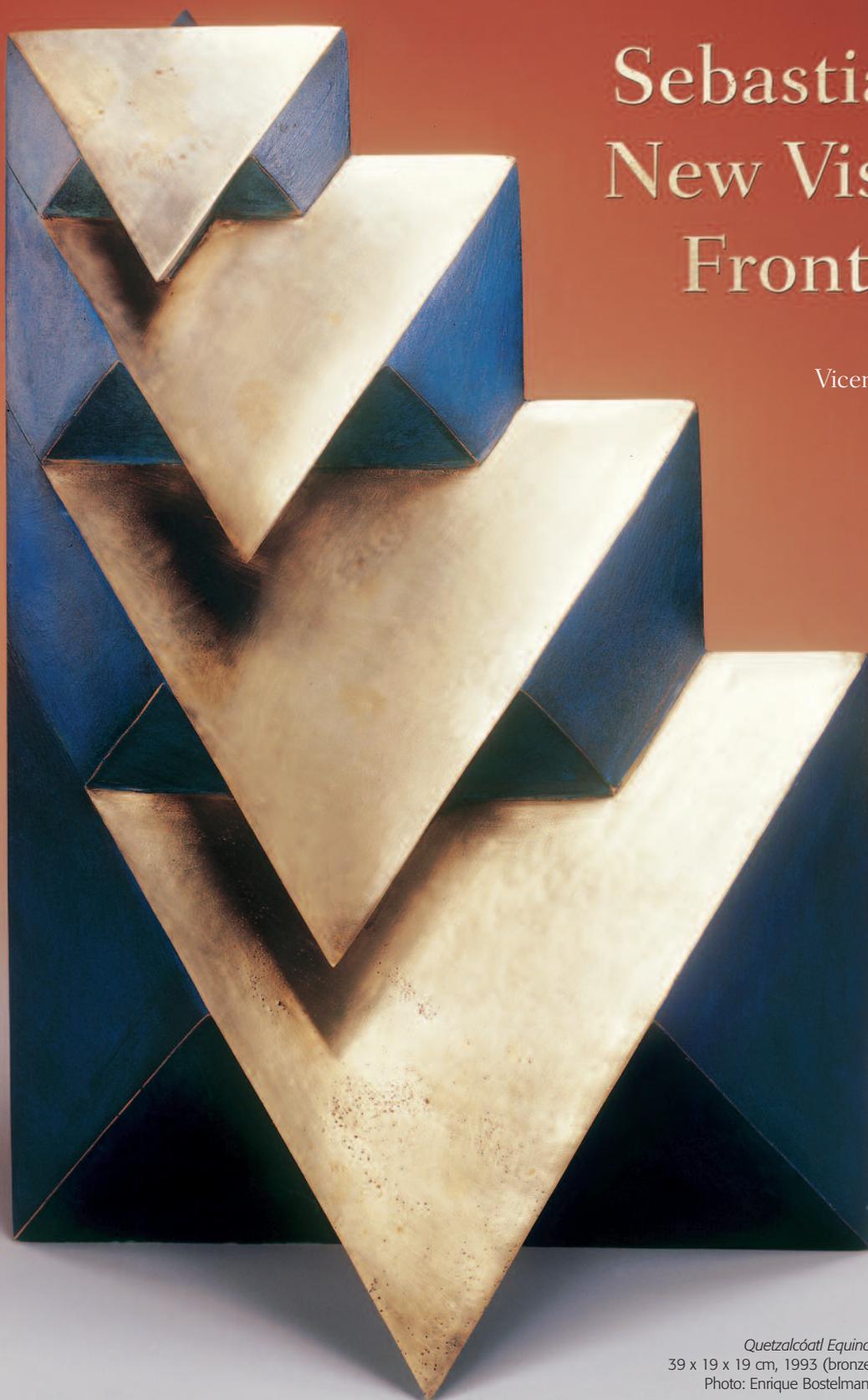


# Sebastián's New Visual Frontiers

Vicenzo Sanfo\*



*Quetzalcóatl Equinox,*  
39 x 19 x 19 cm, 1993 (bronze).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.



*Blue Sphere*, 8 m in diameter, 2002 (iron with acrylic enamel). Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

When I first saw Sebastián's work on one of my trips to Mexico, I immediately understood that he was a very important artist and that the search he was making went far beyond the purely local: he spoke to the entire world in an extremely personal language with universal scope. The first work I saw was *Horse Head*, masterfully placed and, perhaps, one of the twentieth century's most important monumental sculptures.<sup>1</sup>

Some years have passed since then, but I continued to want to meet the artist—I was already familiar with his work thanks to books I had bought to study it more closely—and finally, unexpectedly, the opportunity to meet him came, contrived together with a far off country with thousands of years of history behind it: China.

