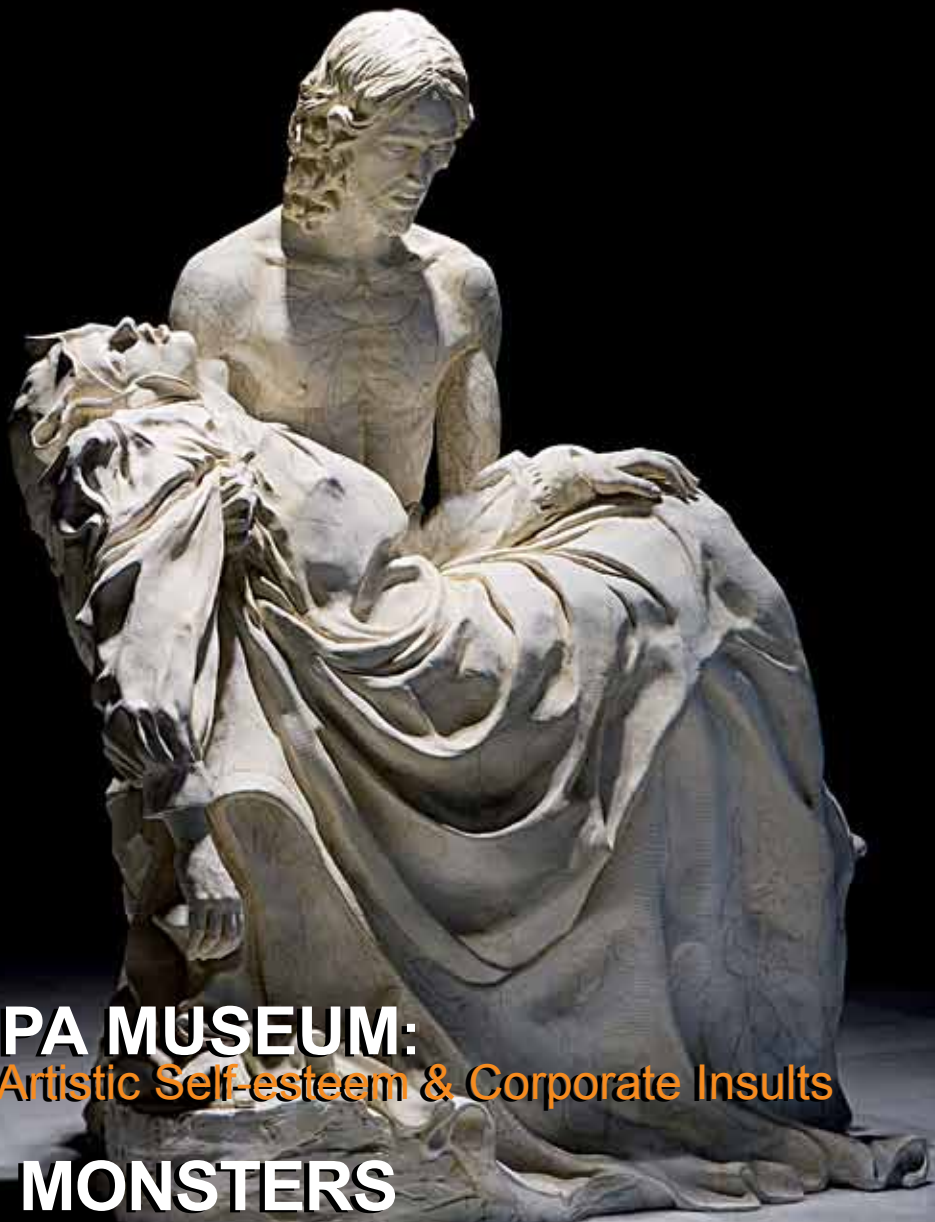


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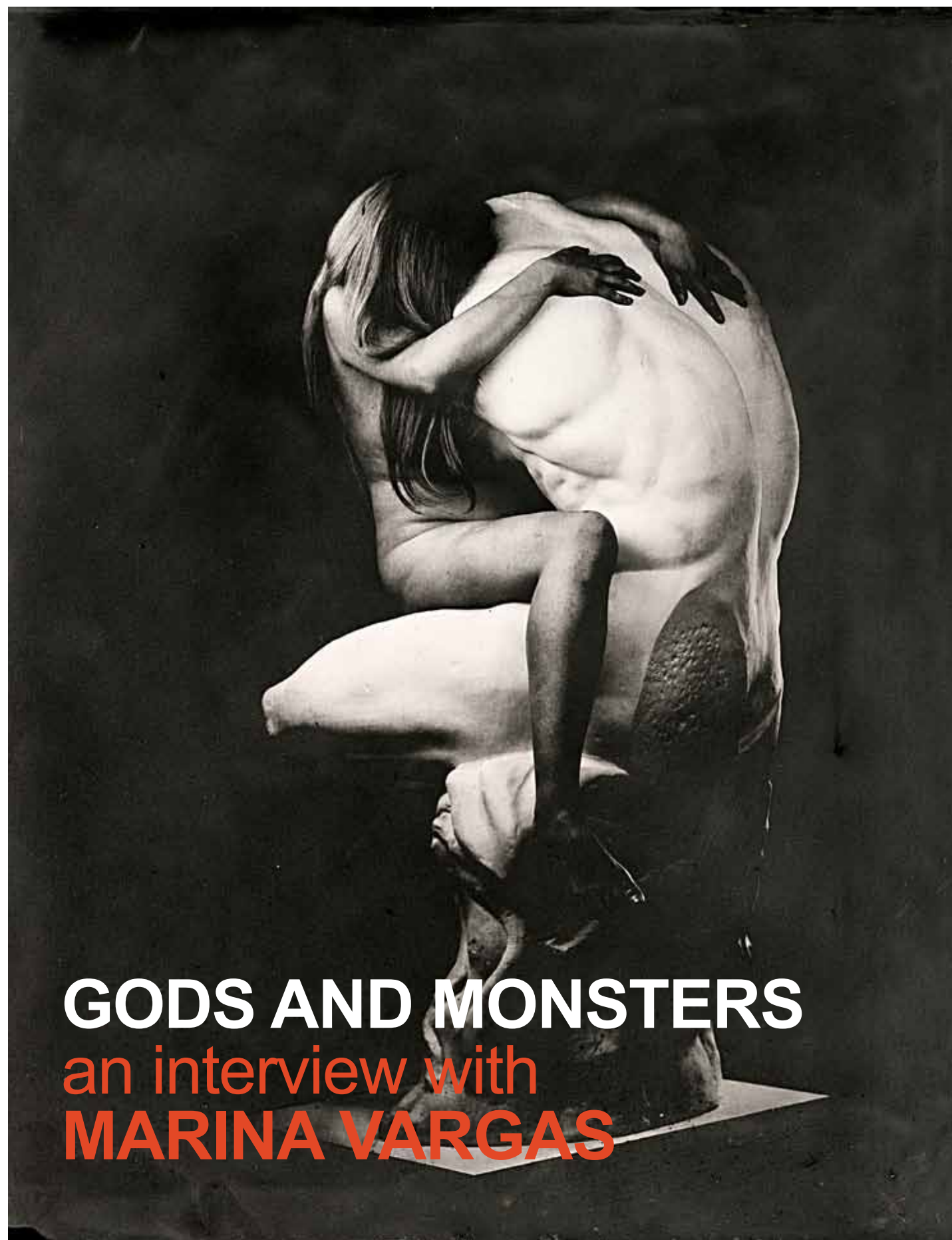
The Question of Artistic Self-esteem & Corporate Insults

GODS AND MONSTERS

*an interview with **MARINA VARGAS***

RENAISSANCES OF PUBLIC ART:

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GODS AND MONSTERS

an interview with MARINA VARGAS



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Noli Me Tangere, 2008-2009.
 Polychrome Polyester Resin, White Mare
 Tail, Glass Eyes and Fabric.
 Collection: CAAM. Centro Atlántico de Arte
 Moderno,
 Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
 Photo: Teresa Arozena.

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El Modelo y la artista
The Model and the Artist,
 201 Digital Print on Cotton Paper
 100cm x 80cm, 2015

Artist Louise Bourgeois said of her suspended objects in space, that they were about the “fear of falling,” admitting “horizontal is a desire to give up, to sleep, verticality is an attempt to escape. Hanging and floating are states of ambivalence.” For Spanish artist Marina Vargas, Bourgeois’ creative candidness has proved a heady elixir for the manner in which the French artist treated the greatest torment of all, death itself. By which Vargas appears devotionally driven to critique the industries of our energy whilst we are alive. Beauty, instinct, violence and faith, as well as “the symbolic, the mythological, the sacred and the religious, belong to that visible, invisible world.” As the physical affairs of our lives are absorbed as much by the imposition of an act of violence, as our unflinching faith for gods and monsters. Critically everything for Vargas comes as a perverse consequence of our dedication and ultimate devotion to

life, as our encounters with ‘sleep’ or death are manifest through our engrossment of human magnificence, malevolence and everything sacred.

