronistic, images announces our uncertainty as well as our fragile and limited apprehension of ourselves and of the world in which we believe ourselves to be. The reflected burnt angel and crying bronze boy are phantom consciences whose existences echo ours, and so as we interact with this reflected world our own dissolves. Our image in the mirror, like a painting, invites a dialectic between the perceiving/experiencing subject and a perceived/experienced object. Thus, to look at the image in the work of art or in the mirror is to



recognize our distance from what we see while at the same time being offered the suggestion, if not the promise, of unity, a promise that is frustrated as soon as it is recognized.

Burning as it were a Lamp brings forth those questions that have an effect on our own identity and memories, and maybe also on our relationship to loss, especially the loss of who we had been and of those places in which we had been. The environment places the duality of self and reflection at the center of a visual, literary and philosophical web of relationships that tries to represent—to catch—the irrepresentable. The project also suggests any non-trivial knowledge of who we are in the world depends on our recognition of the movement of those invisible gears of history, world, and individual experience, and that even in the best of cases, this knowledge is inadequate. This inadequacy hovers around Burning as it were a Lamp in the form of the instability and, perhaps also, of the dislocation of one's relation to the work, as well as in the uncertainty we feel in knowing what the work itself is.



### **Enrique Martínez Celaya – The Self Regained**

February 6,2014

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Enrique Martínez Celaya, Burning As It Were A Lamp, bronze, mirrors, and concrete block, variable dimensions, 2013. Photo by Frank Casale © Fredric Snitzer Gallery

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#### The Murk of Memory

October 17, 2013 by Brandon Ghigliotty

Enrique Martinez Celaya transformed nearly 12,000 feet of gallery space into an autobiographical journey at SITE Santa Fe. "The Pearl" spoke of loneliness, longing and and a troubled relationship to the landscape. Both through absence and explicitness, the work conjured the turmoil of memory.

Pushing past the entryway of the installation, the gallery-goer confronts the image of a German Shepherd eating a house-shaped block of meat. Hideous baby laughter bleats out intermittently as the canine devours its meal from the plate. The image was projected on thick canvas blinds that concealed the next part of the journey.



Once the canvas curtains hosting *The Guardian* are navigated, a small window appears on the left, giving a glimpse of the future experience ahead. The space opened up to 24 Casuarina pines leaning against the walls. Small nubs jutted from the tree trunks where the branches have been stripped off. *The Forest (or The Others)* borders an area enveloped with the cacophony of surging waves and tinkling piano music.



A thin ribbon of tubing hung from the ceiling and served as a trail of breadcrumbs leading further into fantasy. A carved statuette of a German Shepherd, its neck betraying its role as a cookie jar, greeted visitors to the room that seeped piano music. The cookie jar's table was relatively unmarred, with a diminutive ash-splotched unicorn attached to its side. The music, Martinez Celaya's first composition, sprang from *The Stone and the Air*, a kitsch-littered old Zenith radio. Twelve porcelain songbirds rested on the radio and walnut shelf, reminiscent of a warm, distant memory. *The Short Journey* was a rowboat that rested at the center of the room, tarred and feathered, containing a glimmering, toppled lighthouse. Water, possibly taken on during its journey, pooled in the bottom of the rowboat.



The Table, a charred dining set, brooded against *The Ocean,* a projected backdrop of black and white waves. At the center of the dining table was a bejeweled elephant, which, through stubbornness or ignorance, flaunted its opulence against the tragic setting and crashing waves.



The tubing continued to an immense space occupied by two paintings staring at each other past a weeping, jewel-studded boy. The first painting, *The Dock*, depicted three swimwear-clad boys on a pier. The nearest boy looked down the pier at the pair of other boys, one squatting while the other returned the onlooker's gaze. The painting projects sadness, alienation and longing, although a gallery attendant offered the interpretation that depicts Celaya at different points in his life. Reconciling the two reveals a composite characterization of Celaya's loneliness. *The Separate Cascade* slouched at the center of the room, weeping into *The Fountain*, a pine needle-laden trough that narrowed and snaked out of sight. Moving through the impressive space created distance from the bawling child, a passage of time accentuated by the trickle of water. Then, *The New Comer* came into view. An uncertain young boy reached out to a smattering of flowers as a hummingbird watched on. "This is where I made my stand" was scrawled along the bottom of the scene.



The trough ducked into a room that contained *The North*, a raw plywood house spewing stars through its roof. The night sky ceiling dripped into walls sprinkled with dozens of taxidermied cotton butterflies—petite cut-outs—interrupted by the sheets from which they were clipped, which gave the illusion of jet-black butterflies through the wounds.



The butterfly-infested walls spilled out to a shining white room shrill with songbirds. *The Better Place* consisted of a labored machine gasping into a set of lungs that floated on a gleaming pond, while a stuffed fox stood amongst a pine tree setting taking in the scene.



The asthmatic, desperate child that was Enrique Martinez Celaya brought the observer along with him on his journey through "The Pearl." A journey through the stirred murk of memory.

Photos by Eric Swanson, courtesy of SITE Santa Fe.

## Art in America

OCTOBER 2013

**EXHIBITION REVIEWS** 

### ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA SITE Santa Fe

The Pearl takes you on a slow nocturnal journey experienced through the eyes of a child. As in Proust's night visions, time and place are fluid. And as in Proust, the installation maps onto the present a remembered past of conflict, regret, fear and longing. The journey collapses inside and outside, domestic and epic, substance and shadow, sight and sound. The Miami-based Enrique Martínez Celaya, now 49, has an unusually wide range, and his commissions have included projects for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (New York), the Hermitage (Saint Petersburg) and the Berlin Philharmonic. The Pearl amounts to a midcareer retrospective, a summa of themes that have preoccupied the artist for years.

Freud called dreams the "condensation and displacement" of waking life, in which daytime experiences coalesce and reappear as mutable vignettes and episodes. This could serve as no mean description of The Pearl's modus operandi. At SITE, you are led through eight sequential rooms, 12,000 square feet altogether, in which you find houses made of dog food, plywood or paint; a 1950s radio playing a musical composition by the artist; 12 Hummellike songbird statuettes; a 12-foot-long tarred-and-feathered boat containing a lighthouse; a wall-posted poem; waterworks; motiongenerated audio; a walk-through diorama with a taxidermied fox and fake Christmas trees ringing a pond; and 600 cutout butterflies pinned to the walls. This catalogue may sound disconcerting, perhaps even distasteful. But the pleasure—and spookiness—of The Pearl comes from your registering how these things accrete, and how Martínez Celaya invites you to connect them. Besides being about memory, then, the work creates memories for the viewer that ricochet and accumulate.

Transparent liquid-filled plastic tubing, suspended from the ceilings, guides you through The Pearl, which is both mindscape and bodyscape, as you discover in the last room. There the tube is bundled with electrical wires (the environment's nervous system?) and a respirator, attached to a set of polyurethane lungs floating in the pond. Although your path is linear, it's unclear whether advancing physically carries you forward or backward in time. What you have heard or seen returns in different forms throughout. In the first room a terrifying vision of home assaults you. A video shows a German shepherd devouring the dog-food house (shaped like a classic child's drawing of a house), accompanied by shrieking sounds. The close-up shot is so intimate that you can almost smell the dog's breath. Indeed, breath haunts The Pearl, from canine breath, to drowning, to those lungs, to birdsong audio. (In Latin "breath" is spiritus, and in Greek "butterfly" is psyche, or "soul.") The German shepherd reappears in the form of a terra-cotta cookie jar, behind which hangs an intentionally awkward painting on velvet of this dog watching over a dead fox. The menacing cohabitates with the comforting; the guardian is also the killer.



View of Enrique Martínez Celaya's installation *The Pearl*, 2013, at SITE Santa Fe.

If *The Pearl* has a center, it's a 64-inch-high bronze cast of a boy. The plastic tubing terminates at the sculpture, and tears seem to fall from the boy's eyes into descending beds of pine needles. These echo the shape of a dock in a 116-by-150-inch painting hung behind the boy. It's as if the child stepped off the canvas and into the gallery. The liquid is then channeled from the pine needles through a winding trough that empties into the pond. The tube we have previously followed reappears, rising out of the water.

The Pearl answers postmodern flatness of affect and layered irony with a heart laid bare, for Martínez Celaya is assured enough to be heartfelt. After traveling through anxiety, violence, nostalgia and song, you're left with a feeling of tenderness. As an oyster creates a pearl in response to an irritating grain of sand, so the artist cradles memories in *The Pearl*. SITE has never seen anything quite like it; nor, save in dreams, have you.

-Arden Reed

## ARTFORUM



### Santa Fe Enrique Martínez Celaya

SITE SANTA FE 1606 Paseo de Peralta July 13-October 13

Ana Finel Honigman —

Enrique Martínez Celaya's "The Pearl" is an affecting meditation on nostalgia. Martínez Celaya constructs this exhibition like a tightly composed narrative poem involving a small cast of characters—a boy, a fox, a gaggle of different kinds of small woodland birds, and a German shepherd—depicted through paintings, chintzy figurines, sculptures, and installation. Nothing feels extraneous in Martínez Celaya's dreamlike vision of a lost home and distant boyhood. His surreal narrative unfolds through a series of installations that viewers explore from room to room by following a clear hose hung from the ceiling. It is safe to say that this prosaic hose acts as a metaphor for Martínez Celaya's memory, linking him back to his youth and the meaning behind all the melancholy totems in the show.

The exhibition opens with a white cloth curtain near the entrance, on which is projected a film of the German shepherd

devouring a house made of dog food. Although the dog initially destroys the home, he is a protective force elsewhere in the show, particularly for the boy (spoiler alert: the dog kills the fox). The dog is also not the only part of the story that embodies contradictory meanings. A lighthouse, for example, which is first encountered as a tarred and feathered wood sculpture in an installation with a similarly desecrated rescue boat, is seen as a helpful presence in the background of a series of framed photographs hung on an adjacent wall in the same room.

Throughout the installation, the same forces can be alternatively redemptive, protective, and destructive. Fire both cleanses and destroys chairs and trees, while water is also shown to purify and corrupt. In their totality, all of these elements are deftly employed to symbolize change, our tenuous grasp on cherished memories, and the necessity of accepting loss.





# SITE Santa Fe evolves to display 'The Pearl'

By Kathaleen Roberts on Thu, Jul 11, 2013 Pearls gleam with an incandescent mystery, their lustrous surface disguising the irritant within.

Like memory, a pearl retrieves and hollows what was, burnishing it with its lustre.

Enrique Martínez Celaya's "The Pearl" spans eight rooms and 15,000 square feet at SITE Santa Fe. Opening Friday, it's lled with familiar relics like birds, dogs and pieces of furniture. A surface glance might distill the installation into the rooms of a home. But the artist says it was created with the dust of the rooms of long ago, ladled with the ache of loss.

Martínez Celaya's immersive environment gathers painting, sculpture, video, photography, waterworks and sound, turning the SITE building into a work of art. The artist uses the idea of home as a springboard imbued with equal parts philosophical, emotional and

psycho logical resonance. The objects become markers of time, moving from despair to fantasy and nally, redemption. Great loss surrenders to the image of a survivor navigating an enchanted and dangerous arc.

SITE Phillips director and chief curator Irene Hofmann, who commissioned the work, has been following the artist's career for 10 years. The pair met when she installed a traveling exhibit by Martínez Celaya at the Orange County Museum of Art.

Martínez Celaya inspected the SITE space about a year ago. Unlike a museum, SITE is exible enough to allow artists to create their own space by digging holes, breaking up concrete, moving walls and adding water and living plants, Hofmann said. Martínez Celaya comes to Santa Fe after completing a commission at St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum in Russia.

"He created more than an exhibition," Hofmann said. "He created an environment.

"Coming to this exhibition will have a transporting effect from the reality of the world outside to one of memory and fantasy and surprise," she continued. "You will see a total environment that triggers memories. For him, they're linked at different moments to his own childhood. Images of a house, child-sized furniture, of dogs and magical, idyllic landscapes all stem from his own memories and have a way of being universal."

Both epic and miniscule, joyous and shameful, "The Pearl" lurked within the artist "like a dull ache" for years before he lifted its layered veil. For Martínez Celaya, home is layers of memory unfolding in concentric circles.

Visitors will enter this darkened maze of rooms by first encountering a film of a German Shepherd devouring its dog food. A closer look reveals the food has been sculpted into the shape of a house. We see home as food, as something needing guardianship, Martínez Celaya said.

"Most things in life always have two sides," he said. "With guardianship comes cloistering and isolation. You cannot be cloistered without isolation." Water trickles through transparent tubing flowing from a partially opened window. It threads throughout the exhibition, its shadows rippling across the walls like waves, leading visitors to its final epository.

"You follow the hose and the cycle of water," Martínez Celaya said.

A more tranquil-looking sculpture of another German Shepherd guards a side table in the next space.

"Now it has a childish quality to it," he added.

A radio tops a mantel in this haunted living room. It plays Martínez Celaya's own composition surrounded by 12 ceramic songbirds in a palette of magic and loss. A black rowboat sculpted from tar and feathers reigns over a rectangular gallery, encasing a downed lighthouse.

"In medieval times, and even during the Civil Rights movement, people were

tarred and feathered," Martínez Celaya said. "It was a way to humiliate them."

"This vessel has a skin of shame and humiliation," he continued. "The lighthouse has been brought into the vessel; it can't quide anymore."

"Perhaps you have arrived too late," he added. "There's a sense of finding yourself lost in that storm."

A charred table and chairs stand before black-and-white footage of rolling ocean waves. An elephant constructed of cheap costume jewelry stands as the table's centerpiece.

The scene poses a direct link to the artist's past, Martínez Celaya acknowledged. The furniture is made from causarina wood, a tree common in Cuba, where he was born.

"It echoes the magic and stories and delusion of childhood," he said. "We were very poor. We used to sit at night like this and make jewelry." A series of ve pine needle beds stairsteps the next space. The bronze gure of a boy weeps over them, his tears owing into the beds. They burrow a rivulet owing down from the layers of beds and into a channel connected to the transparent tubing.

"This is a hose of tears," Martínez Celaya said. "Your memories have become your possibility for redemption."

Hofmann sees echoes of the artist's previous work in "The Pearl."

It has "all these qualities of being very evocative of memory, of another era," she said. "He's often nodding to sources of inspiration in grand painters of the past. It's a very purposeful, naive kind of painting he employs to suggest the fading of memory. The painting is loose and fades on the edges like memory does."

"The past is irretrievable," Martínez Celaya said. "There's no way to go back and correct, and there's the sense of what could have been and wasn't."

"The Pearl" isn't meant to be a specied portrait of the artist's childhood, Martínez Celaya insisted.

"It could be (Danish philosopher) Kierkegaard's story; it could be many people's stories. That little boy is still calling you from the past."

Trained as both an artist and physicist at Cornell University and the University of California, Berkeley and Santa Barbara, Martínez Celaya has produced solo exhibitions at the Miami Art Museum, the Berliner Philharmonie and the Orange County Museum of Art. His works are included in collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

There will be a concurrent exhibition, "Concepts and Studies for The Pearl," at James Kelly Contemporary, 550 S. Guadalupe St. in the Railyard through Aug. 17, 2013. Call 505-989-1601.







### **Enrique Martínez Celaya's "Burning as it were a Lamp" opens at Fred Snitzer Gallery**

November 2013

Opening reception: November 23, 2013, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

November 23, 2013 - January 16, 2014.



The mirror has been a frequently recurring signifier in Martínez Celaya's work, functioning as a proxy subject, a site of uncanny reflexivity, and an object of philosophical inquiry. In Burning as it were a lamp, the mirror is again at the center of a dense web of visual, literary and philosophical relationships which investigate issues of identity, memory, and loss through the space of multi-disciplinary installation. The exhibition is a continuation of themes and concepts explored in a recent museum-wide environment at SITE Santa Fe, The Pearl.

The exhibition takes as its starting point one sculpture of a bronze boy with circular holes cut

from his metal shell. Three of the room wall's are tiled in mirrors so although only the back of the boy can be seen initially, the reflection reveals that he is crying into a pool of his own tears. The mirrors also introduce a mid-format vertical painting of a burnt angel crashing into the sea, which hangs on the fourth wall behind the crying boy.

As the viewer moves through the installation, the relationship between subject and object is destabilized by the interplay of painted surface, reflected imagery, and sculptural object. Doubled in the mirror and gazed upon by real and depicted subjects, the works are sources of both spatial ambiguity and self-identification. Through the activation and reordering of the various affective, symbolic, and structural registers of the installation, Martínez Celaya seeks to both dislocate and affirm the viewer's relation to the work and, consequently, their own identity.

Enrique Martínez Celaya, trained as artist and physicist, works in painting, sculpture, photography, and writing. His work has been widely exhibited internationally and is included in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The State Hermitage Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, and the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, Germany, among others. Martínez Celaya is a Montgomery Fellow at Dartmouth College, was honored as the second Presidential Professor in the history of the University of Nebraska, taught as a tenured professor in the faculty of Pomona College and Claremont Graduate University. He has received the National Artist Award from the Anderson Ranch Arts Center, the California Community Foundation Fellowship, J. Paul Getty Trust Fund for Visual Arts, and the Young Talent Award from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2013, Ediciones Polígrafa (Spain) published Enrique Martínez Celaya: Working methods/Métodos de trabajo a comprehensive study of Martínez Celaya's work process.

Fredric Snitzer Gallery 2247 NW 1st Place Miami, FL 33127 305.448.8976 www.snitzer.com



### Life reflections from Enrique Martinez Celaya

November 15, 2013 by Anne Tschida



Detail of installation of Enrique Martinez Celaya at Snitzer Gallery.

Here's an interesting turn of events: Fred Snitzer will now be representing Enrique Martinez Celaya. They were once neighbors in the heart of Wynwood: the sprawling, slate-gray Whale and Star studio and exhibition/lecture space of Martinez Celaya sat next to Snitzer's gallery, which at one point last winter was going to relocate. Now Martinez Celaya is the one who has moved (though still in Wynwood), and his art will be represented in the Snitzer gallery as its Art Basel show.

"Burning as it were a lamp" has all the tell-tale marks of a Martinez Celaya work. The installation incorporates a bronze sculpture of a crying boy, mirrors covering three walls and imagery of the sea. The Cuba-born artist-exile often addresses issues of loss, as in a homeland but also of a childhood; of memory; and of contemplative reflection of the philosophical underpinnings of life. Martinez Celaya has a graduate degree in physics and is also a writer, so the various facets of these interests appear repeatedly in his work.

Since transplanting to Miami several years ago (his work is in major museums in the Americas and Europe), his work has been seen here in museum exhibitions, in collections, and on the street — another bronze sculpture of a struggling boy stands on Biscayne Boulevard near the Freedom Tower.

In "Burning," he has included a painting of a mythical creature crashing into a turbulent sea — the reference to the dangerous passage so many from troubled island nations to the south have taken across the sea to get to these shores is there, as is the imagery of spirits based in Afro-Caribbean heritage. The burned creature could also be an angel literally fallen from grace. With the mirrors reflecting the painting, the bronze sculpture and the visitors themselves, identities become mixed. Who is arriving, leaving, crashing?

This is a departure for Snitzer, and part of a series of works from Martinez Celaya that will be shown around town during December.

"Burning as it were a lamp" opens on Nov. 23 and runs through Jan. 16 at Fredric Snitzer Gallery, 2249 N.W. 1st Pl., Miami; www.snitzer.com.



### Pizzuti Collection Welcomes Enrique Martínez Celaya

November 7, 2013 4:17 by Anne Evans

Internationally recognized artist Enrique Martínez Celaya will deliver an Artist Talk on Wednesday, November 20 at 5:00pm.



Above: Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Two Worlds, Oil and Wax on Canvas, 2007, 92" x 118"

As part of the newly opened Pizzuti Collection's educational programming internationally acclaimed artist Enrique Martínez Celaya will be delivering an Artist Talk on November 20th at Pizzuti Collection at 5:00pm. The Artist Talk offers participants the opportunity to listen to Martínez Celaya speak about his artistic practice, career and be immersed in the dreamlike qualities of his work. Pizzuti Collection members of all levels are invited to a private party in the galleries immediately following the Artist Talk until 8:00pm, offering a chance to visit with the artist in a more personal way.

Martínez Celaya is featured at Pizzuti Collection in the Sculpture Garden with the bronze La Torre de Nieve (The Tower of Snow) (2012) and in the Cuban Forever exhibition with two oil and wax paintings:

The Becoming or The Wagon (2011) and The Two Worlds (2007). A deeply romantic and engaging individual, Martínez Celaya draws inspiration from a plethora of sources including poetry, literature and science. Skilled in creating artworks in several different media including painting, sculpture and writing, Martínez Celaya's artworks are philosophically evocative and diverse in form. He is also the founder of Whale and Star Press, which publishes books about "art, poetry, art practice and critical theory."

Martínez Celaya's work is held by many collections around the world notably including the Metropolitan Museum of art, The State Hermitage in St. Petersburg, The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles.

The Artist Talk is free to Pizzuti Collection members and is open to the public with the cost of admission to Pizzuti Collection (\$10 adults).

Please RSVP for this event to info@pizzuticollection.com or by calling 614-280-4004.

For more information about this event, the artist or membership visit: http://www.pizzuticollection.com or call 614-280-4004.

Pizzuti Collection thanks the Ohio Arts Council for their support of the Artist Talk through a Project Support Grant.



