

rods, and/or domestic items like woolen yarn and pins. While each object is made of a combination of parts, it is delicate, yet sturdy, and invites the viewer in to contemplate its many components. Thus Caldas' works not only challenge hierarchies inherent to artistic production, but also question the spectator's relationship to art more generally.

Three large-scale installations incorporate the walls and space of the gallery. In *Wing* (2008) five stainless steel rings project out from the wall, at varying heights, resembling small-scale basketball hoops without the nets. The hoops are all linked to one another by a piece of pink yarn that guides the viewer's gaze from one to the next. A horizontal pink dash is painted on the wall above or below the steel apparatus and conveys motion, mirrored by the sharp horizontal orientation of the yarn. While the emphasis on geometric shapes and industrial material is reminiscent of concrete Brazilian art—the incorporation of the yarn and the three-dimensional composition shares more in common with the Neo-Concrete practices Caldas is often associated with. In fact the very shape of the steel hoops simulates those used in sporting events, which allows for the viewer to relate to the work in a very corporeal way—a key concern to have grown out of Neo-Concrete artistic production.

The installation *A Greek Day* (2007) can be described as a line drawing executed in three-dimensions. A turquoise rectangle is painted directly on the wall marking the space traditionally occupied by a painting. Yet, the only other painted component of the work are two small faint blue squares located on the ceiling, and hanging from each is a long piece of blue yarn. The delicate and limber yarn dangles before the turquoise square in sharp contrast to two stainless steel E and circular shaped formations that project from its surface. The composition vaguely resembles equipment found in a gymnasium—the steel formations again look like hoops, and the yarn, ropes. Guy Brett has observed, "Caldas' objects are 'thought' objects. They tend to open a gulf between what you see or touch, and what you think, which can be vertiginous."¹ In regards to *A Greek Day*, one cannot deny the desire to interact or play with the work, however, it is too fragile and remains a sculpture to be observed.

Shade (2009) and *Dinamo* (2009), two sculptural forms comprised of stainless steel rods and a black granite sphere (the size of a billiard ball) affixed to its surface, are mounted to the wall and a base, respectively. The ball

on each appears as though it could roll along the surface of the rods, yet it is held firmly in place. In *Shade*, a single piece of pink yarn winds its way around the work, heightening the sense of motion. Contradictions exist between motion and stasis and the natural granite, polished to look artificial, and the industrial stainless steel rods, which reflect the natural world on its surface.

Four framed works appear as enclosed still lifes, as opposed to traditional mimetic drawings of objects. In *Drawing 1* (2009) two outlined diamond shapes, one red and one black, intersect. In the top point of each, Caldas has placed a pin with a round cap in the same color as the diamond. Evoking the nail painted on the surface of cubist paintings to produce a *trompe l'oeil*, and emphasize the two dimensionality of the work's surface, the actual pins and their shadows have been included, making the work three-dimensional and non-illusionistic. However, the work is framed so that upon initial inspection it appears as though the pins and their shadows are drawn. The word *simples* is written above the two push pins, challenging the seemingly simple composition of the work.

Drawing 4 (2009), a small horizontal composition of rectangular forms and an oblong bowling pin-shape, cut out of cardstock and painted beige, occupies the center of a white sheet of paper. The small composition is three-dimensional and again breaks with what is expected of a traditional still life drawing. Two small orange dots bring color into the otherwise monochromatic composition. Caldas often incorporates small intrusions of non-representational color in his objects to question the function of color in a work of art.²

In all of the works on view Caldas combines disparate media and forms to produce work that ruptures with traditionally defined categories. Yet each work is poetic and invites the viewer in for further inspection. Caldas' objects compel the spectator to rethink his or her own expectations for and relationship to a work of art.

NOTES

1. Guy Brett, "Waltercio Caldas," *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 70.
2. Waltercio Caldas, Black Series, Opening Reception July 16, 2005, with an Interview with Gary Garrels, DVD, produced by the Christopher Grimes Gallery (Santa Monica, CA: Christopher Grimes Gallery, 2005).

Beth Rosenblum

Julio Valdez

Latin American Masters

A tantalizing body of water undulates before the viewer. *Cayo Levantando III* (2009-2010), Julio Valdez's recent oil and ink painting on linen, nearly five by eight feet, features rising and falling brushstrokes in shades of turquoise and aqua with green, white, yellow, and purple accents. The painting is formally alluring, drawing the viewer in with its play of light and space. Water flows across the canvas, changing directions; it doesn't follow a perceptible pattern and tension is evident, indicative of the water's force. Spectators cannot be sure whether they are positioned above the water or facing it straight on so that they can see its reflective surface. This sense of displacement expands the symbolism of the painting to more than a metaphor for the liquidity of the paint and the creative process.