Much less simple than the idea that good and evil are polar opposites, Vargas is driven to deliver art that engages with violence as an unreasonable religion. Saying of such tempers “I think we’re always at that limit, between good and evil. Between what one culture considers to be good and another evil. The diabolical as you well say has not been possible to define, nor what is evil. It seems the honest thing to do would be to redeem that wound. Many things are done from a position of honesty and irremediably cause huge evil.” Convinced that there is in pugnacity as much devotion to an extreme ideal, however misled, as there is in the love for one’s neighbour; Vargas invites her audience to consider whether we cannot have one without the other. “I think that religion, violence



and power are both necessary and unnecessary because they are not a mere necessity, they are naturally linked to man.”

Critically in discussion Vargas talks eloquently of the moral issues and ideas that constitute her practice; as beauty, knowledge and power, carry the symbolism inherent in her work beyond its visual significance and into the realm of our individual personal belief systems. And of her work Vargas’ examination of beauty culminates in a series of sculptures that appear plagued by impurities, whereby *Ni animal ni tampoco ángel*, (Neither animal nor angel) 2015, challenges our understanding of the anatomical study of the human form, as a historical bench-mark for the evolution of perfection.

Introducing a fallibility to the perfect form Vargas explains “I reverse the process of what was understood

as the sculptor’s task: to subtract what is superfluous from the stone until the true statue is revealed, that which corresponds to the idea.” And of violence she cites the contradiction that underlies our need to protect our principles, easily becoming a folly for social violence and civil war. Saying of her decorative imagery of guns in her *Revolver* series 2011, “(Andy) Warhol represented weapons as just another icon of American society. I represent them as a cult image creating an irony and contradiction about the nature of violence.” And in the spirit of Louise Bourgeois, Vargas sees death as an exhaustive end of a life tormented as much by beauty as brutality. “From the moment a man dies the simple fact of looking for the most adequate way to get rid of and not coexist with the body, from that moment we are looking at something that has to do with religion and violence. Therefore I think they are aspects that are linked to life and

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View of the Pictures from the Installation “Noli Me Tangere”, 2009, Lambda Print on Photographic Paper on Dibond. 119 cm x 84 cm (each one). Collection: CAAM, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain. Photo: Teresa Arozena.



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Ni Animal Ni Tampoco Ángel, Nor Animal, Neither Angel. CAC Museum Málaga Photo Courtesies: José Luis Gutiérrez.

death and whether we need them or not they will always be present.”

INTERVIEW

Rajesh Punj: *For an audience less familiar with your work, can you begin by explaining and exploring the principles of your practice?*

Marina Vargas: The main principle of my work is to move people, in order to feel moved myself and to move others. I think this is a vital driving force not only in art but life. With my work I seek to unsettle, to create a state of convulsion, a subconscious emotional parenthesis. As death is only a metaphor, for example in Latin cadaver means to fall.

RP: *You have shown in Madrid and have plans for New York, what works do you envisage for the US?*

MV: Yes I just had a solo one at CAC, (the Contemporary Art Centre

of Malaga), and I will take part in Volta, New York City, with Ge gallery, Mexico. For which I plan to take some pieces that are very representative of the works I exhibited in Malaga: *Ni animal ni tampoco Ángel* (Neither animal nor Angel). Specifically I will take three pieces that are closely linked to and very representative of the Malaga project. In a certain way the driving force of this project is to pick apart and question the classical canon of beauty. To bring the inside out and the outside in as if the sculpture itself was returning to its original matter. Creating a new idea of anatomy that is closer to a more primitive concept, thus relating the titles of the sculptures. With the concept of the body that Paracelsus had, of an internal relationship between the material and animal body; and of the astral body and the luminous and insurgent body. Among all the pieces in the project there is one that epitomises the meaning of the exhibition.



