Rodel Tapaya

Rodel Tapaya

DISTANZ

The One You Feed.
Stories and Images in the Work of Rodel Tapaya

David Elliott

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere ...
The cheap price of commodities ... [compels] all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels from *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) [1]

1 Extracted from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Chapter 1. Bourgeois and Proletarians," in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), translated from the German by Samuel Moore in co-operation with Friedrich Engels (London: William Reeves, 1888).

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Rudyard Kipling from *The White Man's Burden* (1899) written in reference to the Philippine-American War [2]

2 First verse from Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden* (London: s. n., 1899). This peon to western Imperialism was written at the time of the United States' subjugation of the short-lived 1st Philippine Republic during the Philippine-American War of 1898–1902.

A Long Story, Not Yet Finished

It may seem eccentric, if not perverse, to preface an essay on the work of Rodel Tapaya, a thirty-four-year old artist born and living in the Philippines, with quotations from Karl Marx and one of Rudyard Kipling's most offensive imperialist poems. Yet, there is method in this madness, and strong links can be established between all three. From vastly different perspectives, these texts and Tapaya's work are emblematic of still unfinished stories of colonization, capitalism, and globalization that have contributed to a massive erasure of memory and sense of values. Firmly rooted in the present, Tapaya has grown up with, and reacted against, this relentless process—the impulse for destruction prophesied by Marx and lauded by Kipling. Touching on history, politics, psychology, economics, culture, ecology, and national identity, Tapaya's paintings not only question narratives that try to make everything the same, but also focus on the ways in which they have exerted a grip on how "we" (whoever "we" are, and wherever "we" are situated) view the world. The artist does this—consciously, and intuitively—by creating spaces for new myths and stories—and recycling old ones—in order to present different choices from those we are conditioned to make.

Tapaya's neo-traditional world of ghosts, allegories, and symbols is rooted in common experience and reflects values relating to "human" rather than "bourgeois" interests. Yet in a country as diverse as the Philippines, that for centuries has been subject to successive waves of migration and colonization, the nature of common experience is difficult to define and has too easily been compounded into opposing clichés of solidarity or otherness. The definition of a thing in the terms of what it is not is a familiar ruse by which power seeks to legitimize itself. Tapaya does the opposite by forging networks of associations and ideas that are built on his experience and critical perception.

Unknown photographer, *Begging for Food, The Philippines,* 1899

Within the pattern of the colonial development of South East Asia, the Philippine experience is particular: it is the only country in the region colonized in the sixteenth century, when the Spanish explorers first set foot on the islands, until it was "granted" independence from the United States as part of the new system of power and alliances that followed the end of the Second World War.[3]

Oblivious of but none the less participating in what Marx described as an expanding world market, the Philippines nestled within the bosom of an increasingly sclerotic Spanish Empire until the fading years of the nineteenth century when, unsettled by indecision in Madrid and revolutionary unrest in Havana and Manila, Spanish forces were defeated in a brief, relatively unbloody war with an increasingly expansionist United States.[4] As a result in 1898, as one of the stipulations of the Treaty of Paris, Spain was forced to cede this territory to a new colonial master in return for the princely payment of twenty million dollars.

But the citizens of the Philippines thought otherwise. Revolutionaries who had supported the United States in their war against Spain now rapidly declared an independent First Philippine Republic and refused to welcome the Americans whom they felt had turned against them. A bitter, bloody, and strangely prophetic guerilla war with the United States ensued; its now familiar combination of superior firepower, blatant abuses of human rights, and violently self-righteous hypocrisy still resonates in many present-day conflicts.[5]

Some time in 1899 an anonymous photographer snapped two Filipina women, one of them carrying a baby, "begging for food" at an American Army encampment. An unusually ambiguous photograph for its time, it shows neither the rictus grins of phalanxes of winsomely posing troops, nor the piles of corpses that, according to their nationalities, could denote either an atrocity or rightful retribution. These small, poor, barefoot peasant women are obviously frightened, and dwarfed by the armed soldiers who surround them. The soldier in control returns their gaze, leaning heavily on his rifle. Three others, standing behind, look sullenly on, waiting. It is an unsettling portrait of power and fear.

A gaze of malevolence characterizes the face of the tall young soldier who, unconsciously hogging the center of the photograph, stands directly behind the two young women. It sticks in my mind because this look seems eternal, connected with neither place nor time, and derives its disquieting power from an unquestioning belief in its own entitlement. I recognized this gaze again in *The Magic Show of the Haciendero Magician* (2007), one of Tapaya's earliest paintings, first shown in an exhibition called *Carnival*, a series of works showing people "enjoying" themselves at a fairground.[6] This work focuses on the rolling eyes and vulpine teeth of a magician—in fact, a wealthy landowner who abuses and exploits his tenants—who, accompanied by his gorgeous assistant, pulls not a rabbit out of his top hat but, with a malevolent flourish, a vampire bat—to the puzzled but obvious delight of his strangely masked, half animal audience. In this neo-gothic scene the moon, masked by scudding clouds, picks out a billboard with the legend *Horror Ride* painted on it. Not only does Tapaya present us here with his sardonic view of the "law of the jungle," pulling "out of his hat" contemporary society and politics in the Philippines, but also, using the allegory of the fairground or carnival (a convention deeply rooted in European *commedia dell'arte*), he transcends topicality to encompass human values that can easily be recognized in any place at any time. Tapaya's carnival presents an implicitly subversive, "bottom up" view of culture and life that criticizes dominant structures of exploitation and power by turning them on their heads.

The sense of foreboding is intensified in *Airplane Ride* (2007), a painting from the same series of works, in which terrified figures whizz by in small metal planes on armatures high above the fairground. A man, his mouth gaping wide and his hands thrown up in what appears to be real rather than vicarious horror, occupies the foreground while in the plane immediately behind him, decked in an American Stars and Stripes, another figure covers his eyes. The nose and propeller of a third plane hoves into view showing a fragment of a Japanese flag. It is difficult to judge

3 In 1521 the explorer Ferdinand Magellan first claimed the islands that comprise the Philippines for Spain. He was killed in a skirmish on the small island of Mactan near Cebu in the same year and his second-in-command, Juan Sebastián Elcano, took over the expedition to complete his circumnavigation of the globe. In 1542 Spanish explorer Ruy López de Villalobos named the islands after the Spanish King Phillip II, and in 1565 the first Hispanic settlements were formed in Cebu. By 1571 Manila on the northern island of Luzon had become the capital of the Spanish East Indies, a trade hub serviced from Mexico that dispatched Chinese porcelain, lacquer wear, and later tea, to the Americas and Europe, in return for corn, chili peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, and pineapples.

The Magic Show of the Haciendero Magician, 2007

5 The Philippine-American War (1899–1902) took place between the United States and the revolutionaries who had independently declared the First Philippine Republic (sporadic resistance continued until 1913 by Muslim insurrectionists in the southern island of Mindanao). This guerrilla war was bitterly fought on both sides and the Americans used torture (including water boarding), concentration camps, and indiscriminate massacres of civilians to intimidate the Philippine people and its army. In retaliation, Filipino soldiers also committed atrocities against American prisoners-of-war. Some historians have regarded this war as a defining moment in the evolution of American national identity and foreign policy that continues to have an impact on the present. See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

Unknown photographer, *Begging for Food, The Philippines* (detail), 1899

4 The Philippine Revolution against the Spanish began in 1896. The Spanish-American War lasted for ten weeks during 1898 and was initially occasioned by American intervention in the Cuban War of Independence. It ended, to the benefit of the United States, with the Treaty of Paris (1898) that allowed temporary American control of Cuba and indefinite colonial authority over Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. After defeat, the departing Spanish troops handed over power to the incoming American forces, ignoring the Philippine revolutionaries.

6 The title of this work in Filipino is *Ang Palabas ng Hacienderong Salamangkero*; the name of the exhibition is *Perya*.

whether Tapaya is making a reference here to painful histories or to the fact that both the United States and Japan are currently key destinations for overseas Filipino workers. The likelihood, however, is that he is referring to both, as throughout Philippine history, as well as in his work, the present takes form as a surreal echo of the past.

Poverty and its obese *doppelgänger*—the empty dream of materialism—is the central subject of *Kinakawowowee II* (2007), a painting in which an elderly woman, a winning contestant in a popular noon-time television show, dodders onto the center of the stage to receive her prize.[7] The compère brandishes a wad of money, a vapid grin, and a microphone, but the contestant's family, also on the stage, seems alarmed and one member appears to be praying. Placards with the names of different countries, along with familiar cartoon characters, pepper the enthusiastic audience: Mickey Mouse lurks in the background while Ronald McDonald has nabbed a ringside seat. This Ship of Fools, fueled by the brain-sapping benzine of globalized entertainment—in honor of which a poor, untalented grandmother is, like a circus animal, forced to dance pitifully for a pathetic cash prize—churns up an overwhelming tide of perplexity in its wake. It is as if the voice of an unknown, unheard figure is drowned out by the roaring ocean: "Oh what on earth will become of us!"

Kinakawowowee II, 2007

7 The title of the painting *Kinakawowowee II* is made up of a play on two words: *Kinakawawa* meaning someone who is causing another person to look miserable or pitiful and *Wowowee*, the name of a popular TV show. Rodel Tapaya, email to the author, November 4, 2014.

The Filipinos' Burden

In *The White Man's Burden*, convinced of the West's duty to assert its moral superiority over others, Rudyard Kipling made an appeal for the United States to temper its instinctive isolationism by extending its doctrine of Manifest Destiny (the justification for previous border wars against the Indians and Mexicans) into a more general mission to "civilize."[8] The Filipinos felt little need for such an offensive form of civilization yet they had little option but to endure it, rather as if it were a typhoon, an earthquake, or some other natural disaster.

An examination of what the Spanish left behind and the Americans brought with them in 1898 throws light on the kinds of "burden" that the Filipinos had no choice but to shoulder. Yet, since gaining independence they have undoubtedly added to it much more weight of their own.[9]

The Catholic religion is firmly placed at the top of the Spanish legacy; its festivals are still fervently observed by over eighty percent of the population and many others go along for the ride.[10] Through intermarriage this legacy was also encrypted in people's genes and names, as well as in the remnants of a feudal class system, and it is also still expressed in the colonial art and architecture that has survived. Occasionally, it is revealed through an educated interest and sympathy for things Hispanic as well as in the use of the Spanish language.[11]

In addition to the Americans' insensitive ethnocentricity and English lingua franca (with Filipino one of the two Official Languages), they presided over nothing less than the advent of modernity to the Philippines, including, in 1909, the building of a School of Fine Arts as an integral part of the new University of the Philippines. To this legacy a taste for fast-food restaurants and a continuing system of international security alliances should also be added. The near defeat of the United States in the Second World War, along with the brutal disruption of the Japanese occupation, however, tarnished both the mystique and reality of colonial power of any kind and this, in 1946, culminated in the formation of an independent Philippine Republic.

But when the United States first took over, the ideal of political independence, once so close, did not completely dissipate but resurfaced in art and literature, although in an initially muted form. The Mexican muralists, particularly Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, were a strong inspiration as, from the beginning of the 1920s, they had been charged by their government with a nation-wide program for decorating public buildings along with the formidable task of synthesizing a visual history of revolutionary Mexico that extended far beyond the Spanish colonists to include the pre-Columbian Indian empires. The muralists cast a stern and critical eye on this rewriting of history and, during the 1930s after the

8 The occupying American Army regarded the Filipinos as "negroes." This unsettled many of the 7000 African-American forces who had been sent to serve in the Philippines as they felt that they had been enlisted in an unjust racial war. Some deserted to join the Philippine forces. Contemporary documentary accounts are available in Arnaldo Dumindin, *The Philippine-American War 1899–1902*, www.philippineamericanwar.webbs.com, last accessed November 13, 2014.

9 In 1946 after Independence, it was planned to regenerate the economy by developing the country's largely unexploited mineral and natural resources. In 1965 such hopes were put on hold for the next twenty years by the corrupt autocracy of President Ferdinand Marcos and his flagrantly kleptocratic wife Imelda who, while staunchly supporting American foreign policy, plundered the country for their own gain while imposing widespread censorship, violent suppression of political opposition, and violations of human rights. Once an increasingly disgruntled populace had restored the rule of parliamentary democracy, haltingly the country again began to right itself.

10 Out of a total population of 100,618,000 (2014) 9% is Protestant and a further 5–8% Muslim.

11 In the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Spanish, along with Arabic, is categorised as one of two "Optional Languages."

government had changed, Orozco in particular presented a strong critique of the corruption of the revolution's ideals.[12]

Victorio Edades's large mural *Rising Philippines* (1934), painted with Galo Ocampo and Carlos Francisco, was one of the first Philippine ripostes to the Mexicans. It echoed their allegorical approach but, in spite of its rousing title, had little revolutionary bite. The Philippines was represented as a "Greek" maiden in a flowing white dress presiding over the work, with Spanish influence benevolently symbolized on her right side while the United States, on her left, was depicted, without irony, as the purveyor of liberty and democracy.[13]

Although the Mexican model of national myth-making was accepted as part of the discourse of modern Philippine art (and would resurface in the 1980s and 1990s in the work of such artists as Lazaro Soriano and Egai Fernandez), only very recently has it been realized by artists such as Rodel Tapaya that monumentality and clarity of message are only privileged to the detriment of complexity and ambiguity. The reduction of the Mexican approach to a form of heroic propaganda had made it a blunt and useless instrument.

