

Living



I woke up this morning, feeling brand new/Cuz the dreams that I've been dream ing have finally come true."

WILL.I.A.M.
Singing new song about Obama's victory

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Gigantic puffed lips, pucker for a kiss or whistle, greet you as you enter Javier Marín's sculpture studio. A dozen half-sized male figures stick out from the wall at a 90-degree angle, as though walking through a gravity-free zone. A pair of half-finished leopards pose on a pedestal, awaiting their artist's next move.

A mammoth nose here, a single, staring eye there, little heads, little heads—there a body and body parts everywhere. Some look like they've just come out of painful reconstructive surgery, others appear to be riddled with bullet holes. Several gaze placidly ahead, though awaiting their entry in an ancient Greek play.

While his sculptures may be imbued with violence and anguish, Marín is anything but a tormented soul. Greeting visitors in his strikingly modern studio in Colonia Roma (designed by the architects Claudio and Christian Gantous), he's dressed in T-shirt and jeans, dark eyes sparkling and intent.

"I love my work," he said. "I've been very fortunate, and I'm very grateful, to have had success with my art from the beginning. Each new project is better and more challenging than the last."

Born in Uruapan, Michoacán in 1962, Marín was no child prodigy. His father, an architect, introduced him to art and design, but it wasn't until he took class in clay sculpture at the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City that inspiration to become an artist took hold.

"The school was a mess," he said. "They'd just moved to a new location near Xocmilco and it was very disorganized. But there was one very strict teacher there who taught us the classic techniques of clay sculpture. I knew at once that was for me."

His early works were modeled directly in clay, but for several years now he's been casting his sculptures in resin or bronze. His sculptures are finished with plasticine, which is soft and malleable like clay, but does not dry out or shrink, allowing more working time.

"I can leave a piece for years



EXHIBIT INFO
Check out Pedro Meyer's collection now on display.

"Fragmentos"
Museo Dolores Olmedo
Ave. México 5843
Col. La Noria
Tel: 555-0891
Until Jan. 18, 2009
For information, and a map on how to get there, see the Web site: <http://www.museodoloresolmedo.org.mx>.

then come back to it and continue where I'd left off," explained Marín.

After the plasticine figure is complete, the project is handed over to a team of technicians. The sculpture is encased in a flexible silicone mold, which provides an exact negative, into which is poured molten bronze or liquid resin. After hardening, the piece is finished by adding colors and patinas. Molds can be re-used—usually an edition of four copies is made from each original.

Marín mostly sticks to his theme of the human figure, but creates variety in the materials he employs. Mixing resin with organic matter such as dirt, amaranth seeds, tobacco, and even fibers of dried meat, Marín can alter the texture and color of each piece. "I like experimenting with new materials, like the amaranth seeds," he said. "The Aztecs made ceremonial figures out of amaranth. I like feeling that connection with my Mexican heritage."



His work suggests a range of influences from classic Greek and Roman sculpture, to the Baroque marbles of Bernini, with a touch of Rodin, and even a hint of the anguished angularity of German expressionism. But Marín denies any direct connection to art historical references, and claims a strong affinity with his country.

"I consider myself a Mexican artist, 100 percent," he explained. "I was born here, I studied here, and I've always lived here. I'm as likely to use an image from a shampoo ad on a billboard on the periferico as anything from art history."

One distinctly contemporary aspect of his work is his willingness to allow the technical

process to show.

In contrast to earlier sculptors, who worked long hours grinding, sanding and scrubbing their sculptures to erase any indications of the construction and mold-making techniques, this artist revels in letting us see the connections that hold his large-scale works together, sometimes even accentuating them with stitch-like seams.

I asked about the "bullet holes" in the foreheads of a few of the sculptures. Was he making a statement about violence in contemporary culture?

"Not at all," he responded. "I just thought the piece needed more darkness in that area, and the hole was a quick way of

making a shadow."

The textured surfaces of his figures dance and twirl, the movement of the artist's fingers always in evidence. In a close-up photograph, one might think of a monochromatic DeKooning or Jackson Pollack. "My work is abstract in a way," he said. "The face is just a vehicle for my exploration of color and texture and form. I'm not thinking of a narrative or a specific personality when I'm working."

The titles of many of his works, such as "Man," "Woman," "Head," and "Torso," reflect this directness. He uses no complex poetical metaphors or "art-speak" to confound the viewer.

Marín has exhibited all over the world, and was recently awarded the Grand Prize at the Beijing Biennial in China. Clearly pleased with his success, the artist admits it has its price. "Sometimes I would just like to rest and read and travel without thinking about work, but I can't," he said. "I have a staff to pay every week, overhead on my studio, taxes to pay—I can't stop, making art is a business. I work hard, five days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. But I can't complain. I've always been able to do what I want, to be my own boss. What's more important?"

What's next for Javier Marín?

He has a big show in Milan later this month and has been invited to compete to create a sculpture for the cathedral in Zacatecas. He also dreams about working in theater or the movies.

Javier Marín's Web site is <http://javiermarin.com.mx/> "Fragmentos"



GODS AND MONSTERS THE ART OF JAVIER MARÍN

Although the work of the Michoacán-born sculptor suggests a wide range of influences, he considers himself to be a '100 percent' Mexican artist. A collection of 31 pieces, currently on display at the Museo Dolores Olmedo, shows his preference for the human figure.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE NEWS/JIM JOHNSTON