It is a self-portrait where I embrace one of the most enigmatic images in the history or art: the Belvedere Torso. This image arises as a gesture of reconciliation with the concept of female nudity in classical culture. Because as we know female nudity started to appear later on and in a more demure way. Relating to antiquity when women would either decide to dedicate themselves to art modelled in male artist workshops, or attend a convent to fully dedicate themselves to their mission. This work whose title completes the piece the model and the artist is a gesture of poetic reconciliation and vindication. A fragile gesture that emerges with force.

My subsequent intervention of the sculpture results from this performance photo: Belvedere (Liquid gold) was as a result of my bodily relationship with the sculpture. And it is therefore that the polyurethane flows like an amatory liquid that permeates the torso. The association with Paracelsus' term (liquid gold) comes to mean the supreme elixir of life that transforms the human body. I am not an animal nor an angel, but I favour a dialogue between opposites,

although I am drawn more by passion (pathos) than by rules (ethos). The result of my work is of balancing these dualities; because as writer and anarchist André Breton said "beauty will be convulsive or will not be at all".

RP: You have talked of your 'openings as funerals'; do you see the exhibiting of your works as the death of the creative process?

MV: I do truly feel that it is the end of a life experience and creative process. As an artist when I exhibit a project that has taken time to research, study and materialise, I feel that it is the end of an existential process. With this I mean that I am an artist who works on my own ideas and projects.

That is I don't create a work or have an idea and stretch it for ten years doing the same thing with small changes. I think that if you immerse yourself in the projects you do and involve yourself at all levels it is inevitable to feel that you are ending one cycle to start another one. And in my case when I do an exhibition and hand it over to others it is when I truly celebrate the end of a cycle as a small funeral.

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Diadúmeno (Materia Prima), 2015
Polyester Resin, Marble Powder, Enamel Paint.
170cm x 100cm x 90cm
Photo Courtesy: Diego Fajardo

RP: Can you discuss your early artworks, and of your use of video and photography?

MV: I consider my early work to be a rough diamond. If I think about it I realise that I was already tinkering with the same ideas and interests I have now. It's like a very pure beginning that I started off with and which I continue to develop at all levels. When I started the media I used were mainly video and photography. I carried out actions symbolically and in a certain way, with psycho-magic content.

For which I always sought a connection between video, photography and objects. I focused on the idea of creating sculptures - corporal and spatial prostheses, which I interacted with myself. Creating objects that would provoke or were the consequence of an action; an action that I experienced directly.

Questioning the physical and psychic limits so that the final work would be the visual document of my experience and of my sculptures. And in this way the sculptures act as a residue and a driving force of the experience. I currently still maintain this aspect in works such as the main pieces with which I will participate in Volta (Art Fair): such as The model and the artist 2015, Belvedere (Liquid gold), or previous pieces such as Noli me tangere 2008-2009.

RP: You have previously talked eloquently of your physically interacting with your early works, and of your participating in the production of ideas. When did you decide to divorce yourself of your art, in order to redefine your work from you?

MV: As I said before, since I started I have felt the need to know, locate and show myself. I think there are many ways of working or making art. There are artists who work like civil servants, who organise themselves with an office timetable and apply for grants and awards as if they were sitting exams everyday. Other artists have a high social commitment and work collectively and for the collective, and there are artists who enjoy painting and who cannot stop. Other artists who do exercises that they know will fit in the trend or



fashion within the system. None are better or worse than any other and they all belong to the world of art. And in this respect I also think that there are artists who need to work at a conceptual and procedural level, starting from within themselves. I need to involve myself with what I research, to make it mine and experience it. I think that when you work with yourself as the starting point, you work with and for others, as a medium or mediator. And I am very interested in that as an idea. From very early on in a natural way I started to know and recognise myself; and as I have continued working I have come to explore myself more openly. Without forcing anything and without having to ask myself this question of my involvement as art. I don't think there will ever be a

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Torso del Bevedere (Belvedere Torso) or Liquid Gold, 2015,
Polyester Resin, Marble Powder, Enamel Paint, 150cm x 96cm x 86cm.
Photo Courtesy: José Luis Gutiérrez.



divorce between myself and my work, but rather a maturity of ideas.

RP: In Fernando Castro Flórez's catalogue essay *The Hunting Gaze in your book Nadie Es Inmune*, he refers to Omar-Pascual 'having accurately observed the main themes of your work'. Specifically of 'emblems of power', 'fetishes', and 'coercive control systems'; how do you convey such significant and subtle ideas to an audience?

