

Barry X Ball *Masterpieces*: A Collection of Selected Statements

From an October, 2009 letter to a Collector. The Collector was particularly interested in where I thought my new sculptures stand in relationship to "Appropriation" and what makes my works more than "copies".

***Purity*: some differences between these, the first of my *Masterpiece* sculpture series, and their historical "starting place" antecedent, Antonio Corradini's *La Purità (Dama Velata)* in Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.**

In general, I have set for myself the difficult task of making new sculptures that are "more perfect" than the "perfect" Corradini, a "Masterpiece" of Baroque sculpture. Here is a partial list of the ways I have gone about attaining that goal:

- 1.** The substantial additions I have effected and the way I have carved / polished my works have made mine true sculptures-in-the-round, not frontal portraits intended for placement in niches or against walls.
- 2.** I have employed non-traditional (for sculpture) stones for my works, not stereotypical white Italian Marble. My translucent stones (e.g. onyx and calcite) render the veil, shawl, and drapery diaphanous. The calcite's exuberant veination establishes a parallel surface network, one that alternately camouflages and reveals the sculpture's network of folds and sweeps while adding a dizzying complexity. The more subtle onyx patterning works in a similar, yet less-assertive way. The translucent stones, when carefully lit, appear to glow from within, to have an inner light that radiates outward, that penetrates the veil. This is not possible with opaque marble. Corradini used the material that he was familiar with, the most readily available carving stone in Italy, the one that responded well to traditional hand-carving techniques. Because of my high-tech techniques and my access to and knowledge of worldwide stone sources, I have many more options. I made a concerted attempt to select stones that work with the form to create something rich and new.

3. My sculptures are mirror images of their sources. The mirroring, a feature of many of my portraits, is intentional. It is the view that the subject "sees" in a mirror. This feat is extremely difficult (i.e. near-impossible) to accomplish through traditional means of sculptural reproduction (e.g. "pointing up"). It is possible through my use of advanced technology, and I hope, adds a significant element of strangeness, of unfamiliarity, of newness to my sculptures (especially for those who are familiar with the Corradini).

4. I eliminated the Christian Latin cross from the bodice area of the veil. By so doing, I intend to make the veil more universal. The veil is a widely used head covering - Christian, Islamic, Indian, mourning (think Jackie Kennedy at the funeral), etc. The universal veil is especially appropriate for Venice (location of the Corradini source sculpture) because of that city's role as crossroads of Islam and Christianity. I hope that by removing the cross, I have made the veil one of rich mystery, not just a relic of religious devotion, mourning, penitence, or modesty. The white Iranian Onyx of one version of my sculpture adds yet another layer of meaning and counterpoint to the veil and the enhanced sexuality (see below) of the woman. I purchased the last block of this material available on the world market last year. The Iranian government has requisitioned the entire quarry for the construction of the tomb of the Ayatollah Khomeini, that prudish patriarch of the Iranian Revolution.

5. I eliminated the lace border from the veil to freshen its appearance and enhance its smooth, sensual liquidity.

6. My sculptural treatment of the veil and drapery is intentionally softer, more flowing, less sharp than that of the Corradini. In my works, the veil has become more than a covering - it is the form itself. This difference is subtle, but important. The Corradini woman appears to be covered by an improbable, wet-look, relatively crisp pile of cloth. In my sculptures, the body and veil are more unified. It almost appears that the body has departed and left behind a misty, swirling, dematerialized fabric surrogate.

7. I have corrected several of Corradini's sculptural errors. Corradini not only didn't finish the bottom, sides, and back of his sculpture, certain passages of his work are

confused. In particular, the layers of his drapery sometimes don't make sense or were not completely resolved. I fixed those problems in my works.

8. I subtly enlarged the breasts. For a sculpture ostensibly with devout "purity" as its subject, the Corradini woman is quite sexy. By my breast enhancement, I have tried to gently tip the pious / sensual balance a bit farther toward the latter.

9. I have polished the small patch of exposed flesh to differentiate it from the matte finish of the cloth. The entire lower back of my sculpture is also mirror-polished. The Corradini has a dull surface finish throughout. I have worked hard to give the cloth passages of my works a fine, ultra-uniform satin finish so that the surface softly "disappears".

