

is actually broken down, as it were, into sinuous line akin to the trace of flame or vapor or perhaps anything seething, incense of labor and land. It may also be translucent vein or sinew that form the resilient and the wretched human.

This current exhibition, however, takes us to another aspect of Alvarado's historical imagination, and this pertains to his constant craving to draw, to register the idiosyncrasies of face on small sheets of paper, rendered in ink and through a sense of line that is purposeful as it is persuasive. There is barely any color here, only lineament or silhouette, at once study and caricature, which is never to be mistaken for as sketch. This is a suite collected over the years, an assembly of visages in a time of "selfies," amassed through keen observation of people around him and in the routine of prosaic urban life. The drafting seems to be quick, assured, tonalities achieved through hatching and heavy shading of some parts. The angles are sharp, the faceting sometimes merciless. It might be worth relating this preponderance with the social types that he has essayed in his paintings. Guillermo calls them "emblematic portraits," the range of which include not only the "beautiful and the brave" but also "pimps and prostitutes, gangsters, spies, dirty old men, gossips"<sup>2</sup> as well as overseas workers, lackeys of imperialism, actors on the global stage, faithful of a persistent insurgency. In this foray, the artist tries to catch the sympathies of the evil, the innocent, the wishful, the misunderstood: the *naturaleza* and *habitus* of myriad personhood.

Alongside the paintings in the exhibition, which are vintage Alvarado in the most gripping way, these drawings home in on the intuition of the artist for the graphic in terms of stroke and sensibility across the two-dimensional media he chooses. And we leave the room of these images amazed by the absence of fatigue in the act of delineation. The sheer accretion of inspired inscriptions on any surface in the hands of the prolific artist tends to prove the point that it is in art that the new might alight, not in the mass media, which is thought to be the hothouse of the latest. The art theorist Boris Groys asserts that the "diversity of images circulating in the media is highly limited." He adds: "Indeed, in order to be effectively propagated and exploited in the commercial mass media, images need to be easily recognizable for the broad target audience, rendering mass media nearly tautological."<sup>3</sup>

The copious art of Nunelucio Alvarado challenges this tautology that masquerades as new, novel, never-ending. It foregrounds an open circuit, a kind of an ex-citation of the image of his world, the hulagway of his banwa, from the highly instrumentalized mediascape so that renewal, and not only repetition, could be grasped at hand. ©



MANGINGISDA  
Oil on canvas  
182.88 x 137.16 cm  
2000



RED ESPADING  
Oil on canvas  
180.34 x 152.4 cm  
2002

## NUNELUCIO ALVARADO

b. 1950

Studied Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines, Diliman  
Studied Advertising at La Consolacion College School of Architecture and Fine Arts, Bacolod City

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 = HULAGWAY, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati City
- 2012 = INSPIRASYON NI ALVARADO, Museo Iloilo, Iloilo City
- 2010 = HIMBIS, Gallery Anna, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong
- 2006 = OBRA MAESTRA, Galleri Graphitto, Robinson's Place, Iloilo City  
PALANGGA, Galerie Joaquin, San Juan
- 2005 = PASKO NI ALVARADO, Maribago Bluewater Resort, Mactan Cebu  
SIMPLE LIVING, Elizabeth Mall Art Gallery, Cebu City  
ALVARADO, Gallerie Andrea, Intramuros, Manila  
LONELY TABLE, Penguin Café, Malate, Manila  
BIRADA, Synaesthesia Art Gallery, Tacloban City, Leyte
- 2004 = DAILY BREAD, Hiraya Gallery, Ermita, Manila  
PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS, Bunga Art Gallery, Pabrik, Sagay City, Negros Occidental
- 2003 = KANSIAHA, Kulay Diwa Art Gallery, Sucat, Parañaque  
NAMI, L'Fisher Hotel, Bacolod City  
LOLOLOLA, West Gallery, Mandaluyong City  
ALVARADO AT LUNA-LUNA ART COLLECTIVE, Luna-Luna Art Collective, Cebu City
- 2002 = LUST, Big & Small Art Gallery, Mandaluyong City
- 2001 = FIELDTRIP, Hiraya Gallery, Ermita, Manila  
NAMIT-NAMIT, Galleria Duemila, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City
- 2000 = TAGIMATA, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Roxas Boulevard, Manila  
TAGIMATA, Atelier Frank & Lee, Emerald Hill Road, Singapore
- 1998 = PALAGPAT, Hiraya Gallery, Ermita, Manila
- 1997 = KATAHUM, Galleria Duemila, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City
- 1996 = SOLO SHOW, Mariyah Gallery, Dumaguete City
- 1994 = TIEMPO MUERTO, Galleria Duemila, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City  
ONE-MAN SHOW, West Gallery, SM Megamall, Mandaluyong City
- 1992 = WELCOME TO MY PARTY, Penguin Café Gallery, Malate, Manila  
ALVARADO NEGROS, Hotel Nikko Manila Garden, Makati City  
PIESTA : ART IN COMMON, Pabrik, Negros Occidental
- 1991 = BULANTE, Bulwagang Amorsolo (Small Gallery), Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila  
TIGBATAS, Museum of Ilo-ilo City  
PALANGGA, BAA Atelier, Bacolod City
- 1990 = GILOK, Art Gallery, University of the Philippines - Visayas, Ilo-ilo City
- 1988 = TWELFTH ONE-MAN SHOW, Art Association of Bacolod Gallery, Bacolod City  
THIRTEENTH ONE-MAN SHOW, CAP Art Center, Cebu City
- 1984 = KASIMANWA, Galleria Andrea, Intramuros, Manila
- 1983 = HALA-LUPAD, Galleria Juan Sebastian, Bacolod City
- 1982 = KAUPOD, Hiraya Gallery, Ermita, Manila
- 1981 = KABABAYEHAN SA UMA, Heritage Art Center, Quezon City
- 1980 = WELCOME TO YOUR NIGHTMARE, Manila Peninsula Hotel, Makati City
- 1979 = HAMPANG-HAMPANG LANG 'NI PERO TUOD TUOD, Sining Kamalig, Manila

