

Interview With The Artist: Hector Canonge

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MizAmerica is a multimedia art exhibit by Hector Canonge that combines video, 3-D design, and performance art to explore the many aspects of beauty, masculinity, and what it means to be a U.S. citizen. The first one features several rows and columns of Barbie dolls glued up on the wall. There is scrolling text projected onto the dolls, via video projector. *Toy Soldiers* features a video projection of soldiers in a war zone. Beside it, there is a display of little green toy soldiers, in rows and columns. After the opening reception, I had the chance to interview Hector Canonge and learn more about him and his work:

Hector Canonge



AC: Where are you from?

HC: I was born in Argentina, but I grew up in Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, and the U.S.

AC: What kind of artist are you?

HC: New media—an integration of various digital technologies and performance art.

AC: How did you get started in this field?

HC: I don't think an artist gets started in a field. You're born in the field. Ever since I can remember I've always been doing artistic projects. My family has always been supportive.

AC: When did you discover your creative talents?

HC: I was never a kid who was good at drawing. I was a shy kid, so I created a little world to deal with my shyness. I would tell all the kids on the block, *"Listen up! We're gonna go to the movies, and when we come back, we'll re-enact the movie."*

AC: Can you tell me about some of your work?

HC: *'Here She Comes'* is a deconstruction of the idea of beauty, using the Miss America beauty pageant. Miss America is a part of American culture. It was started in 1921 in Atlantic City, NJ. It really shows the disparities of racial imbalance in the U.S. because in the 90 year history of the pageant, only seven African Americans have won. It wasn't even until the 1970s that colored people were even allowed to compete.

AC: What inspired you to make this?

HC: Last year when I was a visiting artist, I used to go to the Miss America Diner. Now, everyone knows that the beauty pageant always has these really thin women [who look like Barbie dolls]. But at the Miss America diner, you see real women [with curves].

AC: I like how your other piece, *Toy Soldiers*, is placed right next to *Here She Comes*. I love the juxtaposition of the Barbie Dolls and G.I. Joes. Little girls see Barbie as a model of ideal beauty, so they try to look like her. And little boys see G.I. Joes and other action figures as the epitome of what it means to be a man.

HC: Yes, that's a good observation. I think the Miss America pageant and the U.S. Military both represent patriotism and the American Dream.

AC: Why did you call this piece *Toy Soldiers*?

HC: Men are put into war zones like little toy soldiers. They're replaceable.

AC: What about your performance piece, *Gilded Cage*? I didn't really understand it.

HC: The Cage represents the immigrant experience. You have a bird in a cage that you feed and take care of, but at the end of the day, it's still in a cage. It's not free. That's what life is like for immigrants.

AC: What would you like people to get from your work? How do you want them to feel when they experience your art?

HC: I want people to take their time with each piece and soak in the message.

AC: How would you describe your style?

HC: Eclectic—performance narratives, visual narratives, video interactive work. I don't hold on to one style.

AC: Describe yourself in five words.

HC: Persistent, resourceful, stubborn, friendly, sentimental.

AC: Where can we see more of your work?

HC: www.HectorCanonge.net