

CLAUDIA HECHT

FINDING THE TRANSCENDENT

In architecture and in art, few attempt and even fewer accomplish the transcendent; works that become iconic images that the people in the cities and countries in which they exist identify with and treasure as their own cultural heritage.

GUADALAJARA.

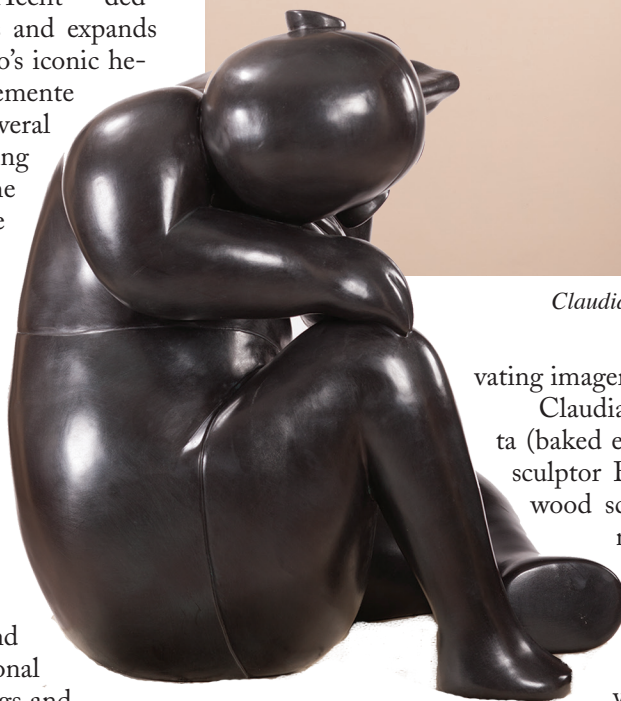
One of the most beautiful cities in the world, even the name speaks of music, art and dreams. "Plus," says artist/resident Claudia Hecht, "the weather is fantastic and it is famous for beautiful women. You see them all over — in the streets, restaurants...everywhere."

Such pulchritude, while prevalent, is not restricted to the female form in Guadalajara. Art abounds in the city, the capital of Jalisco, which has been called the "Florence of Mexico." Its rich artistic history dates back to the 17th century and began to take modern shape after the Mexican Revolution when the country was in turmoil in the 1920s. While born in Mexico City, the beauty that emanates from Claudia's art is a poetic paean to her heritage and home where colorful and powerful murals grace the walls of many of Guadalajara's public buildings. Beyond functioning as decoration, these murals depict the founding of modern Mexican identity, exploring the centuries-old struggle between indigenous and European factions.

With elegance, delicacy and no shortage of internal combustion, Claudia Hecht — dedicated to tradition — continues and expands upon the paths carved by Mexico's iconic heroes of creativity led by Jose Clemente Orozco whose works grace several locations in Guadalajara, including the Government Palace and the University of Guadalajara and the Hospicio Cabañas, the interior walls of which contain some of Orozco's best work. Two hundred feet above the floor at the center of the nave in the buildings main chapel, a man wreathed in flames ascends into the cupola. This is *Man of Fire*, Orozco's masterpiece. Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siquieros are the other components of "The Big Three."

Internationally acclaimed and winner of prestigious international awards, Claudia's vibrant paintings and evocative sculptures combine themes from ancient Inca, Mayan and other primitive cultures with modern interpretation and materials. Her work evokes spiritual rituals from the legends of these civilizations presented in a contemporary style that captures the wonder of this mythology. Her impeccable designs and capti-

Shaman, bronze, 2014



Claudia standing before The Ocean Watchman, Mosaic (50,000 pieces), 36" x 49½", 2006



vating imagery are awe-inspiring.

Claudia began her career in 1988 creating Terracotta (baked earth) works in high relief under the training of sculptor Blanca Göens, completing a large collection of wood sculptures in cooperation with many of the renowned artists of Guadalajara. In 1993, she went on to study with Italian master artist Giulio D'Arolio with whom she delved deeply into the 18th century technique of relief painting on a gilded background in which gold and silver leaf are applied to surfaces and painted with oils and varnish. In these works, Claudia combines images inspired by archaeological, indigenous, mythological, oriental, tribal, exotic and modern elements. Embellishing the initial layers with engraved sculptures of wood and stone, Claudia transforms the mundane into new vibrant forms of expression in an artistic movement she christened "Picto-



The Divine Path, 2002, mixed media gold leaf and oil, 63" ht. x 119" wide

rial Sculpture Art." Few styles present such originality, as there are no planned sequences or inflexible rules. "I do make some basic sketches, but they have little in common with the final."

These works have evolved into an exploration of the infinite possibilities offered of interactivity designed into her new larger-than-life sculptures. These pieces are colorful and elegant and do not belong, she says, "to any existing school. Their intention is to be original, harmonious, beautiful and different."

Based on her love and appreciation of Mexican primitive art, these stainless steel sculptures evoke an organic sense of place, designed to blend into their surroundings, whether natural or man-made. They range in height from five to 18 feet or more and are created to be site specific, drawing on the artistic heritage of her homeland. "Interactive means people are invited into the works, to stand next to them with the building or beautiful scenery in the background so that a memory is made there."

Those designs caught the eye of Christina Cox who proffered on her The National Museum of Catholic Art and Library's International Artist of the Year Award in 2014. Another of her major accomplishments was being accepted as one of the finalists for the World Trade Center Memorial Competition. Her 2003 design

concept for the "Ground Zero Memorial" in New York City made it through the first three rounds of consideration. Of 3,000 artists entered, there were but 30 finalists with ten chosen for exhibition. "I love to work with architects," said Claudia from a café in Guadalajara. "In creating the space for the World Trade Center, I designed a place of introspection, where people could come and quietly think about those they lost in that tragedy. I designed an entrance with symbols representing the religions of the world. The doors would open only one day a year for people to come in and communicate... an annual pilgrimage as a way of remembering those who were lost and to have some kind of a dialogue with those souls."

