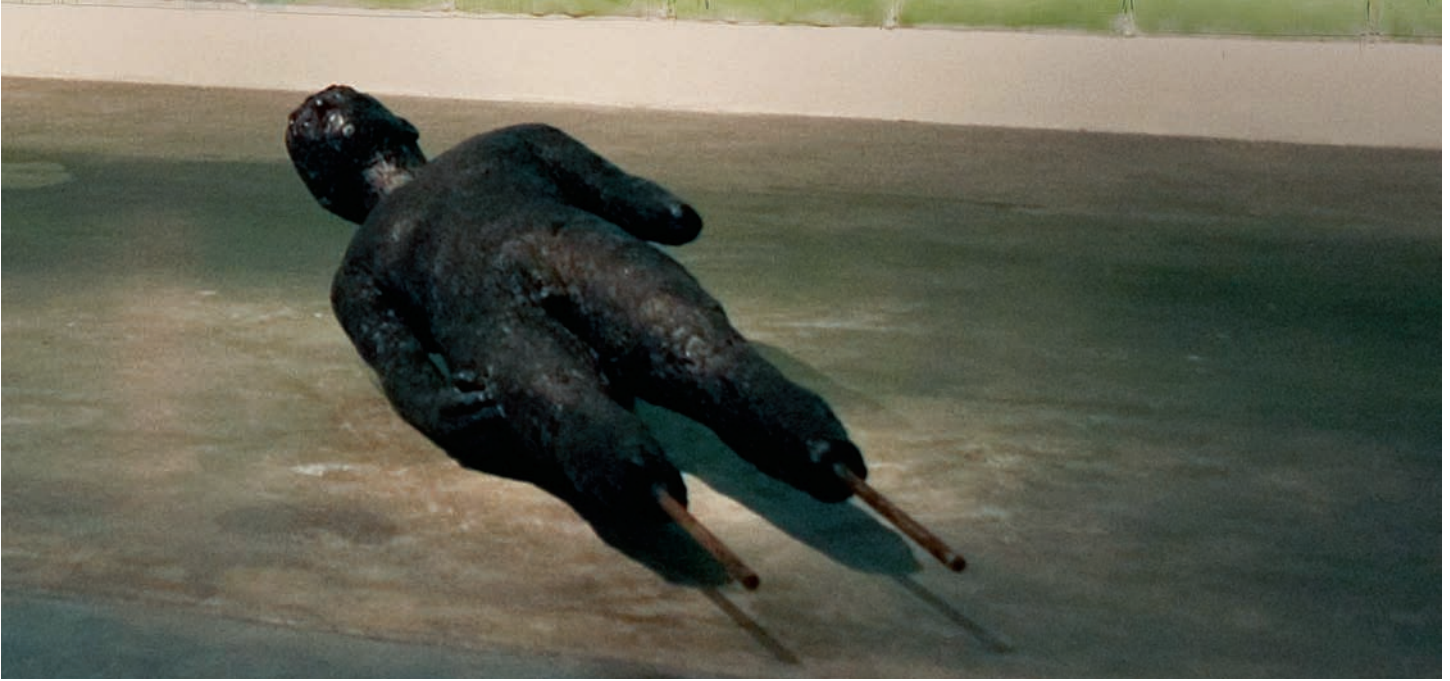


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Renaissance man looks to the past



The Immigrant 2005. Bronze and steel, 93 x 24 x 17 inches.

Art Review

By LEAH OLLMAN

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Over the last decade, Enrique Martínez Celaya has massaged raw matter from the deepest recesses of the mind and heart into stunning visual form. He has an uncommon wealth of tools at his disposal—versatility in painting, sculpture, photography, installation and the written word, as well as studies in physics, philosophy and poetry. As viscerally powerful as his work can be, no Martínez Celaya show ever feels complete in itself. Each batch of work integrates with what came before the way a fresh journal entry expands upon earlier reflections, or a new melody line weaves its way into a fugue. Images recur; familiar rhythms and moods resurface.

In new painting, photographs and sculpture at Griffin, Martínez Celaya continues his meditations on loss, refuge, innocence, melancholy and hope. The show has weaknesses (particularly the group of photographs printed on canvas, which feel conceptually slight and lack the artist's exquisite sense of touch), but the emotional throughline that unifies his work maintains as strongly as ever.

The intense interiority of the work is independent of scale. A small painting of an iceberg in oil and tar has a stark, brooding presence.

Equally powerful though lighter in spirit is “Refuge,” a huge multi-panel painting on paper of a boy standing on an expanse of green beneath the protective canopy of a rainbow. This radiant figure—pure, complete, innocent—complements a slightly larger than life bronze figure, titled “The Immigrant,” which is missing one hand and both feet. The dark, rigid form is propped up on its side on the floor like a piece of driftwood, compromised and vulnerable.

Works in the show bring to mind painters Albert Pinkham Ryder and Caspar David Friedrich, sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz and poet Paul Celan, but the wistful, painfully beautiful atmosphere throughout is pure Martínez Celaya.

Griffin, 2902 Nebraska Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 586-6886, through Jan. 21. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.griffinla.com