

Nora Valdez

Walking into Nora Valdez's studio in Dorchester, MA, is like stepping into a workplace in Carrara, Italy. Housed at the back of the Humphreys Street Studios, her indoor space has a concrete floor and an array of drawings and paintings along the walls, with limestone and wood sculptures punctuating the spaces in between. Just outside is a small patio under a tent, with stone carvings in process on wooden tables. It is hard to believe that such an idyllic space for a stone sculptor exists in the middle of a dense city.

Valdez does not work from the model but prefers to develop her concepts and ideas through copious drawings using ink on paper, and water color pencils. Color has "migrated" onto some of her stone and wood pieces and gives them a unique patina and depth. The resultant sculptures have a poetic quality—Valdez often uses metaphor as part of her intimate language.

Her current exhibition, *Passage*, at Milton Academy, involves three outdoor installations in a courtyard adjacent to the Art and Media Center. The central one, *Passage*, features an elegant, tall doorway, with a sizable limestone

figures in *Voicelless* speaks to the painful variables which attend undocumented immigrants.

Watching Valdez interchange with students at the Milton Academy is an inspiring experience. She is bubbly over with enthusiasm, as they are with curiosity. The students made drawings of Valdez' sculptures, and the interchange produces a lively dialogue. Valdez was also recently awarded an Opportunity Grant from the City of Boston to offer a workshop "Building Empathy" at the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Dorchester.

Valdez, now an American citizen, is an Argentinian by birth, with an Italian mother, and has resided in the U.S. since 1986. She maintains close ties with her town of origin, Villa Mercedes, San Luis, where a street was recently named for her. Her parents were supportive of her early interest in art but preferred "clean" art to "dusty" sculpture. Valdez pursued her dreams through work in Perugia, Italy and Saragossa, Spain where she learned to carve stone.



Above: Nora Valdez in her studio in Dorchester, MA. Photo: Jerry Russo.

Below, from left: Photographed at Milton Academy: *Voicelless*, 2022; *One More Step*, 2022; *Passage*, 2021, Indiana limestone, 84 x 74 x 48". Photos: Jerry Russo.

Valdez maintains her Dorchester studio and frequently works at the Carving Studio and Sculpture Center in West Rutland, VT, in the heart of Vermont's marble quarries. She actively partners with the Carving Studio in the Stone Bench Project, where she works with groups of high school students to create benches which are placed in communities around Vermont. The thirteenth, and most recent, was inaugurated in September for the Gilbert Hart Library in Wallingford, using the theme of caring for the environment and features small figures holding clouds, sun, maple syrup jar, etc. A book documenting the project is being published as part of the Carving Studio's 35th anniversary.

Valdez is a talented artist with an ability to communicate her deepest ruminations in the obdurate material of stone. By using an even-toned Indiana limestone, the pieces are concentrated, with no distraction from grain or polished surface. She has consciously developed a "universal face" for her figures, rather than a particular one. Her feelings about the current broken immigration system are expressed sensitively and succinctly in a narrative fashion. Valdez has experienced first-hand the sense of being a stranger in a new place, and this empathy informs her work. She is a true "citizen of the world" as she shares her deepest feelings which are common to us all.



suitcase about to pass through. On one side, in *Voicelless*, Valdez presents two stele with women perched on top. In one, a woman is bound, accompanied by another who holds the figure of a house in her lap. Atop the accompanying stele, a woman sits precariously, almost unbalanced, seeking not to fall into a chasm in the stone.

Valdez is one of a very small cadre of stone sculptors in the world who participate in international symposiums. A symposium, usually sponsored by a city, is held for a defined period of time (four to six weeks), during which the community of sculptors executes finished works in the public square. These are left in situ, as permanent public pieces. Valdez has partici-

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