

Alfredo de Batuc

About the recurrent images in my work:

Images emerge spontaneously, and when I get used to seeing them in my work I start to make associations and understand why they made their appearance in the first place.

The (Moon/Sun) Presence

Growing up in Mexico I was exposed from an early age to reproductions of the Olmec* heads in books and other visual sources. But it wasn't until I saw one of these at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries in 1991 that I was directly impacted by the spirit of one of these ancient stone portraits. Being in front of this rock made me feel the power a great work of art has to touch, move and inspire, in spite of the time and cultural distances. I felt the presence of a fellow human in the rendering of this visage of fleshy lips, flat nose and full cheeks that shows a calm but vigilant frown. That impression has remained with me. I was struck by the deftness of its execution, especially the raised border around the lips. Soon after this experience I started to doodle little round heads informed of the venerable Olmec head. Whereas the colossal portraits of that far gone civilization are setting heavily on the ground as if resting on or sprouting from it, my two-dimensional avatars are suspended in the air or soaring. I emphasize circularity, which in some ancient wisdom traditions is the symbol for wholeness, completeness. I was very taken by what I thought were African lips and Asian eyes in the original. In my versions I tend to exaggerate these characteristics, plus I add, from Europe, a thin nose and hollow eyes reminiscent of most of the ancient Roman bronzes as we see them today. In my sun/moon images I integrate aspects of human types that tend to comprise the whole spectrum of humanity, and I depict that face (presence) levitating or ascending to higher levels.

The sun, giving light and heat to the earth, is a figure of divine Life and Love, enlightening and sustaining the universe. Sun. The symbol of Soul governing man—of Truth, Life, and Love.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) Science and Health

*The Olmec civilization is the earliest documented complex society in the Americas. By 1750 BC they already occupied the warm and fertile coast of the Gulf of Mexico in the present day Mexican states of Tabasco and Veracruz. Their civilization flourished around 1000 BC and declined circa 250 BC, to later vanish completely. Colossal human heads carved of large stone boulders are the hallmark of this mysterious civilization of which there are sixteen exemplars.

City Hall

Los Angeles city hall began to appear in my work in the early to mid-eighties. I was looking for a visual reference for Los Angeles and found that its signature city hall Art Deco tower was the most appropriate referent. I wanted to steer away from the palm trees, Hollywood and the beach scene, and found city hall the most appropriate signifier since, at least politically; it is supposed to represent all of Los Angeles. At the time I started using this symbol the city council was a bastion of white male power, but, with the passing of time and the demographic shifts in the city and in the state, this has changed, yet it still remains the locale where the city politics are staged.

I made a conscious decision to make Los Angeles the locus of my work because a lot of people still do not think of Los Angeles as a major art center. They associate art and art making with foreign locales dripping with art history. They often think of Europe and New York in terms of art, but not so of Los Angeles. Not that my contribution will reverse this, but I thought important to anchor my work in Los Angeles to leave no doubt as to where it comes from, even if a lot of people still don't recognize the building. Another important point in this line of thinking is that the art centers of the past are associated with high culture; Los Angeles on the other hand is more closely associated with ad forms industrially produced for the mass market, such as movies, television, popular music, comic books. In other words, Los Angeles has a corner on the low brow end of the cultural spectrum, which is something I enjoy.