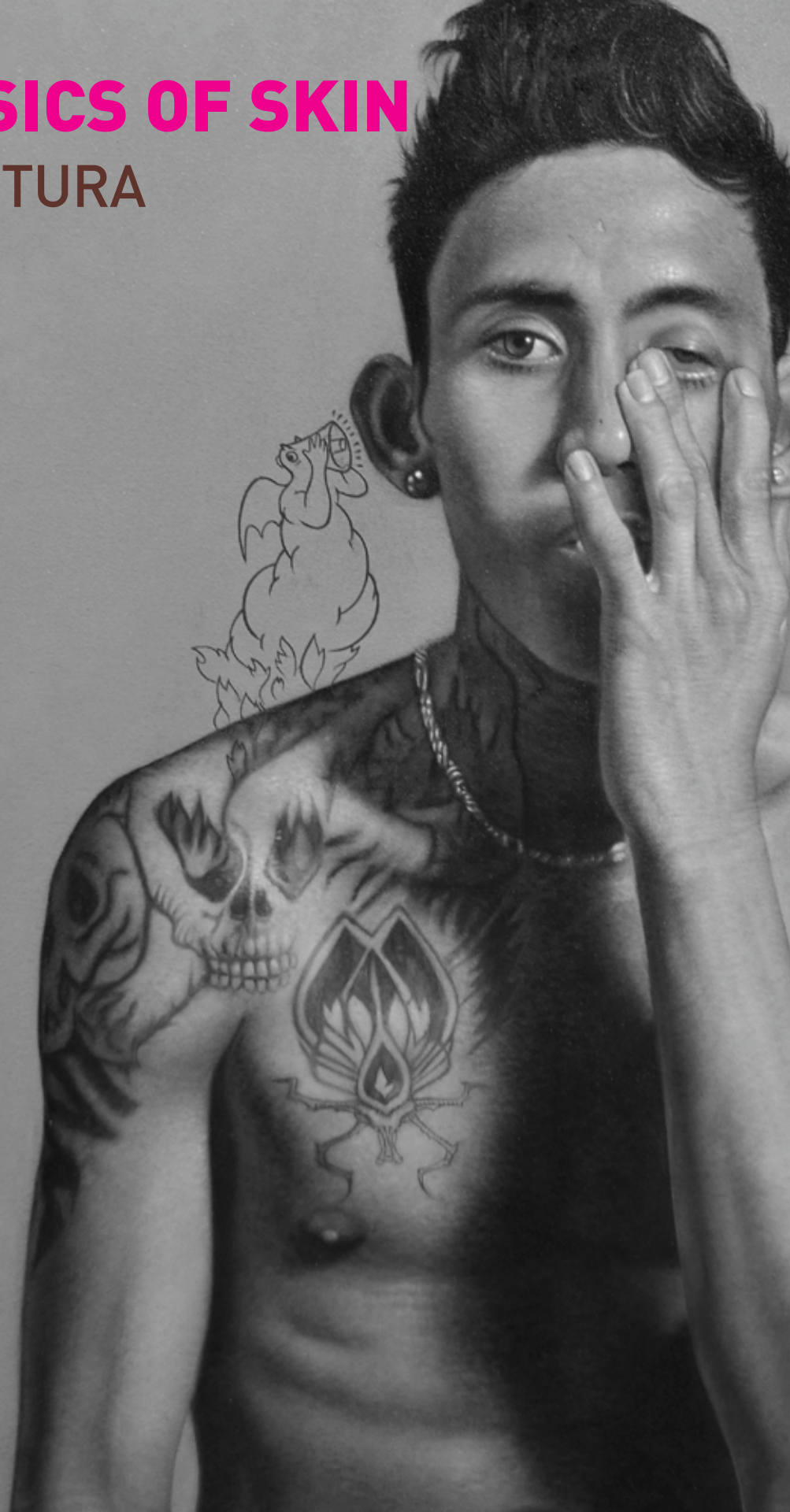


METAPHYSICS OF SKIN

RONALD VENTURA



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TYLER ROLLINS
FINE ART

FORWARD

TYLER ROLLINS

Tyler Rollins Fine Art is pleased to present the first solo exhibition for Ronald Ventura in the United States. One of the most acclaimed contemporary artists from the Philippines, Ventura has garnered significant international attention in recent years. He now ranks among the leading younger artists in Southeast Asia.

