

PERDIDO EDEN

PHILIPPINES / PILIPINAS!

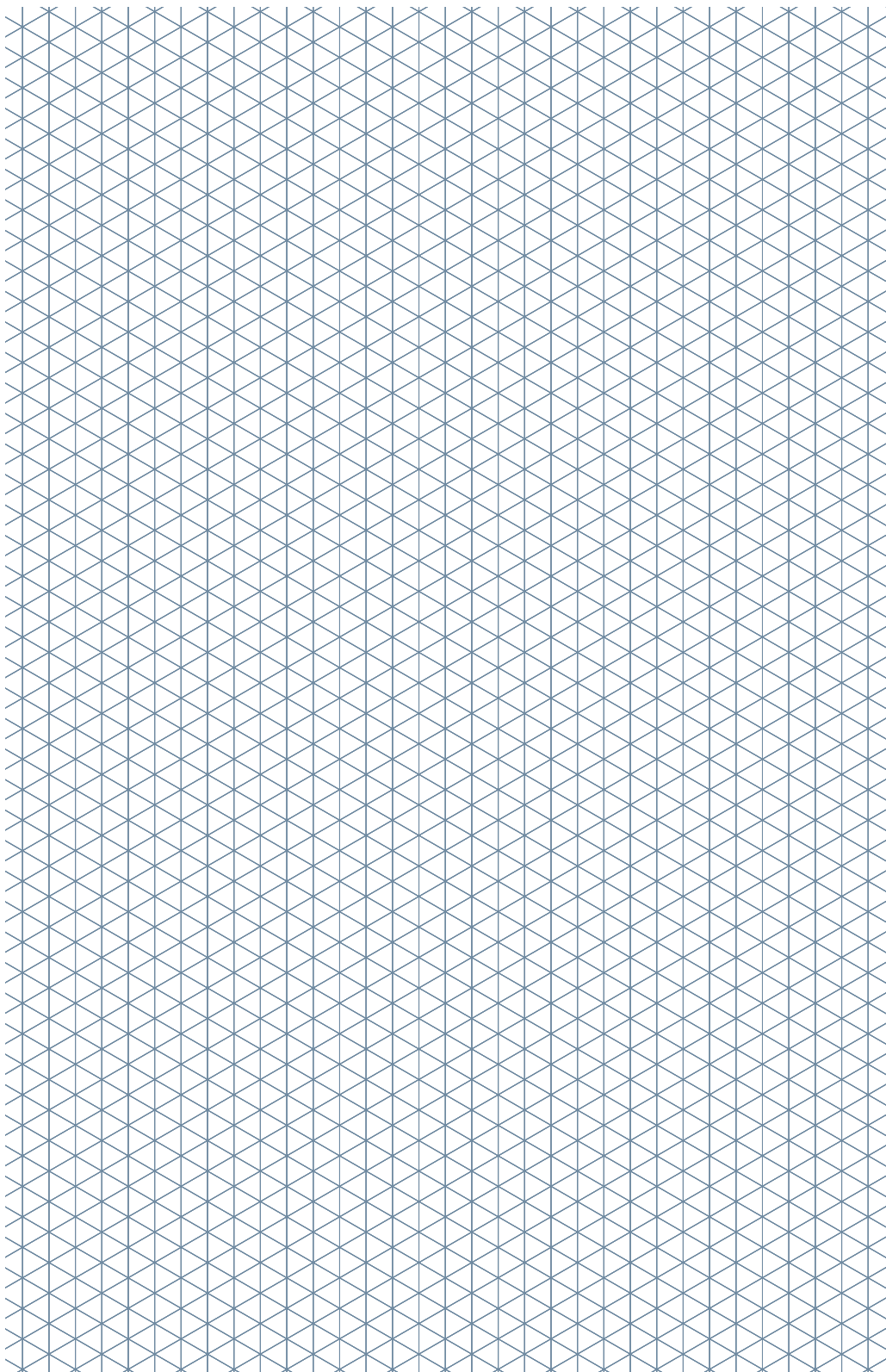


ODETOART

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Foreword

Jazz Chong
Director, Ode to Art

Over the years, *Ode to Art* has grown in its interest in the art practices found in South East Asian countries as we saw the interesting concepts they generated find unbounded expression in the contemporary art world. As we witness the steady increase of young Filipino artists taking their place on the international contemporary art stage, I am honored to present you some of the exciting emerging artists who are making a mark in the field of Philippine contemporary art.

This exhibition titled PERDIDO EDEN highlights the significant energy that young artists are bringing to the art scene in Manila and embraces a new era of bold-

spirited artists who contribute to raising Filipino contemporary art communities to the world's view.

Culturally diverse, The Philippines is about a complex mix of identities which have been significantly influenced by hundreds of years of colonial rule under Spain followed by almost fifty years under the United States of America. Spanish colonial rule in The Philippines brought about many changes such as the introduction of Catholicism to the archipelago and the entrenchment of European painting traditions which were initially dominated by post-Renaissance and heavily Christian-aligned subject matters. With the significant history of oil painting, Philippine artists began to draw from 19th and 20th century modernist artistic movements from Europe while incorporating more indigenous imagery and subject matter into their works. We can see that some of their works are influenced by the complexities of urbanization and social inequities, ethnic and national identities, gender roles, and personal psychologies.

Our featured artists in this exhibition include MM Yu who finds beauty in the chaotic surroundings of Manila and depicts them through her paintings of abstraction and color. In her photography, she has an eye for pattern and repetition, reflecting beauty in simplicity. At the same time, she explores the way paint drips down a canvas and through skill in coordination, achieves a cheerful balance of colours that blend into one another. On the other hand, Robert Langenegger brings a different view of the chaotic surroundings of Manila which verbal description cannot measure. A finalist in the Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2008, his works often embed intensely personified snapshots of harsh situations which are juxtaposed with the cool, vivid scenery in the background.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our contributing artists and our lovely curator, Ms. Isabel Ching, for organising this eye-opening exhibition. I sincerely hope that the show will provide opportunities for audiences to glimpse the diversity of practices which are currently explored in the Philippine art scene.

*ADIOS, PATRIA ADORADA,
REGION DEL SOL QUERIDA,
PERLA DEL MAR DE ORIENTE,
NUESTRO PERDIDO EDEN!*

/

*PAALAM, SINTANG LUPANG TINUBUAN,
BAYANG MASAGANA SA INIT NG ARAW,
EDENG MALIGAYA SA AMI'Y PUMANAW,
AT PERLAS NG DAGAT SA DAKONG SILANGAN.*

/

*FAREWELL, DEAR FATHERLAND,
CLIME OF THE SUN CARESS'D
PEARL OF THE ORIENT SEAS,
OUR EDEN LOST!*

Perdido Eden, Philippines/Pilipinas!

Isabel Ching
Curator of the exhibition

What if, while in Singapore, we turn our eyes around, our pupils to the backs of our sockets; where would we be? Would it be Manila and its hodgepodge urban landscape that we see? Peering through a looking glass in Manila, would we find ourselves in Singapore, the city of gardens that Manila could have been, *nuestro perdido Eden* – our lost Eden?