The independent Philippines seemed trapped within a post-colonial time warp in which the worst things from outside were enthusiastically adopted while the few benefits were not widely distributed. Today, it is classed as a newly industrialized country, largely dependent on service industries as well as the wages returned home by the ten percent of its population that lives and works abroad, often as maids or domestic servants.[14] Poverty, although slowly reducing, continues to be a critical social problem that plagues over a quarter of the population.[15]

Within the 7,107 islands and thousands of kilometers of jagged rocks and winding inlets that define the Philippine coastline, the "fluttered folk and wild" who live there still communicate through at least nineteen regional languages, and often more, sometimes using up to as many as a further 152 recorded living languages. In remote areas many indigenous groups and tribes remain relatively undisturbed, their traditions largely unbroken by the effects of either colonization or globalization. In spite of predictions to the contrary, and alarming attacks on its ecology, the diversity within the fragmented land mass, impenetrable jungles, and mountain ranges of the Philippines has enabled it to maintain a distinct but ungraspable image. But it took an artist like Rodel Tapaya to envisage this because the despoliation of nature on every level has started to seem "natural."

Unfluttering the Folk

The sixth of seven children, Rodel Tapaya was born in the small town of Montalban on the slopes of the Sierra Madre Mountains, an area deeply rooted in Philippine folklore. His parents prepared smoked fish for a living and there was little talk of art at home. He first started making drawings at the age of ten but only four years later, after he had been attracted to the Old Masters through books and had won a number of prizes in art competitions, did he realize he had a deeper interest in art. His mature work is informed by a constant sense of discovery that echoes his early years. It is as if he discovers his own feelings and relationships with the world outside through the regular daily process of working in his studio.

Akin to many Latin American authors, he has been described as a Magical Realist and, from 2006, he began to take a strong interest in this literary genre, particularly the novels of Gabriel García Márquez. Yet he had to learn to compress a whole book within the scope of a group of interlinked images, joined together within a single pictorial plane. In response to this he has described how, when reading stories such as folktales or myths, "it makes my imagination explode with images. Since there is no specific archetype or image assigned to each tale, I have the liberty to imagine and give them form myself."[16]

This freedom he has also granted to his audience who, even if they are Filipino, may not be familiar either with the multiple stories that surface in his works or how they relate to each other, both integrally and across different paintings: "People can look at the works and make [up] their own stories ...

12 See Orozco's different mural cycles made during the 1930s and '40s in Guadalajara in David Elliott (ed.), *Orozco, 1883–1949,* exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (New York: Abbeville Press, 1980).

13 Ahmad Mashadi, "Some aspects of nationalism and internationalism in Philippine art," in T. K. Sabapathy (ed.), *Modernity and Beyond. Themes in South East Asian Art,* exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996), pp. 45, 59.

14 These people are known as overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) and their remissions are in 2014 estimated to be at 8.5 % of the national GDP. Doris Dumlao, "OFW remittances to increase by 8.5 % in 2014—Standard Chartered," *Philippine Daily Enquirer,* Makati City, January 13, 2014. This amount will surpass funds from foreign direct investment.

15 The current population of the Philippines is estimated at 100,617,000. According to the National Statistical Coordination Board 27.9 % of the population fell below the poverty line in 2012. Quoted in Justin Calderon, "How feudalism will undo the Philippine elections," *Inside Investor,* Manila, April 30, 2013.

16 "Rodel Tapaya Mines Filipino Folklore for 'Ladder to Somewhere'," *Blouinartinfo,* April 3, 2013, http://sea.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/886660/rodel-tapaya-mines-filipino-folklore-for-ladder-to-somewhere, last accessed November 13, 2014.

[They] need not be narrated literally but can be felt visually."[17] For these narratives there is no single "correct" reading, merely a range of pleasing or plausible ones.

By 2008 Tapaya's dissection of contemporary Philippine experience had moved decisively from what had been described as the "fictionalized" approach of his previous work to a more magical, "fictional" vision as he began to focus on the illegal deforestation and mining that was beginning seriously to affect not only the land itself but also the communities who lived off it.[18] Fascinated by how plays on words could create multiple meanings that he could refashion into syncretic, surreal images, he started to research ancient myths, folktales, and traditional sayings, initially around the area of Northern Luzon where he lived, but later expanding to other parts of the country. His inspirations for this were the extensive compendia of Philippine folklore assembled by the ethnologist Damiana Eugenio as well as the writings on the pre-colonial Philippines by historian and anti-Marcos activist William Henry Scott. Both served as starting points and continuing sources of reference for his work.[19]

Tapaya's paintings now started to become larger—in some cases taking on the scale of murals—as he moved from using rough burlap as a support to a more finely grained canvas. This marked the beginning of an elaborate, gradually shifting, fantastic morphology that, moving between different stylistic and narrative forms, continues in his work to the present.[20] In his role of storyteller—of creation myths, cautionary tales, and the impact of everyday idiocies—he teeters between hubris and nemesis in densely layered tableaux that telescope time by bringing together long forgotten myths with the actions of blackguards, buccaneers, thieves, and holy men, all composed within an intensely colored framework of arabesques, both visual and mental.[21]

In 2008 and 2009, while making his first folkloric paintings, Tapaya was looking through books on illustration and design to see how strongly colored, simple patterns and motifs could be brought together in complex spatial combinations. He also started to make a series of 'Story Houses,' small three dimensional tableaux, hybrids of domestic catholic altars (*retablos*), museum dioramas and surrealist collages, that explored ideas that were reiterated in larger paintings.[22] These are typified by such works as *The Origin of Rice* (2008), based on a myth from the northern Ibaloi tribe, or *The Origin of Mountains* (2008), a story about Kabunian, the Rice God, and Lumawig, his son, and have flat, planar spaces that bring together different textures and forms that, rather in the manner of catholic ex-voto paintings (or altars), provide frameworks for fantastic and more or less coherent narratives. Other paintings like *The Banquet* (2008), depicting a ghostly, bloated profiteer tucking into a sumptuous feast in the depths of a thorny, vine-smothered, smoldering jungle, hark back to the direct social criticism of the artist's earlier *Carnival* paintings. The sense of carnival is developed further in the sinuous lines of his new mythological characters who, like spectral harlequins or wandering *saltimbanques*, flit nervously across his densely drawn surfaces.

→ pp. 122/123
Cane of Kabunian, Numbered but Can't Be Counted (2010)

The climax of this body of work was the over six-meter-wide *Cane of Kabunian, Numbered but Can't Be Counted* (2010), Tapaya's largest mythological painting to date, for which in the following year he won the coveted Grand Prize in the Asia-wide Signature Art competition.[23] Made at the time of devastating monsoon floods aggravated by illegal deforestation, Tapaya describes this work as "a riddle about rain." Its central figure is the giant dog that in Bontoc myth saved humans from the Great Flood, aided by the benevolent figure of Kubunian, who once formed mountains out of a piece of cloth that also warmed humanity. But within this chronicle of good deeds, Tapaya also issues a warning: the greedy perpetrators of present-day disasters should beware. There is a cautionary Tagalog fable about a glutton who was turned into a frog.

During 2010 Tapaya felt that he was becoming increasingly entrapped within the dense jungles of his own creation and wanted to "loosen up" his painting to allow for "more fluid and dark themes."[24] For a time, he moved away from myth and folklore in favor of an expressionist palette, and orthogonal plunging perspectives in which monochrome, usually gray figures, tensely huddle.

17 Ibid.

18 Geronimo Christobal, Jnr., "Between Gods and Men," in *Rodel Tapaya. Visions of Lore*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Caprice Horn Galerie, 2011).

19 Damiana Eugenio, *Philippine Folk Literature—the Myths* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1993). William Henry Scott, *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain and Other Essays in Philippine History* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1982).

20 *FOLKgotten*, the first exhibition of this work, was held at The Drawing Room in Makati City in February/March 2008.

21 Alice G. Guillermo, "Folk Wisdom in Images," *Business Mirror*, Manila, February 16, 2011.

22 These works were shown in *Diorama*, a solo exhibition at The Drawing Room in Makati City in 2009.

23 *Baston ni Kabunian, bilang pero di mabilang* (2010), acrylic on canvas, 340.8 × 609.6 cm. See also Lito B. Zulueta, "Rodel's 'Ladder': Tapaya builds intercourse between myth, art and reality," *Philippine Daily Enquirer*, Manila, April 15, 2013.

24 Rodel Tapaya, email to the author, November 5, 2014.

In their rhythmic line these characters recall both Orozco's drawings of Mexican peasant women and Edvard Munch's dancing Norwegian country girls. The hunched gray shadows in *Dancing in the Moonlight* (2010) conjure the melancholy angst of an enclosed rural nightmare, while the pink striations of the "El Greco" figures in *Hot Topic* (2010) reflect not only unbearable midday heat but also blistering political argument in the lead-up to an election.[25]

→ pp. 104/105
Dancing in the Moonlight (2010)

25 This series of work was shown in the exhibition *Rodel Tapaya. Believe it or Not* at the Pinto Art Museum, Antipolo City, Philippines in 2011.

These were followed in 2011 by paintings that returned to mythology but had a new feeling of weightlessness. This fusion of "sky world" with human nature takes place over different, brightly colored, decorative grounds onto which the artist situates figures, scenes, and fragments of landscape as if they were in dialogue.[26] Some works, like *Foreknowledge* (2011), echo motifs from the early Italian Renaissance, particularly the works of Botticelli, while others such as *The King's Bridge* (2011) bring together quotations of passages from such post-Impressionist artists as Van Gogh and Gauguin. Manama, the red, clown-like figure wearing what looks like a deep sea diver's helmet sitting on the stump of a dismembered tree in *The Origin of the World* (2011), ironically enacts the creation myth of the southern Manuvu people. By rubbing two sticks together, he makes fire, creating the energy to transform parts of his body into the different elements of the universe. Tellingly, the dirt under his fingernails will become the world and its inhabitants.[27] In *Homecoming* (2011), a mural-like, over three-meter-wide panel, Tapaya imagines the complex journey of the gods from the sky as they track through the dark luxuriant foliage of the world of ancestors and mortals. But everything is floating, almost imperceptibly, on a golden ground of whirling flowers and stars.

26 Many of these works were illustrated with detailed notes in the catalogue for the exhibition *Rodel Tapaya: This Beast I have Become* held at the Y ++ Gallery, Beijing in 2011.

27 Rodel Tapaya, email to the author, November 5, 2014.

Tapaya further extends the visual poetics of his spiritual, human, and natural pantheon by experimenting with different kinds of perspective. This enables him to express different worlds within the same work: "Western" vanishing points find themselves juxtaposed with "Asian" layering of flat planes together with the "South Asian" *tabulae rasae* of decorative colored grounds. During 2012 Tapaya first read *Myth and Meaning* (1977) by the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, which confirmed his own work process through its bringing together of pre-modern systems of knowledge and belief with changing perceptions of reality. In contrast with the unconnected, sometimes dysfunctional, symbologies of C. G. Jung's collective unconscious, Lévi-Strauss's view of myths as expressions of complex "bundles of relations" seemed to describe perfectly the "linguistic" approach of Tapaya's new work.[28]

28 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 211.

Within the different spaces of increasingly anthropomorphic jungles, mountains, and plains that comprised the system of a single painting, the artist now began to articulate series of polyphonic, open-ended dialogues that could be interpreted on many different levels. The idea of the journey or quest becomes an important leitmotif within this "language." In *Biag ni Lam-ang* (2012) he tells the story of one of the most popular epics in Philippine folklore: the deeds and travails of the superhero Lam-ang. Within the complexity of this image, that contains different scenes from the hero's life, Tapaya exercises a strong sense of humor that pivots on the discrepancies between the worlds he creates and the ones that are evident on a daily basis.

The large painting *Multi-petalled Beauty* (2012) extends this track by intertwining legends and folktales with contemporary abuses in biotechnology. In the Philippine version of the Western fairytale "The Princess and the Frog" (in which the amphibian turns out to be a handsome prince) a monkey takes on the latter role. Here we see him peeling back his skin in a Buddha-like pose deep within a jagged, toxic mythical forest. A flock of sheep has gathered (a reference to Dolly, the first animal to be cloned); underfoot a hybrid between a crocodile and a tree refers to corrupt officials who use stem cell technology to appear younger. In mini-format, researchers with test tubes work intently on the forest floor. Here the artist has transformed the innocent narrative of the old fable by turning it on its head: the new technology that upturns the previous rules of nature may be put to good use but also, in the name of vanity and personal gain, it can be widely abused to create uncontrollable monsters.

→ pp. 66/67
Multi-petalled Beauty (2012)

The Two Wolves

Over the past two years Tapaya's mind has continued to race as if it were a factory of images and this, in conjunction with a rigorous working routine, has enabled him to produce a vast number of paintings in different media and sizes. He has also started to work more in three dimensions, sometimes in the form of large installations, as in *Modern Manananggals* (2013), shown this year at his large exhibition at the Ateneo Gallery in Quezon City, but also in canvases shaped like super-sized amulets set within elegantly stamped tin sheet frames.

→ pp. 142–145
Modern Manananggals (2013)

→ pp. 2, 52–59

In Philippine folklore the *mananangal* is a vampire-like creature that divides itself in two so that its head and torso can fly off to find prey; only then may it be killed by placing salt on the lower half of the body so that it cannot reform itself. Tapaya has used this desolate, divided figure as a metaphor for the fate of overseas Filipino workers who are forced to leave the country to support their families, many of them spending so many years away that they are unable to reintegrate on return. These he presents in the form of fourteen large figures, seven of each sex, made out of encaustic and mixed media on fiberglass resin. Their winged torsos and heads grasp cheaply colored suitcases as they flutter desperately across the gallery space while their legs and lower bodies remain abjectly behind. On the smoothly cut "table tops" of their leg-borne bellies, Tapaya has painted different romantic landscapes of "home."

Rather in the way that earlier works echoed popular figures of speech and word plays, his shaped canvases reflect the different forms of charms that are still widely used to protect their holders from evil or just to bring good luck. In *Lucky Fight* (2013) Tapaya refers to the popular practice of cockfighting in a shield-like amulet shape designed to give protection in time of war. The subject of this painting is an allegorical struggle between good and evil that switches in its reference between the Philippine tale of *The Origin of Birds* and the New Testament story of the cock that began to crow after St. Peter had betrayed Christ three times. The triangle of *The Antidote* (2013), the form of an amulet against witchcraft, reinforces its subject in a similar way: it is a composite, everyday folk story about the malevolence of gossip and how to counteract it.