Entitled *Metaphysics of Skin*, the exhibition features a new series of paintings, some large in scale, along with sculptures and works on paper. It marks his first showing since his major solo exhibition at the NUS Museum in Singapore, *Mapping the Corporeal*, in 2008. While the Singapore show explored the inner mechanics of the body, Ventura’s new works take inspiration from the human skin itself.

Ventura views skin as an expressive surface – written on with tattoos, concealed under layers of imagery, or exploding outwards to reveal an inner world of fantasy and conflict. Making ample use of the bravura techniques that he is known for, Ventura combines images and styles ranging from hyperrealism to cartoons and graffiti. The paintings have a complex layering that creates unexpected juxtapositions of images and moods.

Ventura takes this layering process as a metaphor for the multifaceted national identity of the Philippines. Over the centuries, the profound influences of various occupying powers — Spain, Japan, and the United States — along with the underlying indigenous culture, have produced a complex and at times uneasy sense of identity. Ventura explores this historic and psychic phenomenon through a dialogue of images evoking East and West, high and low, old and young — seen, for example, in allusions to Old Master paintings or Japanese and American cartoons. He draws our attention to the “second skin” of cultural signifiers that each person carries with him, however unwittingly.

Metaphysics of Skin is a compelling and provocative statement about contemporary life from one of the Philippines’ most dynamic visual artists.

ADVENTURES IN SKINNY-DIPPING

IGAN D'BAYAN

Ronald Ventura's latest suite of works for Tyler Rollins Fine Art, entitled *Metaphysics of Skin*, deals mostly with how present-day reality has become this baffling multi-layered beast, something that straddles human consciousness with its multiple coverings. The aesthetics, politics, metaphysics of layers. Skin as metaphor. Skin and its transcendental dimensions, far from its literal meaning as "the external covering or integument of an animal body." Heavy meanings. Even heavier images.

The artist explains that his goal is to juxtapose images: whether they be hyper-realistic, or something recruited from art history, such as intricate drawings by, say, Dürer or Da Vinci; or whether they be line drawings, or something regurgitated from some animated Disney or Loony Tunes or fairy-tale nightmare. Ventura says, "The images are all about identity — whether assimilated into a greater whole, or lost totally." Identity is a theme explored incessantly by contemporary artists in the Philippines, since Filipinos — or at least those Pinoys who are aware of history and the delicious fictions that pass for "history" — are burdened by a colonial past. (Centuries under the Spaniards, decades under the American and Japanese occupation. Who are we? And where are we going? And all that jazz.)

All throughout his career, Ronald Ventura has always approached the empty canvas with an inquiring mind. Born in 1973, he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Major in Painting degree at the royal and pontifical University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila in 1993. His first solo exhibition, *All Souls Day*, in 2001, attracted attention for his "magnificent nudes, ivory-skinned with rich tones from dark grays and sepias to luminous whites, in a setting of urban decay — unusual images that signaled a renewed engagement in gender issues in art as well as offering an allegorical critique of the conditions of men and women in our times."¹

From then on, he has participated in numerous solo as well as group exhibitions, including the Asian International Art Exhibition (AIAE) at Fukuoka Art Museum in 2004 and the International Biennial Print and Drawing Exhibit in Taipei in 1999. He received a prestigious studio residency grant in Sydney, Australia from the Ateneo Art Gallery in 2005 and was one of the Cultural Center of the Philippines' 13 Artists Awardees in 2003. Through the years he has created an enthralling oeuvre. He has drawn the distinction between "illusions and boundaries," journeyed "under the rainbow" for hidden colors and meanings, as well as explored "dialogue boxes" and "dead-end images" in various exhibitions.

