



LEE PAJE  
 Things You Don't Know Won't Hurt But It Might Just Kill You  
 Video, 11 minutes looped  
 2010



JOSÉ SANTOS III  
 Clouded  
 Oil on canvas and objects  
 Painting - 60 x 48 inches, Object - size variable  
 2010



MARK SALVATUS  
 Go Home  
 Mixed media on canvas, cement, chains, and duct tape  
 Variable dimensions, 2010



WESLEY VALENZUELA  
 Fragments  
 Mixed media  
 64.25 x 46.5 in., 2010



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**GALLERY HOURS**  
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## SMOKESCREEN

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MIKE ADRAO  
 DENNIS ATIENZA  
 ANTIPAS DELOTAVO  
 MARK JUSTINIANI  
 LEE PAJE  
 GOLDIE POBLADOR  
 MARK SALVATUS  
 JOSÉ SANTOS III  
 WESLEY VALENZUELA

JUNE 18 - JULY 7, 2010





BY PATRICK D. FLORES

# RIP OFF

It seems that the more desperate the times are, the higher hopes people have for change. Such calculus of despair and anticipation translates into an intense desire for images that intimate the possible turning away from a perceived past of catastrophe. This state of mind could only, however, open up "morbid signs" of further alienation, meaning that the greater aspiration for shifts, the greater the chances for them to be deformed and the greater chances for the deformation to be passed off as an alluring prospect.

In the recent political exercise, in which the binary logic of the past and future was locked in dubious moral terms, this was all too clear. And the reason for this well-laid deception to prevail and made to appear both "inevitable and imperative" was the erosion of the public sphere, the absence of a speculative consciousness that transcends rational, because normative, thought and the dominance of a perverse elite morality that condemns corruption vehemently but could never own up to the deeper injustice of class society. A milieu with a deplorable educational system, one of the worst in the world, a weak, if not compromised, intellectual class, and a fully instrumentalized mainstream mass media run by pseudo pundits and big business is key. From this proceeds an exceptional condition in which the vulgarity of politics equals the vulgarity of popular culture, and a spellbound audience disinclined to critique, primed as they are to believe in the survivalist mystification of media and the creative industry it sustains. One wonders which is more deprived: to steal hard-earned keep or to steal mentality?

The exhibition *Smokescreen* responds to this duplicity conjured by those who proclaim democracy in 2010 with the inquilino class and plantation history intact, an anachronism and an anathema difficult to imagine. After 112 years of professing to that term, we are faced with a slacker politician and a laggard nation at a time when the global press reports that Vietnam is the new China. Pretty bad for a people of so much talent.

The pieces in this project pierce the veil of this haze, this film or screen of myth-making that has gripped Filipinos and rendered them incapable of seeing through the designs of their prophets and those who stand to profit on their gospel. The artists spin various cognates of smokescreen: bogus, faux, caricature, mirage, fraud, doppelganger, hoax. They, therefore, inquire into the schemes of "art" itself. First, they revisit the ethical province of truth, of what "really" is obtaining in the world in which they are, in the history of their own making and that makes them in turn. Then, they grapple with the contentious constitution of artifice, how that complex truth is realized, its aesthetic facture investigated and defamiliarized. This facture is not inert, surely; it is charged ideologically, invested with various types of images to convey variations on the theme of reality. Thus, the technique of making, the ploy, is the valence that is subjected to analysis, and in this case, it is foregrounded as a ruse, or better still, a scam. Finally, they conceive of a scheme in which this dialectic plays out in the production of an object itself, which is to be called art and made to circulate in the market of commodities, contrived values, and the other wonders of art history.

Antipas Delotavo's beautifully wicked painting of a bouquet of flowers from newly elected politicians blooming at the jaws of a crocodile is emblematic, telling us, who are depicted as clueless creatures on a pavement of traps, that the day after the elections is the dawn of mendacity. Conversing with this mode is Mike Adrao's disintegrating portrait of potentates, the elegance of their finery giving way to the coarse skin of reptiles. Apparently, artists are keen on peeling the layers of adornment and fabrication to reveal what

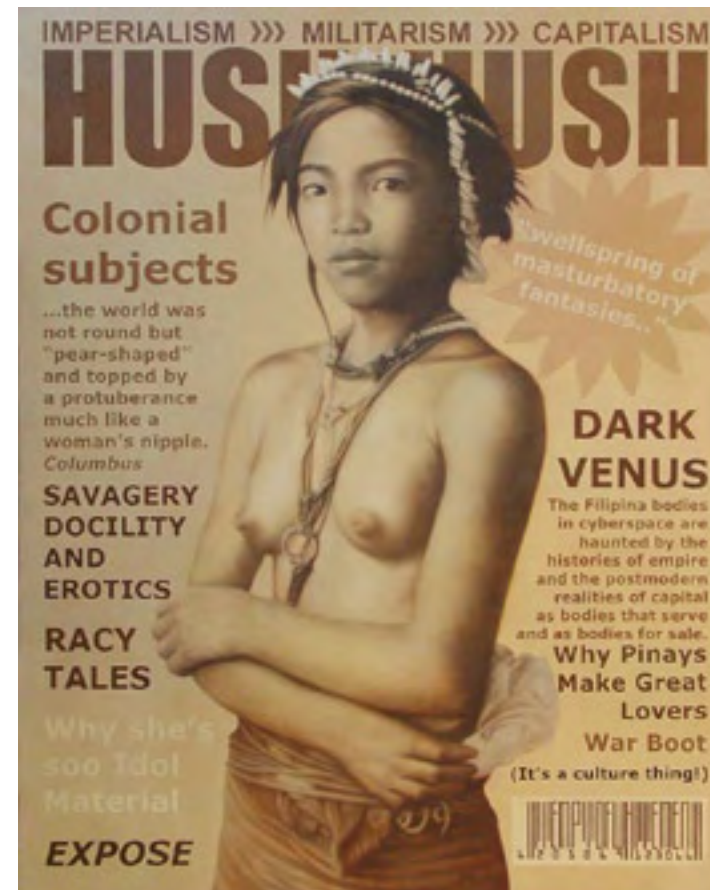
lies underneath, which happens to be a putrid core. And so, below the surface of charm of so-called "change," the show business of democracy, is the very fundamental structure that will never make it possible. Indeed, iconoclasm is merited when falsehood is enchanting, though not necessarily handsome.

