

Nolisoli Picks: 8 socially relevant works from Art Fair 2020

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One purpose of art is to be a reflection of society, and these works shed light on the reality, in all its grit and struggle, of the Philippine's current and historical settings.

A well-known quote by Cesar A. Cruz states that "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." Through art, people are able to realize and understand a message about unsettling truths and taboos in the form of paintings, sculptures and installations. At the annual Art Fair Philippines, local and international artists showcased their commentary on the reality around them, tackling issues of social injustices and disobedience.

The Philippines, being a melting pot of disconcerting political and societal issues, was a central theme of many artwork. And rightfully so as the fair, with its large and diverse audience, was the precise avenue to shed light on these issues.

"Tulog Anay, Wala Diri Imo Nanay (Go Back To Sleep, Your Mother's Not Here Yet)" by Erika Mayo

Gallery Orange

Erika Mayo's work, a triptych oil on canvas painting that also used aerosol spray, brought attention to the struggles women face in the Philippines. The painting features somber women and disfigured naked bodies wearing Masskara head pieces against a background of rough and gritty brush textures. Mayo expresses that this is a depiction of Visayan women being stereotyped in media. While the women look tender and soft, the almost haphazard strokes signify a sense of revolt. The woman in the painting is moving across and veering away from the ideal expectation of a woman. Mayo shows that these stereotypes against women can cause anger but also displays how they can still manage to rise against these conventional ideas and still be strong maternal figures.

“Irresistible Grace” by Julie Lluch

Galerie Stephanie

Veteran sculptress Julie Lluch graced the walls of Art Fair 2020 with a montage of her past works. Lluch’s statues of Philippine heroes, politicians and personalities are her own introspection to the nature of beauty. She tells this through a reflection of history in the Philippines. The exhibit shows parallels to a dystopian nation and is positioned in a way that the various characters are witnessing a fallen man being dragged on the floor, surrounded by his own blood which is a scene that bears semblance to Juan Luna’s “Spolarium.” Through these statues, she shows the ghosts of Philippine history and the current horrors it is facing, and poses the question “Will everything eventually turn to nothing, or will there be grace?”

“Paradoxikalye” by Guerrero Habulan

Art Cube

In order to showcase the Philippines’ societal and political issues, Guerrero Habulan took it to the streets. “Paradoxikalye” is an homage to the masses that congregate in the streets of Manila to protest injustices or worship political and religious figures. He brings attention to a paradox that happens in the streets: how street vendors who are grasping to have a sale sit beside large malls in Carriedo, how folk religion by quack doctors and faith healers work around Quiapo Church. These paradoxes can be seen in how he incorporates a number of contrasting elements, including bodies, animals, abstract shapes and figures all combined into one central figure.

“Dukot Survival” by Manny Montelibano

1335 Mabini

Priced at P90,000 is an artwork made of burnt rice and plastic human figures called “Dukot Survival” by Visayan multimedia artist Manny Montelibano. “Dukot” is a term in Hiligaynon that pertains to the overcooked rice that follows the shape of the pot it’s cooked in. It is a metaphor that shows how people evolve according to the demands of society, and how

Filipinos leave evidence of how they have lived over the past civilizations.

“Basahan” by Kristoffer Ardeña

Tropical Futures Institute

Coming from Cebu-based organization Tropical Future Institute, “Basahan” is an art installation made by Kristoffer Ardeña that features a tapestry of old shirts, retaso rugs, tarpaulins and store signage. It resembles an actual basahan, which is a knitted doormat used in many Filipino households. Ardeña creates this as a representation of the socioeconomic conditions of being an artist as well as a callout to the material consumption and product waste that the Philippines’ culture of commercialism has created.

“Giatay” exhibit by multiple Visayan artists

Giatay

With more than 20 Visayan artists, this exhibit in Art Fair’s Incubator platforms placed the spotlight on Visayan talent. “Giatay” is a Cebuano word that has no direct translation in English or Tagalog; it is used to express a strong range of emotion. The artworks featured all follow political themes, some playful and others serious. The all-Bisaya group is composed of Bastinuod, Budoy Marabiles, Christian Linaban, Herm Bensi, Max Surban, John Villoria, Jukus Sepada, Mark “KDLT” Copino, Keith Deligero, Khriiss Bajade, Lhee Taneo, Manny Migrino, Mirjam Dalire, Mykill, Soika Vomiter, Yoyoy Villame, Wyndelle Remonde, Ivan Zaldarriaga, Kolown, Ronyel Compra and Fidel Ricafranca. Their participation at this year’s Art Fair is a testament to the regional talents that allow people to move away from the Manila-centric views of art.

“Karnebal” by Max Balatbat

Secret Fresh Gallery

Max Balatbat’s collection of paintings and sculptures center on the taboo topic of prostitution. In his installation at this year’s Art Fair, the central figure is a sculpture of a young girl selling sampaguita with her underwear pulled down and surrounded by abstract pieces that depict

the artist's take on a carnival, which he uses as a metaphor for whorehouses. Through the artworks, he shows the reality of rape and murder of young girls that have occurred in the Philippines. Balatbat here sends a call to action to not turn a blind eye to what happens in communities around us where people continue to face social and economic injustice every day.

“Brown Study: The Wanderings of Juan Pikas” by Salvador Joel Alonday

Tin-aw

Another addition to Art Fair 2020's regional talents is Salvador Joel Alonday's real-life perceptions of the characters of Visayan folk tale Juan Pikas. The tale follows the story of a half man, Juan Pikas, who was born with one eye, one ear, one arm and one leg. He sets on a journey to find God to ask him to make him whole. Along the way, he meets different characters who represent themes of morality and human nature, in all its flaws and imperfections. Through the characters of the story, Alonday shows the same themes and introspections of humanity: the tuko is a symbol of the territorial side of the people, the girl in a flowing dress is a symbol of desire and the nude man with a pig's head signifies the masks people wear in society.

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