Edgar Mendoza

Essays by the Artist

HECTOR DIAZ

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Adam and Eve

2021, Oil on Linen, 130 x 195 cm

I started this painting in 2018 and completed it three years later in 2021.

An unfinished project whose characteristics and symbolism were largely suggested by the collector.

For me, the most interesting aspect of the work was the lesson left by its exhaustive realization, to which I dedicated all my resources and pictorial tools up to that moment.

This work has been a lesson about the general values that help an artist stay on their feet in the face of adversity.

The challenge was to satisfy the collector's full vision, setting aside my own free interpretation, a situation that greatly drained me, questioning my own foundations and making me doubt my own abilities.

A whole battle against the artist's ego and a profound reflection on the limits that should exist between the person commissioning a painting and the painter themself.

Being able to satisfy that need of another, obtaining their full acknowledgment, is one of the best rewards for our work, but a complex individuality of each party often comes into play in this transaction.

The painting underwent countless changes and modifications, which at first I decided to take on as the best of challenges, but after so many corrections, my will began to wane, creating chaos in my own sense of security.

I stopped believing in myself and my ego played a very bad trick on me... As painters, we experience multiple lessons throughout our career that will turn us into the best professional version we aspire to, but in this process, we learn much more from the major blows and obstacles we manage to overcome.

The painting hung in my studio for a prolonged time as if it were a warning, but also in this noble craft, time usually heals mistakes, and one day "Adam and Eve" made peace with my past frustrations…

The values of Adam and the teaching of Eve

It could be said that paintings are like living entities, they are not just objects; a painting accumulates the entire record of diverse circumstances that the author lives while creating it. And even more so when it comes to pictorial realism, due to the long duration and coexistence needed for its execution.

How could AI replace that human record called painting?... We won't know until it happens, but in the meantime, it will find it very difficult to first experience its own existential consciousness in order to pretend to equal it.

Within all the technical processes developed in my paintings, I value the compositional structure of this work, as well as every modification that was corrected as progress was made. Behind that rigid aspect transmitted by each of the elements that make up this design, there are technical approaches that struggled to give the final result the best aesthetic harmony. The presence of so many elements competing for their place in the visual arrangement was resolved through a harmony of shapes, colors, and spaces that allowed the viewer a sensation that everything is neatly in its place. However, the whole might have worked better had it not been for that finish and pictorial effect—not so realistic—which, in my opinion, turns this painting artificial and illustrative.

All the calculations that I set out and reflected upon became part of my own dictionary for the construction of subsequent paintings, and a combination of technique, trial, error, and my emotional and lived circumstances of those years, have resulted in a painting that I am proud to show today. Its meaning is perhaps what I am least interested in explaining, however, each of the elements that compose this story generates a symbol that I will allow myself to revisit in future versions.

The narrative uses the figures of Adam and Eve merely as a reference to discuss a story about the interpersonal relationships of a couple, about their differences, judgments, and roles played.

Among the symbols we find: Doors as a threshold, an open cage as freedom, a throne as dominance, a monkey as a pet, a dog as fidelity, a board with a contract and an hourglass as relentless time, a broken mirror as a vanitas, a bitten apple...

In the painting, there is an absence of emotions, as if it were a store window display…

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Nobody

2021, Oil on Canvas, 81 x 100 cm

The events that concern me as a creator directly influence my vision and the motifs I wish to depict.

This painting was created between the winter of 2020 and the spring of 2021, in the midst of the process of ending the lockdown forced upon us by the terrible COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout these months, my priority has focused on a profound reflection on the susceptibility of the human species and the race to become aware as a society of preparing for future major shocks, which we are certain will come.

Certainty, uncertainty, and essence. The clearer we are about our essence, the greater the balance between our identity and who we want to be. Move by who you truly are and not by what you should be.

Being at peace with who you are, so as not to fear uncertainty, and deciding to survive without reproach for as long as it takes, is not resignation, but another version of happiness.

Nobody was conceived after a personal process that has transcended a substantial change in my life and that marked a before and after in my essence that I continue to seek day by day: just for today. For every great change, a transformation is required that exposes us to the point of extinction.

Hitting rock bottom to be aware, and if we manage to survive, to be able to start the path to transcend.

So far, *Nobody* is the painting that reflects my greatest technical advances in tune with a clear and honest personal conceptual vision that I want to convey.
Its message essentially speaks of my personal circumstances translated through a metaphorical scene of this half-naked woman whose serenity wants to convey to us the process she has lived to achieve the self-confidence that allows her to face what could be to come.
The metaphor includes a series of symbols: The origins of *Nobody* go back to four previous paintings linked together whose kinship shows ideas expressed by women wrapped in bubble wrap. Ice and other materials are included as similar substitutes for female models. The creation of these alternatives also served to convey the necessary transparencies that induce the viewer to look inward.

This series sought to create an entire universe in which human figures and objects coexist, creating a new vision that included, for example, the genre of still lifes, but also intended to show landscapes and narratives that are yet to be developed.

Eleven years of maturation passed between my work *Alternating Curren*t, *Ice*, and the two still life examples, which showed screws, washers, and wires encapsulated in ice.

The result was this new painting titled *Nobody*, in which I once again pay tribute for the third time to another saga that since I was a teenager marked my creativity through hundreds of drawings that I made, as well as cardboard models, which finally ended up in the trash can back in the 80s: *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott in 1982, and *Blade Runner 2049* by Denis Villeneuve in 2017. Cult films that I have found in their content perfect suggestions towards my own personal universe concerns.

Part of my process of maturation and honesty over these years has consisted of losing my fear of taking on other people's ideas without complexes or prejudices, processing them in an attempt to create independent images, always with deep respect and the appropriate declaration of the corresponding copyright.

The element itself that I respectfully borrow and incorporate into my painting as is, is the Baseline Test, derived from Voight Kampff's machine, from the science fiction novella *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick from 1968.

In my painting the machine has examined the woman and is also examining the viewer, there are textures and translucent elements that accompany the internal silence of the character and those ice structures that synthesize all the essence of the diversity of lives that we could find in the most unusual structures.

I try to generate a series of reflections on our identity and on how external controls and examinations influence us. A reflection on how this analysis affects us and how it makes us who we are.

Nobody belongs to a series whose project called *Transparencies* aims to develop an ecosystem of paintings on essence, identity, and on the new concepts that can be reborn from this research.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Visitor

2020, Oil on Canvas, 89 x 130 cm

An empty house, a forgotten home, a nakedness that expresses freedom and security, or on the contrary: exposed and vulnerable lack of protection.

A scenario can generate the emotion of feeling alone or accompanied, it makes us reconstruct with memories, the parts that do not exist or that we have lost.

With abandonment, a stage ends but also the possibility of a new beginning is generated. The skin is shed like a peeling wall that whispers its secrets.

The temperature of each season of the year is felt because it filters through those doors and windows that once existed.

Nakedness can be objective when we see it as it is, and subjective even if we see it dressed.

Who is the visitor? The one inside or the one outside?
They observe you from their own perspective.

One under a roof that one day lit up at night, taking the pulse of life that she carries on her arm.
The other, feeling the breath of the house that darkens with the sunset.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Silence

2018, Oil on Canvas, 20 x 20 cm

The third painting stemming from the photographic series created in 2012 for the project "Phenotype."

Initially, "Water" was the theme that the Santiago Echeberría Gallery proposed to its artists as the concept to title that year's winter exhibition.

To date, this series of photographs has inspired three versions; "Silence" is the smallest version that attempts to maintain its level of detail compared to the other two, which surpass it in size.

For a spectator to remain engaged when observing a small painting, it is very important to adequately choose the fragment of detail that allows the motives to be expressed through technique and concept.

Personally, I consider that the technique of hyperrealism executed in minuscule sizes loses its capacity to shine through its details, and even more so when it has a complex concept that seeks to explain the reason behind the image.

When versions are repeated, the character is revisited multiple times so they may continue attempting to communicate an idea seen from different angles...

It is as if the model takes on multiple identities that allow her to retreat and advance in her own reasoning...

Identifying an artist who repeats versions to deepen their thoughts indicates that they need to develop the creation of an ecosystem that will possibly become the creation of a series.

In the paintings: Phenotype I (2013), Phenotype II (2013), and Silence (2018), the complex structure, meaning, and purpose that "water" holds as the protagonist, need to be incorporated into that internal reflection conveyed by these painted women who dialogue through their gazes.

