

Oscar Cueto VS Oscar Cueto

By Frederick Janka

How does an artist inevitably or perhaps consciously work against himself? How is it possible for him to be in contradiction to himself, and the notion of being an artist in today's world and market? Oscar Cueto struggles with himself as an artist, like the classic example of a *Luchadores* wrestling match is the iconic Mexican pop cultural reference, in that it emphasizes the opposition with a spectacular showmanship, the spectacle. In doing so he creates an invitation into his world of make believe and subtly playful critique of the role of the artist, and the whims of the art world and market.

Cueto is a schooled graphic designer and a self-taught artist. He made his transition to artist through a fascination, as if it was almost an experiment, but a childish fascination with what he saw of the art world, but always with an interest in fame and fortune. He has a cynical view and one influenced by several key moments in recent art history: the Mexican art boom of the 90's which rocketed to international status a generation of new "art stars," and the repeated attempts at the end of the Millennium to discover, designate and market the constantly "hot and new," which resulted in the hefty tomes: ART NOW, Art of the Millennium, Fresh Cream, among countless others.

The proliferation of the "art star" and the ravenous demand of the international market for more, more, more are not only his influences but also the subject matter of his illustrative painting, line animation, and sculptural work. His artwork began as a paper doll-like world of artist fighting each other and being killed by their own artwork or inspiration. It is an interesting line of thought to pursue, which artists would you love to see fight to the death? How would you kill Cindy Sherman, or John Bock? His artwork has evolved over the last year to become more conceptually abstract and less innocent in the types of games he plays with himself and his public. This work is more conceptualized as art, involving more serious investigation of form and subject matter, and also ever more deeply pessimistic. Recently his delicate renderings of burning art books (Titled "Twin Towers"), and of himself lying in pools of his own blood, are strong examples of this transition.

What is interesting about a self-denying artist? Who actively refuses to play a certain game, or does so with a naïve burst here and there? Cueto's artwork is a part of

the current debate regarding artists who are attempting to address a larger issue of how money and the value of the art commodity is driving the art world, but I am not sure that any artist has been able to address critically and simply this issue as Cueto has, especially an artist from Mexico. He has been able to develop a body of work that is extremely self-critical with critiques of the art world and market that do critique his own role as an artist. Cueto is able to involve the public, in a way dumb it down, to comically and interestedly open this international phenomenon of a money-driven art market and the resulting fame and fortune. Cueto is still a young artist who has the potential to hone his craft, and to grow, but will fame escape him? Perhaps, never the less, this is a refreshingly honest body of work that does not lose its self in scholarly pursuits but is inviting, entertaining and pointedly questions a *status quo*.

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