

**INTERVIEW MADE BY THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST AND JOURNALIST REPDIGEST TO VERONICA HUACUJA**

**2021**

**For the month of August, I am pleased to present the distinguished works of Mexican artist Verónica Huacuja. A career artist who has worked in various mediums, Verónica specializes in both forensic and medical-themed exhibits. On the surface, one might observe her works as an oil specialist, or perhaps even working in the digital theatre, but there is so much more to this artist than meets the eye. A skilled traditional painter, Verónica is not bound by one genre alone. She is passionate about sculpture, poetry, and many other forms of expression. In many ways, her works borderline on the macabre. Any number of her visuals would fit nicely on a heavy metal record, or perhaps even a suspense novel, yet for each mind-blowing experience Verónica produces, there is a wealth of research, knowledge and intuition calculated in each delicate brushstroke. Among these attributes, there is a deep and discerning eye peering into the psychology and science of her subjects. Criminal expression, the decadence of flesh and bone, the unspeakable resilience of the human condition – these are the parameters of her brush. Beyond her discipline, Verónica remains a student of her craft. She is an artist who is always listening, always paying attention to the critical pulse of her oeuvre. For these reasons alone, it was my singular duty to share this platform. Here are the results of our timely discussion...**

**Verónica, welcome to RepDigest. Tell the audience a little about yourself – your background, where you're from, what you specialize in as an artist.**

My name is Verónica Huacuja (wu-a-koo-ha). I am a painter and an art coach, born in 1958 and living in Mexico City. Like many artists, I found I had this "gift" in childhood. One sunny day, in full leisure of my living room in my middle class home, I copied one of Walt Disney's characters from a 33 record cover on a sheet of paper as I listened to the story. It surprised me that I had "that thing with me". In those days, parents weren't as interested in knowing or developing their children's vocations. That was my case. On both sides of the family, there were dilettantes of art (pianists, painters), yet none were art professionals and none took the time nor interest in bringing their children closer to the art.

So, perhaps wrongly, I conceived that art was only for adults. My mother was a housewife, a sweet woman and an avid reader of novels, while my father was an engineer struggling through life with three children of their own. That was the home environment in those days. Because of my mother's interest in literature, books

were all over the house. When she prematurely died in a tragic way – she committed suicide – literature saved my soul. My mother's sea of novels and poems that were at home saved me from drowning, and they still do.

**How long have you been an artist and how did you get your start?**

It's a hard question to answer. I wish I could say "since always" but that wouldn't be accurate. Painting for me has been in different periods of my life. I took this vocation seriously when I was 26, some years after graduating from a technical career as an Industrial Designer. During this period, which lasted approximately four years, I attended many autodidactic art workshops. It was a splendorous period of my life. The second period of practicing art was when I was about 38. It was a very productive time, and that's when I pristinely understood that I was a painter. This period lasted for seven years, but life with its predicaments interrupted my journey. Now, since around ten years ago, I've been painting daily ever since... and no matter what, I won't stop. This is the first time in life that I can make this statement.

**It appears you work primarily in oils as well in digital. What other creative mediums or techniques have you pursued? Which mediums do you prefer working in?**

Oil painting, charcoal, acrylics, digital painting, colored pencils, 3D digital sculpting, clay sculpting, photographs of other creators and stills from true crime documentary videos – giving the artists their due credit, of course – are all good resources for my work. I've sometimes mixed, very interestingly, acrylics with digital painting, such as in a work I like very much *The Deaf Man No. 7*. For this painting, I first made up a portrait, *The Deaf Man No. 6*. I digitized the latter, distorted it with PhotoShop and, using the same software, created the character's body in a pink environment.

Another interesting work using mixed mediums is one I recently created, which belongs to a new sub-collection entitled *A Thousand Crimes*, which pertains to the collection *The Relentless*. The work I'm referring to is *Inmate No. 7*, where I portray my interpretation of the inmate's life in two different mediums: a painting (oil and acrylic on canvas) and a physical sculpture (plasticine, clay, plaster, cement, and acrylic paint). I present these two artworks as a unit. This to provoke a speech, a certain interaction between both works.