Silence (2018) is a work that is briefly described, attempting to be commensurate with its size and the title that names the meaning of its absence...

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Submarine

2018, Oil on Canvas, 71 x 61 cm

"Discover the monsters that inhabit your depths, and talk with them..."

The phrase is about the exploration and confrontation of our deep mysteries, perhaps to answer our concerns that might lead us to resolve the end of a path. But to reach that depth in a search toward our inner world, every path first has a beginning...

"Submarine" is a painting that represents that first step toward the threshold of an entrance; in its allegory and visual narrative, it only wants to pause at the symbolic representation of that beginning without going further into the depths.

Its main symbols are shown through a nude, drowsiness, and a separate creature...

This subtle beginning is starring a woman who is about to fall asleep and is on that boundary between the first phase of light sleep and slumber. At this moment, reality is altered, and anything can happen... The interesting thing about this phase of lethargy is the partial loss of control from not knowing whether we are asleep, awake, or in a state whose rules of logic are confused in a mixture of reality or unreality, which gives rise to that necessary subjectivity in my narratives. We enter that unique and indefinite zone where objective realities and subjective realities can mix at the same time, even if they are incoherent and without being able to control their logic, which imposes itself upon us.

My work, in general terms, precisely has as one of its main pillars the representation of painted images that look real to convince us of their own unreality.

The nudes I paint can show vulnerable characters who seek refuge in the settings and clothing to resolve their purpose or expose their problem... but they can also express secure and balanced attitudes that do not need to cover the intention of their goals with unnecessary garments.

The woman has entered a semi-conscious state in search of her monsters; she does so completely nude, secure, and determined. In her primary logic, she and we all know that we don't go into the water dressed... she must enter without clothes because to begin searching for what is needed, she must be fully convinced to take that step to freely feel the water soaking the senses of her skin.
She submerges herself in those depths as if it were a sea, between reality and unpredictable imagination. Before... Perhaps she was reading Jules Verne or watching a movie about

submarines; maybe she needed to find answers to the problems and concerns about her existence that have been affecting her lately.

We are our own monsters that disturb our reality; going out to search for them within ourselves is an act of maturity that sometimes takes a lifetime to get just one answer.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Death

2017, Oil on Canvas, 81 x 114 cm

Mexicans abroad are culturally linked to death; even among ourselves, we boast of this deep root, not only in the collective unconscious of our people but also in a real and full awareness of the extreme violence experienced in our country with exorbitant figures of the dead and disappeared. And yet, we continue to celebrate the vision of this deeply rooted tradition in such a particular way because the inheritance of its legacy contains origins and precepts so ancient that they are capable of neutralizing that dramatic and dark part.

In Mexico, the tradition of death is seen and experienced differently according to the region you are in; its folklore represents one of the most important vital structures of the syncretism between the indigenous past and the arrival of the Spanish, which remains alive through our miscegenation. While in the communities of central and southern Mexico the amalgam of these two cultures has remained balanced, even with a greater tendency towards indigenous customs and their historical ancestral wealth, in the North, on the contrary, we practically renounced that local indigenous heritage because our more primitive and elemental tribes did not have as much sociocultural weight in the construction of our societies. In the northern Mexican states where I come from, the folklore and traditions are simple and with uprooted pre-Hispanic identities, which makes it difficult to keep native customs latent. Our Indian vestiges have barely communicated their increasingly extinct legacy through a language that feels more ancient and rudimentary from the precariousness of the desert and the rugged mountains. In the North, the tribes of our ancestors practically suffered extinction, and their absence was replaced without resistance by the new dominant New Spanish beliefs of Creoles and Mestizos and their Renaissance and Scholastic customs and thoughts.

Through this description, I intend to somehow explain how our origins and their anthropological circumstances influence our contemporary vision of what we want to transmit...

My parents followed the tradition of taking flowers to their deceased; they attended the cemetery on the Day of the Dead each year without any ostentation that resembled those replicated in other regions of Mexico that overflowed with folklore. In the neighborhoods of Durango, when people died, they were watched over in their homes with open doors so that neighbors could participate with prayers and condolences, and also so that children could see the face of the dead as part of life. As a child, the corners of the house were refuges for imagining, especially a small abandoned room that my parents allowed me to clean and tidy up to turn it into a storage room where I placed shelves with jars that classified a collection of insects and plants—my memories... I collected that inert world in abandoned houses and vacant lots... after school or

during summer vacations, it was common to find dead dogs and cats with their seven lives exhausted. On the rooftops and climbing high tree branches, I liked to watch the horizon full of hills and the church steeples while insects buzzed around me and I listened to the birds sing. All of Durango was full of birds; I suppose, like everywhere, the birds flew and kept the sky from seeming static... There were so many birds that children killed them playing with their slingshots; I once tried and intentionally missed the shot... I could never do it...

In her hands, she, who is nude, is Death; she carries an inert bird that will no longer sing... Vanitas.

Over the years, I feel more honest if I practice what I believe in, attempting to construct concepts with which my nature and instincts truly feel identified; I no longer strive so hard to pretend to understand knowledge for which I was not born. I try to maintain coherence between the beliefs of my personal life and the congruence of painting a reality, not only with a contemporary realistic style but also with a genuine narrative of my thought, so as not to provoke a sensation of artificiality or pretentious falsity. My own idea of death is ethereal, being more of an existential reflection that is supported by my belief in God but also in loss and the realistic and objective fact of no longer having life. But to represent this concept and personify it, in the Spanish-speaking world, our language overwhelmingly grants it a feminine form; therefore, in our New Spanish world that has been the foundation of Mexicans, we pronounce death as a woman…

Death (2017) is a painting that attempts to convey a sensation similar to what we experience when we see a sequence shot in a film, but in this case, without movement. Its panoramic vision is arranged so that the spectator experiences the sensation of being part of the environment in the scene themself... observing how the twilight illumination descends and presents the main character in the foreground, whose purpose is to show the concept that titles the work reflected in a dead bird. To transmit the synthesis of the thought I have accumulated in my life about death and its influences in a painting, I have created a composition with two main horizontal bands; the luminous and colorful upper one with the trees represents my ancient indigenous heritage... and the lower one is sober and refers to the legacy of the old Eurasian world.

Between these two planes, chiaroscuros are distributed and intermingled, alluding to New Spanish miscegenation; the protagonist figure is arranged vertically between the two bands, reinforcing the idea that its meaning is the product of both in a syncretism.

The work's narrative is intimate and humanist, proposing the sensory contemplation of a scene that wants to convey the true simplicity of the concept of death.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Bulbs

2016, Oil on Canvas, 114 x 81 cm

I wanted to show a lot and make it seem like one sees very little.

Without an open horizon and with a wall behind one.
To synthesize so much information from elements, the transparencies of glass and vaporous fabrics were propitious.

If we have a wall, the metaphor of glass can pass through it like an imaginary stained glass window.

I chose light and its whiteness so that it could be the narrator of that character who proposes the following reflection:

"The renewal of creation; the beginning of things is within ourselves."

A nest that has been built so that things can happen if the wind is favorable.

As a child I watched through the rear slits of that first black and white television that my parents bought with great effort. It was a whole world of electronic vacuum tubes that people of my time called "bulbs." I imagined a whole micro system between those little lights, as if they were strange incubators rooting future lives.

How long will the fairies accompany us along the way?

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Nest

2015, Oil on Canvas, 82 x 105 cm

About dystopian worlds and the visual language that we begin to evoke through films even when we are ignorant or illiterate.

It was inevitable that George Miller would not inspire my limited imagination as a lover of his Mad Max saga, and a romantic of those post-apocalyptic worlds that put man in total survival forced by a destroyed era.

The distance narrates a wide desolate landscape in its own nature.

We do not know the time, it could be dusk or a new dawn, perhaps it is midday, clouded by the swirling dust that foretells a rain of dirt in that wasteland.

The survivor is no longer just the man, but is also a woman, twin, double or cloned showing the two sides of herself.
We read stereotypes as we were taught to look at black and white.

Can we extract from such a magnificent cinematographic work, a piece that breathes on its own?

This is one of my attempts to pay homage and at the same time humbly try to create a new idea by being myself in my need to convey the concept of looking inside ourselves using a certain scenario to generate emotions and feelings through a simple painting.