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As general practice, Martínez Celaya creates images we wish to but cannot join. A boy stands alone in a meadow. Lightning flashes against a dark and stormy sky. Icebergs float in the sea. These scenes should speak to some part of us, but they remain too broad. We hope for something meaningful, but encounter the usual platitudes.

Dying was the theme of Martínez Celaya's Schneebett, and everything since. That project was first shown in Berlin in 2004, and is a meditation on Beethoven's final years. The installation includes a cast bronze bed covered with frost, a



pero son demasiado generales. Tenemos la esperanza de ver algo significativo,

El morir fue el tema central de la obra de Martínez Celaya Schneebett y de todo lo

que le siguió. Ese proyecto, una meditación sobre los últimos años de Beethoven,

pero encontramos los habituales clichés.

Martínez Celaya working on the sculpture *The Short Journey*, for the exhibition, "The Pearl", at SITE Santa Fe. Martínez Celaya trabajando en la escultura *The Short Journey*, para la exposición "The Pearl", presentada en SITE Santa Fe.



The Dock, 2013.
Oil and wax on canvas, 116 x 150 in
Óleo y cera sobre tela, 294.6 x 381 cm

picture of a snowy forest made from paint, tar and feathers, a pile of branches, a poem by the artist written on a wall, entitled, "Poisonwood," and a single empty chair; a symphony orchestra plays the protagonist's later concertos. Rather than fusing art, poetry, and music, the redundant formats reveal the inadequacy of each to its subject. How could it be otherwise? No one can imagine the end of days. "I was humbled by the futility of Schneebett," Martínez Celaya remarked in 2006.

Perhaps dissatisfaction with the status quo comes naturally to the artist. He is exceptionally articulate, and other writers have paid attention to his biography, especially his graduate studies in physics, readings in existential philosophy and literature, and family's relocation from Cuba to the United States via Spain and Puerto Rico. Also referenced are the artists whose examples he has said were most valuable. Among others, earlier, there was Joseph Beuys, the Luftwaffe veteran who transformed a national vocabulary into a tool for personal and political repentance. Later also came Leon Golub, a Chicagoan who captured the plight of all people by painting the oppression of a few. "To be a prophet," Martínez Celaya wrote in 2009, "an artist doesn't need God but clarity of purpose, character, and attention."

The best modern study of the quietism I see in Martéinez Celaya's art is From Cliché to Archetype, a popular book written in 1970 by the Canadian pioneer of media studies, Marshall McLuhan, and the poet Wilfred Watson, who was active in Canada's

se exhibió por primera vez en Berlín en 2004. La instalación incluye una cama de bronce fundido cubierta de escarcha, un cuadro de un bosque nevado realizado con pintura, brea y plumas, una pila de ramas, un poema titulado "Poisonwood" (Guao), escrito por el artista sobre una de las paredes, y una sola silla vacía: una orquesta sinfónica ejecuta los últimos conciertos del protagonista. Más que amalgamar el arte, la poesía y la música, los formatos redundantes revelan la inadecuación de cada uno de ellos con respecto a su tema. ¿Cómo podría ser de otra manera? Nadie puede imaginar el fin de sus días. "La futilidad de Schneebett me dio una lección de humildad", observó Martínez Celava en 2006.

Tal vez la insatisfacción con el status quo sea algo innato en el artista. Es excepcionalmente articulado y otros escritores han prestado especial atención a su biografía, especialmente a sus estudios de grado en física, sus lecturas de filosofía existencial y literatura, y el traslado de su familia de Cuba a Estados Unidos vía España y Puerto Rico. También se suele hacer referencia a los artistas cuyos ejemplos han sido muy valiosos, según lo expresado por él. Entre estos se contaba, en una etapa inicial, Joseph Beuys, el veterano de la Luftwaffe que transformó un vocabulario nacional en una herramienta para el arrepentimiento personal y político. Más tarde llegaría Leon Golub, un nativo de Chicago que captó la grave situación de la gente en general pintando la opresión de una pocas personas. "Para ser un profeta", Martínez Celaya escribió en 2009, "un artista no necesita a Dios sino que precisa claridad de propósito, carácter v atención".

El mejor estudio moderno del quietismo que distingo en el arte de Martínez Celaya es From Cliché to Archetype (Del cliché al arquetipo), un libro popular escrito en 1970 por el pionero canadiense de las ciencias de la información Marshall McLuhan y el poeta Wilfred Watson, que tuvo una activa participación en la comunidad del teatro experimental en Canadá. Como ellos lo explicaran, el cliché es un filtro que da forma a nuestras percepciones, pero una vez que es reconocido se convierte en una sonda para diseccionar los supuestos habituales. "Shakespeare destroza todos los viejos clichés del amor hasta su época", observaron, 'y concluye con una maldición sobre el amor". Toda destrucción debe ser abrazada. puesto que libera nuestra conciencia de la mentalidad predominante.

Una vez que un cliché ha captado la atención, en lugar de deslizarse inadvertido se





Works in progress for the SITE Santa Fe exhibition, "The Pearl", Studio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013. Obras en curso para la exposición "The Pearl", presentada en SITE Santa Fe, Estudio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013

experimental theater community. As they explained, the cliché is a filter that shapes our perceptions, but once acknowledged becomes a probe to dissect commonplace assumptions. "Shakespeare smashes all the old clichés of love up to his time," they observed, "and concludes with a curse on love." Every destruction is to be embraced, since it frees our awareness from prevailing mindsets.

Once a cliché draws attention instead of slipping past without notice, it becomes "a catalyst to confront exile and foreignness," which is a phrase Martínez Celaya used in characterizing *Schneebett*. This is a haunting work of art precisely because it probes our every attempted imagining, and lets us recognize that we come up empty.

Though Schneebett concluded Martínez Celaya's Beethoven trilogy, the shock-and-awe ethics of the project remain. "Schneebett is," he noted, "the threshold." One important lesson was that his creations interacted in unexpected ways. The inaccessible frozen

convierte en "un catalizador para enfrentar el exilio y la extranjeridad", frase que Martínez Celaya utilizó para caracterizar a Schneebett. Esta es una obra de arte perturbadora precisamente porque sondea cada uno de nuestros intentos imaginativos y nos permite reconocer que el resultado es un vacío.

Aunque Schneebett cerraba la trilogía de Martínez Celaya sobre Beethoven, la ética de choque y temor del proyecto persiste. "Schneebett es", señaló el artista, "el umbral". Una lección importante fue que sus creaciones interactuaron de modos inesperados. La cama congelada, inaccesible, proponía una ecología imaginada que era lógica y materialmente incompatible con los puntos de vista sugeridos por la pintura que incluía la brea y las plumas. La indiferencia no dejaba lugar para el confort.

Entre otras obras, una serie de cuatro pinturas de quince pies de altura por once pies de ancho diseñadas en 2010 para la Catedral de San Juan el Divino, en la ciudad de Nueva York, continuaban creando humildad a escala

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bed proposed an imagined ecology that was logically and materially incompatible with the points of view suggested by the tar and feather painting. The indifference left no room for comfort.

Among other works, a series of four fifteen feet high by eleven feet wide paintings designed in 2010 for the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in NewYork City continued to create humility on an environmental scale. Entitled *The Crossing* and installed in pairs in the ambulatory alongside the nave, Martínez Celaya's silent figures (one boy embraces a horse, another walks on crutches), empty rowboat, and path through a wintery wood challenge the soaring stained glass windows and the massive stone architecture.

Gentle, and with demanding perspectives, the brushed images lack the polished finish of gothic glass. There are drips of paint and smears of mud. The images stop short of the sides of the canvas, leaving the edges raw and exposed. The high horizons crush down on us like a weight, though the fluted stone columns of the cathedral soar. Here is where

ambiental. Bajo el título de The Crossing e instaladas de a pares en el ambulatorio a lo largo de la nave, las silenciosas figuras de Martínez Celaya (un muchachito abraza a un caballo, otro camina con muletas), el bote de remos vacío y el sendero que cruza un bosque invernal desafían a los elevados vitrales y a la sólida arquitectura en piedra. Delicadas y con perspectivas exigentes, las imágenes pintadas no tienen la pulida terminación del vidrio gótico. Se observan chorreaduras de pintura y manchas de barro. Las imágenes no llegan a cubrir los costados de la tela, dejando los bordes del lienzo crudo expuestos. Los altos horizontes nos aplastan como un peso, aunque las columnas estriadas de la catedral se elevan hacia lo alto. Aquí es

Es lo disyuntivo más que la continuidad lo que crea una experiencia estética en la cual las respuestas estándar fallan y se liberan nuestros deseos. Lo que era probado y cierto adquiere nueva vida. McLuhan y Watson explicaron la revigorización del sentido de la forma siguiente: "El arquetipo es una

donde el ateísmo se mezcla con lo divino.

Sketches and studies for the SITE Santa Fe exhibition, "The Pearl", Studio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013. Bocetos y estudios para la exposición "The Pearl", presentada en SITE Santa Fe, Estudio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013

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Works in progress for the SITE Santa Fe exhibition, "The Pearl", Studio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013. Obras en curso para la exposición "The Pearl", presentada en SITE Santa Fe, Estudio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013

atheism mixes with the divine.

It is disjunction rather than continuity that creates an aesthetic experience where stock responses fail and free our desires. What was tried-and-true gains new life. McLuhan and Watson explained the reinvigoration of meaning in this way: "The archetype is a retrieved awareness or consciousness. It is consequently a retrieved cliché – an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché."

Since Schneebett, Martínez Celeya has also made a number of delicate watercolors, including *Girl and Sun* (2005) and *Boy and Skate* (2005). Both are pocket versions of the installations, and *Boy and Skate*, for example, isolates the saltwater fish on the left half of the sheet of paper and shows the child embracing one on the right. Written below are the first three lines of "El niño yuntero" ("The Plowboy") by Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), a Spanish poet who died in Francisco Franco's prisons. In translation, the elegy begins with the sentence that most captured Martínez Celeya's attention, "Flesh for the yoke, he was born more / humble

conciencia y una percepción recuperada. Es, por lo tanto, un cliché recuperado – un viejo cliché recuperado por uno nuevo".

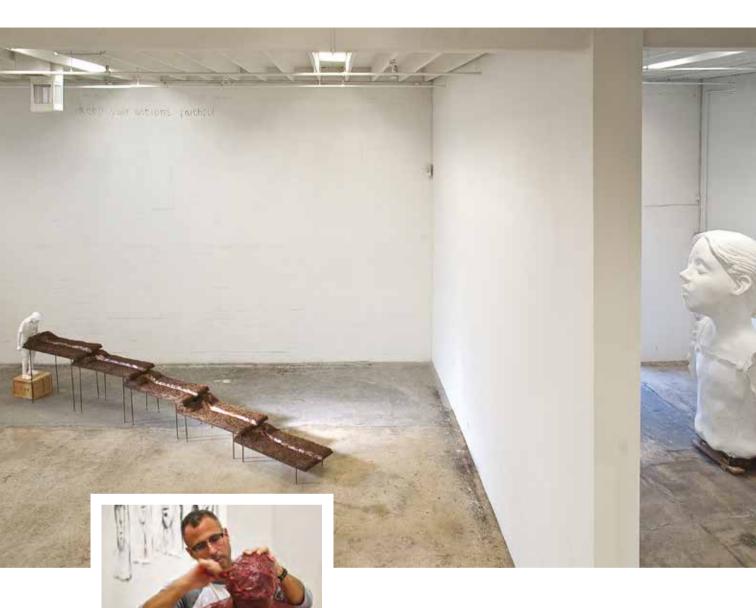
Desde Schneebett, Martínez Celeya ha creado también una cantidad de delicadas acuarelas, que incluyen Girl and Sun/Niña y sol (2005) y Boy and Skate/Niño y patín (2005). Ambas son versiones de bolsillo de las instalaciones y Boy and Skate, por ejemplo, aísla a los peces de agua salada en la mitad izquierda de la hoja de papel y muestra al niño abrazando a uno de los peces a la derecha. Debajo están escritas las primeras tres líneas de "El niño yuntero", de Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), un poeta español que murió en los calabozos de Francisco Franco. En su idioma original, la elegía comienza con la frase que más atrajo la atención de Martínez Celaya: "Carne de yugo, ha nacido/ más humillado que bello, /con el cuello perseguido / por el yugo para el cuello". El poema finaliza con un llamado de los Republicanos a las armas, que no está reproducido aquí pero que así y todo es relevante: "¿Quién salvará este

#### ARTISTS | ARTISTAS



Studio/Estudio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013 than handsome, with his / neck pursued by the yoke for his neck." The poem concludes with a Republican call to arms, which is not reproduced but relevant nonetheless: "Who will save this little boy / smaller than a grain of oats? / Where will the hammer come from, / that executioner of this chain? / Let it come from the heart / of these day-laboring men / who before becoming men are / and have been plowboys." Combined, these images of skate, voke, and hammer create associations that run in multiple directions, and overwhelm with their indeterminacy. For Site Santa Fe, July 13, 2013 to October 13, 2013, Martínez Celeya continues his investigation of the power of clichés to become archetypes, thus probing our expectations and assumptions. Premised on the notion of "home," the installation will seek to create an immersive experience from large paintings and sculptures, videos and smells. With such sensory overload, the artist will ask viewers to compare their present lives to the hopes and dreams of their childhoods, which perhaps allows both sadness and satisfaction simultaneously.

chiquillo / menor que un grano de avena?/ ¿De dónde saldrá el martillo / verdugo de esta cadena? / Que salga del corazón / de los hombre jornaleros, / que antes de ser hombres son / y han sido niños yunteros". Combinadas, estas imágenes de patín, yugo y martillo crean asociaciones que van en múltiples direcciones, y abruman con su indeterminación. Para SITE Santa Fe, a realizarse entre el 13 de julio y el 13 de octubre de 2013, Martínez Celaya continúa su investigación sobre el poder de los clichés para convertirse en arquetipos, sondeando así nuestras expectativas y presupuestos. Basándose en la noción de "hogar", la instalación buscará crear una experiencia inmersiva recurriendo a grandes pinturas y esculturas, a videos y olores. Con tal sobrecarga sensorial, el artista pedirá al espectador que compare lo que es actualmente su vida con las esperanzas y sueños de su niñez, lo que tal vez permita experimentar tristeza y satisfacción simultáneamente.



Studio/Estudio Enrique Martínez Celaya, Miami, Florida, 2013

Enrique Martínez Celaya is a Cuban American artist who was born in Havana in 1964. He emigrated with his family to Spain at the age of eight. He earned a BS in Physics from Cornell University and pursued a PhD in Quantum Electronic from the University of California, Berkeley, before deciding to devote himself fully to his artistic practices and earning an MFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Now based in Miami, his collected writings were published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2010, and his art is in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others.

[profile | perfil]

Enrique Martínez Celaya es un artista cubano-americano nacido en La Habana en 1964 y que emigró con su familia a España a la edad de ocho años. Se graduó en Física en la Universidad de Cornell y obtuvo un doctorado en Electrónica Cuántica en la Universidad de California, Berkeley, antes de dedicarse exclusivamente a su práctica artística y graduarse en Bellas Artes en la Universidad de California, Santa Bárbara. Actualmente está radicado en Miami. La editorial de la Universidad de Nebraska publicó una recopilación de sus escritos en 2010, y sus obras se encuentran representadas en las colecciones permanentes del Museo Whitney de Arte Americano, el Museo de Arte del Condado de Los Ángeles y el Museo Metropolitano de Arte, entre otros.



### **Enrique Martínez Celaya: From Cliché to Archetype**

Thursday, October 10, 2013 by David Raskin

Enrique Martínez Celaya's summer 2013 exhibition at SITE Santa Fe follows a 2011-12 installation of *Schneebett* (2004) at the Miami Art Museum, and provides an opportunity to survey his career.

As general practice, Martínez Celaya creates images we wish to but cannot join. A boy stands alone in a meadow. Lightning flashes against a dark and stormy sky. Icebergs float in the sea. These scenes should speak to some part of us, but they remain too broad. We hope for something meaningful, but encounter the usual platitudes.



Dying was the theme of Martínez Celaya's *Schneebett*, and everything since. That project was first shown in Berlin in 2004, and is a meditation on Beethoven's final years. The installation includes a cast bronze bed covered with frost, a picture of a snowy forest made from paint, tar and feathers, a pile of branches, a poem by the artist written on a wall, entitled, "Poisonwood," and a single empty chair; a symphony orchestra plays the protagonist's later concertos. Rather than fusing art, poetry, and music, the redundant formats reveal the inadequacy of each to its subject. How could it be otherwise? No one can imagine the end of days. "I was humbled by the futility of *Schneebett*," Martínez Celaya remarked in 2006.

Perhaps dissatisfaction with the status quo comes naturally to the artist. He is exceptionally articulate, and other writers have paid attention to his biography, especially his graduate studies in physics, readings in existential philosophy and literature, and family's relocation from Cuba to the United States via Spain and Puerto Rico. Also referenced are the artists whose examples he has said were most valuable. Among others, earlier, there was Joseph Beuys, the *Luftwaffe* 

veteran who transformed a national vocabulary into a tool for personal and political repentance. Later also came Leon Golub, a Chicagoan who captured the plight of all people by painting the oppression of a few. "To be a prophet," Martínez Celaya wrote in 2009, "an artist doesn't need God but clarity of purpose, character, and attention."

The best modern study of the quietism I see in Martéinez Celaya's art is *From Cliché to Archetype*, a popular book written in 1970 by the Canadian pioneer of media studies, Marshall McLuhan, and the poet Wilfred Watson, who was active in Canada's experimental theater community. As they explained, the cliché is a filter that shapes our perceptions, but once acknowledged becomes a probe to dissect commonplace assumptions. "Shakespeare smashes all the old clichés of love up to his time," they observed, "and concludes with a curse on love." Every destruction is to be embraced, since it frees our awareness from prevailing mindsets.

Once a cliché draws attention instead of slipping past without notice, it becomes "a catalyst to confront exile and foreignness," which is a phrase Martínez Celaya used in characterizing *Schneebett*. This is a haunting work of art precisely because it probes our every attempted imagining, and lets us recognize that we come up empty.

Though *Schneebett* concluded Martínez Celaya's Beethoven trilogy, the shock-and-awe ethics of the project remain. "*Schneebett* is," he noted, "the threshold." One important lesson was that his creations interacted in unexpected ways. The inaccessible frozen bed proposed an imagined ecology that was logically and materially incompatible with the points of view suggested by the tar and feather painting. The indifference left no room for comfort.

Among other works, a series of four fifteen feet high by eleven feet wide paintings designed in 2010 for the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City continued to create humility on an environmental scale. Entitled *The Crossing* and installed in pairs in the ambulatory alongside the nave, Martínez Celaya's silent figures (one boy embraces a horse, another walks on crutches), empty rowboat, and path through a wintery wood challenge the soaring stained glass windows and the massive stone architecture.

Gentle, and with demanding perspectives, the brushed images lack the polished finish of gothic glass. There are drips of paint and smears of mud. The images stop short of the sides of the canvas, leaving the edges raw and exposed. The high horizons crush down on us like a weight, though the fluted stone columns of the cathedral soar. Here is where atheism mixes with the divine.

It is disjunction rather than continuity that creates an aesthetic experience where stock responses fail and free our desires. What was tried-and-true gains new life. McLuhan and Watson explained the reinvigoration of meaning in this way: "The archetype is a retrieved awareness or consciousness. It is consequently a retrieved cliché – an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché."

Since *Schneebett*, Martínez Celeya has also made a number of delicate watercolors, including *Girl and Sun* (2005) and *Boy and Skate* (2005). Both are pocket versions of the installations, and *Boy and Skate*, for example, isolates the saltwater fish on the left half of the sheet of paper

and shows the child embracing one on the right. Written below are the first three lines of "El niño yuntero" ("The Plowboy") by Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), a Spanish poet who died in Francisco Franco's prisons. In translation, the elegy begins with the sentence that most captured Martínez Celeya's attention, "Flesh for the yoke, he was born more / humble than handsome, with his / neck pursued by the yoke for his neck." The poem concludes with a Republican call to arms, which is not reproduced but relevant nonetheless: "Who will save this little boy / smaller than a grain of oats? / Where will the hammer come from, / that executioner of this chain? / Let it come from the heart / of these day-laboring men / who before becoming men are / and have been plowboys." Combined, these images of skate, yoke, and hammer create associations that run in multiple directions, and overwhelm with their indeterminacy.

For Site Santa Fe, July 13, 2013 to October 13, 2013, Martínez Celeya continues his investigation of the power of clichés to become archetypes, thus probing our expectations and assumptions. Premised on the notion of "home," the installation will seek to create an immersive experience from large paintings and sculptures, videos and *smells*. With such sensory overload, the artist will ask viewers to compare their present lives to the hopes and dreams of their childhoods, which perhaps allows both sadness and satisfaction simultaneously.

#### **Biography:**

Enrique Martínez Celaya is a Cuban American artist who was born in Havana in 1964. He emigrated with his family to Spain at the age of eight. He earned a BS in Physics from Cornell University and pursued a PhD in Quantum Electronic from the University of California, Berkeley, before deciding to devote himself fully to his artistic practices and earning an MFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Now based in Miami, his collected writings were published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2010, and his art is in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, among others.

