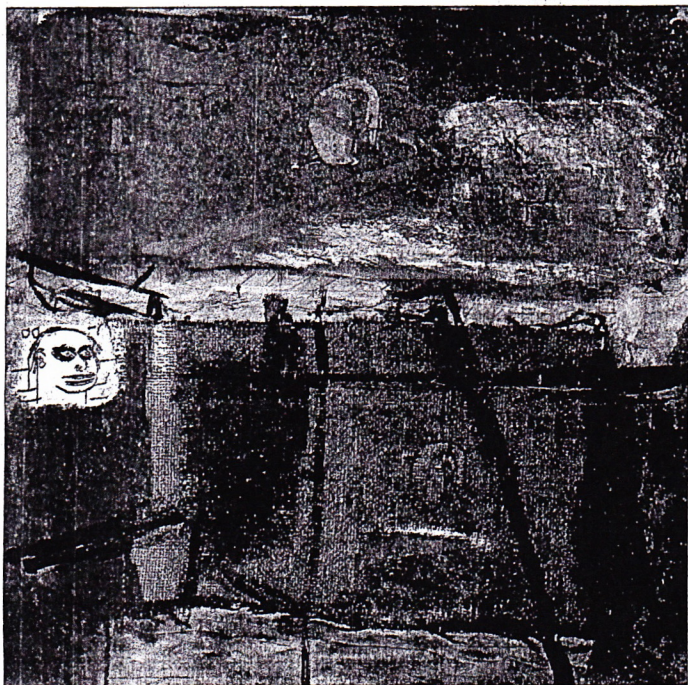


REVIEW

RAW EXPRESSION



Untitled, 1985: gouache, pencil and jute on paper.

Tacla's stark, brutal visions of humanity aren't for the faint of heart

By JAMES AUER
Journal Sentinel art critic

Nightmarish. Sensual. Tantalizingly fragmentary. These are just a few of the words that spring to mind on encountering the work of the Chile-born, New-York-based artist Jorge Tacla.

In Tacla's skilled yet almost frighteningly unpredictable hands, human beings wander—agitated, isolated, alienated, lust-ridden—in a vast desert of profound disenchantment.

Desire corrupts. Arms and legs wither away. Houses that ought to provide shelter are open to the sun, wind and rain. Primal urges undermine rather than empower the intellect.

Bits and pieces of other painters' masterworks, from Velasquez to Basquiat, drift in and out of the picture frame. Pain and tension, time and history add to the psychic collage.

It's not a particularly upbeat vision, but it is a riveting one, and it gives Tacla's



Art, says Jorge Tacla, reflects "intellectual problems."

solo show of drawings at the Milwaukee Art Museum a peculiar, if chilling, fascination.

This is art-making at its rawest and most primitive—yet, oddly, its most sophisticated. The draftsmanship is deft and spare, and the insights cut deep into the contemporary soul.

It's not, quite frankly, for kids. Conventional sex acts are taboo. Tacla's gamy folk prefer bizarre postures and unlikely partners. They are of, and with, the animal kingdom.

Still, for all their unbridled freedom of impulse and action, these bald, muscular beings are sad, even poignant. It is as if they have been quarantined on a plague planet.

Art historian Donald Kuspit theorizes that "the isolated figure in (Tacla's) desert... is a symbol of narcissistic trauma and spiritual vacuousness, core problems of modern humanity...."

"As Goya dealt with social disaster," Kuspit writes in his catalog essay, "Tacla deals with emotional disaster.... (He's concerned with) man's cruelty to man, stupidity in general...."

Carrie Przybilla, another student of Tacla, argues that he "evokes both vulnerability and brutality to establish an emotional dynamic that is palpable for the viewer."

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Untitled, 1987: gouache on paper.



Untitled, 1985: gouache and pencil on paper.

Tacla/Art that isn't for the squeamish

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Joseph Ruzicka, who organized the show for the Milwaukee Art Museum, contends that Tacla's imagery conveys his unwavering belief in the absolute necessity of human interaction.

Tacla himself appeared curiously removed from all this analysis and erudition when he was interviewed over breakfast at a downtown Milwaukee coffee shop. He seemed to be a truly contented man.

Family, rather than social dislocation, occupied his thoughts. He is happily married, he said, to curator and writer Beatriz Tacla. They have a child. His career is on the rise.

Indeed, Tacla gave the impression of being delighted that, for him at least, the act of drawing — his passion and addiction — lets him tap into a pool of unalloyed emotion.

Speaking in staccato English with a subtle Spanish twist (he has lived in the United States for 17 years), Tacla told of building an American reputation, and a life as well.

"Drawing is a language," he said. "It's a daily confrontation. The information (contained) in drawings is very direct, very naked. You don't have to cover any meanings."

For some artists, drawing is a preliminary step secondary to the final product, a painting. But for Tacla, who also paints, a drawing is in itself a worthy and climactic goal.

"Drawing for me is primary," he said. "It's information, investigation, research — your entire way of being. It allows you to be intellectual and passionate at the same time."

Born in Santiago in 1958, Tacla came to New York in 1981. He said his reasons for leaving Chile were simple: distaste for the ruling military junta and better career opportunities.

A musician as well as an artist, he has played with bands as a percussionist but has not worked professionally. He has displayed his work in the U.S. and Chile, singly and in group shows.

In person, Tacla comes across as the very antithesis of the wild, tormented, misshapen,

If you go

What: "Jorge Tacla — Drawings"

Where: Milwaukee Art Museum, 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays; noon to 9 p.m. Thursdays; noon to 5 p.m. Sundays through Feb. 15. Closed Mondays.

Admission: \$5 adults; \$3 for students, seniors 65 or older; free to members, children 12 or younger with adult. Free to Milwaukee County residents 10 a.m. to noon Wednesdays and Saturdays.

oversexed creatures of his pictures. Asked whether drawing is therapy for him, he replied:

"Oh, I think so. It's like getting things out from your mind. It's a way of dealing with memory, the past time that will never be back. It combines the future and memories."

Mark making for Tacla quite clearly is a quick, intuitive process, albeit with underlying intellectual input.

"Doing something without thinking," he said, "is the essence.... You've got to make your hands smart and have your mind in your hands. It's always an intellectual problem, because how can you do art without intellectual problems?"

Significantly, Tacla views some of his more outre imagery as being socially charged. A woman giving birth to a fully grown adult, for instance, reinforces the importance of family.

And several of his more grotesque imaginings — i.e., a legless man using a pair of hapless swordfish as crutches — are designed to demonstrate human strength and resiliency.

There's no need to pity these warped but proud figments of the innermost mind, he seems to be saying. All of life is a casting-off process, but out of copulation grows closeness.

Openness and vulnerability are thus the keys to Tacla's message. Sex is less a recreation than a means of communication.

By facing up to our fears we can, in the end, defeat them.