In 1896, Philippine national hero – physician and poet José Rizal of mixed indigenous Filipino and Chinese, as well as Spanish and Japanese ancestry – bid his final farewell before his execution with an untitled poem written in Spanish and hidden in a *cocinilla* or small alcohol stove to be smuggled out of prison, later named “*Mi último*

adiós” (My Last Farewell). In the first stanza of the famous verse are the words ...*nuestro perdido Eden*... imagining an originary homeland that one yearns to recover, a utopia that has been lost. The Philippines was a colony of Spain when Rizal was executed, its national language still an issue of contention. It was later translated into English, its most popular version by an American translator published in 1911 when The Philippines had already become a colony of the USA. There also exists hundreds of versions translated into various Filipino languages, and further, it makes its mark as one of the most translated valedictory poems in the world, recited during the most heart-thumping of occasions such as the Indonesian National Revolution of 1945-9.

Today, our cities within the modest region of Southeast Asia – sharing a memory of colonization and a struggle for independence not long ago – seem a paradox, so close yet so far away. Singapore is fashioning itself as a global city, whilst its counterpart in the Philippines, Metro Manila, is inundated with all the problems of an over-developed city in a developing country. Re-reading Rizal’s poem, I googled “Perdido Eden Philip-

pinas”, arriving first at the blog of “just a casual traveler” which begins,

“Manila is not for the faint of heart. Even if you’ve been to some pretty nasty places on the face of this planet, it is hard not to feel sad and disgusted at the sight of Manila’s slums and squatter areas... makeshift houses made of corrugated sheet metal, cardboard boxes, plastic awnings, and other junk scavenged from a dumpsite; naked homeless kids washing in dirty unsanitary water; people begging; people sleeping on the pavement; pickpockets; people with that hazy look of somebody high on drugs; people selling drugs. It’s pretty hard not to run into this kind of destitution when walking around Manila. It will find you...”

Then, typing in “Perdido Eden Pilipinas”, I went straight to the third site on the list Google threw up, attracted by its heading “Nuestro Perdido Eden... ¿Tienes Hambre?” (Spanish: hungry?). A blog about “Gen-X life in the San Francisco bay area”, it starts:

“*Kawawa naman talaga ang Pilipinas* (Tagalog: really ‘poor thing’, the Philippines!). I sometimes wish I could just wave a magic wand and fix the ills of

the Philippines. All that poverty is heartbreaking. Ninety million people, the vast majority of whom are poor.”

Through the Mirror

In fact, it was not too long ago, in the 1950s and 60s, that The Philippines was deemed the most prosperous country in Southeast Asia and a beacon of development for other newly independent Southeast Asian nations to look up to. Going back longer, to Rizal, who was made one of the guiding lights of Asian nationalism, what was the Eden that was lost and perhaps could be recovered? What sort of resources of memory do we tap on to compensate for the loss in the present? What sorts of desires, dreams and attitudes do we bring to our notions of home? The well-traveled Rizal had practiced in Hong Kong, and before that, studied in Madrid, the University of Paris and the University of Heidelberg – the last where he completed the final chapters to his novel *Noli Me Tāngere* portraying the abuses under the Spanish clergy in the Philippines that was to become supremely influential in the revolution. It has been noted before that although the Philippines was one of the earliest to give birth to a nationalist movement of its kind, the ruling

elites identified themselves with their colonial masters more than their compatriots in other Southeast Asian countries. *The feeling of being exiles in one's own country, being exiled from one's homeland – the lost Eden that was the Philippines, or the Spanish 'motherland'*. Later, after decades of American colonization, as a Filipino American poet had written, one experiences the ‘return’ to America from the Philippines as a homecoming despite never having stepped on the shores of the former before.

Being gently prodded to curate a group show of Philippine contemporary art to introduce audiences in Singapore to the field, select artists have been invited to submit works for a group show of emerging artists based in Metro Manila instead, to be held in a Singapore gallery entitled *Perdido Eden*. From where the title was taken was made clear to the artists, so was the request that the works should be ‘friendly’ to the transportation process. Some responded by making new work or rearrangements of existing work, others selected works from their recent practice. Both in the minds of some artists and mine was the consciousness of a certain obsolescence in national divisions when showing contemporary art since the borders of contemporary culture seem

only increasingly porous both as a notion and as a practice in reality, while local cultures shift at an ever more urgent pace. One needs to decisively break with questions that try to fix down the identity of Philippine art and the concomitant old dangers of essentialism. The intention is to go beyond nationalistic representation of artists’ perspectives to weave together a necessarily uneven yet complex narrative of country and homeland. Yet, how the publics in Singapore might approach, read and understand the works on show needs to be engaged with. Do we box them up as Philippine art in a category of their own? To what extent do we have to bring in historical, social and cultural information in reading the works? On what terms can we relate to the works, drawing correspondences to our own experiences? Has the art today become different because of proliferating technologies and how it envisages a different type of audience figure? Why is it important or necessary today to adopt a certain approach towards meaning over another?

These are just some of the questions whenever art travels across borders for shows. Here, a group of sometimes similar but in other major aspects often diverging artistic practices, from the very young to those hitting

mid-career soon, have been gathered together in one space-time. They are indicative, however, of some of the noteworthy tendencies in or coming from Manila that involve related but different perspective and process to their predecessors. These can simultaneously involve vociferous consumption, accommodations and resistances to the international, where the local has become both a vital and dispersed (more open-ended and contingent) site for acting and for interpretation. There is the potential of dealing with recollection and contemporary subjectivity, cultural legacies and ruin in ways that already acknowledge an apocalyptic present, undermining fantasies for a post-apocalyptic *tabula rasa* – a type of foundational condition for utopia.¹

¹ Singapore itself has become known as a *tabula rasa*, a scrapped-clean blank slate on which a modern city has been built. Culturally, we have lamented this and its effects on memory. The layers of our physical landscape also appear much more flattened than our neighbouring cities; many of us have perhaps come to prefer the comforts that such evenness affords, lacking a tolerance for complexity and disorder. In the Philippines, however, it is not uncommon to hear the sparkling garden city-state of Singapore touted as the dream of what the country should have become – if only one could start on a clean slate!

*Verge of Country,
Self and Sight/Site*

We can appreciate the shaping of artistic subjectivities as an active, dynamic, and varied process involving the interaction of various histories, contextual factors, opportunities and artistic legacies. The formal manifestation of a work is revealing of choices, as much as the subject matter. The sense of identity engendered by an accretion of meanings at a place could nowadays be seen as an accumulation of meanings from an accretion of places in the plural as actors and cultures are understood to move across borders. These ‘places’ include physical spaces and our imaginations of them, as well as non-places, signified by Rizal’s lost Eden. Home, which draws in both place(s) and non-place(s), is however also a feeling fortified by the quality of banality arising from the everyday comfort of familiar surroundings and objects; that is, the ordinariness of home.

In the work of Gary Pastrana, a reduced form is the result of an active, conceptual decision. His mode of making uses everyday materials – found objects, household items, things that are easy to come by or are already being used – and is churned by the collage process of taking apart, tearing, cutting, ruptur-

ing sources and their intended meanings, then putting these together in new compositions, thereby linking his works from cutting a boat in pieces to melting rings together to form a sword. The *White Flag* – a Philippine flag sewn together from Pastrana’s old white T-shirts – was made while on an overseas art residency in Bangkok in 2010/11 that led to the solo presentation *Vivo Fragmenta* (Spanish: live fragments). It was then hoisted over the balcony of his living quarters in Bangkok using a floor mop as pole, the white flag signifying surrender and truce. Both shirt and flag, the condition of simultaneity is doubled in another coloured Philippine flag sewn from cut-up old shirts with the red band on top instead of the usual blue – an inverted flag hoisted when war is declared. A series of photographs were then taken of these flags installed on his balcony over a couple of days. Pastrana explores the possibilities of individual action that even in a situation of being trapped, confined or locked in, one is still able to declare and express his/her state(s), feeling(s) or identity(s). The makeshift object declaring a paradoxically divested nationality, with intimate associations to the body/self/experience of the artist, also acquires and accumulates fresh meaning

when transported and installed in different spaces, cities or countries.