A nest that symbolizes losing and not having hope so that it allows us to activate the self of survival.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Ophelia

2015, Oil on Canvas, 56 x 90 cm

Ophelia is in some ways such a stereotypical symbol that attempting to present yet another version out of thousands can be dangerous and pretentious... besides being a female character who transcends through her death and as a corpse.

In 2004, I saw Millais' painting "Ophelia" for the first time in London. It is one of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings I like the most, and seeing it live motivated my desire to work on my own version, which I began planning in 2013. But reinterpreting such a widely used and versioned icon by various media, like the character of Ophelia from the work Hamlet, raised doubts for me because in those years I resisted using such a recognizable character so directly without practically modifying their aesthetic discourse.

For me, the idea of my own narratives was the creation of figures authentically authored by me... As the years passed, I modified my criterion, mainly because I concluded that it was limiting or absurd to deprive myself of the possibility of reinterpreting everything that has captured my attention and added to my identity throughout my life.

As a reflection, I consider that our creativity daily receives an innumerable diversification of artistic proposals from other creators as inspiration. All this information offered to us by the various media—be it literature, cinema, history, sciences, art, and creativity in general in its multiplicity of possibilities—definitively influences our vision, however original we try to appear. Freeing oneself from prejudices that can limit one's own creation is an important step in an artist's maturation process, which is why today I have no problem painting my versions of historical ideas or icons.

"Nihil novum sub sole (There is nothing new under the sun)..."

Even so, I needed my reinterpretation of Ophelia to focus on another narrative direction that did not involve a Romanized aesthetic language; instead, I wanted to frame my story around an extremely delicate topic in Mexico during those years: the tragedy of missing women in Ciudad Juárez. I had no opportunistic intention of creating a social or political outcry; I only wanted to represent a fact itself about one of the many faces and identities of the concept of death... about its emptiness.

"When you kill a man, you take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have." (Unforgiven, 1992, Clint Eastwood)

From the beginning, I was very clear that my Ophelia—to name her somehow and relate her to the icon—should actually and specifically be the discovery of a dead woman found on the banks of a stream or drain. The body, which has not yet been removed from the scene, should present the disturbed appearance of a recent, disheveled corpse undergoing the corresponding investigations by the police and forensic experts; therefore, the scene should also show some kind of sign of that chain of custody at some edge of the painting.

In a realistic painting, every existing element is fundamental to its reading and interpretation; composing a scene with a coherent narrative is a complex task of composition.

The flowers and their powerful allegorical capacity also had to be included, not only because of Shakespeare's original mention in the story and the highly varied presence of these in the Millais painting that inspired me, but because flowers were necessary as a symbol of the fragility of life as vanitas among so many other interpretations that, according to contemporary critics, turn this element into just a discredited, archaic, or kitschy ornament... delusionally. The perfect and protagonist plant for my painting would be the oleander, a Mediterranean shrub whose flowers and leaves are toxic and poisonous.

In 2013, I conducted the photo session with Julia, the model who posed for this character... I dug a ditch in my garden, improvising a small pit with plastic, which I filled with water, oleander branches, and soil. We spent an entire morning trying to reproduce the character's role in every shot I needed, and I finally achieved it, not without a slight cold from the model's superb collaboration to represent a corpse—which fortunately was just an anecdote of no great importance compared to the dramatic end that befell the model for the master Millais...

A project that is still waiting to be realized...

I have painted two preparatory exercises in small formats as sketches, but they do not reflect the characteristics described above that I intend for this project, which is still unmade.

In 2017, the architect José Manuel Infiesta asked me for a new painting for the MEAM, and I told him about this project, which he accepted for the museum... Unfortunately, with the architect's death, the commission was canceled and remains pending a new collector who values the idea exactly as it is.
We are talking about a large, horizontal painting that shows that lying body, whose characteristics and theme are not necessarily commercial or pleasant...

This first exercise, which I titled Ophelia (2015), in no way contains that complex burden on the subject that I need to express; on the contrary, this painting, done on a 56 x 90 centimeter panel...

...rather reflects the serenity of the character in contact with the water of the pond and the rhythms of the poisonous oleanders that are her bed…

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Symphony No. 1

2014, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 220 cm

Inspiration

Symphony I could be part of that controversial polemic about the limits that we should not exceed when we decide to take back someone else's intellectual property.

We all have references that inspire us with their wonderful creativity and vision. History is full of examples and influences between some creators and others that have ultimately resulted in a richer and more extensive creative universe in its multiple versions.

Perhaps the limits are only exceeded when we try to say that we are the original author of an idea that is not really ours.

In 1996 I read one of my favorite novels for the first time, *Perfume* by Patrick Süskind, with it I imagined scenarios that years later I was able to see materialized when I saw the film adaptation of the novel directed by Tom Tykwer in 2006, *Perfume, the Story of a Murderer*.
It was above all the climax scene: the orgy with mass nudity; accompanied by that sublime soundtrack by Johnny Klimek & Reinhold Heil. This scene inspired me to paint *Symphony I*.

With this painting I wanted to pay homage to *Perfume*, trying not to fall into the dangerous terrain of plagiarism.

I already had the setting so that my personal reflections and concepts could be conveyed. When we use an idea or an icon that is already known, we make the viewer subliminally reconstruct a part of the narrative that we are proposing as an environment.
Once the viewer has recognized the symbols in the environment, the next step will be to show characters characterized to transmit messages. This is where the coherent reading that the viewer has been reading visually ends, to then provoke a new reading with other apparently incoherent codes that are not based only on objective images, but that begin to communicate through a sensory and subjective proposal.

Characters

The woman on the left is wearing a semi-transparent fabric, like a camouflage that sticks to her wet body; with her gaze she speaks to us silently.

The woman on the right is tied to a scaffold, she does not observe us, it is as if she were alien or hermetic.

These characters act out a role for which they have been disguised, one could easily free herself from her bonds, the other invites us to recognize her possible story.

In the next section, loving couples interact, as if wanting to impregnate the atmosphere with the meaning of a kiss or a hug.
Then, a clear and empty background unifies through light every detail of the global scene, allowing those independent stories to exist on a single plane.

If these anachronistic protagonists do not have a logical narrative and there is a disconnection between them, there is a great possibility of generating in the spectator the sensation of observing a meaningless scene.

We would therefore be saying that this painting intends to communicate through an abstract language despite its realistic technical elaboration.

The experiment proposed by *Symphony I* is: to stop asking ourselves whether meaning exists and move on to the fleeting realm of the perception of sensations.

Four possibilities or movements that are expressed independently, but that are linked together by the background that unites them.

Does *Symphony I* succeed in making its different sounds share common properties and become a whole?

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Mutant

2013, Oil on Canvas, 162 x 114 cm

Mutant is a painting that can easily be confused with a gore theme, but this is just an excuse to provoke a first impression. It is surrounded by an atmosphere to give a certain symbolic meaning.

It is framed as a highly empowered character, a term closely related to feminism and its ongoing sociocultural reflection.

The character does not seek approval of what she considers her consistency, she carries as a banner the concept and the warning of being protected, the weapon itself seems to be herself, a chainsaw that provides her intentions in her purposes or in her actions.

A model was needed that showed physical strength and firmness of face, that concealed her nakedness with transparencies without complexes or erotic pretensions.

This woman in that first information is presented powerful with her artifact, half-naked to tell us that perhaps she is not what she seems.

Later she takes you to her gaze, which in reality when you observe it, does not threaten you. She wants you to go inside her like the other women in my paintings.

Silence can provide answers to the concerns of a character who wants to cut off what she no longer needs from herself, and which prevents her from moving on to the next stage of growth.

More than an empowerment that wants to fight for something, it's actually having the conviction that to continue evolving, you must leave something behind and sacrifice it.

Are the conceptual nature and psychological and feminine personality of *Mutant* enough to compete with the powerful symbol of that powerful chainsaw?

The painting belongs to the collection of the European Museum of Modern Art (MEAM).

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Phenotype II

2013, Oil on Wood, 86 x 140 cm

The painting is technically executed in an extremely detailed style. It involved long and arduous days of work in which patience and concentration prevailed. As a painter I had to use a very complex technique.

The clean gaze is a weapon of seduction and one of the characteristics of *Phenotype I*.

It is a psychological portrait of a character that, using a hyper-realistic pictorial technique, shows in a very detailed way a kind of physical map of the model.

She shows herself directly and objectively to the viewer through her face, but in her greatest need, she needs to be heard, inviting us in her silence to penetrate her inner existence, and read the circumstances and events that have made her who she is.

