

*Girls*



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Sculpture by  
***Martin Di Girolamo***

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**scott richards contemporary art**

251 Post Street Suite 310 San Francisco CA 94108  
415.788.5588 [www.srcart.com](http://www.srcart.com)

# Luxury Dolls

BY JORGE LOPEZ ANAYA



Landscapes and depictions of the nude are two of the most recurrent themes in the history of Western Art, but while landscape iconography diminished with the advent of technology, the nude has enjoyed a constant popularity. Since the 5th Century BC, the ancient Greeks revered the human physique into an idealized form, but the iconic cult of body image has reached its peak in the 21st Century where mass media and culture added something new to its appeal: exhibitionism for some and a voyeurism for others.

The naked body, or partially clothed, is the recurring theme in the work of Martín Di Girolamo, an Argentine artist who very quickly achieved unusual recognition in the art world. Drawing on “soft-porn” erotic iconography derived from the pages of adult magazines such as *Playboy* or *Penthouse*, Di Girolamo celebrates the nude by creating hyper-realistic figurative sculptures of gorgeous young women portrayed as if caught in the freeze-frame of a photographic lens. Like a journalist, he captures and exposes not only his subject’s attitude, but also the viewer’s, cleverly drawing out the exhibitionist and the voyeur in all of us.

The son of an architect and a psychoanalyst, Martín Di Girolamo abandoned the study of architecture and began his artistic career by painting erotic, figurative paintings with realistic detail (fig. 1). Driven by his obsession with the female form and compelled to give shape to two-dimensional imagery, he decided to study sculpture, initiating his own rendition of the Pygmalion/Galatea myth. While his creative process could aptly be described as highly detailed pre-production work for creating every man’s fantasy muse, Di Girolamo defies the traditional method of sculpting from live models, choosing instead to carefully render his subjects from a multitude of photographs.

Made of molded epoxy, Di Girolamo’s doll-like *GIRLS* are playful, candy colored, anatomically correct sculptures around four feet high, (113 centimeters) that stand goddess-like on pedestals at eye-level with the viewer. Inviting our curiosity, these clone-like temptresses seem to ooze seductive girl-power, yet put us on edge with their direct, confrontational gaze. While their accurate proportions perplex us, their plastic nature reveals a disquieting look at the standards of 21st Century beauty. Drawing upon the pervasive presence of sex in advertising and the universal fascination with pornography, Di Girolamo’s works honestly reveal our pre-occupation with body image and the superficial aspects that form the iconic cult of the body today.

Effectively challenging our collective notions of beauty, Di Girolamo’s works often portray recognizable stereotypes: the aloof, adolescent ‘Lolita’ in tight jeans and Converse sneakers seen on the streets of Buenos Aires, the unattainable fashion model, the sexy tease found in strip clubs. Often, the artist’s muses are regular people from his neighborhood. For instance, Paula and Luciana (pgs. 9 & 12) are twin sisters; two young girls portrayed as displaying the arrogant confidence that embodies the uninhibited spirit of today’s youth. Clad in revealing, layered tank tops, trendy shoes and the funky stockings indicative of the ‘hip-crowd’ found in bars and clubs worldwide, these girls flaunt their obvious assets, clearly in charge of their sexuality.



fig. 1: *Sin Título 1* oil on canvas



Judging from the erotic nature of his work, Di Girolamo's interest in Pop artists from the 60's and 70's such as Allen Jones and Tom Wesselman is undeniable while he simultaneously reflects the "come-hither" sensuality of Mel Ramos' lush oil paintings from the same era. One might say Di Girolamo's early sculptures recall the artificial eroticism of Jeff Koons' *Made in Heaven*, featuring Koons' ex-wife, Ilona Staller, better known as La Cicciolina, the Italian porn star cum politician. But where Koons' work is a staged production involving multi media and the input of various studio assistants, Martín Di Girolamo works alone sculpting in clay, traditionally making the epoxy molds and painstakingly painting all the intricate details of his sculptures. However, since Di Girolamo began sculpting in the 1990's, it is clear that his iconography coincided with the new symbolic valuation of the feminine physique that developed around the same time in Argentina.