→ p. 53
Lucky Fight (2013)

→ p. 58
The Antidote (2013)

A commission from the Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt am Main triggered the production of his triptych *The First Beings* (2014) which, invoking the creation myth of the southern Bukidnon people, illuminates the creativity and ingenuity of the contemporary Philippines workforce. The painting is assembled in three parts, *The Ten Headed Creature*, *The Mediator* and *The Supreme Planner,* representing different approaches needed to achieve success. In both its structure and subject this work could be seen as a response to the ideological hubris of *Man, Controller of the Universe* (1934), the monumental triptych fresco Diego Rivera made for Mexico City's Palacio be Bellas Artes in 1934. But there are neither heroes nor political creeds in the more nuanced, less bombastic world shown here by Tapaya: merely moral choices governed by basic needs.

→ pp. 26/27
The First Beings: The Ten Headed Creature, The Mediator and The Supreme Planner (2014)

In *Chocolate Ruins* (2013), a painting over seven meters wide, a cartoon-like element of parody indicates the extent to which natural balance has been disrupted by human intervention. Manaul, the bird protagonist of the Philippines' foremost creation myth, breaks open the trunk of a bamboo stem—not to usher into existence the first man and woman, as in the story, but to give birth to different processes for the production of chocolate. Such absurdity cannot hide the obvious fact that all is not well. People are in pain, homeless, as the country suffers three major—natural and manmade—disasters.[29] This is not a carnival but chaos, a free-for-all in which the rich get richer and the poor are left to drown. Chocolate here has become a metaphor for the corrupting attraction of kitschy sweetness—money, vapid beauty, entitlement or hidebound tradition—all of them impediments in an epic battle for survival.

→ pp. 62/63
Chocolate Ruins (2013)

Tapaya is of the firm opinion that there are many more worlds than those we experience. "There are different forces; some good and some not; just like in society" but ultimately he believes that "there is goodness in everyone, in everything."[30] The path we decide to follow is a matter of choice. He is a master

29 The disasters are a 7.2 magnitude earthquake, Supertyphoon Haiyan, and the scandal over the misuse of congressional funds, all of which took place in 2014.

30 Rodel Tapaya in Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, "The Spirit in the Forests. Rodel Tapaya's Magical Art," *ArtMag by Deutsche Bank* 82, 2014. http://db-artmag.de/de/82/feature/der-geist-in-den-waeldern-rodel-tapayas-magische-kunst/, last accessed November 13, 2014.

storyteller who weaves these elements throughout his work. Concerned with human relationships and values rather than with problems or their solutions, he shows how discord is nurtured through the deep roots of ignorance, callousness, fear, and greed; and how this creates a toxic alternative to natural ecology can only be repudiated once its true nature is recognized.

In his most recent paintings Tapaya has started to tread a path between public and private identities, breaking off from shared mythologies and experiences to express more existential concerns. In recent works on paper he has, on a more intimate scale, returned to the severity of his works of 2010. In a sense, these small paintings may be regarded as fragments of a much larger whole within the accretive context of his development in which stories and characters are constantly recycled and remixed. However, in such paintings as *Meeting with Self* (2014), the face, body, and desire of the artist appear alienated, a feeling accentuated by the figure's colonial pose and the smothering ghostly presence of its alter ego.

→ p. 12
Meeting with Self (2014)

Mask-like faces, angular planes, and muted tones also delineate *The Two Wolves Inside* (2014), a dark, formal portrait of a grandfather with his grandson that echoes the enthronement of one of Francis Bacon's Popes. It is based on a short story about the metaphorical battle between two wolves that struggle for primacy within the minds of us all. "One is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies, and ego," the grandfather explains. "The other is peace, joy, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, and truth." "But which wolf wins?" the boy asks. Oblivious of Marx or Kipling or any of their ideas, the old man quietly answers. "It is the one you feed," he says.[31]

→ p. 18
The Two Wolves Inside (2014)

31 Note by the artist in the archive of Matthias Arndt, Singapore, 2014

Meeting with Self, 2014

Crossing Over, 2014

Door to Door, 2014

The Disguise, 2014

Dinner with Forest God, 2014

Lift, 2014

The Two Wolves Inside, 2014

The Lector, 2014

Goddess of the Forest, 2014

The Idiot Box, 2014

Forest Spirit, 2014

Outpouring, 2014

The Heirloom, 2014

The First Beings: The Ten Headed Creature, The Mediator and The Supreme Planner, 2014

Fragrance and Harmony, 2014

Armor, 2014

Eagle's Rebirth, 2014

The Caretaker, 2014

The Lion and the Rat, 2014

The Carabao and the Snail, 2014

The Origin of Bul'ul, 2013

Unfinished Bridge, 2013

Living Underworld, 2013

Modern Captives, 2013

The Hole in the Sky, 2013

Origin of the Stars, 2013

The Attraction, 2013

Lucky Fight, 2013

The Gift, 2013

Monkey Beauty, 2013

Business Prosper, 2013

Faithful Lover, 2013

The Antidote, 2013

She's from the Sky, 2013

Earthly Desires, 2013

Chocolate Ruins, 2013

Manama's Abode, 2012

Multi-petalled Beauty, 2012

The Magic Stone, 2012

Greener Flight, 2012

Maria's Mother, 2012

Don Miguel, 2012

Banana Skin Peeling, 2012

Lost Saw, 2012

Dalagang Bukid, 2012

Treasured Egg, 2012

The Wise Man, 2012

Bangan's Appearance, 2012

New Home, 2012

The Metamorphosis, 2012

Mountain Fantasies, 2012

The Early Bird Catches the Worm, 2012

When the Sun Visited the Earthworld, 2012

The Precious Bell, 2012

The Girl Who Turned Into a Fish, 2011

Secrets of the Forest, 2011

Fairy Healer, 2011

Mother and Child, 2011

The Golden Coat, 2011

Emergence from Bamboo, 2011

Redeeming the Fire, 2011

Campfire Scene, 2010

Dancing in the Moonlight, 2010

Chicken Feeding, 2010

Road Less Travelled, 2010

A Windy Day and a Swirl, 2010

A Bountiful Harvest, 2010

Moving with the Carabaos, 2010

Secrets of the Forest, 2010

Passing by the Calm Waters, 2010

Tikbalang, 2010

Tabi tabi po, 2010

Diwata, 2010

Mahiwagang Kabayo (Magic Horse), 2010

Bituin, 2010

Baston ni Kabunian bilang pero di mabilang (Cane of Kabunian, Numbered but Can't Be Counted), 2010

Nang wala pang ginto ay doon nagpalalo, nang magkaginto-ginto ay doon na nga sumuko?, 2010

Creation Myths, 2009

Top Secret, 2009

The Legend of Sibul Springs, 2009

The Origin of Bat, 2008

Cornelia and the Batbat Cuao, 2008

Bodobodo, 2008

Origin of Echo, 2008

The Visual and the Visionary of Rodel Tapaya
or
The Present Time Reflected in Mythology

Heinz-Norbert Jocks

It has been a long time since such narratives have seen the light of day in painting, with such intense expressions as well as ones so multifaceted and—due to their strong sensuousness—so fascinating. An atmosphere unfolds which touches us deep inside, not just because of the skull which, baring its teeth, stands out in an almost ghostly way; it transports us into the meta-wide realms of the collective unconscious. Such is the extent of the spontaneous impression, to which we will devote more attention and review in greater depth later. These pictures, partially created as panoramas, oscillating thematically between life and death, are of a positively junglesque density, simultaneously enhanced by larger as well as (also understated) miniature scenes. Standing alone and at the same time somehow subliminally linked with each other, and namely not only in a formal way, in the happy moment of their perception we gain the strong impression that we are poised on a threshold between waking and sleep: outside of the "real," as it nearly filterlessly imposes itself on us in everyday life, yet not so far away from it either.

How does Tapaya create this curious sphere of distance without an absolute parting from the real? By breaking reality down into fragments and transporting them into the imaginary realm, he draws parallels to the narrative material of Filipino mythology imparted to him when he was a seven year-old boy, and in such a way that both the real and the mythological mutually inform each other, without blending together beyond recognition. Everything stands opposed to each other, while at the same time existing in an associative relationship. In this way, not only is a distance constructed but a bridge is built as well. It connects that which has its origins in ancient times with that which forces itself upon people today as current, where everything which is considered the past is masked if not even suppressed. Through the means of painting, Tapaya becomes a passionate storyteller, who knows that he cannot compete with literature, but can only correspond freely with it. Therefore, he has also developed an excursive narrative form. Breaking with linearity as well as with the fatal disposition to illustration, he allows narrative moments to appear as associative, as they are sketchy and insular. In this way he helps the experience whose value appeared on the wane to a new level of status and regard. In the painter as allegorical storyteller, in whose organically organised fantasy analogies between the myths develop and are productively proliferated, the lore of the origins of the Filipino culture—which was suppressed by the Spaniards between 1565 and 1762—is combined with the unorthodox quest for a now topical cultural identity. The existential question of how the reading of old epics can contribute to the elucidation of contemporary life is also important to Tapaya—although in doing so he is concerned neither about authenticity nor absolute coherence in the reproduction, for what one has experienced oneself should also, according to him, be given full expression in painting.

Due to his experiences as a child, and his research as a university student later, Tapaya respects the historic significance and identity-defining meaning of handed-down stories. In conversation, he mentions the legend of the giant called Bernardo Carpio. Falling victim to the attempt to end the battle between two mountains, he was buried under the cliffs in the north of the country—to be precise, the mountains located in the province of Montalban—and thereby became their prisoner. There, in the village where Tapaya was born, reports of the handwriting left on the mountains by the giant circulated. As a boy Tapaya, with implicit belief in the truth of the tale, climbed the mountain. Later, he found out that one of his country's heroes had sought it out on the occasion of the war during the colonial period, hoping to find a strategy there that would bring about a victory over the colonial masters. In addition amulets, produced out of little stones from the area, were rumored to have a strength-granting power. For Tapaya, the legend

of the giant has been more than just an enduring reference for as long as he has been familiar with it. For he sees in it the root of his origins! Although he does not speak the local language (which he regrets) because of having to repeatedly move with his parents, the view of the holy mountain imparts to him—as a descendant of this region—a comfortable sense of belonging.

As viewers of this remarkable attempt to bring to light correlations between what was once told and what is now taking place, here we move in a no-man's land between the real and the magical, the sensual and the transcendental, and within it Tapaya refers to the so-called contemporary, but out of the perspective he has individuated from traditional mythology with its ensemble of god figures. In this mythological world "lied true" (Louis Aragon) by colour and form, everything appears to proliferate and, in doing so, projects far beyond the frame of the picture. Instead of forcing them into a normal picture frame, Tapaya significantly chooses the form of the amulets that are normally worn on the body. This takes as its basis the animistic belief, shared by the artist, that with the aid of the talisman a person can affect the magical forces that have an influence on him. The application of the protective form, readable as the first instance of the fact that this special painting goes beyond purely what is represented and enters into an alliance with the spiritual, appears like a discrete link. The view of the painter, which escapes the prison of reductive concepts, testifies here to what Umberto Eco once termed an "open artwork," breaking the sound barrier of the surface. Through this, one is enabled to enter into never before seen spaces. Within them we must first, somewhat painfully, struggle for orientation.