COVER IMAGE: FREAKS (Series) detail, 3 x 7.62cm each, Mixed Media on Acid Free Paper, 2009-2013



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NUNELUCIO ALVARADO

HULAGWAY

12 JULY - 02 AUGUST 2013



2 Guillermo 2001, p. 65  
3 Groys, Boris. 2008. Art Power. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 17.

# THE ROOTS OF IMAGE

by Patrick D. Flores

How does an artist build up a visual vocabulary of social condition? How does he translate the sharp cleavages of asymmetry and the political feeling of restiveness? Over the years, Nunelucio Alvarado has patiently and intensely probed the material life of his province Negros, where sugar had once ruled the realm and the elite, the rent-seeking cacique, were ensconced as lords in dominion of their vast plantations beginning in the nineteenth century. The legacy of those years has been deep and iniquitous, and the artist who has seen much of the exceptional poverty and profligacy has not relented in bearing witness to the tenacity of class conflict as well as its perverse permutations in seemingly banal everyday life and the very structure of unimaginable violence. His native locus is Barangay Fabrica, in Sagay in Negros Occidental where his creative and political instincts had been sharpened, honed in Manila, and then finally wrought back in his hometown. These are his trenches, the ground on which he has engaged with ideologically aligned art in the seventies, performance, mural making, and the formation of communities of artists.

In this depiction in extremis and on a scale that is consistently confident, there is always in Alvarado's imagination the stamina of a suffering, surviving people, their agency always complicit in the decadence of power and the struggle against it, in both the folly of pretensions to higher stations in the hierarchy and the makeshift efforts of those who must outlive the destiny of a class society. Landlord and peasant, lumpen and proletariat inhabit this by turns surreal, macabre, grotesque, constricted universe, with no inch seemingly ceded to breathing space. Apparently, redemption lies elsewhere, only in rupture, and yet there seems to be no outside, too, as everything is imbricated within. As Alice Guillermo once wrote: "During the milling season, the behemoths of gray steel incessantly spew forth a white smoke with a residue that settles on the skin like the essence of molasses."<sup>1</sup> Bitter sugar becomes second skin, a tragic constitution difficult but necessary to shed amid plenty and pestilence.

Such stamina may well be cognate of the kindred energy that Alvarado possesses and expends in every work he offers. We discern in piece after piece a firm commitment to painting and its expressionist potential, be it in the robust figuration, the rigorous pattern, the fulsome sentiment of the characters of his hectic tableau, teeming with details of the wild. And surely, the chromatic atmosphere that is vivid, strident, unafraid. In the history of Philippine art, the artist contributes compellingly to the repertory of images of the stalwart Filipino and like the seminal modernist Carlos Francisco, Alvarado strongly casts this

<sup>1</sup> Guillermo, Alice G. 2001. *Image to Meaning: Essays on Philippine Art*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, p. 62.



LUGA TWERKA  
Oil on canvas  
182.88 x 137.6 cm  
2000



KARGA TAGPAS  
Oil on canvas  
180.34 x 152.4 cm  
2002



FREACKS (Series)  
Mixed Media on Acid Free Paper  
11.43 x 7.62 cm each, 1865 pieces  
2009-2013

personage through dense design, the narrative moving along like in a frieze, sustained by a monumental sensibility. That said, the context that surrounds the world of the *sakada* or the seasonal plantation worker is equally remarkable, implicating the changing environs and the various impulses that shape contemporary culture, and one that is not oblivious to ludic moments. Part of this contemporaneity is the reference to the ethnic idiom in the titles of the works, affording us a glimpse of the language at work in the knowing of the world. Supplementing this further is an evolving iconography consisting of intriguing signs like thorn, mango, heart, skull, crocodile, nail, cane that is spear that impales. All told, Alvarado configures an ecology of specters.

At the heart of this commentary is the ways by which the body, and by extension the body politic, is subjected to different forms of temptation as well as of discipline, from state-sponsored brutality to the feudal demands of religion to the corruption of the flesh. Then, there is death: *tiempo muerto* in the language of the local moral world of Negros, the interval between planting and milling, when toilers wait in abjection; and liberation as well through the intimation of Christ-like sacrifice and the brandishing of the hooked blade or the *espada* of the sometimes enigmatically veiled radical: hardened, gazing piercingly, stunted, rooted in the history of property and ceaseless crisis. The body's constitution can be ambiguous; while seemingly rock-hard, upon closer viewing, it