MV: Fernando Castro Flórez refers to the remarks that Omar Pascual Castillo made on the topics of my work. Omar Pascual is a curator and friend and we have been working together for ten years. Those are his words. I don't have to convince

anyone. It is my work which has to introduce itself, my words are not necessary. And the driving force of my work is not to convince the public, I don't understand art as something that attempts to 'convince'. I bear in mind and respect the spectator and that's why I think this thing about convincing would be more appropriate for politics than for art.

RP: I am interested in understanding the materiality of your work, and of your choosing to create coloured drawings, (Andy) Warhol styled canvases, murals, and mixed media sculptural forms, in order to construct and convey your message.

MV: Yes you are right that some of

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Untitled
Mixed Media on Paper, Different Sizes
Done between 2002-2014



my works have more to do with (the (Andy) Warhol style) than others... I think that specifically RAW WAR 2011 project and previously The Honey Games 2006 project (with which I started my series on weapons) would be the closest to Warhol. Warhol represented weapons as just another icon of American society. I represent them as a cult image creating an irony and contradiction about the nature of violence; as during my stay in Caracas, Venezuela, it was something that I saw and experienced up close.

For me the fact of touching upon and being interested in popular topics and dealing with them in an ironic way brings us closer formally. But I think that in the rest of my work I am quite far from Warhol. Although in appearance painting with pure and flat colours can be related to pop art, the interest and driving force is completely different. And although I use a small palette of colours, I approach colour for its symbolic charge.

RP: With your use of repeated symbols, in a matter befitting Warhol, specifically with works using the 'revolver' and 'rifle'; are you celebrating its iconographic significance by drawing attention to it; or suggesting its shape, form, and intrinsic violent overtones are responsible for much of humanity's ills?

MV: I suggest both things. On the one hand I seek to call attention to them and on the other I want to suggest that they are responsible for our economy and hardship. That is why I

transform the weapon into a work of art that will be sold. It's an ironic metaphor that reflects reality and that's why I think that in a certain way this series disconcerts, and precisely because of that perversion it interests me. On the other hand weapons have always been considered an artistic and collector's item. There are currently many museums housing weapons from all periods. And in a way they contain the history of how man has evolved and created instruments of defence and protection. This is a reality that I think we shouldn't ignore, and even more so now that the term 'religion' is used to cover market interests such as oil and weapons. Pillars of our economic system which comprehends the political, cultural and social, and which are the main driving force of the greater conflicts we have.

RP: I am fascinated by your applying 'the grievances' of a gun to it, in terms of decorating the entire revolver in all of its damaging details; and by doing so you appear to dispense with the inner and outer membrane of an object in order to explain everything. Is that a fair way of looking at it?

MV: My intention with these pieces was to create a contradiction. A contradiction because the violence and power of a weapon is contradictory. I was not interested in reflecting the results of violence because that's what news bulletins are for and we can watch them everyday. Precisely because we are used to seeing an injured and massacred person, but not to seeing weapons as cult objects of power,



and that precisely is the root of the problem. This is why creating this contradiction leads to more questions than offering the image of a dead child during a war.

RP: *Is your practising and performing art a religion all of its own? For which you have the autonomy and intention of reinterpreting history, rather than faithfully following it.*

MV: For me it is my religion because it is my lifestyle, and the way in which I relate to the world; and of the reason why I am here. This is how I see it and why regardless of my circumstances, I have never stopped making work. It's a commitment which is in a certain way above me, and in that respect my faith is projected onto my work. Although it sounds romantic it's the driving force, which means I will never stop

doing what I feel I must do. The primitive need to make art arises in man to relate his reality of what he cannot see, but which is always real too. I'm not looking for answers but for questions and that's what art is for, to be able to survive with those questions; as a threshold.

RP: *And if you are irreligious as you have previously said, are you faithful to a life-code of your own?*

MV: If at a certain moment I said that I'm not religious it's in the sense of religion as an institution.

I do consider myself to be religious regarding my relationship with the sacred, religious and of faith. In this respect I'm faithful to myself, to my intuitions and to my way of being; or at least I try my best to be. If we disrespect ourselves everything

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La Piedad Invertida o La madre Muerta, 2011-2012
Inverted Pieta or The Dead Mother
Polychromed Polyester Resin, 152cm x 138cm
Private Collection, Spain
Photo Courtesy: Teresa Arizona



around us collapses. I believe that we all have an internal code we must respect. And with this I'm not trying to be moralistic because I'm not talking about morals but about survival.