Another of Claudia's major accomplishments is *Feminalia 2000*, a traveling exhibition that Claudia initiated and financed. "I was very conscious that there were not many opportunities to support feminine art in Mexico so I decided to make a foundation to promote female artists. I started looking at different artists with positive attitudes who would be good ambassadors for Mexico and Mexican culture. All the artists were from my state, either born or living in Guadalajara." The well-received exhibition opened in Rome in 2000, and traveled to Washington, DC where it was shown at the Mexican Consulate, before heading home to Guadalajara. "We had a lot of support

from the Mexican Embassy and created a major catalog. In Italy, radio and television was extremely supportive and while I was there, the Director of the Fine Art Academy of Rome invited me to stay on and study. I trained in Ravenna, Italy for mosaic art, and refined my painting techniques in Rome."

Claudia returned to Mexico two years later, met her future husband, David Ne-



Sitting Shaman #2, from the Council of Shamans series, mahogany, second piece, 29" ht, 18" wide, 23" deep

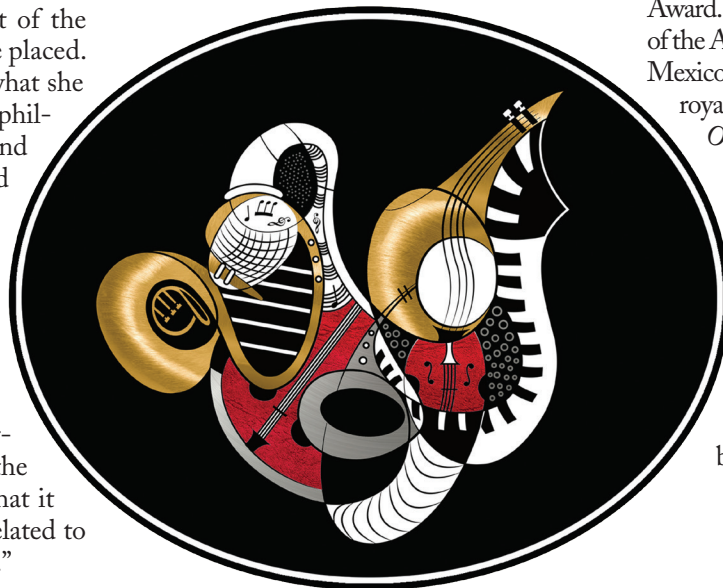


Yin Yang and The Origins of Life, mixed media, acid-etched marble with mahogany base depicting The Creator holding the world. 88" ht. x 51" wide, 2008

wren at an Artexpo and married in 2004. Currently, Claudia is in the midst of completing a commission for the stunning new cultural facility Palcco in Guadalajara where, in addition to an interactive stainless steel installation of larger-than-life sculptures that rise from a garden at the entrance, she is also producing a granite medallion (*Medallon Rojo*, pictured below) to be embedded in the floor of the grand rotunda, and a 10' x 50' mural. Her hope is that this is the first of many future installations to be placed in prominent places around the world where they will become part of the identity of the city in which they are placed.

Each of Claudia's works have what she calls "a back story" with historical, philosophical or spiritual truths behind each. Personal tragedy, triumph and awakening are her major themes, executed in such a way that they become, as she states, "Harmonious and happy resulting in a much more fulfilling experience. Not all my art is colorful. Some are somber, but all are elegant. I don't paint with a purpose of making people understand a particular message. Rather, the creation talks to me and tells me what it wants. The outcome is very much related to my emotional space at that moment."

Claudia's "emotional spaces" resonate equally with **MADALLON ROJO**, mixed media, granite, bronze and stainless steel, 96" x 70"



The National Museum of Catholic Art and Library honored Claudia Hecht with International Artist of the Year Award at the 3rd Annual Roman Gala La Primavera on April 2, 2014 in the Embassy of Italy. Her NMCAL's award was presented by Prince Lorenzo de Medici, Patron of the Arts (right) as Christina Cox, NMCAL Founder and Timothy Barton NMCAL Chairman look on.

collectors and the general public. For many, they become a source of inspiration — treasured masterpieces that combine beauty, distinctiveness of design and purity of form with unique materials and unparalleled creativity. The result is in-depth communication — powerful and original — which is the basis of the interaction she seeks. They crystallize Mexico's artistic and cultural values and are technically brilliant above reproach — works of a modern master, magnificently expressed.

Christina Cox, Director of the [National Museum of Catholic Art and Library](#), concurs.



Claudia with her painting Ancestral Philosophy.

"Our museum art committee chose Claudia Hecht's mixed media sculpture *Our Lady of Guadalupe* for the 2014 NMCAL International Award. Our Lady of Guadalupe is the "Patroness of the Americas" who appeared to Juan Diego in Mexico in 1531. Claudia painted a magnificent royal blue color with golden stars on the *Our Lady's* sacred cape. The wooden rays of the sun standing in back of her are beautiful and striking. The *Our Lady* is sweet and strong with her delicate hands in prayer. The fit for a Virgin's golden crown is one fit for a Queen of the Heavens and Earth. At the base we see an Angel guarding Our Lady wearing a gold armor breast plate. This is truly one of the most beautiful sculptures we have ever seen."

— VICTOR BENNETT FORBES

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