

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 Hacendero 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 Kaluluwa (Orphaned Spirit). After Galang Kaluluwa, who had killed Ulilang Kaluluwa 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 Sibuanoptan, 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 Manual 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 knives 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. ʔʔ

→ 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 drip-pings 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 nagpalala, 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 sugarcane, and of the initial assumption of Bodobodo (masquerading as Bangan) and Gatan (Bangan’s husband) that it was the gods who were killing the sugarcane, 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, desperately 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*

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RT: Rodel Tapaya

