

## The World of Hector Velázquez

OCTOBER 15, 2012 | BY HONG KONG TATLER

ARTS

Our guest writer discusses the sculptures of one of Latin American art's rising stars

To behold Hector Velázquez's works – intricate and often entangled sculptures weaved together with multiple layers of yarn – is an invitation to touch. Certainly, that was my first reaction when I gazed at *Entanglement* (below) at Puerta Roja for the first time. Like any good sculpture, the sense of the tangible and the material form of the object simply defies the best photography, and in the end the photographer is bound to throw up his arms in frustration. More than anything, sculptures are three-dimensional bodies that lend themselves to be touched and the aesthetic pleasure they afford is beyond

one of disinterested, contemplative pleasure in the Kantian sense, but an emotional experience that connects the viewer to the artist through the medium of sculpture.

clear



This is particularly true of Hector Velázquez's work. First of all, rather than the more conventional wood, bronze and stone, he has chosen that most domestic and pliable of materials, the homely yarn, which evokes an immediate warmth and intimacy not always associated with sculptures. Speaking to gallery owner Adriana Alvarez-Nichol, she said the artist was inspired by indigenous Mayan women of Mexico, who spend much of their time spinning and weaving. As it turns out, the homespun yarn is an inspired choice that communicates extremely effectively the primal bonding that exists



between human beings, which underlie some of Velázquez's most moving creations.



*Solveig and Maria Teresa* (above) is moulded on the hands of the artist's sister and her son. There is no mistaking that the upright arm, plumb with soft contours, is that of a child's. It is firmly grasped and supported at the base by a feminine hand, which holds it in position. At the same time, the child's hand, open with fingers pointing up, is reaching out, so in this simple, retrained, yet touching composition, the artist shows both the physical and emotional relationship between a mother and child, and how the mother is both supporting her son and helping him realize his own potential. The overall effect is one of classical simplicity, modern in execution yet infused with human warmth. Nothing

further can be added or subtracted. The artwork is a personal note on the relationship between his sister and nephew; at the same time it is a homage and idealised discourse on motherhood.

To take another example, *Entanglement* is modeled on the hands of Velázquez's mother, who is in declining health with fading memory. With growing senility his aging mother often sits at home with her hands joined together, and the artist would often sit there by her side holding her twitching hands. It is through this speechless tactility that the artist communicates and comforts his ailing mother. Velázquez's mother is afflicted with arthritis and one can see and feel the inflamed joints in the sculpture. Through this artwork one can feel not only the hands and suffering of the elderly Velázquez, but through touching the artwork, the viewer becomes connected to the artist's complex feelings, tenderness, love, worry and sadness, and through this to our own and humanity's suffering in general.

It is said that great works of art have the power to communicate universal ideas through the particular. As one of the rising stars in contemporary Latin American art, Velázquez has all the ingredients to make his mark not only in the here and now, but leave behind strong artistic statements articulating the sensations of living, and help us reconnect to our inner world and deeper humanity through his narratives of unfolding bodies.