When I was curator of the first Beijing Biennial, a very important historic event, Sebastián was proposed to represent Mexico; obviously, I approved the idea enthusiastically, happy to be able to meet a master whose work had fascinated me for so long. For me, then, it was a pleasant surprise to discover that the artist, capable of competing with the monumental stature of skyscrapers and with the imperiousness of great contemporary architecture, capable of dominating iron and steel, of bending to his will forms of unthinkable size, was amenable, extremely courteous and unassuming.

Over the days in China, the pleasure of that meeting became a friendship of great intellec-

tual intensity, reinforced by a common vision of contemporary art and, particularly, the great unexpressed potential of contemporary Mexican art that is, in my opinion, worth of a great deal of attention. This common conception of the contemporary art world became the glue of a friendship, strengthened by my successive visits to his studies and my more and more profound understanding of his quest.

Today, Sebastián's course seems clearer to me, his place in the contemporary art world more certain and his identity more secure. I place him among the great sculptors of our time, among those whose work is destined to give the art world to come new ways forward. However, Sebastián's work could not be understood without taking into account a vision of sculpture derived from logic and mathematical reflection, from the impact of quantum theories, of the fundamental laws of geometry, of the rules of balance in composition and of the use of new instruments for research and calculation, capable of causing that feeling of grandeur and stupefaction innate in human beings when standing before a work of genius.

For the sculptor, aspiring to the monumental is necessary to make the greatest possible number of people feel amazement at perfection, in which the work of art is the closest thing to divine wonders. For Sebastián, the Brancusian aspiration to the essence of the sublime, which finds in this essence the road of asceticism and, as a result, of absolute spirituality, is valid.

Resorting to mathematical models to create his compositions is a way of channeling the search

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\* Art critic. Curator of the Beijing Biennial.



*The Goller*, 13 m, 2002 (iron with acrylic enamel). Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

“These sculptures embody great paradoxes. They are fragile, fun and volatile and they weigh tons. They remind you of the folds in origami that move with the slightest puff of wind, yet enormous technical difficulties have to be overcome to put them in place.”<sup>2</sup>

BEATRIZ ESPEJO

for that Brancusian perfection of the essential, that clearly defines his limits and perspectives. Equally, there is no doubt of the nearness of certain searches à la Calder that, through the use of new forms, of materials from industry and of color, offer new perspectives to contemporary sculpture. At the same time, the similarity of attempts and searches is indicative of another great actor: Vaserey, of course, seen not only as a great master of optical art, but rather as the researcher of those balances in composition I mentioned before. However, it seems to me to be appropriate to situate Sebastián’s quest in the common trajectory of Chillida who has partly followed the same road, though with other media and other prerogatives.

I think that whoever wants to systematically and profoundly face the history of the sculpture of our time cannot help but take into consideration Sebastián’s work and the value of his quest, recognizing in him the stigmata of the great artist because of his courage, inventiveness, and the modernity of his course.

The numerous public sculptures exhibited not only in Mexico but almost all around the world speak of him with continual appreciation for his work, work that should be an unquestionable reason for pride for Mexico and, for him, for international

consolidation, even though he is barely starting and still has far to go in the future.

A visit to his studios and direct contact with his sculpting career make it clear how easy it is to understand and appreciate his language internationally and how his large sculptures do not lose the feeling of the monumental even when they are rendered in small formats using materials like silver, wood or plastic. Sebastián’s surprising reality is that, through the use of mathematics and the laws of geometry, he manages to condense in small proportions all the monumental feeling of his largest pieces; thus, our minds can read the DNA that they carry with them and that is ready to expand in space where they will be turned into *Phoenix Arch*, *Door of Monterrey*, *Large Spider*, *Door of Chihuahua* or other forms in becoming, unique and autonomous, but generated by the same matrix.

Thus, to speak of Sebastián is to speak of sculpture that looks to the future, of sculpture capable of allowing us to get a glimpse at new visual frontiers and with which the force of Man’s imagination manages to surpass the narrow limits of figuration and step into a world between science and technology, so highly valued by the new generations.

Sebastián’s sculpture is related to Stanley Kubrick’s avant garde cinema, to John Cage’s sound re-

search, to Frank O'Ghery's daring architecture. It is, in summary, avant garde à la Leonardo, to the extent that it is scientifically poetical and, therefore, the antithesis of traditional sculpture. His monumental sculpture does not celebrate a man, whether he be leader or *condottiero*, but rather celebrates humankind and its intelligence. It celebrates everything that humankind in its earthly history has managed to conquer through collective efforts in a continual quest for itself. Herein lies the greatness of Sebastián's work, in the awareness that the revelation of art is to celebrate humankind as such, as an intelligent being, capable of thinking and seeing what are often unknown spaces and worlds.

