

## REVIEW: Martínez Celaya and the rugged beauty of becoming

BY LEAH OLLMAN

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.



**Enrique Martínez Celaya**

*The Sigh*, 2015, oil and wax on canvas, 132 x 180 in. (335.3 x 457.2 cm)