The purpose of *Phenotype I*, speaks about how our physical features are influenced or modified by our environment and the circumstances that surround us. The character portrayed is playing a role for this purpose, but it has nothing to do with the model, a friend named Carmen who posed to characterize this idea.

The clean atmosphere contrasts with all the extreme hyperrealistic detail on her face, but the character doesn't ask for her exterior to be seen; she wants to converse through her existential vitality, allowing us to observe her introspection, her feelings, and her emotions.

Phenotype I has been my most hyperrealistic painting to date and was the first-place winner in the first edition of the MODPORTRAIT 2013 International Portrait Competition, organized by the ArteLibre Gallery and the European Museum of Modern Art of Barcelona (MEAM). The work belongs to the museum's collection.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Phenotype I

2013, Oil on Wood, 86 x 140 cm

This painting is the first version of the series titled Phenotype, which also includes the work Silence (2018), whose protagonist is the same model who shares the stage with several glass jars containing roots under water... an idea inspired by the painting Lumen (2012).

Attempting to encompass the vast territory that water signifies when one thinks of it through a design... generally first takes us to the colossal quantities of seas and rushing torrents of rivers and waterfalls. But in this first version, Phenotype (2013), the concentrated representation of this liquid is expressed in small portions as if they were analysis samples stored for a study. In that laboratory, the contents of each sample are classified to allow for the diagnosis, through results, of the experiment's conclusions, either to declare it finished or to continue the search for that antidote.

To recreate in this painting a conceptual synthesis and the allegorical representation of a laboratory where an experiment on this protagonist woman is being conducted, I needed to transform, substitute, and synthesize the meaning of typical instruments with simple, everyday glass jars. My designs often find a better characterization of their symbolic objects in other elements or figures that can only ordinarily resemble the original containers...

"They look alike, but they are not..." as in the case of test tubes, flasks, beakers, etc., replaced by common, ordinary household preserving jars. In this way, we grant objects or actions an inherent capacity to be reinterpreted or decontextualized conceptually.

(Precisely, and as a separate note, this is the argument of two of my upcoming "series" titled... "Illusories" and "Invisible Camouflage")

Any object, material, or structure could modify the meaning of its purpose or nature depending on the context and the various norms where it is viewed...

In Phenotype (2013), these capsules... let's call them that... which contain water and something else, try to offer us a narrative that does not refer to chemical or biological results and analyses... Rather, it refers to the existential investigation into the emotions and capacities of the character's consciousness.
This laboratory is a memory that stores 'memories'...

All these stored thoughts form part of an existential archive of each individual portrayed; in those jars, aqueous solutions rest that engender small ecosystems of memories, starting as a seed that branches into roots to propel the construction of a tree with the capacity to recall events and experiences.

The "containers that hold memories" began to manifest in my work through glass cups and jars containing water or inverted containers indicating an absence of the aqueous element since 2006; their symbolism was always linked to the concept of recollections and memory.

(The Time Machine (2006), Maurición (2007), The Snack (2008), Lumen (2012), Phenotype (2013), Bulbs (2016), and Silence (2018)...)

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Lumen

2012, Oil on Canvas, 89 x 75 cm

Our culture has created subliminal stereotypes of both men and women that are often unfavorable as symbols.

When I paint a portrait of someone, the first step is to reproduce their physical resemblance, but if I want to create a narrative beyond that, and turn that person portrayed into an independent character regardless of who he or she is, I must create a context and an identity for them. These environments can simulate an artificial reality or a true illusion.

Lumen is the portrait of a woman who shows a medieval stereotype in her clothing, but who contrasts it with a personality of not being an objectified creature, but rather an intelligent, curious human being open to the knowledge of the existence that surrounds her and that is within herself.

She is an architect who asks questions, investigates answers and dares to invent possibilities.

Lumen is the light that a firefly emits not only in the darkness but also in the adversity of the day.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Extraction of the stone of madness

2012, Oil on Canvas, 150 x 150 cm

This painting is part of an important Mexican art collection, whose owner asked me to make a new version of the painting titled, The Snack (2008)... which belongs to the private collection of the (European Museum of Modern Art), MEAM, in Barcelona. In my opinion, the decision that artists must make to paint a new version of a previous painting simply has to do with the expressive capacity of the original idea to transcend, along with its characters, stories, and interpretive purposes.

The Snack (2008), with its concepts and arguments, not only suggested a further reinterpretation to materialize with the painting that this description refers to, Extraction of the Stone of Madness (2012)... but also makes me consider the creation of an entire series in which the global idea about the universe surrounding these two very particular and mysterious characters within the concept of multiple personalities... proposed in several of my paintings, can be developed.

Another necessary context...

The new theme that inspired this work, Extraction of the Stone of Madness (2012), was that medieval belief which held that madness was lodged in the brain in the form of a stone and could be cured by its removal. But this subject, although it seemed very interesting to me, would not have captured my attention so much without the experience of having seen Hieronymus Bosch's marvelous painting titled precisely (The Extraction of the Stone of Madness, 1480) for the first time in the Prado Museum in 1997... a title and theme that I copied as a humble and respectful tribute to one of the universal painters I have most admired. But this painting by Bosch also represents a perfect guide on how to suggest, through symbols, interpretations that actually mean the opposite or have readings with critical messages hidden in plain sight... Bosch criticized the ignorance of a society manipulated by imposed beliefs, such as those of the clergy and the quackery of the time... I in no way intend to compare my work with the colossal figure of such an illustrious painter. On the contrary, my recognition is directed towards the formulas that these distinguished artists bequeathed to us to be used in the interpretations we want to give to our current work, whose interests are similar in how to suggest our concepts.

While in my painting The Snack (2008), I propose a search and self-analysis of two characters who want to obtain answers about themselves by resorting to their double as a mirror to identify a truth about the whys of their personalities, in the design and subsequent version of Extraction of the Stone of Madness (2012), that internal self-analysis in constant transformation is also proposed as a concept.

The title of the work is exactly what we see directly in the scene...

Three characters who carry surgical instruments with which they have practiced the extraction of that stone... but... have they already removed that stone? Or rather... are they about to do it... precisely this is the difference in the new version. This variation intends an interactive experiment that consists of knowing if the three women influence the viewer enough through their attitudes and physiognomy to know if they can extract the stone of madness... They need our authorization. Resuming and generating new versions of our own work allows us to activate the necessary creative risks to get out of our comfort zone in the search for new advantageous findings.

While in the painting The Snack (2008), there were only two characters... here we are presenting three repeated figures whose purpose is to investigate the pictorial possibilities they have to be able to manipulate the viewer and convince them to be part of that community.

It has been proven that we subconsciously accede more easily to an invitation made by three people or more, than to one from just a pair of two... The more elements a collective has... the more confidence in participation or inclusion is generated, and the hive mind is activated...

The three women present themselves to the viewer as a mirror for self-analysis... they observe you directly, waiting for you to confirm the extraction of your own stone...

The landscape registers the levels of abundance and firmness of the land with its horizons as far as the eye can see and those skies that warn of the unpredictable with their clouds...

The diagrams with anatomies behind them are waiting to dry in the sun and air that surrounds them... one of those sheets is upside down...

In this painting, we find ourselves in a new territory, "That of Allied Personalities..."

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Ice

2010, Oil on Canvas, 114 x 41 cm

To achieve an effect of verisimilitude in a realistic painting, a long and patient process of observation, technique, and maturation of the natural talents that each artist possesses is required.

Among the materials that offer a true challenge to paint and successfully convey their truthfulness, fabrics and all accessories related to them are among the first. For centuries, artists have tried to reproduce them because, simply put... fabrics have dressed the character of scenes throughout practically the entire history of figurative art. This important material represents a record of every part of time... an anachronistic detector test that has the capacity to conceptually convert...

The past into the present, the present into the future, and transform the future into a perfect machine that designates an era in any temporal space...

Fabrics have transformed their appearance with the passage of fashion, technology, and will continue to be present as one of the inventions of the human being that has most granted identity, aesthetics, and protection. I began to discover in fabrics and clothing the enormous capacity these materials had to transmit and reinforce the symbology that my characters needed to communicate.

At the end of the 20th century, my work began to manifest a tendency inspired by magical realism that, during the first decade of the 21st century, was consolidated with paintings full of symbology and an oneiric language. The designs of the custom-made costumes to dress my characters began to demand not only a disguise that communicated an exterior image but also had the capacity to transmit concepts.

