

Bobby Marines: Resurrection
NE Sculpture | Gallery Factory
Curated by Bobby Marines
December 1, 2022–February 4, 2023

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At NE Sculpture | Gallery Factory in Minneapolis, the Minnesota-based and Texas-born artist Bobby Marines exhibited eight works created during his two-month studio residency at the gallery from December 1, 2022 to February 4, 2023. Marines acted as both artist and curator for the show. The title *Resurrection* refers to a process of rebirth in his own life and in the lives of his friends and family. Marines is originally from Robstown, Texas, a small town with a population of ten thousand that has been called the “most dangerous” city by the FBI and the “worst city in Texas” by *USA Today*.¹

Place is important for Marines. His pieces trace different stages of his life chronologically, from *The Wander Years* of his early childhood in Texas, to *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died*, which refers to Marines’s rediscovery of

his interest in art making and community building after he moved to Minnesota. He simultaneously reflected on the influence of Robstown’s environment on himself and fellow residents and critiqued the systems that created a place like Robstown, with its poverty, gang culture, and drug epidemics.² Other pieces in the show reflect more broadly on Marines’s experience as a Chicano man and on the lives of his friends and family. Ultimately, *Resurrection* raises questions regarding what systems produce negative experiences and dangerous places, as well as what it takes to overcome those conditions.

Though some visitors expecting traditional smooth marble sculptures may have felt uneasy faced with Marines’s ordinary materials like pencil on paper and cardboard, Marines intentionally employed these both out of necessity and as

part of the lineage of *rasquachismo* aesthetics, defined by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto as a sensibility or taste of the underdog.³ Marines used found materials like cardboard, discarded reflective insulation, the back sides of previously used canvases, and accessible marking instruments like pencil and pen. For example, his installation *Pleasantville and the Abyss* faced the entrance into the gallery and was entirely filled with the reverse sides of large cotton canvases. Because the canvases were simply pinned on the wall next to each other, the viewer could glimpse the dark painted edges curling around from the front. The front of the white canvases were filled with pencil sketches depicting a montage of cityscapes, signs, lettering, graveyards, and people.

Marines's *rasquachismo* aesthetic was effective because it was true to his experience as an artist putting together his own show with limited institutional support, and therefore limited money for expensive supplies. His attention toward reuse also critiqued both the aesthetic values of the polished art world and the effects of race, class, and the criminal justice system on Marines's own life and those of the people he knows. *The Wander Years*, an installation representing Marines's early life, conveys this institutional critique

especially well. As viewers entered the gallery, the first wall to their left was filled with smaller and more colorful portraits of individuals, families, and objects. Several of the pieces had symbols, like green money signs or guns, that signaled the poverty and violence of Robstown and critiqued their impact on the families that live there. The depicted figures' faces were mostly void of any definition or expression, appearing simply as blank planes. A few had ovals of tinfoil placed where the facial features would normally appear. The blank and reflective faces evoked a sense of shared experience, suggesting they could have been anyone. Marines extrapolated his own experience to speak to the larger reality of other Chicanos/as and residents of towns like Robstown throughout the United States. Starting from a personal place, Marines speaks to universal themes about systemic violence, its detrimental effects, and the difficult intentional and transformational work one must undergo to counteract it.

However, Marines did not stop at systemic critique. Instead, he also visualized his own process of transformation through his piece *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died*. If the early and middle eras of his life, depicted in the aforementioned works *Wander*

Years and Pleasantville, were defined in part by the negative effects of systemic violence, then *The Resurrection of Things that Never Died* and the show's title, *Resurrection*, were about his process of the personal rediscovery of self. By re-using materials, such as the dispersive reflective metal house insulation panels cut and layered to form an archway around the central figure drawn in pencil, presumably Marines, he referenced elements of the previous two pieces. His *rasquachismo* aesthetic of reviving materials acted as a visual representation of his personal revival of self through returning to art making as well as the revival of his community through his return to Robstown and the founding of Robstown Arts Committee and Robé Art Blitz. References to Robstown Arts Committee and Robé Art Blitz were penciled on the dark background surrounding the central figure of Marines.

Off in a small room in the back of the gallery was an altar surrounded by three pieces: *Blessed, Virgin and Child*, and *La Virgen de San Juan (The Story of Genevieve)*. There, Marines reimagined his cousin as the Virgin of San Juan. Instead of placing the name of a possessive ex-boyfriend on her neck, Marines wrote "Juan," proclaiming her a saint adorned with the self-assertion of her own name rather

than the controlling power of the men in her life. Through this piece, Marines asserted that even if those around him had been harmed by the same systems that harmed him, they too could return to the creative parts of childhood as a source of inspiration for self-transformation. Even if Marines's cousin had not yet undertaken this journey, Marines was visualizing the first step for her to take, inviting her to join him in the self-creation of art making and community building. In this way too Marines spoke to a broader audience who had been affected by poverty, racism, and violence, conveying that they are never too for-gone to transform themselves and can use easily found materials and creative pursuits to do so. Viewers needed to put aside any expectation of a glossy art-world aesthetic to understand the creative reuse and critique of a *rasquachismo* sensibility when entering into Marines's biographical world.

¹ “Resurrection,” NE Sculpture, last modified November 30, 2023, <https://ne-sculpture.org/resurrection>.

² “Resurrection,” NE Sculpture.

³ Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,” in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, exh. cat. (Los

Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991), 155–62.