

5-2010

Walking Back

Benjamin Martinez-Alvarez
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“WALKING BACK”

A Thesis

by

BENJAMIN MARTINEZ-ALVAREZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2010

Major Subject: 3D Studio Art

“WALKING BACK”

A Thesis
by
BENJAMIN MARTINEZ-ALVAREZ

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Dr. Reynaldo Santiago
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Committee Member

May 2010

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ABSTRACT

Martinez-Alvarez Benjamin, "Walking Back". Master of Fine Arts (MFA), May, 2010, 68 pp., 23 images, references, 7 titles.

My work is organized around the search for my direction, as a person, and as an artist, my trips, my suffering, my dreams, and my family. Through my sculpture I try to describe my own experience with life, capturing the essence of those things that bring me peace or make me suffer. My three-dimensional work is influenced by Mexican expressionism and by individual artists who also searched for ideas and feelings related to cultural identity. Artists like Diego Rivera, Mardonio Magana, Octavio Medellin, and Patrocinio Varela, artists who communicated through the use of expressionism in advancing technique and style which influenced the world art.

DEDICATION

The completion of my Masters of Fine Arts would not have been possible without the help of my family. I want to thank my wife, Irene and my two children, Mickel Angel and Angela Kipa, for being with me and walking alongside me every day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my advisers, and Committee Members: Professor Reynaldo Santiago, Professor Richard Hyslin, and Professor Carlos Roberto De Souza. They encourage and allow me to express my artistic skills with enjoyment and ease, to bring this project to completion. Thank you for your honest critiques of my work and dedication to me as one of your students.

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CHAPTER I

A TRAIL FOR MY FEET

Ever since my early childhood my father always tried to involve me one way or another with his daily life, though it was uncomfortable for me because I was merely 4 or 5 years old. Until then, my life had always been involved with situations related to my mother or my grandmother, with the additional contact of or should I say ridicule by, my older brothers. It was I the youngest in a family of eight brothers.

My mother, like all mothers I believe, would blanket me with her protection and warnings as well as scolding and punishment when these were necessary. The fact that my grandmother, on my mother's side who lived with us, would grant me certain privileges when interposing in order to protect me from all sorts of punishment from my parents and brothers. I remember my grandmother Julia who enjoyed visiting with her good friends and preferred that I be the one to accompany her instead of any of my older brothers. I really enjoyed this because it was kind of fun visiting those good old ladies who gave me things and let me do what I pleased while they talked about grownup things. I would sit under a grand wooden table playing with some toys and viewing those enormous strong and rude feet, some which were only protected by large "huaraches" of the kind worn by the rural people. I think I even enjoyed being able to see and touch those cracked feet marked by the work done in the soil and climate, feet belonging to people that were accustomed to walking long trails sometimes hauling heavy things or

sometimes merely desiring to visit someone. *(Image 12)*

Life for a boy like me at that time was not easy because my parents had to provide for seven more sons and being the youngest was the reason why I had to use hand-me-downs such as shoes, clothes and toys. I remember the first time something was bought new especially for me at my size and need; they were “huaraches”. Though they were bought for a school event, they gave me the opportunity to wear something new. That was a fantastic experience as if those “huaraches” were like wings attached to my feet. It felt as if I were flying and reaching unimaginable speeds. I did not even want to take them off when going to bed and when I would take them off for just a moment, my mom would scream from inside the house way back in the kitchen to put the “huaraches” back on, “your feet will wear away by walking around bare footed”. With the passing of time and heavy usage, those “huaraches” molded onto my feet, and to my games, and my walkabouts. They were my inseparable friends for a long time, but eventually those “huaraches”, like me, had become older and no longer could accompany me; my feet had grown. Though I desperately tried to adjust them to prolong their time with me, my quest was fruitless and again went back to using the recycled elder brothers’ shoes. *(Image 16)*

I remember those long hikes taken by my father’s hand, a man with strong hands given form by hard work, work initiated at an early age, as required by the necessities of his family. I think for him it was not an easy task being the oldest and helping his mother acquire food and cover other necessities for his younger siblings. Cleaning and shining shoes, carrying heavy loads to the market, or creating ceramic pots to sell in the streets were among those laborious tasks. *(Image 18)*

It was not always this way. When he was a boy he enjoyed a very different life. He was

the son of one of the most prominent miners in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico. He enjoyed many good things like: a large house, a maid, cooks, private teachers, family car, toys, and many other things. Unfortunately, that well off period in my fathers' life suddenly ended and for many reasons they decided to move to the big cities and start a new life for which they were definitely not accustomed. Life taught my father to understand the world in a hard way. At 15 years of age, and in poverty, he experienced the deaths by hunger and diseases of more than half of his brothers. *(Images 22 and 23)*

Thirty years later (1946) in the city of my birth Saltillo, Mexico (with some 75,000 inhabitants at that time); I would accompany my father on long walks throughout the city. It seemed to me quite fascinating that anywhere we would go during our long walks the people in general, the neighbors, and their friends would greet him in an amiable way like if they had known him for years, "Goodbye Jorge. How are you Jorgito? Nice to see you again Jorge". They would transform a simple hello into hours of conversations. The truth is, those days were different. It seemed as though time had stopped and no one was worried about anything. Now that I wonder about it, I am not sure if my father really enjoyed talking or was it a way to utilize those long conversations with some people he didn't even know, as an excuse to sit down and rest his ailing feet. A forty-six year old man, with problems in his bones and deformed feet, suffering from intense pain due to severe arthritis, he was teaching a six year old boy to walk the trial of life; that boy was me, the youngest of his children. *(Image 17)*

Before I married and had my own children, I thought on how unfair it was that my father had played with me on very few occasions. My relationship with my father was, and still is, a formal one constructed with conversations between men containing contrasting arguments that at times become heated. How can a son question his father for not playing with him when we were younger? How could I complain when I could see at the end of our long walks how that man would remove his shoes and from them emerged those swollen feet that at times were also bloody and ground down due to the long treks? His face always reflected the enjoyment and happiness of having those walks; I was taken by his hand behind him making me his pride or even his mission. *(Image 15)*

I believe life repeats its patterns and schemes. Fortunately, I have not suffered the loss of my parents or brothers. Among my parents' responsibilities was to take care of us at home by assuring we were not short of food, clothing, or education. But it was I who would receive something extra from my father through genetics. The extras were the pain and deformation of the bones in my feet. At twenty years of age this genetic inheritance made itself present, and by the age of twenty-four I had had two reconstructive surgeries of my feet where a great part of the bones had been removed causing loss of feeling and movement of some of my toes. The pain and discomfort still remain and will never leave. Now I see my father's swollen feet in mine and I can say I am on his same path. His path makes me think of my responsibilities as a father and a human being. *(Image 14)*

