

SEDIMENTS OF TIME



MANOK VENTURA

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SEDIMENTS OF TIME Manok Ventura
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Front Cover Image:
Withstand by Manok Ventura, Oil on canvas, 152.5cm x 122cm, 2012

F O R E W O R D

During this occasion, I am like a thrilled little child, cupping a beautiful gem in my hands, totally mesmerized and wide-eyed as I eagerly await for light to bounce and explode into a phosphorescence of colours each and every time. This is indeed a gem of an occasion, and I am very excited to set an exquisite collection of artworks against a prodigious background.

Manok Ventura's first solo show in Singapore takes place at Artesan Gallery + Studio's new space at the storied Raffles Hotel, a serendipitous occasion. The building is one of Singapore's most illustrious monuments, boasting a venerable, august history. Its continued survival, quite unlike the reshaping of the city's urban fabric, offers a telling counterpoint to the artist's preoccupation with the concrete: the slow, unhurried life-cycle of fabrication, evolution and maturation that his walls and his materials are subject to. This fabulous collection and the noble venue presents a stark contrast to the frenetic pace of new construction developments taking place around us today, and this exhibition appropriately serves as a wonderful analogy for the steadfast existence of an iconic structure like the Raffles Hotel – corresponding to Manok's enduring walls that have borne the test of time. We are in a truly fitting venue for the artist's latest works.

Things have fallen into place very neatly – and I am not only proud and thankful to Manok Ventura for being true to who he is, but thank the universe equally for the blessing of a celebrated new space.

Roberta Dans
Director, Artesan Gallery + Studio

Manok Ventura: Matter and Medium

by Louis Ho

An abstract field of black and white paint patterns, a swathe of streaks, splotches and tactile imprints. A monochromatic, trompe l’oeil wall of bricks, impressed with the vague outlines of an object.

Blocks of broken-off concrete, an archipelago of rubble amidst a sea of overgrown weeds. A compacted chunk of found objects, scraps of debris pressed and packed into a sculptural statement.

These are Filipino artist Roldan “Manok” Ventura’s preferred subject matter – at once striking and singular.

Even in the wide-ranging landscape of contemporary Filipino art, Manok occupies a distinctive niche. He is not interested in theoretical forms of conceptualism, nor in genres of mimetic representation. His iconography, rather, is overwhelmingly concerned with the facts of materiality: the play of fluid paint on the texture of canvas, or the obsession with surfaces,



On Guard
Oil on canvas
122cm x 91.5cm
2012



Withstand
Oil on canvas
152.5cm x 122cm
2012

rendered in hyperrealistic detail, in seemingly three-dimensional scrupulousness. Here, the underside of urban life comes to the fore. The viewer encounters in Manok's work the matter and the processes of the quotidian, the objects and rhythms of tangible experience; the nondescript things that populate the routines of our daily lives like so much unregarded flotsam and jetsam emerge from their habitual hiddenness. In an age of mass consumerism and global capitalism, the artist embraces instead the mundane, the anonymous, the gradual.

In a milieu like Singapore's, where the obsessively new and the unabashedly glitzy take pride of place, Manok's work acquires fresh significance. The Marina Bay Sands towers, for one, a glittering monument of glass dominating the downtown skyline, has become the embodiment of the nation's economic progressiveness in the twenty-first century – and the rash of private property developments mushrooming across the island likewise exemplifies the chronic refashioning of our architectural terrain. Set against this context of relentless building and rebuilding, the artist's interest in the minutiae of humble materiality becomes an expressive aesthetic tool.

Withstand, at first glance, presents little more than an abstract image. Sustained attention, however, evokes optical allusions: the design of creases, folds, and drips begins to suggest everyday phenomena that linger,




Manok Ventura's vision is far from bleak – simply meticulous, and clear-sighted. The textures of ordinary things; the surfaces of architecture; the life and death of the physical world we inhabit

Aftermath 1
Oil on canvas
122cm x 183cm
2012



Effect
Oil on canvas
122cm x 91.5cm
2012

vaguely, on the peripheries of our perception: an expanse of crumpled paper smoothened out, perhaps, its crinkled appearance resembling a dense map of lines, or the appearance of tie-dyed fabric, with its distinctive runnels and masses of color. Even the texture of tree-bark – rough, ridged, knobbly – leaps to mind. That the surface of a wall, coarse and weather-beaten with age, is namechecked here, is all too appropriate. *Effect* likewise utilizes its own material configurations to imply broader resonances. The ostensible subject of the painting remains no more than a discolored bruise in the center of the composition – the imagination is left to figure out if it's just that, a purposeful stain, or something more, possibly the amorphous outline of a human silhouette. The piece is also overlaid with a web of cracks, clefts and lace-like arabesques, which to the naked eye seems to echo the network of veins one finds on a leaf. This tactile skin forms a patina over the canvas, subordinating what is otherwise the primary point of visual interest, the blackened mass, to its own subtle predominance.

Manok Ventura's vision is far from bleak – simply meticulous, and clear-sighted. The textures of ordinary things; the surfaces of architecture; the life and death of the physical world we inhabit. Nothing could be further from the shiny facades and the single-minded excess that characterize the twenty-first century. 



Edged
 Oil on canvas
 122cm x 91.5cm
 2012



Aftermath 2
 Oil on canvas
 152cm x 100cm
 2012


About The Artist

Manok Ventura

Roldan “Manok” Ventura was born on the fourth of October of 1979, into a family who later produced three amazing artists. He has won many awards and recognitions during his university days in the University of the East in Manila, Philippines. During his first year he received an honourable mention from the University of Santo Tomas Inter-School Painting Competition, and was recognized for an exemplary performance in the arts in his school. He received the National Grand Prize for the Third Nokia Arts Competition and Most Innovative Art Design in the Veteran’sArt Competition on 2001. In the years 2002 – 2004, he was awarded Artist of the Year in his university. He has held nine solo exhibitions and 22 group exhibitions, in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore.

Manok’s is recognized for his unique gift in seeing art in a scenario that have stood the test of time, as well as painting discarded objects. In an exhibit in 2010, entitled *Traces*, he similarly focused on found materials whose primary functions seemed to have ceased and have been overturned by the passage of time. Yet, to Manok, they remain useful, visual tools for his next masterpieces. This time, the subject of interest for him were objects that were familiar and close to

home, such as walls from old structures that he would pass by every day during a long commute. While most people might not even give these urban/suburban backdrops a second look, Manok would take photographs of these “damaged goods” so he could recreate them on canvas and breathe into them a new life, a new purpose, injecting something new out of something very old.

His keen attention to detail and faithfulness to his photorealistic roots, including using very fine brushes to reflect chipped paint or the onset of corrosion, would mean that each large-scale piece would take weeks or even months to complete. Still, “the execution is quite spontaneous”, recalls Manok. Though the images are based on photographs, he lets his brushstrokes dictate the pace and the direction of his work, often leading to a near-abstract finish. For this exhibition, in particular, Manok has included impromptu installation pieces that lend three-dimensional points of references to the wall-mounted oil paintings. Manok leaves it to the imaginative viewer to see what he would like to see, to write its history and carve its future. He merely sets the tone and the plot as it thickens through the actions of man and the course of natural events. 

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