## Enrique Martínez Celaya: Concepts and Studies for The Pearl

IAMES KELLY CONTEMPORARY 550 SOUTH GUADALUPE STREET, SANTA FE

The work is fundamentally impenetrable to me. Why shouldn't it be to someone else? -Enrique Martínez Celaya

# THE IMMEDIACY OF ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA'S

exhibition of preparatory drawings and maquettes at James Kelly Contemporary is stunning—markedly so when compared to the finished product, the installation The Pearl, showing concurrently at SITE Santa Fe. In fact, the exhibition at Kelly's gallery is meant to serve as a studio visit, sans artist, complete with drawings, sketchbooks, and maquettes; books, articles, and an intelligent staff are also there for your edification. If you didn't quite get The Pearl, a visit to James Kelly could turn your experience around. From it, I came to believe that Martínez Celaya's work, albeit figurative, is not nearly as narrative as it would seem on first glance: It is the stuff of memory articulated in the strangely familiar language of the unconscious. His vocabulary consists of, but is not limited to, an achingly lonesome little boy; birds, dogs, and other animals; water and the vehicles that traverse it; and the devices—both mechanical and metaphoric—that make a place a home.

Martínez Celaya's work is largely about what it cannot say. It is post-structuralist and poetic, built upon a foundation of science and literature. The result is an odd mixture of the ineffable and the mundane, comprehensible during that brief moment of awakening from a dream in which the impossible has just matterof-factly occurred. Under the reign of full consciousness,

deep understanding recedes. As slippery as nirvana during a meditation session, once we think we've got it, realization steals away. In an essay about the artist, Daniel A. Siedell proposes that Martínez Celaya's works on paper "act as the 'still, small voice' compared to the thunder and lightning of his paintings and sculpture." Upon entering the Railyard gallery, it is readily apparent that the show here is more delicate, vulnerable, and

The Dove, a smallish drawing of a boy crying colored tears, carries its own solemn presence in a way that the painting of the boy and the bronze sculpture across the street don't. On the other hand, while the large tarredand-feathered boat piece at SITE is strikingly evocative, its counterpart, Untitled (Boat and Lighthouse), a charcoal drawing at James Kelly, is rather more academic. Still, it is an absolutely luscious drawing (but then I've always loved works on paper for their tactility and directness) and I suspect that, in terms of longevity, the drawing will hold its own via the very hesitancy with which it is rendered. Martínez Celaya makes ghosts, not objects, and this drawing is effectively haunted. In his own writings about his work, the artist has hinted that his media is the mater of grief itself. A house-shaped maquette in the gallery is labeled The Grief Box; across the street, the plywoodhouse installation in The Pearl conceals anguish under a ceiling of projected stars. Unlike the maguette, with its self-containment, drawings of the house with stars radiating from it are quite exuberant, even childlike, a quality that did not translate to the three-dimensional installation piece at SITE.

Every boy, and every home, must have its dog. For Martínez Celaya, that dog is a German shepherd, the eternal guardian, a heartbreakingly faithful friend. The artist's studies convey the endearing, profound love we experience with our beloved pet. For a lonely boy, that dog can be more lifesaver than companion, keeping savage predators (like love and loss) at bay. In the gallery exhibition, dogness is delivered more directly by the clay Study for the Treasure Keeper than by the drawing on the wall next to it. The excellent watercolor-andink paper piece The Gate presents the dog swimming in water; in or on his head is a small house—his crown, his obsession, his everything. The treasure keeper will gladly lay down his life for the boy, and we, the viewers, are relieved that the abandoned child has such a brave sentinel at his side. At SITE, Martínez Celaya created an elaborate fountain with a bronze sculpture of the boy-hero weeping into a trough that carries his copious tears into the next gallery. It is an arresting piece, but one that either hits or completely misses its audience. If it doesn't score an instant strike with the viewer, that is probably because it comes across as too self-aware, too precious, to be an effective work of art. In his Studies for the Fountain at Kelly's gallery, an ink, graphite, and conté crayon work on paper, Martínez Celaya manages in a few exquisite strokes to conflate sculpture, painting, and drawing on the toothy paper. "It's strange," he told critic Jori Finkel of The Los Angeles Times, "to love painting and to be so much anti-painting." Studies for the Fountain is breathtakingly beautiful in its delivery, far beyond the object it was meant to be a prep drawing for.

As to the above quote by the artist: Impenetrability is one thing. Don't allow it to fool you into thinking Martínez Celaya doesn't work on a seductively intimate level. Concepts and Studies is must-see viewing for any fans-and the not-so-convinced-of his work, and is indispensible to eradicating much of the preciousness of The Pearl at SITE Santa Fe, replacing it with the personal and the profound.

-KATHRYN M DAVIS

fragile than what is on display across the street at SITE.

Enrique Martínez Celaya, Untitled (Boat and Lighthouse), watercolor and charcoal on paper, 38½" x 61", 2013

# art Itd.

# Enrique Martinez Celaya: "The Pearl" at SITE Santa Fe "Concepts and Studies for The Pearl" at James Kelly Contemporary

Sep 2013 by Iris Mclister



The Dove, 2013, Marker and charcoal on paper, 18" x 24" Photo: courtesy James Kelly Contemporary

It's impossible to ascribe any one creative practice to Enrique Martinez Celaya, a physicist-turned-artist who's proficient in a number of disciplines. His latest project, "The Pearl," is ambitious and sprawling, covering 12,000 square feet of exhibition space at SITE Santa Fe. Works in the show, including burned furniture, intricate water displays, and video art, are explained, or at least explored, in the form of maquettes, sketches, and diagrams on view across the street at James Kelly Contemporary. This clever collaboration fleshes out a not-always-straightforward foray into contemporary multi-disciplinary media. Titled "Concepts and Studies for The Pearl," it feels like a private glimpse into the artist's mind-and an imperative one for anyone who hopes to understand the subtlety and sadness that infuses so much of Celaya's work. Born in Cuba, Celaya moved to Spain as a boy, and later, to Puerto Rico. He eventually settled in Miami, and if one thing is clear it is that Celaya left his birthplace at a huge cost to his psyche and sense of self.

The SITE space is disconcertingly dark, and organized so that the viewer moves from room to room on a path that's disorienting and a little spooky, which is a concept Celaya wouldn't necessarily have a problem with. A visit to James Kelly is less visceral and more intimate, but feels just as challenging. The gallery's exhibition literature likens this quiet presentation to a studio visit, and that's not far off. Sketches and diagrams line the walls, many of which feature repeated themes, like houses, boats, dogs, and boys. *The Dove* (2013) is a drawing made of charcoal and marker. Its subject is a downcast boy, presumably Celaya, from whose closed eyelids colorful strokes of marker form bright, strange tears. One of the most striking works at SITE is a large installation of five cascading, linked beds, covered with prickly Casuarina pine tree needles. At the head of the piece is a life-sized sculpted boy, whose eyes feature cut out holes through which trickling water flows. The work is referred to in several iterations at James Kelly, the most poignant of which is a little bed whose indented top mimics softened pillows.

Most of us find fantasy hard to resist: we're hopeless converts of secret worlds, whose darkest shadows are yet rife with marvelous potential for personal introspection. Enrique Martinez Celaya's provocative latest project beckons us to worlds both interior and exterior and encourages us to explore the enigmatic interpenetration of past and present.





Image: Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Pearl, Miami studio, process photos, 2013; Courtesy of the artist's studio.

# **The Pearl of Memory**

by Lauren Tresp

#### The Pearl

Enrique Martínez Celaya SITE Santa Fe 1606 Paseo de Peralta , Santa Fe, NM 87501

July 13, 2013 - October 13, 2013

It is curious how memories from childhood have their own specific barriers to being completely restored. They are not only hollowed out by the distance of time, but also altered fundamentally as psychosocial development takes its course. The result is a slippage between history and its many emotional associations; what's left are mixed feelings of remorseful nostalgia and relief that bygones are indeed bygone.

In the current exhibition *The Pearl*, Cuban American artist Enrique Martinez Celaya takes up the drama of youth, wrought as it is with fear, wonder, trepidation and exuberance, in various proportions, and explores both the deterioration of memory and memory's role in informing the present.

The Pearl is an immersive environment that sprawls across the entirety of SITE Santa Fe's 12,000 square feet of gallery spaces. Utilizing painting, sculpture, sound, video, and light, the artist creates various installations threaded together by a continuous clear plastic tube of circulating water. The viewer follows the flow of the water from gallery to gallery in a manner suggestive of following a narrative. However, the individual installations are more akin to rhythmic pulses within a meandering melody, or emotional beats within a theatrical performance. The installations



Enrique Martinez Celaya, Enrique Martinez Celaya: The Pearl, 2013, installation view, courtesy of the artist and SITE Santa Fe.



Enrique Martinez Celaya, Enrique Martinez Celaya: The Pearl, 2013, Miami studio, process photos; courtesy of the artist's studio.

are better described as moments of encounter, sparsely arranged in the vast gallery space, replete with both climaxes and spaces of silence.

The first of these encounters takes place beyond a dark curtain in a small vestibule. On a white curtain ahead, a projected video of a German shepherd eating wet food in the shape of a house loops to a recording of a child shriek-laughing. In this liminal space, the jarring experience dislodges the viewer from conventional temporal and spatial markers and prepares the viewer for the rest of the exhibition. Following this introduction, time and space are left ambig uous as they are contemplated as obstacles to remember things lost: loss of home, the anxiety of boyhood, the persistent longing for guardianship, and ultimately the hard-won pains of growth.

Several of the major motifs repeated throughout the instalations are confronted in the first, large gallery space. In one scene, an old radio surrounded by kitschy porcelain bird figurines invokes warm attachment to relics found in a grandparent's house. A sculpted German shepherd on an ordinary end table appears as an earnest, if not sentimental, monument to a lonely boy's beloved protector. A rowboat, sunken into the floor and filled with a pool of water bears a small lighthouse. Referencing an historical method of public humiliation, the vessel is tarred and feathered, carrying a protective device rendered useless due to dislocation.

Following the flowing, water-filled tubing into the next room, a charred dining table and chairs support an elaborately bedazzled elephant figurine. The jeweled object recalls the wonder and simple fascination felt by youthful eyes. Atop a funereal table, marking loss of domesticity, the elephant now looks simply ridiculous.

The visual verses of *The Pearl* continue along its watery path, with recurring motifs and re-iterated themes. A small side room consists entirely of ornithological portraits of birds, read as so many takes on a single impulse as the shadow cast from the tubing ropes them together. In a large, stark room a bronze, larger-than-life bedazzled boy cries out tears at a pace unrealistic enough to resist sentimentality. Now freed from its tubing, the water trickles down straw-covered platforms, leading the viewer past two large-scale paintings. Occupying opposite walls, the two paintings reflect

conflicting emotional concerns. In the first, two boys stand on the edge of the sea on a decaying dock, isolated against the clouded water. They are distanced from the shore as they encounter the vastness of the unknown world before them. In the other, a boy plays in a lush field, encountering brilliantly colored flowers and a super-sized songbird: an ordinary scene made fantastic by naive eyes. Despite their conflicting moods, both paintings are loose and wrought with brush-marks. Rough and raw edges fade like the memories the images reach out for as the dénouement begins.

The trickling water resumes its course in the following room, darkened except for stars of light cast on the ceiling from cutouts on the ceiling of a plywood house, illuminated from within. Martinez Celaya's visual poem comes to an end in the final room in which a pool of water has been built into the concrete floor of SITE's gallery. As the water collects, it is pumped back into the tube at the beginning with an anatomically lung-shaped pump. A faux woodland scene surrounds the water feature, a taxidermied fox present as a testament to the German shepherd's affections.

What then, is the meaning of the pearl in *The Pearl*? The pearl grows over the painful aches of youth, surrounding the foreign grains in the luster of memory. It is self-curing, both obscuring grief, and existing precisely because of it. Simultaneity is threaded throughout the exhibition. As the distance from childhood and longing for the idea of home are re-envisioned again and again in visual and material vignettes, conflicting emotional connotations are conjoined and entwined, as mutable as the water linking each iteration. The component installations are mildly redundant, in that each is a contemplation ostensibly inadequate in its attempt to recapture the previous life that is youth. It is the uncomfortable emptiness of the exhibition space, the silences in between that reaffirm the aching realization that time and space lost is irretrievable to objects and meditations alike.

—Lauren Tresp



## The Rustic, Intricate Fantasy of Enrique Martínez Celaya

August 12, 2013 by Jonathan Blaustein



Various installation views of Enrique Martínez Celaya's The Pearl at SITE Santa Fe (July-October 2013) (all photographs by Eric Swanson)

SANTA FE, New Mexico — When conjuring visions of the Santa Fe art scene, it's the cliché of cowboys and cacti that comes closest to capturing reality. If you're looking for a two-ton, life-size bronze statue of a bison, though, you might just be in luck. Yes, Southwest Impressionism is alive and well, so if you need a soft-focus mountain-scape above your sofa, you now know where to look. Santa Fe, after all, is the third largest art market in the US.

Fortunately, there are a couple of institutions in town that are committed to showing the kind of work you might see in the world's contemporary art capitals. The cultural institution and erstwhile biennial SITE Santa Fe usually tops this list. I visited SITE recently for the opening of "The Pearl," a new exhibition by Miami-based artist Enrique Martínez Celaya, and had to go back again to take it in properly.



Step through an inky black curtain, and you find yourself in a dark corridor. Ahead, on another curtain, you see a projection of a german shepherd eating dog food. Just as he takes a slobbery bite, the sound of a small child giggling is piped into the space. Cute at first, the twisted shriek morphs to menacing in less time than it takes for the dog to inhale his grub.

On through the second curtain, into an atrium of sorts, with the walls painted black. Debranched, dead trees lean up against the walls. Above, next to the Reznor heater, you see clear plastic tubing about an inch thick hung from the ceiling. The sound of waves crashing wafts in from up ahead.

Following along, I stepped into a very large room, also painted black. There were little mininstallations spread about, in such a manner as to encourage walking in an orderly fashion. First, another german shepherd, rendered as wooden end-table. Looking up, we see another of the same canine species, this time embedded in a painting on the wall.

In the back corner, I spied a wooden pedestal emerging from the wall. It featured an old, beautiful wooden radio, which was quietly playing music. The shelf and radio were covered with kitschy ceramic birds, the kind you'd see at someone's grandma's house. (The couches in said home would be covered with plastic, and the year would always be 1978.)

And it cut right through the intellect and touched my emotional core. I stared at those birds, and the ceramic red cardinal and blue jay took me right back to my childhood home in suburban New Jersey. My dad had a bird feeder, right outside the kitchen window, and I remember those birds flitting this way and that. Filling the feeders with sunflower seeds was one of my only real "chores," and yet still I complained. (That's about as good a definition of "spoiled middle class American child" as I can give you.)



Moving along, I saw a ratty, black canoe in the center of the floor. I was a little perplexed, until I looked up to see a painting on the wall. A boy sits in a canoe, much like the real one before me, and he's out at sea at night. It's a beautiful piece, though it looks more than a bit like something rescued at an estate sale in Santa Monica on a Sunday afternoon.

After the canoe comes the ocean. A video of cascading waves awaits in the next room, projected behind a dinner table topped with an elephant wrapped in Mardi Gras beads. On the wall above, a clock is covered with birds, in place of numbers. The video is not particularly original, but the light dancing on the floor, a castoff of the reflected projection, is rather lovely.



The plastic tubing still snakes above, and leads further into the space. (Which reminds me of the advice I was given upon leaving the front desk: follow the water.) The tube ducks into a side room, painted gray, so I do too. The serene space is lined with lovely paintings of birds, the same East Coast types seen before. (Is that an Oriole? Does it matter?) The gray paintings,

with the slight changes on a recurring theme, remind me a bit of Gerhard Richter. The sparrow, shivering on a snowy tree, looks cold.

I notice the shadows of the tubing on the wall, undulating like waves. Then it's out the way we came in, into the biggest gallery yet. On the first wall, an oversized painting shows two boys at the end of a rickety pier, jutting into the ocean. One holds his arms around him, as if he's cold. The light, warm and yellowish, makes me think of the end of summer. (Again, I'm taken to a nostalgic place.)

Wheel around, and things begin go make sense. In the middle of the room, we see a ceramic man, leaning over a succession of descending stairs made out of pine needles, or something like that. Get close, and you can see the clear tubing is hooked up to his foot. His eyes are leaking tears, which spill into a little groove in the middle of the wicker-like apparatus.

The best part: the sculpture guy is bedazzled. (Of course.) He's totally decked out in fake crystals. Celaya has created "that" kind of Baroque experience, and I loved it. You go, bedazzled dude.



The tears, now a slight stream of water, are conducted down an aqueduct of sorts, which is held up by tree stumps. Across the 80' room it flows, bisecting the gallery as it goes. (At the opening, a guard asked me, retroactively, not to step over the aqueduct.)

The water feature passes another large painting on its way out the door. A boy, in a landscape that looks like New Mexico, stands by a group of rainbowbrite flowers while a bird descends to join him. It's the first, and only time, that I'm reminded of where I'm standing. Up to that point, Mr. Celaya transported me out of the state entirely.



The next room is the only real miss, because Celaya overdoes it a bit. There is a closed, plywood house, in the middle of a dark room, with star holes cut out of the ceiling. Light is projected through, which makes a beautiful faux-night-sky above. Totally great. But there are also some bed-sheet/bath-robe-type-white-fabric hoods affixed to the wall, along with pinned paper butterflies. The fabric sculptures don't really fit, and distract from what is otherwise a seamless experience.



Finally, the last room beckons, and then the installation really does all come together. In the middle of the space, we see a taxidermied fox, standing beside a fake pond encircled with fake Christmas trees. In the pond sits a pump shaped like a pair of lungs. The aqueduct deposits the last few trickles of water into the pond, while the pump sucks out fresh liquid to send out into the tubing, which begins right there. A closed loop. Brilliant.

This massive, intricate fantasy of high art and kitsch, hand-made things and found objects, all snaps together tighter than an Ikea bookshelf.

Just as I'm ready to leave, I look up one last time. As the tubing cascades away, through the generic double-pane window cut into the wall, I notice a sign in the distance: SITE Santa Fe. Yes, the exhibition closes with one slick bit of branding. How 21st century is that?

Enrique Martínez Celaya's The Pearl continues at SITE (1606 Paseo de Peralta, Santa Fe) through October 13.

Tue, 16 Jul 2013

# Home from home

PAC POBRIC on Enrique Martínez Celaya's "The Pearl" at SITE Santa Fe, until 13 October



Enrique Martínez Celaya's immersive installation at Site Santa Fe

"Every once in a while, we get requests that only a space like ours can accommodate," says Irene Hofmann, the curator at SITE Santa Fe. Enrique Martínez Celaya's new project at the museum, *The Pearl*, which opened on 13 July, is one such exhibition. Taking over the entirety of the gallery's 12,000 sq. ft exhibition space (the site of a former beer warehouse), the artist has designed an immersive installation that explores our understanding of home and memory.

The show leads visitors through a series of rooms featuring painting, sculpture, film, photography and sound, weaving together a narrative that asks viewers to re-evaluate what they remember having seen in previous galleries. "It's not dissimilar from reading a novel or listening to a piece of music, where you understand the first words, images or

sounds better after you've seen it all," Hofmann says. In the exhibition's final room, which includes a 4ft-deep pond, it becomes clear that its water source has been following the visitor all along: a hose travels throughout each room in the show before reaching its final destination.

"From the very first gallery, it reads like a total work of art," Hofmann says. And though the show grows in part from Martínez Celaya's personal experiences—in his notes for the exhibition, he writes that "rooms where the boy I used to be still waits for my return, sitting on a pine-wood chair, his eyes wide open"—the scale itself is what pulls it away from being purely autobiographical. It's an exhibition about childhood, home and memories of the past, which is something we've all taken time to reflect on.



### Home from home

#### Enrique Martínez Celaya's "The Pearl" at Site Santa Fe, until 13 October

July 16, 2013 By Pac Pobric



Enrique Martínez Celaya's immersive installation at Site Santa Fe

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Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Pearl, 2013, Courtesy of the artist.

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# ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA THE PEARL

SITE Santa Fe is pleased to present a new project by Enrique Martínez Celaya entitled *The Pearl*. For this exhibition, Martínez Celaya transforms almost 12,000 square feet of SITE's gallery spaces into an immersive environment that includes painting, sculpture, video, photography, waterwork, sound, and writing, as well as the artist's first musical arrangement. This exhibition integrates and expands many of the elements and ideas that the artist has engaged with over the last several years. In *The Pearl*, the artist takes the notion of home as both a point of departure and a destination to craft a visual poem of strong emotional, philosophical and psychological resonance. The structure of the exhibition invites a specific movement through the galleries thus unfolding a multi-layered narrative where objects, images, and references are continuously reconsidered in a similar way that a piece of music, a film, or a novel are revealed in time.

In creating *The Pearl*, many materials and ideas come together as Martínez Celaya transforms the entire building into a work of art, whose imagery point to the natural world and the everyday seen through the window of sorrow. But far from being a work of despair, the power of *The Pearl* resides precisely in its ability to reinvent loss as hope and the mundane as the fantastic. The artist has said, "a pearl grows from an irritation, a desire to seal the disturbance, and this a fitting way to look at much of what we do with our life, or to what our life has done with and to us."

The exhibition weaves together, among other things, music, sound, images of pine trees, the ocean and a German Shepherd, an elephant made of jewels, a burnt dining room set, and paintings of the past and the present, to evoke a state of unbearable concreteness as well as fantasy, where brutality, imagination, memory, and longing become different facets of the same experience. The artist wrote, "The Pearl is a poem about time, the marker as well as the current of those markers. Like memory, it retrieves and hollows what was, and in doing so, builds and undermines what is. Ostensibly it is made of objects, images, words, and sounds, but it is really written on the dust that was left in rooms long ago left silent. Rooms where the boy I used to be still waits for my return, sitting on a pine-wood chair, his eyes wide open."