A third work I'd like to discuss while disregarding its ultimate results, of which I am not satisfied, is *Head Study 76*. The process of this piece is interesting. I sculpted a human head in Blender (open-source 3D software), duplicated it and merged both pieces. In the same environment, I explored the work from different points of view, such as profile, above, and below, etc. I then selected the

one I liked most. I used the final image as an initial source to paint this portrait in a physical environment with oil on paper.

**The majority of your fine art studies seem to be influenced by grim social issues: extreme pathological behavior, criminology, forensics. What attracts you to these subjects?**

My art interests are diverse. I believe what drives me to them – or them to me – are abnormality, malformation, deformity, anomaly and their deep impact on human life. As soon as I understood your question, I associated it with other creators I know and what came to my mind was the American crime-detective novelist, **James Ellroy**. This man suffered a tragedy in his childhood analogous to mine. In his case, his mother was murdered. So, life and its strange way of being provided to him and many others, myself among them, ignited our creative interests. The thing is to be loyal, authentic to them, even though they have a tough nature.

So, yes... sickness, pathological behavior, forensics... are just some of the topics I explore. I find them fascinating. Because of the diverse subjects I'm interested in, I've classified my work in collections. This helps me understand my work in a better way. It also helps the re-creator to understand it, to invite or produce in him or her a state of mind that assists them in penetrating the work's creation circle. In my *Portraits* collection, I work special characters in borderline situations. This means that the artworks are dramatic and in most of them I try to grasp their \*exasperated beauty. These criteria apply as well to a new collection entitled *Women*, in which I interpret and portray historical females. Some of them are renowned characters, others anonymous, but all of their biographies called my attention as both a woman and as an artist. I treat most of these creations with drama.

**NOTE:** \*Ficacci, L. "Bacon", 2003. Taschen

In my *Art and Radiology* collection – Periods I and Period II – the precarious conditions of man (temporality, decay, fragility) are the central topic of my work. Some initial sources I use are radiological medical studies performed on sick, genderless, anonymous persons: a Jane or John Doe. I call the results of my work "Human Landscapes." Categorically, I mean to explore the carnal material that makes us human. I've divided this collection into two periods of my production: Period I goes from 2000 to 2003, while Period II gathers artworks that I've created from 2015 to present.

In 2021, I created a new collection, *The Relentless*, where I picture people that have social malfunctions and disorders which drive them to commit crime. The tragedy of their lives and the paths in which they have crossed in the lives of others, they are impulsive elements that compel me to create this series. My work in this collection isn't an apology for crime, it is my interpretation of the criminal phenomenon. Also included in this collection – *The*

*Manhunters* – are the professionals who pursue these outlaws. I think they too, are relentless. Those who fight "monsters" are also part of this collection because if they "... gaze long enough into the abyss, the abyss gazes back on them." I believe their work causes profound harm to the criminal. They're as injured as those they pursue, only differently.

**VERÓNICA'S NOTES:** The above quote is a freedom I have allowed myself to use in this context. It's from **Friedrich Nietzsche**, as we may know. It is also used by **Robert Ressler** (1937-2013), an American FBI agents that coined the term "serial killer" during the 1970s. After his government service, Ressler became a crime consultant and author.

**The tortured facial expressions in your work: whether an infant in perpetual slumber or the criminal eyes of an inmate. How do you determine your intense subject matter?**  
I am prone to deformity and drama as splendid art topics. What initially provokes me to make up certain works are words, information I discover in books, articles, photographs, documentary films, and videos I find on the Internet. I'm always open to new manifestations of reality, to making an empathic exercise to comprehend the motivations of others. Tragedy connects me with the characters that call my interest. Maybe it is an empathic "inner movement" that binds my life with theirs. Or perhaps it's the other way around. Maybe they're "open" and that opening appears in front of me, compelling me to "freeze the moment" – to generate an artwork. Of course, this is only one way of putting things together, but not suggesting it's all that has to be said about it. Philosophers can illuminate us much more in the art creation process. Their theories or corpora, might help us understand it in a better way.

