

INTERVIEW. RAFAEL GALLARDO. VENEZUELAN PAINTER



**Artist in residence**

# A mix of reality and fantasy

**ARTIST RAFAEL GALLARDO GREW UP IN VENEZUELA, AND LIVES IN BOTH BARCELONA AND WASHINGTON, TWO CITIES THAT HAVE MUCH IN COMMON, HE SAYS**

**JILL ADAMS**

Venezuelan-born painter Rafael Gallardo had already established a name for himself in his native land before moving to the US in 1995, where he is now a permanent resident. He now splits his time between Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. His current exhibition, *Nuevas Creaciones*, is running until July 19th at Sala Almirall, carrer Princesa 16, where you will find the artist ready to chat about his work or anything you like – anything, that is, except Hugo Chavez.

**So why not Chavez?**

Because that is the first thing everyone asks, always, and it gets tiring. I haven't been in Venezuela for well over a decade and so it's difficult to have an opinion – and I don't like to play politics – though I think the man speaks for himself. No president of any country rates very high with me. I do feel huge respect for politicians like Nelson Mandela or Václav Havel, but unfortunately there are few like them.

**You moved to the US to bring your work to a larger audience. What brought you to Barcelona?**

Actually, back in Venezuela, Barcelona was the desired cultural destination for many artists, including myself. But at that time it was more practical for me to move to the US, which is a fascinating place for art. Once I had a solid grounding there, I set my sights again on Barcelona, and I have been painting and exhibiting here for three years and having a heck of a time.

**What was it like growing up in Venezuela?**

Having the Andean mountains as a playground and swimming in the mountain river of La Grita; later, the 1970s university scene in Valencia and then the liberal, intellectual community of Mérida. The educational system, which is free of charge, gave me a broader view of the world.

**What cultural differences do you find between Washington, D.C. and Barcelona?**

I've found more similarities than differences. In fact, I've found so much common ground that I think of D.C. and Barcelona as twin cities. Both have an international mix and a thriving art scene. Most everyone in D.C., of course, is involved in the bureaucratic world, so dress is more formal; women, for example, must wear



Nude, reflecting Gallardo's fascination for female figures and faces/ARCHIVE

heels and pantyhose to work, and it's not unusual to find men in suits and women in long gowns at a gallery opening. Commercially, it is difficult to exhibit and sell anywhere, with each city having its advantages and disadvantages. Here there is

not the tradition of open studio art shows in homes; but on the other hand gallery rental is more accessible. Interestingly, most of my sales here are to foreigners, including many Americans. If I really need to sell, I head to D.C.

**Do you find that living here**

affects the way you paint?

I've created some of my best paintings here thanks to the high level of happiness characteristic of Barcelona. I find more energy here, but paradoxically I also find more peace and have more patience so I attain a higher level of concentration in my work. And certainly, working in a place like *plaça Taginers*, with the Roman Wall as backdrop, is inspirational. One evening last year I was watching the play of light on the stones of the wall and felt transported to the old Roman city; the result was a painting called *Barcino*. The affordability and great quality of art supplies is a real plus, too.

**Your paintings are full of strong, vibrant color. Has color always figured prominently in your work?**

I started my career with India ink, working a rigorous pointillism, and soon evolved toward colour which proved a new revelation. It brought breathing capabilities to my work. Since then, more than 20 years ago, I've worked with colour, with oil and acrylic, sometimes adding epoxy resin, sometimes a splash of sea water.

**Besides your abstracts, you have worked many variations of *Don Quijote*. What is the significance of the *Quijote* theme?**

*Don Quijote's* fame transcends most international borders; he is the Hispanic culture's genuine expression of gallantry and bravery; the quintessential romantic adventurer that resides somewhere in all of us. There is also a literary element involved; before I began painting, I wrote poetry and short fiction with real passion. When I paint *Don Quijote*, I feel as if I were writing a tale.

**Female figures and faces also form a large body of your work. What is your inspiration?**

Do you see that woman in the street? And the one behind her? They are. And you. And the woman who just walked into the gallery. *Quijote's* *Dulcinea*, of course. It is the universal idealised woman, a mix of reality and fantasy, steering my imagination, conducting the brush strokes. What comes out on the canvas is always new, with an element of surprise. Maybe she'll have three eyes, maybe she'll be an angel, but colour, always colour.

[www.gallardo.net](http://www.gallardo.net)

**Questionnaire**

**A book.**

*Last Evenings on Earth* by Roberto Bolaño

**A film.**

*Spring, Summer... Spring* by Kim Ke Duk

**Piece of music.**

*Paco de Lucia*, Pink Floyd, Metallica

**Local haunts.**

*La Rambla*, *passaig Marítim*, the streets of the *Barri Gòtic*, bar *Andu*

**Catalonia.**

*Barcelona*

**Barcelona.**

A rich, international cultural paradise; the intricate details of modernisme architecture

**What gets you up in the morning?**

A *carajillo de Cointreau*

**Three wishes.**

To establish an art studio in Barcelona. To keep evolving with my work. To stop war



Artist Rafael Gallardo in a recent picture/ARCHIVE