RP: *How important is it for you to move between mediums, (materials) and does that depend entirely on the message, (the nature of the work)?*

MV: I like being at the service of the work. I like to listen to it and see what it asks of me. With this I mean that I don't dismiss any medium. It doesn't mean that I am a god who knows how to do everything. But if the work asks for a medium that I'm not familiar with it will also ask me to take on a challenge that I am likely to learn a lot from.

RP: *Moreover are you developing*

one idea through several mediums? And do you see materials as having a hierarchy, in terms of the significance of the message?

MV: As for a hierarchy of materials, I do think there is one and that it is important. I think everything has its why and its how. And I think one influences the other and vice versa. For example in one of my works *Inverted Pietà* or *The Dead Mother 2012*. A work that consists of inverting the values of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo. Therefore this work had to be done as a sculpture, because it concerns the reversal of the piece as an idol and not as an image. The sculpture is there, it's present. It would not have been the same to take a photograph or do a recreation. The idea would remain in a virtual plane and the values would not be inverted but suggested entirely.



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RP: And of the individual scale of your works, how do you determine that?

MV: Scale is fundamental, the work also asks for this. And the way of seeing and perceiving it also changes. Like with the materials, with regard to scale I also stop to listen to the work. I'm aware of the relationship between pieces and that's what interests me the most. And if a gallery does its job well it will bring the idea and relationship of its artists' works closer to the market.

RP: Can you explain your use of colour? And its individual significance upon works?

MV: Colour is very important to me. I decide to add colour and drawings to pieces that in principle would be correct if they were left plain. But I'm not looking for correctness. If I use colour or decide to paint the pieces it's because I consider that colour adds power.

This is not at all original because as we well know Greek and Roman statues and architecture was polychrome, and it was not a decorative aspect; power added to power. With respect to my drawings I intentionally reduce the palette to relate religious aesthetics with my personal imaginary. The colours I choose are red, white, black, gold and silver. They are colours that I have chosen because of their magical-sacred nature: red is the colour of blood, of the contradiction of aggression, white is the colour of renewal, of a conscious beginning. Black is mourning and mystery. The

golden colour that radiates energy is the colour of deities and silver is the colour of the subconscious. This is broadly what it symbolises for me. In other cultures these colours will have another meaning, as they are the basic colours of iconography and alchemy.

RP: Regarding your mixed media works on paper, are they as significant to you as the larger more permanent works?

MV: For me they have the same importance as the other pieces whether they are larger or smaller. I have never stopped drawing, and drawing is always with me even if it I am doing another project which doesn't involve drawing. I consider it practically a way of thinking and of talking to myself. It is where I meet myself and where I retreat. And it is a medium that I maybe relate to more directly, and a support that helps me to understand and discover myself. I feel it as something therapeutic.

RP: Can I ask what are you reading right now?

MV: Right now I am reading: El tarot o la máquina de imaginar by Alberto Cousté, because I am interested in gathering information and research for my next project, which will be based on Tarot. The Tarot as an image and element that has travelled around the world, and as a fortune-telling resource for those who believe in it or not. I'm creating my own tarot system and deck of cards. This project The lines

of destiny curated by Óscar Alonso Molina, will see the light in May 2016 at the ABC Museum in Madrid.

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1. Revólver Smith&Wesson, 2011, Mix Media on wood 150cm x 90cm Collection CAC Málaga. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga. Spain. Photo Courtesy: Mario Padilla

2. Revólver Smith&Wesson, 2011, Kali la Destructor (Kali the destructor) Mix Media on wood 150cm x 90cm Photo Courtesy: Mario Padilla

3. Revólver Smith &Wesson de entrañas, 2011, 150 x 90 cm, Colección Almudena Bentin. Perú, Photo Courtesy: Mario Padilla

4. Revólver Smyh & Wesson, Fuego Camina Conmigo, 2011, Mix Media on wood 150cm x 90 cm, Private Collection. Photo Courtesy: Mario Padilla

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Gamínides Satélite, Satellite Ganymede, 2015, Polyester Resin, Marble Powder, Enamel Paint, 170cm x100cm x90cm Photo Courtesy: José Luis Gutiérrez.