Far from reproaching and complaining, I say that the greatest support my father gave me was his advice. He would say things like, "Do what you have to do. If you cannot find it continue searching. No one will knock on your door to offer you a new

life. Never say I can't and continue trying. Work now and later you will have plenty of time to rest when you die." It would be fair to say that these and other warnings have made me perceive my life in a different manner. (*Image 21*)

For some, life is like a pair of shoes tailored to fit comfortably, be warm, and have space. They provoke advantageous sensations like walking neither without being conscious of the steps nor if the feet are in good health. Just walk without thinking about the path below or the pain above. (*Image 19*)

One day, the feet with their steps will wish a desire to remove themselves from those known and comfortable shoes. It's a strange sensation and at first one tries to deny it. It's not easy to confront discomfort and those wounds that make one feel the necessity to return momentarily to the eternal shoes. But the stubborn steps continue making you conscious of the necessity to walk and continue forward until the day those shoes no longer adjust to the demands of freedom. Life pushes you to walk without protection for your feet, to taste the soft sensation of liberty and pain, the pain of the experience of walking on the ground with the uncomfortable feeling of the pebbles and the wounds of walking barefooted. Do not mind the passing of time for it will make you remember and yearn for the warm sensation and comfortable danger and security of those eternal shoes. (I refer to the eternal shoe, as a metaphor of life).

Do not surrender. Your feet will continue searching with great determination, and it is they that you should be listening to, even if you must pay attention to the path, the stones, and the cold that at times will leave you voiceless. It is a liberating sensation of freedom and a coherent feeling between those feet wanting to move forward. I know that the day will arrive when your feet, as mine, will find in that hard path the sensation of

complete comfort and strange warmth in their own pace, without sorrow or pain.

Above all that, I have the necessity to walk barefooted and demonstrate that I am capable of guiding my steps much further than what any shoe had taken me before. Who knows?

The liberty of walking is strange and there are no certainties since no one formally learns to follow the footprints on a path left by someone else. *(Image 20)*

“Los Zapatos de mi Viejo”

Mi padre es un digno ser, buen amigo y buen cristiano
fraternal como un hermano y de un justo parecer
al llegarlo a conocer, he querido ser su espejo
meditando su consejo, sus penas y sin sabores
me quedan grandes señores... los zapatos de mi viejo

El sol salía más temprano, en aquellos tiempos idos
hombres de rostros curtidos, con el mundo entre sus manos
mi padre es un ser humano, que deja al mundo perplejo
su firmeza en el manejo, por una meta alcanzar
y no soy quién para calzar... los zapatos de mi viejo

Su andar se ha tornado lento, pero no suelta las riendas
gladiador de mil contiendas, firme siempre como el viento
expresar lo que yo siento, es sumamente complejo
si en mi corazón añejo, remembranzas y quimeras
son grandes para cualquiera... los zapatos de mi viejo¹

By Manuel Rivera Cátala

¹ Rivera Catala, Manuel. Rodriguez T. Luis. Los Zapatos De Mi Viejo. From: Puerto Rico y su Música. Posted 12-05-2007. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfhUZvgoTwM>

“LOS ZAPATOS DE MI VIEJO”

Los zapatos de mi viejo
tienen sabor a nostalgia
al barro y la lluvia de un invierno
atrapado en el tiempo
Los zapatos de mi viejo
saben al reloj a cuerda
con hebilla de cuero
a esos del pasado...
Saben a la Cantina de una esquina
a la cambucha de diario
que encubramos
una primavera a mediodía
sabe a las noticias de la radio
a esas de la mañana
que daban en la radio cooperativa
Saben a huellas que se fueron
que alguien quiso borrarlas con un dedo
Quizás saben a una sonrisa
quizás a un enojo con una mirada
a un no lo digas quizás un no lo hagas.

Entre recuerdos, nostalgias
amores y promesas
apagados en silencio
los zapatos de mi viejo
tienen sabor a melancolía
a la distancia del tiempo
que se quedó junto a él dormido

Los zapatos de mi viejo
están gastados por el tiempo
digamos que ya no parecen zapatos
están tan rotos y tan cansados
que ya nadie los quiere...
ya nadie ni siquiera los recuerda
pero a pesar de todo
yo los quiero porque fueron
los zapatos y compañeros
que trazaron las huellas de mi viejo.
Los zapatos de mi viejo
sin darme cuenta
todo este tiempo los he llevado conmigo
porque los tengo siempre puestos.....²

By Alejandro Fernandez

² Fernández Alejandro. Los Zapatos de mi Viejo. From: La Página de los Cuentos – Posted 04-03-2006.
<http://www4.loscuentos.net/cuentos/link/185/185684/>

“Your Feet”

When I can see your face
I look at your feet.

Your feet of arched bone,
your hard little feet.

I know you say,
and that your sweet weight
rises above them.

Your waist and breasts,
the doubled purple of your nipples,
the box in your eyes that have just flown,
your mouth wide fruit
your red hair,
my little tower.

But I love your feet
but because they walked
on land and on
wind and water,
until they found me.³

By Pablo Neruda

³ Neruda Pablo. Your Feet. From: <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/your-feet/>

“Tiny Feet”

A child's tiny feet,
Blue, blue with cold,
How can they see and not protect you?
Oh, my God!

Tiny wounded feet,
Bruised all over by pebbles,
Abused by snow and soil!

Man, being blind, ignores
that where you step, you leave
A blossom of bright light,
that where you have placed
your bleeding little soles
a redolent tuberose grows.

Since, however, you walk
through the streets so straight,
you are courageous, without fault.

Child's tiny feet,
Two suffering little gems,
How can the people pass, unseeing.⁴

By Gabriela Mistral

⁴ Mistral Gabriela. Tiny Feet. From: <http://oldpoetry.com/opoem/58314-Gabriela-Mistral-Tiny-Feet>

“His Feet”

(The Beautiful Feet of Jesus)

His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That treaded across countless miles
 Bringing hope, healing, happiness, and smiles.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That traveled over sand, rocks, and dirt
 Carrying comfort and love to all those who hurt.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That gently bent a blade of grass
 Are the very feet that bore the guilt of my past.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That didn't run when His accusers approached
 But held fast His stand in spite of every stroke.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That marched up Golgotha's hill
 Fulfilling God's purpose and His will.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That were nailed to the cross
 Just so I would not be lost.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 Stepped over into captivity
 And lead the broken captives free.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That walked out of a borrowed tomb
 And through locked doors of an upper room.
His feet, oh, those beautiful feet
 That crushed the curse of sin,
 Will one day step on earth again,
 To judge all history,
 And forever reign in victory.
 Oh, to sit at His feet,
 Yes, those beautiful feet—
 Is where I want to be
 Worshipping God for all eternity.⁵

By M.L. Maughmer, Jr (*Image 13*)

⁵ M.L. Maughmer, Jr. His Feet. The Beautiful Feet of Jesus. From:
<http://christianity.about.com/od/membersubmittedprayers/qt/hisfeetpoem.htm>

“Ode to Feet”

I have seen poetic feet so perfect,
 The very smallest units
 Of patterned stress,
 Soft idioms of Iambic
 And drum beats of Anapestic,
 That march across the carpet
 In measured meter toward full-length mirrors.

