

# Vitaly Garcia Sigoenko in profile

## Vitaly Garcia Sigoenko tells us about his woodcarving career

Woodcarver Vitaly Garcia Sigoenko was born in the city of Lviv, Ukraine, USSR in 1968 to his Cuban father and his Russian mother. From childhood Vitaly loved moulding clay, drawing and making wood crafts with his cousins and, living where he did, Vitaly had great opportunities to visit well-known art galleries in St Petersburg and Moscow. Some of these included the Hermitage and the Tretyakov Gallery. As a young child, Vitaly's family moved to Cuba, where he would spend his childhood. During his years at college, Vitaly loved to make models and integrate sculptural designs in all of his projects. In 1994, he graduated with a degree in architecture,



'Regalando Sueños', 2005

acquiring great skills in developing models. During those university years he started to create his first woodcarvings. Although they were small scale – 'thumbnails' – Vitaly was motivated by a set of small tools that had been sent to him from his cousin from the former

USSR. Vitaly also felt an influence and encouragement from his mother, who always inspired him to love the arts. After graduation, and with a few years of practice as an architect, Vitaly devoted himself entirely to sculpting. He is primarily self-taught, but over

the years has received various snippets of advice from two professors at the Higher Institute of Arts in Havana, Cuba: one, a painter, Iris Leyva and a sculptor Panfilo Cañizares. Vitaly has also taken some courses and workshops in drawing throughout his sculpting career.

### Favourite pieces

"This is quite hard to answer," Vitaly tells us when we asked what his favourite piece of his own work is: "It's like having to say who my favourite child is. I can tell you that the themes of my work are very broad, encompassing figurative contemporary linear, portraits, miniatures, among others."

Vitaly soon picks a number of pieces to tell us about. His first chosen piece is titled 'Friends...why not...', which for Vitaly symbolises why the weak – in society's eyes – and the strong – in society's eyes – cannot live together in harmony. He believes that the strong always end up depending on the weak. The piece was inspired by a visit to the southern coast of Havana, Cuba, with his wife. The southern coast is filled with mangroves, crocodiles, fishermen and hunters, who told Vitaly a number of anecdotes about their lives.

The second piece that Vitaly chose to talk to us about is his 'World of Races'. Vitaly describes it as a 'utilitarian work'. The piece uses portrait pipes to represent the four races which inhabit the Earth – based on the ancients' view of the world. In the piece Vitaly uses four elephants to represent the number of races and the round Earth contains the cut of the pipes.

After his first two chosen pieces, Vitaly moves onto some of his other works, which are much more straight-to-the-point in their meaning and portrayal. Vitaly's 'The Guardian' represents an elf guardian of nature, with elements of current technology mixed in. His 'Giving Dreams' and 'Fine Cubita' represent the 'beauty' and 'sensuality' of Cuban women in traditional costumes.

One piece, 'Untouchable' is a self-portrait, but of Vitaly as a child. The minister carving is sat inside a wooden replica of Vitaly's hands. It is inspired by a photograph taken of Vitaly as a child, playing in the sand on a beach, when he would build stuff with pieces of wood.

A theme that has inspired some of Vitaly's pieces is the theme of Don Quixote. He explained: "I always had a great interest in the literature of Cervantes, the Quixotes made with different woods and using different styles, always looking for the expressiveness and his adventurous spirit. I should also mention his squire Sancho Panza, Dulcinea and the portrait of Cervantes as part of this set."