*Service* 2003

Following the collapse of its military regime in 1983, Argentina began to experience a rapid economic prosperity, and as global consumerism infiltrated mass media advertising in the early 1990's, the modeling and fashion industries exploded. It was a remarkably successful time for modeling agencies that began to provide the market with a steady supply of new faces chosen from modeling contests or discovered on scouting campaigns. International supermodels began to find competition from the naturally beautiful young women in Argentina, who in turn, started to emulate the "waif-like" look. The image of a thin, beautiful, perfectly accessorized, young girl permeated the media and the stereotype of woman as 'luxury doll' was created.

Martín Di Girolamo's works clearly recognize the sexual power that female imagery holds and how that power is manipulated in today's society. Meticulous and foreign to any expressive or formalist intention, they portray women with provocative verisimilitude. Their voluptuous figures, flawless skin, trendy tan marks and revealing clothes are rendered with extreme, almost loving care. While the artist is often inspired by images of women found in erotic magazines and on the Internet (cyber porn), he not only replicates their lascivious expressions, but punctuates their attitudes by adorning them in lux-

urious, fashionable items. The sculptor's joy in the most significant characteristics of erotica is evident, but his honest depiction of woman as 'arm candy' or 'luxury doll' is most striking.

Controversial for their overt sensuality, Di Girolamo's sculptures inevitably pose confrontational questions. Eliciting the viewer's immediate reaction, his *Pathological Beauty* series (pgs. 14-19) subtly departs from whimsical eroticism while revealing the widespread obsession with being thin, young and beautiful. In his own words, Di Girolamo not only wants "to generate a tension between that which should be beautiful and ends up not being attractive at all, although some might find it beautiful" but manages to accurately illustrate the *quest* for flawlessness. It is the act of idolizing perfection, more than attaining it, that he reveals.

Another of his series, entitled *Sola* (*Alone*), presents seductive images of women that seem to exhibit a sort of longing melancholy. One image in particular, *Sola 5*, appears to be crying (pg. 22). In this instance, the artist's inspiration happens to be the famous Argentinean beauty, Dolores Barreiro, a woman whose magnificent physique is worshiped throughout Latin America. Pictured naked, except for a skimpy thong, leather belt and thigh high boots, she is weeping while riding a horse. Is she a damsel in distress? Actually, Di Girolamo explains that he set out to portray the notorious beauty in an erotic-fantasy stance, but while putting the finishing touches on her image he decided to add crystalline tears to her face in order "to create a tension between pain, sadness and solitude that sharply contrasted with her perfect features". Even though she appears to be someone who has everything to be 'happy' about, the artist's work reminds us that, like everyone else, she cries. Not even she is capable of escaping the human condition.



*Sola 11* (detail)

Presenting a new mythology of sexuality and eroticism, Martín Di Girolamo's racy sculptures tease our imagination and challenge our preconceptions. Does beauty really bring happiness?

*Jorge Lopez Anaya is an art critic for La Nation newspaper (Buenos Aires); correspondent of Lápis. Revista Internacional de Arte (Madrid); collaborator of Art Nexus (Bogotá), and Arco Arte Contemporáneo (Madrid). Among his latest books is Arte Argentino (1600-2000), Emecé Ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2005.*

*I love to represent the female image. I realize the power  
that it has, that it always had, and how it is manipulated.*

