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CHEN LONG-BIN

George Sánchez-Calderón *
Bronwyn Taylor * Alexander Seton
* Mongolia: L. Gankhuyag * Reviews



figure is a small female figure. They are both within a fertile and desolate landscape, with painstakingly painted and detailed foliage: the rugged, barren hills upon which the foliage grows are rendered in inky blacks.

Floating above the scene are three islands roughly carved from the landscape seen in the installation. If the installation showed the island of Java as an entity, here the three parts, West, Central, and East Java are separate entities, each fighting the other and resulting in distorted and dismembered bodies and krisses. Other smaller works have the same theme, using aluminum, resin, pigment, and thread (polyurethane coating), while the *Expanded Dreams* series is in brass, resin, pigment, thread.

Entang Wiharso is one of Indonesia's foremost contemporary artists. His art is a complex mix of memories in which frictions of identity and discrimination and cross-cultural love and intimacy intertwine with visions of the future in which past and present flow into each other.

Carla Bianpoen

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HONG KONG

Héctor Velázquez at Puerta Roja

It is not often that one is stopped in their tracks at a sculpture exhibition these days, but this was the case with Mexican artist Héctor Velázquez's solo show entitled *Unfolding Bodies*, which included work from the past decade. Here is an artist for whom the elegant and the grotesque, the illuminating and the sinister coexist quite comfortably, each speaking to the other's qualities without contradiction, indeed enhancing them. The collection of works here—heads, hands, faces, arms, and so on—was unique in its forms and their volumes, their materials, and their placement on stands as well as protruding from the walls or hanging from the ceiling.

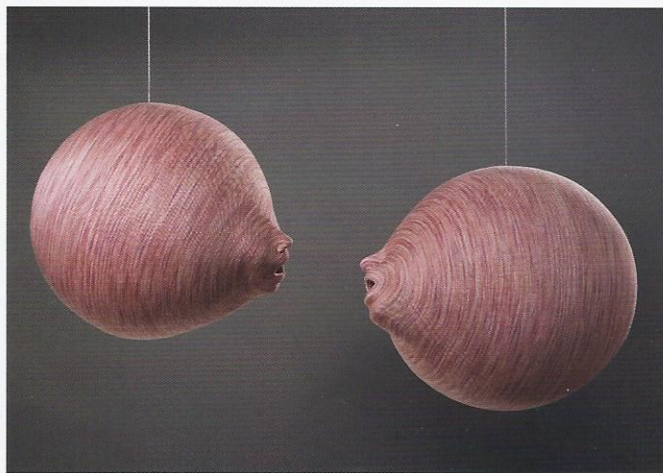


Above left: Héctor Velázquez, *Double Self-Portrait*, 2007, cotton yarn and polyester resin, 33 x 24 x 18 cm. Edition of 3. **Above right:** Héctor Velázquez, *Héctor Open*, 2005, cotton yarn, textile and plaster. 220 x 120 x 22 cm. Edition of 1.

The collection exudes a discomfited search for identity. Also there is a reserved demand by the artist that his work be touched to reinforce that identity. There is also the sense of a cerebral quest among the beautiful and the distorted for something spiritual. It is no accident that Velázquez's vision suggests the ethereal for he comes from a dynamic and ancient culture that reveres the dead and the world of the spirit. His experience has also been tempered by European art-training and cultural sensibility. However, above all, there is something magical about Velázquez's vision and his emotional depth. His sense of the magical is not only influenced by his rich and varied colors and line but also by his startling physical

juxtapositions and an extraordinary sense of the physical, one that borders on the visceral; one that suggests the physical trials of life before the fall.

Although Velázquez's works are not exceptionally large, their physical and surreal presence demands space. This surreal characteristic or quality demands that, if one wants to absorb the totality of their physical presence, one has to move about without obstruction. Take, for example, *Héctor Open* (2005), which shows his fine use of plaster, fabric, and yarn to hint at a living being. This dramatic figure is disconcerting: its amputated hands and feet and screaming visage speak to a variety of metaphorical narratives from primitive religion or abhorrent violence to love and even to death's rituals.



Héctor Velázquez, *The Kiss*, 2002, cotton yarn and polyester resin, 135 x 65 x 85 cm. Edition of 3. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Puerta Roja, Hong Kong.

Such an image is neither pleasant nor comfortable but it is a forceful reminder of just how powerful figurative art can be and why figuration remains a significant part of a true sculptor's art.

Perhaps the most obviously surreal work is *The Kiss* (2002), two suspended bulbous heads pouting at each other: their lips will never touch—it is the thought that is more important here than any physical contact. Here, Velázquez is, as in many works, more involved in the spiritual aspect of his art. This work, which is as far from the Auguste Rodin's literary sculpture *The Kiss* (1889) as possible, draws a smile. There is also such a surreal element in *Entanglement* (2010), which may also be read as a landscape of human elements.

Velázquez's hands are elegant works that signal and are clasped perhaps in prayer, but they somehow lack the visual power of his heads and his busts, which would not be out of place in any science fiction tale. These heads and busts, with the exception of the beautiful red *Double Self-Portrait* (2007), are anonymous. They are also quite alien visually as in the quietly dramatic *Jazmina* (2002) and *Toumani* (2010). What is striking about these works—beyond their beautifully realized forms—is the richness and beauty of the artist's colors. It is the colors rather than the enigmatic expressions on each face that drew me to these works and that fixed their images in the mind.

The world of Héctor Velázquez is one in which silence reigns, in which reality and fantasy compete for separate identities and for the recognition of the potential of these. It is also a world that is deeply spiritual and emotional, yet at the same time a world that is anonymous, one in which the viewer must work imaginatively to add identity to the works, which is something that one suspects Velázquez wants us to do.

Ian Findlay

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