**At times, your abstract depictions of the human figure take on an almost alien or horrific landscape. Is this intentional or merely a byproduct of an unchained imagination?**  
My work intends to picture life with its sometimes dark, dramatic, incomprehensible ways of presenting itself. I do my best to make art that has a metaphor within, a poetic moment of self-contemplation for those who want to "look" at it. I produce works that connect with the observer's experiences of life. It's up to him or her to use their tools (sensitivity, culture, beliefs, personal history) in the act of re-creating the work. One thing I never do is "shut" the speech with my explanation or version of the work. I try hard to make art that, as **Umberto Eco** refers to in his oeuvre, *The Open Work*, has polysemic or different interpretations done by the observers. So, I only point in a direction without defining a destiny. That journey has to be made by the re-creator.

In my work, there's no room for fantasy or science fiction. I don't make art that entertains, that makes the observer "run away" from him or herself. What I try to capture is reality – to make a work of contemplation where the observer looks at himself through a mirror. And yes, occasionally, reality appears with its strange mock right in front of us.

**According to your bio, the paintings you produce are "medical artwork." Is this a field you have studied or have direct career experience?**

I don't have medical training or professional experience of that sort. In my collection *Art and Radiology*, I don't seek to realistically capture the human organs or implants that modern medical imaging provides, but to reinterpret them – in a kind of pictorial-poetic gap that recreates human nature. In fact, I try to recreate a new order of elements that I take from the source images. The poetic experience that drove my attention to medical topics is the work of painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992, Ireland), whose sources, in some of his works, are medical X-rays made to human bodies and animals. I find this grand master's resources fascinating.

Therefore, I introduce into my own work the medical results of today's modern imaging: radiography, angiography, tomography, fluoroscopy, magnetic resonance, 3D X-rays, etc. Images of diagnosis and medical solutions intent on restructuring our human "carnality" which mitigates its decay, its deformity, its pain... are all topics of my work. What comes out of this appropriation are "maps" or "Human Landscapes" of organisms that reveal their decayed condition. In this way, the hip, the rib cage, the skull, the spine, hands, heart, lungs... those are just some of the organs explored in my pictorial of the human body. In it there is a "triple sight" – that of the medical apparatus, the one of my own, and the third one is the re-creator's.

**Start to finish, how long does a standard Verónica Huacuja painting take? How do you fill the art space and when do you know that you've achieved satisfaction with your work?**

Most of the time, I make three versions of an artwork that altogether take me about two or three weeks: a small physical sketch (charcoal or crayon on paper); the digital version; and finally a third, oil or acrylic on canvas or paper. I do three versions to understand the work thoroughly. Sometimes, I even make variations of the same topic, like an obsession or like in dreams. One good thing is that it's never the same to make up the work on the desk or the desktop (small sketches or digital) than to approach a 39x31-inch surface (canvas or paper) with oil and acrylics. The latter version requires more than the digital version because, in order to accomplish the work, I need to master the graphic space, to appropriate it. I first make up the digital version,

so whenever I approach the traditional techniques, it helps me know how to solve the artwork with success. When do I know when an artwork is complete? I take time to decide this. I let the artwork "rest" for a couple of days. When I come back, it unfolds, letting me know its completeness. Otherwise, the creation process restarts again (on the same work).

**To briefly define your paintings, I would suggest they are surreal reflections of the human condition. You tastefully manage to capture the essence and psychological nature of grotesque, if not disturbing attractions, yet achieve this with full humanity, compassion and discipline. How would YOU define your work?**

I say this with humbleness: I paint what human life unhides at certain moments and permits me to palpate. Sometimes – when this happens – it is the extraordinary that unfolds, plentiful with deformity and drama. I seek to capture this deranged beauty with polysemous meanings. Within these results, I always search too... to cause a visual impact, a blow, a strike upon the soul of the observer.



**You hold legendary artist Francis Bacon in high regard. How does his work influence you? Any other artists whose works are dear to your heart?**

I admire and study many painters, such as da Vinci, El Greco, Caravaggio, Velázquez, Goya, Rembrandt, Orozco, Siqueiros. I add Pre-Columbian art; contemporary artists, such as Olivier de Sagazan, Lucien Freud, Edward Hopper; photographers such as Joel-Peter Witkin, Eadweard Muybridge, Étienne-Jules Marey, John Coplans, Marie Lene Fossen; film-makers like Kieślowski, Lynch, Cassavettes, Lanthimos, Tarkovsky, Bergman... The list goes on and on. But the artworks of Bacon are so dear to me, maybe because I discovered his work when I was a young adult. He has the "brush of existential pain." Bacon is one of these "monsters" that has added his vision to painting.