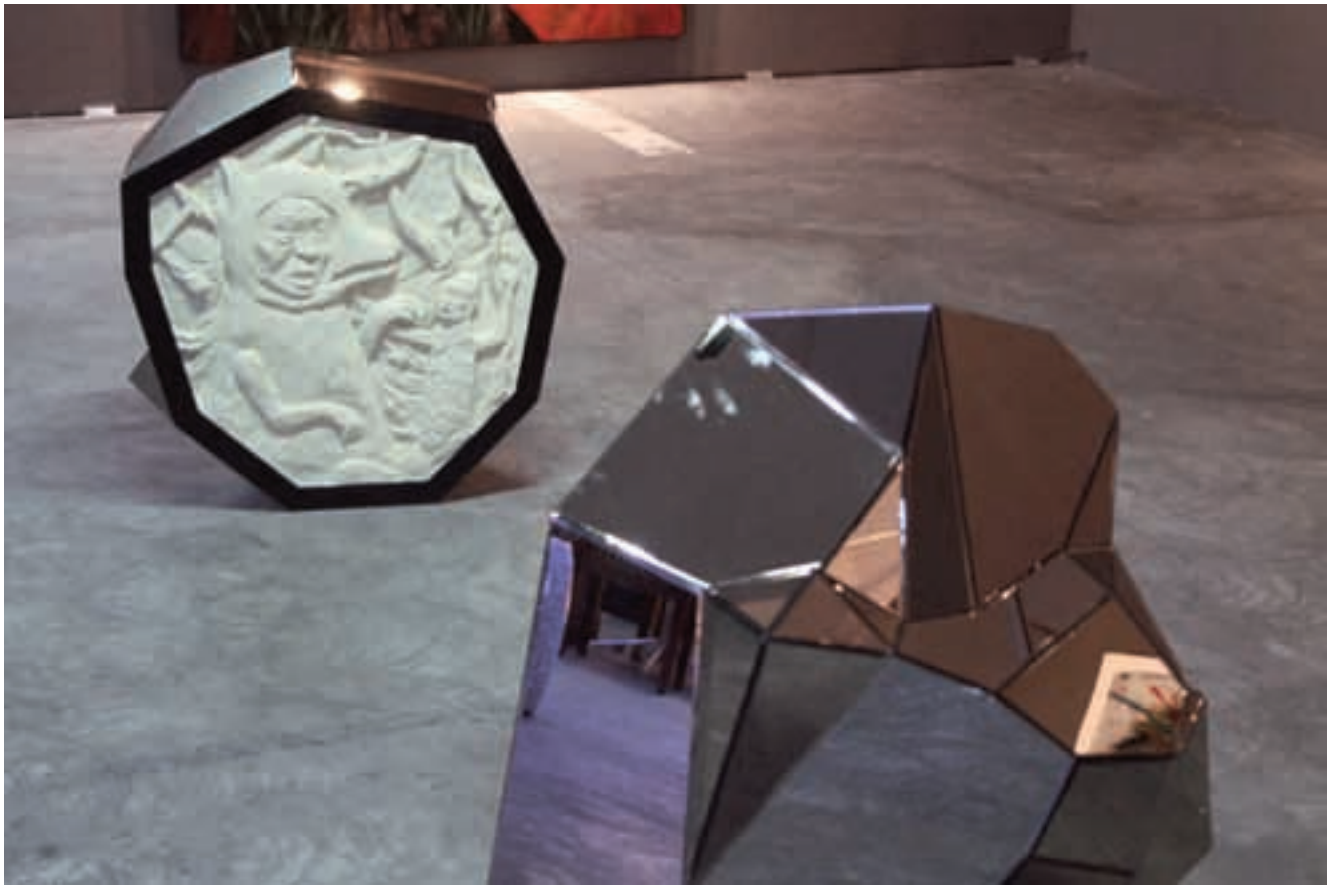
That is why, at the beginning of our imaginary journey through this exotic thicket, the banal question is necessary: what do we actually see or recognise? Besides the trees reaching into the air, we see also expanding bushes. Unidentifiable undergrowth. Hills. Lakes. Flowers. Not only delicate or dainty plants, but also huge leaves or, in the midst of these, a still life with fruits and vegetables like a proffered gift: all motifs that could refer to the opulence of paradisiacal nature and simultaneously to the increasingly incalculable breadth of the cosmic world. And in addition to this, we see the emergence of animals: among them are fish, bees, parrots, crocodiles, wild boar, chickens, lions, hyenas, a group of monkeys, a donkey, a raptor, or a soaring flock of birds. Yet there are also strange hybrid and mythical creatures, half-human, half-animal. Furthermore, all kinds of things from everyday life appear, such as a sewing machine and other appliances, a chest of drawers, vases, whole houses—and everywhere lurking ghosts and gods. The dominance of the unutterable spreads far and wide, as if saturated by leaden alienation. This realm, mysterious and enigmatic to us, full of apparitions with their melodic symbiosis, organic complexity, and strange connections could perhaps, upon a fleeting glance, be misunderstood as an escape from the present or as a nostalgic return to an ideal state of nature. We should definitely resist from accusing Tapaya's painting of unworldliness or of being detached from the world, because, by avoiding everything direct and apparently familiar to us, it resides only in the here and now through subliminal allusions or indirect references. If we pigeonhole his art as unworldly, we find ourselves up an ever-narrowing alley with no vision of the work's immeasurable and multi-faceted depths. Despite all the differences, this irreducible complexity belongs to another form of unity, lacking the separation between subject and object which is so highly praised among us in the West. What we are confronted with certainly has nothing to do with any example from the realm of naive art. Anyone who, faced with these obscure landscapes, feels the melancholy flowing of metamorphoses could easily be inclined to link the whole thing with surrealism. Yet this allocation or connection also distracts from the distinctive features, the difference and uniqueness of this artistic position. So it is better not to make any flawed or hasty comparisons which draw more on the pressure of conformity than a need to differentiate. Neither can we delimit where we have landed, nor definitively push the style—which rests on many styles—in any direction. The time that is portrayed in front of us is also not actually datable, because here past, present, and future cannot be divided from each other. Instead it

seems as if we are dealing with a lesson in constancy, which is expressed in a special way. That is to say that, appearing like a continually moving river, time nevertheless always remains the same.

In conversation Tapaya speaks of the almost paralysing effect of studying art books and visiting museums in New York and Europe at the age of twenty. Confronted with the broad spectrum of the most varied means of painting and expression—among them figurative as well as abstract and minimalist art—and following the promising possibilities of other media, he tried out everything. While copying what he saw, he gradually came to realize how little of himself he found there, and eventually he forged towards a unique style that freed him from all guidelines and vitalised him. Thus he was able to conjure up these singular landscape fictions, crowded with creatures. There, fauna and flora are so strongly conjoined that the one positively elides into the other. No elements can be separated without disturbing the heterogeneous order. For instance, the feet of a figure in a black suit with yellow dots mutate into the roots of a tree, which is seeking purchase in the earth. In another case, the right leg of a red-flecked dark-skinned person lengthens into a tree—or the plumage of a bird, transitioning into the plant-like and snaking around various things like trees, digs deep into the earth in order to ascend again elsewhere in a columnesque form. The metamorphoses taking place here represent permanent becoming and renewed transcending. At the same time, the organic excess in which we submerge ourselves is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively too much, primarily because it is joined in a subtle composition. In it, the visual and the visionary appear as synonyms, insofar as mythology proves itself to be an unresolved place of existential experiences. They are related to the bad as well as the good. Indeed, it appears as if the view from a distance, creating a poetic continuity, brings more clarity to the darkness of the experience of living in the here and now.

Modern Mananggals, 2013

Modern Manananggals (details), 2013



Sigbin, 2014

Pangudyawon, 2014

Manama, 2010

Isang Kahig, Isang Tuka, 2010

From the *Diorama* series, 2009:
Pedro and the Witch *Mang Pedro and the Snake*

The Wise Monkey and the Foolish Giant

The Hunter of Pinamaloy

Rodel Tapaya

1980

→ Born in Montalban, Philippines
Lives and works in Bulacan, Philippines

Education

→ "Intensive Studies" course, emphasis on drawing and painting, Parsons School of Design, New York City, USA
→ "Intensive Studies" course, emphasis on drawing and painting, University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland
→ Studies with Major in Painting, College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2014

→ *The Chocolate Ruins*, Arndt, Berlin, Germany
→ *Bato-Balani*, Ateneo Art Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines

2013

→ *The Ladder to Somewhere*, Arndt, Singapore

2012

→ *Mystic Origins: Plants I,* Wada Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan
→ *Deities*, West Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Prism and Parallelism*, BenCab Museum, Baguio City, Philippines

2011

→ *Believe it or Not,* Pinto Art Museum, Antipolo City, Philippines
→ *Visions of Lore*, Caprice Horn Galerie, Berlin, Germany
→ *This Beast I Have Become*, Y++ Gallery, Beijing, China

2010

→ *Bulaklak ng Dila [Flowers of the Tongue]*, The Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Memory Landscapes*, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines

2009

→ *Mythical Roots*, Soka Art Center, Beijing, China
→ *Diorama*, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines

2008

→ *Into the Forest*, Utterly Art and The Drawing Room, Singapore
→ *FOLKgotten*, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines

2007

→ *Perya*, Boston Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Mapapel*, The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines

2006

→ *Parables*, Utterly Art and The Drawing Room, Singapore
→ *Looban*, Boston Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Tauhan*, Big and Small Art Co., Mandaluyong City, Philippines

2005

→ *Lunan*, Boston Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Recent Paintings*, Big and Small Art Co., Mandaluyong City, Philippines

2004

→ *Balangkas*, Boston Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines

Selected Group Exhibitions

2014

→ *Burning Down the House,* 10th Gwangju Biennale, Republic of Korea

2011

→ *Emerging Asian Contemporary Part I*, Wada Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan
→ *Bisa: Potent Presences*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Philippines

2010

→ *Simple Depictions,* Alliance Francaise de Manille, Makati City, Philippines
→ *Looking Back*, Ark Galerie, Jakarta, Indonesia (with The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines)

2009

→ *Thrice Upon a Time: A Century of Story in the Art of the Philippines*, Singapore Art Museum
→ *Verso Manila*, Verso Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy (with The Drawing Room, Makati City, Philippines)

2008

→ Showcase Singapore
→ *Bridge Art Show*, New York, NY, USA

2006

→ *New Directions*, The Rotunda Gallery, Neilson Hays Library, Bangkok, Thailand

2005

→ *Figuras*, Art Center, Mandaluyong City, Philippines

2004

→ *Alay 8*, Pinto Art Gallery, Antipolo City, Philippines
→ *Configured Drawings*, Cultural Center of the Philippines Pasilyo Guillermo Tolentino, Pasay City, Philippines
→ *Gamit*, The Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
→ *Danas*: *Sinsin*, Small Gallery, CCP – Cultural Center of the Philippines, Pasay City, Philippines

2002

→ *Toys*, Ayala Museum, Makati City, Philippines

Selected Awards

2014

→ Sovereign Asian Art Prize: finalist

2012

→ Recipient of the Ani ng Dangal (Harvest of Honors) Award

2011

→ Asia Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize: Grand Winner Singapore
→ Ateneo Art Awards – Anatomy of Autonomy: shortlisted

2010

→ Ateneo Art Awards – Shattering States: shortlisted

2007
→ Philippine Art Awards: finalist for NCR Region

2006
→ Ateneo Art Awards – Outbound: shortlisted

2005
→ Ateneo Art Awards: shortlisted

2003
→ Philippine Art Awards: among the fifty semi-finalists

2001
→ Nokia Arts Awards – Asia Pacific (International level, held in Seoul, Korea): winner of Grand Prize
→ Metrobank – Young Painters' Annual: semi-finalist
→ Shell National Students Arts Competition (oil/acrylic category): first place
→ Kahusayan sa Larangan ng Sining, Pagkilala ng UP (National and International level)

2000
→ Nokia Arts Awards – Asia Pacific: among the five finalists

1999
→ Shell National Students Arts Competition (watercolor category): finalist

Selected Collections

→ Ateneo Art Gallery Collection, Philippines
→ Deutsche Bank Art Collection
→ Metropolitan Museum of the Philippines through Central Bank of The Philippines (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) Collection
→ Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
→ Pinto Art Museum Collection, Philippines
→ RCBC Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation Collection, Philippines
→ Singapore Art Museum Collection
→ Taguchi Art Collection, Japan
→ The Hori Science and Art Foundation Collection, Japan

Selected Bibliography

Monographs

→ *Rodel Tapaya: Bato-balani*. Exh. cat. Ateneo Art Gallery. Quezon City (Philippines), 2014.
→ *Emerging Asian Contemporary Philippines, Vol. 1. Rodel Tapaya: Mystic Origins Plants*. Exh. cat. Wada Fine Arts, Tokyo (Japan), 2012.
→ Cristobal, Geronimo. *Cloudland. Rodel Tapaya*. Exh. pamphlet. Hong Kong International Art Fair. Manila (Philippines), 2012.
→ *Rodel Tapaya: Prism and Paralellism*. Exh. cat. BenCab Museum. Baguio City (Philippines), 2012.
→ *Rodel Tapaya: This Beast I Have Become*. Exh. cat. Y++ Gallery. Beijing (China), 2011.
→ Flores, Patrick. *Rodel Tapaya: Bulaklak ng Dila [Flowers of the Tongue]*. Exh. cat. The Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, 2010/2011. Makati City (Philippines), 2010.
→ Guillermo, Alice G. *Rodel Tapaya: Believe it or Not*. Exh. cat. Pinto Art Museum. Antipolo City (Philippines), 2011.
→ *Rodel Tapaya: Diorama*. Exh. pamphlet. The Drawing Room. Makati City (Philippines), 2009.
→ Legaspi-Ramirez, Eileen. *Perya (Carnival): Works by Rodel Tapaya*. Exh. cat. Boston Art Gallery. Quezon City (Philippines), 2007.

Essays in Books and Exhibition Catalogues

→ "Rodel Tapaya." *2012 Thirteen Artists Awards*. Exh. cat. CCP – Cultural Center of the Philippines. Pasay City (Philippines), 2012.
→ Cristobal, Geronimo. "Philippine Folk in a Labyrinth. Rodel Tapaya at Art Stage Singapore." Exh. cat. Art Stage Singapore. Singapore, 2012.
→ Cristobal, Geronimo. "Rodel Tapaya: A Painter's Life [interview]." Geronimo Cristobal, ed. *Moment's Notice: Collected Encounters*. Manila/Berlin, 2011.

Articles in Periodicals and Newspapers

→ Koerner von Gustorf, Oliver. "The Spirits in the Forests. Rodel Tapaya's Magical Art." *ArtMag by Deutsche Bank* 82. October 14, 2014. http://db-artmag.de/en/82/feature/the-spirit-in-the-forests-rodel-tapayas-magical-art/.
→ Moore, Christopher. "Rodel Tapaya: The Chocolate Ruins." *randian art magazine*. April 2, 2014. http://www.randian-online.com/np_review/rodel-tapaya-the-chocolate-ruins/.
→ Cristobal, Geronimo. "Rodel Tapaya. The Ladder to Somewhere." *Wall Street International*. April 19, 2013. http://wsimag.com/art/2718-rodel-tapaya-the-ladder-to-somewhere.
→ Zulueta, Lito B. "Rodel's 'Ladder.' Tapaya builds intercourse between myth, art and reality." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. April 15, 2013, p. F1. http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/98897/rodels-ladder-tapaya-builds-intercourse-between-myth-art-and-reality.
→ Chia, Adeline. "Rodel Tapaya Mines Filipino Folklore for 'Ladder to Somewhere' [interview]." *Blouinartinfo*. April 3, 2013. http://sea.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/886660/rodel-tapaya-mines-filipino-folklore-for-ladder-to-somewhere.
→ Flores, Wilson Lee. "Don't forget the Good News." *The Philippine Star*. December 18, 2011. http://www.philstar.com/sunday-life/759158/dont-forget-good-news.
→ Zulueta, Lito B. "Filipino artist Rodel Tapaya bags grand prize in international art contest, November 2011." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. November 19, 2011. http://lifestyle.inquirer.net/23161/filipino-artist-rodel-tapaya-bags-grand-prize-in-international-art-contest.
→ Guillermo, Alice G. "Folk Wisdom in Images." *Business Mirror*. February 16, 2011, p. D4.
→ Garcia, Brian B. "Rodel Tapaya: The Art of Visual Narrative." *Manila Bulletin*. April 19, 2010, p. F1.
→ Hilario, Riel J. "The Emergence of Rodel Tapaya." *Contemporary Art Philippines* 2, Vol. 2. January/February 2009, pp. 54–62.

