

AROUND TOWN WITH KOAN JEFF BAYSA

Supraconscious Appropriations by Koan Jeff Baysa, M.D.

Metaphysics of Skin

Tyler Rollins Fine Art
529 WEST 20 STREET, 10W,
NEW YORK, NY 10011
September 17, 2009 - October 31, 2009



The arc of Manila artist Ronald Ventura’s rocketing career tracks a steep slope over the time axis. His first solo exhibition in the United States, *Metaphysics of Skin*, at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York, explores skin as a topological landscape with its contested sites of personal, sexual, and national identity. Appropriations from pop culture abound, but the works appear fresh due to the skill by which the disparate images are assembled in relationship to each other, something that the artist terms “visual defects.”

The artist draws largely from American, Japanese, and Filipino cultures, from sources as disparate as Disney characters, old masters drawings, and *manga otaku*. Ventura was born a year after the beginning of martial law in the Philippines and was eight years old when it ended in 1981. His works reflect a post-colonial, post-Marcos sensibility. He says that his joy in painting lies in being able to construct a narrative from multiple and disparate parts: different places, different time periods, both real and imagined, all portrayed on one surface. It is an implosion, rather than an explosion, of ideas, one that is distinctly introspective rather than extroverted.

Frequently working from mockups in collage before completing the works in paint, Ventura derives most of his imagery through research in old books and magazines. Only 10% or less, he says, is found on the internet. Born to a father who was a chef and a mother who was a teacher, he additionally attributes his mother’s cousin to fostering his creative interests. He was enrolled in art classes at 5 years of age and remembers being encouraged to paint and draw, and to place technique over content. This structured teaching took him to Manila galleries and museums, and he recalls viewing original master works by Manansala, Luna, and Hidalgo. This is the artist’s first visit to the U.S. Citing the works of Duchamp and Magritte as sources of inspiration, he saw his first Magritte in person when visiting MoMA the week prior to his New York opening.

He paints from the realm of the personal, the social, and the sacred, fascinated by the oscillating distances between truths and mythologies . . . that which is “truth no longer.” He appropriates images that are free and accessible to everyone, turning them into a “living dialogue . . . that extend the possibilities of the image . . . combining seriousness with humor . . . changing the original intent,” i.e. visual contradictions, countercurrents to the apparent.

In the self-portrait *Pop* (2009) the artist, arms akimbo and with his back to us, places himself in the central field with his head disappearing into the looming darkly transparent skull floating against a pastoral landscape derived from a old book; dysmorphic and injured Disney-like cartoon characters cavort alongside a copy of George Stubb’s 1766 painting of a horse skeleton; images, including robots, toys, and machinery float like thoughts inside of the skull dwarfing the artist. His own drawings of a skewered headless human body and a grinning cartoon animal inhabit other areas of the large painting. It’s the artist contemplating the cosmology of his own orchestration. Here is the collapse of time and space, appropriation and imagination into one image interrogating identity that is characteristic of Ventura’s work.

In *Second Skin* (2009), the artist paints a shirtless young man wearing his t-shirt like a shroud, doo-rag, or the Veil of Veronica. Derived from the popular Filipino saying, “you’re like a t-shirt, always changing” Ventura gives a nod to the current commodification of tattoo culture exemplified by the ubiquitous brand *Don Ed Hardy* by *Christian Audigier*. Along with the “visual defects” for which he is known, the artist has drawn three cartoon characters triangulating the masqueraded head in a game of baseball.



Armed with his virtuosity and assembled hagiography, I eagerly await the next group of paintings for which the artist ordered the largest raw canvas sizes he could locate. I’m anticipating deeper explorations of identity with confounding appositions of mixed truths in immense proportions.

--Kóan Jeff Baysa

(*Images: Ronald Ventura, *Pop!*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 96” x 72”. Ronald Ventura, *Second Skin*, 2009, oil on canvas, 84” x 60”. Images courtesy of Tyler Rollins Fine Art.)

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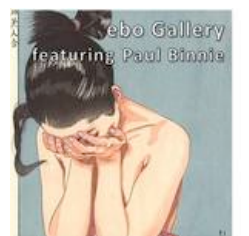
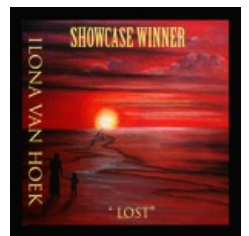
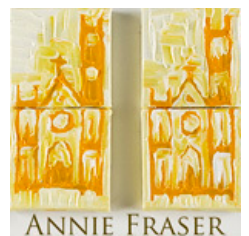
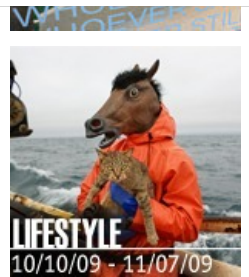
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