I am the bard of bare soles
 And naked ankles,
 Of fallen arches and
 Swollen heels,
 Of toenails
 Pedicured and painted,
 That catch the light
 Like so many cut sapphires,
 All arranged
 In descending order of size.

I have crafted couplets in Trochaic,
 And started the heartbeat of lines in Spondaic,
 For I am the poet of feet,
 Perfect and imperfect,
 Poetic
 And otherwise,
 Of bunions, bumps and bent toes,
 Carried within or laid upon
 A pump, mule, sandal or thong.⁶

By Doug Tanoury

⁶ Tanoury Doug. Ode to Feet. From: Log Cabin Chronicles. http://www.tomifobia.com/odeto_feet.html

“Shoes on My Feet”

Sandals, pumps and high heeled boots,
It really is a treat.
To wear Mom's many pairs of shoes,
Upon my little feet.

Loafers, wingtips, cowboy boots,
It really is a treat.
To wear Dad's many pairs of shoes,
Upon my little feet.⁷

By... Unknown

⁷ Unknown Author. Shoes On My Feet. From: <http://www.scrapbook.com/poems/doc/1761/351.html>

CHAPTER II

FINDING MY PATH

In 1990 I was working with the John Deere Company in Saltillo, Coahuila after completing a technical education. I worked long hours averaging ten hours per day and at times also some overtime. It was a hard job but had a good salary. It was not easy to find similar employment at that time and my parents were proud of me; I could now contribute money to the family and was no longer an economical burden for my parents.

Fortunately, no more than a year had passed when I grew tired of the repetitive work, and decided to pursue a new education. For many years my friends and peers at school had encouraged me to develop projects related to art for them. I was good at reproducing images and also creating caricatures of some of the faculty. In 1992 at age 24, I found that art was the direction that I should follow for the rest of my life.

It was during that year that I applied and took entrance exams at the Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila. The day that the exams were administered as part of the acceptance process, I arrived late but one professor was willing to administer the exams since there was someone else that also arrived late. Nobody could have imagined that the woman who also arrived late would eventually be my wife several years later. I felt intimidated and began to think I was in the wrong place when the professor asked to produce work of a quality I had not created before as part of the entrance exam.

The works I produced and the knowledge I had in art were sufficient for me to be

accepted into the program, and other student that arrived late was also accepted. The following four years were filled with countless projects and creation of drawings during week nights and weekends for students in the School of Medicine. I produced drawing and paintings of different parts of the human body and also helped cut and open those motionless stiff cadavers. These cadavers also served as models for the understanding and configuration of the human body via the instruction given by the professors of the Art School. At times, apart from helping my creative process, those bodies gave me the opportunity to have contact with the most basic knowledge of aesthetic techniques that could be applied to the human figure using oil, acrylics, watercolor, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and ceramics.

In 1996 my education at the Art School was concluded. I felt empty and with the need to continue my search for information and contacts in order to grow as an artist. I asked my professors at the school, “Why have you given me so little support and give little interest to the lessons you are teaching?” It was at that time that I established an internal battle with myself. I was dissatisfied with what I had achieved at that stage in my career. I then decided to search for new opportunities for my growth. A year later in September /27/1997, I married Irene and a week later, we received for the first time ever scholarships from the Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila to study art in the city of Oaxaca. (Taller Rufino Tamayo). Now I understood that my work had its purpose, and a deep connection with the accounts that surrounded me personally, my culture, and my family.

At the Rufino Tamayo studio in Oaxaca, I learned from my teachers that artists need to create and share their dreams by means of their images. Friends, peers, and

teachers such as Francisco Lopez Monterrosa, Abraham Torres, Juan Alcazar, Ian Baldwin, John Tierney, Elis Olivella, Shinzaburo Takeda, Rodolfo Morales, and Francisco Toledo, all artists themselves, taught me that my work had to search for a daily purpose. This would assist me in remembering why I toil in becoming an artist.

The time lived in Oaxaca from October 1997 to August 1998 was magical, educational, and reflective. For me it was a fantastic and emotional voyage of self revelation to me, my wife and my art work. Every time I look at my painting, prints, and other works that I produced during that time I would transport to that place for a moment. These moments were all joined by lines, textures, colors, smells, light, shadows, the coming and going of people, the food, the streets, and my walks taken by my wife's hand. It was also the daily pain that gave me the capacity to be creative and capture the images of the world I was experiencing. The time lived away from home and the security offered by parents and family made my wife and I grow together as individuals and as a couple.

As part of the responsibilities of accepting the scholarships, we had to return to the Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila and teach various classes related to the areas we studied while in the city of Oaxaca. We returned but were denied our service by the teachers and director at Coahuila. During the following four years we fought with the University to honor the contract tied to the scholarships. They made us wait but at the end we denied employment. During that time it was difficult for both of us as a couple but it was much more difficult for us as artists. We survived by taking alternative jobs like teaching mornings in elementary schools, taxi driving in the afternoons, photographers or waiters in the evenings. We did this to generate enough wages to

survive and pay the bills; our families could no longer assist us due to the lack of their own resources.

During those hard times when we slept almost anywhere, even during the morning classes, we kept working with little rest and tried not to think much beyond the four walls of our small bedroom. We were now three. My son Mickel Angel was born, (07/20/1999) and I had to abandon my artistic goals and concentrate on my responsibilities as the head of the family. I applied my past work experiences in order to improve the conditions in which we found ourselves. I went door to door to solicit work based on my studies and abilities.

In 2001 I was hired as coordinator of the Cultural Center at the Technological University of Coahuila in the nearby city of Ramos Arizpe. I was given the charge of designing and conceptualizing the cultural center for the Technological University. It was a monumental task but the employment put me in contact with the world of arts and culture in the state of Coahuila and Mexico. At times I was away from my family working 12 hours a day on projects for the university.

