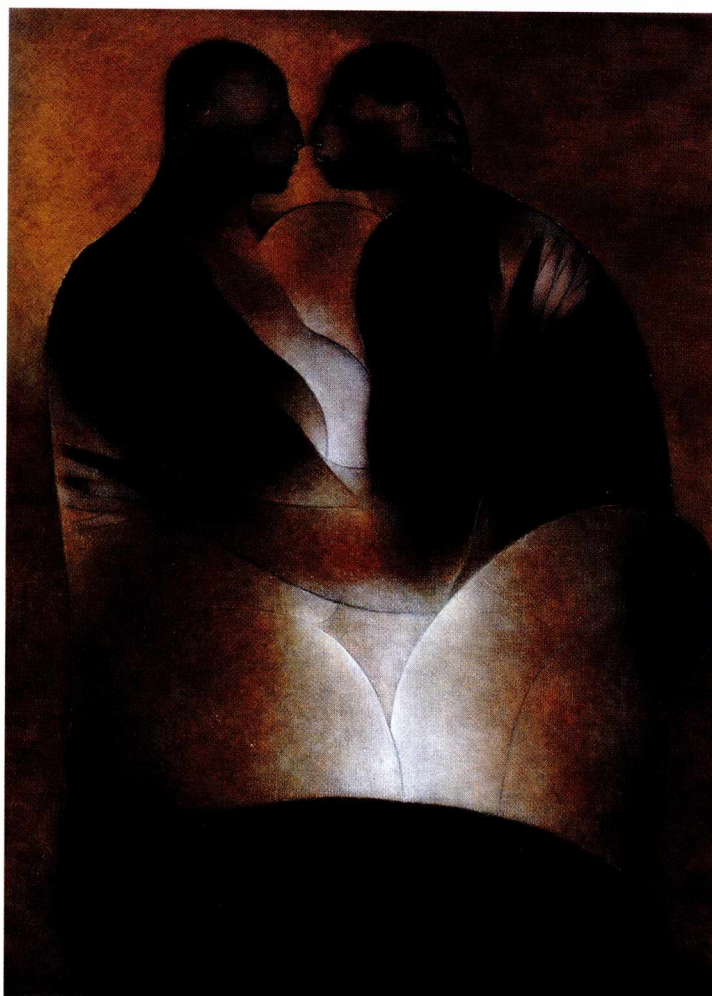


Man with Boy, 2.00 x 1.75 cm, 1994 (oil on canvas).