Citing aspects of the domestic as well as of the epic, of the small arc of individual histories as well as the big arc of time, the installation unearths memories seemingly left behind, and through this unearthing intimates there are secrets inherent in everything, particularly in the familiar. In *The Pearl*, the concrete becomes the evanescent, a great loss gives way to the fantasy of the survivalist, and what has no remedy is reinvented as something better. For the artist, unresolved memories become the inspiration for a spectacular, enchanted, as well as dangerous world.

This installation will be accompanied by a documentary film on the making of The Pearl by Peter Kirby.

Martínez Celaya's interdisciplinary practice, which encompasses painting, sculpture, photography and writing, is influenced by a wide array of interests including Nordic poetry, samurai mores, quantum physics, the emotional mechanisms of kitsch, analytic and continental philosophy, Latin American literature and everyday life. Martínez Celaya begins with the autobiographical to explore the universal. Although his figures echo archetype-like symbols alluding to larger existential concerns, the artist considers the subject matter the framework of his practice to be constantly evolving.

Martínez Celaya was trained as an artist and physicist. He earned a BS in Applied & Engineering Physics from Cornell University, a MS in Quantum Electronics from University of California Berkeley and a MFA in Painting from University of California, Santa Barbara. He has had solo exhibitions at the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, the Miami Art Museum, the Berliner Philharmonie and the Orange County Museum of Art, among others. His works are included in several private and public collections including those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. His Collected Writings and Interviews 1990-2010, was published by the University of Nebraska Press. Under the imprint Whale and Star Press, Martínez Celaya has published several books on art, poetry, art practice and critical theory.

# SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN



Domestic disturbance: Enrique Martínez Celaya's

# "The Pearl"

Friday, July 12, 2013

By Michael Abatemarco

To walk through Enrique Martínez Celaya's The Pearl — a large-scale sitespecific installation that meanders from room to room throughout SITE Santa Fe - is to walk through a dark passage of fragmented memory. Details relating to a specific memory or series of memories are arranged through the space not chronologically, however, but in layers. One must reconstruct events, fictional or real, as one goes along. That makes for a challenging, cerebral experience. For Martínez Celaya, the work is personal, touching on autobiographical content, and from within that content he has attempted to cull more universal experience of how childhood trauma can shape one's later life. "I'm interested

in the friction between the epic and the domestic," he told Pasatiempo. "This particular body of work has a lot of my own history in it. More than usual. I'm not so interested in a confession. The point is not a rumination of what happened, of what my experience was, but certain cracks open up those events. I want to explore what they mean, the larger questions. What I'm interested in is our condition. What is memory, and how do we find our place?"

Entering the installation, visitors are confronted with an unsettling image, a projection of a snarling German shepherd devouring a house made of dog food. Visitors hear the laughter of a baby girl. "It's very disorienting," Martínez Celaya said. "You're in the dark, and the laughter of the girl is so off from the images you're looking at,

it's a dislocation similar to the dislocation of going back to an image you cannot quite place." Moving on, you come to a window looking out on a bucolic scene, installed in another room, of a fox approaching a small pond surrounded by trees. The pond is lit from inside by a mysterious light, and a hose extends from it through the window. The hose is suspended from the ceiling and courses through room after room. The next room brings you to a forest of Casuarina pine, and one can glimpse the sea through the pine trees, five of which are burned. These images — the German shepherd, the fox, pine, the number five — are repeated in various ways throughout the exhibit. One room, for instance, contains a sculpture of a German shepherd. "The German shepherd, for me, invokes immediately the idea of

home and guardianship and protection and domesticity, but also there's a certain threatening quality to it. Anything you guard you also hold." There are other recurring motifs: songbirds, a lighthouse, a boat, the number 12. These may hold certain meanings for Martínez Celaya, and others must make an intellectual leap and begin constructing a narrative to account for them. *The Pearl* is like a story puzzle whose pieces need to be fitted together.

Early in the installation, as you are guided through, always following the hose, there is a boat enveloped in tar and feathers, something suggesting humility and shame. Think about that when you come to a room with urine-stained sheets and, for some visitors, painful memories may surface. How, then, is this rather dark exhibit like a pearl? "We think of a pearl as a jewel that we like to wear, but it's really an irritant that comes into the oyster. What the pearl is is just the effort of the oyster to wrap itself away from this irritant. I like this dual meaning. In many of our lives we have some sort of irritant, part of our childhood, and we're somehow trying to do something to that memory to convert it."

Touches of domesticity run throughout the installation as well. There is a table, burned like the pines, surrounded by four chairs and a missing fifth (which shows up again further on). A gaudy jewel-encrusted elephant rests on the table. Moving through *The Pearl* is a bit like moving through a dream. Martínez Celaya likens it to a musical composition or story told in several acts. "You have a first movement, and then by the time you get to the end, you reconsider that first movement and say, 'What I saw was not what I thought I saw."

The strange repeated patterns continue into a room where a painting on the wall shows three boys playing on a pier. In this room the hose drops down and the water coursing through it flows as tears from the eyes of a bronze statue of a boy. It flows through a channel cut into five beds of pine needles, each set lower to the ground than the one before. It continues to flow along a narrow trough into another room where there is a house of undressed pine, its roof riddled with star-shaped cutouts. Illuminated from within, the roof casts a dreamy nighttime sky full of stars onto the ceiling. The house is surrounded by the stained sheets, which have butterfly shapes cut from them. Follow the water into the next room, and the cloth butterflies from the sheets line the walls. This is the room glimpsed at the start, through the window. Come to the pond with its otherworldly glow, where the river of tears finally empties out. Look inside the pond, and you see a pair of human lungs, inflating and deflating to

the rush of air from a machine that gives them, like an oxygen tank hooked up to a patient in a hospital bed, the air they need to breathe.

Martínez Celaya was born in Cuba in the 1960s, one of three brothers. He immigrated first to Spain when he was 8 years old and then to Puerto Rico before coming to the United States. As a child, he suffered from respiratory trouble. "I had these terrible asthma attacks. And then I had a domestic life that was full of unrest, violence, difficulty, sadness, and isolation, and then the move from one country to another, which is not so much a question of exile as it is a question of displacement within yourself — the sense of being dislocated and the loneliness that comes with that." The five trees arranged around the pond, two big and three small, suggest the units of a nuclear family: a mother, a father, and three children. The jewel-encrusted elephant references Martínez Celaya's long nights spent working with his brothers, often until the early morning hours, making costume jewelry to support their family. But these tangible expressions of memory hold meaning for us all. "As a child there's a certain density to reality at times that you cannot pass through, so you project around it, instead. You project fantasies and fairy tales that allow you to bear the reality as is." □







### **Enrique Martinez Celaya**

March 1, 2013 by Eve Wood

Stating that visual art derives from a "poetic impulse" reduces the experience of looking at a particularly seductive or engaging work of art to a passing mystery, some moment of gloriously inexplicable inspiration that is bound to pass. While the work of Enrique Martinez Celaya, who was born in Cuba but spent much of his youth in Spain and Puerto Rico, is luminous, and perhaps even "poetic" in the very best sense of the word, both Celaya's paintings and sculptures push way beyond the single transformative gesture that poetics all too often suggests, to encompass a territory of staggering complexity.



Enrique Martinez Celaya, The One Who Has Taken Its Place, 2012, ©Enrique Martinez-Celay, courtesy LA Louver, Venice, CA

Celaya's paintings beg no obvious questions, but instead provide strange and sometimes incongruous vantage points into a universal human narrative. Celaya's images are illusory, and at times wondrous, and have a distinctly filmic quality like stilled images from a Guillermo del Toro film, wherein the narrative is simultaneously beautiful and haunting, seductive yet terrifying. The One Who Has Taken Its Place (all works 2012) suggests an ecstatic if perilous relationship between reality and the world of dreams—a German shepherd overtaking a terrified unicorn could represent the struggle between the known world and that of imagination. Celaya's animals don't function as anthropomorphized stand-ins for humans but instead operate as incontrovertible reminders of the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious mind, between desire and denial, and finally, between reality and imagination. Artists like Marino

Marini and Rene Magritte come to mind as influences, as both engaged mythic imagery in the service of the imagination—Marini especially, as he, like Celaya, utilized the horse as a metaphoric symbol of transcendence.

Celaya's exhibition is filled with dualities. In the painting The Tunnel and The Light (For the Ones Who Hope to Come Out), the darker interior space of the cave, replete with a cluster of dangling and sharply delineated icicles, gives way to a misty field of spring flowers, implying a relationship between the known landscape with the more sacred but brutal topography of the artist's own interior world. It's tempting to read this work as an image of rebirth or redemption, yet like the exhibition's title, "The Hunt's Will," Celaya posits the simultaneity of life and death. Perhaps the "hunt," i.e. the journey through life, is autonomous as though it were a viable and traceable phenomenon that acts upon us and propels us forward.

Other images are more concrete. Celaya's sculptural work The Enchantment, for instance, creates a visceral relationship and yet another duality between nature and the desire to contain it as a small bronze birdhouse rests wedged between the branches of a low tree. As with Celaya's paintings, the narrative is fractured, the bird hunted to extinction or simply walled up inside a manmade container. Either way, this work, like poems written by Celan, Martinson and Frost—among Celaya's favorites—derives its power from the complex relationship between disparate ideas and images, deliberately fragmenting narrative in order that we, as viewers, might lean in closer to glimpse the otherworldly.



# **SVENSKA DAGBLADET**

Torsdag 13 september 2012 svd.se

# Längtan i exil blir en fullträff

#### MÅLERI, SKULPTUR Enrique Martínez Celaya: Roadhome

Galleri Andersson/Sandström, Hudiksvallsgatan 6 TOM 7 OKTOBER

Galleri Andersson/Sandström expanderar. Säsongen startar inya, delvis ombyggdalokaler (gamla Brändström & Stene) med presentationen av kubansk-amerikanske konstnären Enrique Martínez Celaya. Det är hans första utställning i Sverige – och en fullträff.

Martínez Celaya föddes på Kuba 1964 och var bara ett barn när familjen tvingades i landsflykt 1972. Vägen ledde först till Spanien. Efter en period i Puerto Rico bor Martínez Celaya idag i Miami.

Exil, både i konkret och existentiell mening, ligger också som ett finmaskigt raster för hans skapande. Detta samtalade han om med Theodor Kallifatides, aktuell med den visdomsoch humorgnistrande romanen "Brev till min dotter", när de möttes på ABF en sensommarkväll.

Exilens förbannelse är inte bara längtan till den lilla plätt på jordklotet, där man råkat bli född. Det är även längtan efter den tid, som man inte kan få tillbaka. Kanske just därför är det ofta ett ensamt barn, en liten pojke som ibland får sin broders sällskap, som vandrar genom Martínez Celayas ödsliga landskap.

Landsflykten innebär både Dukens vit att lämna en platsoch att överge ojämna kar en tidsperiod, menar han. I färgstänkenh utställningskatalogen citerar han den om a filosofen Julia Kristeva: "Det verklighetsin förlorade paradiset är det förflutnas handlar om hägring som aldrig kan återfås." Det med pensel.



Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The voiceless," 2012. Olja och vax på duk.

förlorade hemmet är en förlorad tid, instämmer han med henne.

Martínez Celaya fastnar dock aldrig i det sentimentala. Hans konstsyn är djupt intellektuell och genomsyrad av både fi losofi ska och litterära referenser. De tynger aldrig hans bildspråk. Harry Martinson och Søren Kierkegaard fi nns bland dem som konstnären återkommer till. Martínez Celayas egna texter är som upplysta stigar till konst och skapande, både hans eget och andras.

Hans målningar växer fram under en långsam process. I den till synes kompakta bakgrundssvärtan upptäcker blicken de former som mörkret successivt har slukat.

Dukens vithet lyser vid verkens ojämna kanter. Tillsammans med färgstänkenhär och var påminner den om att det inte är någon verklighetsimitation utan måleriet det handlar om. En hemlängtan skriven med pensel.

En av utställningens fi naste och gåtfullaste verk är bronsskulpturen "The fight for air". En manstorso genomborras av kvistar som går genom bröstkorgen ochsticker ut från ryggen som spröda vingar.

På mannens axlar sitter en liten hare, en elefant och ett lejon. De små djurfi gurerna är välmodellerade i motsats till gestaltens otydliga anletsdrag. Det är som när vi ur minnet försöker framkalla ett kärt ansikte som tiden obarmhärtigt suddar ut medan andra ovidkommande bilder tränger sig på med en irriterande skärpa. Så känns det att kämpa för att fortsätta minnas.

#### JOANNA PERSMAN

kultur@svd.se

### November 23, 2012

# Los Angeles Times

# Critics Choice: Enrique Martínez Celaya art of displacement and longing

By Leah Ollman

Billy Collins, among the most accessible of contemporary poets and an eloquent advocate of poetry's place in public life, spoke recently about why people tend to resist the genre. Too much emphasis, he feels, is put on interpretation, to the detriment of poetry's 'less teachable, more bodily pleasures."

Collins' words came to mind when hearing Enrique Martínez Celaya talk about his new paintings and sculpture at L.A. Louver and how efforts to decipher the meaning of a work of art too often hijacks the experience of it.

In the case of visual art, and especially art like his that makes use of familiar, recognizable imagery, "we're so attached to what's given," he said, "rather than what's underneath what's given."

In one of his most stunning new paintings, Martínez Celaya presents the view from inside a dark cave whose floor is rocky and wet, its threshold rimmed with pendulous icicles. Beyond lies a field of grasses and brightly-hued flowers beneath a frosty, vaporous sky.

Symbolic readings of the painting are inevitable -- the tunnel of death with its famed bright light at the end, despair giving way to hope -- but what matters is the potency of the encounter. Like so many of Martínez Celaya's works over nearly two decades, this one seems to enter

through the bloodstream and lodge in the heart, the soul, the gut.

Martínez Celaya's working procedure begins with notes rather than sketches, and the philosophical probing that courses through his prolific writings also infuses his imagery.

His childhood displacements were formative (he left his native Cuba at 7, living in Spain and Puerto Rico before settling in the U.S.), and both the concept of home and a tone of longing are constants in his work.

In the bronze sculpture, "The Enchantment," a small, archetypal house is lodged in the branches of a leafless, thorny bush, itself uprooted. The piece evokes destabilization, but even more strongly a comforting sense of protective shelter -- as of something live, nested.

Martínez Celaya's internal negotiations with place, belonging, rupture and fragmentation are enacted on every canvas, in the waxy pigment's provisional drips, the layers that visibly track a history of making and remaking, and the images' raw, unfinished edges, precluding any seamless illusions.

These tableaux of the mind and memory take place in a realm of temporal and spatial ambiguity. They are anchored by an emotional authenticity that holds fast even though some of the imagery is saddled with kitschy, sentimental associations. Unicorns appear



Photo: Enrique Martínez Celaya, "The Tunnel and the Light (For the Ones Who Hope to Come Out." from L.A. Louver

repeatedly here, for instance. They are most affecting when rendered (as in another of the bronze sculptures) abject rather than cloying: their black, disembodied heads in a heap like so many chunks of spent fuel.

The lives and works of numerous poets -- among them Celan, Mandelstam, Martinson, Frost -- inform Martínez Celaya's sensibility. For all of his work's profound visual presence, he remains a sculptor and painter of an interior world, radiant with the innocence of childhood, steeped in the darkness of loss, ever unsettled.

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through Jan. 5. www.lalouver.com

# LAVANGUARDIA

Miércoles, 22 de febrero 2012

Barcelona, España

# Enrique Martínez Celaya: Ficción Invernal

#### Noélia Hernández

No hay más que echar un vistazo al voluminoso curriculum de Enrique Martínez Celaya para comprender que se trata de un artista cuya obra se desarrolla en un ámbito mucho más amplio que el mundo del arte. Celaya personifica aquel ideal humanista de algunos genios renacentistas, capaces de conciliar varias ramas del saber. Es un intelectual cuyos intereses incluyen la poesía Nordica, la filosofía continental, la física cuántica, (área que abandonó tras ganar un reconocimiento internacional que le brindaba un futuro prometedor), la literatura americana y la vida cotidiana.

### Amplio espectro de intereses

Un espectro tan amplio de intereses como éste explica que su pintura posea una carga simbólica y filosófica tan potente yendo siempre más allá de la simple transcripción de una imagen. El artista explora varios lenguajes como la escultura, la fotografía, la escritura y el vídeo, aunque es la pintura el que le ofrece la posibilidad de acercarse más a las respuestas que siempre ha buscado y que la física no le pudo reportar. Las obras expuestas en El Cielo de Invierno son figurativas, pero no en un sentido convencional de la palabra. Contiene imaginería seductora, de aire metafísico, vinculada a la naturaleza, junto a personajes que transmiten cierta tensión en un paisaje invernal, a la vez que expresan un estado emocional que nos invita a reflexionar sobre temas como la subjetividad, el desplazamiento, la memoria, lo temporal frente a lo absoluto o la confrontación existencial del individuo frente al mundo.



Enrique Matínez Celaya: 'The Castle', 2011 óleo en cera sobre tela.

#### Enrique Martínez Celaya El Cielo de Invierno

GALERÍA JOAN PRATS BARCELONA

Rambla de Catalunya, 54 Tel. 93-216-02-90 www.galeriajoanprats.com Hasta el 6 de Abril



No. 231, January 2012: Page 6

# Hermitage buys Martínez Celaya's first video

By: Anny Shaw



Film clip from The Master, 2011

The first video by the Miami-based artist Enrique Martínez Celaya, *The Master* (edition of five, priced at \$45,000 each), 2011, has been bought by the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg following its premiere at the Sagamore Hotel during Art Basel Miami Beach last month. The work, in which the artist acts out Beethoven's death, is due to go on show at the Russian Museum in the spring. Martínez Celaya, who is best known for his large-scale paintings, says working with video was liberating: "Because I don't know, nor am I interested in, the history of video, making *The Master* was freer than making paintings. My awareness of theory and the history of painting is a continuous limitation."



# L.A. Louver Presents Enrique Martínez Celaya: The Hunt's Will

November 17, 2012 by Megan Koester

L.A. Louver is pleased to present *The Hunt's Will*, a solo exhibition of paintings and sculpture by Enrique Martínez Celaya. Created over the past two years, these new works will be presented throughout L.A. Louver's first and second floor galleries. An opening reception for the exhibition, which runs through January 3rd, 2013, will take place Saturday, November 17th from 5 to 8PM.



Martínez Celaya's recent paintings and sculpture have rich narrative content that ranges from the grand to the seemingly insignificant. Each work conveys its own reality. They also interact with the other paintings and sculptures in the exhibition, offering a kaleidoscope of images as if drawn from an epic tale. Some images in the paintings belong to the imagination of a child: including ships, tigers, unicorns, dogs and birds. Other images, often in the same work, are associated with an experienced world vision: sea, ice, landscape, bullfighters, death. The friction that emerges amid these references incites surprise and nostalgia.

According to the artist, "During the years I have been working on this exhibition, I have been influenced by reflections on the life of Robert Frost, the writings of Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Hermann Ebbinghaus, Arthur Schopenhauer's essay *On Suicide*, toys, and the design of Chinese night lights for children's rooms. The biggest influence, however, was observing the twists and eddies of the movement of time."



The title of the exhibition, *The Hunt's Will*, refers to the overarching theme that imbues the work: the tension between will and choice, and how identity and longing binds this aspirational or traumatic discord. Each painting and sculpture conjures an ephemeral reality that draws on the ambiguous and mysterious forces at play as we move through life, while overlaid with accumulated memories. In the words of writer and curator Rosanna Albertini, "Enrique Martínez Celaya's visions emerge from the unwritten layers of his pre, or unconscious mind, filled with stories that are neither matters of memory, nor matters of fact."

L.A. Louver 45 N. Venice Blvd. Venice, CA 90291 http://lalouver.com/



### Monumental sculpture inspired by Cuban exodus unveiled at Hermitage

Enrique Martínez Celaya's towering bronze work explores the plight of children exiled from Cuba

July 8, 2012 By Anny Shaw. Web only



Enrique Martínez Celaya and his work The Tower of Snow, 2012

A monumental bronze sculpture by the Miami-based artist Enrique Martínez Celaya is due to be unveiled in the courtyard of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg on 10 July (until 31 November). *The Tower of Snow*, 2012, which depicts a boy on crutches carrying a house on his back, is the latest large-scale sculpture to be installed in the Russian museum's courtyard following, among others, Louise Bourgeois's *Maman* in 2001 and three reclining figures by Henry Moore in 2011.

According to Martínez Celaya, who left his native Cuba as a child, the work is about his own experience of exile, but also about Operation Peter Pan, when more than 14,000 Cuban children were sent to the US between 1960 and 1962 by parents who feared the Cuban government would take away their right to decide how their children should be educated. "It's about the anguish of those children," Martínez Celaya says. "I wanted to memorialise that event." A smaller version of *The Tower of Snow* is due to be installed at the Freedom Tower in Miami on 19 October.

Martínez Celaya's first ever video work, *The Master* (edition of five, priced at \$45,000 each), 2011, was bought by the Hermitage during Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2011. The work, in which the artist acts out Beethoven's death, is due to go on show at the museum this autumn.

### THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

D4 Friday, October 28, 2011

Miami Ice: A View of Beethoven

By: Rachel Wolff



Part of the 'Schneebett' installation by Enrique Martínez Celaya in Miami. Miami Art Museum, 2011

Inspired by Ludwig van Beethoven's death during a snowstorm in 1827, Florida-based artist Enrique Martínez Celaya has created "Schneebett" ("Snow-bed")—a series of rooms, one of which contains a bronze bed blanketed with a thick layer of frost. It's at the Miami Art Museum until Jan. 1. Outside "Schneebett," a video performance of one of Beethoven's late quartets is playing. Inside the initial corridor, a compressor system and cooling tower buzz loudly. The sonic clash is intentional: "Not only was Beethoven deaf toward the end of his life, but his head was ringing," yet he composed until the end, says Mr. Martínez Celaya, who sculpts, paints, photographs and writes. The piece was first shown in 2004 in Berlin.

Now on view
Miami Art Museum
October 14, 2011 - January 1, 2012

## The Sydney Morning Herald

Sydney, Australia smh.com.au Saturday, May 7, 2011

### **Arts & Entertainment**

### From the Heart

### John McDonald

Enrique Martínez Celaya is an overachiever by any standard. An American artist of Cuban extraction, he has been feted and praised as only the US can fete and praise. He studied to be a scientist, specialising in lasers and quantum theory, before turning to the visual arts. Since the late 1980s, he has pursued an artistic career with such energy and determination that he is now an established star of the American scene, with the mega studio and voluminous CV that goes with the job.

What sets Martínez Celaya apart from the stereotypical big-time artist is that he makes paintings and sculptures with his own hands. The more common procedure is to enlist a small army of helpers to execute museum-scale works on your behalf. Many of today's leading contemporary artists could best be described as factory managers, but Martínez Celaya's works have the Martínez touch.

Another distinguishing feature is Martínez Celaya's intellectual ambitions, which go far beyond the level at which most artists opt out. While the expression "stupid as a painter" has only ever applied to bad painters, it has to be admitted that an artist's intelligence is generally of a different order to that of a scientist, a lawyer or even a writer. Artists tend to take only what they need from a book or a visit to a museum. They are less interested in complex arguments than in memorable images.

Martínez Celaya has this fascination with images but also a formidable interest in literature and philosophy. His writings and interviews, collected in a book of last year, are peppered with references

to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and many other serious cogitators. My first thought was, "Is this for real?" A whole page devoted to a black-and-white photograph of Hegel's tombstone is enough to ignite anyone's scepticism.

But in some cases reading is believing, or at least accepting. Martínez Celaya writes well and with lucidity (which is more than I can say for Hegel). There is none of the jargon that many artists fall back on when they want to appear to be great intellectuals. It's rather like those people who think that snobbery makes them seem like gentlemen and ladies. Martínez Celaya is no snob and he has a genuine element of the philosopher in his make-up.

This raises the question as to whether a taste for philosophy makes him a better painter. If we leave aside the proposition - which I thoroughly endorse - that a taste for philosophy makes one a better person, then it is interesting to note that all Martínez Celaya's works are problem pictures. He never sets out to demonstrate an idea or theory but creates ambiguous, poetic images that give the viewer much to ponder.

In *The Cliff*, his third solo exhibition for Liverpool Street Gallery, he concentrates on the motif of a bare-chested child. In *The Giant Cliff* this boy wanders by the seashore, lamp in hand; in *The Music* and *The Sunrise*, he carries a small house on his back. In *The Brother*, the child pulls a younger child behind him in a cart enclosed in a pink bubble. It is not necessarily the same figure each time, but the motifs feel closely related.

We read these figures as meaningful but puzzling, like the figures in a dream. In the same manner as dream images they have a persistent sense of deja vu. There is a hint of the child motifs of the German romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge. There are also



The Giant Cliff, 2010

nods to Edvard Munch, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Rene Magritte, Anselm Kiefer and Francesco Clemente. None of this may be intentional, but a portrait of the artist emerges as a man with a highly absorbent mind.

To give but one example, Martínez Celaya's watercolour *The Last Reason* shows a girl eating a bird. It's impossible not to think of Magritte's painting with the uncharacteristically descriptive title *Girl Eating A Bird* (1927) in the Dusseldorf Kunstsammlung. But where Magritte's image gains its potency from its stylistic crispness and the girl's neat dress with its lacy cuffs and collar, Martínez Celaya's carnivore is a dark, murky figure with bare breasts standing beside a bare tree.

The child in these paintings is probably an oblique self-portrait but it has resonances with the motif that Robert Rosenblum called "the romantic child" - the child in mystical commune with nature, found in the works of Runge and his peers. Martínez Celaya's child belongs to an



The Last Reason, 2011

age of disenchantment in which nature can paint and draw a lot more correctly has been ravaged and despoiled. His child if he chooses, but the roughness of these is no allegory of nature's innocence and works is fundamental to their identity. abundance but a survivor of its wrath. He As a painter, Martínez Celaya aspires to portrays nature in the guise of a rocky seashore, snow-covered fields and a than the cerebral precision of Magritte. barren, muddy track.

Another picture, The Way Things Are, is even more apocalyptic, showing a crystalline sarcophagus under a dark sky lightly dusted with stars.

These images possess a bleak but powerful poetry. They are all the more affecting because of the loose, unfussy manner in which Martínez Celaya has wielded the brush. He is not concerned with the technical aspects of a painting, only with the rapid transcription of an image that haunts his imagination. One assumes he

the emotional impact of Munch rather It's a lesson for artists that it takes selfdiscipline and self-knowledge to paint expressively. The emotions need to be cultivated and channelled no less than the union of eye and hand.

The conundrum of how to express one's thoughts and feelings in a way that doesn't become illustrative or didactic lies at the heart of abstract art. Many artists consider abstraction to be a logical progression, believing that once they have crossed the line that separates them from strictly representational art there is no turning back.

ENRIQUE MARTINEZ CELAYA: THE CLIFF Liverpool Street Gallery, until May 19

# The Miami Herald

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2011

### Snows of exile: Enrique Martínez Celaya's Schneebett at the Miami Art Museum

At Miami Art Museum, Enrique Martínez Celaya's 'Schneebett' acts as meditation on death and its parallels with exile.

ANNE TSCHIDA SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

The entry into this room at the Miami Art Museum, built specifically for this exhibit and seemingly recessed from the main gallery, is startlingly dark.

A dim light ahead suggests the way forward, but meanwhile a loud humming, or more like a chugging sound, fills the space, emanating from an almost oldfashioned looking machine. Turn the corner, and a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling reveals a solitary chair, a somber antechamber. The view from the chair is of a bed, also lit by a single light bulb, which in turn has its own view out into a winter forest with trees covered in snow, bereft of leaves. Although the doorway to this third room is blocked by a low fence built of branches, look closely and the bed is covered, literally, in a frozen blanket with pillow.

The effect is stunning — both subtly gorgeous and deeply melancholy at the same time, in this installation called *Schneebett* (German for "snow bed") from Enrique Martínez Celaya, an acclaimed Cuban-born artist who has recently made Miami his home. As of next week, a video of the Miami Symphony Orchestra playing Beethoven's Late String Quartets will play on a screen outside the installation room, adding another element of dark beauty and unease.

The meaning and craft to all this reflects the man behind it. Martínez Celaya started his career as a scientist studying superconductivity and pursuing a PhD in quantum electronics before leaving physics behind for a master's in fine arts and an intense interest in German philosophy.

Fast forward to 2004, when the artist created *Schneebett* for the Berliner Philharmonie building (an early 1960s architectural prototype for later music halls), meant as a meditation on the dying days of Beethoven. Although known primarily for his pensive paintings, Martínez Celaya's remarkable installation struck a chord: here was a Cuban artist memorializing not the heyday of Germany's — and arguably the world's — greatest classical composer, but his painful last moments. Germans could understand the zeitgeist, and the installation moved on to Leipzig and was acquired by the German collector Dieter Rosenkranz.

Perhaps in a nod to the new MAM museum under construction, Rosenkranz has now donated the piece to the museum.

As the artist walks by that chugging machine days before the opening, he explains that he wants the visitor to hear it — partly to appreciate the mechanism hard at work freezing up the schneetbett in the other room, and also to relate to the composer himself, who while technically deaf, apparently mostly heard loud humming. The electrical contraptionwater-cooler also emits heat, but when entering the next part of the exhibit, an incredible blast of cold hits the intruder. In this chilled room stand the chair and frozen bed. There are no figures, but on the bed is an imprint of one: the pillow is indented, the blanket is wrinkled.

"With the empty chair, there is an absence of somebody," explains Martínez Celaya, but



Schneebett installed at the Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig, 2006.

someone who "is witness to a bed of death."

This death bed is what most intrigues the artist, as it represented the time when an incredible talent in the end lay almost alone, estranged from his father and his country — Beethoven had left Germany and died in Vienna — with little comfort, hence the ice covering. His view is of an unforgiving, empty winter landscape.

It is the ultimate fear of exile, something Martínez Celaya relates to. "Much of the regret and longing," says the artist, "is my own."



Film still from *The Master* (2011), created on the occassion of Schneebett at the Miami Art Museum.

Even the "painting" of that empty forest has several layers. It is in fact made from tar and feathers, which, claims the artist, made it harder to craft; it was a hardship he physically wanted to feel as he made this complicated work.

The painting itself reflects Beethoven's hardship, Martínez Celaya explains. Bedridden in the final months of his life with terrible bloating of his stomach, the composer was nonetheless visited by members of the German cultural elite, who wanted a piece of him. So they cut off parts of the musician's famous mane. He was left with just patches on his head, and people still claim to have bits of Beethoven's hair. "What humiliation,' says Martínez Celaya, calling it the "ultimate tar-and-feathering."

On a broader level, the time of Beethoven's death in 1827 was also a transitional time, when Europe was moving into the Industrial Age. "The spiritual and emotional desolation" of the composer's deathbed reflected that of the time, similar to the "cynicism, the numbness of ours," says Martínez Celaya. "It's a period when it's difficult to believe

in anything....but the counterpoint is the great music of Beethoven."

Yet here another unexpected meaning of the deathbed arose during the original installation, remembers Martínez Celaya. In a horrifically cynical deception, the Nazis arranged for quartets to play classical music, including that by Beethoven, in concentration camps to convince foreigners that all was good. When the artist realized the added symbolism to Schneebett, he included poetry lines from Holocaust survivor Paul Celan to the work. This is why the piece is a welcome addition to MAM. As it moves into its Herzog & de Meuron home, and with luck onto a national and international stage, the museum needs smart works that speak locally but also globally.

Here is an homage to the death of the Beethoven, centered around a bed made of ice and bronze first commissioned in northern Europe, created by a Cuban exile, with references to Jewish suffering—but which in the end serves as a testament to the triumph of human creativity.

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In a continental role reversal, Martínez Celaya takes Beethoven out of the snow and down to the blue Caribbean shore his constant backdrop, he says, to exile — in a video that will be screened at the Sagamore Hotel on Miami Beach during the opening night of Art Basel Miami Beach, on Nov. 30. "I am wearing a white wig, dressed in my impersonation of Beethoven," he says. Martínez Celaya replaces the frozen setting with a rising sun over a South Florida beach, as he dons and takes off his fake hair. Again accompanied by a Beethoven score, the sunrise breaks up and dissipates, along with the music, and this landscape too becomes unforgiving for the exile looking for home.

#### IF YOU GO

- "Schneebett" by Enrique Martinez Celaya, Miami Art Museum, through Jan. 1; 101 W. Flagler St.; 305-375-3000; miamiartmuseum.org.
- Screenings of Martínez Celaya's Beethoven at the beach video, evening of Nov. 30, Sagamore Hotel, 1671 Collins Ave., Miami Beach.

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Enrique Martínez Celaya, The Children, 2008, Oil and Wax on Canvas, 127 x 117 cm, courtesy Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York;

Enrique Martínez Celaya's paintings are nothing if not allegorical. A recent cycle of paintings, exhibited under the title *Nomad* and debuted at the Miami Art Museum in 2007, hinged upon the figure of the leopard, shown at once dead, draped around a young child's shoulders (in four different seasons), and very much alive, stalking through a wintry landscape. But these allegories are not really for us; as Martínez Celaya has noted, 'The work is fundamentally impenetrable to me. Why shouldn't it be to someone else?' His latest series of paintings offer many new images that remain equally reticent as to their existential gambit. And as with much of the artist's work, this silence can be deafening.

# The New York Times

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Courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, Calif.

"The Young" (2008), for which the artist, Enrique Martínez Celaya, mixed oil and wax on canvas — a technique he uses for many works.

### Layers of Devotion (and the Scars to Prove It)

By JORI FINKEL

SANTA MONICA, Calif.

MAGINE you're an artist finishing work for a big gallery show. You're standing on a ladder trying to reach the top of a wooden sculpture with a chain saw; the next thing you know, you've sliced open your left hand. You've

severed the tips of two fingers and nearly cut your thumb to the bone. You've hit an artery. Blood is spurting everywhere.

This is the scene that played out in June for the artist Enrique Martínez Celaya, when he was preparing for his first exhibition at the L.A. Louver gallery in Venice, Calif., which opened on Thursday and runs through January 3.

To make matters worse, he had attached the chain saw blade to a grinder for speed.

He credits his studio manager, Catherine Wallack, with thinking



Stephanie Diani for The New York Times

The painter, sculptor and sometime scientist Enrique Martínez Celaya beside one of his works in his studio in Santa Monica, Calif.

quickly, pressing his paper-towel-wrapped hand in hers, almost tourniquet-style, to staunch the bleeding and letting emergency paramedics know he was an artist. (Pity the studio intern, three days on the job, who had the unglamorous task of finding the fingertips.)

He also credits his reconstructive surgeon, Jerry Haviv, with skillfully repairing his ligaments and tendons. (Mr. Martínez Celaya says he now has 80 percent function in his left hand — which is not his dominant hand — and expects a full recovery within a year.)

As for his own reaction that day, he described it as strangely calm. "I said to Catherine as the paramedics were taking me away: 'Don't throw away the paper towels. I might want to use them in an artwork.'"

It was the reaction of an artist who has often used unorthodox materials like tar, blood, hair and feathers in his paintings. It was also the response of a highly rational, self-disciplined scientist who once worked on the femtosecond laser

as a physicist at the Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island.

Mr. Martínez Celaya is one of the rare contemporary artists who trained as a physicist. He studied quantum electronics as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, until he found himself more and more often sneaking away to paint, something he had considered a hobby.

"I found that the kinds of questions I wanted to tackle were not the questions of physics," he said. "Art is usually described as a luxury, but I felt the opposite. I just couldn't go to the lab anymore and ignore everything going on emotionally with me."

The questions he explores in painting (and in his related writings) belong to religion and philosophy: the meaning of life and death, the purpose of consciousness, and what it means to be good or do good. He is as likely to talk about Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein, or Herman Melville and Paul Celan, as Joseph Beuys and Lucian Freud.

Although he shows regularly with John Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco and Sara Meltzer in New York (and has a retrospective that will open next year at the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg), he recognizes that he is not exactly of the moment.

"So many contemporary paintings have this wink to say we're both in on the joke," he said. "Any time I find myself being witty or clever, I paint over it."

For instance, the wooden sculpture that cost him so much blood — carved from a single, 4,000-pound log of Paulownia Tomentosa, also known as the Empress tree — has the gravitas of a medieval Pietà. Only there is no body of Jesus, just a stiff girl sitting alone on a big rock in a penitent pose.

"The robe that she wears is too big for her," he said. "I wanted her to have this awkward, vulnerable feeling." The other works in his Santa Monica studio that day, another sculpture and a dozen good-size paintings now at L.A. Louver, are also lessons in isolation — sparse landscapes and astringent snowscapes, boyish figures that seem lost against the wide horizon, and animals holding their own, sometimes with no humans in sight.

The idea of exile and, more broadly, the existential condition of being separated from home haunts Mr. Martínez Celaya's work. Born in Cuba, he emigrated with his family to Madrid in childhood and to Puerto Rico as a teenager before moving to the United States for college.

Even today at 44, with a wife and three young children, he remains mobile. He has been shuttling for the past five years between Los Angeles and Delray Beach, Fla., a town, he said, that he and his wife picked out on a map. (The current plan is to live in Delray Beach year-round, and he has just sold his Santa Monica studio.) An exhibition of his work last year at the Miami Art Museum was aptly named "Nomad."

# The artist on his style: 'It's strange to love painting and be so much anti-painting.'

"Someone asked me a while back why I paint all of these images of coldness and snow," he said. "I think that's the temperature I feel inside. Isolation, solitude and loneliness, I'm always feeling the condition of things — or what you could call the illusion of things — being separate."

He walked over to a painting that shows a thin sliver of a naked boy trapped inside a tall block of ice, an image he worked on for more than two years. Part of what took so long, he said, was the inherent melodrama of the image, more surreal than most of his scenes.

"It seemed like a remarkably stupid painting to me," he said. "I even painted pine cones trying to get him out of the ice. I created cracks in the ice, but I couldn't get him out."

For all of the paintings in his studio that day, he relied on the same basic technique. He mixed wax into oil paint (about a 1-to-3 ratio), building up one thin layer after another to achieve a matte finish and translucency of color. ("Shiny paint makes me feel like I can't breathe," he said.) Some paintings have as many as 20 layers.

In the process he often painted over shapes or even human figures so that the finished canvas could contain less by way of content than it once did. One muddy, mountainous painting originally showed a boy sitting off to one corner holding the head of a deer. Now both the boy and head are gone.

In another canvas a boy stands in a deep field of dandelions, his face popping out like an overgrown flower. But the more you look, the less the image yields. There is no expressive or virtuosic brush stroke, and little realistic detail, to flesh out the figure or reveal the boy's age or size. Mr. Martínez Celaya said it was intentional. "There's not enough there to hold you emotionally. You begin to sink into a black hole."

"It's strange to love painting and be so much anti-painting," he added. "I'm not interested in luscious, sexy, virtuosic painting, but the destruction of the image, undermining the certainty of the image."

Near that work hung a darker painting of a horse in front of a forest, tethered to something out of sight. Here too there are signs of a painter making himself less painterly, as well as an empathy for animals. "It's clunky, like I like," he said. "It was hard to paint a horse as aggressively as I wanted. It wanted to be treated better than that."

This painting originally featured a white deer, but he ended up instead making a bronze sculpture of a deer,



Courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, Calif.

"The Unwilled" (2008), a work that features a boy in a block of ice.

which stood near the large western stretch of windows in his studio. From a distance it looked as though the deer was pulling a sled, in a possible reindeer reference.

Only this is no garden ornament. The sled turns out to be a small bronze model of a Rocky Mountainstyle landscape, complete with peaks and lakes. And the deer has moments of realism, not to mention testicles.

Still, the creature, now installed in the roof garden at L.A. Louver, remains elusive in many ways. Its bronze surface is highly reflective (waxed, not patinated), and the artist imagines that it will shimmer like a mirage for visitors. "It's a little like a magic trick," he said, "trying to make something as solid as metal vanish a bit."

Then there are the seams on the deer's legs and torso, where the welding process has etched faint rainbows into the metal. Mr. Martínez Celaya decided not to smooth these seams so he could "expose the sculpture's constructed nature."

And now, after his accident, the ridges have new meaning for him.

He glanced down at the deer's legs, then held up his left hand.

"The seams on the deer look like scars to me," he said. "I feel even more of a connection to him now."



### Enrique Martínez Celaya: Coming Home Before and After Schneebett

#### DANIEL A. SIEDELL

I DO NOT THINK ABOUT WHAT I HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN; I THINK ABOUT WHAT I AM GOING TO WRITE-WHICH IS USUALLY WHAT I HAVE ALREADY WRITTEN, LIGHTLY DISGUISED.

JORGE LUIS BORGES

A work of art acquires meaning over time. This is true for the artist as it is for the viewer. The production of new work sheds light on previous work, either by extension, differentiation, or as autocritique. This is perhaps truer of Cubanborn Enrique Martínez Celava than of a lot of artists working today. Although trained as a painter, Martínez Celaya also produces sculpture, photography, drawings, installations, as well as prose and poetry. Moreover, he works in and through the art cycle, series, or project, all of which provides the overarching idea behind the overwhelming diversity of his artistic means.

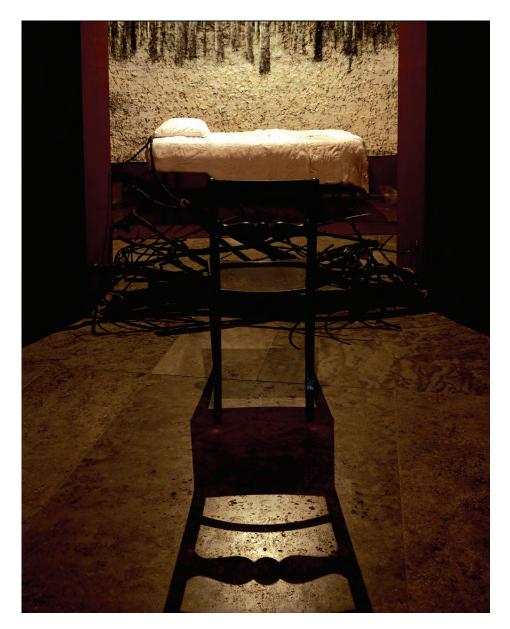
Martínez Celaya does not always determine beforehand a particular cycle or series. These will often emerge in the course of his practice. Perhaps starting work on a series of photographs feeds into his paintings while also prompting some written response that gradually brings forth the faint contours of a project, unified thought, or feeling. Or





occasional writings might lead to chance representations that end up giving shape to a former memory or experience. However, there may be other serial implications that emerge only retroactively, years after the work has been completed. This is due not only to his predisposition toward making ever finer adjustments or finishing touches, but also his conviction that past actions or deeds cannot be reclaimed without somehow inviting revision, which by necessity excludes them from ever being "finished" in any material

or existential sense. His work is almost Wittgensteinian at times, with his elaborate system of sets and subsets to be inevitably abandoned in favor of new ones, which in turn must also be replaced or at least rebuilt. Attributing critical significance to a Martínez Celaya series is thus almost always a retroactive as well as forward-looking procedure. In this way his work is deeply rooted in St. Augustine's Confessions, which argues that knowledgethe so-called "stomach of the mind"- is a theatre or rumen of memory.