At first this job offered the possibilities of generating new ideas and projects that could open doors for other artists and for me. It could generate exchanges and present viewpoints related to creativity, production, and ideological art concepts, but all that turned boring and sterile for me. I was opening doors and urging others to be creative and present their work in exhibits. The emotional load and the need for me to be artistically creative forced me to leave that job several years later and search for more and better opportunities in other places. In 07/21/2003 my daughter Angela was born and I did not find any open opportunities in Saltillo or my country which forced me to generate my

own artistic projects.

The year 2004 represented another difficult year for me and my family. I invested one entire year in developing a public art project that eventually would open new doors of opportunity for me and other artists. This particular project would require 10 hour work days and it was a series of sculptures carved over surfaces of four dead trees located in the most important park of my native city of Saltillo, (The Alameda Park). None of these was an easy task, I was using a wooden mallet and wood chisels to create relief images related to my playing in that park with my children. (From: May/15/04 to May/15/05)

I donated my work to the city and in exchange I received temporary recognition and respect from the Mexican society but more than that, the doors opened for me to represent Mexico in August of 2005 at the international scene spending five weeks in residency with sixty-five other artists from around the world at Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont, USA. A month later I had the opportunity to begin my master studies in art at the Texas A&M University at Kingsville.

I have always been a person that loved to travel and take challenges. I have never felt physically attached to a place for long, but the fact that I would leave my country and confront a new culture and a different language with my family was a major challenge. Opportunities like this arrive once in a life time, sometimes never for others, so we plunged through the open door in the search for a new way of life. In Kingsville I encountered a new work style with a mindset that was contrasted to how we in Mexico created art. There were tools that I did not know existed and ideas and concepts that were missing in my culture and society. It took two years for me to finish my master

degree requirements at Kingsville but the experience changed my life and in the way I perceived things in general.

I found myself different as an artist and discovered internal matters that I had not explored before. I found the sensation to be or not to be, to be there without being there, and continue searching without finding anything. In May 2007 it dawned on me that the years were passing and I was getting older and the necessity for me going forward was linked to my lifelong project called art.

The world goes round with no stopping so why should I? I will take this path and follow it and continue learning and preparing myself for new goals that I should take as a challenge and conquering them will make me more knowledgeable. What I had begun as an MA at Kingsville now had transformed into the challenge of an MFA at the University of Texas – Pan American in Edinburg. This opportunity continues my quest in my internal world, living, constructing, and working through the possibilities that the art world has and will continue to offer me.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, art has been often used to express an idea, a feeling, and the way we see and represent everything we are and all that surrounds us. There is a reality that the twenty first century new generations of artists have the opportunity of criticizing or praising the works of those before them, keeping always the theme and technique as the point of discussion.

On the other hand, twentieth century Mexican artists were looking for simplified forms that spoke loudly about things that happen everywhere, and not everyone sees or wants to see, like: politics, wars, hunger, poverty, diseases, etc, etc. Modern Mexican muralist artists kept from over detailing their pieces and giving long explanations about them. The simple forms were carefully chosen and placed to speak for themselves to convey the message that the artist had in mind. These forms helped reveal what is hidden behind an image. Dynamic strokes used transmitted feelings, thoughts, states of the soul, fears, fantasies, dreams and of course my realities.

For example, the drawings, paintings and murals of artists like Diego Rivera captured and transformed the force and expression of primitive cultures, such as the Latin-American or African. They turned world cultures into sources of inspiration while speaking of the realities of a village, of the people, and of everything that can be sensed through the essence of things, and all that is figurative and abstract.

Furthermore, I believe that other artists, for example Mardonio Magaña, Octavio Medellín, and Patrocinio Barela used traditional folk art (wood carvings) to represent the common people from village and the city. They exalted images of man, woman and family; a cultural identity seen from two different perspectives, the Mexican and the Chicano life of suffering, inside or outside of the country.

This document is an exploration of how my art works relate to my cultural roots, and the early twenty century expressionist movement in Mexico, and in particular to the artists mentioned above.

CHAPTER IV

MY INFLUENCES

It is important to understand where ideas come from when they involve the thinking process and utilize that energy to create unique directions and concepts. Science tells us that there exist four phases involved in the creative process which are: preparation, incubation, vision, and verification. Preparation refers to the collection of information. One must be submerged consciously or unconsciously in a group of problematical inquiries that are interesting and that revive creativity. It is a stimulating moment because it is when you recognize a restlessness that is moving and you begin looking for possibilities and alternatives.

The incubation phase is developed in the unconscious self. It consists of an unconscious consideration of the problem and of the search of a solution. This phase, where the unconscious accumulated experiences glide on, represents for the individual a time of restlessness and frustration that often goes accompanied by inferiority feelings and demands a remarkable tolerance to the frustration.

The phase of vision is constituted by the experience of “Aha” and of “Eureka”. It is a moment that is totally vacant of freedom. Here the accumulated material during the phase of incubation is transformed into a clear and coherent concept which flowers in a torrent way. Such experiences are accompanied by very strong feelings; the unprepared individual at times will just stop of the next phase.

The verification phase constitutes the final part of the process which is verified. It examines and it forms the new vision until adapting it to the creative individual and to the surroundings. In this phase the most difficult assignment occurs, it is communication, consisting of translating the subjective vision into objective symbolic forms (like writing or language). Singular importance is given to culture and its development into effective creative communication.⁸

Personally, I always work with my personal experiences because these represent information that I have at hand. I put into play my lived experiences; I combine and transfer positioning them in different times and spaces. Its new configuration solves my problem, trying to satisfy my individual needs, through the generated images. Naturally, I create. I worry more about the content, always trying to connect it with my cultural and spiritual nature. I take ideas and solutions from works created by other artists, in the present or the past. In a fantastic way, I find that my work shares many similarities with the works and lives of artists like: Diego Rivera, Mardonio Magaña, Octavio Medellín, and Patrocinio Barela.

I believe these are similarities, like coincidences in our lives, since I discovered these artists much later in my artistic career particularly after the production of my first three-dimensional works of art, around 2006-2009. I did not try to imitate them, nor exploit their concepts, ideologies, or images. It is until now, studying these influences I have reached a better understanding of my own works by trying to go beyond the use already established of ideas, means, and techniques adopted by these other artists. Like

⁸ Gross, Manuel. Las características y etapas del proceso creativo (La creatividad y su expresión artística) http://manuelgross.bligoo.com/content/view/181968/Las_caracteristicas_y_etapas_del_proceso_creativo.html

social commentary, cultural roots, poverty, migration, and wood carving. These artists now motivate me to continue with the development and growth of my work and ideas because some of them, just like me had a difficult life full of deficiencies and poverty. They had to look for a way to reach their goals that maybe they never imagined. They immigrated from place to place which represents great changes in any person's life. As for them, these situations guide my path to my growth and development.