**What is the art scene like in Mexico – more specifically, the region from which you are from? Are you influenced by the history or culture of your country or region?**

I believe time and space define every manifestation of humanity. Historical cultures have different world views influenced by language, history, race, religion, economy, political regime, idiosyncrasy, education, personal beliefs, personal history, etc. All these and more make us understand the world in different ways and produce diverse art. Mexico has a very interesting history in contemporary art: *El Muralismo* – with the artists: Siqueiros, Orozco, Rivera; *La Ruptura* with Tamayo, José Luis Cuevas, Remedios Varo, etc; and now what we call *La Transvanguardia*, "...whose main characteristic is the mixture of styles marked above all by the use of digital technologies and novel concepts, thus generating a creative proposal in the artistic manifestations." I believe my work subscribes to the latter.

**ATRIBUCIÓN:** 20th Century Mexican Art. Retrieved from [programas.cuaed.unam.mx](http://programas.cuaed.unam.mx).

**Do you find any cultural barriers or stigmas being a female artist in Mexico – or being a female artist in general? If so, how would you open minds to change the landscape and perception for female artists across the world?**

This is a delicate topic, as all that refer to marginalization. I'm not a feminist in the strict sense of the term. I, as a 21st century woman, pursue equality, same opportunities, same wages for women and men that strive as hard, no sexual harassment, and a long etcetera. We have to start this brief dissertation from the point that we – both women and men – make up mankind... But watch this term: *mankind*... Do you see what I mean? We are different. Women menstruate, experience the miracle of giving birth (or have the potential to do so), feel, think, perceive differently from men.



Yet we've had a sad and different role in history, a less protagonistic one, not willingly, but because of the patriarchal culture (phallogocrazia) in which humankind has developed. So yes, we, women have been marginalized in the history of humankind in all fields.

As **Virginia Woolf** assures in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, women must understand that we have to have our own "personal room" – and the resources that are needed to maintain it... to give ourselves the time and space to reflect, to acquire the conviction of our own determination as artists, scientifics, or whatever we choose to be. So, emotional and practical independence is a must for women to find ourselves in life. The patriarchal society in which we have lived for centuries still holds us back – emotionally, mentally, financially, familiarly, etc. – from overcoming our conditions. I'm going to cite two sad and dramatic examples of countless stories that have occurred to women because of their female condition: the lives of the sculptress, **Camille Claudel** (1864-1943, France), and **Maria Anna Mozart** (1751-1829, Austria), older sister of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Their own male relatives and lovers (in the case of Camille Claudel) owned their lives as creators. So, yes, in Mexico, and in many other countries, women artists have struggled much more than male artists to find opportunities to shine.

**Are there any other places you would like to visit in the world? Have you been able to travel elsewhere to see art or museums? If not, what places remain on your bucket list?**

I've had the fortune of traveling to the U.S., Canada, France, Italy, Spain and England. All of these countries are wonderful in their history, language, urban design, architecture, arts, and so on... Paris is one of my favorite cities, among so many others. I love to "see it" through **Julio Cortázar's** eyes (1914-1984, Argentina) in his short story, *The Devil's Slime*, where a Chilean-French photographer strolls the city, ends up in Saint Louis Island and involuntarily captures with his camera a scene where a crime was to be held. "Ojos de fango verde tus ojos," (green mud eyes your eyes) Cortázar refers to the female character of the story. Maybe Paris is a city within a story as seen by the dilated eye of an unreal photographer, one who is still rewinding his **Leica** on a chilly afternoon near a crime that hasn't yet been committed. Or the other way around... Ireland, with its beautiful and magnificent natural landscapes, is also one of the countries I must visit before my 100th birthday.

**What would you suggest to anyone starting out as an artist? What advice would you give to a struggling artist who is ready to quit?**

I would say don't give up, don't distract yourself, don't waste your time. The only resource we can't get back is time, so use it

responsibly. In most cases, the eminent artist's young work is nothing if you compare their late, cumulative work of 20 or 30 years. Mastery, with its splendor, appears in their work. Strive for it! If you're young, you have half the opportunities on your side. Work to achieve the other half... I also can also give practical advice after having experience with an art gallery. They advised us (the artists) how, when, what to paint in order that they could have "popular-taste-painting-merchandise" to sell to their clients.