As with his previous works, Cocoy Lumbao in his own words tries to “find one of video’s innate capabilities in image-making borne out of practical use and to wield it into a language of its own by exploiting it as part of the text or narrative”. In *Untitled (Eclipse)*, he explores the relationship of the video image with light and its absence in two sequences shot entirely in the lowest level of lighting possible with the particular camera’s night-shot function. Within a home setting, a blind woman reads to a young boy (her son?), who has normal eyesight in the darkness, a passage from the Psalms in the bible in braille. We see how the pupils of the young boy glow in the video as we have become used to seeing in night function footage; however, the mother’s remain dull. Her lips move, but we do not hear her and wonder if the boy does. Indeed, halfway through, he takes out a toy and tries to play with it under the limited light while the mother continues to read, unaware and unable to respond to the needs of the child for light. Its flip side is the video possessing a God-like ability to have transcended both light and darkness. Light and darkness are no longer

irreconcilable oppositions, defined against each other (eg. darkness is the absence of light), but becomes unified at a higher level (“Darkness and light are both alike to thee”, Psalm 139 verse 12), exceeding common understandings of reality via a transcendental vision, a non-sight.

In painting, Nona Garcia’s conceptual decision to stick to the photo-realistic format denies using expressive techniques to suggest a depth of meaning. Using the methodical process of painting grid-by-grid indicates a type of relation to her artistic ability to act that abstracts the subjective qualities and represses the emotional and symbolic, yet this is often applied to depict subject matter – whether persons or objects – that is familiar for Garcia. The artist comes from a family of doctors and her photo-realism can be likened to both a forensic eye for dissection and a medical eye for diagnosis, able to see what is often unavailable to normal sight. It evokes a mode and scope of perception made conscious through medical imaging and camera capabilities, allowing us to discern technologically worked-through, fragmented and extended spaces and realities that exist in parallel, thereby appropriating lost worlds. Painting domestic interiors that

are ruined and abandoned, and other subject matter, she reduces colouring to monochromes of grey and is not resistant to some manipulation of the photographic image using computer technology. The work both taps on the atmosphere of a haunting (forensic?) photograph and works against the operation of spectacle and subjectivity. The effect is often a stark feeling of absence that probes a deeper, unseen connection between the realities of daily things beyond conventional identity markers. Here, a window beckons, inviting us to dive through to the other side.

Mark Andy Garcia, on the other hand, uses an expressive mode to convey the authenticity of experience and being, augmenting subjective values. His work is often diaristic in nature, recording and communicating his life experiences from pure bliss and everyday contentment to redemptive grief; his palette corresponding to the emotional colouring, his brush strokes rapid, capturing the fleeting sense of existence and sometimes incorporating fragments of text. Meditating on Rizal’s poem, he turns to the idea of freedom and of its correspondence with truth, inflecting his interpretation with a distinct Christian morality. The artist personifies Rizal as a preacher

figure, whose message about a lost Eden as relevant today for all as when it was first spoken. Therefore, through accessing the transcendental, the artist explores the transcultural and transnational significance of the poem.

Ryan Villamael's *Liwayway* (Tagalog: dawn) also takes off from the words of Mi Ultimo Adios, somewhere midway through:

Let the moon with soft, gentle light me descry,
Let the **dawn** send forth its fleeting, brilliant light,
In murmurs grave allow the wind to sigh...

Liwayway can also be read as a reference to the Philippines, known as the land of the morning, reiterated in its national anthem (English version) since it is one of the first nations west of the International Date Line with dawn arriving on its shores earlier than most other nations. Hardly discernible with a pale paper cutting of the word against light background, shaped as another white flag of sorts, or a blowing horn or trumpet which makes a loud sound, it is both like an alarm to wake you up to a new *liwayway*, and a permanent state of in-betweenness. *Hope almost lost but present, both appearing*

and disappearing without resolution, or a vision at the edge of sight and blindness. With meticulous craft technique, Villamael mines local folklore and mythology, with another work, *Asta*, being a takeoff from the local story about "Juan Tamad" who waits for the guava fruit on the tree to fall directly in his mouth while lying down and doing nothing. The two laughing cartoon images are friars while *carabaos*, Philippine symbols of diligence, end up kneeling in the composition. The artist thereby connects religion, colonialism, cultural values and habits together and comments on their reign over positive survival instincts and progressive mentality. Another work for the show involves a giant formation that reminds one of apocalyptic smoke or cloud formations, the sublimity of the subject matter interestingly acquiring a decorative, folksy quality that transforms a powerful, formless darkness into something rather tactile and cheerful.²

Upside Down View

The chaotic, disruptive excesses of the capitalist mode of production are usually hidden in our landscape. In the realm of the visible, we tend to associate their dysfunctions with our imaginations and experiences of

the contrastive and (what may appear to our eyes as) dystopic cityscapes of Bangkok, Jakarta or Manila. Artists in Metro Manila themselves dig into nightmarish imagery and social/cultural bad dreams of a world already ended but still not coming to an end. The days are perceived as an endless re-staging of the aftermaths of colonialism, war and dictatorship; the underlying psyche of deep inferiority complexes, self-abuse and inner passivity rich territory to mine.

Here, we turn our attention to two younger painters in this show, namely Robert Langenegger and Maria Jeona Zoleta. Langenegger's figurative paintings often play on the idea of Eden, the unspoiled tropical landscape that actually harbours grossly violent histories, or unfold narratives about abuse and lost innocence. His approach can luxuriate in the viscosity of paint and a gaudy, muddy mix

² The work is entitled The Big Cb: we learn from Wikipedia that Cb is an abbreviation for cumulonimbus, "a dense towering vertical cloud associated with thunderstorms and atmospheric instability, forming from water vapour carried by powerful upward air currents. Cumulonimbus may form alone, in clusters, or along cold front squall lines. They may produce lightning and other dangerous severe weather, such as gusts and hail."

of colours, while the twists of forms delineate the bawdy and the comic, having been introduced to the art of freehand figuration and painting at a young age through the practices of Romeo Lee, l'enfant terrible of painting in the Manila art scene, and underground animator Rox Lee. Langenegger's work, however, fundamentally touches upon a dark, twisted core brewing from the religious guilt and psychic leftovers of colonialism, corruption and neglect. Repressed traumas resurface as dystopic scenarios and robust brushstrokes form deformed, noxious characters that exert their power especially over the domestic realm.

The paintings of Maria Jeona Zoleta display yet another approach towards working, where a particular guise is assumed, apparently for the sheer fun of it. Still, the girly role-playing conjuncts with issues about gender and beauty. Saccharine prettiness becomes more than a bit distorted and almost outrageous; an avenue towards freeing oneself and one's artistic practice from schematic confines. The artist plays on the paradoxical co-existence of alienation and empowerment, revealing the deep ambivalences of a contemporary female subject of choice and consumerism. Using glitter, pastel colours and

super-thin washes, Zoleta covers the territories of the sexual, the domestic and the virtual, especially where they overlap. Her practice perhaps signify efforts at disengaging and dislodging oneself from certain structures and experiences of the personal, the collective and the historical.