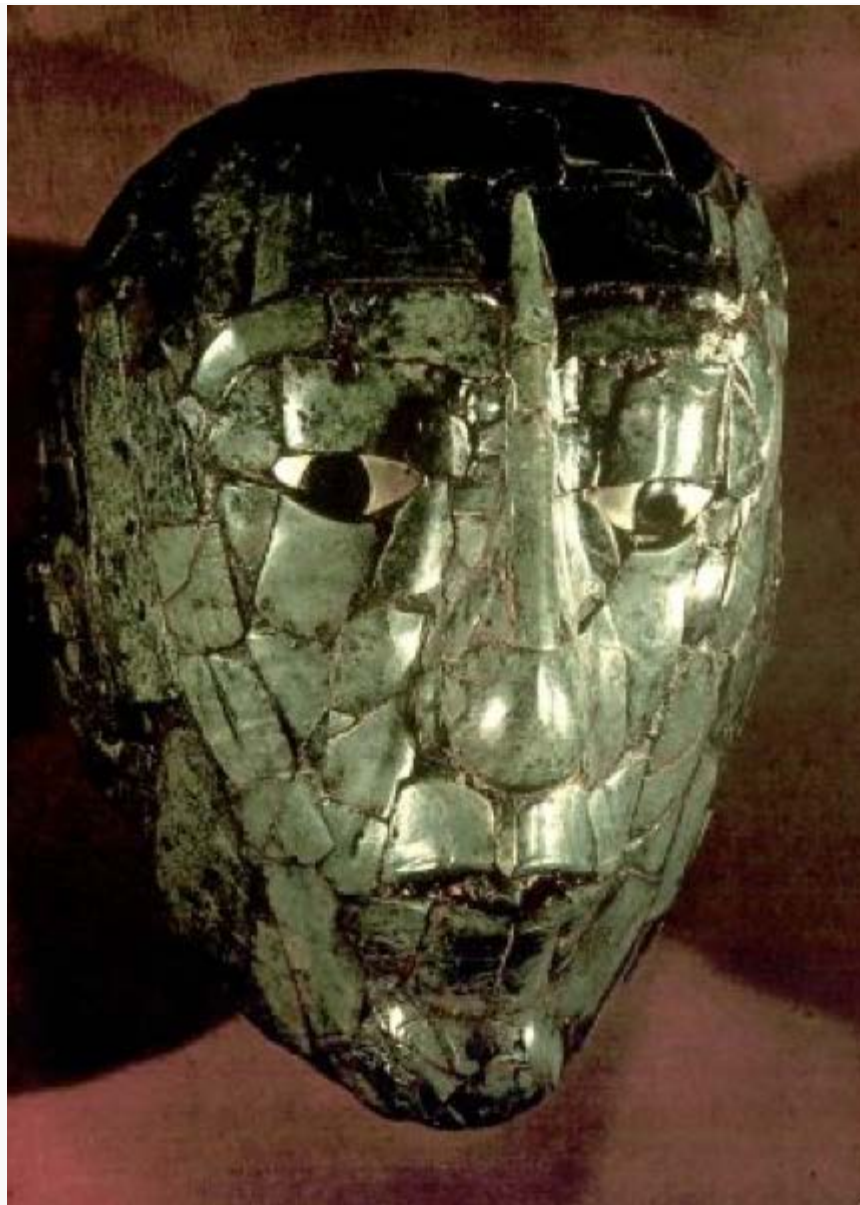
Given Velázquez's unique artistic language and modern expression, I did not expect to find a common thread that connects his work to Mexico's artistic and cultural heritage. However, the more I come to know and understand his work through speaking to Adriana and looking at Velázquez's sculptures, the more I feel they are connected to the past.

His preoccupation with the human body harkens back to Mesoamerica's intense fascination with the human body in pre-Columbian times, which was seen as a vehicle not only for subjective experience and interpretation of the phenomenal world, but a channel of communication, interaction and exchange with the invisible and noumenal,

to connect with ancestors from the past as well as the greater spiritual and cosmological forces beyond. In Mayan, Toltec and Aztec societies, simple acts as breathing, listening, speaking can have significance reverberating far beyond our immediate experiential realm. Likewise, Velázquez challenges us to pay attention and truly live with our senses, as we urbanites seldom do.

As an avid ethnographer, I feel Velázquez's work holds a key to unlocking secrets of ancient Mesoamerican civilisations, which conceal its messages in embodied languages that often accompanied their kings and warriors to the grave, and I certainly hope to question Velázquez on the visible connection between *Héctor Open* and Mexico's jade-entombed kings (both pictured below, respectively).





This month Puerta Roja is organising an exhibition for Héctor Velázquez at The Space, with a chance for Hong Kong's public to view and experience Velázquez's *Unfolding Bodies*. And later this week, I'll be discussing with Alvarez-Nichol further about the many dimensions of Velázquez's work on video, make sure to look out for it.

*The exhibition runs from October 18-27 and is presented by Puerta Roja at The Space, 210 Hollywood Road. Open 11:00 - 7:00 pm. Opening night October 18, from 7pm. RSVP at [info@puerta-roja.com](mailto:info@puerta-roja.com)*