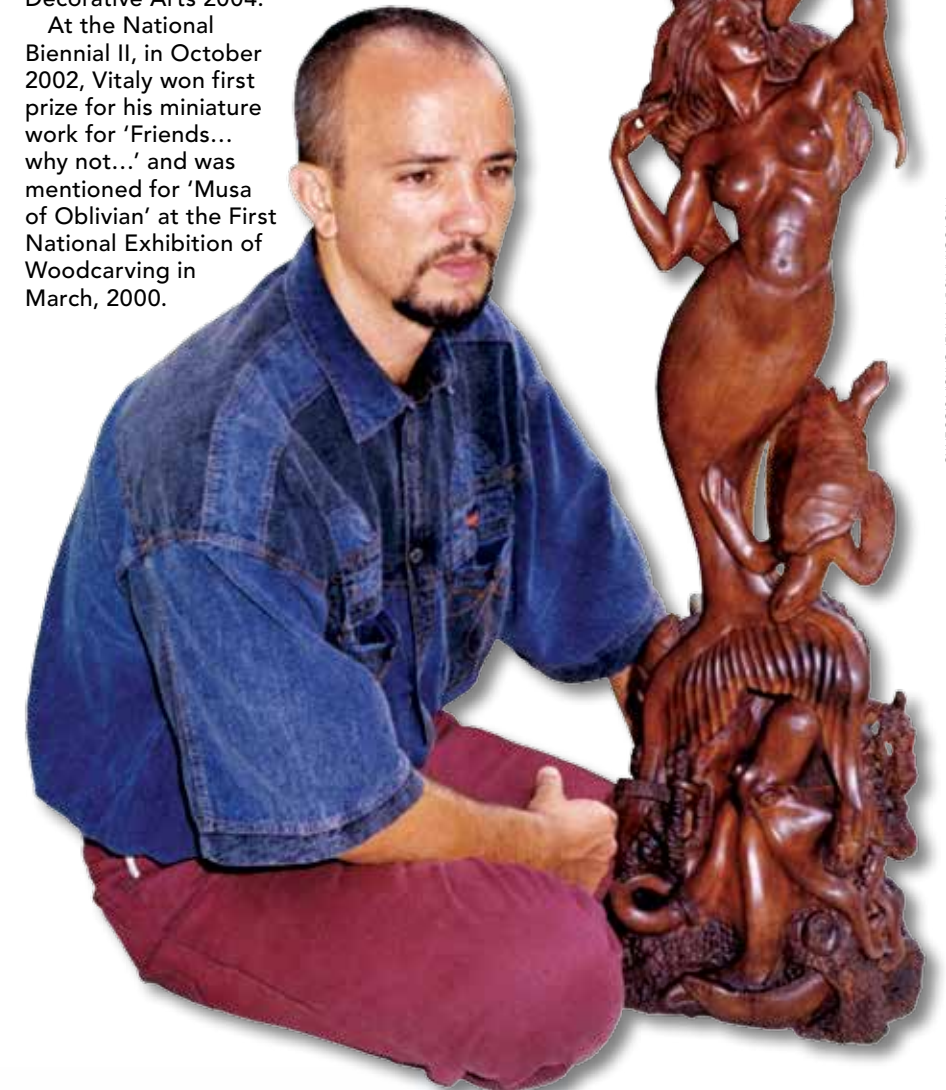
Vitaly's final piece is 'The Muse of Forgetting', a critique of commercialism of the markets in Cuba, where Vitaly believes "the creativity of many of the carvers is motivated by money and they quickly fall into oblivion."

### Awards

Vitaly has been nominated for and won a number of awards over the years. Some of these include: second place

in the category of 'No partners' in the 'First Day of Wood' competition, held in Lugones Asturias, Spain in July, 2012; Vitaly was mentioned with his 'The Guardian' work at V Biennial Carving ACAA – Cuban Association of Artisans Artist – held at the National Museum of Decorative Arts of Cuba in July, 2008. Vitaly won second place in the Third National Biennial Carving ACAA, held at the National Museum of Decorative Arts 2004.

At the National Biennial II, in October 2002, Vitaly won first prize for his miniature work for 'Friends... why not...' and was mentioned for 'Musa of Oblivian' at the First National Exhibition of Woodcarving in March, 2000.



It was held in the International Press Center, Havana, Cuba.

### Work methods

Vitaly's work can vary in theme and purpose, listing 'figurative contemporary linear, sometimes fused with realism', 'fantastic realism', 'figurative' among them. These all depend on the objective to be achieved in his work. Most of them reflect the dynamism of life, which is rarely static. "Although I often seek to synthesise the shape of the figures in the figurative contemporary linear line of work, facial expressions is something I always intend to express, because faceless figures, to me, are as if they had no spirit or no reflection of their 'me' inside of them," Vitaly explains.