¹ Alice Guillermo, curatorial statement, *Human Study*, The Cross Art Projects, Sydney, Australia, 2005.

His landmark 2005 show, entitled *Human Study*, at the Art Center in Metro Manila featured paintings and sculptures that “refer to the contemporary hell in which humans live: soldiers in perpetual warfare, commodification and religious emotionalism. What gives his work its power is its virtuoso style, derived from the classical tradition but revealing a dark underbelly.”² He “mapped out the corporeal” in his 2008 show at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum, laying the “groundwork for an investigation of the commodification of the human body, paranoia and religious consciousness in modern societies.”³

No matter the visual twists and turns of his opuses, every exhibit is an outgrowth of the preceding one. Like a bizarrely twisted yet productive plant. A Ventura flytrap that out-eats mediocre artists for dinner. Every image is a take-off point for the next. All are nocturnal preludes.

Ventura explains, “In these paintings for the Tyler Rollins show, everything overlaps — three-dimensional images with caricatures, color with black and white, fashion with philosophy, cartoons with art history, G.I. Joe with tattoo iconography, East with West, etc.”

The paintings still show this contemporary artist’s technical prowess in graphite drawing, shading and other drafting sorceries, just as in past shows in the Philippines and abroad. Colors (and playful ones at that), however, play a more defined role in the proceedings — maybe an outgrowth of his current fixations with all things pop.

Ventura is also exhibiting small sculptures that are part of the *Zoomanities* series at Tyler Rollins. This battalion of mutant-men assemblages wages war on preconceived notions of “what sculpture is and what sculpture shouldn’t be.” Like a cross between Rodin’s poetic bronzes and Todd McFarlane’s Twisted Fairy Tales action figures.

The *Zoomanities* sculptures (in fiberglass, fiberglass-resin, plastic, metal, silver, bronze; most of them hand-painted) include a gas-masked figure with wings, humans with animal heads or TV-set helmets, punk rockers, tattooed freaks, among other beasts of burden — a combination of sculptures, casts of toys, dolls, saint figurines, whatever the artist could get his hands on.

² *Ibid.*

³ Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, curatorial statement, *Mapping the Corporeal*, NUS Museum, Singapore, 2008.

“I put them together automatically, not consciously,” says Ventura, who thought of mixing religious icons and cartoon characters in coming up with his own “creatures of discomfort.”

The artist noticed how animals are used in defining moral conduct. The title of the series was inspired in part by the Cirque du Soleil production in Las Vegas, which is a play on the words “zoo” and “humanity.” But if the Cirque show is about sensuality and animal magnetism (and about “natural beauty and acceptance of differences”), Ventura’s *Zoomanities* are more existential, more confrontational, and more of an inquiry on how men have stereotyped other men by using beastly metaphors.

He explains, “If you’re scared, you’re ‘chicken,’ or if you’re bad, you’re a ‘black sheep.’ If a person behaves badly, somebody would tell that person, ‘*Hayop ka* (You’re an animal)!’ Why is that? What I did in *Zoomanities* was to fiddle with those images handed down from generation to generation. Blue rhinoceros figurines are displayed by the Chinese for protection against robbery and accidents, so I purposely painted mine black to turn everything on its head.”

The artist takes a jab at gender wars in one painting, revisiting the Filipino mythology of “Malakas” (the Strong) and “Maganda” (the Beautiful). In other works on canvas, he has depicted the magenta revolution of emo-rock fashion, reinterpreted the mother figure as a woman with a tattoo of a map of the Philippines, and deconstructed self-portraiture by portraying himself with a mushroom cloud “silently exploding” in his head, with the cavalcade of Bambi, Thumper, Chip (or is it Dale?) and other characters on a peaceful plain reminiscent of the cover of the Penguin edition of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* showing a philosopher ruminating over civilization and its various discontents.

Ronald Ventura is one discontented artist, always seeking the perfect form (or forms) for the inexpressible. And the art world is a much better (and beautifully stranger) place because of this.

