

“Yes, Sir/Ma’am! No, Sir/Ma’am! Right Away, Sir/Ma’am!”: Filipino painter Manuel Ocampo in New York – artist profile

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Manuel Ocampo returns to Tyler Rollins Fine Art for a fourth solo show, “Yes, Sir/Ma’am! No, Sir/Ma’am! Right Away, Sir/Ma’am!”.

Commenting on colonial expansion and (art) history’s most chaotic moments, the Filipino artist turns the New York gallery into a collaborative studio space. *Art Radar* profiles the painter on the occasion of his exhibition running until 14 April 2018.



Manuel Ocampo (with Gorka Mohamed, Roger Kleier, Irene Iré and title by Paolo Javier), 'Let's debrief & jockey for position under where you grin & bury it all', 2018, mixed media, 305 x 432 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Manuel Ocampo: eccentric iconoclast

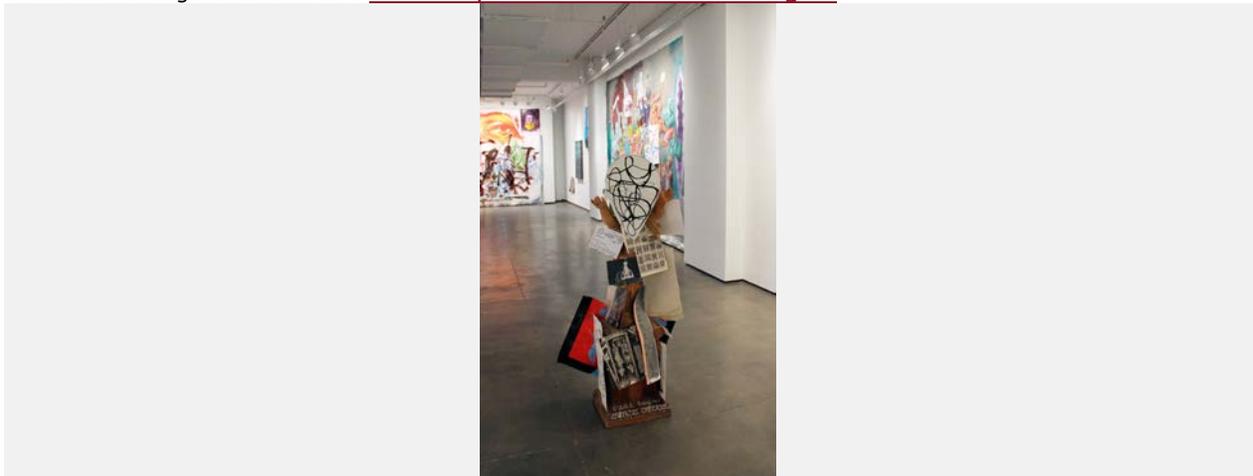
Manuel Ocampo has maintained a dynamic presence on the international art scene with a reputation for fearlessly tackling the taboos and cherished icons of art history and religion. Born in Manila, he moved to California in his early 20s, living first in Los Angeles from 1985 to 1994 and, then after a few years in Spain, settling in San Francisco between 1999-2005. By the early 1990s, his name was steadfastly recognised, shown by his invitations to participate in **Documenta IX** (1992) and the 1993 **Venice Biennale**. He was the youngest artist to participate in "**Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s**" at the **Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art**, in 1992, a seminal and, at times, controversial exhibition featuring artists like **Chris Burden**, **Paul McCarthy**, Charles Ray and Jim Shaw. From early in his career, Ocampo has sought solace in themes of alienation, dispossession, perversity, sex and violence that dominate the landscape and form disruptive undercurrents within communities. His paintings make powerful, often contested, claims about fluctuations in identity, and depict, often quite graphically, the physical and emotional wounds that cut deep into the body of contemporary society. With little regard to its aftereffects, Ocampo's early work translates visceral forces of colonialism, racism and violence into our contemporary era of doubt, instability and fictionalisation. The careful intermingling of concept and frenzied form set the stage for Ocampo's rapid success as an eccentric iconoclast.



Installation view from "Yes, Sir/Ma'am! No, Sir/Ma'am! Right Away, Sir/Ma'am!" From left to right: Manuel Ocampo (with Lazaro Juan), 'Carved in Stone', 2018, mixed media, 50 x 58.5 cm. Manuel Ocampo (with Gorka Mohamed, Jigger Cruz, and Irene Iré), 'Spanish Olive', 2018, mixed media, 106.5 x 76.5 cm. Manuel Ocampo (with Liwayway Ocampo and Ma. Jerissa Enriquez), 'Sunday Worship', 2018, mixed media, 108 x 73.5 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Ocampo's mixed media work frequently revisits and makes reference to the art historical canon of political allegorists like Daumier, Goya and Géricault. His dark, often disturbing paintings transform horror into a bizarre form of beauty, history into art history and purgatory into salvation. Beyond this, the manic energy on even his earliest canvases revels in its own obscurity and conceptual hauteur, notions which have followed him to his most recent collaborative forays at **Tyler Rollins Fine Art**.