'Eterna Tentación', 2012

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VITALY GARCIA SIGOENKO



➔ Before Vitaly's work begins, he can take days to conceive it first in the mind, then he makes sketches, but the final decision is left to the material, in this case, wood. Vitaly tends to improvise most of the elements, but lets the material guide him to the final result.

Vitaly tells us: "My work is based on traditional carving techniques, but I also use an electrical powered Dremel tool to achieve certain effects and some cleanness." In his work, Vitaly tries to achieve a visual balance with the shape and the different shades of the wood. The figurative contemporary linear is also crucial to ensure the continuity of the lines, volumes, or sometimes break one or more elements to highlight an action. Vitaly's pieces are mainly decorative, but sometimes also functional, especially those related to tobacco.

#### Influences

Many Russian sculptors have influenced Vitaly in his work, but mainly Soviet sculptors Lev Efimovich Kerbel, Vera Mukhina and I. D. Shadr, in addition to Italian sculptors Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Michelangelo Buonarroti, and Cuban sculptor and Vitaly's friend José Duverger Aliaga.

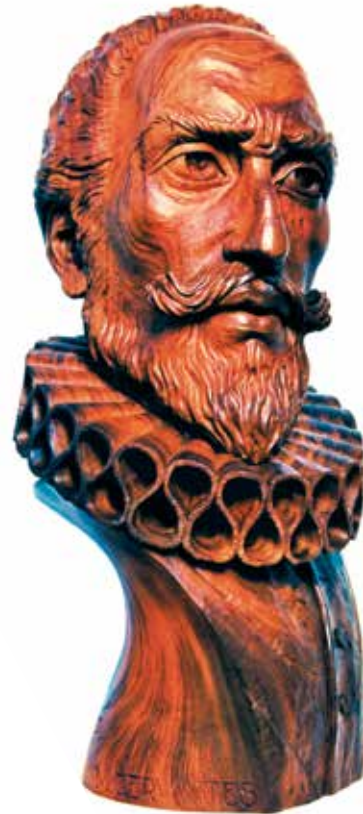
#### The future

Right now Vitaly is focused on preparing a place to work more comfortably and where he also plans to teach carving. He wants to revisit the issue of creating hands, which he really enjoys, because he feels they are the part of the body that can be used to express the most messages if accompanied by other elements.