Martin Di Girolamo

## *Girl 2*

2007

Painted epoxy

edition of 5

22 x 11 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches

56 x 30 x 30 centimeters



# *Paula*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 3

36 1/2 x 23 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches

92 x 58 x 35 centimeters



# *Luciana*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 3

15 x 30 x 15 1/2 inches

39 x 76 x 39 centimeters





# *Luba*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

29 1/2 x 10 5/8 x 8 5/8 inches

75 x 27 x 20 centimeters





# *Pathological Beauty 1*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

38 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 12 1/4 inches

96 x 40 x 30 centimeters



# *Pathological Beauty 3*

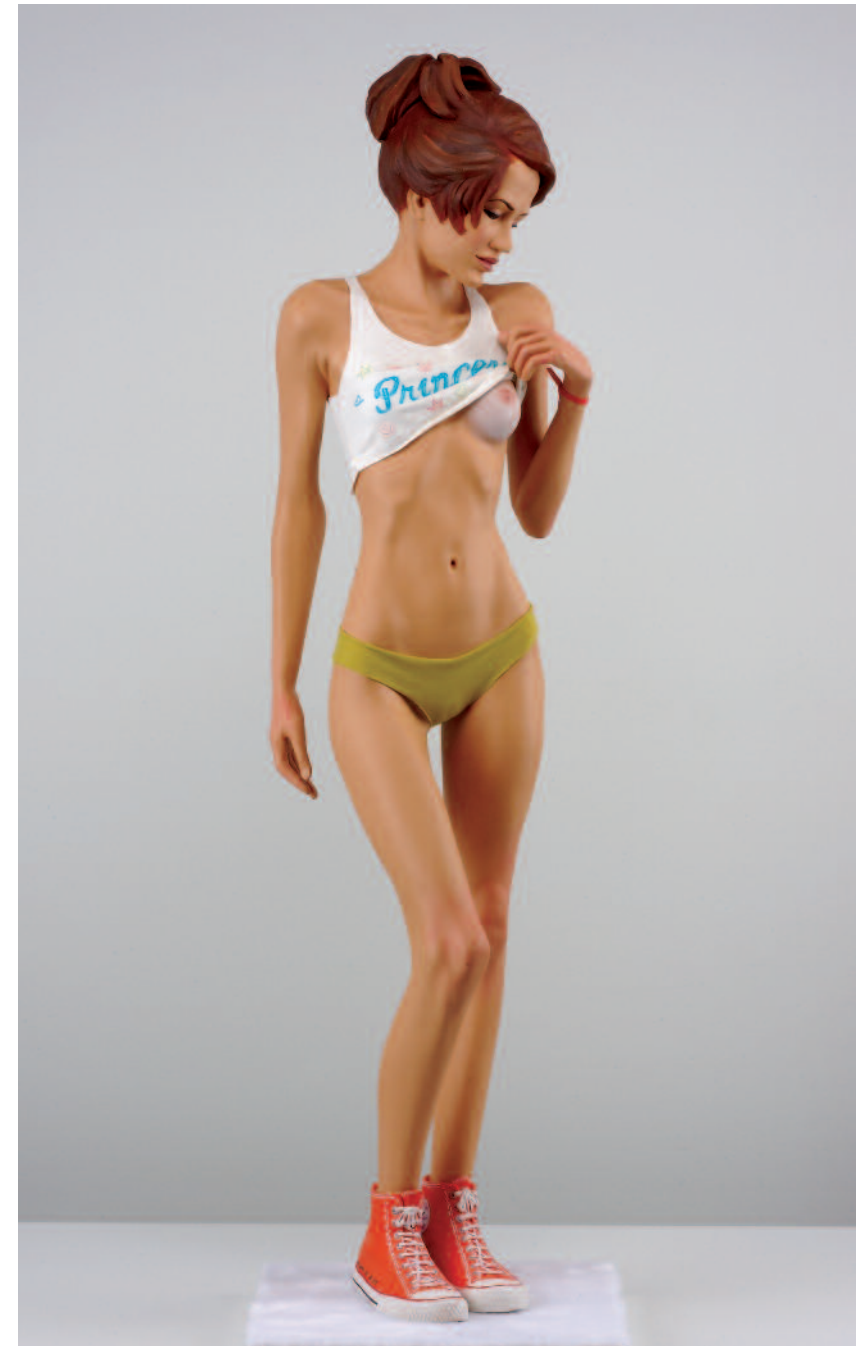
2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

39 1/2 x 11 1/4 x 10 1/4 inches

99 x 28 x 25 centimeters



# *Pathological Beauty 4*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

24 x 14 1/8 x 10 5/8 inches

61 x 36 x 27 centimeters







*Installation featuring Sola 4*

*She is a girl who has everything to be  
'happy' about, nevertheless - she cries.*