Diego Rivera (1886-1957) Diego María de la Concepción Juan Nepomuceno Estanislao de la Rivera y Barrientos Acosta y Rodríguez was born on December 8, in the city of Guanajuato, México. In 1896, he began to take night courses at the Academia de San Carlos in México City. There, he met landscape painter Jose Maria Velasco. In 1905, he received a scholarship to continue his art studies in México. And in 1907, another scholarship was given to him by the Governor of Veracruz, México. The Governor encouraged him to travel to Spain and enroll in the workshop of Eduardo Chicharro in Madrid. In 1922, he joined the Partido Comunista Mexicano and started his murals on public buildings in México City; commissions sponsored by the post-revolutionary Mexican government. In 1927, he was invited to the celebration of the first ten years of the communist revolution in October in the Soviet Union. In the same year, he married, for the third time, to the now famous Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. During the next four years, he created many murals in the United States, most of them surrounded by controversies. He died on November 24, 1957 in Mexico City and his remains were placed in the Rotonda de los Hombres Ilustres in this city. ⁹ (Boddy-Evans 390)

⁹ Diego Rivera's Biography. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diego_Rivera

Kneeling Child. Image 1. (1927, Oil on Canvas) Diego Rivera's art includes portraits of infants. This painting presents a composition that makes the child the principal focus and seems the only thing in the painting. The attention is drawn to the child who is placed in the center of the artist's composition. If one observes the details, the suffering, the peace, the poverty, the work, the pain and joy of children games are well represented through a child's gaze. A young girl is surrounded by elements like the "petate", (A "petate" is a bedroll used in Central America and México. Its name comes from the "náhuatl" word "*petlatl*". The "petate" is woven from the fibers of the Palm tree. The main use of the "petate" is for sleeping)¹⁰, and the clay mosaics which are integrated and give the painting a greater value and fill the piece with colors that give off emotions. Ochre colors, strong lines and visual textures speak through the girl's image, sitting on a "petate", a floor mat, and playing with a necklace. It is no longer a simple image, as Rivera transforms his painting into a social plea. Through the artist's paint brush, Rivera shows the harsh reality of the life in rural towns, where I used to be living, and this little charming girl lives. Dressed in her mature dress, she is humble and curious, as she holds her necklace and looks at me with tenderness and acceptance.¹¹

¹⁰ Definition of "Petate". Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petate>

¹¹ De Broice Olivier. Diego Rivera pintura de caballete y dibujos. FEPM, México, 1991.



Image 1

Diego Rivera
"Kneeling Child"
1927
Oil on Canvas
58 x 48cm

Ignacio Sanchez Portrait. Image 2. (1925 - 1928, Oil on canvas) This piece in particular seems to capture the essence of Mexican childhood of those years. In almost all of Diego Rivera's works, the use of colors is vital, but in some like this one in particular, the atmosphere is created to show the reality of a child that lives in the fields, a hard worker, barefoot and in need of play time. For many children, play time is always postponed because of the obligations of work. He wears a hat that protects him from sun and rain, and plain overalls that also represents his working class roots. He stands barefooted, clasping his little hands at his waist. The "petate" and the floor tile mosaics anchor him to his reality, hard work and poverty, reminds me of my father. This piece is charged with emotions and power that show the past, present and future of a town as symbolized in the young boy. ¹²

¹² De Broice Olivier. Diego Rivera pintura de caballete y dibujos. FEPM, México, 1991.



Image 2

Diego Rivera
“Ignacio Sanchez Portrait “
1935-1928
Oil on Canvas
67 x 51cm

Mardonio Magaña. (1868-1947) was born in the Hacienda el Refugio in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. He eventually left for México City, after the fields of his village were destroyed during the Mexican Revolution. In 1929, he was discovered by Diego Rivera in the Escuela de Arte al Aire Libre de Coyoacan, when Magaña was 55 years old. He worked as a custodian at the school and in his free time he worked on wood sculpture. Rivera saw the expressive force in the pieces by this peasant who, like Rivera, showed the feelings and values of the field worker through his pieces. It was Diego Rivera who helped him present his first solo exhibit in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in 1930. This sculpture exhibit represented a group of simple and bulky figurines of people and animals. Mardonio Magaña uses his simple pieces to reflect his personality, the essence of humanity and that of the Mexican people. His sculptures represent the everyday life of men and the women, working the fields and living the moments of they family life. Magaña transforms natural materials like wood, or stone, to give life to his characters.¹³

La Molendera. Image 3. (1930-32, Wood carving) Magaña's carving La Molendera presents us with a popular situation, a woman at her occupation. The piece serves as social commentary, describing the hard work that women do in specialized jobs or everyday activity, strictly feminine at that time in Mexico. To me the intention of this piece is to exalt these jobs and dignify the image of my culture which, although sinking in poverty, becomes the image of all that I recognized as mine: homemade food, tortillas, mariachis, tamales and the field. His moving and simple representation recalls past reality of what was familiar to him as a worker at a hacienda. Here, like in other of Magaña's pieces, the absence of a use of learned proportions and the roughness of the wood carvings reflect the conditions of the life of a people's sculptor, who represents the real

¹³ Mardonio Magaña. <http://escultormagana.com/>

life of my people, my culture, the Mexican culture and traditions. ¹⁴



Image 3

Mardonio Magana
“La molendera”
1930-1932
Wood Carving
60 x 30 x 45 cm

¹⁴ Molina Carlos. *La Molendera*. *Arte moderno de México. Colección Andrés Blaisten*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005.
<http://www.museoblaisten.com/v2008/indexESP.asp?myURL=paintingSpanish&numID=321>

Familia Campesina. Image 4. (1930-32, Wood carving) La Familia Campesina presents a theme centered on motherhood. In this sculpture a woman (can be my grand mother) lovingly embraces her youngest daughter (can be my aunt) while her son watches (can be my father). The mother and son are “campesinos” (farm or rural workers), both wearing hats because they have been working all day under the sun. After a hard day, now they rest from working in the field. The boy has served himself something in a cup and is cooling off. In many farming societies, like in mine, the boy is a young adult who helps with family responsibilities and the mother serves also as a provider, when the father is not there to help. The intensity in the kindness of the mother’s face gives this sculpture a state of tranquility that is very special. I think it is not easy to create this feeling through wood carvings.¹⁵

¹⁵ Familia Campesina Agustín Arteaga, *Arte moderno de México. Colección Andrés Blaisten*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005. <http://www.museoblaisten.com/v2008/indexESP.asp>