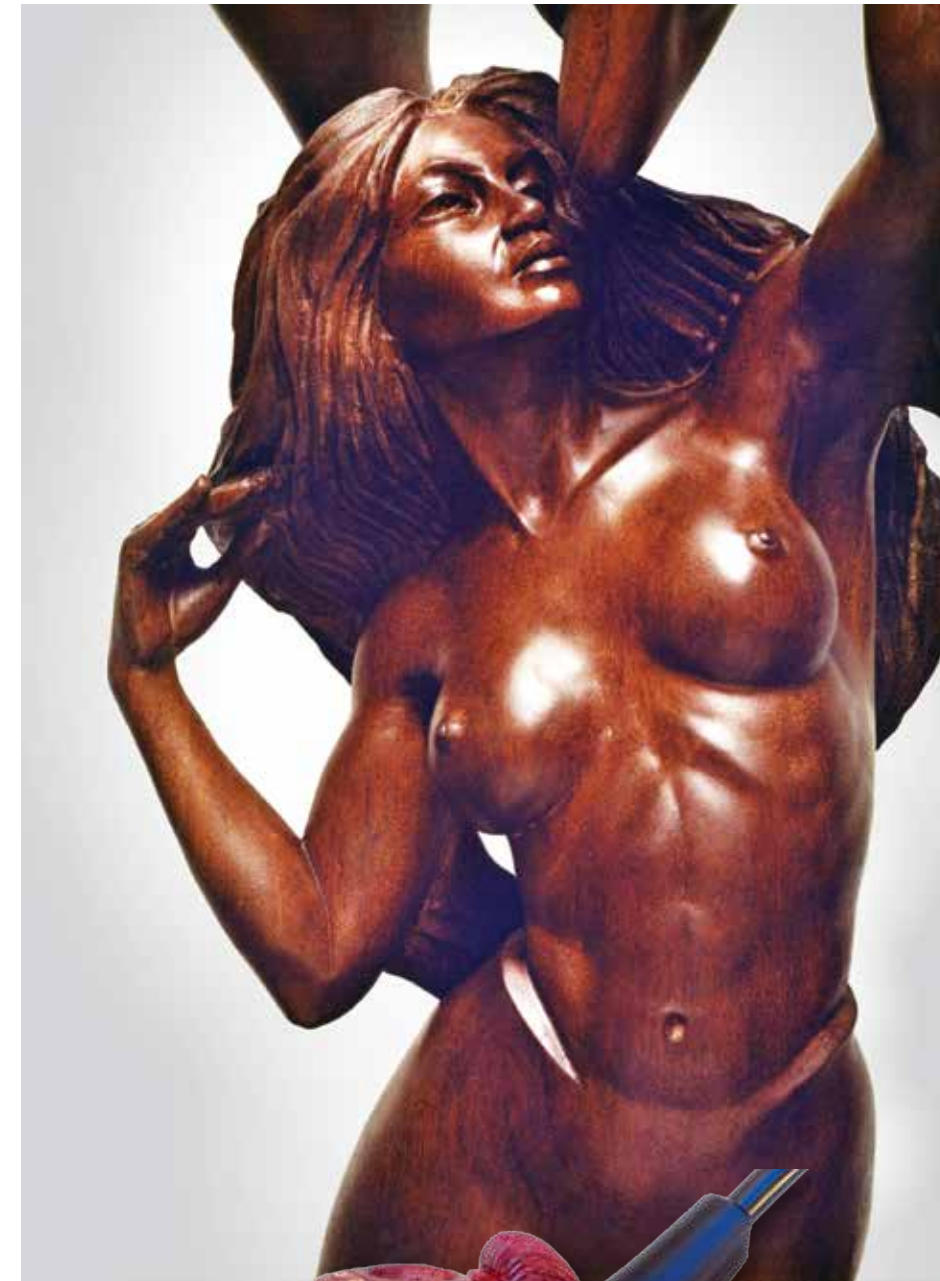
Vitaly's work transmits his own life experiences or his own impression of the issues and the people of today's collective society, or even his own. "My work does not have a defined line, it flows from different ideas, always changing and adapting, just as my own life is," Vitaly tells us. Besides the stories of elves and fairies, which fascinate him, Vitaly prefers the reality and the greatness of life itself. In summary, Vitaly wants to work on anything that calls his attention, to reflect it in his work. ▶

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'Cervantes', 2003



'Amor profundo', 1999



'Azteca', 2011

#### A letter from Rafael Morales Queneditt

These are the words written by Vitaly's past president of the manifestation of carving of the Cuban Association of Artists Artisans, of which he was vice president:

Careful, be not mistaken, you are not in the presence of a cold and calculating scholar, although it may seem so at first glance. Even when his work takes us to the authentic school of human renaissance, Vitaly is a true creator of his images. We can bet he has the power to penetrate in the unimaginable world of dreams in order for us to discover, in each of his works, what is obviously hidden in appearance and, in essence, portraying joy, pain, longing and memories, reminding us of a deep and enigmatic Leonardo Da Vinci; the more you look at the Mona Lisa, the more it challenges you and immerses you in her mysterious universe.

The perfection of its shapes, the fine finishing and the cleanness of his execution, tell us that we are in presence of a master who has transcended his time and, in these turbulent times of anguish and despair, he invites us to peace and contemplation.

In his priesthood, he reminds us of past times that never fade because they contain footprints of the men of those times and he establishes an important continuity. He has the power to dominate and build; he does not diminish, but increases and enriches the value of the material, forming images, like a god, extracting from a deep and hidden mystery box, that which is hidden from our eyes.

I do not want to point to any particular work, because I would be leading you by the hand down the wrong path. You have to discover for yourself the vibration, the charm, the magic and pain, because every stroke is a tear where light emerges.

I praise your courage, miss his presence, never absent and, as the poet Antonio Machado stated: "a new journey begins by walking the trails that culminate in glory and the deserved recognition."

You, Architect of shapes and dreams, keep filling our spaces with the magic flowing from your hands. Continue walking because that is the only true journey. Do not stop, because the doors will open sooner rather than later.

Yours sincerely,  
Rafael Morales Queneditt



'Amazona Tropical', 2000



'Brisa Tropical', 2001