In her paintings, MM Yu blends a nostalgia for the modernist emphasis on surface and the physical properties of paint with a contemporary sensibility in colours and campy decorative sense drawn from her local environment, the latter which she cultivates with her photographic practice. Her photography captures things around her physical body as subject-matter and can be organized into archives of friends in the art community, stray dogs, religious statuettes, provision stores, exposed electrical wiring and more, and is intimately tied to her movement through the streets of Manila. It allows us to somewhat enact the visual intensity in the everyday landscape of the city and locate the 'unexpected beauty' and 'accidental artist' around us. *Standstill*, a selection of photographs for the show from an inventory of 2000–12, lay out a stupendous perspective of Manila at the interstices of decay and life, loss and gain, rubbish and art. The frequency and randomness of these

encounters creates a feel for the possibilities of living out one's sense of imagination travelling within a landscape that is often numbed in highly organized and efficient surroundings.

Stirring up dormant imaginations with trash material is one of the crucial strategems of Paul Mondok's work. His witty and surprising assemblages have the quality of a creative flash of mental lightning and also tap on a sort of 'common man's humour' to ground their temperament. Materially-speaking, they are characterized by easy portability, a certain arbitrariness and ordinariness, and a simple, almost child-like way of stacking things together. In the show, he features a fiberglass gold-coloured hand picked up from the streets (now complete with band-aid around a finger) that creeps up to grasp at a box of heart-shaped supermarket chocolates branded "Dreams". A working shirt and tie denote an executive-type, but the body has dematerialized – a tragic-pathetic state indeed! *Slow Bull & Weasel Tail* is an older work that uses cheap, second-hand, disused objects scoured from the street markets of Quiapo and elsewhere to conjure up unlikely narratives when juxtaposed together. In *These Weeks Scatter Like Seconds*, the artist combines fa-

miliar material from the detritus of urban construction with the subject of elemental lightning, giving rise not to an integrated object, but a phenomenon that is one and the same time comic/grave, banal/regenerative, destructive/constructive, gritty/transcendent.

Roving through the treasure troves of cosmic mysticism, African sculptures and Philippine kitsch, Louie Cordero pulls together a nostalgic and nonsensical trip of fancy from the body to space, from local commercial cultures to artistic avant-gardes. Perhaps here is reminiscent of the paintings of Philippine modern abstractionist HR Ocampo, and perhaps there, the French pointillists of the late 19th century, or the cubist takes on African art, or the mechanical compositions of Fernand Léger – or some altered, acid state of their legacies and in combination! Fidelity to history or authenticity and accuracy of the image has secondary importance. Rather, the painting builds on the power of evocation and juxtaposes resonances to agitate the imagination and stimulate a life of the mind that can tunnel into its hidden recesses. Its angle towards the local and authentic experiences are artistic and personal, played out in colouring, symbolism, organic

forms invoking the body, and an attitude of homage and humour. There is a distinct sense of an almost schizophrenic subjectivity enabled by the internet age and marked by mad, colliding cultures. Under Cordero's rather insatiable image-crunching eye, these cultures of interest become both highly individualistic and highly common, ringing in a certain ordinariness as well as otherworldliness of what we recognise. Crucially, this strange sense of the familiar is not just related to one place, but to many places that we know, or that we have lost.

Ghosting

Luis Santos, in contrast, explores the possibilities of the detailed and detached photo-realistic mode for investigating issues related to memory and identity. The skulls of humans and animals that he paints do not just look like they belong to a biology lab, but also have the quality of having been unearthed, dug out from beneath the ground – approximating archaeological finds. They speak of their own traumatic histories, for instance, the indents on the skulls, which marks left are perceptible but the realities of which remain out of reach. In his portraits of friends, relatives and mentors in the art com-

munity, he meditates upon the in-between state of existence, catching the subject 'between moments'. They touch a nerve about the profound anxiety to capture time and also the failure of fixing and possessing it. At the heart of looking at every image is the functioning of recollection and projection, and Santos' work resists the comfortable progress of this viewing process and the objecthood of the person he paints. The sense of distinctiveness of the person portrayed remains elusive rather than empowered, the painting questioning the ability of images to deliver the promise of identity.

The quiet sensibility of Jacob Lindo's work latches onto a strategy of veiling and unveiling to illuminate on the surprising essence of forms and the (in) authenticity of meaning. Also a sculptor, Lindo created clay statue heads in the vein of classical Roman sculptures and some other amorphous clay forms. Photographing them then collaging their monochrome prints together, he makes various combinations of slow, thoughtful forms that are able to comment on aspects of the tensive relation between old ideals and new approaches, lost utopias and contemporary attempts to recover them. Again, the functioning of identity and

01 *Untitled (Gold Hand)*, 2013 Paul Mondok

memory are ambiguous in these works, since both appear to be copies and appropriations of some sort – a ‘pseudo-remembrance’ or ‘pseudo-classical’ – and aesthetic legacies or legacies of the image become pliable, mutable and living things in the hands of the artist.

Victor Balanon applies his accomplished charcoal drawing and brushwork towards creating a series of black and white pictures entitled *Dreams of the Nameless Hundred* that meditates on the moving image and the nature of memory. He reenacts scenes from the history of cinema, isolating iconic frames that have the quality of anticipation; and when viewing in a series, streams past as slow motion dream sequences. Balanon’s images are often about looking. Sometimes, the human figures in his work stare straight out at us, as if seeing something in our reality that we cannot see. With their backs turned towards us, they stare out into a great beyond, or a space-time warp that exists outside of or in spite of the physical space-time represented by the movie scene and person(s) in the image, yet sharing its reality – a parallel reality. In front of its gaze, Balanon inserts an object that often exists in real life as contrasted to the fictional world created by the movies, but objects with a status akin to

the unwieldy term of ‘futuristic anachronisms’ in our real world. *Dreams XXXVI & XXXVII* is a diptych and feature scenes from two movies by great Russian director Tarkovsky, namely *Nostalghia* (Nostalgia, 1983) and *Zerkalo* (Mirror, 1975). In the bigger piece, the main character of the film pauses in the last moments before death, after walking across a drained pool with a lit candle in a culmination of a 9-minute long shot. He has been told to do so by an ex-intern of an asylum who believes that a successful attempt would save the world. In Balanon’s work, instead of an iron staircase, the man leans against the Russian sputnik satellite launched in 1957 that precipitated the space race, with his figure, the candle and other surrounding objects mirrored or doubled along more than one plane. In the smaller drawing, it is 1935 in the autobiographical film *Zerkalo* about the director’s memories as a child of his depressed mother and an absent father. Here, the mother at a window ledge of their house looks down at Alexander Rodchenko’s 1920 diminished hanging sculpture, almost but perhaps not nearly touching it. The textured realistic modes thicken the timber of time and enhance the virtual realities within Balanon’s diptych, pulling forth intuitive responses to these fantastic futuristic forms

of the past rather than intellectual responses to history and culture.

Repositories of places and times. Hauntings and dreams. Distances between comfort and reality. Discontinuous spaces and epochs. Evoking opposite sensations and opposite states. Nostalgic futurism. The process of returning through internalization, of attempting to return to where we wish to be.

In the context of alienation from or imminent anxiety over the links between nation, artistic identity and personal experience, the artists in the exhibition imply that locality in an age of mobility continues to be important, although it is shown to operate very differently today. They illuminate on why we make art today and what sort of art is fun, necessary or motivational to make now. In the exhibition, they point towards and map something beyond to be accessed that is vast and myriad, connecting the here with the there or the elsewhere. And just maybe, their particularity of place(s) would activate a vertex contacting our sense of selves, home, country, time and history, collapsing and restructuring our yearnings for utopia and characterisations of dystopia. For through the mirror, we not only see ourselves, but recognize ourselves through how others see.