Silence and the Work of
RICARDO MARTÍNEZ

*Rafael Ruiz Harrell**

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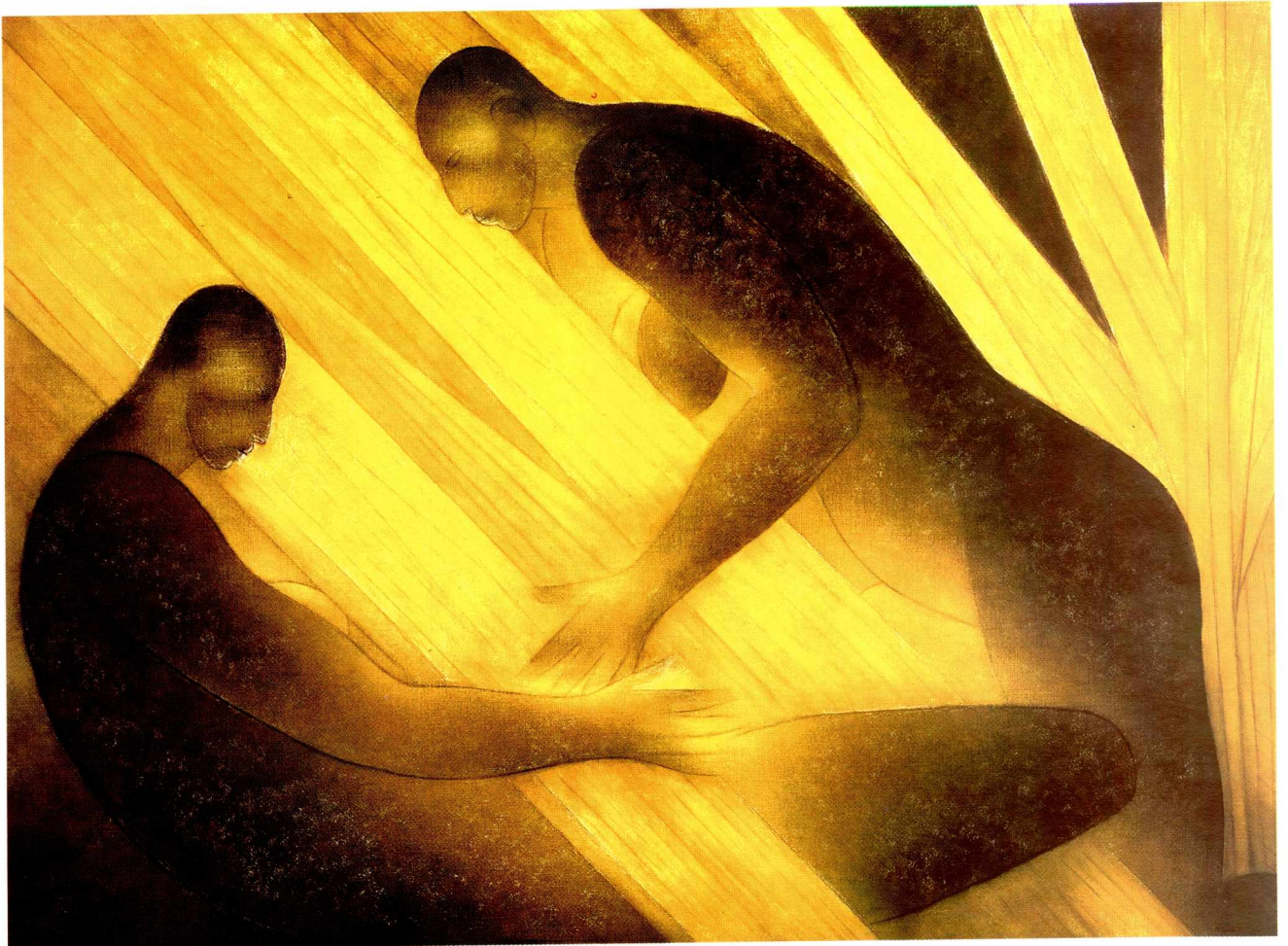


Photos by Cuauhtli Gutiérrez

Lovers, 2.00 x 1.45 cm, 1989 (oil on canvas).

Your first impression, when you see it, is that it has a secret. Something secret and sacred, humanly sacred. Or, perhaps something sort of old and terrible that forces everyone who goes to exhibits of Ricardo Martínez' work to speak in hushed tones, in whispers.