So, if you don't want to lose yourself in that marketplace of art, produce your own resources doing some other professional activity on the side. In that fortunate case, you'll have the power and resources to decide what to paint, when, and how. I've practiced this strategy and it has worked for me. I've earned a Master's Degree in Education, and achieved another in Social Responsibility. I work in these fields as both an investigator and consultant. One thing to keep in mind is that you'd have to work harder because you'd have two different jobs to accomplish, but we can do the latter with joy and gratefulness.

**How have you managed to continue during the age of Covid? Has there been an impact in your production, in your creative energy, in your worldly feelings or goals?**

Covid is an unprecedented, global, scary disease, analogous in many ways to the Black Death or Spanish Flu... I, as all the rest, would never have imagined the world's population using a mask and stepping outdoors as a probable cause of death. Covid is like a theme from a dreadful novel or science fiction story, not reality. Staying at home and working hard is something I'm grateful for. I have life, health and work, as all the members of my family do. We're so fortunate! I hope many people have the same luck. This disease has caused so many deaths and pain to many people all over the world. It's good to know the governments of the world are doing their best to stop it.

**What are your feelings on the wide range of diversity and talents on social media in 2021. Do you feel a sense of amazement or do you feel overwhelmed by a sense of oversaturation?**

Nowadays, the art industry has changed. Galleries, among others, don't have it the way they used to. Individuals (artists) can work out their own ways into the art market by themselves – with outstanding success – through the mass and social media. Nevertheless, "playing the game", that is positioning oneself in the market, requires a lot of time and effort. As an artist, it's a great fortune to be living in this part of history using the Internet and its resources. This is also in regard to all the new people – other artists, groups of artists from the same field, etc. – social media permits us to gather around, something like McLuhan's *Global Village*.

**I was drawn to your art on an intellectual, cerebral level. What is the greatest compliment you have received on a painting or series of works? What did it mean to you on a spiritual level?** Your interpretations, thoughts and comments to my work are very dear to me, Aaron, while using your @repdigest.76 pseudonym on Instagram. They are, as we've commented in the past, "round, beautiful, strange, shining black pearls" – gifts – so valuable and appreciated by me. Thank you very much for sharing them with me and with our visitors on this platform. This is one example of your generous, poetic, talented words and thoughts... in this case, referring to my post for **Head Study No. 70**:

*It certainly does resemble a broken poem... a shape without a face, a face without a presence, a presence without a body. First there was Adam and Eve, then there was Jane and John... A sad tale indeed, but their story was never truly written. There was no Bible for them, no golden halo or wings. They lived in sin, in the shadow of earthly pleasures and twilight... the lonely drug dealer, the wasted prostitute... lost souls bathed in the glow of neon. A broken poem indeed, but one more close to reality than anyone would care to admit. Only the mortician will ever hear their final psalm... Beautiful work as always Verónica! Thank you very much, Aaron!*

**What painting or work of art from another human being represents your favorite?**

There are many other paintings I love. One of them is from the triptych of Francis Bacon's **Three Studies Of Lucian Freud** (1969, oil on canvas), which I like so much. Its composition, elements, palette and character invited me to write, years ago, a short story, *De los Sentidos Trastornados* (2004).

This is one fragment of the cited story:

*Veinte veces veinte. Esa tarde apareció sentada frente al espejo, se ofrecía en la vastedad de sus colores y formas dentro de un tetraedro transparente, enorme. Entonces, él (el pintor) comenzó a modificar las dimensiones del rostro. Donde antes el músculo nasal cruzaba la cara, posicionó el orbicular entreverado con el transverso en una masa ocre. La apófisis la dobló hacia el centro, evitando simetrías y, al final, escarbó un pozo negro en las profundidades de la boca. De las modificaciones aplicadas al cuerpo, surgieron sonidos inaudibles, de tan sonoros. Quedó una sensación de aturdimiento. De aturdimiento y rojo.*

My translation to English, *Of The Deranged Senses*:

*Twenty times twenty. That afternoon, she appeared sitting in front of the mirror. She offered herself in the vastness of her colors and shapes within a transparent, enormous tetrahedron. Then he (the painter) modified her facial dimensions. Where the nasal*