All internet references last accessed on December 17, 2014.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Rodel Tapaya for his commitment to and support of this project. Thanks also to Marina Cruz for all her wonderful effort and help, and to Rose Anne and Kevin Belmonte for supporting this publication.
My further warm thanks go to my team Tobias Sirtl, Lisa Polten and Valeska Hageney, as well as to Kristin Rieber.

Matthias Arndt, Berlin, January 2015

Colophon

Editor
Matthias Arndt

Managing Editor and Editing
Kristin Rieber

Texts
David Elliott, Heinz-Norbert Jocks, Zeny May Dy Recidoro (ZMDR), Rodel Tapaya (RT)

The essay by Heinz-Norbert Jocks was published before in *Rodel Tapaya: Bato-balani.* Exh. cat. Ateneo Art Gallery. Quezon City (Philippines), 2014.

Translation
Alexandra Skwara (German–English, pp. 138–140)

Design
Bureau Mathias Beyer, Cologne

Copy Editing
Sarah Quigley

Image Editing
max-color, Berlin

Production Management
DISTANZ Verlag, Sonja Bahr

Production
optimal media GmbH, Röbel/Müritz

Photo Credits
All photographs were taken by Rodel and Marina Tapaya, except: pp. 2, 44/45, 48/49, 52–63, 142–145: At Maculangan; pp. 115–125, 148, 150/151: Ocs Alvarez; pp. 146, 147: Ryan Tizon and Potchie Lazaro

Distribution
Gestalten, Berlin
www.gestalten.com
sales@gestalten.com

ISBN 978-3-95476-096-1
Printed in Germany

Published by
DISTANZ Verlag
www.distanz.de

Cover Image
Refreshing Fluid, 2014

Frontispiece
Protection in the Forest, 2013

Rodel Tapaya

List of Works and Selected Descriptions

DISTANZ

Rodel Tapaya in his studio in Bulacan, Philippines, 2014; photo: Marina Cruz

→ Cover
***Refreshing Fluid* (crop), 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
213 × 152 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

Refreshing Fluid takes on the perennial issue of drought. It draws from the Bagobo tale of a couple called Toglai and Toglibon; after their death a great drought came upon their land, lasting three years and forcing their children to move to various locations and eventually become the pioneers of present-day groups in Mindanao. One of the children, on the verge of death, discovered water in sugarcane, and settled in a region that was plentiful of it; his descendants were the Bagobo (the first ethnic group in Mindanao). In this work we see the anatomy and effects of drought, with water taken to propel electric powerplants supplying the big cities, while none is left for the *lumad* or indigenous peoples. The image of the sugarcane embodies suffering, as it calls to mind the *haciendas* and *azucareras* or sugar factories, where farmers toil for very little pay. This collision of past and present crises results in a powerfully visual and well-considered social commentary that does not resort to literal sensationalism. *ZMDR*

→ p. 2
***Protection in the Forest*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
166 × 137 cm
Private Collection, Berlin

The shape of *Protection in the Forest* resembles the shape of an *agimat* (talisman) used by people for protection. Some would even claim that their *agimat* makes them immune to possible injuries from bullets and knives, thus rendering them invincible and perhaps even immortal. In the painting, an apprehensive-looking hunter is making his way through the forest, rifle in hand. He is surrounded by forces both bestial and otherworldly. An eagle (perhaps the prey he is hunting) is in turn protected by the forest, which camouflages the bird: its body melds with root, smoke, water, and earth symbolized by arch and pillar. The same goes for the formidable lion and leopard. At the bottom, man and beast encounter each other, on separate rock formations, and the river is presented as far more than a placid body, with its spirit hidden beneath its surface. In this magically bewildering environment, the all too mortal hunter has to cling to an object, its charm fueled by his belief. *ZMDR*

→ p. 5
***The Magic Show of the Haciendero Magician*, 2007**
Acrylic on burlap
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 6
***Kinakawowowee II*, 2007**
Acrylic on burlap
152 × 183 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 12
***Meeting with Self*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 13
***Crossing Over*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection

In many of Tapaya's works, familiar images or tropes are given new dimensions and depth of meaning. *Crossing Over* is one example—a person rides on the back of another, signifying a rescue. Thick gray cords framing the image of the rescuer and the rescued further reinforce this interpretation; the dark areas in the foreground of the painting can be seen as a representation of a river that has to be crossed (which in turn is a metaphor for any crisis or adversary that has to be overcome). On the other hand, the scene can also be considered a new take on the narrative of death, as was perhaps first expressed in the Philippine manunggul jar which depicts a boatman accompanying a dead person across a river to the afterlife, so that even in death a person is not completely alone. And Tapaya gives this a warmer aspect by expressing this rescue or companionship through the uncertain in terms of physical contact, the figures themselves being melded into each other while making the journey across a river, towards death. *ZMDR*

→ p. 14
***Door to Door*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection, Berlin

This work depicts a scene of a fish vendor. On a personal note, my family's business is producing smoked fish, which vendors buy and sell around the village. *RT*

→ p. 15
***The Disguise*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

The Disguise presents hunters who camouflage themselves as animals in order to pass unnoticed, ensuring a successful hunt. It has often been said that much can be learned from nature, and being in it affords us insight and well-being that is becoming harder to come by in our increasingly urbanized lives. In this respect, the painting can be interpreted as exposing the human race's failure to grasp the idea of being in harmony with nature, rather opting to work against it and exploiting it. *ZMDR*

→ p. 16
***Dinner with Forest God*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 17
***Lift*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection, Berlin

→ p. 18
***The Two Wolves Inside*, 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

I remember quite early on reading this story about a grandson and a grandfather talking. The grandfather said, "My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies, and ego. The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth." The child asked, "Which wolf wins?" The old man quietly replied, "The one you feed." *RT*

→ p. 19
***The Lector,* 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

The Lector prompts one to muse on the possibility and power of words. The work depicts a lector reading passages from a book; the faint figure behind him seated in a chair, from which various lines emanate, can be seen as an extension of the lector imagining the prophetic power of his words upon his listeners. His uncomfortable stance on the stage expresses the presence of fear and insecurity in the face of the prospect of great power, his alter ego in the background appearing tense (with both arms across the chest) and seemingly frustrated that the lector is not rising to the occasion. This is an expression of an existential crisis which unfortunately prevails among many people from the artist's country, in which potential remains only that and is never realized, and possibly meaningful roles disappear, unfulfilled. *ZMDR*

→ p. 20
***Goddess of the Forest,* 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Hotel Luna Museum Collection, Vigan City, Philippines

→ p. 21
***The Idiot Box,* 2014**
Acrylic on paper
77 × 57 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 23
***Forest Spirit,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Collection Linda O. Coscolluela, Philippines

Forest Spirit depicts a world that is both fleeting and older than, or beyond, words. It refers to the tale of a skilled hunter named Dangkaw who falls under the wrath of the fairy guarding the forest and the animals in it, because of the constant disturbances caused by his hunts. The fairy condemns him to remain in the forest, away from his family and the world he knew. Eventually Dangkaw marries the fairy and, along with his new wife, becomes the guardian spirit of the forest and its inhabitants. The story has it that if hunters in the forest hear a shout when there is no one in their company who could have made such a sound, they postpone their hunt and leave the animals alone, fearing they will be punished by the fairy and Dangkaw. *ZMDR*

→ p. 24
***Outpouring,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 122 cm
Private Collection, Hong Kong

Because of the massive damage caused by Typhoon Haiyan, many of those in the Visayan region, in the center of the Philippines, were left homeless and starving. With help from both fellow countrymen and others around the globe, they were able to rebuild their lives. *Outpouring* reflects on this lending of a helping hand by echoing a myth of the northern Bontoc tribe about a great flood caused by many days of ceaseless rain. Two groups of people, or two tribes, were able to survive the disaster. But because it took some time for the flood to subside, one tribe almost perished from the cold on the top of a mountain. The second tribe, located on another mountaintop, helped them: they sent a dog that swam across the floodwater and brought fire to the first tribe, thus enabling them to survive the cold. *RT*

→ p. 25
***The Heirloom,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
213 × 152 cm
Private Collection

The inspiration comes from an Ibanag folktale about a magic medallion that gives the young boy Juan and his mother a fortune. Already a poor family, when the father dies the only thing that is left to them is the *bolo,* which Juan uses to cut down trees. On one such tree, a medallion appeared inside the trunk. When this was removed a strange-looking man, like a genie, appeared and granted all Juan's wishes. *RT*

→ pp. 26/27
***The First Beings: The Ten Headed Creature, The Mediator and The Supreme Planner,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
Triptych, 213 × 152 cm each
Deutsche Bank Collection

This triptych refers to a Bukidnon creation myth in which the interdependence of three celestial beings gives rise to the known universe. In the middle panel, the Mediator, a winged creature, holds the ring in which are contained the Supreme Planner and the Ten Headed Creature; it also serves as an arbiter between the two. The Supreme Planner sets out to create the world with the help of the Ten Headed Creature, who possesses the means to carry out the Supreme Planner's vision. In the right and left panels, the celestial beings are repeated, accentuating the importance of their presences by and with each other, and suggesting that without their mutual help, nothing can be fully realized. On a more practical note, cooperation, interdependence, and collaboration are crucial, from the home to the community to the workplace, and every person is important for the success of another. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 28/29
***Fragrance and Harmony,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
244 × 335 cm
Private Collection, Switzerland

This work is about war. I particularly like the lyrics of a Filipino folksong that says, "if your enemy doesn't have heart, you should use your heart instead; you need to treat him like a friend and think that he also has a heart like you." The white flowers represent the hope for peace. This work doesn't pertain to any particular folktale or story, but is my interpretation of the Historic Peace Agreement of the Mindanao people and the Philippine Government, which grants largely Muslim areas of the Mindanao region greater political autonomy in exchange for an end to armed rebellion. This is a victory for Muslim people, for it ended four decades of the arms struggle in the Mindanao region, in the southern part of the Philippines. Earlier attempts at establishing peace hadn't worked. But this time, this is the closest to peace we've so far achieved amongst our Muslim brothers and sisters, and hopefully our people will live in harmony with each other. *RT*

→ pp. 30/31
***Armor,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
244 × 335 cm
Private Collection, Switzerland

This is inspired by a folktale from Pampanga in the Northern part of Luzon (Philippines). The main figures, Juan and Maria, are siblings. When they were still young their father forced them to leave home because he was too poor to feed them. As they wandered about in the countryside, they encountered a deer that (somewhat strangely) advised them to eat it. Inside the deer's body Juan found a suit of armor, and Maria found an egg. They took these possessions with them and continued on their journey, eventually coming across a house where an old lady took them in and brought them up as her own children. One day there was a tournament hosted by the king. The winner of the contest was to become the husband of the princess, and would inherit the throne. Juan fought in the competition, using his armor, and defeated all his opponents. Maria's lucky egg hatched; the rooster grew and was entered in a cockfight, which won her a fortune. Later, she married a prince and eventually became queen. *RT*

→ pp. 32/33
***Eagle's Rebirth,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
244 × 335 cm
SEACO Collection

Eagle's Rebirth is about the possibilities of hope and the chance to change. In a rather whimsical story, it has been said that an eagle has a lifespan of seventy years, but that by the age of forty it has to undergo a long and painful regeneration process. It must retreat to the mountaintops to knock off and regrow its beak, must pull out and regrow its talons, and finally pluck off and regrow its feathers. This process affords the eagle another thirty years of life. In the painting, a boy who has grown up in the slums is on his way to becoming an eagle, which signifies the chances he can take: to escape a life of poverty and fly high, fulfilling his dreams and ambitions. Another image, located in the middle of a painting, is that of a fairy with a box containing opportunities, represented as tiny seeds, which people can grab and then grow. The eagle-boy holds one himself, and it appears that only a few from his community are interested in or even notice these small seeds of opportunity. On the right-hand side of the painting, a bat preys on rotten fruit; beneath it a hamster runs its endless course on a wheel, unaware that it is going nowhere, and a man watches television, his mind hollowed out and then fed with a petty coin. Ultimately, it is people's mindsets that determine their destiny and there is always the possibility that even a person from the poorest and darkest slums can have a chance at rebirth, and change even when the odds are against it. *ZMDR*

→ p. 35
***The Caretaker,* 2014**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection, New York, USA

The Caretaker refers to a Filipino creation myth revolving around the supreme gods Bathala, Galang Kaluluwa (Wandering Spirit), and Ulilang Kalulawa (Orphaned Spirit). After Galang Kaluluwa, who had killed Ulilang Kalulawa in a battle, died, a coconut tree sprouted on his grave. Its nut reminded Bathala of Galang Kaluluwa's head and its leaves of his wings. Bathala also noticed that the trunk of the tree was hard and ugly like the body of Galang Kaluluwa's enemy, Ulilang Kaluluwa. The tree became the tree of life for the humans whom Bathala had created thereafter; its water and white meat served as nourishment, and its leaves and trunk were used for making a variety of tools and for building houses. *RT*

→ pp. 36/37
***The Lion and the Rat,* 2014**
Acrylic on acrylic sheet, reverse painting under-glass
51 × 81 × 5 cm
Kirk and Joanne Young Collection

A rat caught stealing rice was thrown into a lion's den. The lion wanted to eat him up, but the rat asked the lion to spare his life and promised to help him in the future. The lion set the rat free. Years later, after the lion had also been set free, he was recaptured by a huntsman and tied up with rope. When the rat saw this, he gnawed through the rope and set the lion free to repay his old debt. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 38/39
***The Carabao and the Snail,* 2014**
Acrylic on acrylic sheet, reverse painting under-glass
51 × 81 × 5 cm
Private Collection