10. The Baroque-era Corradini has suffered damage in some areas over time. Its carved surface also has several rough, chipped, unfinished passages. This could be because Corradini didn't feel the need to finish those areas, because he didn't have sufficient time to complete the work, or because those sections have been subject to abrasion. My sculptures are completely finished and damage-free. I have treated backs, sides, fronts, and tops with equal fastidiousness. The bottom of my work is also scrupulously finished, and I have permanently affixed a custom stainless steel insert and ABS base plate to ensure display / transport safety. Corradini's sculpture lacks these accommodations. The Corradini is very much in need of cleaning - it is absolutely filthy!

11. My pedestals are fitting accompaniments to the sculptures. The Corradini is displayed in a corner at Ca' Rezzonico on an unfortunate, too-large, too-dark wood base, to which it is crudely attached. My pedestals are refined, multi-part, carefully-designed-and-constructed ensembles that I believe present my sculptures far more elegantly. They permit my works to be seen from all sides. They are beautiful pieces of furniture, but they don't interfere with the 'Purity' of the sculptures.

I hope this list answers your sincere inquiry about my intentions and adequately addresses the subject of "originality". I want my works to induce questions, not dictate

answers. While almost forcing a type of refined viewing, of connoisseurship, the sculptures should seduce. Ultimately, the analytical approach I have employed in the creation of these pieces doesn't feel all that different from the one I have used to make my portraits. Yet it is undeniable that the net result is quite new.

There is a long tradition of artists making works "after" the works of their forebears. Although utilizing an unprecedented, advanced, complex technological armamentarium, I am, in a way, working in that great tradition. I don't think, however, that my project owes much to "appropriation" and the contemporary artists whose works have been labeled as such. Fueled by love, I'm reaching way back to a time centuries before the Modernist Revolution, searching for a way to make something equally revolutionary.

From the *Frieze Art Fair Yearbook, 2009-2010* (not written by Barry X Ball)

Employing both traditional and technological processes, Barry X Ball approaches figurative sculpture from a contemporary perspective that is more than a little laced with historical reverence. The heads of his sitters – often well-known figures from the art world, such as his New York gallerist or the artist Matthew Barney – are photographed, cast and digitized, then computer-lathed in patterned marble, to be hand-finished with subjective flourishes by the artist. In a new body of work, Ball makes his historical provenance more explicit, taking as direct reference two 18th-century sculptural works – Antonio Corradini's *La Purity (dama velata)* (Purity, Veiled Woman) and Giusto Le Court's *La Invidia (Envy)* – which he subtly reconfigures to pose questions on such ecstatic representations in a secular age. (SO'R)

From a 2007 letter to a Collector, detailing initial ideas for a proposed exhibition at Ca' Pesaro in Venice (first mention of plans for the *Masterpieces*).

My exhibition at Ca' Pesaro will be a sculptural paean to Venezia: its art, its culture, and its architecture. I will respond to historical works – portraits and other sculptures – in Venetian museums and by Venetian artists (or those from the Veneto region). The form of my response will be different in each of the 3 interior spaces (the one large interior court and the two small side rooms) at Ca' Pesaro. The show will feature new sculptures I will create specifically for the exhibition as well as some of my currently-existing works. I would also like to make a new piece for a 4th “space” – the exterior platform on the Canal Grande side of the Museum.

I will digitize portraits like the *Dama Velata* of Corradini, the *Old Woman with Snakes* by Giusto Le Court (both from Ca' Rezzonico), or a Medardo Rosso (from Ca' Pesaro or other Italian collections) and use the resultant data to make new sculptures. I will bring my non-contact 3D laser scanner and its attendant computers to Venezia at the beginning of the process. In the exhibition, my sculptures will be displayed next to the historical works. My pieces will be subtle re-interpretations of the originals that will “complete” them and open up new readings of both the historical models and my new sculptures.

For example, I would sculpt a mirror-image version of the Corradini - perhaps in another stone (black?) – with characteristic BXB carving details. I would substitute an Islamic star-and-crescent on the chest (in lieu of the original Croce Latino), thereby re-interpreting the veil as a sensuous chador while pointing to the rich Islamic influence on the art of Venice.