Nowhere is this digestive process more evident than in the sandwich of two of Martínez Celaya's more ambitious sculptural projects (he prefers to call them "environments"), Coming Home (1999-2001) and Schneebett (2003-04). Although both are canonically discrete works, they relate closely to one another. In fact, they relate so closely as to be in direct correspondence. First exhibited at Griffin Contemporary in Venice, California in 2001, Coming Home was reinstalled this fall in Lincoln, Nebraska. Initially shown in Berlin in 2004, Schneebett was reprised in Leipzig this summer, only a few months before the repetition of Coming Home. The two shows should thus be understood first as a diptych, a

transitive or ramified elaboration, achieved over a six-year period (and still counting). However their close relationship is not, as these reprises suggest, merely chronological, with the earlier of them merely "suggesting" the latter. Their independent histories and meanings are far more inextricably entangled.

#### **COMING HOME**

Coming Home features a boy, molded from tar, feathers, and wire, bowing to a gigantic, dissolutive elk made of the same materials and with a mirror set between its antlers, which the boy's downcast gaze seems to avoid. The installation also included a series of photographs and works on paper painted with emulsified tar and feathers, which extended and elaborate on the pivotal boy/elk confrontation.

The tar and feathers used by Martínez Celava lend the scene a rancid atmosphere or debasement and abjection. implying that the encounter between selfhere a self-in-formation or even under-selfand other is fraught with personal or philosophical uncertainty. Furthermore, these base materials allude to the artistic process itself, being nearly impossible to work with, and, given their putrid odor, offering a great challenge to Martínez Celaya's physical and mental endurance. This is why his figures possess a somewhat tentative or barely described form, appearing almost on the brink of collapse. But it is not quite accurate to say that what remains lack "finish," for they do not look as if they could ever be pulled together, resolved, or made whole.

It is easy to imagine the sculptural duo standing in for the youth's anticipated or distantly recalled encounter with a brute force of nature-in this case, a forest deity of "Erl-King" (which is the artist playing the role of ambivalent father). There is a narrow gap between boy and beast, not only heightening the impression of the sudden and miraculous latter's appearance, but also inviting the viewer to pass through it himself, thus confronting his reflection in the mirror perched precariously between the elk's antlers. Although Martínez Celaya claims he didn't make the connection at the time, this primal scene recalls the legend of St. Eustace, who before his Baptist was a Roman general under Trajan named Placidus. One day he went out hunting and saw a stag coming toward him with a crucifix between his antlers, crying out-"Placidus, Placidus, why persecutes thou me. I am Jesus Christ." The general believed and was baptized, along with all his family. But the Emperor was so furious he had Eustace, his wife and children placed inside a brazen bull and burnt to death. The long religious and artistic pedigree of this encounter (St. Eustace kneeling before the miraculous stag was a favorite subject with Medieval painters) has always emphasized the fuliginous moment of recognition, of instantaneous Aufklärung or metamorphosis.

On the other hand, Coming Home could be thought to materialize from the unusually redolent imagery of Martínez Celaya's 1999 poem "October," which invokes autumnal reflections on the ephemeral, transition, and, as Thomas McEvilley has suggested,



purification, supposedly initiated by some encounter with death.2 (It is important to note that the poem also spawned another project, the October Cycle [2000-04], a series of 23 paintings presented at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in 2003 and the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale in 2004.) Yet the Griffin "environment," acquired in toto by businessman Dieter Rosenkranz, was only part of the Coming Home project, which also included photographs, drawings, and other related documents, material that would all come to play a central role in the formative, yet to be realized diptych.

#### **SCHNEEBETT**

Perhaps Martínez Celaya's most ambitious project to date, *Schneebett* (Snow Bed) owes its title to a 1959 poem by Paul Celan, whose stark yet powerful language remains an important catalyst for the artist's visual as well as literary work. This complex splitroom environment, created for the Berliner Philharmonie, offers an aesthetic reflection on Beethoven's long and painful convalescence in Vienna, culminating in his death in 1835.

Like Coming Home, Schneebett challenged Martínez Celaya's fortitude, obliging him to start, as he says, "from a

disadvantage," that is, from the very real possibility of failure, whether technical or conceptual. The focal part is a partially divided room in which lies a lifesize bed cast in bronze, which, through the complex workings of an elaborate (and even incongruous) refrigeration system, is frozen, festooned with ice-just like a mortuary bed. Beyond it, acting like the room's window, is a painting of a birch grove in tar and feathers, not unlike what Beethoven must have looked out at while reflecting on his dwindling life. At the threshold of the room are a stack of birch branches, a poem called "Poisonwood" written in German on the wall, and finally a chair. This chair is meant for us. It is here that, while contemplating the cold and empty bed of snow and ice, we contemplate our own "bed of death," as Heidegger called it. Yet despite this melodramatic aspect, Martínez Celaya says the installation is not intended as "a diorama (...) recreation of [Beethoven's] room, but an exorcism of the spirit of the room as it was." Schneebett would thus be a place of silence, of banished or resurgent thoughts, deep in the recesses of a performance hall where the faint echo of Beethoven's music can still be heard. According to the artist, the work represents "one embodiment of a possible final moment. It's the memory of a room as the room remembers the demand of being."3

"To the pensive wood I am driven," Beethoven yearns in his deeply introspective song cycle, *An die Ferne Geliebte* (1816). It is this precise yearning that is recalled by the birch

grove painting and branches straddling the transition between both sides of Schneebett's divided room, translated here as a "pensive wood" for Beethoven's (and our own) dying moments, inviting remembrance and retrospection. "When Schneebett opened at the Philharmonie," Martínez Celaya recalls, "I saw the public waiting in a line to see it and the orchestra playing Beethoven's late concertos in the lobby. I was humbled by the futility of Schneebett, and I love it more for it. That day my mind was filled with thoughts of Beethoven as a boy."4 It would, however, be two years later, after Schneebett's reprise at the Museum der bildenden Künste in Liepzig, when the boy resurfaced in Martínez Celaya's thoughts.

In fact, this image of Beethoven's youth reappears via Coming Home. Dieter Rosenkranz donated the work's sculptural components-the boy and the elk- to the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery at the University of Nebraska Lincoln in 2005, which also recently exhibited them. Coming four years before Schneebett, Coming Home already anticipates the latter's major themes. Now, Schneebett can be seen to have even prefigured Coming Home.

#### COMING HOME AT THE SHELDON

The Sheldon's reprise of *Coming Home* is very different from its pre-*Schneebett* incarnation. Martínez Celaya chose to omit the drawings and works on paper that first accompanied the sculptures in 2000. This time there are nine



ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA, (TOP TO BOTTOM) BOY IN LIGHT, THE GARDEN, 2006, TAR, OIL & WAX ON PAPER MOUNTED ON LINEN, 60 X 37 IN. COLLECTION OF THOMAS & ODETTE WORRELL. SCHNEEBETT, 2004, BRONZE, REFRIGERATION UNIT, BIRCH BRANCHES, PAINTING (OIL, TAR & FEATHERS ON CANVAS), INSTALLATION DETAIL.COURTESY OF THE BERLINER PHILHARMONIE. COLLECTION OF DIETER & SI ROSENKRANZ.

photographs, which variously depict the elk, the boy, and an enigmatic nude female standing in a birch grove, her body painted a birch color with two arrows on it, one pointing to the name "Celan." We even see the boy lurking on a Californian beach. But the most significant new addition here is undoubtedly the wallpaper compose of nine-foot fragments of an as yet unrealized photograph of the same female nude. Titled *Woods*, the wallpaper wraps around the entire gallery and generally acts as a support for the photographs, which are directly applied this wraparound backdrop.

The environment of Coming Home is dark and gloomy, depriving the viewer of a firm footing or sense of distance. Unlike Schneebett's chair, which sits just this side of the threshold overlooking Beethoven's deathbed and the woods beyond, here the viewer is thrust directly into the spectacle of a birch grove, itself mimicking the matted branches one has to cross when "passing over" or through the aforesaid portal. In return, Woods confounds the sense of visual integrity normally afforded by the presence of white spaces or gaps between individual works in an art museum. Martínez Celaya enfolds or papers over this modernist, Neo-Kantian separation. But Schneebett is not just about space or living-and-dying room, it also gives places to or takes time, repeats itself in and because of the passage of time.

In reprise or in time, *Coming Home* is recast through the lens of the death or mortuary bed. Can it be that this

encounter with the other, which elicits such an ambivalent response from the boy, is precisely what we in turn fall prey to, from which we gain such a bittersweet morsel of spiritual comfort? It has been said that life is one long preparation for dying well, that our entire life's work is brought to bear in that moment such that we do not merely confront death, but look beyond it, see it from behind or beneath (like Orpheus), from across the divide of the "complete" or finished self. Can dying somehow complete the encounter as an open invitation, as something as tentative or incomplete as the whole of life itself?

Coming Home repeats the beginning of life (art) from the vantage point of impending death (finitude). At the end of life, one reflects back across a distance from a position of maturity, as an imaginative, strictly Augustinian "recollection" of the past's presence. From the perspective of the art process, the work retraces an original founding gesture, which is also the point of departure from its suddenly remembered death or closure.

Neither Coming Home nor Schneebett portrays a particularly flattering or comforting image of human nature. The Erl-King suddenly appearing out of nowhere at the height or glint of noontime, reemerges at the twilight of life, when once again the fate of dissolution looms before us. In an early sketch by Martínez Celaya, which sheds light on Coming Home's bipolar deportment, he observes: "I have been interested in the spaces covered or

created or made apparent by thought (rational) but not explained by it-the possibility." Coming Home BEFORE Schneebett projects hope in or at least deferral to the future, Coming Home AFTER Schneebett implies a terminal memory that does not so much forgive or forget, but makes possible. As Borges said, "what is left at the end of our memory." And perhaps, in this context, before and after Schneebett, it bears remembering.

**Daniel A Siedell** is Curator at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture garden, University of nebraska, Lincoln.

Notes: I. Jorge Luis Borges, Conversations, ed. Richard Burgin (University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 242.2. Thomas McEvilley, "Martínez Celaya: No Horizon Line," in All the Field Is Ours, exh. cat. (Griffin Contemporary, 2003), 5-10.
3. Enrique Martínez Celaya, lecture at the American Academy in Berlin, October 10, 2004. 4. Quoted in "Schneebett," Martínez Celaya: Early Work (Whale & Star, 2006). 5. Borges, 4.





ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA, COMING HOME, 1999-2006, RE-INSTALLATION DETAILS, SHELDON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN, AUGUST 22- OCTOBER 29, 2006. COLLECTION OF DIETER & SI ROSENKRANZ.



*The Leopard*, 2005. Bronze, marble, earth and tar sculpture on table. 46 x 67 x 35 in. (117 x 170 x 88,9 cm.) Courtesy of LA Louver Gallery, Venice, California.

### Enrique Martínez Celaya The Rhythms of Life

#### **CAROL DAMIAN**

It may be said that artists and the art historians forge the master keys that open the mysterious locks to our senses, to which originally only Nature held the key. They are complex locks.<sup>2</sup> Enrique Martínez Celaya is an artist who thrives on such complexities as he explores the media of painting, photography, and sculpture from the perspective of a scientist, philosopher, poet, and intellectual. One may also be tempted to describe his search for the answers to life's meaning as that of an existentialist, an analytic philosopher seeking "truth"

in human existence through artistic expression and creation. The work of Martínez Celaya is informed by his intellectualism and by his sensitive responses to the world around him, especially to nature and family. He studies with the intensity of a German thinker and makes fine distinctions in his work using critical theory that he has mastered as an artist and teacher. These serious pursuits have even resulted in the establishment of a publishing company to create texts and guides to assist his students in understanding the primary sources of theoretical literature.3 A combined commitment to the production of art and the history of art is what elevates Martínez Celaya's work above the mere application or fabrication of materials.

The quiet intensity with which Martínez Celaya approaches the making of art is best understood after learning his biography. Born in Palos, Cuba, in 1964, he first studied art at the age of eleven with an academic painter. In 1972, his family left Cuba for Spain, where they suffered the extraordinary trauma of exile, a dark experience that would never leave him. After another move to Puerto Rico, the young Martínez Celaya quickly demonstrated his precocious talent as a scientist and earned a scholarship to study applied physics and electrical engineering at Cornell University. He then continued his studies with graduate work in quantum electronics at the University of California at Berkeley, where he was supported by a fellowship from the Brookhaven National Laboratory. He also published poetry, built a laser, and received awards from the Department of Energy and National Congress of Science. He explains his proclivity for science as an escape from the chaos of exile and displacement, as a refuge of precision and order within a world of confusion. Science appealed to him because it was a constant search for truth, the same search that is so evident in his work as an artist. After Martínez Celaya's years of scientific investigation, however, the artist in him finally emerged when he left the PhD program to pursue a Master of Fine Art degree and follow his passion. After living for many years in California, where he taught and pursued his career as an artist, he moved with his family to Delray Beach, Florida, and now enjoys a quiet village life and a view of the sea. It is impossible to discuss the work of Martínez Celaya without recognizing the dual nature of his genius (what is often referred to as "left brain/right brain" sensibilities) and the effects of his life experiences, from the past to the present.

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Martínez Celaya uses the process of creating art to understand these life experiences and their effects on his everyday reality. Often, as he begins to layer paint, tar, photographs, drawings, words, and other materials on the surfaces of his canvases, he is not sure what will evolve, or how. He can work on a painting for months, reworking, adding, scraping, and layeringsometimes destroying and beginning again. Some of his most powerful works involve the application of tar and feathers, materials that imply history and violence. Tar is like blood; both are natural, viscous substances, yet Martínez Celaya gives them new meanings as life substances with dark overtones. He also uses blood as a medium with its own unique characteristics. His faith in the medium and the process results in what he describes as "projects" or "cycles" rather than "series".

The publication of his most recent book, *Martínez Celaya: Early Work*, presents an opportunity to focus on some of his latest works (2004–06) within the context of his career (1977–present). The book is divided according to his projects, which have been compiled from his studio archives of photographs, sketches, and reproductions of the works, and they

reveal that, for the artist, "The urgency of certain interests and methods always had their moment. The projects follow the rhythms of life, often mapping my inadequacies more than my strengths."4 In the book, the images are organized in reverse chronology, and this decision encapsulates the work ethic of Martínez Celaya, who explains that: [in] conventional chronologies a linear progression is assumed: early activities seem inevitably and almost deterministically to lead to subsequent or later activities that tend to fix the meaning and significance of the past... The organization suggests something else. The past is not causally linked to the present, but is alive, active, and a source of continued reflection and interpretation.5

This is an important statement that suggests an evaluation or discussion of his work from a conceptual rather than linear perspective. Certain subjects appear again and again: the boy, children, the sea, trees, mountains, animals, and birds. However, in each project, they take on new meanings with a wide range of emotions and aesthetic expressions.

Boy in Vitrine, 2004. Paint, dirt, tar, straw, pins, hair, steel, plaster, glass, wire and flowers 64 x 17 ½ x 14 in. (162,5 x 44,4 x 35,5 cm.). Courtesy of Akira Ikeda Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

"By their true nature rhythms and tunes are copies of anger and mildness, courage and temperance (with their opposites) and all the other qualities of character."

—Aristotle, *Politics VIII*<sup>1</sup>



*Tree in Snow*, 2002. Oil, wax and tar on canvas. 100 x 78 in. (254 x 198,1 cm.). Sammlung Rosenkranz, Berlin, Germany.



Schneebett, 2004. Installation at the Berliner Philharmonie. Sammlung Rosenkranz, Berlin, Germany.



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The boy who appears so often in Martínez Celaya's work may be seen as the artist's alter ego, a vision of self-exploration. He is a monumental presence as a life-size sculpture made of paint, dirt, tar, straw, steel, glass, and flowers (*Boy in Vitrine*, 2004); he is a subtle reflection of the child coming of age (*Boy Raising His Arms*, 2005); and he floats above the ice-blue sea, as rapturous as he is brooding in other works (*Boy and Iceberg*, 2005). The boy appears often: solitary, in shadow,

in photographic reality, in paintings, drawings, and installations. Is he the frightening tarcovered vision in bronze on a marble table in *The Leopard* (2005), who lies there with a gavial in the process of being devoured by a leopard?

Such dark imagery once earned Martínez Celaya the nickname "Prince of Darkness." His *October Cycle* (2000–02) with its origins in philosophy, poetry, and complex life experiences, was meant to "function as

Boy in Sunset, 2005. Oil and tar on canvas and mirror. 72 x 144 in. (182 % x 365,7 cm.). Collection of Akira Ikeda, Japan.



The Two Worlds, 2007. Oil and wax on canvas. 116 x 150 in. (294,6 x 381 cm.). Collection of Ron and Ann Pizzuti, Columbus, Ohio. Courtesy of the Sara Meltzer Gallery.



icons, an aesthetic form that invites contemplation of the transcendent through the immanent." Martínez Celaya describes it as: [an] extended metaphor exploring the relationship between the seasons and the transition in human life. The large paintings are covered with emulsified tar combined with oil paint and solvents to generate a compelling surface with colors ranging from blacks and browns to warm, rich tones of amber and rose. The imagery of trees, figures, and falling snow emerges as notations of experience—and traces. 8

What at first may appear as dim and mysterious, as in Man and Sky (2002) and Tree in Snow (2002), upon close examination reveal traces of white and rainbows beneath the surface that speak more of hope than of darkness and evoke a mood of scientific inquiry transformed into an alchemical ritual. Has the scientist/artist now become the artist/scientist? Martínez Celaya is and has always been both; now, he has substituted instruments of precision for the rituals of a shaman. Art is an act of transformation, like science, poetry, photography, and music-each is significant to Martínez Celaya's aesthetic.

Music is the subject of one of his most provocative projects: Schneebett (2003–04) was inspired by the death of Beethoven and reveals the artist's fascination with the genius composer. The project involved an intense period of research and work that concluded with exhibitions in Paris, in Aspen, at the Berliner Philharmonie in 2004, and at the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig in 2006, where the work was installed in a bed of snow. The installation of Beethoven's deathbed at the Philharmonie was based on drawings of the actual bed. It was a refrigerated bronze bed, with its pillow and sheets made of frost; it was placed against a large painting of a snowfilled birch forest, and the horizon line was meant to symbolize the view from the composer's room and the transition from life to death.9 Dead birch branches from the nearby Berlin Tiergarten

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completed the effect of a cold, contemplative environment. The cold climate of Nordic places, which has appeared in Martínez Celaya's images of romantic mountain landscapes and floating icebergs, was brought inside: death is winter.

In Florida, there is no winter, and the past few years have forced a change of mood in Martínez Celaya: a lighter palette interrupts the brooding tar paintings that continue to be part of his oeuvre. Two projects, The Atlantic (2004–05) and Shore: "Is Today Yesterday?" (2004–05), 10 are the first to be presented in his new book, according to his reverse chronology, and may be seen not only as a new direction for the future but also as a summation of the past. Shore was inspired by a question asked by Martínez Celaya's three-yearold daughter and by the transitory experience embodied in a camphor tree that he saw one day as he biked along the shore road. A visual commentary on the illusion of permanence, the project is "an environment of works in which children and the landscape articulate concerns of identity, displacement, and mortality." His children play a significant role in his life and his work. However, they are never simply the objects of artistic invention or fatherly pride but important participants in his creative process. In Shore, the minimal work has a quiet intensity that marks Martínez Celaya's aesthetic of absence. Figures emerge from beyond a ghostly presence to become phantoms integrated in new environments, with the sand and sea. Boy in Sunset (2005) is a large diptych with a mirror. A boy, with arms outstretched, stands against a dark background created from oil and tar; the glow of a sunset forms a halo. He is about to fly and appears like a mythical figure surveying his territory. A mirror disrupts the space, forcing the image into an ordinary space, a studio or gallery, and breaks the reverie.

In *The Atlantic* (2005), Martínez Celaya reveals his relationship with the tropical landscape of Florida, its blue sky and seas and exotic trees that thrive in the



*The Mountain*, 2003. Oil, wax, varnish, graphite and tar on canvas. 72 x 66 in. (182,8 x 167,6 cm.). Private Collection, Berlin, Germany.

warm moist air. He describes the smell of the place as "a complex Southern mixture of death and melancholia that some around here call excitement." The haunting presence of a small boy appears often in this project. In Boy Against the Horizon (2005), a life-size figure made with ink on canvas, the photographic quality of the figure is a counterpoint to the painterly background of the sea. This figure appears again in The Water (2005), an elegant abstraction of sea and human form. The juxtapositions of time and space and disparate media lead to a different perception of Martínez Celaya's ideas, which he uses to create a total concept.

A huge diptych, *No Title* (2006), commissioned for the exhibition "The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama," dominated

Martínez Celaya's studio in recent months. Beside the large painting, a mirror of equal size reflects the viewer and his/her space as much as it serves as a dislocating element that visually invades the wall and the space itself. The image of a storm dissolves, with lightning as a metaphor for conscience. It is streaked with a substance that turns out to be blood, which expresses the temporal, yet there is a strangely sublime and calming effect as Nature shows her power. It is not a violent image but rather an oasis of calm and peace amidst the drama of nature.