01/02 *Untitled (Eclipse)*, 2013 Video still, Video duration: 13min20sec

01

COCOY LUMBO

Born 1977



Cocoy Lumbao is a visual artist whose works continue to revolve around the properties of video as a tool for image-making, and the possibilities of conveying a new language within. Employing the different nuances innate to the medium and exploring the mutability of its form that resides within its own technological condition, Lumbao achieves the finality of his work either through the manipulation or the fabrication of an image/idea with his single-channel works, and the very nature of how it can be projected onto a surface with his multi-media installations. As a graduate of Film in the University of the Philippines, Lumbao also studied Art History and Art Theory from the UP College of Fine Arts

which prompted him to search for the moving image's own doctrine as objects for meditation, while turning away from the discipline found in film as a stage for communicating a spectacle.

His works have been shown in different galleries in the Philippines, including Metropolitan Museum's permanent exhibition. *Philippine Contemporary*, as well as overseas in Korea and Hong Kong among others, and has been part of *Move on Asia's* travelling exhibition.

02



GARY ROSS PASTRANA

Born 1977

Gary-Ross Pastrana is a prominent conceptual artist also actively engaged in curation. At once committed and resistant to the object and its attachments, he dissects things into units, then reconstitutes these into a similar entity but now existing on a parallel register. A seminal work, *Collapsible Stream*, has been reassembled in various times and locations including Singapore and Hong Kong in the past years. First conceived for the 2008 Busan Biennale in Korea, Pastrana airmailed a boat from Japan during his artist residency to Korea by sawing it into pieces, with instructions to reconstruct it on site. He is also known for his sculptural installations and collages which are approached

as exercises in composition and design thinking. This relates to the process of rearranging information, and like the objects 'created' by the artist, involves breaking things apart and reassembling them into different 'wholes'.

Pastrana's sparse, minimal works have been described as visual haikus. Retaining a strong poetic sensibility, they reveal the metaphysical substance of things while transforming the properties of material. From working in a design workshop in the day, he draws connections between modes of thinking, design and art-making in recent work. Pastrana graduated from the University of the Philippines, Fine Arts, in 2001. He is co-founder of Future Prospects, an artist-run space, in 2005, and a recipient of the Cultural Center of the Philippines 13 Artists Award in 2006. Recent participations of note include *Thrice Upon a Time*, Singapore Art Museum, 2009, Aichi Triennial in Japan, 2010, and *The Ungovernables*, New Museum, New York, 2012.

01 *White Flag*, 2012/2013 Inkjet print on fine art paper mounted on aluminum panel (Old white t-shirts of the artist, cut-up and sewn to make the Philippine flag, hoisted over a balcony in Bangkok on a floor mop) 56.8 x 91.4cm, Editions of 3

01



- 01 *Portrait of a man no 2*, 2012 Print and acrylic on paper 48 x 63.5cm
 02 *A Nice, Harmless Man (Redux 1)*, 2013 Collage 50 x 64.8cm
 03 *A Nice, Harmless Man (Redux 2)*, 2013 Collage 50 x 64.8cm
 04 *A Nice, Harmless Man (Redux 3)*, 2013 Collage 50 x 64.8cm

01

JACOB LINDO

Born 1985

Jacob Lindo works in drawing, collage and sculpture. While pursuing his degree at Far Eastern University (Philippines), Fine Arts, majoring in advertising, he has been shortlisted in the finals of the Shell National Students' Art Competition in both oil painting and sculpture categories. He has participated in group exhibitions in Manila since his graduation in 2010 and has also had five solo exhibitions to-date. He is drawn to things that feed his curiosity like obscure movies and thought-provoking pieces of literature. In the medium of collage, he achieves striking compositions with fragmentary shapes, fluid lines and vague objects by virtue of their mutability when combined, rather than from

startling juxtaposition. Form and content interweave to produce persistently quiet works in monochromatic registers. The interchange between his mediums and their associated formal strategies is agile and intelligent. Sculpture becomes wall-bound, drawing becomes material for collage, and collage acquires the thinking and formal capabilities of drawing as well as potential for sculptural experiments.









01 *Strange Victory, Strange Defeat* 2013 Acrylic on Canvas,
152.4 x 152.4cm

LOUIE CORDERO

Born 1978

After graduating in 2001 from the University of the Philippines, Fine Arts, Louie Cordero became a core member of the painting collective *Surrounded by Water* and an artist-in-residence with the artist-run initiative *Big Sky Mind*. His work explored imagery and narratives at the nexus of Philippine Catholicism, politics, mass culture, mining the collective consciousness of the Pinoy everyman with a humorous edge. He won the Grand Prize (Painting), 8th Annual Freeman Foundation Vermont Studio Centre in 2002-3. In 2005, he co-founded Future Prospects alternative art space. He is the creator of *Nardong Tae*, the underground comics of cult status in the Philippines.

Fascinated with colonial-era leftovers and kitschy outsider aesthetics, acrylic has become Cordero's medium of choice in painting since 2005 as he turned towards the super-flat aesthetics of spray-painted Philippine jeepneys and other waning commercial art forms. He received the Cultural Centre of the Philippines 13 Artists Awards in 2006. Solo exhibitions overseas include *DELUBYO* (Giant Robot, Los Angeles, 2008), *Soft Death* (Osage, Hong Kong and Singapore, 2009) and *Sacred Bones* (Jonathan Levine gallery, New York, 2010). The recent years display an intensity in the bricolage-method of image construction that take us on a thrill ride through unbridled imaginations and rerouted libidos, coupled with awkward rendering and visionary courage. His work has been included in *World of Painting*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Australia, 2008; *Coffee, Cigarettes and Pad Thai*, Eslite Gallery, Taipei, 2008; *Open House*, Singapore Biennale 2011; 14th Jakarta Biennale, 2011; and *PANORAMA*, Singapore Art Museum, 2012.

01







01 *Untitled (Figure) 012*, 2013 Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 91.4cm

LUIS SANTOS

Born 1985

Luis Santos experiments with the photorealistic painting as specimen, one that can quietly creep into human consciousness to unnerve and unsettle. Amongst his repeated subject matter is that of skulls, both human and animal. These he reproduces with scientific accuracy against wooden panels or a monochrome background from models of skulls, relating the real-life medical dissection process with the methodical building up of illusion in painting, thereby exploring death, meaning and the essence of existence in certain ambivalent, metaphysical directions. Santos has been exhibiting in solo shows in the Philippines since 2010, the first named *Modular/Variations* zooming in on traumatized

human skulls that bear marks of illness or injury. In his recent one-man show in Manila, *Then It Happened (2012)*, ten portraits of art world friends, mentors and relatives surround the viewer. While their dress stands out in clear depiction, their faces are blurry, paradoxically frozen in a whirl of movement. The community of people depicted familiar enough to many viewers, but standing apart in their strangeness and elusiveness as neither corpse nor ghost.

01



01



MARIA JEONA ZOLETA

Born 1989

Young artist Maria Jeona Zoleta graduated from the University of the Philippines, Fine Art, in 2011 and already has more than a handful of solo shows under her belt, with experience exhibiting in group shows in Bangkok, Hong Kong, New York. She was nominated for the 2011 Ateneo Art Awards for her solo exhibition *Tricky, Sexy, Sodomy*, or *The Case of Attention Seeking Whores* in Manila.