Image 4

Mardonio Magana
"Familia Campesina"
1930-1932
Wood Carving
74 x 65 x 45 cm

Octavio Medellín, (1907-1999). Was born in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. He exemplifies the hardships and dislocation suffered by many Mexicans during the Mexican Revolution. Escaping to the U. S., his family, forced to move often, finally settled in San Antonio, Texas, in 1920. In Texas, he began his art studies. All his early training was under the direction of painters rather than sculptors. He soon sought his own way as a sculptor, however, and in this respect was self-taught. His strongest influences were from México, representing native and primitive crafts of the Indians who live in the small villages of Veracruz and Yucatan. The directness of their works had an enduring impact on his sculpture. In 1921, Medellín studied painting with Jose Arpa, and life drawing under Xavier Gonzalez at the San Antonio School of Art. For the next several years, he continued his studies in painting at the same school's evening-class program. By 1928, he was able to attend night classes at the famous Chicago Art Institute. In the following year, he returned to Mexico, and he tried to enroll in San Carlos Academy of México, but he was not accepted, supposedly because of his lack of formal training. It was after this rejection that he began his travels in rural Mexico. His return to the United States in 1931, and his marriage that year, provided the kind of impetus that was to help him devote all his time to his wood and stone sculpture. Medellín credited his wife with giving him the necessary encouragement to continue in his sculpture

In 1979, semi-retired, he moved to Bandera, Texas, with his wife. (Quirarte 49 - 52)

The Bather. Image 5. (1966, Wood carving) Medellín's *The Bather* represents a spectacular work in which the wood color and grain are important expressive elements. The nude bather, made out of monkey pod wood, shows softness and sensuality. Medellín works the grained surfaces carefully creating the illusion of real skin. The arms show fragility and strength at the same time. The sculptural lines show physical and sexual tension and contain the voluptuous forms, anchoring them and creating the sensation of the piece trying to reach and penetrate the space around it. Medellín's talent incorporates these ideas and other sculpture elements creating pieces of great expressive quality.¹⁶

¹⁶ *The Bather*. octavioustudios.fws1.com

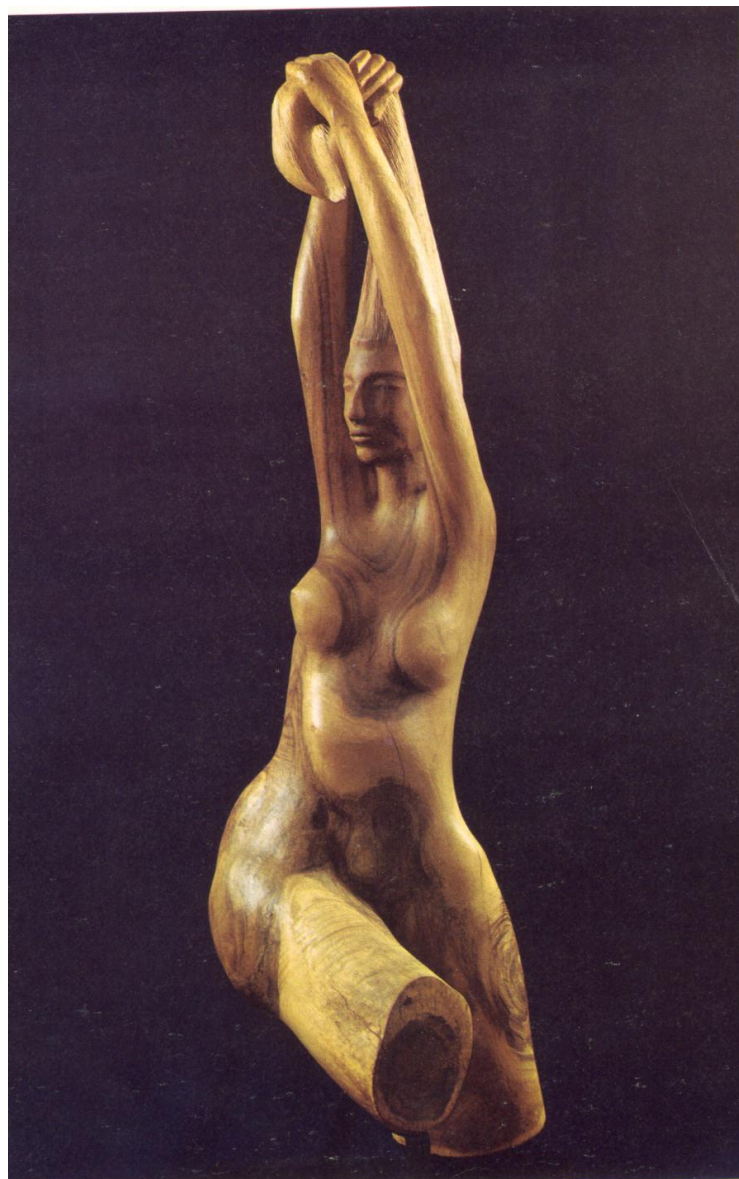


Image 5

Octavio Medellín
"The Bather"
1966
Wood Carving

The Hanged. Image 6. (1942, Wood carving) Even though it appears as a rigid, heavy and closed form, its expressive quality gives the illusion of being suspended in the air. While the viewers may not be aware why this man was executed by hanging, we are nonetheless uncomfortable with this startling, disturbing image. Whether the hanged man was properly tried or not, I feel threatened by my own impending death. The feet barely touch the base that holds them, making it seem that the man will fall at any moment. It is interesting to observe the texture with which the surface of the skin and the cloth was adorned. It gives to me the feeling of softness and makes the skin seem to contract or stretch with the force of the rope that chokes the man by the neck. (Was he lynched?). The man's body strains against the rope and fights gravity. It is important to notice the detail in the feet, the hands and the face which, thanks to fine lines and forms that play with the lights and shadows, create volume. The piece shows the hard work and great talent of the artist, Octavio Medellín, despite the tragic scene before us. Medellín, much like other artists, uses violence to speak against violence, especially if inflicted upon innocent persons. Medellín touches my heart and mind with this piece.¹⁷

¹⁷ The Hanged. octaviusstudios.fws1.com



Image 6

Octavio Medellin
"The Hanged"
1942
Wood Carving
42" X 10 ½ X 10"

Patrocinio Barela (1900-1964) Born in Bisbee, Arizona, around 1900, Barela arrived in Taos with his brother and their widowed father in 1908. For the next three years, Barela worked as a child laborer, and then left his family to begin a long period as an itinerant laborer in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming, usually as a farm worker or sheepherder. In 1930, he returned to the Taos area, and married Remedios Josefa Trujillo y Vigil, a widow with four children.

Their marriage, and his new responsibilities, coincided with The Depression. Work became scarce. When he could not find other employment, Barela carved wood; even when he did find work, he often stayed up all night carving. Eventually he was hired as a teamster through a government relief program, but continued to carve wooden sculptures featuring religious and secular themes, mostly involving human relationships.