In my work, the clothing and scenography that accompany the protagonist characters require the creation of very well-analyzed and planned designs because they will represent that unmovable suit or second skin, which will accompany them forever as a personality to continue narrating their discourses. The aim is not only to grant a personality identity to the proposed human models... all other non-human components must also have their own unique and individual characteristics to turn them into structures capable of transmitting concepts and meanings.

Precisely in my creative process regarding the design of these non-human elements... From a clothing item that was, up to a certain point, normal, I experimented with new materials, being

careful not to fall into the manufacture of exaggerated or artificial suits... I began with the possibilities offered by the suggestive textures of transparent fabrics and their capacity to simulate nudity in all its meaning.

I found in paper and cardboard materials with which conceptual and subjective dresses could be manufactured to go beyond the mere sense given to a garment objectively. In the course of this period, dreams and their proposals as an inspirational source, as well as that magical language, were replaced by a need for a transformation, perhaps more metaphysical and psychological, that would more broadly cover my new themes and interests that I wanted to propose in other directions.

This new language arrived accompanied by the necessary change to a more realistic pictorial technique that served to transmit this new model of sensations and feelings whose reality needed a different type of truthfulness.

Having reached this point at the beginning of 2009, I discovered other materials with new expressive capacities for my ideas; these were: plastics and synthetics, which offered me the possibility of a renewing proposal for a new prototype of alternative clothing.

The predecessor painting to Ice (2010) was my painting Alternating Current (2009), where I first showed figures dressed in bubble wrap. My interest in this new transparent and semi-transparent plastic material wanted to symbolize above all:

Looking inward through the wrapping that protects the fragility where the answers lie.

In my research on the presence of plastic in the paintings of realist and hyperrealist artists, this material began to be represented starting in the 1960s of the last century. Two main approaches have been designated to plastic: one objective as is, and the other with a more complex and subjective meaning.

On the one hand, we will find this material in some examples of North American hyperrealism among the iconic painters of that country in this style, as well as in the work of extraordinary Spanish hyperrealist artists, all of them with examples that, from those years to the present, have had as their main purpose to reproduce with extreme detail an iconography of emblematic commercial everyday objects, among which are some examples precisely of plastic bags and wrappers that function merely as what they are objectively; this selection also includes other artists with more academic realist styles dedicated to Still life. In general, we would be talking about a type of genre related to still lifes in whose compositions these new materials are proposed as part of modern and contemporary furniture.

But it is especially in the realism of Spanish painters from this same decade of the 60s where, although sparingly, representations of plastics appear as wrapping and transparent material that contributes to the general meaning of these existential and reflective realist works on subjective concepts.

Undoubtedly, the work of these Spanish painters has influenced the proposals I intend with my personal painting: Antonio Lopez, Eduardo Naranjo, and especially Cristobal Toral (Packaged for Travel, 1980) with their mysterious characters and objects wrapped with fabrics and bindings with conceptual meanings, without forgetting to mention the Chilean Claudio Bravo, all of them with proposals more akin to each other and different in comparison with the hyperrealists mentioned above.

Two years after I started manufacturing my suits made of bubble wrap in 2009, the extraordinary Australian hyperrealist painter Robin Eley presented a series of magnificent realistic paintings in 2011, with nude models who were wrapped in transparent plastics… This coincidence at very similar moments at the end of the first decade of the 21st century makes me think and wonder what were the coincidences that influenced both of us to begin using plastic not only as a companion material but as a suit that somehow functioned as a second skin full of meanings. Of course, there are several artists who have used this material, and among the new generations of realist painters, we are beginning to see excellent recreations, particularly of bubble wrap, more commonly.

But let's return to our described painting... Perhaps the most intriguing element of Ice (2010) is that strange structure that the model holds in her hands. My previous paintings had been showing, as a fundamental part of the characters, objects that were more than just a symbol but were the representation of:

A kind of codified memory about identity.

In this idea, for an object to be able to modify its apparent aspect and utility for other meanings that went beyond its everyday function, I was always influenced by the works of Bosch and Brueghel the Elder, as well as the complex religious iconography of New Spanish colonial painting of saints and virgins.

But in the 1990s, the time I lived in Mexico City contributed to my formation with a new artistic criterion on creative conceptualization that was expressed through performances, installations, and especially with object art and its capacity to decontextualize.

I must, of course, highlight that for me, cinema is perhaps the main and most sophisticated source of inspiration that regroups all these artistic expressions, contributing with its vision the effect of reality that I intend to show for my paintings.

The code/entity. In a figurative painting, the possibilities for describing our ideas are immense and at the same time very limited; our creativity only has the space provided by a canvas for the elaboration of a static image that can narrate very complex reasonings. The intriguing object held by the woman in this painting is a product based on the prototypes I developed for my project called *Postestertorismo*, from 1992 and 1994. The design and appearance of this structure are amorphous and abstract in nature.

Its nature has mimetic capabilities of transfiguration that allow it to adopt the form of a biological organism, but also the diversity of other materials. The code/entity is the conceptual representation of a living entity with the capacity to diagnose and explore other beings, acting as a translator and code reader. The code/entity, with its mimetic capacity, presents us with a portrait of how it views and diagnoses the model, translating her semi-transparent suit as if it were ice, and the character and her concerns with an appearance in the form of screws.

A woman performs her own interdisciplinary performance, showing the ice and screws object art designed for her... ephemeral in its concept of existence that sensually melts in her hands, aching from the cold... The woman experiences her existential loneliness in the middle of that empty environment... She looks in one direction without looking at us because for her, we do not exist...

There is a time to decipher the codes of internal questions, with hands that suffer the melted cold whose memory will only remain in the memory of pieces of metal…

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Alternating Current

2010, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 200 cm

"Direct current" and "Alternating current" are the two main types of electric currents that we use.

"Direct current" is not so powerful, its transmission is compact and short, as well as being linear and in one direction.

"Alternating current" can be transformed from a high power to a short one in both directions, its undulating movements are transported and connected by means of transformers for its transmission as needed without taking into account the order of the connection poles.

This simple but complex description of the "alternating" electrical method generated in me this symbolic metaphor in which two female characters mutually and alternately feed each other's capabilities.

"Alternating current" to transmit and adapt its purpose needs "transformers", the cages symbolize that function.
A cage is an open mystery, from inside or outside, everything can be looked through.... but being inside is not the same as being outside, which is why cages can be transformative symbols.

Between these two powerful women, there is the capacity to adapt in their communication. Only they know what their internal and secret dialogue is, and although they may seem like similar clones, there are radical differences between them. It is not known which one could be more powerful or dominant than the other, in fact it does not matter, since both have the ability to transform their meaning as needed.

Two characters feeding each other in the middle of a dystopian landscape, apparently inert or inanimate, inviting the viewer to observe and discover their meaning, and beyond a comprehensible explanation, results in a silent and abstract explanation.

They show their nudity not in the erotic sense, but through a veiled, protected and semi-transparent invitation, so that we look inside ourselves, a mirror effect.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Entomophagous

2009, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 60 cm

The premise of this painting in a first stage is presented as a metaphor for the necessary sustenance to exist. But the food displayed in the scene is an implausible dish, indicating that what we are seeing is not exactly what it seems... that it goes further. In one part of its narrative, this painting could seem like an allegorical reflection on how every organism requires a variety of sustenance according to its nature and circumstances, and according to the type of hunger it has, whether physical, mental, or existential... There is something to this viewpoint, without dismissing it...

As a particular detail to consider at this beginning, the character has been designed as a predator who is devouring not a butterfly as prey, but another impeccable predator in the insect kingdom, like the dragonfly.

The design of the general scene of this painting is inspired by the way the Flemish painter Brueghel the Elder, who has greatly influenced my work, depicts metaphors in an anecdotal style.

I wanted to represent, in a clean and concise way, a kind of aphorism or visual proverb that synthesizes the entire meaning in a simple image to function like the proverb, "The big fish eats the small fish." I allow myself to elaborate another of my own for this painting that reflects in its first part on food.

Eat it even if you don't want to, because if you don't, another will eat it...

Up to this point, the narration has presented this entomophagous and anthropophagous woman who preys and observes us fixedly to reflect on her nutritional metaphor.

For the staging, she is wearing a nightgown because perhaps she is dreaming in the middle of that dreamlike landscape that does not belong or is indifferent to the other reality she wants us to see.