Although Zoleta's work assumes the appearance of fun-play, to an extent, it can be said to take up a self-conscious, rebellious positioning among a fresh set of female artists emerging onto the scene, both (co-)curating and participating in exhibitions such as *Fishnet Strangling Shemale Acupuncture Bitchfest* or *The Y2k Babes*. The artist means

02

to provoke, to overwhelm with an excess of girly gestures and underwhelm with the lack of serious meaning, to embody a current sensibility of the Revolution-Girl-Style-Now aesthetic. Masculinity is simply disregarded in this blend of sugary kitsch and in-your-face abjection (like icing spiked with speed spelling out 'shit'), where girlhood is presented as trickster and muse, with drives at turns coyly and coarsely sexual.



01 *Manila Grand Prix*, 2012 Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4cm

02 *On winter passing glaciers*, 2012 Oil on canvas, 45.72 x 61cm

03 *Little brown fucker turns blue*, 2012 Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 61cm

04 *Cooking Show*, 2012 Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 183cm

03



04





01 *Preacher*, 2012 Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9cm

MARK ANDY GARCIA

Born 1984

The anti-trend, painterly style of Mark Andy Garcia serve to impart emotional honesty to paintings that operate like entries in journals. His various one-man shows since 2008 have detailed his life as an overseas contract worker in Saudi Arabia, laid bare his emotional anguish over the passing of his father, and operated as keepsakes of memories of his daily life.

These bring out various intense transformative experiences and also more ordinary, blissful moments. His approach towards painting has something of a child-like sincerity to it, charged with an undercurrent of religious intensity that churns both his content and brushwork, whether for lighter or darker autobiographical periods, and to portray joy or despair. Garcia

graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Advertising) from the Technological University of The Philippines, Manila, in 2005. He is also the recipient of many awards such as the Grand Prize for Art Petron, the National Student Art Competition (Watercolor Category) and the Juror's Choice Award of Excellence, Philippine Art Awards National.

01



MM YU

Born 1978

Almost never found without her camera slung around her neck, MM Yu has built an extensive photographic archive of the accidental urban environment of Manila. These detail people, objects and places that communicate the world surrounding her. She frames enchanting scenes out of overlooked and chaotic subject matter, and random relations between disparate things through her ability to discern resonances in color, pattern and whimsical features. Her drip paintings are process-oriented and quote modernist abstraction, but they possess a pop appeal and exuberance, their changing variables supplying guilt-free ocular pleasures. Physical gravity being integral to the process, they seem to

encourage grounding the visual experience with associations to the real world.

Yu graduated from the University of Philippines, Fine Arts in 2001. She has had numerous solo shows within Manila and also at the Galerie Zimmerman Kratochwill, Austria, 2011. Select group exhibitions include *Beyond Frame*, aUTS Gallery, Sydney, 2008; *No Soul For Sale*, Green Papaya Art Projects, Tate Modern, 2010; Chongqing Youth Art Biennale, Art Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, 2011; and *Bastards of Misinterpretation*, at Freies Museum, Berlin, 2010, and Queens Museum of Art, New York, 2012. She received the Ateneo Art Gallery Common Room Bandung Residency Grant in 2007 and the Cultural Center of the Philippines 13 Artists Award in 2009. She was also a finalist in the Sovereign Art Prize in 2010 and was shortlisted for the Ateneo Art awards in 2011.

01 *Untitled*, 2012 Enamel on canvas, 121.92 x 152.4cm

02 *Standstill*, 2012 2000–2012 Lambda prints, Dimensions variable

01











9



01 *Untitled*, 2013 Oil on canvas, 213.4 x 152.4cm

NONA GARCIA

Born 1978

Nona Garcia continues to be one of the few artists who employ painting as a planar surface to present foremost – a conceptual premise – while continuing to be one of the most skilful working today who are rendering their subjects in photo-realistic manner. Through her palette and abstraction/manipulation of phenomenon, Garcia's pictures undermine both our view of reality and the nature of painting itself, and initiate the complex interplay between emotion and objectivity. They also dwell on subjects both common and catastrophic from corrugated metal roofing to car wreckages, somehow abandoned or in ruins, or that elaborate on the nature of identity.

See-Saw (2000) marked the beginnings of the possibilities Garcia found in answering questions posed about painting's role in contemporary art while studying at the University of the Philippines, Fine Arts, which went on to garner the Philip Morris Asean Art Awards Grand Prize. This a diptych of one part photorealistic painting of an object wrapped in cloth, and the other part a x-rayed image of a chainsaw within. She has gone on to exhibit both in Manila and abroad including in cities such as Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Beijing and Milan. She also participated in the 3rd Fukuoka Triennale (2005) and the Prague Biennale (2009), and was among the recipients of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines 13 Artists Award in 2003, and her work is held by important collections such as those of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the Singapore Art Museum.

01







- 01 *These Weeks Scatter Like Seconds*, 2012 Aluminium sheet and cement, Variable dimensions
 02 *Untitled (Gold Hand)*, 2013 Shirt, tie, chocolates, fibreglass, paint, plaster Variable dimensions
 03 *Slow Bull And Weasel Tail*, 2012 Hairy fabric, exercise ball, rubber mouse, umbrella, rubber feet, masks, gems, 45 x 65 x 55cm (approx.)

PAUL MONDOK

Born 1978

The makeshift and quizzical works of Paul Mondok often have their anomalies augmented within the space of exhibition, charging them with a sense of anticipation. His sculptural assemblages are developed intuitively and imaginatively, from objects and situations that the artist comes across in daily life without much deliberate intent, from which are sensed meanings both personal and inconsequential; and by playfully combining things, more broadly evoke the absurdities and contradictions of what we define as reality. His recent two-man show at Mo_Space, Manila (2012), suggested keywords to his practice that include “Peculiar Equations”, “Totally Unlikely Narratives”, “As-if-landed-in-the-place-

it-is-in-presently”, perhaps thereby making “Burrows to The Unknown”.

Mondok earned a Bachelor degree in Fine Arts, the University of the Philippines. He has been exhibiting since 1998 in alternative art spaces (Big Sky Mind, Future Prospects, Green Papaya Art Projects) and other exhibition spaces that ponder contemporary art practice and formats. Selected group shows include “The Topology of Signs” (Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1999), “Shoot Me: Photography Now” (Mo_Space, 2007) and “Room 307: Inkling, Gut Feel and Hunch” (National Museum, 2008). His works have also been featured in venues such as The Philippine Center, New York, and Osage Kwun Tong, Hong Kong.









01 *Nobel Prize for Painting Winner (2nd runner up)*, 2012
Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 121.9cm

ROBERT LANGENEGGER

Born 1983

Known for his vulgar depictions of social life, Robert Langenegger's paintings are loaded with a kind of psychological violence reflective of the social deformities of his home city, Manila, which he perceives. The crass, the lewd, the gross and other hard aspects find a home on his canvases – the artist's comic-style treatment, dark humour and fearless honesty establishing a temperament hospitable to their existence where otherwise they would be concealed. Langenegger's work reveals a profound detachment to, even contempt for, acceptable appearances and conventional codes of conduct. Its gaze is equalizing in nature and cuts across human-made hierarchies to expose hypocrisies. Not

simply proselytizing about morality's end, its pursuit is to visually encompass the often brutal, horrific, unspeakable truths about ourselves, within which may still enfold a mangled beauty or redemptive intensity. Langenegger started exhibiting at the alternative art spaces *Big Sky Mind* (2003) and *Future Prospects* (2005), and studied Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines in Diliman in 2004–5. He has had numerous solo shows in Manila since 2006, and also in Paris (2009) and Graz, Austria (2011). He has participated in group shows in Freies Museum, Berlin and Queens Museum of Art, New York, as well as in Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Sydney, and was a finalist in the 2008 Sovereign Asian Art Prize. He was also awarded the Cultural Centre of the Philippines 13 Artists Award in 2013.

