

## Marisol Escobar

Marisol was born in Paris to Venezuelan parents Gustavo Escobar and Josefina Hernandez on May 22, 1930. Marisol has one brother; an economist is living in Venezuela.

Financially comfortable, the family lived something of a nomadic existence in Europe, Venezuela and the United States. Their wealth derived from the Venezuelan oil business and real estate that afforded the family a very comfortable, social lifestyle.

Marisol's mother died in New York in 1941 when Marisol was eleven years old. Following the tragedy and for the duration of World War II, the family lived mainly in Caracas, with the children attending a series of local schools. Near the end of the war, Marisol's father moved the family to Los Angeles, California where Marisol was enrolled in the Westlake School for Girls.

With aspirations to become a painter, Marisol first studied art in evening drawing classes at the Jepson School in Los Angeles when she was sixteen. By this time, she was already proficient in representational drawing. Catholicism imbued Marisol with beliefs in mystery, miracles, intercession and awareness of a spiritual/supernatural aspect of life that permeated both her character and work as an artist. As she revealed to Avis Berman in a 1984 interview for Smithsonian, Marisol suffered self-inflicted acts of penance for a brief period in her early teens. She walked on her knees until they bled, kept silent for long periods and tied ropes tightly around her waist in emulation of saints and martyrs.

As a sculptor, Marisol has always followed her own path. "Not Pop, Not Op, It's Marisol!" was the way Grace Glueck titled her article in the New York Times in 1965, and this difficulty in categorizing her work and answering the question "Who is Marisol" still continues to be evident in much that is written about her today. Marisol passed through many art movements, but it is true that it is difficult to situate her within any one movement. She was close to Abstract Expressionism and was, without a doubt, an important figure of American Pop, producing her John Wayne in 1963, the same year that Andy Warhol created his first Marilyn. But she went her own way appropriating elements from varied sources ranging from American primitive art, the aestheticism of ancient Egyptian art, the legacy of the Italian Renaissance, contemporary social rites and conventions, as well as her own personal history and identity.

Silence in Marisol's work is very meaningful. She handles silence with mastery. It is thoroughly present in her work. She gives it form and weight. It is interesting that silence is also very much a part of her own personal world. She does not speak with many people and does not use words for background noise and idle chatter. In interviews she tends to respond to questions with a simple yes or no. Summing up her career with characteristic brevity, she says, "I have always been very fortunate. People like what I do."

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