The character who eats insects wants us to look her straight in the eyes to propose an interaction with her... she needs to create a story about a strange dish to capture our attention... and once captured, to expose what truly interests her...

This protagonist wants us to learn to distinguish the differences between certain reflective concepts, so that we empathize with her and her personal background from where she will launch her second reflection.

First, we must identify whether she is eating or devouring... to be conscious ourselves that we are truly observing and not just looking... In this way of interacting with the spectator, she subtly suggests trying to educate our instinct so that we know how to differentiate. Why? To differentiate between what the balance of reason and the imbalance of unreason mean, between the ambition to possess and wanting more than we need to be more than we are... To differentiate the dichotomy between being or not being...

Second part... The differences and the transmission of the interactive experiment between spectator / entomophagist... Does this painting succeed in transmitting this experiment?

Entomophagist (2009) is a work that is part of a series of paintings that has as one of its conceptual principles... The philosophical dilemma of existence...

I have been expressing this concern in various ways in the previous and subsequent paintings that surround this work.

When we ask ourselves something repeatedly since we were little... we end up seeing that something in everything that crosses our path as if it were a coincidence.

Around 1985 at the age of 18, long before I wanted to be a painter, I first saw the movie, Blade Runner, directed by Ridley Scott in 1982. Later I read the novel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968)" by Philip K. Dick, which is the original source of this science fiction story. From the beginning, I felt completely identified with that universe that posed the same reflection that troubled me about...

The dilemma of being, existing, and being conscious of it...

This concept would gradually manifest as a constant in my paintings; all my characters throughout my career as a painter reflect being bearers of this concern as if they needed us to acknowledge their existence.

All of them throughout my work in each painting transform and substitute... They are no longer the portrait of someone or the objective representation of something... They are now the others who have acquired a new identity... Hence the dilemma of why it is fundamental for them that we understand why it is useful to know how to differentiate.

But let's go directly to the reason for this proposed second reflection... For every person of the human race, the idea of balance has different meanings that influence their individual concepts of happiness.

Happiness is an emotional and relative state in which well-being and feelings of fulfillment are manifested. But does happiness only belong to people? If we consider in this second reflection a creative experiment that includes other consciousnesses, such as those of animals for example, or going further, even endowing the woman painted in this very painting with a consciousness…

In her apparent reality, does she exist or is she just a painting? What is the category of existence that we attribute to the characters and beings who star in our stories as interlocutor mirrors and their own identity characteristics. Are they just the mere copy of a model whose conceptual narrative is only an anecdote to entertain?

Of course, not all these characters manage to interact, talk, or just whisper to a spectator, but those who succeed, even if they are artificial, perhaps already belong, like us humans, to that place of consciousness whose philosophical dilemma grants the capacity to be and to exist.

The contemporary phenomenon of AI and the advances in robotics begin to give more meaning, even if it is still very distant, to the approaches that science fiction has proposed for decades. But the figure of automatons is lost much further back in time with "other models of human manufacturing" that we forget are very similar in essence; spirits, gods, and ghosts, to name just a few that have already been accepted by our centuries-old beliefs as beings authorized to wander among us...

In the multiplicity of realities, perhaps what matters least to the woman in this painting and those of her kind or similar, is our pretentious human opinion, because simply... She has already decided to exist.

That water well painted on a panel looked so real that the birds crashed and died believing that it existed...

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Two Pilares II

2009 Oil on Canvas, 50 x 73 cm

I imagined you helping me, but it was only my voice.

There, in the confines, the sky battles the earth to determine who has dominion over that strip of the horizon...

In 2009, my work began to feature paintings with better-balanced colors that provided a greater effect of reality and truthfulness to my images. Throughout the previous year, my color technique underwent a final transitional stage that sought to clean up my palette in favor of harmony between warm and cool tones.

This painting titled Two Pillars II (2009) represents the first example in my production where a harmonic coloring in stable forces was achieved; that balance, which had not been fully achieved before, confirmed to me the great importance of adequately understanding the proper use of color and how it impacts each of the structures involved in the design of a work. Of course, this research into my own vision of reality and the way to balance colors to represent it is in constant technical review, growing alongside the other areas of construction for my artistic designs.

In a concise but very complex explanation for realist painters to grasp in practice, it is not just about interspersing spaces with brushstrokes or cool and warm tasks, creating a visual mix as if it were a messy multi-colored display. What is sought is to achieve visual compensation between the different weights and sizes of the warm and cool colors existing in an image. For example, a sunset with a heavy weight of warm colors will be well compensated by areas of cool colors whose tones have the same frequency, which serves to enrich or enhance the discourse. Similarly, in the opposite effect with an environment predominantly made up of cool colors, the presence of warm colors in the right proportion will achieve a well-leveled atmosphere, as is precisely the case with this painting.

Two Pillars II (2009) is the second version inspired by the painting titled with the same name, made three years earlier. One of its important features to highlight is its handling of color, which has been previously described and served as a starting point as a reference for subsequent works.

When a design has several well-resolved structures as a whole, it generates a painting that satisfies various aspects and needs in the spectators and in the creator himself...

The first version from 2006 had practically exactly those characteristics, but it called for a new, refreshed attempt with better-developed colors and a script that expressed the new transformation of my concepts about the philosophical dilemma of existence.

As an important piece of information, the painting titled Three Pillars (2005) is the mother idea, which is completely linked to this series about multiple characters who have a landscape as their environment to develop their discourses. Three Pillars (2005) is also awaiting a new version soon.

It is curious how the changes we experience in our diverse stages of artistic maturation mutually impact each of the structures, both technical and conceptual. Around this period, it was not only necessary to make second representations of my previous designs, but my need for transformation was already seeking updates that would lead me to more realistic results that I had been observing in the technical environment of the great Spanish realist painters with whom I was beginning to associate.

But it is necessary to emphasize that when we realize a discovery that will give a turn to our painting, these changes are not improvised and are accompanied by many reflections and failed attempts that will allow us to become more conscious of the purpose of these modifications and the need to adopt them.

That oneiric and fantastic narrative, which still showed influences of a predecessor magical realism, began to be insufficient to transmit the new reflections that troubled me about the psychology of the characters and their ability to interact with the spectator through another new conceptual proposal.

The change of palette brought with it neutralized colors, and with them, the stories acquired a more serene character, necessitating a more uniform and overhead lighting. That physical aspect of the scenes with pastel color ranges generated atmospheres whose calm invited reflection on deeper, more basic, and elemental themes.

They were more conducive environments for formulating internal questions without high contrasts or darkness, and the technique employed should be painted with a much purer and more complex realistic style than the one I had managed to reproduce until that moment. With Two Pillars II (2009), this search begins, and its characteristics make it a piece that is among my favorites despite its limitations in a constant transformation to be corrected.

Successes and advances are more authentic when they have the original freshness of imperfections by their side... That is why new versions of the same idea or design are so difficult,

as the saying goes in cinema, sequels were never good... but there are always exceptions, as in the case of this second version.

With the work Multiple Personalities, from the year 2000, I began to develop a concept that later transformed into the creation of individuals with the capacity to duplicate or clone themselves in greater numbers. Through this symbolic multiplication, themes related to internal psychology, both clinical and philosophical, could be proposed, but also, in another context, to expose concerns about the existential possibilities of diverse models of artificial or non-human metaphysical consciousness.

Two Pillars II (2009) shows a double personality that dialogues in silence with itself, trying to maintain balance to resolve the dilemma it carries within as a war. Between them, there is the communication of an allied consciousness or inner voice that asks to be heard to indicate when to turn on the light. Anchored in that city are anti-aircraft balloons, witnesses to a battle that has already begun. Both women wear suits made of semi-transparent paper, a symbolic design that will adopt other forms and materials such as bubble wrap.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

The picnic

2018, Oil on Canvas, 200 x 200 cm

The snack is perhaps the painting of my production that has generated the most controversy among viewers when they see this explicit scene for the first time, which can be unpleasant for some and prevents them from continuing to read the meaning of its message.

A message whose intention is not only to show a gruesome scene without more, but to go further in a conversation that the character has with herself about her inner being that is in constant transformation.

The first aspect to analyze in this painting, would deal with our perception of what should be considered beautiful.

I have always liked the so-called beautiful motifs referring for example to landscapes, still lifes or human models full of harmony. I am convinced that just by painting a well-executed flower, one can masterfully transcend.