01



01 *Liwayway*, 2010 Acid-free paper, 39.4 x 8.3cm

02 *Asta*, 2010 Acid-free paper, 54.6 x 78.7cm

03 *The Big Cb*, 2012 Felt, 127.1 x 180.4cm

RYAN VILLAMAEAL

Born 1987

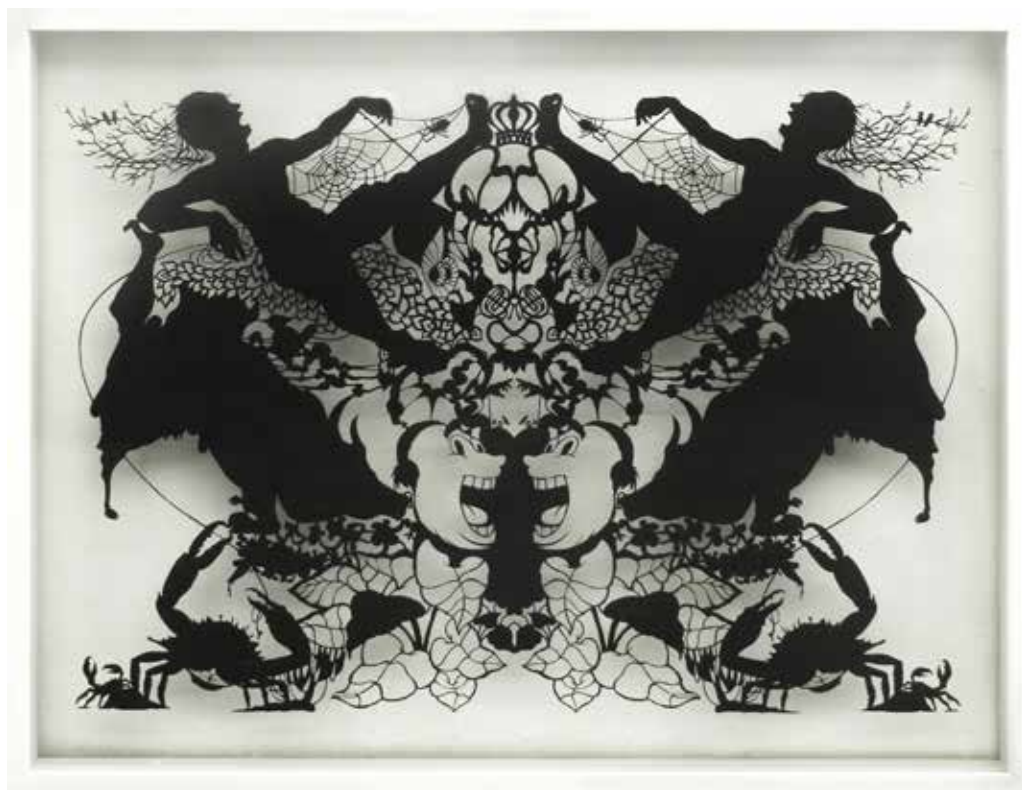
One of the few artists of his generation to have abstained from the more liberal modes of art expression to resort to the more deliberate handiwork found in cut paper, Ryan Villamael's method follows the decorative nature innate to his medium of choice. The province Laguna where the artist hails from is famed for the craft of paper cutting that originated from the Spanish era. However, from Villamael's intricately latticed constructions emerge images that defy the ornamental patchwork found in the provincial craft. It instead becomes a treatise of a unique vision that encompasses both the inner and outer conditions occupying the psyche, from the oblique complexity of imagined organisms to the outright effects of living in a convoluted city.

A graduate of the University of the Philippines, Fine Art in 2009, Villamael has shown both locally and abroad, including in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. He has staged four solo exhibitions to-date. He persists in sustaining a discipline that progresses in handicraft skills, maintaining a primary interest in the conceptual significance of craft in the process of creating contemporary art, and continues to look out for possibilities of how his works can still evolve under this light.

