



**A Hundred Lashes, 2005**  
polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood  
130 cm diameter x 30 cm depth  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



**A Body Without Organs, 2005**  
polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood  
130 cm diameter x 30 cm depth  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



**Becoming Animal, 2005**  
polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood  
130 cm diameter x 30 cm depth  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



**White Holes, 2005**  
polypropylene, polyester and nylon on wood  
130 cm diameter x 30 cm depth  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney



**Troughman (the yellow peril), 2005**  
polyester, polypropylene, nylon and wood frame on castor wheels  
180 x 180 x 180 cm  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney

verso:  
**Un fraile y un muchacho (take 1), 2005–06** (detail)  
polypropylene, nylon, polyester, manila rope and rubber on wood  
200 x 200 cm  
photograph: Paul Green  
courtesy the artist and Sherman Galleries, Sydney

## The art of tying ends

Dani Marti was born in Spain, lived in Australia and recently moved to Glasgow. This cultural condition – the feeling of being at home, but not at home<sup>1</sup> – is central to his artistic practice, showing us how he (re)builds his identity and faces the challenge of fitting into a different culture.

This situation may also shed light on the driving forces behind Marti's works, which, on different levels, function as perfect dichotomies: minimalist–neo-Baroque, Catholic–Protestant, rational–emotional, natural–synthetic, local–global, relaxed–tense, excessive–restrained, mystic–erotic, dominant–submissive, painterly–sculptural, industrial–handmade, innocent–perverted.

The ambivalence of Marti's work is a subtle representation of neo-Baroque society, where people seek dystopias of illusion and excess because they perceive harmony and happiness as no more than a mirage. Marti's compositions are exactly this: a beautiful mirage, a seductive mirror that gives us back an uneasy – and even unpleasant – image of ourselves, at the same time providing us with a more realistic interpretation of the world.

### A sense of guilt

Dani Marti's Catholic breeding and background informs his artistic practice literally, formally, and conceptually. In Catholic societies, life still revolves around the concept of 'guilt', whereas in Anglo-Saxon societies 'duty' determines the course of life.<sup>2</sup> This pristine sense of guilt goes back as far as the Baroque era, where the separation of body and mind led to highly

paradoxical artistic representations. As with Gianlorenzo Bernini's *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, Marti's series of works – *The Seven Pleasures of Snow White* and *Un fraile y un muchacho* (Take 1 and 2) – suggest a state of quasi-orgasm. The dwarfs, monsters, buffoons and bearded women that have inhabited Spanish culture from the Golden Age until today – such as Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Goya and, more recently, Luis Buñuel and Pedro Almodóvar – become, in the hands and eyes of Marti, evidence of an eternally turbulent and dramatic world vision. In contemporary culture, to paraphrase Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, the desires of the body, the great sacrifice, are never extinguished, but keep returning to our lives with the violence of one who has been repressed.

And this series of allegorical and apparently minimalist 'paintings' – I say *paintings* as I consider Marti's work to be an exercise of 'expanded' painting and a clear example of what painting may mean these days<sup>3</sup> – is executed in a clean, meticulous and obsessive way. The Baroque fold, in this case hundreds of ropes and cables which fold and unfold endlessly, towards infinity – conforms with *horror vacui*,<sup>4</sup> every orifice being formally and conceptually filled by the artist; and *vanitas*, a reminder of the fugacity of our lives. The works exemplify a passionate labyrinth where the intricate relationships between the body, eroticism and power are questioned, reflecting the social, political and philosophical crises of our time.

### The hell of the beautiful

The artist penetrates what Karl Rosenkranz called 'the hell of the beautiful',<sup>5</sup> creating a narrative whose coordinates are revealed by the somewhat *deleuzian* titles: *A Hundred Lashes*, *Fascist Desire*, *White Holes*, *A Flow of Intensities*, *A Body Without Organs*, *Pablo* (*The Impossible Dream*), *Un fraile y*

*un muchacho* (Take 1 and 2) and *Troughman* (*The Yellow Peril*). Moral tension, according to Rosenkranz, is caused by beauty, which camouflages the real and distracts injustice: the kind of beauty that goes beyond good and evil, that expresses the beautiful through the ugly, the real through the false, life through death. As these compositions show, this provokes ambivalent experiences and impossible conciliations: pleasure and political engagement, conformism and rebellion, spirituality and sensuality.

Weaving represents an act of bondage, a ritual that enables the artist to 'possess' the person that is portrayed.<sup>6</sup> Aesthetics, pleasure, fantasy and security come into play as Marti works carefully and symbolically, not pulling too tight, always able to untie his 'submissive subjects' in less than a minute, never leaving them alone, especially if they are gagged. Michel Foucault's ideas about violence as an exercise of power that negatively affects freedom and the dignity of the other arise under a new light. It is a question of faith, of mutual consensus.

Representing ecstasy pills, flakes, sacred hosts – these cool, geometric, luxurious and virginal paintings reveal a highly controlled passion for weaving. Such labour-intensive work may be considered a challenge to superficial ideas about memory, tradition and globalisation. By using the 'impure' and popular discipline of weaving, Marti's work addresses social interaction, politics and even the desire for self-sufficiency. (Although it should not be forgotten that 'impurity' is the trademark of globalisation.) Moreover, weaving was a tradition beloved of Marti's grandmother: in spite of which, the artist had to learn it for himself.<sup>7</sup>

Dani Marti looks deep inside his 'phillias' and phobias, his dreams and disappointments, for order, perfection and redemption: and he does so by way of allegory. His works regain the original sense of the word, whereby any

person, object or action 'talks' (from Greek *agnorier*) about the 'other' (from *allos*) with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. In such a world, allegory is a powerful instrument for understanding the *zeitgeist*.

In *The Seven Pleasures of Snow White*, Dani Marti exposes the torture of our spirits, our desire for emancipation, in a visceral, suffocating manner – straight from the intestines, as neo-Baroque.

### Paco Barragan

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- <sup>1</sup> In this context, one might quote Irit Rogoff: 'In a previous formation there was a necessary alliance between identity (being Red, being French, being Muslim) and the placing of that identity within a national, regional or cultural location (being Turkish, being Northern European, being of the art world). In the current moment, however, the mutual dependence of these two categories has been loosening in intriguing ways.' See Irit Rogoff, 'The where of now', catalogue essay, *TIME ZONES: Recent Film and Video*, Tate Modern, London, curated by Jessica Morgan and Gregory Muir, October 2004, p. 87.
- <sup>2</sup> See the Protestant theologian John Calvin's attack against Catholic ascetic lifestyle when he writes in *European Origins of American Thought*: 'If we are to pass through the earth, we ought undoubtedly to make such a use of its blessings as will rather assist than retard us in our journey.' (David D. Van Tassel & Robert McAhren, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1969, pp. 11–12).
- <sup>3</sup> In late 2005, Marti was shortlisted by Barry Schwabsky, Karen Wright and Javier Panera for the II Castellón County Council International Painting Prize (Spain), one of the few international contests dedicated to expanded painting. See <<http://www.dlpcas.es/paintingprize.htm>>.
- <sup>4</sup> Re the *horror vacui*: Baroque has not been eliminated but rather exacerbated by the high-tech communications and global visual culture that continue to define urban life.
- <sup>5</sup> I recently co-curated with Javier Panera and Omar Pascual an exhibition on this subject called *Baroque and Neo-Baroque: The Hell of the Beautiful*, at the Domus Artium (DA2), Salamanca, Spain. See <<http://www.e-flux.com>> (15 October 2005).
- <sup>6</sup> Conversation with the artist, Madrid, 12 November 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.