While he was preparing for exhibitions and residencies in Europe, Japan, and the United States, Martínez Celaya embarked on another project based on the work of the Russian poet Osip Mandelshtam for the Sara Meltzer Gallery in New York City



Boy Against the Horizon, 2005. Ink on canvas. 72 x 52 in. (182,8 x 132 cm.). Courtesy of Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, Colorado.

(May–June 2007). The exhibition's title, "Awaiting a Second Plan," simultaneously confessed failure and hope. This hope was of interest to Martínez Celaya as he explored the philosophical and the poetic through memorializing Mandelshtam's wife as the metaphor for solitude in *The Two Worlds* (2006, Figure 11).

Inspired by the cycles of nature, the works of Enrique Martínez Celaya follow the rhythms of life as sensual references to the illusions of the real and the imaginary. They proclaim the right of art to soar and to invade the territory of the intellect and the scientific with a material literalness that ranges from the luminous and ephemeral to the depths of the obscure. I am grateful to Enrique Martínez Celaya for the

opportunity to interview him at his studio and to preview his new book and work in progress.

#### **NOTES**

- 1. Aristotle, Politics, 1340A, in E H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen series, 1956), 359.
- 2. E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen series, 1956), 359.
- 3. Enrique Martínez Celaya, Guide (Los Angeles: Whale and Star, 2002), and Sketches of Landscapes (Readings on the Philosophy of Art) (Los Angeles: Whale and Star, 2002). Whale and Star Press is the artist's publishing company.

- 4. Enrique Martínez Celaya, in Martínez Celaya: Early Work (Delray Beach, FL: Whale and Star, 2006), 11.
- 5. Daniel A. Siedell, in Martínez Celaya: Early Work, 5.
- 6. ElisaTurner, "The Prince of Darkness," Miami Herald, March 7, 2004, 3M and 5M.
- 7. Daniel A. Siedell, Enrique Martínez Celaya: The October Cycle, 2000–2002 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2003), 21. Catalog for exhibition at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden. The exhibition, curated by Daniel A Siedell, traveled to the Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, in 2004.
- 8. Siedell, artist's comments, 82.
- 9. Schneebett: An Installation in the Green Room at the Berliner Philharmonic, Berlin, 2004–05. Comments by the artist, New Work, 104.
- 10. Shore. "Is Today Yesterday?" has been exhibited as Part I in Berlin and Part II and Santa Monica, California in 2005.
- 11. Collection of the Sammlung Rosenkranz, Berlin, Germany.

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## **ART PAPERS**

### ENRIQUE MARTINEZ CELAYA SEATTLE

Enrique Martínez Celaya's paintings, watercolors, and one small bronze head were recently on view in the exhibition Splinter. Return [Greg Kucera Gallery; April 6-May 13, 2006]. These works visualize various states of consciousness - fragility, loneliness, delicacy, haunting, and meditation. Martínez Celaya's roughly surfaced paintings build an unstable physical setting for images of young boys quivering on the edge of visibility, anonymity, and consciousness. Tar is the paintings' dominant medium. Figures emerge from a ground that is at times blank or left unpainted. At other times, an oil line is painted over the



blackened tar surface. The figure almost disappears in a sea of darkened tar in the large painting *Your Will*, 2005.

Martínez Celaya's male figures are all about the same age as the artist was when he moved from his native Cuba. He changed homes every other year, moving to Spain and then to Puerto Rico, until he was eighteen. Such constant relocation requires inner resources. One must detach oneself from one's immediate surroundings and focus on soulsustaining constants. In Martinez Celaya's paintings, tar and blood are these constants. Tar suggests suffocation and toxicity. Blood, especially dripping references sacrifice and suffering in Catholic contexts. Young, nonsexualized boys float in a dark place filled with thin lines of blood, and only an occasional light, in many of the works on view. They are not quite in our world, nor in other worlds, living inside their heads in places that are invisible.

Blood Landscape, 2006, is drawn with blood on white paper. Here, the pale outline of a boy is juxtaposed to a delicate tree. Theirs is a silent relationship, the coexistence of two discrete entities rather than a conversation. The tree is also the more energized of the two figures. The camphor tree's odor is a major reference in the artist's statement about the exhibition. Here, it exudes life, reaching out to

nourish the child, who may be inhaling its fragrance.

Invoking an aura, an iceberg appears behind the boy's head in *Boy in Icy Landscape*, 2006. Light is cold and solid in this larger canvas also drawn mainly with blood. The boy projects an inner life. He seems to be praying, detached from his surroundings. Across from this painting, *Tu Sonrisa Miguel*, 2006, is paired with an identically sized mirror, which reflects *Boy in Icy Landscape*. These two works become a pair – one cold, the other warm, one somber, the other almost smiling.

In the exhibition's last section, a pair of hand-colored lithographsa boy and a girl - faces a large photograph. The boy in the lithograph and the boy in the photograph wear identical transparent and diaphanous blue shirts embroidered with vines. Apparently, the artist depicted the shirt, and then had his father make it for the photograph where, looking blankly into the distance, the artist's young cousin inhabits a limbo similar to the spaces in Martínez Celaya's paintings.

The artist has lived his entire life in intensely sunny environments. In his art, however, Martínez Celaya deliberately turns away from the sun's seductive brightness, seeking escape in a darkness that he finds more profound. He refuses society's distracting lures in order to explore the profundity of the soul.

- Susan Platt

ABOVE: Enrique Martínez Celaya, Boy in Icy Landscape, 2006, blood, watercolor, and charcoal on paper mounted on linen, 60 x 37 inches (courtesy of the artist and Greg Kucera Gallery)

# Art in America



Enrique Martínez Celaya: Gabriela's Laughter, 2002, oil and tar on canvas, 77 by 60 inches. Collection Herta and Paul Amir.

## In a Silent Season

While often working in a multiplicity of mediums concurrently, Cuban-born artist Enrique Martínez Celaya remains acutely aware of the limitations of each. A recent retrospective and a new cycle of paintings highlight the contradictory impulses at the core of his enterprise.

#### BY LEAH OLLMAN

They say each person is an island, but its not true, each person is a silence, yes, that's it, a silence, each of us with our own silence, each of us with the silence that is us.

- José Saramago, The Cave

Enrique Martínez Celaya's recent 10-year survey exhibition, organized by the Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, had all of the textural richness of a fugue. His paintings contain strata of concealed imagery and sometimes embedded objects, like feathers, artificial flowers, butterfly wings and hair. Dirt and flower petals float in his resin sculptures of body parts, and poems appear incised upon their surfaces. His photographs are occasionally painted on, after being printed from negatives he has altered scratched. interweaving and layering feeds into the reciprocity of the artist's working process.

His written notes might invoke a sculptural idea, which in turn might generate a poem or give rise to a painting.

Since the conclusion of that show's tour last year, Martínez Celaya has created a spare yet intimate new group of paintings, "The October Cycle." He showed the work-concurrently at Griffin in Venice, Calif., and Danese in New York-in uncharacteristic isolation, without the company of corresponding work in other mediums. Between this purer mode of presentation and the work's own emphasis on fundamental emotions and conditions (tenderness, sadness, grace), "The October Cycle" came across as uncommonly concentrated, less like a fugue than the clear, resonant tone of a single bell.



No Doubt Good Writing, 1995, charcoal and collage on paper, 17 by 16 inches.

Though physically imposing in size (up to 10 feet wide), the paintings feel restrained, purposefully quiet. Painted in oil and varnish on grounds of emulsified tar, their surfaces are dark and rich, fertile as humus and as primal. They oscillate between thick and thin, matte and glossy, dense and translucent. In places, paint drips in thinned streaks down the canvas. In others, the artist furrows into deep, viscous tar. An animate darkness presides. The warm, brownish black evokes neither night nor despair, but a primary condition, a place of beginning, anterior to light and language. Into this rich silence, Martínez Celaya voices his world, one element at a time. A man. A tree. Snowfall. A rainbow.

In the stunning Gabriela's Laughter (2002), named after the artist's young

daughter, an adult figure in pale outline half stands, half sits in darkness. Brilliant light cascades from an intensely radiant source above, fanning out and enveloping the figure in its blessing.

Laughter and light, as suggested by the title, have converged into a single affirming force. *Light* (2002) has an urgent, brooding kind of beauty familiar from the landscapes of Albert Pinkham Ryder. The simplest denotation of a tree, a trunk dividing upward into two thick branches, appears against placeless black. As in *Gabrieia's Laughter*, light redeems this darkness, too. A muted luminosity emanates from the crotch of the tree, as if it had been nesting there, a dense glow spreading its pale, thinning rays.

Rugged textures and translucent veils in the paintings convey a sense

# The fragmented body parts in Martínez Celaya's work conjure larger discontinuities within physical experience and enduring memory.

of shifting space, space-in-process. These are staging grounds for becoming, rather than fixed locales. Martínez Celaya named "The October Cycle" after the startling transition in seasons that he experienced for the first time at the age of eight, when he moved to Spain from his native Cuba. October became, for him, a metaphor for premonition and revelation. A few years later, his family moved again, to



Milk, 2002, oil and emulsified tar on canvas, 100 by 78 inches. Courtesy John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco.

Puerto Rico. He had begun studying art as a child, and he continued developing as an artist but simultaneously proved himself something of a prodigy in philosophy and science, publishing papers by the time he was a teenager.

As a college student, Martínez Celaya relocated to the U.S., earning his B.A. in physics from Cornell University and continuing with graduate study in quantum electronics at the University of California, Berkeley. He switched to the graduate art program at Berkeley but left after a short while to work at a laser company (where he took out several patents in laser technology) and to paint. He later enrolled at U.C. Santa Barbara, where he earned his M.F.A. in 1994, and moved to Los Angeles, where he has remained, teaching at Pomona College.



Map, 1998, oil on fabric, 48 inches square. Collection Stephen Cohen, Los Angeles.

The figures that have recurred in his paintings over the past decade are vaguely male but have no specific identities or detailed features. Their one consistent quality is their inwardness. Their eyes are nearly always closed, and their backs curve in a slight hunch, as if reflexively protecting a fragile interior. These are portraits of the introspective self, reckoning with the circumstances of loss, transcendence, memory and impermanence that have shaped Martínez Celaya's sensibility. The experience of never living two consecutive years in the same house until he was 18 exiled him repeatedly from his past and forced upon him the condition of the stranger with perpetually unfinished business. For him, looking became synonymous with looking back.

Last year he published Guide, a fictionalized account of a dialogue



House of Arms, 1998, wax and titanium dioxide, 27 inches long. Collection Stephen Cohen.



The Empty Garden, 1997-99, oil, tar, and objects on canvas, 84 by 100 inches. Collection Christopher and Tracy Keys, Laguna Beach.

about art and its meaning that he had with an older mentor while on a road trip up the California coast. In the book, Martínez Celaya allows himself two voices, one in quoted conversation with his companion, and the other silent and italicized, augmenting and second-guessing the first. His process pivots on both faith and doubt, he writes. Faith in a medium's possibilities fuels his efforts; doubt in its capacity to measure up to the intensity of lived experience infuses those efforts with an aching sense of displacement.

Working in numerous mediums concurrently, he remains acutely conscious of the limits of each. He wrestles, through his work, with the prospect of meaning being located just beyond the boundaries of expression. In *No Doubt Good Writing* (1995), he painted in white over a page of his own writing, then adhered the page to a larger sheet blackened by charcoal. "I could not live with what I had written," he has stated in regard to the work, "but I could live with the writing denied." A cycle of searching, defining and undermining plays itself out openly here. It's a process that is also at work in early canvases that the artist cut, then stitched back together, and in the recent paintings, with their images buried under layers of blackness. Clashes between affirmation and denial, repair and violence, redemption and loss all lend their friction to his work.

In the early '90s, Martínez Celaya reduced his vocabulary to a modest set of primary images that he has used ever since: the human figure, birds, trees and flowers. He practices a kind of blunt poetry of essentials, stripped of small talk, using a palette of charged, basic tones-milk, earth, blood and light. The hummingbird appears frequently as a metaphor for consciousness. Its own duality-fragile yet sturdy, delicate yet aggressive, capable of stillness within continuous movement-mirrors the mind's synthesis of opposing impulses.

Heads and hands also recur often in Martínez Celaya's work, usually in isolation. In the 1998 painting *Map*, the image of a pale, truncated arm dangles unanchored upon a ground of florid upholstery fabric soaked blood-red. Thin red lines trail across the arm, more like branching rivers than veins. Martínez Celaya, like Guillermo Kuitca, asserts the validity of a personal, bodily geography, in which demarcation of territory parallels the articulation of experience and meaning. In *The Empty Garden* (1997-99), a large silhouetted head seems to have fallen like a dead weight into a lower corner of the canvas. The neck drips like a fresh wound. Feathers stick into the milky white ground near the chin, and small, rolled scraps of canvas poke through slits in the surface. The mouth hangs open, bereft, as dispossessed of speech as the feathers have been deprived of flight.

In Rosemilk the visual overlap of split tree branch and cruciform torso reads as romantic - a confluence of spirit, body and nature.



Rosemilk, 2002, oil and tar on canvas, 78 by 120 inches. Private collection, Corvallis, Ore.

The fragmented body parts in Martínez Celaya's work evoke larger discontinuities within physical experience and memory. A head or bird's wing or flower petal invokes the larger whole from which it is detached. It channels our attention to what's absent. What isn't represented then becomes emblematic of what cannot be represented-an entirety, a full understanding of the workings of consciousness. That polarity between the possibilities and the limitations of representation (again, faith and doubt) drives Martínez Celaya, and links him, soul to soul, to the poet Paul Celan (1920-1970), whose writings have served as his touchstones for the past decade.

Celan, a Romanian-born Jew, lost his parents in the Holocaust: his father died of typhus in a concentration camp, and his mother was shot. After the war, he resettled in Paris and ultimately drowned himself in the Seine. Though he wrote in German, he struggled against its loaded status as the language of his enemy. In part to reinvent the language, and to reclaim it, he conjured a wealth of neologisms, compound words that compress multiple associations into singular, densely emotive form: breathturn, threadsuns, smokemouth, madnessbread, sleepscraps.

Martínez Celaya conjoins disparate images in much the same way, adhering rose petals onto the silhouette of a head or setting birds across a figure's eyes and mouth. In one of the new paintings, *Rosemilk* (2002), he superimposes images of a split tree branch

and a cruciform torso with outstretched arms, The visual overlap reads as romantic-a confluence of spirit, body and nature.

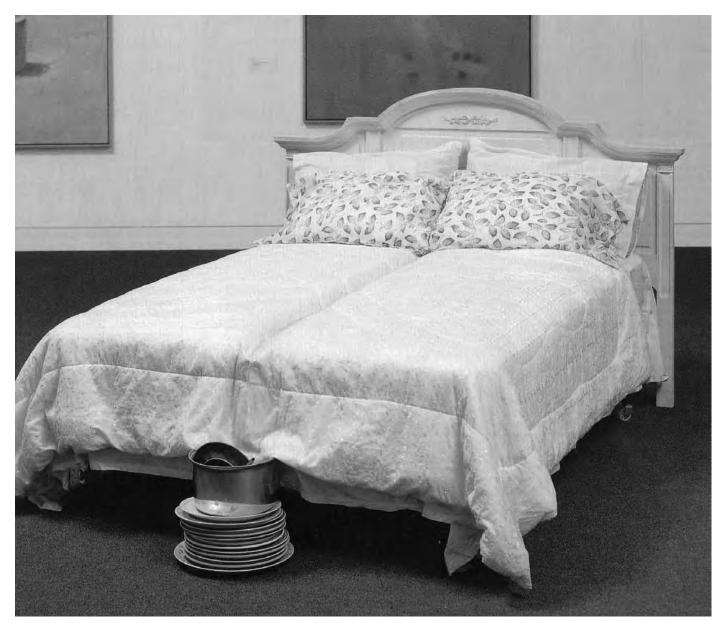
Martínez Celaya's work shares with Celan's a common texture and attention to essentials-the seasons, hair, breath, stones, sleep, death, love, loss, the darkness of

earth and the whiteness of snow. His images, like Celan's, are concentrated to the point of irreducibility. Memory inflects his every gesture, and silence in his work assumes fullness arid palpability. His cast-resin heads and caramel-colored arms have the import of sacred relics, bringing the lost forward into the present.

In Bed (The Creek), a 1997 installation, Martínez Celaya staged a stunning reconciliation of love and pain on par with Celan's call (in the poem "Speak You, Also") to "keep yes and no unsplit." The double bed, neatly made with two sets of pillows and an embroidered spread, exuded domesticity, stability, intimacy. Sourced somewhere between the pillows was a stream that coursed steadily through a resinlined trough running down the center of the mattress. A kitchen pot atop a stack of plates caught the water at the foot of the bed. The water was nourishment, perhaps, vital arid cleansing. But its path split the bed into two separate banks, unbridged.



Frankness (Work of Mercy), 2000, gelatin silver print, 60 by 43 inches. Neuberger Berman collection.



Bed (The Creek) 1997, water, resin mixed mediums, 22 by 60 by 85 inches.

In his paintings, Martínez Celaya both cuts and mends, buries and excavates. He pairs the extremes of tar black and milk white. Throughout, he reckons with time's duality - its generosity in bestowing beauty and love, its violence in canceling them both out. He trusts the authority of silence and the truth in contradiction. "Is the record of our loneliness the best we leave behind of ourselves?" he asks in *Guide*. It may be so, but it also may be enough. In the record of Martínez Celaya's inner silences, there is profound beauty, and it proves to he a powerful form of communion.

1. Ann Trueblood Brodzky, *Unbroken Poetry: The Work of Enrique Martinez Celaya*, Venice, Calif., Whale and Star Press, 1999, p.16.

2. Paul Celan, Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan, trans. John Felstiner, New York and London, W.W. Norton, 2001.

Paintings from "The October Cycle" were on view at Griffin in Venice, Calif. [Oct. 19-Nov. 30, 2002] and at Danese in New York [Oct. 18 - Nov. 16 2002]. The complete series will be shown at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln [openinq Nov. 21, 2003], with additional venues to be announced. The survey exhibition "Enrique Martínez Celaya: 1992-2000," organized by The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu traveled to three US venues in 2001-02. It was accompanied by a catalogue with essays by Charles Merewether, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Rosanna Albertini as well as an interview with the artist by Howard N. Fox.

Author: Leah Ollman is a critic based in San Diego and, most recently, the author of The Photography of John Brill (Kent).



### Interview: Enrique Martinez Celaya: Self & Beyond Self

May 2, 2003 by Richard Whittaker



I first met Enrique Martinez Celaya while he was still teaching art at Pomona College. Our meeting had an element of serendipity. Acting on an impulse, while visiting Claremont, California, I took a walk on campus and found my way to the art building. He was teaching a class that day and I got to the room just as his class ended. Walking in, I introduced myself and, to my surprise, the artist already knew the magazine I founded, works & conversations. We quickly found we shared some essential questions and agreed to continue a conversation which began that day in such a propitious way.

The more I learned about Martinez Celaya, the more I was struck by the unapologetic depth of his intent in his work, and its frank sincerity. It has always seemed odd to me that such a path should be difficult in today's artworld. It's well known that Martinez Celaya brings with him an impressive background in science, having essentially completed his PhD in quantum electronics at UC Berkeley. He is also well read in philosophy and literature. In truth, Martinez Celaya's gifts are many and formidable. Few artists I've met are better suited to attempt an art born of the basic questions that, earlier, were understood as rightfully belonging to the world of art, philosophy and religion.

Over a year passed before we met for this interview. I talked with the artist at his studio in Los Angeles.

**Richard Whittaker:** I can't help feeling you've come an amazingly long way having left science only a few years ago, but I don't really know your history. I know you were living in Spain as a child.

**Enrique Martínez Celaya:** Yes, my family emigrated from Cuba to Madrid in 1972, and then to Puerto Rico a few years later. Spain, back then, was not an easy place for foreigners, but the difficulties and the lack of distractions helped strengthen my relationship to drawing, so when we moved to Puerto Rico I became apprentice for a painter and took courses at the academy there.

RW: What academy was that?

**EMC:** La Liga del Arte de San Juan. Most artists from the island, at one point or another, have been associated with it.

**RW:** So when you were apprenticing to a painter, how old were you?

**EMC:** I was around ten or eleven.

**RW:** Would you talk a little about your apprenticeship?

**EMC:** At first I did many still-life drawings, pastel portraits and copies of Leonardo's paintings—not very well. As I got older that interest in academic drawing continued, but it took the form of narrative paintings—allegories of what was happening around me. I still have a few of those paintings, and I really like some of them.

By my mid-teens expressing my feelings didn't seem good enough anymore, so I devoted more time to physics, which was appealing, partly because it gave me access to an emotionally simpler world. Physics held the promise of an orderly life.

The summer I turned sixteen, I worked for the U.S. Department of Energy and built a laser in my spare time. But I continued to paint and read and was fortunate that at my high school everyone was encouraged to explore all disciplines.

**RW:** What was this school you're describing now?

**EMC:** It was a school founded in the nineteen-twenties by the University of Puerto Rico as an extension of the College of Pedagogy. By the time I was there it had evolved into one of the best schools on the island.

RW: What a great stroke of luck!

