

EXHIBITION REVIEW

“Seattle Enrique Celayo, Splinter.Return”

Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, Wa.

April 6 – May 13, 2006

©Susan Platt first published in *Art Papers*, September 2006

Enrique Martinez Celayo's paintings, watercolors, and one small bronze head visualize various states of consciousness, fragile, lonely, delicate, haunted and meditative. The rough surfaces of his paintings using tar as the main medium. *No Title (Boy with Aura)*, 2006 has wrinkles, scratches, and irregular rough sandy textures. They build an unstable physical setting for images of young boys quivering on the edge of visibility, anonymity, and consciousness. The figures emerge from a ground, sometimes they are blank ground, left unpainted, sometimes, an oil line painted over a blackened tar surface. In one large painting, *Your Will*, 2005 the figure almost disappears in a huge sea of darkened tar.

The child/boy in these paintings are all about the same age as the artist himself was when he experienced severe displacement by moving from his native Cuba to Spain and then to Puerto Rico. He changed homes every other year until he was 18. That perpetual disruption demands the inner resources to detach from immediate surroundings and focus on constants that can sustain the soul. The constants in Martinez Celayo's paintings are tar and blood. Tar is an asphalt product that suggests, to me, suffocation and toxicity. Blood, especially dripping blood as used here, is embedded in Catholicism as a reference to sacrifice and suffering. The young, non sexualized boy is suspended a dark place filled with thin lines of blood, and only an occasional light. He is not quite in our world, nor in another world, living inside his head in a place that is invisible.

In *Blood Landscape*, 2006, drawn with blood on white paper, the pale outline of the boy is juxtaposed to a delicate tree. It is not a conversation, but a silent relationship between two entities, the more energized being the tree. The odor of the camphor tree figures as a major reference point in the artists' statement about the exhibition, and here is a tree that seems to exude life, reaching out to nourish the child, who may be inhaling its fragrance.

Boy in Icy Landscape, 2006, a much larger canvas also drawn mainly with blood, includes an iceberg behind the boy's head, where an aura might appear. Here light is cold, rather than hot, solid rather than vapor. The boy has an inner life, he seems to be praying, detached from his surroundings. Facing the *Boy in Icy Landscape* across the gallery is the painting *Tu Sonrisa Miguel*, 2006, which is paired with a mirror of the same size in which the *Boy in Icy Landscape* is reflected. The two become a pair, one cold, the other warm, and one somber, the other almost smiling.

In the last part of the exhibition a pair of lithographs of a boy and a girl face a large photograph. The boy in the watercolor and the boy in the photograph wear the same shirt, a transparent, diaphanous blue with vines embroidered on it. Apparently, the artist painted the shirt and then asked his father to make it. The real boy in the photograph, the

artist's young cousin, exists in the same limbo as the boys of the paintings as he looks into the distance.

Martinez Celaya has spent his entire life living in intensely sunny environments, but in his art he is deliberately turning away from the shining seduction of the sun in order to escape into a darkness that he finds more profound. He refuses the lures that society holds out to distract us in order to explore the state of the soul.