Who could not like that long list of themes that awaken pleasant values in us regardless of what fashions and ideals dictate. But my approaches over the years have also found a suitable ground to express many of my concerns in the territory of what is considered incorrect, macabre, twisted or unpleasant.

Ideas that are politically incorrect for some are very necessary for others.

Another characteristic that my paintings in this line must have is that their message must not have a moral sense as a priority, but rather a reflection on the limits of human personalities and their existential readings.

The concept of beauty is relative for each person, what for some may be sharply unpleasant, for others it is an opportunity to expand those aesthetic limits of beauty.

I do not believe that art has to fulfill only the function of pleasing, it can also question and disturb, and if the proposal requires it, one must dare to explore those areas and take the risks to achieve the intended meaning.

This painting marked the end and the beginning of a new stage in my work with a technique and concepts that experienced a change in procedure and language.

The symbolic, fantastic and dreamlike themes that had been feeding my previous paintings inspired by dreams would begin to diminish in 2008 and would gradually be replaced by conceptual proposals directed towards an internal psychological analysis.

A story about doubles, clones, replicas, twins or doppelgangers.
In *The snack* the characters seek their own self-analysis to obtain answers about themselves and for this they resort to a double with whom they can converse, but above all discuss in their privacy about those personalities that we do not want to recognize as part of ourselves but that we avoid talking about because they are unpleasant, contradictory or violent.

The painting aims to be a mirror for the viewer to look at themselves and reflect on the possibility of finding an answer to the whys of their own imbalances.

As a kind of stage design, the painting shows us the theatrical staging of a metaphor starring two women who are actually one, interpreting a story whose experimental genre theme is called *The snack*.

The furniture of the setting accompanies the protagonists through symbols, reinforcing the narrative through a pair of chairs arranged with a table, a white tablecloth, cutlery for eating and drinking, and a clothesline from which X-rays hang in the middle of a green field with a sky full of clouds.

Does the second woman want to eat the first, or is the first woman forcing the second to eat her?

Is the first woman forcing the second to cut off a piece of her arm to eat herself?

Or is the second woman the one who dominates, forcing the first to devour herself?

The fact that one of the women is cutting off a piece of the other's arm to use as possible food is actually only suggested by the series of instruments present, but beyond what this may mean for each spectator, the approach also raises an unknown about what role each of these two characters plays and whether there is a dominant figure between them that guides us to formulate a diagnosis about what is happening to her.

The objects on the table are arranged towards one of the characters, as is the case of the glass of water, which, in addition to indicating who may be the next to eat, proposes the interpretation of water that cleanses and purifies everything.

At this point, it is worth highlighting the symbol that refers to the circular, supported by the shape of the round table that raises a concept of feedback.

The circular symbolizes the constant struggle, the cyclical nature of things, the eternal return of cycles that end and begin.

In a continuous manner and synthesizing the two women as one, the character is swallowing herself, giving rise to the representation of a rebirth of things that never disappear but only undergo eternal transformations.

Finally, the scene symbolically shows some x-rays that confirm the idea of an internal examination of the protagonists, but that by being hung from a clothesline create new and small metaphors within each other.

Some x-rays that hang, drying in the sun and the wind. We have washed them and all that remains is to wait for them to dry.

The explicit metaphor of cannibalism proposed by *The snack* moves within these limits and risks being classified as a mere grotesque image without any further meaning, but that is precisely the challenge that this painting aims to address, that of transgressing not without cause, but with a reason to capture attention and propose a complex analysis.

It is important for an artist to be aware that when we paint a metaphor in a very realistic way, we create the sensation in the viewer that this image is real and true, so we must be careful not to distract the reading and the conceptual meaning that we are proposing with the images; we must seek a balance to transmit the message.

The snack was awarded an Honorable Mention in 2008 by the International Competition of the Foundation for the Arts and Artists of the European Museum of Modern Art (MEAM), and is part of its collection.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

The surgeons

2008, Oil on Canvas, 97 x 130 cm

This painting represents not only the starting point as the design that inspired The snack (2008) and Extraction of the stone of madness (2012)... it is also a key painting as a bridge between my way of technically painting reality up to that moment and how it would begin to show significant advances in color and details of truthfulness.

This work reflects the great influence I had from the Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum... whose pictorial style and representation of his stories I was interested in assimilating in the best possible way. Given my limited circumstances in several aspects, especially technical, and the inability to have seen the work of this artist live, the tool that has always allowed me to elucidate procedures of other artists, living or dead, was activated in me. Of course, this has nothing to do with the true technique employed by such great figures of painting whose mysteries they only share with privileged disciples and prodigious academies of very difficult entry. But the barriers against us also activate a spirit that, although ignorant, is equally daring to turn us into good imitators capable of reproducing the copy of what we admire. It is precisely in this process of imitation of styles where artists in training find a propitious field for experimentation to discover their resources and limitations.

The best part of having influences from others is admitting them without prejudice so that they give us their secrets while we grow by patiently observing them... Then perhaps one day we wake up with one less influence and one small step more of our own identity.

As a narrative painter that I am, Nerdrum's universe captivated me from the beginning. Pilar discovered him on a trip she made to N.Y. where she bought one of his books to bring it as a Christmas gift in the year 2000.

All kinds of language generate a coded identity that is activated when a receiver coincides with the same interests that they manage to read by having the same nature. This instinctive communication makes us experience a great affinity for the ideas of others, making us feel as if we ourselves were the authors of that same idea. Identity defines us and differentiates us from others by our individual characteristics, but above all, identity communicates its essence through feelings and emotions so as not to remain just as a mathematical concept. When we see a scene that makes us remember a memory, our identity is sensorially activated as a translator that serves to introduce us to the scene... but from our own experience so that we have a better reading tailored to us.

That darkness of the Baroque, which in my opinion Odd Nerdrum reinterprets very well, even bringing it to a modern language, influenced my paintings to have dark contexts whose lighting produced strong chiaroscuro contrasts.

Every Mexican realist painter of my generation has passed through the influences of the Mexican masters, Cauduro and Arturo Rivera, and I personally also through the language of the masters Benjamín Domínguez, Rafael Coronel, Francisco Corzas, or Guillermo Meza... In the marvelous work of all of them, we find a marked weight of European and New Spanish Baroque painting. My work for almost a decade between the years 2000 to 2008 became a mixture of all these painters who inspired my production with paintings of a marked Neo-Baroque style and a Neo-Realist narrative that also moved between magical realism and the oneiric language. That same Neo-Baroque language requested an abundance of symbols that could decontextualize objects to give them magical and strange capacities... Then my personal identity modeled the form of my ideas and placed them in those dimly lit darknesses between the shadows and the contrasting lights.

In the design of these scenes, the landscapes opened spaces that granted dimensions to each of the present elements; the technical challenge of distances and a strong approach to representing the enveloping air between solid structures and ethereal effects appeared. Given the inherent Baroque elements of this style, whose abundance contains blocks of various genres in the same setting, I dedicated myself to planning the best possible convergence between each form and the reactions that are provoked between them. To work and better understand the high contrasts of chiaroscuro in a painting, it helps to have developed the fundamentals of drawing because its graphic language facilitates the visualization of the accidents that are achieved when we experiment with the juxtaposition between solid layers and layers of glazes. That variety of effects works very well in shadowy environments, enriches them, and prepares them to house the other fundamental part of a painting... its tone and theme. One of the emotions that is most activated in the codes that I try to transmit about my own identity... is nostalgia.

As a child, I loved climbing onto the rooftops to patiently observe the sunsets; I watched carefully as the sun went down, leaving its traces on the ground and in the clouds. The ancient painters have inspired me... but much more education I have received since childhood by contemplating those twilight periods... Among the natural phenomena that occurred in each season of the year, it was the rains with their lightning and thunderbolts that caused me fear during those times when my parents still had black hair. I learned to overcome the fear of storms by facing the rain face-to-face, just as we do when we must mature in each stage of life if we wish to know the mysteries of the next stage. In Durango, the sky fell, especially in the summers, there around the months of August and September; I confronted the downpours by making waterproof suits out of plastic bags that I tied from my feet to my head. I also began to enjoy those rainy afternoons from the

rooftops, just as I did with the sunsets, observing and feeling every difference between the cloudless skies... the neutral and serene drizzles of gray... and the majestic storms that with their thunder altered the palpitations in my heart. I became very assiduous in walking through the streets of Durango while it rained; it was like continuing to search more and more to make peace with the storms... But the best part of all was rediscovering that spectrum of yellow light that appeared from time to time at the end of a storm with its golden color of a twilight sun that veiled everything in its path and that I felt... as the color of my own nostalgia. The oldest memory I have of this golden twilight light places me in front of the tent of a town fair that had two representations of skeletons dressed in Elizabethan clothes painted very detailed... The bells announced the end of an afternoon that reflected its clouds in the puddles of a past rain... and just as quickly as it came, it went... in a moment everything turned into that aged yellow color that only remains for a few minutes as a remembrance of the fleeting existence of a child looking at two skeletons. Lighting has been a primordial factor in transmitting the anecdotes described above; I still experience that color of my own nostalgia when the light of the sunset filters or projects through the blinds, illuminating corners and fleetingly lighting the paths where I walk.