This reflection on the "real" that is obscured by "reality" takes on different forms, wavering from either the quiet contemplation of painting or the hectic rhythm of graphic art and graffiti. José Santos III explores the allegorical potential of trompe l'oeil to address the theme of the exhibition and Wesley Valenzuela probes the plethora of images on violence and media to initiate a different discourse on trickery. For her part, Goldie Poblador creates tension between the fragility of glass and the felicity of perfume, on the one hand, and the metaphors of social condition in an installation of a scent sensorium in which the stench or odor of truth wafts, on the other: here, the reek of squalor and government mingle. To cross the gap between the painterly and the graphic, Dennis Atienza paints a magazine cover of an invented publication titled *Hush Hush*, with a half-naked ethnic woman on the cover, referred to as Dark Venus and fleshed out for her erotic, colonial, ethnographic, capitalist, and imperialist inscriptions. Such an exposure is nearly soft-porn to the degree that it is obscene in its reification of woman who is nation who is icon who is democracy.

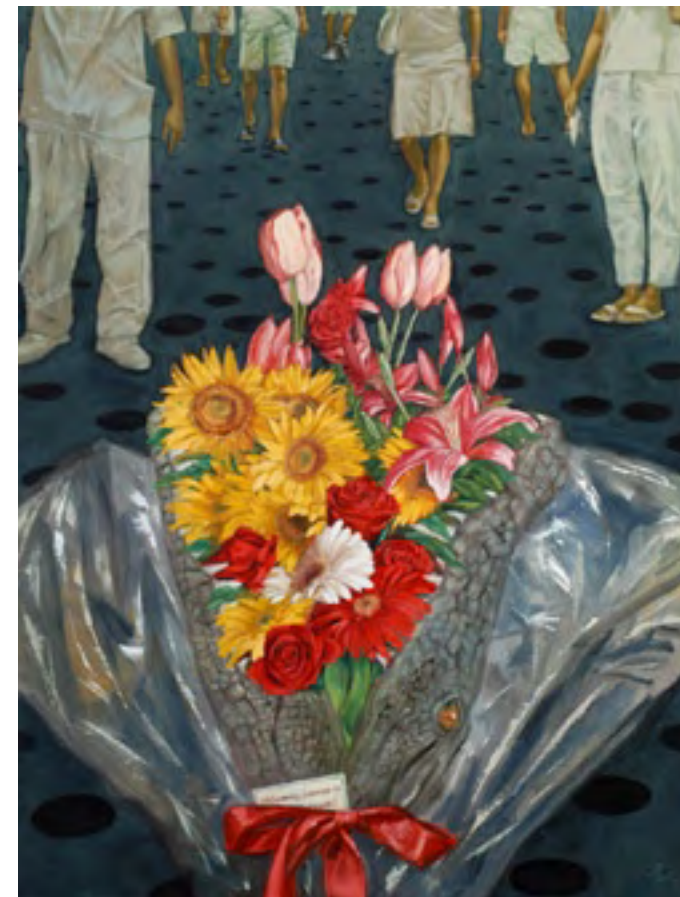
Finally, three works sow an ambience of the wider regime of this deceit and trace the blueprint of inequity on a larger scale or "cognitive mapping." Mark Justiniani references the atomic bomb as a reverberation or echo of empire and the fallout that smothers the globe; through mirrors and scratch board, he is able to interpret the ruin of civilization ominously and in all starkness. Lee Paje's video is an intimate vignette of routine, but may actually be in the end a symptom of fatal iteration, the repetition that wears down the human agent. And finally, Mark Salvatus's installation of a street painting on canvas bound to a wall by a duct tape and chained to black avian figures in cement, staple fixtures in the gardens of the middle-class, testifies to homelessness in the city, the makeshift nature of shelter, and most of all the failure of flight, a fitting metaphor of the day's news and countless speeches hereafter about change that will never take off. ☹



MIKE ADRAO  
Intricate Rug-Beautiful Snake  
Charcoal on paper  
59.25 x 59.5 in  
2009



DENNIS ATIENZA  
Hush Hush  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 48 in  
2010



ANTIPAS DELOTAVO  
Pasasalamat  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 36 in  
2010



MARK JUSTINIANI  
Manhattan Project  
Scratchboard and Mirror  
40 x 36 in (Quadrupitic); Echo - 9 x 10 x 8 in  
2004



GOLDIE POBLADOR  
Ang Halimuyak ng Ma-I  
Collected scents in hand-blown glass bottles  
Variable dimensions  
2009