

CLAUDIA ALVAREZ: FAMILIAR CIVILIZATION

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The sculpture of Claudia Alvarez engages in diverse subjects such as immigration, violence, youth/aging, and power struggles that are at once current and perhaps ancient. She creates straightforward sculptural installations of child-sized figures made of fired ceramics---often painted in layers revealing levels of physicality of the maker and the made. Touch is prevalent in the modeling/painting of the life-like and life-sized characters she discovers through this process---characteristics that modulate between naive and wise, cute and threatening, adorable and pitiful. They enact relationships most associated with adults or young adults in thematic tableau or candid theatre. These 2-4 year olds seem conjured from Alvarez's Mayan/Spanish roots combined with her childhood immersed in American cartoon culture---where humans and animals transmute in creation and destruction under the auspices of mainstream entertainment.

Alvarez masterfully models and paints her sculpture, embracing both eastern and western traditions she absorbed in the bay area from her teachers Arthur Gonzalez at California College of Art and Wayne Thiebaud at University of California, Davis and others (she also exhibits paintings and drawings). Her work takes memory portraiture to active levels when contextualized in quasi-theatrical relationships---from one portrait to another---

groups act out various power struggles. Her sculptures carry a recognizable life force that is persuasively human. These kids ply for our sympathies and attention, as kids tend to do. The economic scale of the sculpture is efficient for the task of exuding intensity. Reminiscent of the Velasquez midget paintings---the interplay of corporeal and illusion within a limited space plays into the meaning of their mission. A frankness and sincerity of the figures bring to mind the natural maternal strength, quick wit, and gentle touch of Alice Neel portraits. There is no need to disguise quirky mannerisms or paradox---kids act out all kinds of things without filters acquired through adulthood cares.

Mediating between active modeling of the sculpture and painting is where the power of her art lies. We feel the presence of the hand on the child's body: the poking, pinching, smoothing and wiping of clay---transports us instantly into the emotional body. Our sympathy is further transported when glazing and/or paint takes on multiple tasks: as bruises, stains, flesh tones, mascara, rouge, lipstick, and other layers of material identity. The physical and emotional space these children inhabit is our own space. We are the maker and the made---the parent child. Alvarez extends a reflection of social structures we live in---questioning a continuum of past generations with the present and maybe the next.

Alvarez was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States at age 3---settling in the California Central Valley with her large family. Her intention as a adolescent was to work in the medical profession-volunteering as a hospital intern at age 16---then working her way up to ambulance driver where she provided transit and handling of terminally ill children and adults at the University of California Davis Medical Center for 12 years while taking art classes along with pre-med part-time in college. Eventually she changed her course and enrolled at University of California, Davis fine art program. She earned her MFA in 2003 from the California College of Art in San Francisco. Alvarez currently lives and works in New York City.

Alvarez will present *Acercate*, a solo exhibition at Centro Nacional de las Artes in Mexico City March 6-April 20, 2014. For additional information:
www.claudiaalvarez.org

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