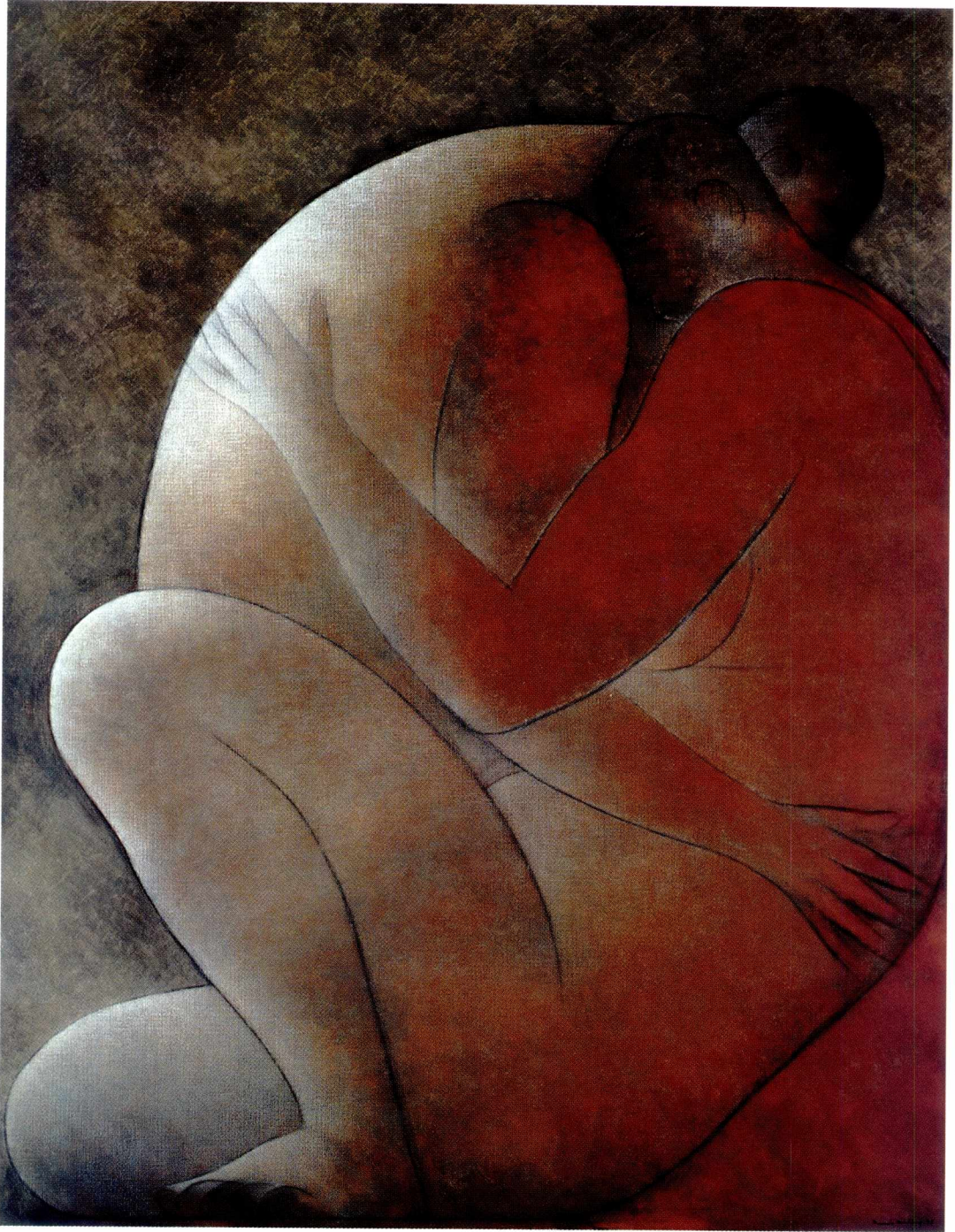
Doing that is recognizing yourself as an intruder. You are admitting that suddenly you are in a different world, a world where color has volume and weight and where light follows other rules. Here, everything is gigantic, larger than time: none of these figures, these men and women, really fit on the painting that



Untitled, 1.50 x 2.00 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).



Untitled, 1.75 x 2.00 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).