In 1956 Leo Steinberg published on Claude Monet's fascination with the reflective surface of water stating

in his later years he seemed to have found the cause of that fascination and to have faced what it implied: that a ground-line which arbitrates between the actual and its false mirror image separates two absolute equivalents, like the midline of a Rorschach

Waltercio Caldas. *A Greek Day*, 2007. Stainless steel, wool and acrylic paint. 134 ½ x 62 ¼ x 38 in. (341,6 x 158,1 x 96,5 cm.).



blot; that the hierarchy of things more or less real is not determined by degrees of tangibility; that all those things are real which fully form the content of experience.¹

More than half a century later, the same can be said for the Dominican-born artist's *New Water Paintings*. Valdez has been painting the liminal symbol of water for a lustrum, exploring the spaces in between reality and surreality. Nearly all of the fifteen paintings on view at Latin American Masters in Santa Monica, California, prominently feature bodies of water, some containing silhouettes of human profiles, standing figures, outstretched bodies or aquatic animals and vegetation.

Niño Soñando (2009), an oil and ink painting of water on rice paper on linen (57" x 61"), is painted with similar depth to *Cayo Levantado III*. However, a dark gray and shadow-like body of a child floats on its back beneath the surface of the water. The body, with the mouth slightly ajar, does not appear to be floating peacefully across the surface of the water; rather it appears as the ghost of a child. Perhaps it is an allusion to the artist's son who appears in other works, or a nostalgic, or even melancholic, reference to his own childhood spent near the sea.

The blues and greens seen in the previously discussed works are replaced by deep reds, pinks, and purples in *La Maldita Circunstancia* (2007), acrylic and oil on three wood panels (96" x 114"), converting the sea into a blood-like substance. In the left-most panel the bust of a man, in the semblance of the artist, painted in shades of blue, bobs above the surface. Below him floats a small origami boat. The paper boat

is a metaphor for both childhood and *yolas* (makeshift boats or rafts used by Dominicans to leave the island). This image depicts both nostalgia for the island life and its darker side. The weight of insularity, or the island condition, is further referenced in the title which is derived from the opening line to "La Isla en Peso" by Cuban poet Virgilio Piñera.

Pido Silencio, 2009, oil and ink on canvas on wood panel (29" x 83"), includes a dark silhouetted figure lying horizontally on the bottom of the panel, submerged in a body of water. Is this silhouetted figure a self-portrait of the artist or a symbol for mankind more generally? Is the figure a shadow or figment of the viewer's imagination? Similar silhouettes have been discussed as the artist himself floating between the Dominican Republic and New York, illegal migrant workers lost in the Canal de la Mona between Quisqueya and Puerto Rico, and figures in the position slaves assumed when being transported on slave ships. As Valdez's silhouettes are nondescript they can assume many meanings.²

The transparency of the water allows for the layering of imagery and ideas, emblematic of the complexities of life and a meditation on what it means to be from the Caribbean. As Cuban historian Antonio Benítez Rojo wrote, "The culture of the Caribbean, at least in its most distinctive aspect, is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly... The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, or fluidity and sinuosity."³ Water for a Caribbean artist who emigrated can symbolize at one time the insularity experienced living on

an island and that which now separates him from his homeland.

NOTES

1. Leo Steinberg, "Monet's *Water Lilies*," *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 237. This essay was originally published in *Arts* magazine, February 1956.
2. Federica Palomero, *Julio Valdez* (New York: FTC Group, 2009), 73.
3. Antonio Benítez Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 11. As cited by Federica Palomero, *Julio Valdez*, 89.

Beth Rosenblum

SANTIAGO DE CHILE / CHILE

Juan Luis Martínez

Galería Departamento 21

A culturally revolutionary iconic figure and refined poet, Juan Luis Martínez (1943-1993) developed, alongside his writing, an object-work that was unknown despite its being groundbreaking. While he had originally exhibited it in Valparaíso at the beginning of the 1970s, it was not until the year 2000 that one part of that work was finally presented in an important art space. Art critic and curator Justo Pastor-Arellano included two pieces by Martínez immediately prior to inaugurating *Chile, Cien Años de Artes Visuales* (Chile, One Hundred Years of Visual Arts), an exhibition organized by the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes to bid farewell to the Twentieth Century. According to Pastor-Arellano, the collages – created with pieces of wood,

Julio Valdez. *Accursed Circumstances*, 2007. Acrylic and oil on three wood panels. 96 x 114 in. (37,7 x 44,8 cm.)



Juan Luis Martínez. *Swan*, 1990. Mixed media. 12 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (32 x 24 cm.).