My experiences are symbolically represented through designs of forms, colors, and concepts that I use to largely transmit the necessary nostalgia that accompanies my identity to bring back those longed-for sensations that transmitted feelings and moments of consciousness to me.

The surgeons (2008) is the painting that represents the moment of greatest technical and conceptual maturity in my Neo-Baroque tenebrist era. The painting shows a painstaking finish as a result of a long investigation process in every detail. Here we observe the elements of the composition participating more harmoniously not only with the purification of the ochre colors that were excessive in previous paintings but with a much more balanced palette between cool and warm tones. The sensation of the enveloping air has been resolved in a better way to contribute to the truthfulness of the terms, and every detail has been worked on more meticulously with the purpose of transmitting a superior realistic chiaroscuro well drawn around the entire scene.

To develop the meaning of this work, I have believed it convenient to first transmit the reflections and observations about: influences, codes, identity, nostalgia, memories, the observation of landscapes and natural phenomena, the color of light, emotions, consciousness. Because all this is a vital part of what is intended to be expressed in each work; each of the concepts and languages are inevitably imbued with all these accidental experiences of the life of an artist that escape our control. Observing the evolution of these details and their reiterative influences indicates the complexity that can be behind each story and the capacities available to express it in the synthesis of a painting.

Surgery of bonds... The symbolism headed by these two pairs of twins, of course, belongs to the conceptual project on multiple personalities developed in other similar works; however, one of the priorities in this painting is to show, like a window, the existence of a more complex world full of arguments that respond to the unknowns generated by the world of these multiplied characters. For the spectator to be able to experience the need to want to see more stories related to this universe, it was necessary to build a new and improved version of that reality that had been presented previously... for this, the modifications shown precisely in The surgeons (2008) were proposed, whose objectives are met in most of their purposes, both technically and conceptually. As I have mentioned, this painting manages to surpass the quality standards that had been achieved up to that moment, making it a unique piece of its generation. But incongruently, this work is also part of another list of undervalued paintings whose virtues have not been appreciated in their just measure by a public that has shown indifference to the significant progress of the artist and his best exercises.

The concept and foundation of The surgeons (2008) is the bond, which represents the union and tie of one person or thing to another. This story is the representation of not only a duplicated character with their own personal concerns or reflections with themselves... but also another model is presented in the figure of a doubly linked couple. Therefore, we are seeing duplicated characters in the scene who interact as individuals and also as couples, creating a confusion of multiple possibilities about who the companions are and what functions they perform through their characterizations and behaviors that reflect expressions.

Another capacity of the doubles is the antagonistic representation of opposing symbologies, as happens between white and black or light and darkness, which can have positive or negative connotations. The differences between the two women are clear; through their stereotypes, they may be pretending what they are not by relying on their characterizations... Both the blonde model and the black-haired one seem to play very defined roles in a story about submissive and dominant postures, but in the concept of the bond, the spectator is sought to formulate more possible options... Are the women in white being manipulated, or are they the ones manipulating?

In short, this painting is the metaphorical and symbolic representation of the bonds between these four women who show us their stories and characteristics in the middle of a setting where they perform a hair-cutting performance. One of those seated waits to give the order to cut what is needed, but cutting is not in her hands. She is very clear about what she wants but depends on the other so that that cut is exactly the right one; the simple cut of a lock can signify an entire surrender of dominant trust or the full behavior of a figure in submission. One of the duplicates has had her hair cut; the necessary surgery has already been performed on her as part of this mystical ritual we are witnessing; one of them, who is the only one who looks at us, carries an umbrella as a protective banner to shelter us all from malicious bonds. The expressions of all of

them are barely distinguishable, subtle... rather like the non-existent gestures that people usually have in the territory of dreams.

As a final detail, the seated women are blind; they orient themselves towards the nothingness of their unreal world to be able to see in our real world... They and the others awaken more questions than necessary in us about the relationship they have with all that barren land where wandering clouds circulate as if they were the surgical representation of the X-rayed spirit of that strange place.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

Two Pilares

2006, Oil on Canvas, 50 x 73 cm

We live until the last person remembers us...

From the highest summit, a labyrinth is observed, a lost city with questions from the present and answers from the past that travel like clouds from one place to another...

By 2006, my work continued to display images whose fantastic and dreamlike meanings were the necessary language to argue the path traveled up to that moment about my identity. Although in reality, my paintings from that stage, which lasted approximately 10 years, between 1998 and 2008, are more of a kind of metaphor that wants to tell stories similar to dreams but with an still undefined intention about my existential concerns. At that time, I continued to use dreams, myths, and beliefs of an ordinary or popular nature as a source of inspiration, but now from a different location in my condition as a Mexican foreigner residing in Spain. For a couple more years, I would continue to prioritize the discourse in my work over technique, not precisely because I considered that content more relevant, but rather for the simple ignorant reason of not having sufficient knowledge about color and its theories, which I did not receive in my self-taught training.

It is there but we don't see it until we discover it...

The painting Two Pillars (2006) was built around those limitations, but its creation as the first proposal that inspired a second version made two years later allows us to compare it and draw conclusions.

Without lagging behind, this first version definitely has its own personality that is coherent with the narrative of its time to offer us a very well-composed and interesting painting within its group, and although its handling of color perceives an attempt to adequately combine warm and cool tones seeking harmony and an effect of greater reality, it does not achieve the proposed results precisely because of its technical colorist incapacity. But this does not prevent this piece from being considered iconic, thanks to the quite well-assembled whole between characters, clothing, accessories, and symbols that are distributed in that landscape full of allegorical and poetic structures.

As a background, the painting Multiple Personalities, made during the year (2000), with its proposal served as inspiration for the creation of these characters who are seeking in the figure of their own symbolic duplicate, the self-knowledge that defines the whys of their behaviors..."

But let's return to our painting in question: The main theme that was intended to be transmitted in Two Pillars (2006), and which was difficult to express through the two figures facing each other in that environment, had to do with a psychological dilemma. The so-called Emotional Attachments in psychology, whose patterns generated since childhood affect all our interpersonal relationships that we will have with other people throughout our lives.

As you can see, this theme was a very complicated challenge to represent, and the way to do it was by insinuating the expressive attitudes that each of the two personalities is reflecting. One apparently serene and patient and the other apparently restless and nervous... one avoiding conflict and the other confronting it...

Precisely this genre of fantastic and dreamlike style reflected in the series of paintings I made during those years was beginning to show those limitations that would make me emigrate to another genre. The fantasy and magic reflected by those symbols lost their validity for me, but at that moment, it was the honesty that continues to endure in my work that granted it the coherence of its time so that Two Pillars (2006) is valued in its fair measure.

Two figures with different personalities have a communication problem... For them to understand each other, one must yield and the other concede. Faced with this dilemma that prevents them from communicating, the metaphor places the structure of a labyrinth behind them as a representation of how difficult it will be to find a solution, but also as the determination to enter it and seek remedies... The symbolic presence of an object, the umbrella, stands out in the painting, which has been used in other paintings of this period as a multifaceted, protective, and miraculous amulet, but at the same time as a comfort zone that we grant the capacity to self-manipulate ourselves so as not to leave it... Both are dressed in elemental mystical objects that protect them thanks to their beliefs... The painting shows us for the first time suits of wrinkled paper that do not necessarily clothe but rather protect like figurative shields with medieval or baroque reminiscences. With their golden armor, they pretend to protect themselves from a threat, which more than physical is psychological, whose mystery is realizing that they are the same person. In my work, symbols can generally show meanings that actually express the opposite, expanding their interpretive possibilities to give the spectator more than one possible reading.

–**Edgar Mendoza**

HECTOR DIAZ

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