In recent years, Ocampo's projects have featured more emotionally, even comically, charged motifs that evoke haunting visions and nightmares. He makes use of an eclectic array of quasi-religious, highly idiosyncratic icons featuring body parts, meat and cartoons alongside more traditional Catholic motifs. The process of artistic creation is a central concern, with many works making caustic commentaries on notions of inspiration, originality and the anxiety of artistic influence. The artist himself is frequently the subject of parody and self-mockery, sometimes being referred to as a **"buzzard, a kind of cultural scavenger"**.



Manuel Ocampo, 'Para Los Artistas Operados', 2017, wood and paper collage, 139 x 59 x 40 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Collaborative commentary

In **"Yes, Sir/Ma'am! No, Sir/Ma'am! Right Away, Sir/Ma'am!"**, Manuel Ocampo returns for his fourth solo exhibition at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York. The exhibition features large-scale paintings inspired in part by the

work of Theodor de Bry (1528–1598), known for his detailed and sometimes fanciful engravings of native American tribes and their brutal encounters with European colonialists. Ocampo melds scenes from these works with motifs taken from the ethically-impaired political cartoons drawn throughout the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). Through an examination of the conflict between the Eastern and Western worlds and the juxtaposition of historically antagonistic imagery, Ocampo explores the evolving role of visual art in colonial expansion. His mural paintings thus stand as both “complicit agents and as modes of resistance” and as mirrors that reflect themes of personal identity, language misinterpretation, (in)tolerance, migration and race.



Manuel Ocampo (with Daze, Jevijoe Vitug, Jigger Cruz, Gorka Mohamed, Irene Iré, Lazaro Juan and title by Paolo Javier), 'Why praise interracial, still a white man's facial', 2018, mixed media, 305 x 712 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

What makes Ocampo's ongoing solo stand out is its emphasis on collaboration, not only between materials, media and concepts, but also between other artists. Tyler Rollins has provided its gallery space as Ocampo's temporary studio, where ongoing works are shared with and accelerated by artists based in New York, Europe and the Philippines. Including Daze, **Jigger Cruz**, Irene Iré, Lazaro Juan, Gorka Mohamed, Todd Richmond, Roger Kleier, Paolo Javier and Jevijoe Vitug, Ocampo's gallery takeover is as much a critique of globalised isolation and elitist institutions as it is about inter-continental cooperation.



Manuel Ocampo (with Todd Richmond and Paz Tanjuaquio), 'The Dance of the Intestinal Mishap', 2018, installation, 244 x 250 x 245 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.



Installation view from Manuel Ocampo's "Yes, Sir/Ma'am! No, Sir/Ma'am! Right Away, Sir/Ma'am!". Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Part revelry, part memorial, part protest, Ocampo's mural entitled *Once told Emmy there isn't really a whole lot of racism in America anymore* borrows its imagery from an array of sources. The foreground is spattered with stern-faced lads who march behind a flag covered in appropriated imagery and advertisements from Mexico and the Philippines. The background portrays sculptural figures being led into the horizon by their winged leader. Overlooking the mural is a giant eye and the fierce gaze of a man marked by his yellow beard. Not unlike the images of gods, politicians or martyrs presented throughout art history, the chaotic painting emits a battle cry – not in celebration of progress, but in servitude to the watchful gaze of tradition.



Manuel Ocampo (with Daze, Jevijoe Vitug, Jigger Cruz, Irene Iré and title by Paolo Javier), 'Once told Emmy there isn't really a whole lot of racism in America anymore', 2018, mixed media, 305 x 546 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

History rears its face once more in Ocampo's collaborative mural called *La Herencia Canibal*. Reminiscent of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* or *The Gross Clinic* by Eakins, Ocampo's painting illustrates history's favoured (or forgotten) figures stepping through a portal to consume the flesh of the unfortunate soul left on the 'operating' table. As he amasses references in each of his collective paintings, the artist accrues ideas beyond his own, piling on layer after layer of associations. With a complexity recalling projects by the other "Helter Skelter" artists, Ocampo's relentless accumulations of ideas and gestural work stretches the notion of meaning in art. Further, Ocampo's practice is charged with the intricate politics that come not only from his history or background, but also from the contexts that he has occupied across time, with diverse individuals and through differing geographies. His acquaintance with other practitioners between the United States, Europe and the Philippines at

Tyler Rollins Fine Art is, thus, not one of that of an ingénue, but one which is well-informed and has a depth of understanding.



Manuel Ocampo (with Irene Iré), 'La Herencia Canibal', 2018, mixed media, 305 x 445 cm. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

After moving back to the Philippines in 2005, Ocampo has been primarily based in Manila where he remains an active proponent of and mentor in the local art scene. Inhabiting different spaces is, for him, an opportunity to breathe new life into works which already scream, growl and laugh in their unexpected liveliness. In conversation with [Dr. Karin Oen](#) on the tumultuous, multifaceted nature of his career, [Ocampo states](#):
For me a painting is something that goes beyond thought; it is an accumulator of thought, so it's always at the limits of language. It is like a catalogue of mark-making, of abstraction. [...] When I think about the limits of something, I think about the role of an explorer. I think of myself as being an explorer.

Megan Miller

Manuel Ocampo: Yes, Sir/Ma'am! No, Sir/Ma'am! Right Away, Sir/Ma'am! is on view from 1 March to 14 April 2018 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street, 10W New York, NY 10011.