One very hot day, when the carabao went to the river to bathe, he met a shell and they began talking. "You are very slow," said the carabao to the shell. "Oh, no," replied the shell. "I can beat you in a race." "Then let us try and see," said the carabao. So they went out on the bank and started to run. After the carabao had gone a long distance he stopped and called, "Shell!" And another shell lying by the river answered, "Here I am!" Then the carabao, thinking that it was the same shell with which he was racing, ran on. By and by he stopped and called, "Shell!" Again another shell answered, "Here I am!" The carabao was surprised that the shell could keep up with him. But he ran on and on, and every time he stopped to call out, another shell answered him. He was determined that the shell should not beat him, so he ran until he dropped dead. *RT*

→ pp. 40/41
***The Origin of Bul'ul,* 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 244 cm
Private Collection

The Origin of Bul'ul is a reference to the legend of the origins of the rice granary guardian. The main figure Humidhid, a deity living in Daiya (in the Ifugao Upstream Region), heard and was moved by the wailing and crying of a large narra tree near his house. He asked the tree what could be done to help it: whether it wanted to be carved into a prestigious lounge bench (*hagabi*), or a serpent-shaped house post (*balog*) or some other figure. The tree replied that it wanted to be transformed into a *bul'ul* (the representation of a human body). Humidhid made several but realized that they consumed too much wine and food, so he threw them into the river and they floated to Lagud (also in the Ifugao Upstream Region). Time passed, and Humidhid's family grew. One day his

daughter Bugan was by the river when her lime tube (the small container used for betel chewing) fell into the water and was swept away; it was found by the *bul'ul* from Lagud who returned it to her. Bugan fell in love with one of the *bul'ul*; they married and had children. Only when one of these children went to visit their grandfather did Humidhid realize that the *bul'ul* he had thrown into the river were human. To redeem himself, he told his grandchildren to carve *bul'ul* so that the figures would protect their rice crops and assure their well-being. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 42/43
***Unfinished Bridge*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 204 cm
Private Collection

Continuing the thread of folktales from the Cordillera region, *Unfinished Bridge* takes us to Balatoc, one of the oldest towns in Kalinga-Apayao, and home to various peoples including the Tinguians of Abra, the Isnegs of Apayao, and those from Dananao. This particular tale revolves around a maiden named Ipogao, a god called Kabunian, and an unfinished bridge. The story goes that Kabunian arrives in Balatoc as a stranger from a faraway place and proposes marriage to the beautiful Ipogao, who says she will only accept if he proves his love for her. Kabunian decides to make a bridge that will be of great help to Ipogao's community. However, he demands that no one watches him working, or interrupts him. But Ipogao unwittingly interrupts Kabunian's creation; angry that his demand has not been complied with, Kabunian departs and the bridge is left unfinished. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 44/45
***Living Underworld*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
173 × 304 cm
Private Collection, Switzerland

Living Underworld portrays a collection of images expressing concepts inherent in Philippine mythology—of otherworldly beings, beliefs on the afterlife, and worlds that parallel our reality. There is the idea of the afterlife as infinite and plentiful, symbolized by the woman with many teats (the pre-hispanic goddess of the afterlife Mebuyan), the presence of the wild boar and the dog (widely believed to be shape-shifters, whose planes of existence encompass that of humans as well as other worlds), and the practice of leaving food for the dead to provide the energy necessary for the journey to the afterlife. But beyond these ideas and beliefs also lies the Poetics of Death, crystallized in the image of the skull, reminiscent of depictions of the *danse macabre* or Baroque and Dutch still-life paintings. However, the skull and the skeleton can also be seen as the scaffolding onto which life clings. In this vein, reality and otherworldliness are connected to and overlap with each other through thought and faith. *RT*

→ pp. 46/47
***Modern Captives*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 366 cm
The Hori Science and Art Foundation, Japan

Modern Captives is inspired by a tale about how the world was inhabited by people of various characteristics and traits. It tells the story of the couple Sikabay and Sikalake. They were given a new lot in life by a wizard named Sibu Inoptan, who had the power to change stones into plants, thus allowing them to have a large number of offspring. But their children were very lazy, to the point where Sikalake became furious, and the children fled in fear to various locations which determined their race and lot in life. Those who hid under the lankanos became the *olipons* (slaves); those who hid behind the stove in the kitchen were called *atas* (Negritos); those who concealed themselves in the trees were called the *timauas* (freemen), for they were poor and destitute of fortune; those who fled to the mountains became known as the Igneines, or those that were destined to work on the land; and those who went to the shore were called the Jiguesinas, or fishermen. With regards to the present time, and extending beyond mere myth, this work serves as an allegory for how we let presumptions and stereotypes pervade our perceptions, hindering our ability to realize our own identities as well as to connect with others. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 48/49
***The Hole in the Sky*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 305 cm
Private Collection

The Hole in the Sky is a work that presents us with the interactions of gods and human beings through a hole in the sky. On the upper left part we see Ukunirot, a hunter living in the sky who accidentally created a hole there. The central figure holding a rooster is based on the Bontoc legend of Lumawig, a son of the supreme god Kabunian. Lumawig asked Kabunian if he could go down to live on earth, and Kabunian instructed him to bring a spear, a dog, a rooster, a betel nut, and a bag. The scene on the far right refers to a legend of Bohol Island, in which a god who fell from the sky was helped by animals—depicted here as ducks. *RT*

→ p. 51
***Origin of the Stars*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 142 cm
Michelangelo and Lourdes Samson Collection

Origin of the Stars stems from the Tagalog folktale about the rivalry between Araw, the sun, and Buan, the moon. Buan wanted to rule both night and day, thus appearing even when the sun was still in the sky. Lihangin, the wind, acted as arbiter; he advised Buan not to occupy part of Araw's kingdom, for Araw was just and Buan must behave in the same way. But Buan ignored Lihangin's advice and continued to rile Araw, until they fought and Buan was badly hit. Parts of his body were scattered across the sky and became stars, while he lost his former radiance retaining only a ghostly glow. *ZMDR*

→ p. 52
***The Attraction*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
167 × 136 cm
Private Collection

This work is about gayuma, a love charm with the use of magical chants that will cause a person to love another. I have also made reference to the folk story of Bodobodo, a woman who changes her appearance in order to make a man love her. I likened Bodobodo to a flower that attracts a bee. *RT*

→ p. 53
***Lucky Fight*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
166 × 136 cm
Michael and Janet Buxton Collection, Australia

This work refers to a good luck charm used for cockfighting. Shaped like a shield, this amulet also offers protection in a battle or war. The story inspiration here was a myth called "Origin of Birds." The chickens were originally humans who waged war and fought with each other. The gods got angry and turned them into chickens. The rooster used in cockfighting is also associated with Saint Peter; when Peter betrayed Jesus three times the cock crowed. This bird is also believed to guard the gates of heaven. *RT*

→ p. 54
***The Gift*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
197 × 136 cm
Ma. Charmaine Lim Collection

The Gift is about an amulet that is related to the human desire to have children, and is a symbol of fertility. There is a Sagada Igorot folktale called "The Child Born Without a Body" in which a childless couple wants to have a child, even if that child is nothing but a head. In the story the head helps the birds to escape a trap, and to repay the good deed the birds help the child (the head) to gain a body. There are also birds carrying bags that contain babies, as if babies are made in heaven. *RT*

→ p. 55
***Monkey Beauty*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
196 × 136 cm
Private Collection, New Zealand

Monkey Beauty is inspired by an amulet that is related to the human desire for beauty and eternal youth, as well as by a folktale from Pampanga called "Juan Wearing a Monkey's Skin," in which a monkey is transformed into a human being. In this work, the sheep refers to the stem cell treatment used nowadays to achieve the "fountain of youth." The crocodile in the lower part of the work represents the dark intentions of those who take advantage of the desire to be young by creating fake potions that other people believe to be true. *RT*

→ p. 56
***Business Prosper*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
197 × 137 cm
The HIM collection, Singapore

This work is inspired by an amulet that is for achieving prosperity in one's business, based on a story called "A Tailor Dwende," about a dwarf who helped a poor man's business. On the lower right is a spider: a creature that is very good at sewing and weaving its own home. *RT*

→ p. 57
***Faithful Lover*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
197 × 136 cm
Private Collection

Faithful Lover is based on a vessel-like or container-shaped amulet that is for people who desire to keep their lovers loyal to them forever; it is a guard against divorce and separation. The Visayan folk story about Si Malakas at Si Maganda was revisited here; with the help of the bird, Manaul, the couple Malakas (The Strong) and Maganda (The Beautiful) was able to emerge from the giant bamboo. At the top part of the work are a small fertility charm and a reptile/lizard called Tuko. "Kambal-tuko" means they will never be separated. On the lower right is a woman cooking. There is also a belief that when a wife loses her husband through infidelity, she should begin cooking and let the smoke seep into her husband's clothing. When one does this, it is believed that the man will return and reunite with the wife. *RT*

→ p. 58
***The Antidote*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
141 × 213 cm
Collection of the artist

The triangular shape of this amulet is an antidote for or protection against *kulam* or witchcraft. In this work I look at *kulam* as a curse through words. I refer to the Parable of the Gossip where a wise man (seen in the lower left corner) used the analogy of feathers being blown away by the wind to describe how words, when spoken, cannot be retrieved again. The dark central figure is inspired by the figure of Mangkokolam, from a Zambales legend, who spreads gossip or negative things about a person. On the lower right are two figures wearing blinkers like those of a horse and earphones, implying that the antidote is to be deaf to whatever is said and stay focused on your goal or dreams. *RT*

→ p. 59
***She's from the Sky*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas, framed with engraved tin sheet
136 cm (diameter)
The Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Limited

The circular-shaped amulet is for protection when one travels through the sky. The round shape signifies the world, or the wheel of travel. The work is based on a Hiligaynon folktale called "Magboloto," about a man who wanted to marry a star girl and therefore hid her wings so she could not return to the sky. But later on his wife found out what he'd done, found her wings, and flew back to the sky. Magboloto asked the help of the eagle so he could apologize and eventually reunite with his wife. *RT*

→ pp. 60/61
***Earthly Desires*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 409 cm
Ateneo Art Gallery Collection

Earthly Desires presents viewers with a kaleidoscope of historical and mythological images that represent man's desires, principally for freedom or power as seen, for example, in the detail of a figure standing beneath a banana flower, waiting for the *mutya* (the liquid extract of the flower) to drop into its mouth. It is believed that the *mutya* bestows strength and power over creatures of the netherworld to whoever ingests it. Next to it, an angular, abstracted crocodile is reflected in a mirror as a politician with horns, alluding to an Ilocano folktale of an unjust president, whose thoughtless wish to grow horns in order to frighten his people came true and as a consequence was killed by his people. The painting also shows four elements: fire, earth, wind, and water, each here related to a different story: 1. Fire: a myth about the god Aswang stealing fire, the symbol of his brother Gugurang's power, because of envy.

2. Earth: a historical scene depicting the Filipino revolutionary hero Andrés Bonifacio with a group of peers entering a cave that could serve as a secret meeting place for the Katipunan movement. 3. Wind: the creation myth of the Igneines and Negritos people, with Captan (the origin of the First Man and First Woman). 4. Water / Rain: referring to stories of great flooding, a prevalent problem in the Philippines (often caused or worsened by deforestation). *ZMDR*

→ pp. 62/63
***Chocolate Ruins*, 2013**
Acrylic on canvas
305 × 732 cm
Private Collection

Folklore and modern life meet in *Chocolate Ruins*, which plays upon preconceived notions on the savage and the industrial, the esoteric and the apparent. In the center is the bird-god Manaul who, by breaking bamboo, creates not the first man and woman but a machine that produces chocolate. This image borrows openly from creation myths originating from Bohol. In 2013 this island province was struck by a magnitude 7.2 earthquake, that leveled churches and marred tourist destinations such as the Chocolate Hills. The painting makes a connection between this event, Typhoon Haiyan which ravaged the Visayas region (of which Bohol is part), and the gross inadequacies of the government in responding to either disaster, opting instead to focus on media fanfare, especially the Pork Barrel Scam and saccharine charitable initiatives (that have corrupt motives). The Pork Barrel Scam is symbolized by the legend of the corn plant, a golden crop which grew from a corrupt Pig King's underground treasure of gold. In Tapaya's painting chocolate can be easily equated to momentary pleasure: to something that deludes and corrupts, bringing a false sense of happiness. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 64/65
***Manama's Abode*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 153 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

The painting is inspired by a myth of the Manuvu tribe, in the southern part of the Philippines. The sky became the abode of the creator-god Manama, his *diwatas* (divine beings) and deities. It was once close to the earth, so that Manama or his deities could keep watch over the people and protect them from the interference of the Ogassi and other bad spirits. As the sky was low, people could go up very easily and see their protectors. Indeed, it was so low that those pounding rice were inconvenienced. Their pestles would hit the sky, and therefore they asked for the sky to be raised. Thenceforth, the people could no longer climb to it. The deities showed their concern for the people, however, creating a stairway to the sky. It rose so high that the diwatas provided food on each rung of the ladder so that any time the people climbing got hungry, they would have some food to eat until they reached the place of the diwatas. *RT*

→ pp. 66/67
***Multi-petalled Beauty*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
244 × 427 cm
Private Collection, Indonesia

Multi-petalled Beauty comments on the violence of human attempts to grasp nature's vitality in their desire for beauty and youth. Here we find a flock of sheep, as an allusion to Dolly, the first animal to be cloned; a monkey shedding his skin to reveal a ghostly pale man similar to the prince trapped in the body of a frog in the Grimm fairytale "The Princess and the Frog"; thin, aged tubes producing smoke; and a crocodile and a tree being offered a flower by the monkey, as a metaphor for aged politicians using expensive stem cell treatments to appear younger. On the left, a two-sided being is sucking the essence from a woman, which can be interpreted as the process of taking bone marrow to prolong life, and placentas to produce stem cells. Abuses in the quest to sustain youth occur not only between humans and nature but also among humans themselves. It is interesting to note that all of this is not negotiated within a laboratory (the working scientists being mere specks, addressed cursorily) but within the jungles, i. e. in the spiritual and natural realms. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 68/69
***The Magic Stone*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 153 cm
Private Collection, Berlin