*muscle crossed her face, he positioned the orbicularis mixed with the transverse in an ocher mass. He then bent her apophysis away from the center, avoiding symmetries, and in the end, he dug a deep hole in the depths of the mouth. From the modifications applied to her body, inaudible but loud sounds emerged. There was a feeling of daze that remained in the room. Of daze and red.*

**Which of your own paintings are you most proud of – something you could never part with?**

One of my paintings I like very much is **Deviation of the Spine Study No. 20** (second image down). I like this painting because its medium format pretends to achieve a visual impact, an aesthetical experience in the observer, leaving him or her no other possibility but to look. Also, because it shows the throbbing interior of a deformed, living human organism with its shadows and beams of light.

**If I were to suggest one artist whose works are reminiscent of your own – Marshall Arisman – what are your first impressions of his paintings?**

This artist has powerful work. The topics of his interest are humanitarian. I'm going to study his body of art and life. Thank you very much for bringing him up.

**What traits, behaviors or otherwise do you believe makes an artist a successful creative?**

Just work and its cumulative results is what makes a good artist... And I might add, something that's beyond us – luck, good fortune. That's another variable that counts for success.

**Where do you see yourself in the next 5 to 10 years as an artist?**

Painting, investigating and experimenting in plastic arts.

**Any other fascinating tidbits of information you'd like to share?**

One of my actual interests is to study a course on facial forensic reconstruction. As soon as the post-Covid term permits, I will begin this scientific education. What I seek in this course is the approach to portrait and face sculpting from an anatomical point of view, to experiment these procedures in my work. I also greatly admire the works and forensic contributions of American autodidact forensic sculptor, **Frank Bender** (1941-2011), as well as **Karen T. Taylor** (1952), an American forensic and portrait artist.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the past two years, I have been doing the difficult, yet important work of asking questions... I have interviewed many talented artists from all walks of life spanning many continents and countries. I have enjoyed this journey and learned incredible

lessons from the many wonderful individuals who have blessed me with their time, talent and trust – Verónica Huacuja among them. It has been a bittersweet adventure, but the QA Spotlight series has reached its conclusion. The program will be discontinued indefinitely... And while there are still countless artists out there who truly deserve the honor of such challenging interviews, I can no longer continue the process. Gallery owners and magazine editors far and above my paygrade need to step up their game. They need to do their jobs and discover these wonderful talents for themselves. Instagram alone is ripe with diverse talent... thousands upon thousands of hungry artists scratching and clawing for exposure. I could easily spend the rest of my life interviewing every brave artist slinging their paint on the wild frontier – but I would never have time for my own creative endeavors.

That alone is what draws me home. I must disappear into the canvas that calls my hand, to learn new techniques and experience new wonders. I conclude my journey with Verónica. She, like many other artists, have given their lives to the canvas. Their very souls wait for that one opportunity to share the fruits of their passion, to share the importance of that special spark ignited from within. From the beginning, it was not necessarily the finished masterpiece that called my attention to QA, it was the blood dripping from their brush regardless of the pain or joy they experienced in real life. Artists like Verónica deserve greater recognition. She has persevered and earned her credentials through hard work, discipline, and determination. Her roots in the earth have given her wisdom, and that wisdom is expressed on the canvas. That is the artist's journey, and it is the sole purpose of a skilled journalist to capture that raw, emotional center.

I may only be one person, but I have done the work of many galleries. I have lived through their heartaches, their achievements, and their will to move forward beyond adversity. Sometimes that's all it takes to make someone feel special... to ask important questions and recognize the very fingerprints from their souls that they have placed on the canvas. For me, art has nothing to do with sales or success – that is merely a consequence of the gift. The truth of the matter lies within the marrow. Art is the greater exploration of the human condition, the brushstrokes that make our world a better, more intellectual place. Whether a comic book, a stick figure, or some majestic masterpiece glazed in oil... art is the energy and peace we share from within, and there is no greater place to be. I truly value and appreciate each and every QA participant, as well as the many artists I never had the chance to work with. I wish you all the kindest of blessings and good health, but now it is my turn. I begin a new voyage to discover my own creative destiny. I hope to see you all as visitors from time to time. Peace out...