Igan D’Bayan is a writer and visual artist based in Manila.



POP!

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
96 X 72 IN.



SECOND SKIN

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
84 X 60 IN.



MOTHER'S MARK

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
48 X 36 IN.



ECHO

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
48 X 36 IN.



RAINBOW FOR NO REASON

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
48 X 36 IN.



MAGENTA

2009
OIL ON CANVAS
48 X 36 IN.



ZOOMANITIES

2008
FIBERGLASS RESIN WITH ACRYLIC POLYURETHANE PAINT
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE (APPROXIMATELY 8 - 16 IN.)





RONALD VENTURA
SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

1993
B.F.A. Painting, University of Sto. Tomas, Manila.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2008
Mapping The Corporeal, Museum of the National University of Singapore.
Zoomanities, The Art Center Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

2007
Illusions & Boundaries, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines.
Under The Rainbow, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
Antipode: The Human Side, Artist Residency, Artesan, Singapore.

2006
Cross Encounters, Ateneo Art Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines.
Dialogue Box, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

2005
Human Study, The Cross Art Projects, Sydney, Australia.
Morph, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
Recent Works, Big & Small Art Co. Art Fair, Singapore.
Human Study, The Art Center Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

2004
Dead-End Images, The Art Center Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
Black Caricature, Big & Small Art Co., Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
Contrived Desires, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

2003
X-Squared, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

2002
Visual Defects, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
Body, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines.

2001
The Other Side, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines.

2000
Innerscapes, West Gallery Megamall, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
All Souls Day, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2005
Cross Encounters: The 2005 Ateneo Art Awards Exhibition, Power Plant Mall Rockwell Center, Makati City, Philippines.

2004
Korea Asian Art Festival, Inza Plaza, Seoul, South Korea.
19th Asian International Art Exhibition, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan.

2003
13 Artists Awards Exhibition, Main Gallery, Bulwagang Juan Luna, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Pasay City, Philippines.

2002
Philip Morris Asean Art Awards, Nusa Dua, Bali Indonesia.
Soft: Tresacidos, Art Center, SM Cebu, Philippines.

2001
The 8th Annual Filipino-American Arts Exposition, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, California.
Tresacidos: Small Works, The Enterprise Center, Makati City, Philippines.

2000
Guhit I, II & III, Ayala Museum III; Museum Espana; Jorge B. Vargas Museum, University of Philippines.
Mad About Lithographs, Ayala Museum, Makati City, Philippines.

1999
Philip Morris Asean Art Exhibit, Hanoi, Vietnam.
9th International Biennial Print and Drawing Exhibit, Taipei, Taiwan.

1998
1st Lithograph Competition Exhibition, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines.

AWARDS

2008

9th OITA Asian Sculpture Exhibition Open Competition, Award of Excellence, Japan.

2007

Guest Residence Artists, Artesan Gallery + Studio, Singapore.

2005

Ateneo Art Awards, Ateneo Art Gallery, Studio Residency Grant, Sydney Australia.

2003

13 Artists Award, Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards, Jurors' Choice Award.

2001

Art Manila, Artist of the Year.

2000

Philip Morris Philippines Art Awards, Finalist.

Metrobank Art Competition, Honorable Mention.

Taiwan International Biennale Print and Drawing Competition, Finalist.

1999

Winsor & Newton Painting Competition, Jurors' Choice Award.

Taiwan International Biennale Print and Drawing Competition, Finalist.

1998

Diwa Ng Sining Drawing Category, Second Place.

Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards, Jurors' Choice Award.

National Commission For Culture & Arts and Pap Lithograph Competition, First Place.

1993

Art Association of the Philippines Art Competition, Jurors' Choice Award.

1992

Metrobank Art Competition, Jurors' Choice Award.

1990

Shell National Students Art Competition, First Place.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1993-2001

Art Instructor at the Department of Fine Arts, University of Sto. Tomas, Manila, Philippines.