In 1935, Barela's carvings came to the attention of Vernon Hunter, head of the New Mexico Federal Art Project (FAP). Hunter invited Barela to transfer from Emergency Relief Administration employment to the FAP, where he could carve full-time. In 1936, when eight of his wood sculptures were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, again in an exhibition of WPA sponsored art, "Time" magazine declared him the "discovery of the year." Except for his brief national recognition, Barela remained little known outside New Mexico. However, by 1951, Barela was back in the Taos area and devoting his full time to carving, often selling his work to the small following of dealers and other artists who collected his sculpture. He also bartered his carvings for food, liquor, or supplies. In October 1964, Barela died in an early morning fire in his shop, where he had fallen asleep while carving.¹⁸

¹⁸ Campbell Suzan. Taos Artists and Their Patrons. Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 1999. http://www.fada.com/browse_by_artist.html?gallery_no=11&artist=4674&bio=1

Four Figures. Image 7. (Wood Carving) Patrocinio Barela was a Santero, his stylized and distorted forms carved from cedar or pine has been connected with primitive and colonial art. His technique, didn't come from study or training but rather from innate ability. Barela's images express the simplicity and complexity of men and women, and family life. (Barela often said that the subject of a work was determined by the piece of wood itself, that the story was already there and his job was to carve away the cover from it).

To Barela each carving told a story, or part of a story. For example, the story he felt behind his sculpture called *Four Figures, the Same Family*.

"These figures you look at—all one family. They are father, a mother and two sons. One whole family. But for sure they are four different minds that cannot get along. They cannot get along no matter what. The father or mother decides. This I know in what I see, right or wrong, in my own days I been passing through." (Patrocinio Barela)¹⁹ (Gonzalez Edward)

¹⁹ Recounting the life of Taos woodcarver Patrocinio Barela. Patrocinio Barela, Carver. Collectors Gide, <http://www.collectorsguide.com/fa/fa046.shtml>



Image 7

Patrocínio Barela
"Four Figures"
1942
Wood Carving
42" X 10 ½ X 10"

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Diego Rivera, Mardonio Magaña, Octavio Medellin, and Patrocinio Barela represent to me the best of world artists and demonstrate expressionism through their artwork; most important, these artists symbolize the search for deeper meaning through the creative process. They all spoke without words through the images in their pieces, especially about themselves, family and human condition.

There have been good and bad experiences that have directly influenced my personal and artistic development. I have researched the featured artists and their works with whom I identify. This could include themes used, technique or the simplicity of their forms and their way of expressing, narrating and involving ideas, feelings and values.

Although living not too far from Mexico, its people and culture, I am living in the United States as a guest, knowing that I must leave for Mexico. While trying to find answers about my purpose and role as an artist, I am experimenting with new techniques, materials and tools that have given me the possibility of growing personally, academically and artistically. My sculptures, my pieces of art, symbolize my life in the past, present, and in the future.

CHAPTER VI

FEET AS ICONS IN ART

Our feet are one of the most important parts of our body. However, they tend to be forgotten by artist and researchers, since other body aspects such as hands, eyes or a smile seem to be more attractive.

It is necessary to present iconographic or a symbolic idea that not very often has compositional value considerations such as feet in the art. In a great amount of art works the hands are the protagonist symbolizing a source of force, fidelity, and the destiny of human sort. Other times it is the glance or the smile that play a fundamental role in the composition, for example, the smile of the “Mona Lisa”.

What about the feet? Don't they represent an indispensable part of the human body? Aren't these, what helps us provide movement or static to the representational image? I believe that it would be correct to provide just value to the feet because they are one of the most important parts of the body, mainly by their function as support and to allow man the gift of the movement. Thanks to the feet we jump, we dance, we run; we can be transported to different places.

By no means is this an anatomical study of the foot, much less, to try to examine if they are correct or proportionally the same. Rather, I try to visualize the allegorical, metaphorical or symbolic value of feet in the art works. Of course if we pay carefully attention to the works of art produced since the early man, we can realize the interest

given to this part of the human body, and is not the same in relation with the other parts of the human body²⁰. The following are some samples where the image of the foot is utilized symbolically:

²⁰ GENTIL, I., “Los pies en las distintas culturas y cosmovisiones: los pies en la Biblia” publicado en *El Peu*, http://www.nexusediciones.com/pdf/peu2005_4/pe-25-4-006.pdf



Image 8

Verrocchio

“Bautismo de Cristo”

1475

Oil Painting

Jesus and Saint John the Baptist appear with their feet submerged in the water, during the baptism of Jesus. The feet of both are under water and the clearness of the rendering allows the viewer to see them supported by the bottom of the riverbed. Once baptized, Jesus leaves the water, the skies open, and we view the Holy Spirit descend like a dove to come envelope him (Mateo 3, 16-17). Jesus is supported by the riverbed, because the Earth is considered like the support for the feet of God. In the same way, the vertical position of the left foot of Saint John the Baptist suggests the connection between the verticalness and the spiritual life.²¹

²¹ NACAR- COLUNGA, Sagrada Biblia. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1969. Mateo 3, 16-17).



Image 9

Gregorio Ferro
 “Santa Catalina de Alejandría”
 1775-78
 Oil Painting

In this work, the head of Majencio is being stepped on by Saint Catherine. Saint Catherine of Alexandria is the Patron Saint of Philosophy, visualized as and representing religious art, is dressed in a Roman style robe distinguished with a pronged wheel where she undergoes the martyrdom, and virginity with a sword. While with her left foot, she steps on the head of Majencio, symbolizing victory and demonstrating the power of wisdom and certainty.²²

²² NACAR-COLUNGA, Sagrada Biblia, op.cit. Apocalipsis 12, 1.



Image 10

Jean-Honoré Fragonard
 “El columpio”
 (-)
 Oil Painting

The naked foot of the girl acts here as an erotic symbol. The young girl balances herself on the swing while she is pushed by a boy and is observed by another young man on the lower left hand side of the painting. The author concentrates the light on the body of the girl causing the viewer to feel attracted to that figure. Not only the swing and the girl are centers of interest in the oil painting; we also observe the naked foot and the elegant flying shoe of the girl being emphasized as erotic symbols.²³

²³ Mirjam Western. The Woman on a Swing and the Sensuous Voyeur. *Lover*, Literatuuroverzicht voor de vrouwenbeweging, January 1986 pp. 14-21.

We must consider that not only the appearance, posture or positioning of the feet are important in the meaning of art work. The feet being there but not actually seeing them or hiding any possible deformation or mutilation of these, has an explanation and iconographic value.



