

ATTRITIONS IN ASH

Patrick D. Flores

In this gathering of accomplished works, Mike Adrao revisits an important part of his artistic formation: talking about art and making things every day. He remembers putting down his thoughts where his hand was, and this would form the vein or impulse of his discipline. He also remembers the late Bobi Valenzuela, his mentor and an important curatorial figure in the years leading up to and after the political uprising in 1986, who had once posed the crucial existential question: Who is Mike Adrao? What is his story? Such a daunting proposition from a dogged counselor -- and we could almost hear Bobi intoning it: partly impish, partly grim, but always with the view to purge the angst from the artist and send him on his way to exploring the pressure points of his perturbations.

It must have been probably this toil of persistent drawing in light of persistent thinking, which began in the company of Elmer Borlongan and Roberto Feleo, that has brought Adrao here. As he himself puts it: "It was a simple exercise of sketching every day, usually from life and then

The works in this exhibition allude to this double take of completion and defacement. And this proves to be the basis on which Adrao primes his structure of intricacy, which in turn is the idiom through which he is able to critique the façade or veneer or carapace of appearances. It is at this point that he is able to build up a density of motif and figuration that finally becomes the woodwork, as it were, through which we discern the wickedness that lurks. His tropes of *sunog* (burn), *basag* (break), *lamat* (crack), and *agnas* (dissolution) draw our attention to the precarity of the drawing and the fragility of the social emergency. While it is robust and rigorous, it also signals attrition, a sense of withering. This is the tension that suffuses the project of Adrao, and if viewed in a particular relationship with social types like the macho, the feudal, and the woman, the sign system clarifies with vividness. The social fabric is fraying and behind the beauty of the intricacy is intricate defilement. The details of this picture are subtle. Bone, scale, capillary, thorn, nail, eye, hair, finger;



LAMAT FUEDAL (detail)



1

1 LAMAT FEUDAL
Charcoal on paper
72 x 60 in. / 182.88 x 152.4 cm.
2012

2 KAMACHO
Charcoal on paper
72 x 60 in. / 182.88 x 152.4 cm.
2011

3 ABUSO FEUDAL
Charcoal on paper
72 x 60 in. / 182.88 x 152.4 cm.
2012



2

expanded into thoughts and ideas. A visual diary that I continued and loved. The works are a product of this training." That he shared the same energy field with Borlongan and Feleo in this task of quotidian sketching is telling and surely formative, and not to mention, a privilege. Borlongan possesses one of the most astute graphic sensibilities in his generation and Feleo is a constant inspiration to artists who search for that critical contact between material and cultural meaning, between facture and well being. This likewise explains Adrao's relationship with the process of purging and his longing for healing; he gestures towards inscriptions on the surface that mar or disfigure at the same time that he intimates a coherence that is vulnerable to corruption. All this comes together in a kind of rigor and relentlessness that drafts the blueprint of a reflection on both the personal and social.



3

they are almost forensic in their rendering, offered up as fragments of evidence in the post-mortem of society's carcass. That said, this sight of decay is horrifyingly animate, in fact slithering like some slick creature, reptilian surely, holed up in lairs but always ready to face the prey and crush and devour.

A key element in this endeavor is the medium of charcoal that evinces a somber atmosphere, nearly ominous in fact, and furnishes the scene with urgency. It also demonstrates the artist's sense of control over a fragile material that is given to smearing. In the hands of Adrao, this interaction between the militancy of theme and the vulnerability of material is harnessed to generate haunting images. In his earlier work, we glean this tendency starkly. We, moreover, observe the influence of



SUNOG
Charcoal and pastel on paper
72 x 60 in. / 182.88 x 152.4 cm.
2012

the editorial cartoon in his forays, resonating with the searing and memorable oeuvre of Danilo Dalena and Jose Tence Ruiz in this sphere. But in juxtaposition with his most recent work and his current preoccupation, he is oftentimes torn between his talent for pattern and how to portray that pattern in graphically delicate and moving ways, on the one hand, and the compulsion to essay the figure, to make it appear decisively or even unerringly, and to cast it as signifying the social, on the other. This is not a convenient place to be in, though might in the end prove to be a fertile terrain for him to constantly recalibrate the positions and inevitably to craft an idiom that overcomes the charisma of both obsessions.

