

# ARTnews

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## Enrique Martínez Celaya

Griffin Contemporary

Enrique Martínez Celaya makes being alive look like a very precarious business. In the bronze-and-steel *The Immigrant* (2005), an emaciated man lies on the floor, his chest exposed and his body stiff like Jesus' in so many pietàs. The large painting *Refuge* (2005) depicts a stark white figure opening his arms before a vast blue sky, an alien in his own world. In another painting, a lovely, pensive boy who is literally blue in the face gazes out of a canvas that seems too large for him. Faint cursive writing

above his head spells out "The End," subtly casting the boy as a decadent anti-hero of fin-de-siècle literature, the self-conscious artist type who represents the end of the family line.

Even Martínez Celaya's abstract paintings raise the cosmic questions that Paul Gauguin once posed and that so many artists today avoid: Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? On one side of a diptych, he has worked up black paint and tar (a favorite material of his) into interstellar

clouds. Next to this hangs a mirror of the same size, forcing us to examine our relationship to the universe.

Over the years much has been made of Martínez Celaya's history as an immigrant (his family fled Cuba for Spain and then Puerto Rico), but you don't have to know the artist's biography to appreciate his work. As he sees it, we are all orphans, exiles, and refugees in a world that is not our home but our host.

—Jori Finkel

Enrique Martínez Celaya, *Breath*, 2005, oil and tar on canvas and mirror, 100" x 156." Griffin Contemporary.