The Magic Stone follows the story of the T'Boli tribe of how the sun, moon, and stars came to be. In olden times, a man named Kadaw was appointed as an intermediary between the people and the *diwatas* (divine beings). Kadaw was also the sole owner of a whetstone so anyone who wanted their bolo knifes sharpened came to him. Yet problems arose when people tested the sharpness of the bolos on one of the pillars (*blotik*) of Kadaw's house. Despite being warned that the house might collapse, they kept striking their newly sharpened bolos upon the pillar, and eventually Kadaw's house collapsed. Because of this, he wanted to leave, but he argued with his wife Bulan over who would carry their child, since Bulan said she was not strong enough. Kadaw then divided his child in half, scattering finely chopped pieces on the ground which became crickets (*kerwe*) and the other half in the sky, where they became the stars. Bulan was so angered by this that she told Kadaw she never wanted to see him again. Thus when Kadaw, the sun, is around, Bulan, the moon, is absent. *ZMDR*

→ p. 71
***Greener Flight*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

Greener Flight is a take on the literal flight and diaspora of Filipino migrant workers or OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers). Here the father figure takes the form of the bird, who has to fly away frequently to look for food for his children. He also bears his entire family on his back, expressing the desire to bring loved ones to a better situation while always falling short due to forces that, while manmade, are still beyond individual control. *ZMDR*

→ p. 72
***Maria's Mother*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

The primordial figure of the mother is here presented in a rather symbolic and abstract way. Tapaya portrays the complex dynamic between a dog-mother and her three daughters through symbols and diagrams, implying words and expressions of affection that are inexplicably withheld. *ZMDR*

→ p. 73
***Don Miguel*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

This canvas is a subtle commentary on social disparity and greed as exemplified by the imposing figure of Don Miguel, the poster-image of a typical landlord (*haciendero*) who is slowly being eaten up by power, yet growing at the expense of the small people working under him. *ZMDR*

→ p. 74
***Banana Skin Peeling*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

The act of, and reflection on, transformation by peeling off one's original skin is implied in *Banana Skin Peeling*. Here, the cultural aspect of colonialism and a fatal sort of dependence, the seeking of validation from often foreign perspectives, is explored. The repetition of bananas on the bottom, which appear to revolve on a conveyor belt, also points to ideologies and ideas of a standard beauty that are being sold through mass-produced consumer goods. *ZMDR*

→ p. 75
***Lost Saw*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

Lost Saw is a reference to a folktale from Tarlac, and common beliefs on the fate of lost things. The story is about two woodsmen who went out for a day of tree-cutting. Putting their basket of food on a branch of a tree, they started working. When they returned for a break they could not find their lunch. What they had taken for a branch of a tree was actually a deer's horn. Tapaya ventures beyond a narrative level by connecting the story to present-day issues of environmental degradation, particularly the ravages of forests and ecosystems for the purposes of illegal logging. The work invites us to ponder upon what we will do once natural resources have been exhausted. *RT*

→ p. 76
***Dalagang Bukid*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

Dalagang Bukid stems from an Igorot folktale about a daughter who left home for strange and exotic lands. This quest for excitement and adventure is particularly resonant in the present time, when people travel for money or pleasure but almost always find themselves like "fish out of water." Here, that phrase takes on a literal turn as the quasi-wanderlust daughter is turned into a creature that is half human, half fish, and is put on display at a carnival. *ZMDR*

→ p. 77
***Treasured Egg*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

Continuing with the thread of greed drawn from *Don Miguel* (2012, p. 73), this work has its origin in a classic fable about a greedy man who killed a chicken that laid a golden egg, believing the bird had a regenerating lump of gold inside it. *ZMDR*

→ p. 78
***The Wise Man*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

The Wise Man refers to the parable of a gossipmonger who asked the Wise Man for help in getting rid of her bad habit. The Wise Man advised her to leave feathers at the doors of all those she had talked about, retrieving them the next day. When she returned to collect the feathers, however, she found they had been blown away by the wind. This fable delivers a clearcut message: once we have said something, especially something abrasive, it's rarely possible to take it back. *ZMDR*

→ p. 79
***Bangan's Appearance*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

The work is a reference to a folktale from the Cordillera region, in the northern part of Luzon Island (Philippines). A woman named Bodobodo becomes a false bride by stealing the identity of another woman, Bangan, and turning her into a caterpillar. In the painting, the true bride is seen warning her groom of Bodobodo's exploits but the work also explores the other side of the story: the insecurities and needs of an unwanted person. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 80/81
***New Home*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 152 cm
Private Collection

New Home conveys the optimism of second chances and fresh starts, despite a legacy of unhappiness and ill fortune. We see the recurring motif of the deer, as well as the figures of two young girls being embraced by a woman with a caring gaze. In the background is what appears to be an orphanage with cribs filled with children, overseen by a ghostly white bird. The work refers to the common trope of two siblings left alone in the wilderness, as found, for example, in the folktale from Pampanga (Philippines) of Juan and Maria, the Roman myth of Romulus and Remus, or the Grimm fairytale of Hansel and Gretel. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 82/83
***The Metamorphosis*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 152 cm
Bencab Museum Collection, Philippines

The melding heads of beasts and man presents the viewer with concepts of a primordial core and a unity with nature. However, at the same time, in the center of the image is a man fleeing from what appears to be a *manananggal* (a mythical creature similar to a vampire), which can be interpreted as the act of

trying to escape the primitive part of ourselves. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 84/85
***Mountain Fantasies*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
153 × 305 cm
The Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Limited

This painting is a social commentary on mining and the preservation of nature. Various legends in the Philippines tell of Maria Makiling, a beautiful goddess of the forest who takes care of all the plants and animals there. She is believed to be capable of transforming into a deer, and it is also said that when trees die there are spirits who bring seeds enabling new trees to grow. These tales speak of nature's cycles of degeneration and regeneration. Tapaya's painting deals with the fact that, in today's world, regeneration cannot keep up with the degeneration occurring in forests, rivers, and seas. With this work the artist is suggesting that we need to be more conscious of the natural world and try our best to preserve or protect it. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 86/87
***The Early Bird Catches the Worm*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas 244 × 427 cm
Mori Art Museum Collection, Tokyo

The eagle in Hiligaynon folklore is seen as an ally and representation of redemption. The painting presents the tale of a man sent on an errand by his mother in exchange for the secret of his name. This errand turns into an adventurous journey, during which the man conjures up the Sea Goddess with the aid of a fish and an eagle, and a king eventually offers him his daughter's hand in marriage. However, the man, staying true to his quest, returns to his mother, only to find she has died in the meantime—so he never finds out the secret of his name. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 88/89
***When the Sun Visited the Earthworld*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 334 cm
Private Collection, Philippines

This painting transports us into an ancient world of love and its processes. A vine entwines itself around a maiden named Aponibolinayen (whose name means "a lovely woman who looks like a flame of fire") and carries her up to the heavens to meet Init-Init, the Sun. Finding that he is away, providing light to the world, Aponibolinayen begins cooking food; when Init-Init returns she takes fright and flees. Init-Init spends a sleepless night wondering who the beautiful woman was. The next day he hides and waits for her; after she appears, he offers her a betel nut wrapped in gold as a token of his passion. The painting, in an endearingly funny *Ghostbusters*-esque image, depicts a melted Aponibolinayen inside a jar: in the heat of her bonding with Init-Init, she has quite literally melted. In this respect, the work captures both ancient and contemporary expressions of love. In the Philippines, the betel nut is prized across different groups and tribes for its ceremonial and social purposes: it is often offered during marriage proposals or rituals, or simply as a token of friendship. *ZMDR*

→ p. 90
***The Precious Bell*, 2012**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 152 cm
Private Collection

The work refers to the legend of how the Makopa fruit came to be. Two villages wage war for a magical bell that brings rain and abundant crops. A man from the village that possessed the bell buries it in the ground to protect it, but he dies in battle, taking the secret of the hiding place to his grave. The prosperous village suffers from bad crops and the bell is forgotten, until one day a boy, having got lost in the forest, finds a tree whose red juicy fruits look like bells. The villagers believe that the kindly *anito* who originally bestowed the bell on them has wanted them to find it again and so has created this tree with many bell-like fruits. When they begin digging, they find among the roots their precious bell. As an act of gratitude they replant the tree and thereafter call it Makopa (meaning "many cups"). *ZMDR*

→ p. 91
***The Girl Who Turned Into a Fish*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

Here the artist draws on a Sagada Igorot folktale about a girl who is unable to stand the tedious life of chores and looking after her younger sister and mother. At a place called the Gedangan, where she was to fetch water, she took off her clothes, changed into a big fish and lived among the waters of the rice-field. One day she was caught by a father and son, who put her in a bucket of water and took her home. After they had left to cut up firewood, she turned back into a girl, cooked some food, and then returned to her fishlike form. The father and son were puzzled by the mysterious presence of freshly cooked food; after this they observed their house closely, waiting for the moment when smoke emerged from the chimney, indicating that food was being cooked. In this way they found the girl who told them her story. Eventually the young man and the girl married; they visited the girl's mother, put the past behind them, and lived an uneventful and content life. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 92/93
***Secrets of the Forest*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
180 × 221 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 94
***Fairy Healer*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 102 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 95
***Mother and Child*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
183 × 102 cm
Private Collection

Mother and Child relates the story of the Sun and the Moon—at that time still sharing one face—whose son fell to Earth. Eventually he was returned to his Father-Sun by a giant cat. However, the strain that the crisis brought upon the Sun and the Moon made them separate from each other, and now they appear at different times. It is said that when the Mother-Moon glows upon the Earth, she is wanting to guide her son back home, unaware that a giant cat has already helped him return. *ZMDR*

→ p. 97
***The Golden Coat*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection

The Golden Coat retells a Bagobo folktale of a squirrel who was born from the hair of a woman. He gave a necklace to his mother and asked her to go to the sultan, using the necklace as a dowry in exchange for the sultan's daughter's hand. The sultan declared that he would only concede to the marriage if his house was turned to pure gold. In an attempt to carry out this request, the squirrel went to his brother-mouse in the middle of the night, bit him and took his fur which was made of gold. The squirrel rubbed the fur on every part of the house, turning it to gold. When the sultan woke up and saw all the gold, he was so frightened that he died. The squirrel then married the sultan's daughter but only stayed at the golden home for one month. The couple eventually settled in his mother's house, and after one year the squirrel shed his own coat and became a *Malaki Toluk Waig* (semi-divine being). This folktale is two-fold, on the one hand speaking of perseverance and resourcefulness, and on the other hand portraying a hero with a rather sinister nature. As in many other works, here Tapaya is reflecting upon the duality of so-called values and the price we pay for our desires. *ZMDR*

→ p. 99
***Emergence from Bamboo*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection

Here, the well-known creation myths of Malakas and Maganda, and of how the Philippine islands came to be, are combined. When an eagle hears a tapping in the forest and locates its origin within two giant stems of bamboo, he taps on the stems and releases Malakas and his mate, Maganda. The couple ride on the eagle's back until they come across land. Upon stepping on the land, their combined weight broke it into several pieces, giving rise to the known Philippine topography of land and water. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 100/101
***Redeeming the Fire*, 2011**
Acrylic on canvas
244 × 335 cm
Private Collection

In this work Tapaya references an extensively chronicled Bicolano folktale about the supreme god Gugurang, who guards the sacred fire, his evil brother Aswang, who always tries to steal it, and the Chicken Army, once under Gugurang but after rebelling condemned to live on earth and to be raised as mere poultry. Here fire serves not only as a symbol of knowledge, wisdom, and power, but also represents the frailty of the human character to contain and appropriate these assets accordingly. The eye-bubbles issuing from the hose of the Chicken Army can be taken as a metaphor for the obscenity of army and government surveillance. In a world that has become increasingly virtual and impersonal, where violence is becoming increasingly subversive and sophisticated, Tapaya seems to plead for us to reflect on how to retrieve our fire. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 102/103
***Campfire Scene*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 193 cm
Collection of the artist

Moving away from the highly detailed and folklore-based works, *Campfire Scene* and the eight works that follow it are expressionistic landscapes conveying a degree of mystery. With their pared-down details, the unfamiliar landscapes convey a sense of pleasurable isolation. In the absence of words, there unfold spaces in which it is possible to communicate in other ways. The ghostly characteristics of the figures imply nostalgia for a bygone era of dignity and self-containment that now exists in only a few places. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 104/105
***Dancing in the Moonlight*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 193 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 106
***Chicken Feeding*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 107
***Road Less Travelled*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 108
***A Windy Day and a Swirl*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
122 × 91 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 109
***A Bountiful Harvest*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

→ pp. 110/111
***Moving with the Carabaos*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 193 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 113
***Secrets of the Forest*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 114
***Passing by the Calm Waters*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
91 × 122 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 115
***Tikbalang*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection

This work refers to the belief that spotting a white *tikbalang* (a horse-man creature in Philippine mythology) at the shore is a sign of good luck, and will bring a bountiful catch for fishermen. This is but part of a larger mythological grammar surrounding the tikbalang, marking the compartmentalization and compression that is also occasionally observed in Philippine languages. (Examples would be the term *umuulan*, which encapsulates, in the English language, the entire remark "it is raining," or the use of only one syllable in the sentence *bababa ba?* which roughly translates to "is this [elevator] going down?") Rather than drawing a grand and full narrative, Philippine myths create components that can stand alone in storytelling but that nonetheless serve as a significant part of a whole. Here, Tapaya's very method

of compostion reflects this Filipino tendency towards suggesting or outlining a story rather than recounting every last detail. The focus is on the tikbalang and the figures of the fishermen, while elsewhere the abstract lines and drippings tend to almost "cancel out" the background rather than rendering it in any figurative way. *ZMDR*