More than almost any other contemporary artist, I have responded, through my own work, throughout my career, to historical antecedents – not those from the 1960's, but much farther back (B.C. 2060, A.D. 60, 1360, 1560, and 1760!) The opportunity to do this in Venezia - in depth, with pointed comparative specificity, and with the aim of creating a dense visual / conceptual layering – is very exciting and inspiring to me.

One of my portraits could be paired with a Messerschmidt. (The Le Court Old Woman is sort of a Venetian Messerschmidt, but Messerschmidt has bigger name-recognition.)

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From a July, 2008 letter to the Italian critic, Elena Forin, in response to her questions. Elena subsequently wrote a long article on my work in *Espoarte* in 2008.

I want to imbue my works with fever-pitch intensity. I strive to emulate the excruciating power achieved by art of the distant past (a power I rarely see in contemporary art). My work has always paid homage to its historical antecedents, primarily European, and in particular Italian. In my new sculptures, I will much more intimately interact with those sources. By employing an armamentarium of cutting-edge technologies (e.g. 3-dimensional scanners, high-resolution digital cameras, powerful computers, and 3-d modeling software), I will directly “capture” (digitize) works in museums. With the digital data I glean and subsequently manipulate, I will create, via another set of advanced devices (computer-numerically-controlled milling centers and rapid-prototyping machines), sculptures in stone and various other materials. As in all of my sculptures to-date, the new works will also require hundreds of hours of hand work.

One of the first pieces I will produce with this new method will be based on Antonio Corradini's 18th C. *Dama Velata* at Ca' Rezzonico in Venezia. To add depth to several of my portrait sculptures of the last few years, I have covered the stone “skin” of my figures with a dense layer of patterning. In (*Matthew Barney*), with the goal of integrating the room architecture and the figure, I stretched the all-encompassing

patterning onto the tiered, radiating ceiling array from which the impaled stone portrait is suspended. My use of surface decoration is intended to evoke tattoos, tribal scarification, patterned armor, etc. I have often chosen Victorian patterns, notable for their a-historical, multi-era, multi-style, "proto Postmodern" overall density. I cloak my stone figures in subtle patterns to add a soft, velvety, indistinct richness to their hard stone skin. I usually have employed "generic" decorative designs so that the patterns anonymously emphasize and interact with the delicate undulations of my figures' surfaces. (The exceptions are my recent suspended Matthew Barney / screaming BXB portraits, where the embossed surfaces were painstakingly built-up, element-by-element, from a panoply of original drawings, religious symbols, animal profiles, etc.) By selecting one of Corradini's famous "veiled" figures as my current "model", I want to expand my use of integral obfuscation to the point where the surface covering achieves co-equal status with the figure concealed. At the same time, in a new twist on the Islam/Venezia nexus, I will propel the almost-completely-draped figure's subtle mix of sexuality and piety to the forefront. The veil, the burkha, the cross, the star-and-crescent, the sensual way the body is concealed / revealed will all be in play. Poignant distortions (e.g. stretching and mirroring) and subtle modifications (of materials, scale, and iconography) will be introduced.

New in my work will be the utilization of an exact digital "copy" of a specific existing physical sculpture as my point of origin. No longer content to have my work be generally reminiscent of its antecedents, I will use Corradini's very-identifiable endpoint as my beginning. The tradition of artists making works "after" those of their forebears is as old as the history of art. (Take, for example, my *A Profusion of Loss*: a Leonard-cum-Rubens-cum-BXB piece.) I believe, however, by employing technology only recently available, I can push that tradition in new directions not heretofore possible. I will exhibit my new works both with and without the historical works on which they are based. My works will impact on those antecedents, and vice versa. In an internet-linked world where almost everything from every period is available to me, I will build a new type of sculpture, redolent of its sources, but very much of our time.

From an August, 2008 letter to Jean-Pierre Criqui, curator and editor of the *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* of the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

As I mentioned when we spoke on the phone, last month I scanned two sculptures in Ca'Rezzonico in Venezia: Antonio Corradini's *Dama Velata (La Purita)* and Giusto Le Court's *Medusa Vecchia (Envy)*. I have enclosed a folder of photos of this work. I will use these scans as the starting points to make new sculptures. Riffing on these Baroque babies is going to be a blast!

