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ART

CHISELLING FLUIDITY

Deepa Rajan in conversation with Colombian artist Gustavo Vélez, who is currently showcasing his artworks at the Oblong Contemporary Art Gallery, Dubai

Gustavo Vélez believes he was born an artist and his journey to becoming a sculptor was a natural process. As a child he loved to play with the tools in his father's hardware store and enjoyed assembling and disassembling objects that allowed him to explore and find the "essence of things."

Vélez, one of the most well-known artists from Colombia's Medellín (where he was born), has studied in Lorenzo de' Medici Art Institute in Florence (Italy) and famed workshops in Pietrasanta, Italy. His exhaustive oeuvre of work has gained him recognition all over the world including Asia, United States, and Europe.

His illustrious career has seen Vélez receive many distinctions including the 'La Orden al Gran Caballero' from the Colombian Congress in 2013 and 'Orden de la

"TO MAKE A SCULPTURE IS TO MATERIALISE DREAMS: TO EXPRESS THROUGH MARBLE, BRONZE AND STEEL THE POWER OF CREATIVITY AND THE FLOW OF THOUGHTS. MAKING SCULPTURE, FOR ME, IS SEEING NATURE ITSELF IN EACH OF MY WORKS."

Democracia Simón Bolívar' in 2014.

Not a surprising achievement for Vélez, who, in 2013, became the youngest artist to be honoured in the history as a featured talent for the annual solo exhibit in Pietrasanta. The history of the event features artists such as Igor Mitoraj, Luciano Vanji, Gio Pomodoro, Fernando Botero, Kan Yasuda, among others.

Vélez is truly a visionary artist who carries the gift of moulding his work with creative fluidity that stems from a process like no other. A master craftsman, he deftly plays with the materialistic and the abstract to create works that create a space of their own, suspended in time within pockets of light and shadow entwined with elegant lines.

A theme that runs across in his works currently showcased at the Oblong Contemporary Art Gallery Dubai along with a virtual online exhibition that can be viewed on Gallery's website. Curated by Italian curator Susanna Campolonghi, featuring 15 artworks of Gustavo Vélez, these can be viewed until end of January

next year.

Seamless as his imagination, Vélez's works are evocative of an infinite vision that keeps on giving and as we speak to this maestro, we only begin to scrape at the surfaces of the depth that Vélez brings to his creations.

Presenting excerpts from the interview.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE TO BECOME A SCULPTOR? OR WOULD SAY THE PROFESSION CHOSE YOU?

"Being a sculptor is my DNA, I couldn't think of another option. My parents owned a hardware store and my favourite games besides modelling in clay, were all the tools they used to sell. My father gave me all the confidence and taught me to handle tools at an early age ... And I learned to respect and master craft practice.

"I also liked to assemble and disassemble objects. Above all, the process of disarming and defragmenting caught my attention ... finding the essence of things. I would say I had no choice. I was born being artist and discovering it was a natural process."



WHAT GOES INTO MAKING A SCULPTURE? IS THERE A CREATIVE ROADMAP YOU FOLLOW OR IS IT JUST A NATURALLY EVOLVING PROCESS?

"To make a sculpture is to materialise dreams; to express through marble, bronze and steel the power of creativity and the flow of thoughts. Making sculpture, for me, is seeing nature itself in each of my works. For this reason, I consider it a calm evolution, I do not force my creativity and if I have to pause a work because the lines do not flow in it, I pause it and return to it when the certainty of the next step arrives.

"I pretend that each of my works establish an intimate dialogue with the physical space where it is anchored or with the viewer who looks at it and perceives it. I would like my sculptures to speak for themselves, expressing harmony feelings. Creating a

sculpture is a matter of peace of mind."

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE AND HOW MUCH OF YOUR COLOMBIAN ROOTS INFLUENCE YOUR STYLE?

"Organic Geometry or Geometric Abstraction. I want to dissolve the geometric forms and convert them into movement, gyrate on an axis. It is an action of sensitive geometry. Colombia is an inspiring country. I not only have my roots, but it was also where I began all my creative processes, inspired by the organic richness of Fredonia, the small town where I was born and spent my childhood."

For a sculptor, perhaps the most important tool is the material he or she uses. What is your favourite material to work with and how do you get the material to move in the direction you want?

ART



in this material. The first hammer blow reverberates until the end. For this reason, direct carving is not a matter of strength but of technique and precision to achieve a relationship «from you to you» and to be able to materialise ideas that go through my mind daily.”

THIS IS A WORLD THAT IS INCREASINGLY BECOMING VIRTUAL. HOW DOES ONE STRESS UPON THE IMPORTANCE OF VIEWING ART IN ITS PHYSICAL FORM?

“I hope I can make sculptures till the day I die and that implies a direct connection – not only spiritual, but also physical – with the material. The creation in my mind requires materiality to come to life.



“The most important tool is the spiritual connection with the material. Solid material alloy reveals to me the incredible historical bronze and its slow and rigorous process. The antiquity of the technique and a warm metal allows the emergence of harmonic lines, interpreting with millenary wisdom the principles of my intuitive geometry. The bronze also makes me dream of the colours of the patina, pure energy.

“The mirror-like surfaces of my steel

sculptures are intentionally made to show what is around and they challenge me to break away from the coldness of a material and bring it warmth with fluid and organic lines.

“Last but not least, finding marble is a unique experience as a sculptor. It is a technique that challenges me. I look at the block and I feel like to take out everything that is inside, throw away the rest and capture the basic and harmonious lines that are hidden

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QUICK TAKES

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'MASTERPIECE' MEAN TO YOU?

"Inspiring clarity in the context of art and aesthetics. The greatest challenge, the outstanding."

ONE PIECE OF ART YOU WISHED YOU HAD CREATED ...

"The Victory of Samothrace: A marble masterpiece, made in the 2nd century BC, depicting Niké, the goddess of victory."

A SCULPTURE OR ARTIST THAT SPEAKS TO YOUR SOUL AND WHY?

"Apollo and Daphne by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. It is the most authentic and clear poetic story expressed in a direct carving. The harmony and rhythm of this work transmit to me the expressive grandeur of nature in art."

"However, adapting to new realities is essential. In terms of the virtual, I consider that the evolution in the art chain is aimed at the ease of being able to show art without distance barriers. Although I cannot deny that the sensation of testing the five senses in front of a work of art is a unique experience."

WHAT CAN THE AUDIENCE LOOK FORWARD TO IN YOUR COLLECTION EXHIBITED AT OBLONG CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY?

"Three techniques: Marble, bronze and steel that represent my latest creations and weave a three-dimensional dialogue with the viewer. Several of them are small format versions of existing monumental sculptures."



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