

PRESS RELEASE

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The Museum of Biblical Art Showcases the Artwork of Enrique Martínez Celaya
Contemporary Artist's Haunting Works on Display This Fall

New York, NY, August 30, 2010--The Museum of Biblical Art presents *The Wanderer: Foreign Landscapes of Enrique Martínez Celaya*, an exhibition of works by the acclaimed Miami-based artist, on view from October 1, 2010 through December 23, 2010. Featuring a selection of 16 paintings, sculptures, and photographic prints, *The Wanderer* focuses on themes of exile, exodus, and the search for home. The works on view reflect Martínez Celaya's immersion in a Western literary tradition rich in biblical imagery and project a deeply private existential odyssey.

Concurrent with the exhibition is an installation of paintings at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. As part of the Cathedral's *Close Reading: Spotlight on Cathedral Arts*, Martínez Celaya was invited to exhibit four monumental paintings in the nave. The paintings, which evoke the four seasons through the motif of the figure and the landscape, fully engage aesthetically and architecturally with the stained glass windows and gothic architecture that surrounds them.

Curated by Daniel A. Siedell, Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, the exhibitions present a series of desolate landscapes in which God may or may not have abandoned mankind. Solitary figures, usually partly nude and always adolescent, are set against a harsh terrain. Martínez Celaya employs autobiography, allusions and references to authors who have been influenced by the Bible—including Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard—to construct a complex personal aesthetic steeped in literature and philosophy. Echoes of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise, Cain's exile, and Abraham's journey in search of a new homeland reverberate throughout Martínez Celaya's visual lexicon.

By omitting specific visual details, Martínez Celaya produces images that exist outside the realm of realism. The slender, pale youth he depicts again and again has no precise facial characteristics, identity or age. In his paintings, this blurring effect is compounded through multiple layering of wax and oil paint, a technique which mutes the surface and renders the work almost translucent. His sometimes massive paintings are elusive yet emotive.

“We are excited to highlight the work of this supremely talented visual artist,” said MOBIA Executive Director Dr. Ena Heller. “His luminous images contain subtle references to the Bible and invite contemplation. These powerful themes speak to viewers of every background. We have also been very pleased to work with the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; to see the power and relationship of these paintings in our two locations.”

Said Martínez Celaya: “As I see it, the work of the artist is to dissolve the distance between the self and the cosmos, thereby uniting Being and language, memory and Nothingness, life and death.”

Exhibition Highlights



The Orchard, 2009 (oil and wax on canvas, *left*) evokes the symbolic implications of the biblical flood told in Genesis. Water is equated with chaos and cleansing. What appear to be burned tree fragments imply destruction. While the painting communicates to the viewer through subconscious, universal associations, knowing the story of the flood enriches one’s experience of Martínez Celaya’s work. The artist’s inner landscape is informed by the Bible, filtered through major works of literature such as Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*.

Boy in Vitrine, 2004 (paint, dirt, tar, straw, pins, hair, steel, plaster, glass, wire, and flowers, *right*). After constructing this sculpture of a nude male youth and exhibiting it, the artist responded to an overwhelming sensation that the figure was lonely, vulnerable or in jeopardy. He then placed the figure inside a vitrine and covered its mouth and genitals with dried flowers. The encasement of the sculpture has biblical parallels, while suggesting a God-like desire to protect the vulnerability of man. The vitrine imprisons as well as protects.



About Enrique Martínez Celaya

Born in Cuba and raised in Spain and Puerto Rico, Enrique Martínez Celaya lives and works in Miami, Florida. Martínez Celaya studied applied physics and electrical engineering at Cornell University and pursued a Ph.D. in Quantum Electronics at the University of California, Berkeley. He attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Maine and received his M.F.A from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Martínez Celaya’s work is exhibited around the world and is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and others. He has created projects for art venues such as the Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig and the Miami Art Museum as well as non-visual art institutions such as the Berliner Philharmonie and St. Mary’s Church in Limerick, Ireland.

About the Curator

Daniel A. Siedell is the Director of Special Projects for Whale & Star, the studio of Enrique Martínez Celaya in Miami, Florida. Previously, he was Curator at the Sheldon Museum of Art at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and is a Fellow at the Center for the Theology of Cultural Engagement, Portland, Oregon. He is the author of such works as *God in the Gallery* (Baker Academic, 2008).

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About MOBIA

Founded in 2005, the Museum of Biblical Art celebrates and interprets art related to the Bible and its cultural legacy in Jewish and Christian traditions through exhibitions, education and scholarship. MOBIA has presented exhibitions ranging from “self-taught” artists of the American South to the work of Marc Chagall, Albrecht Dürer, Tobi Kahn and Georges Rouault. Future exhibitions will examine such themes as Andy Warhol’s religious influences, Tiffany’s magnificent and little-known ecclesiastical designs, and the Bible’s impact on African-American artists from the 17th century to the present. To date, MOBIA has provided over 350 workshops, concerts, film screenings, hands-on art sessions, guided tours, and seminars for children and adults. Each year, MOBIA brings free and low-cost workshops of the finest quality to hundreds of public school children, students and seniors, serving such community groups as the Children’s Aid Society, Harlem Children’s Zone and the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan.

About the Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is the Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. It is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. People from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week; the soup kitchen serves roughly 20,000 meals annually; social service outreach has an increasingly varied roster of programs; the distinguished Cathedral School prepares young students to be future leaders; the renowned after school and summer programs offer nurturing activities; the outstanding tapestry conservation lab preserves world treasures; exhibitions, concerts, performances and civic gatherings allow conversation, celebration, reflection and remembrance—such is the joyfully busy life of this beloved and venerated Cathedral. 1047 Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street, New York City
www.stjohndivine.org

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