

# ART Là-bas

Tuesday, April 14, 2015

## THE VAST CHASM OF LIFE

on the “Lone Star” installation by Enrique Martínez Celaya

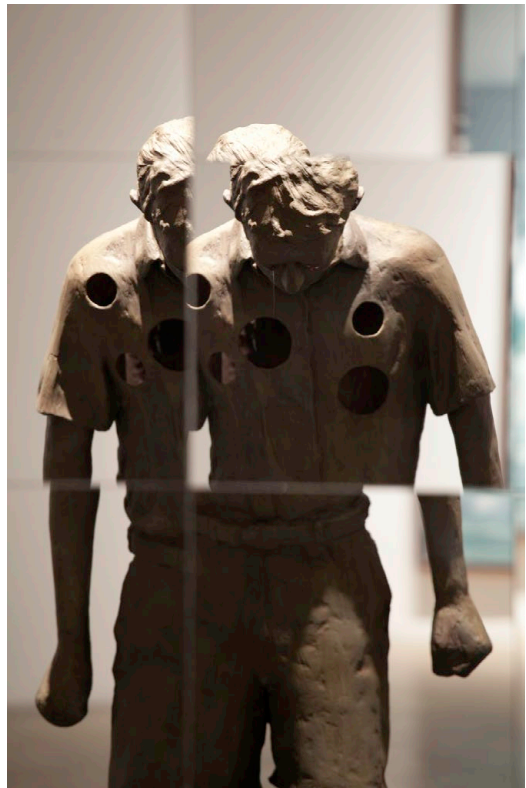
By: Douglas Messerli

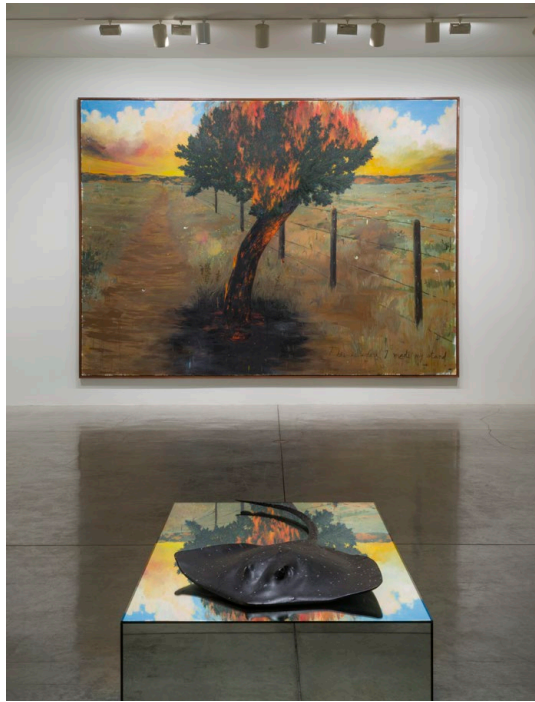
Artist Enrique Martínez Celaya begins his newest installed environment, *Lone Star*, with an image of a tearful young male, surrounded with mirrors, his tears collecting into a pool of sorrow, banked and framed by a mound of what appears to be some kind vegetation, but apparently is made up of bird-seed.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