## *Sola 2*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 3

24 3/8 x 13 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches

62 x 35 x 30 centimeters



# *Sola 3*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

27 x 48 x 30 inches

68 1/2 x 123 x 76 centimeters





# *Sola 5*

2006 - 07

painting epoxy

edition of 3

44 1/2 x 14 x 41 inches

113 x 35 1/2 x 104 centimeters



# *Sola 6*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 3

29 1/8 x 22 x 27 1/2 inches

74 x 56 x 70 centimeters



# *Sola 11*

2007

painted epoxy

edition of 5

29 1/2 x 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 inches

75 x 50 x 50 centimeters





# *Sola 12*

2007

painting epoxy

edition of 5

10 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches

27 x 30 x 30 centimeters





*While my work does not necessarily portray real people, but 'images' of women, I find inspiration in advertisements and photographs that are somewhat pornographic – images which have a great quota of artifice and unreality.*

*Martin Di Girolamo*

## *Martin Di Girolamo*

Born in 1965 / Lives and works in Buenos Aires, Argentina

### *Selected Solo Exhibitions*

- 2007 *Girls*: Scott Richards Contemporary Art, San Francisco, USA
- 2005 *Sola*: Galeria Baro Cruz, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2003 *Cliché*: Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2000 *Maquillaje*: Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1995 *Martin Di Girolamo*: Espacio Filo, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Esculturas*: Le Theatre (Espacio Alternativo), Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Chicas*: Ave Porco (Espacio Alternativo), Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Ciclo Muestras Diapositivas*: Caniche (Espacio Alternativo), Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1993 *Esculturas*: Els Quatre Gats, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1992 *Esculturas*: Espacio Giesso, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1990 Galería La Epoca, Málaga, Spain

### *Selected Group Exhibitions*

- 2006 *ArteBA*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires & Galeria Baro Cruz, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2004-02 *Art Basel Miami Beach*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- MACO (Mexico Arte Contemporaneo), Mexico DF, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Galeria Baro Cruz, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2004 *Transversal*: Galeria Baro Cruz, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Analogías y confrontaciones*: Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2003-01 *Arco Madrid*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Art Basel Miami Beach*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- ArteBA*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2002 *Últimas tendencias en la colección del MAMBA*: Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- El cuerpo del arte–el arte del cuerpo*: Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Arco Madrid*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Art Basel Miami Beach*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2001 *Arte Cordoba*, Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Premio Artes Visuales, Banco de la Ciudad De Buenos Aires*: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. Buenos Aires
- 2000 *Visperas*: Hotel Boquitas Pintadas. Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Siglo XX Argentina - Arte y Cultura*: Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina



- 1999 *Algunas Obras: Un Recorte de los Noventa:* Colección Bruzzone, Centro Cultural  
Ricardo Rojas Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
*Paralelos/Paralelas:* Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
*Bienal Nacional de Arte de Bahía Blanca:* Bahía Blanca, Argentina
- 1996 *Sexo y Erotismo:* Espacio Nave, Teatro Auditorium, Mar del Plata, Argentina  
*Veinte Años Después, Artistas Plásticos Contra el Olvido y la, Impunidad:*  
Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1993 Galería Jacques Martinez, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Del Borde, Fundación Banco Patricios, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
*Erotizarte:* Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1992 Bienal de Dakar, Dakar, Senegal
- 1991 *LXXX Salón Federal de Pintura,* Mendoza, Argentina

*Awards*

- 2002 Konex Foundation Prize for Visual Arts, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2000 Fondo National De Las Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 2001 Banco Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Premio Banco Nación, Sala Cronopios, Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Premio Costantini, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1999 Premio Colección Fortabat de Escultura, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1998 Premio Novartis de Pintura, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Premio Costantini de Pintura, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1995 Fundacion Antorcha, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1994 Fundacion PROA, Kuitca prize for young artists, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 1993 Premio Braque de Escultura, Fundación Banco Patricios, Buenos Aires, Argentina

*Selected Collections*

Banco Ciudad de Buenos  
Bruzzone Collection  
Torsten Prochnow  
Dr. Cyrus Katzen  
Alina and Scott Richards  
Martin Muller  
Mauro Herlitzka  
Mr. & Mrs. Warren Silverberg



Text by JORGE LOPEZ ANAYA  
Edited by ALINA RICHARDS | KAYLEIGH HENSON  
Translated by MARCELLA JOHNSON | MARIANA ABDALA  
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