**EMC:** Yes. It was. My life would not be the same had it not been for that school, especially its bully and its principal. Back when I enrolled, it was a custom for the upperclassmen to grab new

students by the arms and legs, like pigs, and humiliate them by forcing their butts onto a pipe located in the middle of the courtyard. I got the treatment three times, so I modified a kitchen knife to stab the ring leader, a bully named Chelo, next time he tried to bother me.

Luckily, I laid the knife on the desk of my high school principal before I could use it. And that exchange, which could have gone many ways, started a relationship that lasted the whole time I was there.

**RW:** With these gifts, sometimes one feels the wish to give something back.

**EMC:** Yes, when I started teaching, one of my motivations was to give back some of what I had benefited from; to put myself out there, to be honest, and to be interested.

**RW:** You're teaching art at Pomona College right now, although you've tendered your resignation, something I'd like to ask you about later; but a basic question arises; you must have thought about this: what is of value—potential value—in the pursuit of art and art making? I don't see our culture as particularly supportive of the fine arts, and yet you are teaching that; and that is what you yourself are deeply involved in. A big question.

**EMC:** Many people want to change the world in a big way, but that's difficult to do in art, or in teaching. Broad political work is better done in the streets. In the classroom, or with an artwork, the transformations are one at a time. And if in ten years you touch twenty students, that's great. Maybe some of them will push forward and make something out of it.

**RW:** Driving out, I was thinking about this thing we call "art." We say "art" and have an idea, vague, but an idea of what that means. Art is something, right? But the concept of it we have today is not old, historically. What? Four or five hundred years old?

**EMC:** About that, maybe less.

**RW:** So we read that whatever we now look at and call "art" was totally integrated with some societal, institutional form in the past. Then, at some point, the phrase appears, "art for art's sake" which, in a way, defines this separation; that there's something we call "art" that stands alone. Can art really have some kind of meaning without an integration in some other structure?

**EMC:** I think this separation you are referring to began with the Enlightenment. When Kant proposed that art must be disinterested, he erected a barrier that we should now tear down. Only art for life's sake makes sense to me. And by that I mean art as ethics—a guide clarifying one's choices and life.

**RW:** You've made a connection there between ethics and the process of clarifying for yourself, your own life. I've never heard it put that way before. Ethics and coming to a clearer understanding of oneself. Can you say anything more about that connection?

EMC: I don't see any useful distinction between understanding of oneself and understanding of

one's duty. I think that much of what we are shows up in how we view what's right and wrong and how consistently we live by that view.

**RW:** "What is the Good?" In a way, that's the foundational question, as I hear you. And it's not an abstract question, right? It cannot be an abstract question. When the question becomes abstract, when people speak of "the good" and there's no connection with a real person, it becomes very dangerous, it seems to me.

**EMC:** Being ethical away from the world is easier than when we are involved ourselves. I think some people see the path of abstraction as pure, uncompromised, but it's a purity of avoidance instead of distillation of what's essential. And that goes for art too; artists who insist on removing their work from human struggles take an easier path, an easier path that seems particularly wasteful when we know that many live themselves in turmoil and confusion.

**RW:** Intuitively, it seems to me that among artists there's some form of the wish—if not always consciously—to find what truly comes from one's self. The need to find my own thought, my own step, my own perception. It's a profoundly difficult thing to do, but when one has that experience does that not, in itself, give meaning to one's life?

**EMC:** To find one's self in a gesture or in an artwork, even if vaguely, becomes a hint of our possibilities, which invigorates life with the sense of purpose. Of course, these discoveries don't happen everyday, but struggling against one's limitations is often good enough to give meaning to one's life.

**RW:** There's always our egoism—I don't mean that pejoratively, it's just a fact; but intuitively, one knows that's not the whole story of "who I am." So isn't it confusing to say, "What the artist can discover is him or herself?" Maybe that's not so clear. Would you agree?

**EMC:** Much confusion comes with the "am" in "who I am." There's much in oneself that has little to do with individuality, per se, but which instead is part of a much larger continuum. To discover one's self is also to discover one's connection to the world. As one recognizes these connections, a prison sometimes becomes apparent; the prison of what we've established or imagined ourselves to be. For instance, wouldn't it be nice if something were to come out of my mouth that I do not expect? Of course. But it's unlikely.

**RW:** Oh, yes. Now the students at Pomona College are a pretty high-level group, and I don't know if they're representative of this, but I get the impression that among young people today, "deep questions" are thought to be unacceptable? They're "cornball," or something. Do you know what I'm getting at?

**EMC:** Yes, big questions can be exposing and ungraceful and many students stay away from risks like that, and if a student is not willing or capable of taking risks, there's not much one can do as a teacher. Nothing that matters can be solved with "put more paint on the canvas" or "let's talk semiotics." But it's not just them. I think we are evolving into a society afraid to pose certain

questions because we're too embarrassed about the implications.

**RW:** I was reading a post on an email list where discussions often got pretty interesting. In a philosophical exchange, one fellow wrote, "Courageously—grin, grin, face burning with shame—I'll admit that I'm interested in meaning." It's a curious thing, this cultural milieu where one would feel this sort of apology is necessary.

**EMC:** The average person still says, "I'm interested in meaning." It's only among the intellectual elite that the need for meaning has become a sign of weakness. I think many contemporary intellectuals consider "claims of meaning" to be in inverse proportion to mental refinement.

**RW:** Sometimes it seems there's almost an attitude of pride among the most rigorous reductionists—"I'm strong enough and smart enough to take it."

**EMC:** In my experience many of these people are enamored with science's authority and want to make themselves into scientists of the arts and humanities, which leads to nothing but fancy terminology, detachment and those attitudes you mentioned. Of course, there are works, or thoughts, that are too soft because they have no emotional tautness or intelligence. But there are also works and attitudes that are "hard" in a very facile, predictable way. The look of objectivity—the arcane language, the pseudo-science journals, the hard expression in the eyes—only points to what science is not.

**RW:** Yes. Clearly, one sees this. That's well put.

**EMC:** I remember the first time I saw *works & conversations*. I was curious, but not very hopeful. As I began reading I was surprised by your courage, surprised that somebody intelligent was willing to take risks. I think you're going exactly where people need to go if they want to change things. But doing that requires a certain willingness to not wear the badge of the "cutting-edge" intellectual.

**RW:** That makes me think a little about the avant garde. For quite a while the whole concept has come under question. But there's still this tendency to aim for shock value, an old avant garde strategy. Look at Damian Hirst, for instance, just to take one example, and maybe oversimplifying it a bit. This has all long since become a convention of the academy. I think what you're saying has some relationship to this.

**EMC:** The idea of the avant garde has become a fanciful convention of the ruling class it once disrupted. Now, the bourgeois collectors, institutions and galleries are out there looking for the new, the different and the shocking. Hirst is not challenging the bourgeoisie or its values, but rather catering to its expectations of hyper-fluff, amusing theatrics and restaurants, without ever annoying them where it hurts. I think the reactionary work of Thomas Kinkade poses more of a threat to the art elite than the work of Damian Hirst.

RW: Interesting point. I've said before that what would be radical and shocking nowadays

would be something that's quiet, and that doesn't call attention to itself, something that requires your time and attention. That'd be shocking. Do you know what I'm saying?

**EMC:** Yes, I think you're right. Anything that demands serious and sustained engagement is revolutionary today. We are in the age of entertainment. I don't think the last century will be remembered as the age of computing or nuclear power, but the age when entertainment finally took over our consciousness. Now, most other fields—art, politics, war—are defined through, and in relationship to, their entertainment appeal.

Not even Orwell could have imagined that in our time, control and uniformity would be accomplished without the built-in cameras and microphones, but with family programming and by cultivating interest in all superficial things. And unlike 1984, it's hard to see a way to rebel, because dissent is now part of the rules.

**RW:** Dissent—I wonder if there are other words which would also be worth thinking about? That's a word that points you in a certain direction just like the word "subversive" does. But to become more present, to find something more real. The system doesn't care, one way or the other, I'd say. Language is problematic.

**EMC:** I understand what you're saying. It's uncomfortable to speak this way, but it's a battle against loneliness, against the dissolution of the idea—problematic as it is—of quality.

But I do agree with you that language gets us in trouble. Every time I give a talk there's someone in the crowd who says, "Yes, I know exactly what you're saying." And as they continue to speak, I realize that they misunderstand me.

**RW:** Well, yes. I struggle with this myself in pretty much the exact way you describe it; this problem with language. In so many areas the available words are essentially dead. One searches for alternatives, mostly without much success. "The middle ground" for instance; it's not as dead as a lot of phrases, but still, it's burdened with dismissive associations...

**EMC:** ... and it's always heard as some sort of compromise between the two sides.

**RW:** And you know, there should be some pretty good associations with "the middle." The center. Balance. If you're off-center, eccentric, which in the art world, I suppose is thought to be a virtue, it means you'll fly off in some direction. A high level of energy combined with a lack of balance isn't so good.

**EMC:** "The middle" is difficult. It usually rubs against the edge of language which leads to confusion and misunderstandings.

**RW:** It comes to me that there is a word that bears a deep relationship with some of the things we're talking about. Being. Now that's a term we don't hear used too much. One thinks of Heidegger here. It occurs to me that when one is connecting ethics with the pursuit of art, as you described earlier, as a search for clarity, clarity of one's self first, would you not also be willing to say that it's also a search for being, for one's own being?

**EMC:** Yes, I think you're right; many of Heidegger's ideas are helpful in thinking about the connections between self and world.

**RW:** And anyone who loves Heidegger's thinking, as I do, is dismayed by the Nazi connections. Yet I cannot reject the quality of his thought, so much of it. Do you ever feel hamstrung about that?

**EMC:** Not really. Our lives, unlike fairy tales, have contradictions that resist resolution, and to insist that these shouldn't exist is to invite falseness. Heidegger's mistakes and weaknesses don't cancel his contributions, even if some people try to argue that his Nazism was already brewing in his philosophy. I hope that the value of my own work is not measured by my human frailties.

Even more challenging than Heidegger, in this regard, is Wittgenstein. He wasn't a Nazi, but he was both saintly and cruel. And I don't think that the similarities between them are just lives with contradictions; their philosophies have a great deal of connection, even if not always apparent.

**RW:** Well, Wittgenstein pretty much reduced what we can say to language games, right? No deep questions need apply, I guess. But with Wittgenstein, there's this category of "that of which we can not speak." And he also said, "that which can not be said, sometimes can be shown." This is pretty interesting, don't you think?

**EMC:** Yes. And life, like art, is one way "to show." Wittgenstein wrote about logic, mathematics, language, color, but the concerns that seemed most important to him—ethics, belief, spirit—he lived. And as a moral man facing the contradictions that I spoke about, he struggled with himself and judged his actions by standards that he often failed.

Maybe this goes back to the beginning of our conversation. To talk about ethics, to talk about what is good or bad is interesting, but somewhat useless and academic. To live life with integrity is the thing. And the purpose of art is to support and clarify that endeavor.

**RW:** I'm reminded that you've tendered your resignation, of a tenured position, too, at one of the best colleges on the West Coast. I wonder if you want to say anything about that?

**EMC:** It was a hard thing to do. I thought about it for three years before I did it. My approach ultimately failed and that is, partly, why I quit. I couldn't teach in the environment of the institution as it existed and be happy about it.

To give up a tenured position in the fickleness of the art world is a huge decision and, possibly, a stupid one. But I felt I was moving in the wrong direction by staying there.

**RW:** This is not the first time you've made a big change like that. You were just on the verge of taking your doctorate in physics and you made a big turn there, didn't you?

EMC: Yes, and that decision was especially difficult, because I knew I was going to hurt my

parents. Despite my fellowships, they had made many sacrifices to put me through school and dreamed of me being a great scientist. When I told them "I want to be an artist," I couldn't offer any assurances of success. I definitely felt foolish, careless, leaving the promises of my research at Berkeley. But I still did it.

**RW:** Maybe it's the only way. It brings me back to your concern with ethics; a life in which one embodies what one represents. Wouldn't you say that we face these questions, and that we don't know the answers? It's necessary to take a step sometimes in order to find out.

**EMC:** Yes. And also it's an added motivation when the one direction has shown it has no answers. I might not know where the answer is, but I know where it isn't. To realize that there's no answer in something is an important breakthrough. Then, it's just a matter of coming to terms with the personal sacrifices one has to make. There's nothing unclear in that. There may be pain. But that's different.

Martinez Celaya resigned his tenured position in the art department of Pomona College not long after the date of the interview. He left Los Angeles and moved to Florida where he now has his studio and his publishing company, Whale and Star. His work continues to be widely shown.

## OCEAN DRIVE

### Artist Enrique Martínez Celaya is Summoned from on High

By Brett Sokol



ABOVE: Enrique Martínez Celaya with an unfinished painting, one of four comprising his installation at New York's Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine later this month. BELOW: Martínez Celaya with his 2001 sculpture Constellation



Let's dispel the rumors. If you've spotted any of the similarly clad studio assistants inside artist Enrique Martínez Celaya's new 18,000-square-foot Whale & Star compound in Wynwood, you may have been stopped short by the crest on their dark T-shirts. No, that emblem of a large white whale leaping up out of the waves and towards a beckoning star isn't announcing the Miami arrival of the Church of Scientology. But the evocation of Herman Melville's transcendental whale is absolutely intended to be ecclesiastical in tone. And Martínez Celaya is determined to spread the gospel—at least as he sees it—via an ongoing series of Whale & Starhosted workshops, guest speakers, residencies for visiting artists, a publishing house and, not least, his own striking artwork.

"I want painting to function in my life the way most people want religion to function in theirs," Martínez Celaya says, sitting inside one of Whale & Star's rawly cavernous studios. "I was born Catholic, but my relationship with the Catholic Church has always been complex." He declines to elaborate on any formal break, but admits, "Leaving the church created a vacuum inside me. My interest in philosophy, in art, is to fill that void."

It's a process that has come full circle as part of a commission for New York City's Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine—one of the largest cathedrals in the world and hallowed ground among many of that city's parishioners and artists alike. Martínez Celaya joins a select pantheon, from the jazz pianist Duke Ellington to sculptor Kiki Smith, who have been invited by the church's directors to create a site-specific work. His own contribution, set to be installed inside the cathedral later this month, includes four massive paintings—each stretching 15 feet high and 11 wide. However, it's not simply this enormous scale that has challenged Martínez Celaya—his solo installations have already filled sprawling spaces from the Miami Art Museum to the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig, Germany. (Another overview of his work is set to open at Manhattan's Museum of Biblical Art concurrent with the cathedral pieces.)

"In the church, you have to address that people are coming there with real concerns in life: They lost their kid in Afghanistan, or they're praying about something else very serious. These paintings will have to stand against that."

Though only partly finished when we spoke, the four cathedral-bound canvases already carried an arresting power, both in their thick, viscerally beguiling brushstrokes and in their visual associations. In one, a young boy (whose facial structure and closely cropped hair eerily resemble those of Martínez Celaya) balances on crutches while doggedly moving through a blooming field. The outline of a house tied to the boy's back has been erased, though the rope itself remains—part of Martínez Celaya's daily tweaking: "Now it looks like he's pulling the landscape, which seems like an interesting idea. And perhaps truer to what my feelings are." In one of the other paintings, a man stands embracing a horse, a nod to the biography of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who in 1889 came upon a horse being whipped in a town square. As legend has it, Nietzsche threw himself upon the horse's body, desperate to stop the beating. Amid the subsequent commotion he collapsed. When he finally awoke, it was in an unhinged mental state that persisted until his death in 1900.



FROM LEFT: A 2007 installation in St. Mary's Cathedral in Limerick, Ireland, included the artist's *The Boy Raising His Arm*; Martínez Celaya's oil-on-canvas piece *The Garden (Pasternak)*, 2009–2010

"There's nothing in any of Nietzsche's writings that indicated he was an animal lover," Martínez Celaya offers. Indeed, Nietzsche, who notoriously glorified the Übermensch, had little compassion for the struggles of the common man, let alone his beasts of burden. "I found it to be a moving gesture, yet also a strange one. It didn't fit. It was an apologetic gesture of a life that could've been lived differently. I like what that says not just about Nietzsche, but also about all of us. I think of all the times I wished I myself had stopped to hug that metaphoric horse." A dramatic path to redemption? Sure. But Martínez Celaya's life is full of sharp turns. Born in Cuba in 1964, he and his family left for Spain, and later Puerto Rico, when he was a child. At 17 he moved to the United States to study physics at Cornell University, a track that immersed him in the world of superconductors and cuttingedge technology. On the verge of completing his PhD in quantum mechanics at the University of California, Berkeley, he abruptly changed course, trading in his array of lasers for an easel and a can of paint. Leaving behind his nonplussed colleagues at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, he eventually became a successful figure in the Los Angeles art firmament.

Yet LA also seems to have left him wanting more. So here he is in South Florida, having moved across the country with his wife and three young children (and a fourth due just in time for December's Art Basel fair). Eight months into this relocation he remains ambivalent—as a Cuban exile who says he has never felt a connection with "celebrating the Calle Ocho aspects" of *el exilio*, as a Latino artist with little affinity for the locally dominant currents of Latin-American art, and as an art instructor suspicious of the Miami art world's key boosters.

Still, while he continues to eschew the poetry of José Martí for that of the Romanian-Jewish exile Paul Celan, "It's important that people in positions of power here are Latino. I want my children to grow up seeing that. In Los Angeles everything in Spanish was, 'Don't Step on the Grass!' or, 'There's a Camera Watching You!"

As for Miami's status as a burgeoning art metropolis, "There are a lot of people with a lot of financial interest behind the idea of a 'Miami School' of art. The fact that a unique school of art

will spontaneously develop because a city is close to the water, or has a particular nightlife, seems very unlikely. But these people are vested in trying to sell this idea to their constituencies. There's always a price for that: Either it quickly cooks artists who need more time to develop, or it makes deserving artists invisible when they don't fit within the 'school.'" So why stay? Moreover, why focus Whale & Star's outreach programs on a milieu he clearly finds not only lacking in academic rigor, but also desperately seeking approval in all the wrong places?

"I love Miami's sense of insecurity!" Martínez Celaya responds with a laugh. "A city with insecurity has potential. The reason San Francisco hasn't produced anything culturally interesting for a long time is because it's too selfsatisfied. The same is true of Boston. It's very difficult to be an artist in an environment where people just want to get together and celebrate how great they are." He pauses, now seemingly speaking as much about himself as any nascent art burg: "A city needs to be striving to become better than it is. Out of that friction something good gets produced."

Photographs by greg minasian (martínez celaya), sculpture courtesy of la louver gallery, los angeles; courtesy of whale & star (painting, installation); painting courtesy of simon lee gallery, london



#### ENRIQUE MARTÍNEZ CELAYA

#### GALERIA RAMIS BARQUET

For Enrique Martínez Celaya, as for the Romantics, imagination is a faculty of perception, one that unlocks the mysterious world loosely referred to as spiritual. Apprehended in rare moments, the forms of this world are at once allusive and singular, familiar and private, perceptible and fleeting. "Unreal" in the rationalist sense, they are nonetheless the portents on which the quality of our living seems most deeply to depend.

Celaya's recent exhibition, "Drafts of a Landscape," featured large, primarily white paintings on black velvet, as well as more intimate works on paper. A master of texture, the Cuban artist uses velvet to conjure a sense of translucent depth in which seemingly alien or angelic beings-by turns fierce, staid, menacing, and gentle-inhabit the auras of the solitary, often ghostly human forms that dominate the canvases. Mostly depicting inky, brackish landscapes haunted by hallucinatory creatures, the works are stark yet intensely lyrical and reflect an arresting nature mysticism. The human figures gracefully occupy an imaginary spate every hit as phenomenal as the everyday world-a space in which plants, rain, shells, and animals share our very being as participants in a collective experience of life.

It is a tribute to the artist that one cannot distinguish between the features he has subtly yet intentionally articulated and those that our perception cobbles together out of chaos, chance gestures, and inchoate forms. It's this involvement of the abyss-which, as Nietzsche understood, can stare back-that makes the tranquil expressions of the solitary persons in such



Enrique Martinez Celaya, Spoken For (The Merciful), 2000, oil, wax, and gesso on velvet, 96 x 108".

paintings as Man and Dog(Loneliness) (all works 2000) and *Rain (The Wanderer)* read as urgent, not sentimental, In the watercolor Dove and the Lightest Wood, a modeled adolescent figure at the edge of a forest gazes with bashful sincerity past a flurry of blood -red brushwork that could represent the flight traced by the title's dove but could also he a witch (or at least her broom), an attacking medieval Chinese warrior, or a spoked wheel, each above a flaming lotus blossom, It's as though the artist is pointing out the attitude we adopt in this world and how that determines the nature of our experience, individual and collective.

Another feature that mitigates the initially naive-seeming lyricism is the bleakness of many of the paintings. If these works engage fairyland, they are not without quasi-nightmarish intimations of our more common realm. *Rain* (*The Wanderer*) features a solitary figure amid

streaklike silvery-white raindrops that resemble mercury, introducing a sense of the poisonous concomitant with the alchemical. And the occasional metaphysical nuance tugs the emotions gently back toward thought, as in Resolution. Only after approaching this canvas does one notice that a circle has been thinly drawn in the silhouetted head of the work's lone figure, who appears to be standing up to his elbows in water. In the middle of the circle is a smudgy, dark brown mark, caused by the artist ending his brushstroke, that could almost carry some arcane cuneiform Inscription. The contrast between the obviously symmetrical, intentionally rendered circle and the more random seeming mark enhances the enigma of each. Neither arbitrary nor pretentious, these are passionate, complex, and deeply moving paintings.

-Tom Breidenbach