Sebastián's work, in its quest for the grandiose in a perfect, scientifically coordinated order, is capa-

ble of making us glimpse those horizons, new spaces in which we can co-exist with the cosmic universe, overcoming the barriers of space and time. Sebastián's work is all of this, a harmonic whole, timeless; it is work that gives itself over to the future, a great future. ■■■

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This article was taken from *Geometría Emocional, Sebastián*, the catalogue of the exhibition of the same name (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, UNAM-CONACULTA, Mexico City Government, Fundación Sebastián, March, 2004). Published here by permission of the author.

<sup>2</sup>All quotes taken from the books *Sebastián ante la crítica. Antología de textos* (Mexico City: Taller Sebastián/Ediciones del Equilibrista, 1996); and *Sebastián ante la crítica. Antología de Textos II* (Madrid: Taller Sebastián/Turner, 2004).

All photos are courtesy of Fundación Sebastián.

“Abstraction allows Sebastián to pay homage  
not to a version of Paradise, but to the human ability  
to create the sacred on Earth.”

BRUCE NOVOA



*Baroque Altar*, 550 x 750 x 50 cm, 2004 (iron with acrylic enamel). Photo: Gianfranco Dal Bianco.



I



II



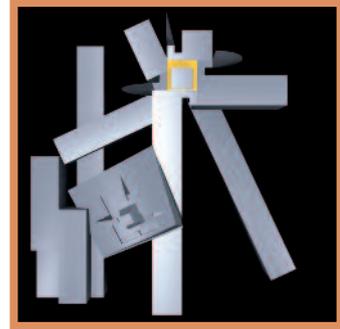
III



IV



V



VI



VII



VIII



IX



X



XI



XII



XIII

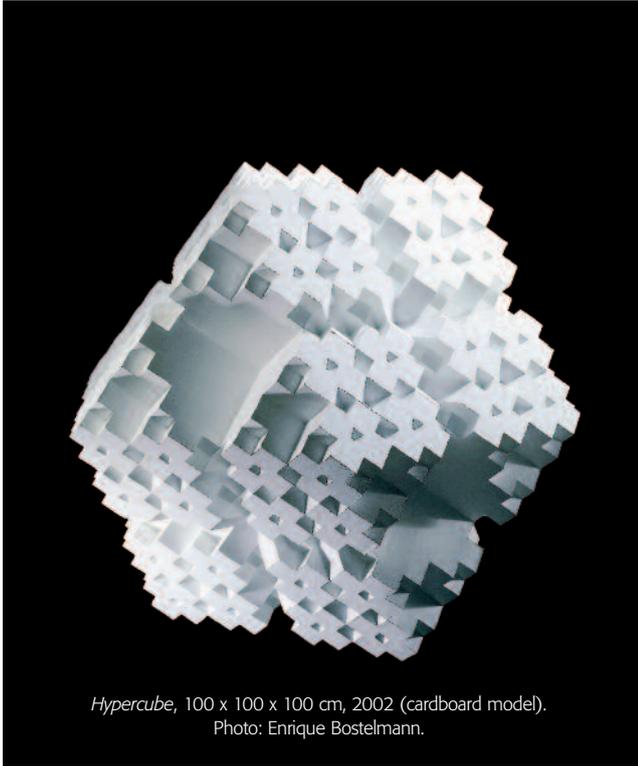


XIV



XV

*The Way of the Cross* (15 pieces), 200 x 200 x 20 cm each, 2004 (iron with acrylic enamel). Digital Illustrations.



*Hypercube*, 100 x 100 x 100 cm, 2002 (cardboard model).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.



*Nagoya Palm*, 92 x 62 x 39 cm, 1993 (bronze). Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

*Guardian Angel*, no measurements available, 2003 (bronze).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

“This man is a modern alchemist who knows more than anyone else understands, amalgamating it in a series of objects that cross our minds, sometimes entering through the eyes, sometimes through the stomach.”

MATÍAS CARVAJAL



*[Olmec] Head*, 65 x 50 x 55 cm, 1992 (iron with acrylic enamel).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.



*Crazy Chair*, no measurements available, 1995 (mahogany).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

“Sebastián’s artistic adventure accepts all the terms of poetic creation, all the risks of the imagination; it thus redeems us from the perfection of ‘pure’ forms.”