→ p. 116
***Tabi tabi po*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection

In *Tabi tabi po*, a figure emerges from what appears to be warehouses or farmhouses into a terrain dominated by the mound bearing a face in the foreground. The painting refers to the goblin Nuno who is believed to dwell in rocks, mounds, or caves, and who curses those who damage his home. Because of this belief, the words *Tabi tabi po* (roughly translated as "please move away") are often uttered when one is in an unfamiliar place or a site that is considered sacred, or if one is faced with anthills or termite mounds. *ZMDR*

→ p. 117
***Diwata*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
152 × 122 cm
Private Collection

→ pp. 118/119
***Mahiwagang Kabayo (Magic Horse)*, 2010**
Acrylic on acrylic sheet, under-glass painting
76 × 102 × 6 cm
Private Collection

Mahiwagang Kabayo is inspired by the tale of Pedro and his flight from the witch Boroka, who had previously given him three handkerchiefs as a kind of bait to trap him. However, the three handkerchiefs also possessed magical powers, being able to turn into a mountain, a body of water, or a wall of fire. Trying to escape on horseback from the witch, Pedro had to figure out which of the three could defeat her; the fire handkerchief did the trick and he was able to evade Boroka. In terms of technique, *Mahiwagang Kabayo* is an example of under-glass painting or the reverse glass method, a common practice in Indonesia and once in colonial Philippines, in which one paints onto an acrylic or glass sheet and the resulting image—the reverse of what has been painted under—becomes the final work. *ZMDR*

→ p. 120/121
***Bituin*, 2010**
Acrylic on acrylic sheet, under-glass painting
76 × 102 × 6 cm
Private Collection

Another example of the popular under-glass painting method (see previous text), *Bituin* relates to the tale of a sky maiden whose wings were discovered by a man watching her and her sisters bathe in an earthly lake. This story, following a narrative pattern and trope, is shared across cultures, from Chinese to Native American. It is a classic captive story, often colored with the concept of female duality (a woman's identity before and after a defining relationship). *ZMDR*

→ pp. 122/123
***Baston ni Kabunian bilang pero di mabilang (Cane of Kabunian, Numbered but Can't Be Counted)*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
305 × 610 cm
The Tiroche DeLeon Collection and Art Vantage PCC Limited

The title of this work refers to a riddle, roughly translating to *Cane of Kabunian, Numbered but Can't Be Counted.* The answer to the riddle is "rain" (which falls on earth in a certain amount, but we cannot count its raindrops). The painting focuses on the tale of the supreme god Kabunian, who, in the shape of a giant dog, saved humans from a great flood. In this tale, the dog is viewed as a symbol of salvation, and an ally and helper to human beings. It is also said that the great flood had been prophesized by two children whose warning went unheeded. Interwoven in this narrative is the origin of the frog. In this second story, the frog is said to have once been a gluttonous man who fell into a body of water and could not swim back to shore. Thus, he turned into a frog. Furthering Tapaya's penchant for intertwining separate myths into a new narrative, here we find an outline of factories and corporate buildings sitting on the back of the frog; in the foreground is an illegal logger felling a tree with a human face. All details suggest still further forms of gluttony at the expense of those who tend to and live off the land. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 124/125
***Nang wala pang ginto ay doon nagpalalo, nang magkaginto-ginto ay doon na nga sumuko?*, 2010**
Acrylic on canvas
194 × 305 cm
RCBC Art Collection, Philippines

The work's title is a riddle whose answer is "rice": or more precisely *palay,* and its appearance before its grains develop, when it still stands proudly upright rather than bending towards the earth. Tapaya also includes the folkloric history of a staple food that can be sometimes taken for granted. He begins with the origin of rice, drawing on tales from the Cordilleras about the supreme god Kabunian offering it to the people in return for *kanyao* or ritual offerings. In one instance the people forget to make these offerings to Kabunian; angry, he sends a rat to devastate the crops. The people, having learned their lesson, vow to never again forget, whereupon the appeased Kabunian sends them a cat to chase away the rat. As the cat and rat run down the path, they are met by bulldozers ravaging the land. A landlord towers gleefully on the earth-turned subdivision: space meant for growing fields of rice. Real-estate development is encroaching on an important way of life and endangering a crop that has sustained cultures and civilizations for thousands of years. This results in flying sacks of rice, indicating the country's present-day malaise about being dependent on rice imports—an embarrassment for a country that once led the Southeast Asian region in rice production and research. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 126/127
***Creation Myths*, 2009**
Oil on canvas and wall installation using epoxy, wood, and acrylic
Painting 183 × 244 cm, extensions of variable dimensions
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Creation Myths is a narrative pastiche of creation myths found in the Philippines. Here we see the mythical bird Manaul, whose feathers are transformed into different animals, including human beings. Along with this are stories about various deities such as

Kan-Laon, the Creator and King of Time on the cloud, and tales about the children of Bathala (the supreme god of the ancient Tagalogs), and Apolaki and Mayari, who are the Sun and the Moon respectively. *ZMDR*

→ p. 129
***Top Secret*, 2009**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 153 cm
Private Collection

Top Secret draws its narrative from an Ilokano folktale about a corrupt president who grows horns—a sign of his unjust nature—and is therefore killed by his people, "for he is no better than a beast." This beastliness is portrayed in a two-fold way: as a leader who takes no responsibility for his people and instead flourishes at their expense, and also, literally, as an animal with no control over its impulses. The title refers to the president's attempt to keep his horns "top secret" out of shame, but it could also allude to under-the-table transactions and ulterior agendas. *ZMDR*

→ p. 130
***The Legend of Sibul Springs*, 2009**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

This painting derives its narrative and title from a Tagalog folktale about the origin of the Sibul Springs. A cosmopolitan man ventures into the countryside to search for a bride. After meeting a beautiful woman living in isolation, he wants to see her again. On his way back to her he sees a magnificent white dog; unaware that it belongs to the beautiful woman, he shoots it. As soon as he touches the dog's body, the ground opens wide and swallows them both. On this site a spring wells up and the woman, full of sorrow, turns into an acacia tree with low-hanging branches. *ZMDR*

→ p. 132
***The Origin of Bat*, 2008**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

The Origin of Bat is another take on transformation and metamorphosis: dominant themes in Tapaya's works. In this work the central image is of a rat who wants to fly. Hunted by a cat, the rat pretends to be dead and the cat takes interest in a bird instead. It eats the bird but leaves its wings intact; the bird's blood ends up on the rat's back and he develops wings, and gains the ability to fly. However, despite his dream of flight being fulfilled, he becomes a pariah-like creature, being no longer a rat but not quite a bird. *ZMDR*

→ p. 133
***Cornelia and the Batbat Cuao*, 2008**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

Here Tapaya takes us into the nightmarish and uncanny side of nature. Against a night sky of grainy swirls, Cornelia is abducted by the *batbat cuao* ("the two-headed lady"). A detail depicts a logger cutting off what seems to be the trunk of an old tree, suggesting that Cornelia has been taken as revenge for the felled tree. *ZMDR*

→ p. 134
***Bodobodo*, 2008**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

This painting is connected to *Bangan's Appearance* (2012, p. 79), as it has its origins in the same story. *Bodobodo*, however, contains a more detailed depiction of Bangan's transformation into a caterpillar and her ravaging of the sugarcanes, and of the intial assumption of Bodobodo (masquerading as Bangan) and Gatan (Bangan's husband) that it was the gods who were killing the sugarcanes, followed by their attempt to appease them with offerings of an egg, a chicken, and a pig (represented by three hands issuing from a tree). While the 2012 work offers a narrative open to redemption, this work presents a narrative that focuses on retribution, with Bodobodo being killed by Gatan in order for him and Bangan to be united once more. *ZMDR*

→ p. 137
***Origin of Echo*, 2008**
Acrylic on canvas
193 × 152 cm
Private Collection

Origin of Echo is based on a folktale from the Bicol region, southeast Luzon (Philippines), about a disobedient boy who, instead of helping his mother with chores, chose to stay in the woods and imitate the call of birds, the sound of waterfalls, and every other noise that he heard. Travelers passing by the village at night were frightened when they heard the boy's various sounds and voices. Eventually his mother became so exasperated, she wished aloud that she'd never had a son. As soon as she uttered these words the boy disappeared, condemned to stay in the places where he had been imitating people's voices and other sounds. *Origin of Echo* is one of Tapaya's most straightforward adaptations of folklore from language to image. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 142–145
***Modern Manananggals*, 2013**
7 pairs (male and female)
Encaustic on fiberglass resin, wood, and engraved tin sheet
33 × 33 × 147 cm (each upper torso)
23 × 20 × 147 cm (each lower torso)
Exhibition view, *Rodel Tapaya: Bato-Balani,* Ateneo Art Gallery, Philippines, 2014
Collection of the artist

The source of inspiration for this is the Filipino monster called *manananggal* likened to the OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) of today. The detachment of the upper body means this can work in another place while the lower body is left behind: i. e. the family left in the birthplace, the Philippines. The word *manananggal* denotes a mythical creature similar to a vampire; the peculiar thing about this creature, however, is that it divides itself into two. The upper part of the body detaches from the lower body in order to devour a victim or get food, after which it will return to and rejoin its lower part. I relate this to overseas workers who have to leave their roots, their families, in order to feed their own families and to provide a better future for their children: greener pastures. But in the case of manananggals, if somebody sees the lower part of the body and puts salt on it, the upper body is unable to rejoin its body and the monster will die. This is the same with overseas workers, if it takes too long for them to return

to their families; it is hard to mend the results of the lost time, leading to broken relationships. *RT*

→ p. 146
***Sigbin*, 2014**
Bronze mirror and fiberglass
48 × 61 × 64 cm
Private Collection

→ p. 147
***Pangudyawon*, 2014**
Bronze mirror and fiberglass
48 × 61 × 64 cm
Private Collection
Ryan Tizon and Potchie Lazaro

This work refers to a folktale about the plight of a boy (Pangudyawon) whose parents fed him rotting food. The child calls on both doves and vultures to provide him with wings, feathers, and a beak. He then flies away, vowing to never come back. In an attempt to appease him and bring him back, his parents perform a rice wine feast for him; when he becomes inebriated, his mother plucks off his feathers, wings, and beak. This story of juvenile flight resonates well in the present age. Children from poor Filipino families are often forced to leave their homes and make their way in the world by begging, hustling, or stealing. *ZMDR*

→ p. 148
***Manama*, 2010**
Fiberglass resin
28 × 38 × 46 cm
Exhibition view, *Rodel Tapaya: Bulaklak ng Dila*, The Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines, 2010/2011

Manama is a sculpture that depicts the highest god of the Manuvu or the Manobo, an indigenous group from the island of Mindanao noted for their warrior spirit. Manama lived in the highest realm of the sky. Singlehandedly he created the sky, the earth, and all living beings. The earth was created from the dirt under his fingernails, but it consisted of dry rocks and nothing would grow on it. So Manama called on his bird, the *limokon,* to steal a particle of the evil god Oggasi's soil. He mixed his dry soil with Oggasi's until mountains were created, as well as rivers and seas that nurtured the earth and allowed plants to grow. From this point on, the tale takes on the familiar Christian trope of first trees being created, then animals, and lastly man as steward of the earth, as well as the idea of the world being created in six days and the seventh day being one of rest. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 150/151
***Isang Kahig, Isang Tuka*, 2010**
Floor installation composed of fiberglass and wood
Dimensions variable
Exhibition view, *Rodel Tapaya: Bulaklak ng Dila*, The Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines, 2010/2011

The expression *isang kahig, isang tuka* describes a way of life that is day-to-day, lacking any foresight or planning. The expression also alludes to the literal feeding habits of chickens, as they peck at the ground and scratch it with their talons. The painting itself refers to a Tagalog myth from Bulacan, central Luzon (Philippines), about the origins of birds, which relates to the conflict between the three kings Rajah Manuk, Rajah Uwak, and Rajah Lawin. Rajah Manuk, wanting to conquer the two other kingdoms, became embroiled in squabbles and fights with the Rajahs Uwak and Lawin, meaning none of them managed their respective kingdoms. The gods, irked by the fighting fueled by nothing but cruelty and greedy ambition, turned the three Rajahs into birds so their descendants might be reminded of their inhuman acts. *ZMDR*

→ pp. 152–153
From the *Diorama* series, 2009
Brass, wood, epoxy, and found objects
60 × 31 × 26 cm each

Pedro and the Witch
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Mang Pedro and the Snake
Private Collection

The Wise Monkey and the Foolish Giant
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

The Hunter of Pinamaloy
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Diorama consists of ten works: the boxes on stilts and the peaked roofs are suggestive of *retables* and *urnas* traditionally used to contain images of saints for display inside houses. However, with Tapaya's melding of the chthonic and the colonial, the dioramas also bear a resemblance to the spirit houses prevalent in neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand. In *Pedro and the Witch*, the viewer encounters the climax of Pedro's tale as he flees the witch Boroka, surrounded by flames from the magical handkerchief he has dropped. In *Mang Pedro and the Snake*, a woodchopper is reprimanded by a snake that dwells in a tree with rare white leaves—the source of the woodchopper's income. The snake tells him to marry off his daughters to a lion, eagle, and fish in exchange for the rare white leaves. *The Hunter of Pinamaloy* narrates the story of a hunter who, after being wounded by a wild boar, desparately creates a garland of pig ears for his dog and instructs it to look for help. *The Wise Monkey and the Foolish Giant* tells the tale of a trickster monkey who persuades a giant that the mouth of a great crocodile is a cave and plays other tricks on him, such as tying his hands behind his back saying it is the only way the giant could survive an oncoming storm, thus leading to his demise. *ZMDR*

ZMDR: Zeny May Dy Recidoro
RT: Rodel Tapaya

Rodel Tapaya is represented by ARNDT Berlin/Singapore