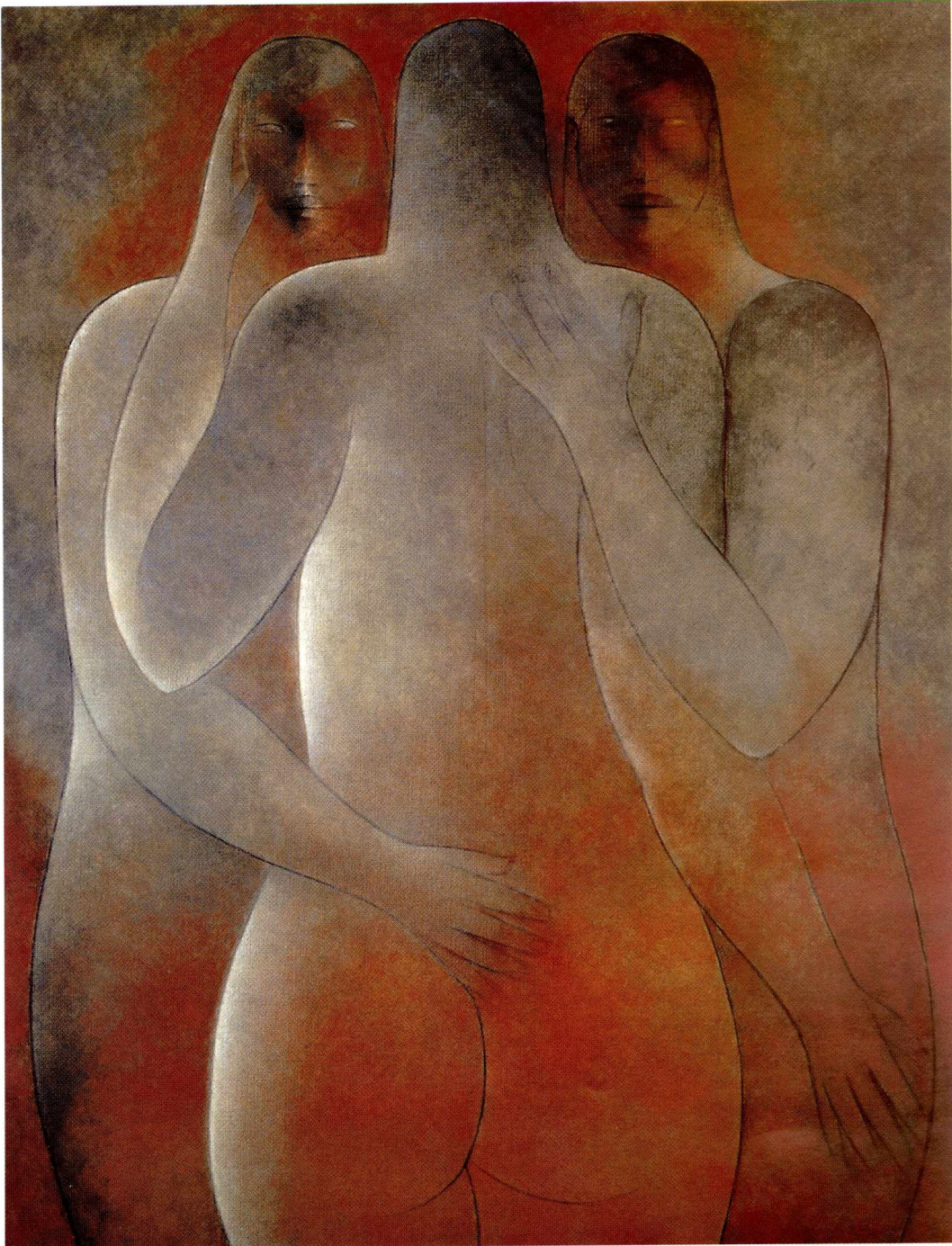
Untitled, 2.00 x 1.50 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).

holds them since, a moment later, just by shaking off their lethargy, turning their faces, getting up, they will demand other dimensions of the universe.

In the long run it is useless, but you cannot let yourself be carried away with-

out a murmur. You have to make an effort and remember that this is just painting, oils on canvas. You have to get so close that you can only see the details, trying to find the brush stroke or the mark of the palette knife, the details that can bring

us back to reality. It is, I repeat, useless. Yes. They are oils. It is painting; it is canvas. But there is so much experience in handling the materials, such a splendid delight in the minute creation of each tone. Look: it is art made with such wis-



Three figures, 2.00 x 1.50 cm, 1996 (oil on canvas).

dom that the paintings of Ricardo Martínez, even at a myopic distance, do not seem painted: the color and the forms grew there, were born there, naturally. There are very violent clouds that decided to rest here a while. There are blue and

yellow, green fires that the eye's alchemy turns into gold. There are weightless lands, luminous siennas, cold reds. And there is, above all, a new light, a light that is only sometimes the sister of our everyday light, that is fascinated by creating

overall shapes, by giving weight to thighs and breasts, by becoming words or by disintegrating, liquid, in your hands.