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02







01 *Dream of the nameless hundred IX*, 2012

Pen, brush, India ink, correction fluid on canvas, 50.8 x 66cm

02 *Dream of the nameless hundred X*, 2012

Pen, brush, India ink, correction fluid on canvas, 50.8 x 66cm

03 *Dream of the nameless hundred XXXVI*, 2013

Ink and acrylic on canvas paper, 91.4 x 121.9cm

04 *Dream of the nameless hundred XXXVII*, 2013

Ink and acrylic on canvas paper, 50 x 65cm

01

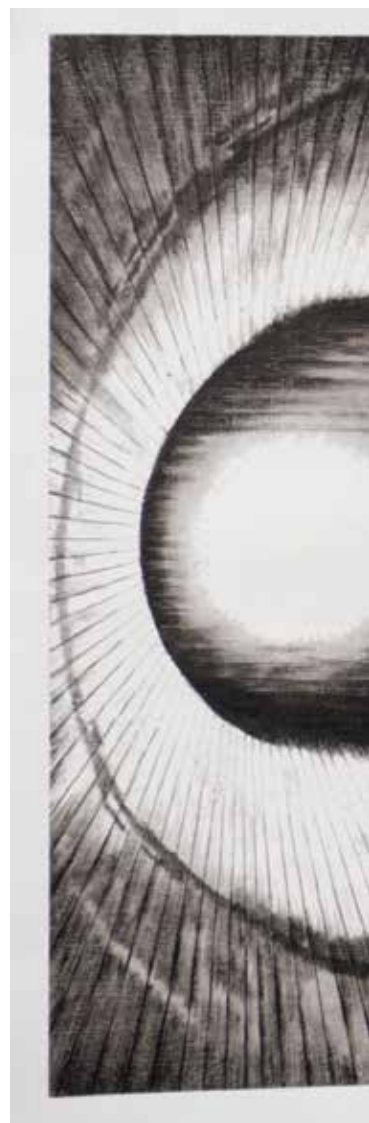
VICTOR BALANON

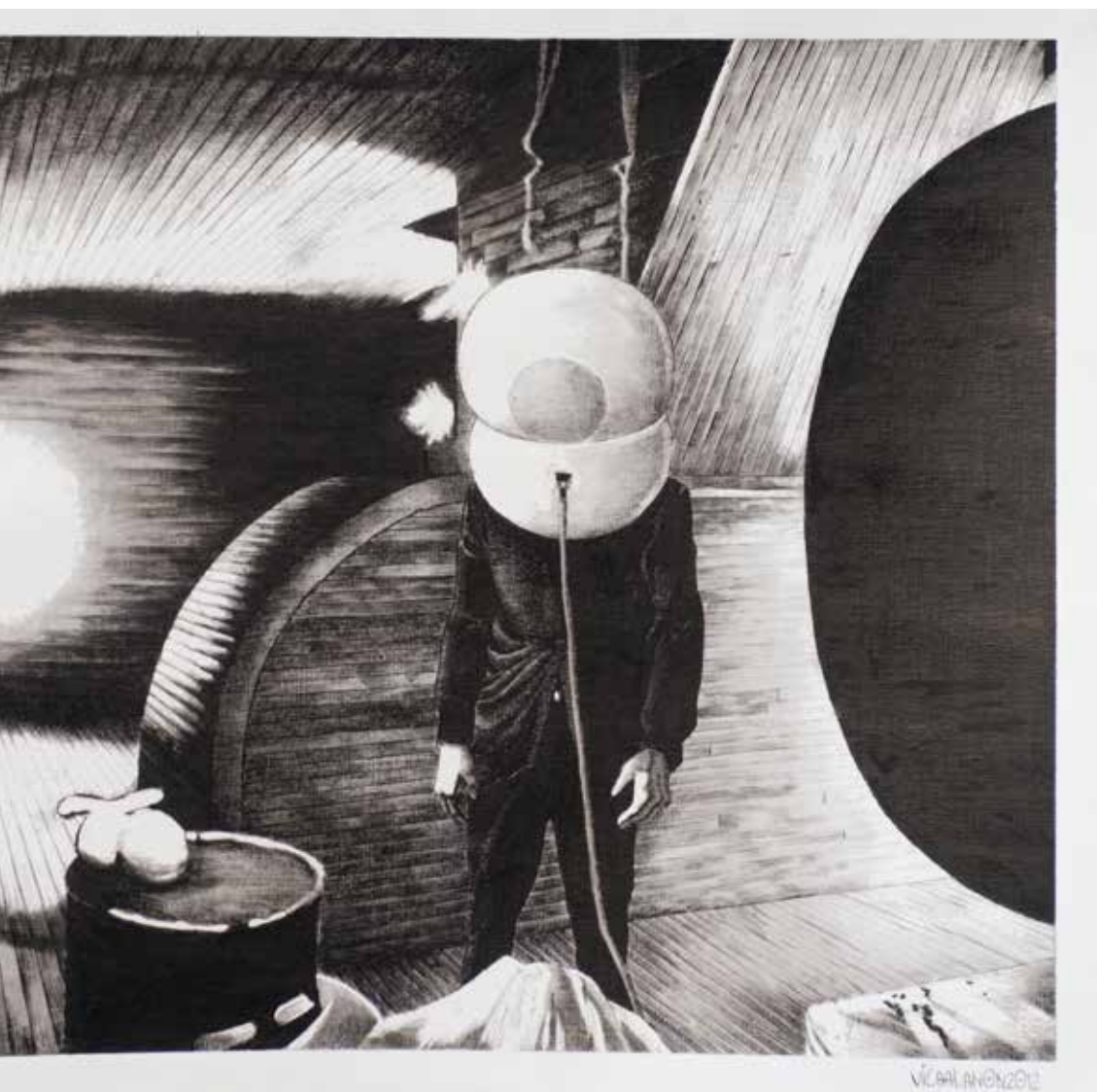
Born 1972

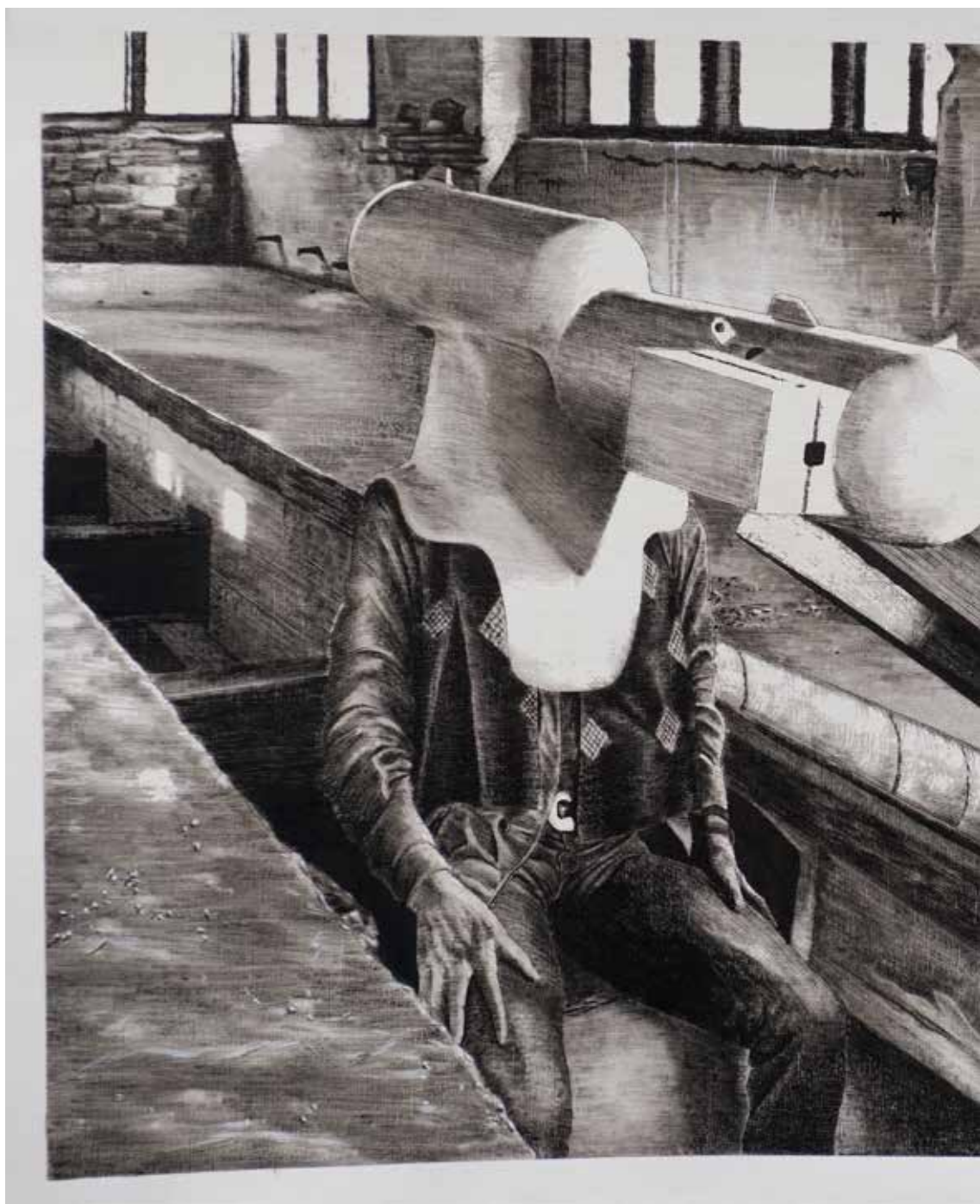
Recently embarking on full-time art practice, Victor Balanon began working as an illustrator creating artworks for film, independent comics and an underground music label. He later studied film and animation at the Mowelfund Film Institute in Manila, producing two animated short films as a result. During this time he also created a self-published comic-book anthology and started working on his serialized pen and ink drawings.

A self-taught artist, he was invited to be a part of the seminal late-90's art collective *Surrounded By Water*, where some of the more prominent contemporary artists of today working in the Metro-Manila area have begun their practice.

He has had various solo and group shows ever since, including prominent showings in overseas group exhibitions in Hong Kong, San Francisco, Singapore and Tokyo, while still engaged in his day job as a (hand-drawn) key animator. He was also a participating artist in the 14th Jakarta Biennale in 2011 and his works have also been collected by the Singapore Art Museum. His ongoing and long-term significant bodies of work include a large-scale sequence of murals, as well as the detailed brush and ink series *Dreams of Nameless Hundred* which open up scenes from cinematic history to modernist imaginations, anxieties and failures, hence creating a stream of anachronistic images for contemporary times.

















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