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WITHOUT WALLS: A tour of Philippine Paintings at the turn of the millennium

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Frontispiece: Pamela Yan-Santos, OBSERVE SILENCE, 2008, acrylic, collage & serigraphy on canvas, 61 x 76 cm
Dr. Toto Salgado collection

Page 6 : Mark Justiniani, ISLA, 2007, oil on canvas, 114 x 99 cm
Toddy & Mel Francisco collection

RONALD VENTURA (b. 1973)

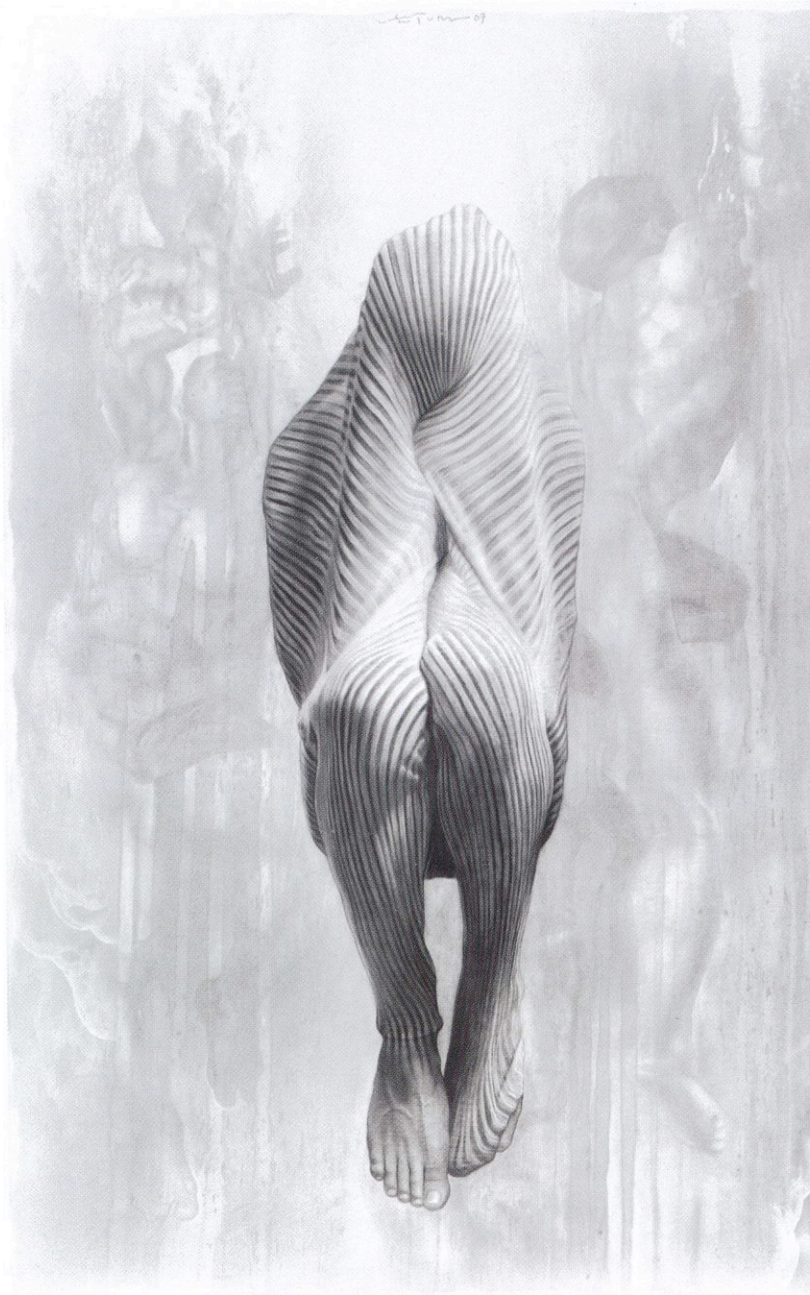
The senior among two painter brothers working in figurative art, Ronald Ventura is among those artists who steadily gained critical reception early on and were soon on their way to becoming masters of their craft. Winning the Grand Prize for the 1990 Shell National Students Art Competition before earning his degree in Painting at the University of Santo Tomas in 1993, Ventura chalked up a credible string of other awards, garnering major citations in competitions including those organized by the Art Association of the Philippines, Metrobank Foundation, Philip Morris, the Taiwan International Biennale and Winsor & Newton - all before unveiling his first one-man show in 2000.

It was Ventura's mastery at creating marble-skinned nudes that propelled him to the full attention of the Philippine art scene by 2001. Exquisitely modelled and almost palpable in their realism, Ventura's nudes go beyond being mere objects for display or demonstration of technique. Bodily forms are signifiers of intersecting realities: sites of tensions, junctions for contradictions simmering beneath skin. In his 2007 work *Apocalyptic Cover*, for instance, Ventura's central figure - a body cocooned in a striped sheet - is not only a form captured by the contours where fabric and flesh meet, but also a signifier of apprehension against a hazy backdrop of the final day of reckoning, denoted by Renaissance tableaus in the background.

More critical reception to Ventura's works soon followed: he was chosen to be among the Cultural Center of the Philippines 13 Artists Awardees for 2003 and was the recipient of a studio residency grant to Sydney, Australia as part of the 2005 Ateneo Art Awards plum. Works from this period, such as *Insecured* and *National Animal*, attest to his merging of hauntingly pale bodies with sepia or rust-tinted backgrounds as well as his use of bestial symbolism. *Insecured* demonstrates the visual binaries that Ventura is capable of combining: from immaculately white compositions to distressed, almost carnal, surfaces. In the work *National Animal*, the headless figure of a male laborer pulling an invisible yoke recalls the form of the Philippine carabao - conveying the sentiment that hard labor is today's true beast of burden.

Ventura's numerous awards and collaboration with galleries have also gradually introduced his art to regional audiences in recent years. After first showing his works in Singapore in 2008, Ventura unfurled a debut solo show of paintings and sculptures in the United States in collaboration with Tyler Rollins Fine Art in 2009. A work from this exhibition, entitled *Second Skin* as well as a 2008 work *Funny Story*, demonstrates how Ventura's style has retained its sharp hyperrealism in portraying the human figure, yet now incorporating images from other visual influences: pop culture, cartoons and tattoos, graphics with bright candy colors. Ventura powerfully complements his monochromatic figures with colorful graphic embellishments, presenting the human form as a complex, evolving layer of mixed identities, histories, and signifiers. (LIT)


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Funny Songs

RONALD VENTURA 2008