Almost without wanting to, without trying, the carefully chosen model for the drawing is revealed. Everything is spare:

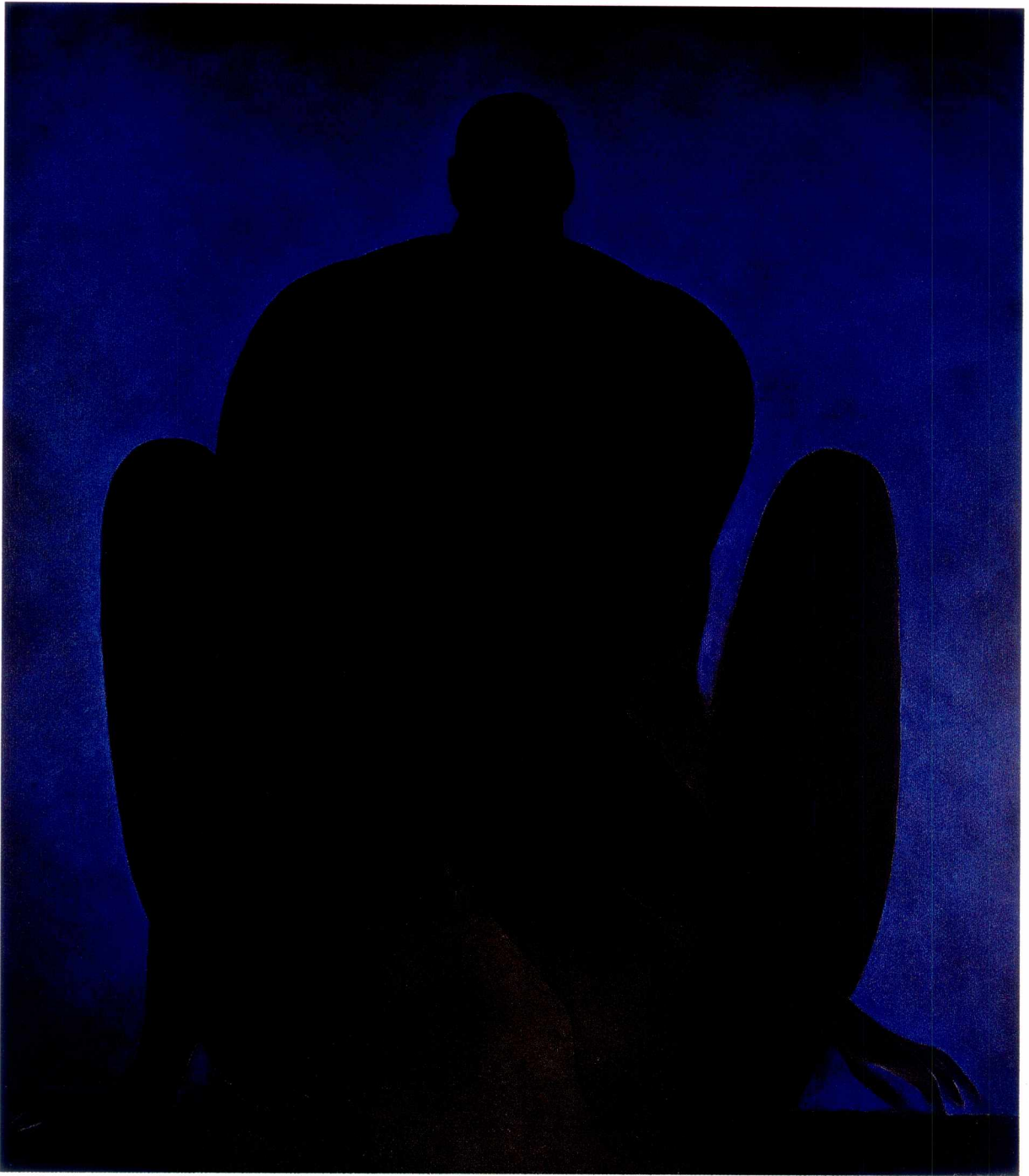
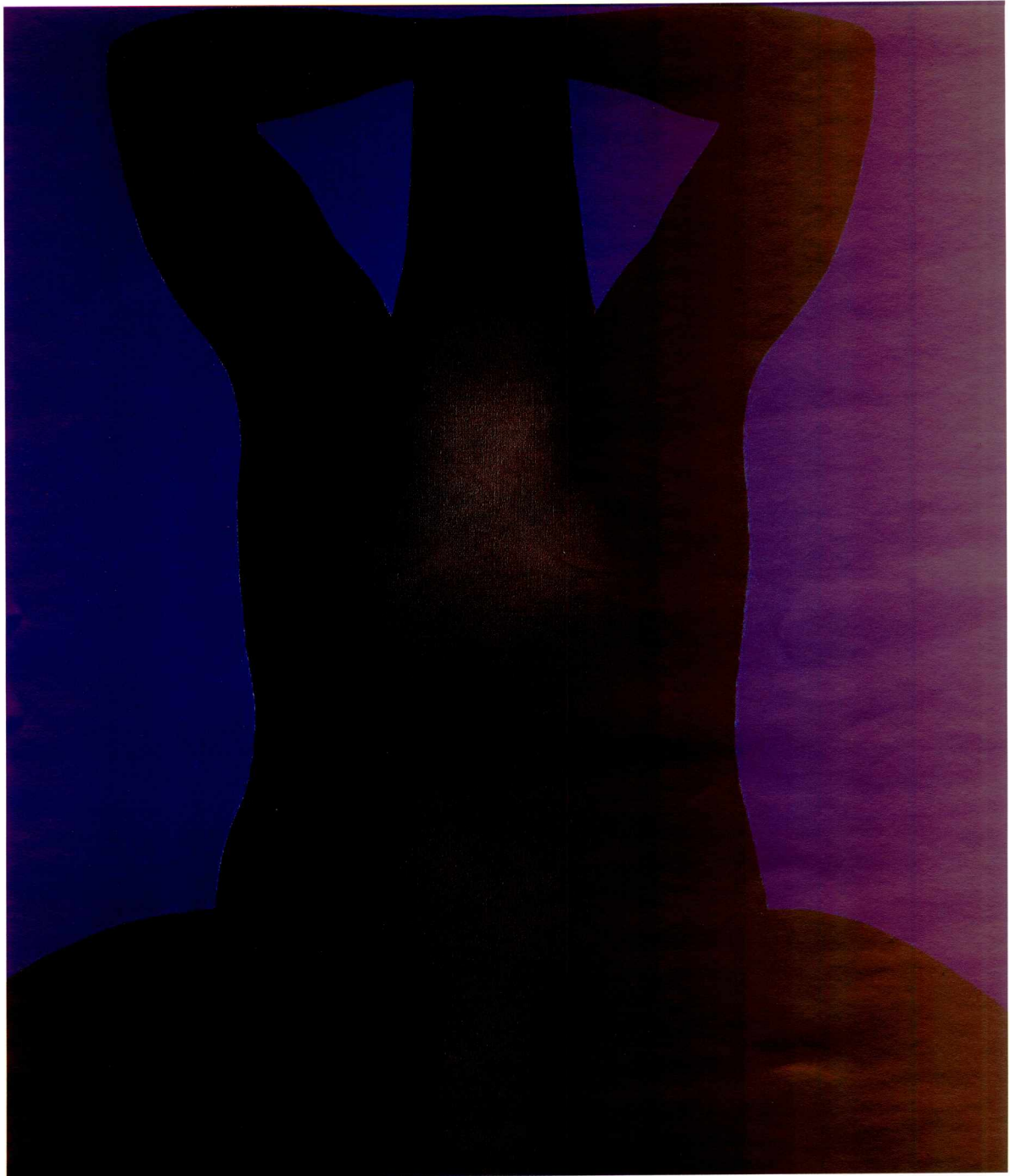