ALFREDO GRACIA VICENTE



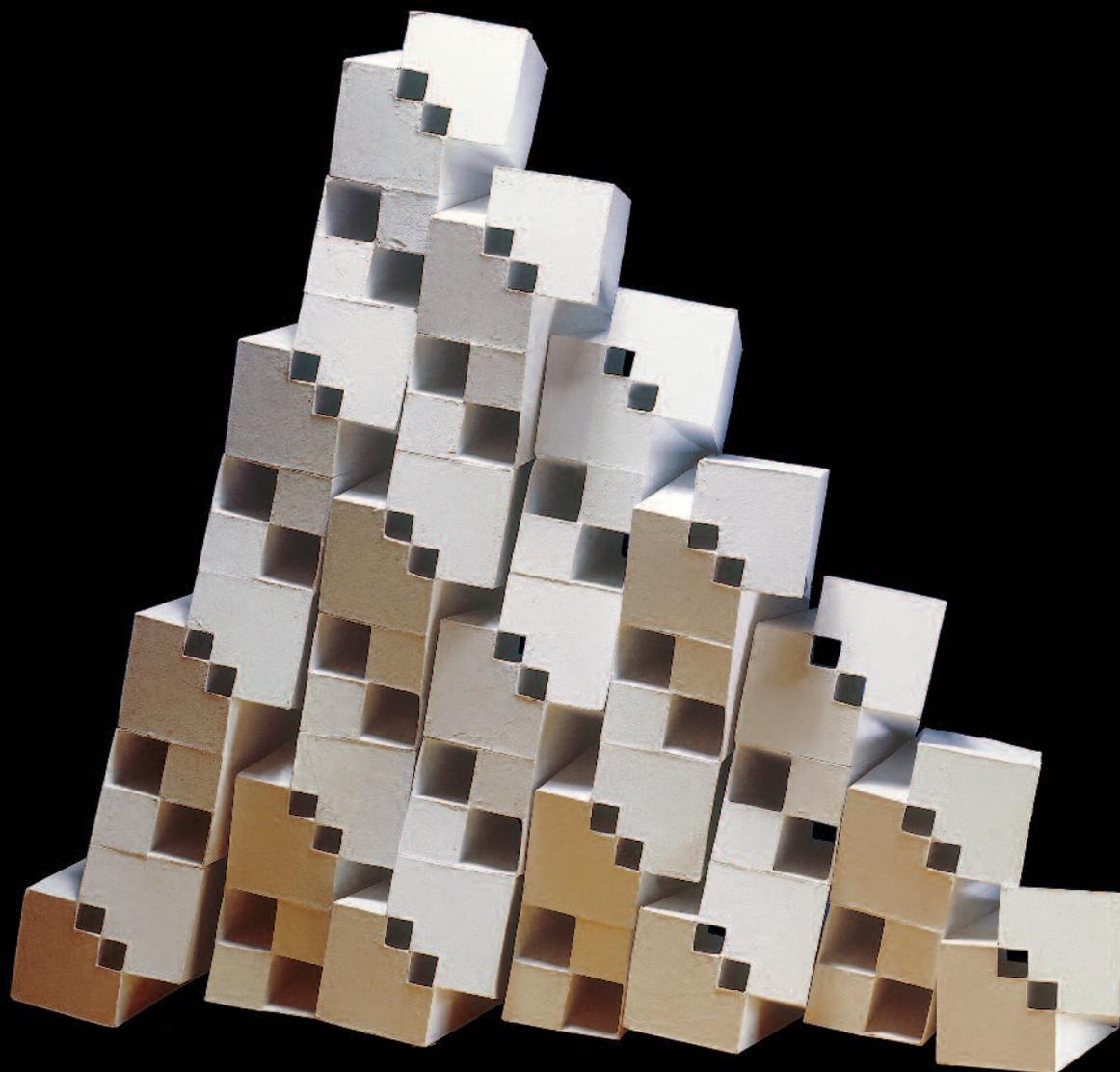
*Nezahualcóyotl's Throne*, no measurements available, 1978 (iron painted with acrylic).  
Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.



*Simplicial*, 74 x 67 x 63 cm, 2001 (iron with acrylic enamel).  
Photo: Jesús Sánchez Uribe.

“Sebastián’s geometric forms shift in continual movement, always the same and always different. His discourse parallels the discourse of life.”

JORGE ALBERTO MANRIQUE



*Tzompantli*, 115 x 115 x 35 cm, 1995 (iron with acrylic enamel). Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.

“The doors he has conceived for different cities can be gone through;  
their open arms are welcoming, their good-byes, warm; they exalt the city  
but never make it prohibitive or hermetic.”

EMILIO CARBALLIDO



*Door of Colima's Royal Highway, 20 m, 2001 (iron with acrylic enamel). Photo: Enrique Bostelmann.*