By selecting one of Corradini's famous "veiled" figures as a "model", I want to expand my use of integral obfuscation to the point where the surface covering achieves co-equal status with the figure concealed. At the same time, in a new twist on the Islam/Venezia nexus, I will propel the almost-completely-draped figure's subtle mix of sexuality and piety to the forefront. The veil, the burkha, the cross, the star-and-crescent, the sensual way the body is concealed / revealed will all be in play. Poignant distortions (e.g. stretching and mirroring) and subtle modifications (of materials, scale, and iconography) will be introduced.

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I will exhibit my new works both with and without the historical works on which they are based. (There is talk of showing the works I make along with the originals, in Venezia.) My sculptures will impact on those antecedents, and vice versa. In an internet-linked world where almost everything from every period is available to everyone, I hope to build a new type of sculpture, redolent of its sources, but very much of our time.

As for what I will do with that sexy Le Court supermodel, what can I say?...I was seduced! Quite the terrifying figure, no?

I worked with an excellent Italian company, *Unocad*, to make the scans in Venice. (See the enclosed *Unocad* brochure.) *Unocad* has done a lot of scanning work in Italy. Some of their recent projects have been the Michelangelo *Moses* in Roma, the Giambologna *Rape of the Sabine Women* in Firenze, and the Canova *Paulina Borghese* in Roma and Possagno. *Unocad* has state-of-the-art equipment and its personnel are very knowledgeable and professional. They would do a fantastic job at the Louvre. I don't know of a similar French company, but I would consider utilizing one if it was politically advantageous.

To scan (digitize) a sculpture, a series of "3d digital photos" are taken with something that looks like a high-tech camera. Those individual images are pieced together with a computer to form a complete "virtual" version of the sculpture. Although 200+ shots would be required to completely scan the *Hermaphrodite*, I would need just one day in the museum to accomplish this, preferably on a day it is closed to the public. The current location of the *Hermaphrodite* is fine (if it is still in the "Salle des Cariatides" where it has resided for many years). It would not have to be moved, and there is plenty of free space around the sculpture to maneuver the scanning equipment without endangering other works in the room. Three-dimensional scanning is completely non-contact – the *Hermaphrodite* would never be touched during the scanning. The actual scanning is done utilizing "white light" from a halogen lamp. The scanner employs a small low-power laser for focusing. Both the white light and the laser will have absolutely no effect on the *Hermaphrodite*. Neither will there be any damage to other sculptures in the salle. (There are no paintings in that room, I believe.) While the scanning is going on, I would also take a series of regular digital photographs for reference. I would use the *Hermaphrodite* scan to make a new sculpture (actually an element of a larger sculpture, as described above) – not a "copy" of the Louvre's work. I may ultimately use the scan to make other new, transformed works – again not copies. As you are particularly aware, the tradition of artists making works "after" those of their forebears is as old as the history of art. (The Louvre Roman *Hermaphrodite*, is, after all, almost certainly a copy of a Greek original.) By employing technology only recently available, I believe I can push that tradition in new directions not heretofore possible.

From a 2008 letter to Filippo Pedrocco, director of Ca' Rezzonico in Venice, thanking him for allowing me to digitize *La Purità* and *La Invidia*. The letter also gives details of a proposed show of my work at Ca' Rezzonico during the Venice Biennale.

It was a great honor for me to be granted the privilege to 3-dimensionally scan both Antonio Corradini's *Dama Velata (La Purità)* and Giusto Le Court's *Invidia* in Ca' Rezzonico this summer. The experience of working with those incredible sculptures in the museum was a profoundly emotional one for me. Although my art has always referenced pre-modern, primarily Italian sources, my upcoming work will much more directly engage its antecedents. The sculptures I will create from the digitized Ca' Rezzonico originals will be the first of a completely new type in my oeuvre.

Last week, in the second phase of my new endeavor, I and my Italian team 3D-scanned (digitized) the *Ermafrodito Borghese (Hermaphrodite Endormi)* in the Musée du Louvre in Paris. This famous work, a fantastic Greek-cum-Roman-cum-Larique/Bernini composite, will also become the model for new sculptures I will make.

The logical extension of my project...my dream!...would be to exhibit my "response" sculptures in conjunction with the originals that are their models, their inspirations. The accompanying renderings depict my works installed in a variety of settings at Ca' Rezzonico. My goal in proposing this presentation is nothing less than to create a paean to the city of Venice: a sensual, complex celebration of its culture, its history, its beauty. At the same time, I aim to re-present Ca' Rezzonico, its renowned collection, and my art. By staging such an exhibition during La Biennale as part of the official program, a new, greatly expanded audience will inevitably be introduced to the museum (and my work).

