

## Enrique Martínez Celaya's *Schneebett*, Beethoven's Frigid Deathbed, Opens at Miami Art Museum

By Camille Lamb



*Schneebett* installed at the Berliner Philharmonie, 2004

*Schneebett*, German for “snow bed,” is a three-part installation that opens at the Miami Art Museum this Thursday. Based on the dying days of German composer Beethoven, it’s not the first thing we expected from an artist named Enrique Martínez Celaya.

But the seed of this creation was actually planted in the artist’s boyhood. Though born in Cuba and raised in Spain, Martínez Celaya became fascinated with German literature at an early age.

“My sense of myself since I was a little kid, strangely enough, came through Friedrich Nietzsche,” Martínez Celaya said. “Through him I discovered Hesse, and after that Schopenhauer, and so on. So both continental philosophy and German writing in particular, for example Thomas Mann, were a huge influence on me through my teenage years. So my emotional and intellectual making, although my last name is Martínez Celaya, I was really German. So when my career got started in Los Angeles a few years back, the first collectors that supported my work were German. And in fact, my biggest collectors remain Germans.”

Though he always kept a paintbrush in one hand, in his youth, Martínez Celaya felt that a career in science “made more sense” for the son of a poor immigrant family.

He studied applied physics at Cornell and pursued a Ph.D. in quantum electronics at the University of California, Berkeley before the gravity of his artistic inclination finally caused him to shift course.

Perhaps the only art student ever to pay his way through school by working as a laser scientist (developing three patented machines in the process), Martínez Celaya says the transition from right to left brain wasn’t easy, but it sure does look that way. His work has been displayed in the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, Germany, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

*Schneebett*, German for “snow bed,” is a three-part installation originally commissioned by the Berlin Philharmonic in 2004. The understated exhibit conveys Beethoven’s final moments through objects like a bronze bed, covered in a thick layer of actual frost (yes, snow in Miami!) created by an elaborate compressor system.

Behind the bed, a painting covered with tar and feathers depicts a dense, snow-covered forest. The entry to the room is blocked by a pile of sticks. On the other side of the doorway sits a single chair from which the viewer can peer into the inaccessible deathbed.

Martínez Celaya’s work deals with the ideas of exile and displacement. The installation conveys a sense of longing, or what the Germans call *Sehnsucht*, to reflect that Beethoven died in Vienna, Austria, far from his home in Bonn, Germany, which he left at the age of 22.

“Beethoven’s being distant from his land was important, but then so was his estrangement from his father, his estrangement from his family,” says Martínez Celaya. “I got a sense of his personal failure when he realizes that there’s so little time left; is there a possibility of reconciling himself with that

past? It’s reflected in his interest to kind of reconcile his battles with some of the earlier composers he had fought all along.

“The process of mending the past is perhaps more important than the physical distance of exile. So in some ways it’s a temporal exile. If it’s just a distance of land, you can always take a trip to get back to the land. But with a temporal exile, with a sense of being banished from a past that you can never go back to, and the regrets of that, it’s a much more difficult exile.”

The exhibit opens at the Miami Art Museum (101 W. Flagler St., Miami) from 6 to 8 p.m. on Thursday and will feature a talk from the artist, followed by a performance by members from the Miami Symphony Orchestra. Tickets cost \$10. The exhibit will be on view from October 14th to January 1st in the Anchor Gallery; admission ranges from free to \$8. Call 305-375-3000 or go to [miamiartmuseum.org](http://miamiartmuseum.org).



Enrique Martínez Celaya, 2011