

The Wonderful Visual Overload That Is Art Fair Philippines 2020

Look, but don't touch; seems to be the hardest thing to do, when attending Art Fair Philippines 2020.

By: Philip Cu-Unjieng

With the true art work spread over three expansive floors of The Link, this year's Art Fair Philippines is visual overload in its truest sense. From works on canvas hanging on the walls, to three-dimensional sculptures and installations, to photographs and prints, to multi-medium renditions, and this year, the inclusion of film, it would seem your retinas are in for an Art Fair workout of the highest order.

To be frank, there seems to be less crowding this year, and I'm actually happy for that, as little pockets of negative space, veritable mini-oases, now exist to allow us to contemplate on what we've just seen, before being sparked by the next booth and display. If there was something I would react to in previous Art Fairs, it would be how crowded and compressed it all seemed, too much busy-ness detracting from the art appreciation one was there for.

When so much floor area was devoted to the art, it was like traversing through a minefield and you had to be on high alert all the time. Thankfully, there's more room to maneuver this year.

I'm not one to dictate, and say which are the must-see exhibits this year, as to be frank, art is often a matter of taste; and one man's manna from heaven, is another person's version of stale bread. If you pushed me against the wall though, I'd say one owes it to oneself to head to the Onib Olmedo gallery, as it's a wonderful retrospective of this illustrious Filipino artist's career.

A figurative expressionist artist, Olmedo was an architect by profession (he actually placed 7th in his board exams), and was running a successful firm when he shifted to painting in the late 1960's before turning 40 years of age. The patrons and collectors of his day would often exclaim that they would never hang an Olmedo in their homes. as this was the time of pretty flowers, dainty decorative paintings, or rural scenes depicting pastoral beauty.

Olmedo would paint the street walkers, homeless, and desperate that he would find in districts such as Ermita, and he would strive to go beneath their physical attributes, and delve into something more essential and spiritual in his portraits. As one of his children remarked, and I paraphrase, Olmedo knew how to make ugly look interesting and beautiful. Critics in Europe apparently agreed, and Olmedo would win awards in France and other Western countries. And in typical Filipino fashion, global acclaim and recognition made acquisition of his paintings by Filipino collectors suddenly 'en vogue'.

The retrospective is especially important because Olmedo passed away in 1996, at only 59 years old. At the apex of his late blooming career, there was still so much to look forward to from Olmedo when his life was cut short. A seminal influence on the young painters of his era, the Olmedo retrospective would be my must-see of this year's Art Fair.

Salvador Joel Alonday's whimsical sculptures are a delight to view. And I can't help but imagine how patrons of his work would display them in their homes. They're ribald at times, always surreal, and provocative. Perry Argel has a gleeful time reimagining toys and mobiles, and I found these fun as well. They take the mundane and everyday, transforming the material into something different and playful.

The photographs of Denise Weldon and Tom Epperson are wonderful objects of contemplation and abstraction. Tom is the 'Sandman', taking patterns in the sand into another dimension. Denise is the Vegetable Queen, taking single shots of different vegetables, and teasing out the artistic from these market and kitchen staples.

And I loved how film has been included in this year's Art Fair. It certainly was the Art Fair teaser that went viral, as Bea Alonzo and John Lloyd Cruz did a script reading earlier in the week.

Over the three floors, you're bound to find your favorite, the art that hits you between your eyes and turns you into a believer.

Source: METRO.STYLE: "THE WONDERFUL VISUAL OVERLOAD THAT IS ART FAIR PHILIPPINES 2020"

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