Figure with Blue Background, 2.00 x 1.75 cm, 1985 (oil on canvas).

there is no superfluous line, no needless shadow, and each stroke is so rigorous, has been subjected to such merciless severity, that everything is necessary: no figure, no gesture, no position could be anything but precisely what it is in the

work of Ricardo Martínez. That is, perhaps, the basis of its taut transparency and, also that any unthought-out movement of his figures would suffice to shatter the order than makes them possible.

Composition, color, drawing. It is said that that is what painting consists of and nothing more should be sought. Standing before the paintings of Ricardo Martínez, however, something else happens, something that cannot be com-



Untitled, 2.10 x 1.80 cm, 1995 (oil on canvas).

pletely seen, even if everything is open and fresh to the eye. The silence explains it again: you speak in whispers, close to the ear, very low, because for some mad reason you want to also hear Ricardo Martínez' paintings. Those men who look

at us from other times are trying to tell us something. His mysterious, straight-backed women hear something that has been heard by no one else but them. There is something here that is enormously important, important for us, for

the life of each of us, in the glance, the gesture, the tenderness of the mother who becomes a sea shell to clothe her son; in the yellow anger of this god who upbraids us for something; in the closed-in roundness of the couple made one by an embrace;



Couple, 2.00 x 3.00 cm, 1974 (oil on canvas).

in the luminous oracle of the wizard who rules over the fire; in the rotund voluptuousness of these Venuses, born before the invention of modesty or sin.

It is said that the paintings of Ricardo Martínez show pre-Columbian influence and, yes, there are faces of an Olmec finish, positions reminiscent of that of the Chac Mol. But these beings are even older: their colossal volumes are those of the first, or the last, men on the face of the Earth.

They are contemporaries of the first fire or the last fire to be lit on the planet and here, in these paintings, through the magic of color, composition, drawing, without losing the nostalgia for their

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sacred nature, with the terror of the history that separates them from us, they come to life to teach us what they were like, what we were, what they will be, what we could become. They bring with

them, therefore, with their eternity, the original seeds of sadness, of rage, of tenderness, of sensuality. Sometimes, simply, generously, they allow us to be part of what they do. Other times they look us straight in the eye and suddenly besides seeing, you are being seen; it is you who is being judged, who has to answer for what has happened since then, for what is going to happen until then, the time when they look at us.

Perhaps for that reason, because only in silence do we dare see and hear our most terrible secrets, you have to lower your voice before the work of Ricardo Martínez. ■■■

RICARDO MARTÍNEZ



Figure with Blue Light, 0.85 x 1.15 cm, 1979 (oil on canvas).

Born in Mexico City October 28, 1915, Ricardo Martínez is a self-taught painter who began his career under the guidance of his brother, sculptor Oliverio Martínez. He had his first show in Guadalajara in 1942, sponsored by María Asúnsulo. Later, he had exhibitions at the Gallery of Mexican Art in Mexico City. In 1958 he was invited as guest artist to the Venice Biennial, and The Contemporaries gallery in New York held showings for him in 1959, 1960, 1961 and 1964. He represented Mexico at the Latin America New Departures exhibition (1960-1962) and the Sao Paulo Biennial in 1963, where he was given the Mohino Santista award. His work was included in the Master Works of Mexican Art exhibit that toured Europe and the United States from 1960 to 1963, as well as in the art programs sponsored by Cornell University and the Guggenheim Museum. In 1967, he was awarded the Raúl Bailleres Prize.

Other venues that have exhibited his paintings include: Mexico City's Modern Art Museum (1974-75), the Rubicon Gallery in Los Angeles (1977), the Armas Gallery in Florida (1978), London's Tate Gallery (1980), Moscow's Modern Art Museum (1981), and, more recently, the Narodow Museum in Warsaw, the Petit Palais in Paris and Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts (1984 and 1994).

Martínez has also illustrated the following books: *Muerte sin fin* (Death without End), by José Gorostiza; *Junta de sombras* (Meeting of Shadows), by Alfonso Reyes; *Poemas mexicanos* (Mexican Poems), by Francisco Giner de los Ríos; and *Epigramas americanos* (Epigrams of the Americas), by Enrique Diez Canedo.

He has also designed costumes for the ballet and scenery for different productions, among them *Xochipilli-Macuixóchtli*, a dance piece performed in the United States, choreographed by Hanya Hom to music by Carlos Chávez. **MVM**