It might be productive to spin the idea at this point, as prompted by this venture of Adrao, that there is in Philippine contemporary art a pedagogical disposition. There is the desire always to teach an audience something and for that audience to learn a thing or two about what is wrong with the world and what needs to be done to change it. This comes in various forms. It could be in the manner of an investigation, an exposition of ills plaguing the polity. It could be about an ideology that is either mystified as ideal or unveiled as fraudulent. It could be about social types who are represented by unmistakable icons and then bashed nearly to death. It could be about the news of the day and the personalities of the hour and their horrid foibles, a litany of dark deeds that begs for commentary. However way this habit manifests with by turns wit, whimsy, and severity, there is a self-consciousness on the part of the artist to be in a state of awareness of the social and the political and that he or she is complicit in their production, that he or she is not a passive onlooker but rather an active agent of possible transformation. That images are catalysts of radical shifts in life ways is an oft-repeated aphorism and may in fact have become some kind of common sense for artists who believe that the only aesthetic with a future is one that is firmly rooted in the material condition. At the core of this is the pedagogy, the instance and instantiation of teaching, the unraveling of false consciousness, decolonization, and the primacy of social reality and its analysis. In this sense perhaps, Adrao is in the trenches. In this personal expurgation, this struggle with the slithering demons in his mind and heart, he struggles in the same spirit with the creeping decline of a society and those who assume ascendancy over others in the fullness of indignity. Hopefully, it is not irreversible -- unlike his talent to chronicle its falling apart and away.



SUNOG (detail)



PUNIT
Charcoal and pastel on paper
35 x 70 in. / 88.9 x 177.8 cm. (diptych)
2012



PUNIT (detail)



BASAG
Charcoal on paper
60 x 48 in. / 152.4 x 121.92 cm.
2012



AGNAS
Charcoal on paper
60 x 48 in. / 152.4 x 121.92 cm.
2012



REQUIEM
Charcoal on paper
21 x 72 in. / 53.34 x 182.88 cm.
2012

MIKE ADRAO

b. 1973

1994 to 1997 ■ College of Fine Arts Major in Studio Arts
University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 ■ DECOY, DECAY, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati, Philippines
- 2009 ■ "BEYOND RECOGNITION" FAMILIARITY AS A STRANGER IN OUR MIDST, Project Space Pilipinas, Mandaluyong City, Philippines

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 ■ SMALL WORLD, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati, Philippines
- 2011 ■ MONUMENTAL, Manila Contemporary (in cooperation with Tin-aw Art Gallery), Makati City, Philippines
IMAGINING IDENTITY: 100 FILIPINO SELF-PORTRAITS, Finale Art File, Makati City, Philippines
- 2010 ■ MANO MANO, with Iggy Rodriguez, Blanc Compound, Mandaluyong City, Philippines
SMOKESCREEN, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati City, Philippines
REFLECTIONS, Bupyung Arts Center, Incheon, Korea
- 2009 ■ PLASTIC SYNDROME, Art Space Plastic, Incheon, Korea
- 2008 ■ 2ND MATAHATI ARTRIANGLE, Soka Gakkai, Malaysia
- 2003 ■ URBANISASYON, Kulay Diwa Art Galleries, Paranaque City, Philippines
RECENT WORKS 4, Kulay Diwa Art Galleries, Paranaque City, Philippines
- 1999 ■ SONGS OF RENEWAL, Casa San Miguel, Zambales City, Philippines
- 1998 ■ X-PRINT, Vargas Museum, UP Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
CROSSROADS, Australian Center, Australian Embassy, Makati City, Philippines
- 1997 ■ VERSES, Discovery Series: Hiraya Gallery, Manila City, Philippines
BEYOND TENSIONS, UP Faculty Center, UP Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
NO KNOWN ADDRESS, UP Faculty Center, UP Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
- 1996 ■ MULA FILIBUSTERO HANGGANG KAY MARIMAR, Vargas Museum, UP Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
ANG DE LATANG PINOY: YES, THE FILIPINO CAN!, Hiraya Gallery, UN Avenue, Manila City, Philippines

ARTIST RESIDENCY

- 2009 ■ Artist-in-Residence, NEAR Dangsang, Seoul, Korea
- 2008 ■ Artist-in-Residence, Project Space Pilipinas, Mandaluyong City, Philippines



KAMACHO FEUDAL (detail)



ART GALLERY

Upper G/F, Somerset Olympia Makati
Makati Ave. corner Sto. Tomas St.
Makati City

GALLERY HOURS

Monday - Saturday, 10:00 am - 6:00 pm

CONTACT

+632 892 7522

www.tin-aw.com

© 2012 TIN-AW ART MANAGEMENT INC.

All rights reserved. No part of this catalogue may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior consent from the artist and publisher.

DECOY, DECAY

MIKE ADRAO



14 September - 5 October 2012