Image 11

Brueghel
 “*Los Lisiados*”
 1568
 Oil Painting

The crippled feet or the absence of these, symbolizes the disease of the spirit and the soul. This work has several interpretations. The most popular is the one that speaks of a political reference. The five disabled persons could be representing the different social levels. By the context of the heads one is a king, a bishop, a soldier, a bourgeois and a farmer. As it seems, there is a certain irony in representing them as disabled because the

appearance of a man with paralyzed feet, amputated or deformed, means something more than a person with ailing feet. It is a metaphor of a diseased spirit and soul.²⁴

²⁴ GENTIL, I., “Los pies en distintas culturas y cosmovisiones: los pies en la Biblia”. El Peu, 2005 (1). P. 35.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In an art work everything must have meaning, value, or visual connotations of religious, social or political forms. The details that compose works of art will have to be studied, measured, and have a need to ask the question why? The interpretations and meaning are many when regarding the feet, especially when related to their position, their appearance, or absence in a composition. What I have seen is that at times the feet serve as mere elements in a composition. In other circumstances they serve as a collection of knowledge for which we learn about the personality of the protagonist or to just understand the basic theme. A good example is the shoe that is not more than an enclosure that takes care of and serves as protection. It has transformed into an iconic symbol of the femininity which sometimes is tied to the idea of “Feeme Fatale” or “sinful” life. Thus we could follow and discuss many more works, but now I prefer to display my own. They are my ideas that are related to the image of the foot and its influence in my personal life.

CHAPTER VIII

IMAGES OF MY ART WORK



Image 12

“Walking Back”

Mixed Media
Metal and Wood
14” x 12” x 8”



Image 13

"His Feet"

Mixed Media

Metal, Wood, Plastic, and Natural Fibers

22"x35"x8"



Image 14

“Bunion”

Mixed Media

Wood, Metal, and Natural Fibers

18”x13”x7”



Image 15

"Pain"
Mixed Media
Metal and Wood
8" x 12" x 11"



Image 16

“Do Not Open Until Christmas”
Mixed Media
Wood, Plexiglas, Natural Fibers
10” x 13” x 6.5”



Image 17

“My Trip”

Mixed Media

Wood, Metal, Plaster, Plastic

17”x13”x12”



Image 18

“Vivir No Da Trabajo”

Mixed Media

Wood, Metal, Acrylic Painting

14”x 9”x 19”



Image 19

“Fifty & Fifty”

Mixed Media

Wood, Paper Bills, Plexiglas

16” x 14” x 13”



Image 20

“Dreams of Freedom”
-Installation-
Wood, Metal, Sand



Image 21

“My Feet”
Wood carving
12” x 12” x 6”



Image 22

“The Holy Family”
-Installation-
Clay, Wood, Light



Image 23

“It’s Sick waiting for dead men’s Shoes”
-Installation-
Clay, Metal, Wood, Fabric, Natural fibers

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Each work of art should be judged on its own merit. Every piece should be readable by the viewers who will hopefully relate to the work, using the Artist's viewpoint and their own personal experience; for art to succeed a personal dialog must be established between the Artist, his art and the viewer. The pieces speak with their own voices and narrate the realities or fantasies they represent. The viewer will discover the representation of a feeling, the life and struggle of any person or town, if the art has universal appeal. It is in the eyes of the observer where one can find answers. Each piece however contains the Artist's general message in his search for deeper meaning in life:

“The true intention of my work is to express my feelings, and thoughts. My art relates to my personal life experience, family values and cultural roots, re-enforcing my way in life.”

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¹¹ De Broice Olivier. Diego Rivera pintura de caballete y dibujos. FEPM, México, 1991.

¹² De Broice Olivier. Diego Rivera pintura de caballete y dibujos. FEPM, México, 1991.

¹³ Mardonio Magaña. <http://escultormagana.com/>

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¹⁵ Arteaga Agustín. Familia Campesina, *Arte moderno de México. Colección Andrés Blaisten*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005.
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¹⁶ The Bather. octavioustudios.fws1.com

¹⁷ The Hanged. octavioustudios.fws1.com

¹⁸ Campbel Suzan. ITaos Artists and Their Patrons. Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, 1999. http://www.fada.com/browse_by_artist.html?gallery_no=11&artist=4674&bio=1

¹⁹ Recounting the life of Taos woodcarver Patrocino Barela. Patrocino Barela, Carver. Collectors Gide, <http://www.collectorsguide.com/fa/fa046.shtml>

²⁰ GENTIL, I., "Los pies en las distintas culturas y cosmovisiones: los pies en la Biblia" publicado en *El Peu*, http://www.nexusediciones.com/pdf/peu2005_4/pe-25-4-006.pdf

²¹ Nacar- Colunga, *Sagrada Biblia*. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 1969. Mateo 3, 16-17).

²² Nacar-Colunga, *Sagrada Biblia*, op.cit. Apocalipsis 12, 1.

²³ Mirjam Western. *The Woman on a Swing and the Sensuous Voyeur. Lover*, Literatuuroverzicht voor de vrouwenbeweging, January 1986 pp. 14-21.

²⁴ Gentile, I., "Los pies en distintas culturas y cosmovisiones: los pies en la Biblia". *El Peu*, 2005 (1). P. 35.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Benjamin Martinez-Alvarez is a Mexican Artist (Painting, Printmaking, and Sculpture) who currently lives in Edinburg, Texas. Benjamin is originally from Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. Saltillo is the capital city of the northeastern Mexican state of Coahuila and the municipal seat of the municipality of the same name. The city is located about 400km south of the U.S. state of Texas, and 90 km west of Monterrey, Nuevo León. As of the 2005 census, Saltillo had a population of 633,667 people, rising to 725,259 if the full Metropolitan Area is considered. Martinez-Alvarez is an artist with more than fifteen years of teaching experience at different levels, from Kindergarten, to College and University. In 1997 he left for Oaxaca City to work with important artists like, Rodolfo Morales, Francisco Toledo, Sinzaburo Takeda, Juan Alcazar, Eliz Olibella and Francisco Monterrosa.. Martinez-Alvarez joined national art associations, art residencies and art shows in different parts of Mexico, Cuba and U.S.A. Benjamin earned a master degree from Texas A&M University (2007). Martinez-Alvarez was awarded in August 2005 with a 5-week residency at the Vermont Studio Center by the MEX-AM Cultural Foundation, where he worked with artists from around the world. He then continued with his education at The University of Texas Pan American, where he fulfilled his dream of earning a terminal degree in fine art. He completed his Master of Fine Arts Degree in May of 2010. The list of his exhibition and images of his work can also be seen on his website: ben-martinez-alvarez.webs.com