My proposed Ca' Rezzonico installations are intentionally minimal interventions. My approach to the creation of my response sculptures (those based on the Ca' Rezzonico and Louvre historical models) will be similarly restrained. I will effect subtle changes in form, materials, and finish, the cumulative effect of which will render my sculptures new.

The accompanying renderings are initial concept ideas, intended to convey the spirit of the show, not its ultimate specifics.

By the simple act of relocating a work from the Ca' Rezzonico permanent collection to another site in the museum, the reading of that work will change. By juxtaposing relocated pieces, both the individual and the collective content of those works will be altered and refreshed, and viewers will experience those works anew. By replacing the relocated original works with the corresponding tribute sculptures I will make, the sense of surprise and discovery will be continued. The concurrent installation of others of my sculptures in a variety settings in the museum will broaden the exhibition and create a rich, densely-layered visual symphony.

The exhibition will encompass a contemporary perspective on Venice as Nexus of East and West, Islam and Christianity. The subtle modifications I will introduce in the sculptures I create 'after' Corradini's masterpiece will animate the discussion. In my various versions of the *Dama Velata*, I will variously exchange the Latin Cross of the original for a Star-and-Crescent, utilize an "unavailable" translucent white Iranian Onyx (exclusively reserved for the planned tomb of the Ayatollah Khomeini) instead of the original opaque Italian Marble, make a mirrored version of the work in Belgian Black Marble (thereby evoking the chador instead of the veil), or further de-materialize an already-ethereal work by realizing it in semi-transparent, glowing, golden Calcite. Concurrently, I will subtly emphasize the veiled-yet-overt sensuality of *La Purità*.

The many depictions (often anachronistically insensitive) of Africans, ("Moors", slaves, etc.) in Venice calls attention to the fact that the city was and is the "crossroads of the world", a meeting place for a wide range of peoples and cultures. My repatriation to Italy (in ironic homage to that great patriotic diplomat of the Veneto, Antonio Canova) of a transformed version of another Napoleonic acquisition, the *Ermafrodito Borghese*, will expand the exhibition's scope to encompass both race and gender. The exhibition will be dominated by the depiction of women - young, old, beautiful, ugly, pious, sexy - and the mise-en-scène in the Brustolon room, with a beautiful sleeping black bi-sexual

figure, openly resplendent in its naked eroticism, awakening amidst the profusion of Brustolon's carved African males, promises to be its sensual, provocative climax.

My version of the *Hermaphrodite* will add another chapter to the work's complex, multi-era tale: originally created (probably in bronze) in Greece, copied in Greek Marble in Ancient Rome, unearthed in Baroque-era Rome, restored by David Larique, 'bedded' with Italian Marble by none other than Gianlorenzo Bernini, installed in Cardinal Scipione Borghese's Villa, removed in the 19th century to the Louvre...and now, transfigured, ready for a 21st century voyage to Venice, a city as rich and layered as the sculpture.

The *Dama Velata*, *Invidia*, and *Hermaphrodite* are mythical, symbolic figures. It will take a Herculean effort, but if I am granted the opportunity to show my work at the museum, I plan to create several completely new stone sculptures in response to those historical models and finish them by the time of the opening of the Biennale. The other works that I propose to exhibit are primarily portraits I have created in the last few years. (Portrait sculpture has been my almost-exclusive focus for the last decade.) Even though the portraits are representations of specific individuals (artworld figures all), they vary in treatment from relatively-straightforward depictions to extreme distortions. Some are violently stretched and impaled, while others are delicately wrapped in foliage. Some have been morphed into fantastic creatures, others are rendered with extreme objectivity. The stones I employ range from creamy, exuberantly-red-figured translucent Mexican Onyx, to rich blue Lapis Lazuli, from pure, dense Black Marble, to ghostly Calcite. In the accompanying renderings, I have selected the works for the various rooms utilizing a variety of criteria. I looked for correspondences of color, form, and content. Sometimes, in an attempt to "activate" a room, I took a deliberately-obstreperous approach.