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A
SOMNAMBULIST
MANIFESTO

VICTOR BALANON

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Front Cover Image:
Detail of *Nameless Hundred XXXI* by Victor Balanon, Ink and acrylic on canvas paper, 122cm x 91cm, 2013

F o r e w o r d

Artesan opens 2013 with art that is different and unique, shared with an interesting kind of intelligence and foresight. We present an exciting artist who goes several layers under our skin, to probe, and allow us to scrutinize, and regard our worldly past. Victor Balanon's fascination for the retro-flick and the *Dick Tracy* era is indeed an interesting subject to combine with the post-modern. We are very proud to present a truly spellbinding collection entitled *A Somnambulist Manifesto: Victor Balanon*.

In 2011, when *Typhoon Ondoy* hit Metro Manila and washed away millions of lives, it included photographs and letters carried away by the deluge, as mementos were destroyed forever. Thus, Victor began a series in early 2012 entitled the *Nameless Hundred* where old photographs were conjured with other objects, and iconic structures, often combined with faceless personalities that were sometimes abstracted. The works prods us to relate our thoughts of today and yesterday and tomorrow, prompted by hundreds of forgotten scenes, jogging our memory of elapsed aspirations. The dark mood of old stills in Balanon's paintings also reminds us of the general skepticism surrounding mankind's ability to achieve its dreams of Utopia. Yet each time light gleams through his ink paintings, it is reminiscent of hope, of our innate optimism, where many of yesterday's dreams have actually become today's many achievements. Indeed, it reminds us that our quest for Utopia has in fact been achieved, yet constantly denied. Could it be conceivable that mankind is perhaps too hard on itself?

What a great thought to usher the New Year !

Roberta Dans
Director
Artesan Gallery + Studio



Nameless Hundred XXX
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013

IMAGINING POSTMODERNISM: THE WORLDS OF VICTOR BALANON

Louis Ho

Like a sepia-hued photograph, or a scene from a film noir flick, Filipino artist Victor Balanon's *Nameless Hundred XXX* is a picture preserved in black-and-white amber, awash in a sea of soft, spidery lines limned in india ink. We observe a camera crew gathered around an interior space: the men are dressed in the sartorial idiom of an earlier era, their equally anachronistic equipment trained on an enigmatic figure, an asymmetrical form perched on a settee like a Modigliani nude. It resembles nothing so much as a sculptural accident, a collection of crushed surfaces and crumpled shapes comprising a misshapen, contorted anatomy.

The inspiration for the piece is indeed cinematic: it is based on a photograph, a snapshot of the filming of a W. C. Fields movie from the 1930s, *The Old Fashioned Way*. Where Fields' portly figure should be is, instead, the anomalous element, a jolt of incongruity: the artist has substituted a rendering of Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni's bronze statue, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), mutating the configuration of otherwise sleek, sharp edges into an almost bashful figurine, not unlike a coy movie starlet perhaps. The sculpture, which represents a body caught in mid-motion, is testament to Futurism's interest in movement and speed; embedded in a filmic macrocosm, it signals a convergence with the emphasis on the moving form marked by the technology of motion picture cameras.

It seems like something out of science fiction: an icon of twentieth-century art interpolated into a setting out of the golden age of Hollywood talkies, a retro-futuristic reimagining of the visual culture of modernism. Yet, informing this collision of trajectories is a decidedly *post*-modern sensibility. If scholar Frederic Jameson is right, postmodernism is premised on several key tenets, one of which is a porous exchange between various spheres of cultural expression, both high and low: "many of the newer postmodernisms have been fascinated precisely by that whole landscape ... of the late show and Grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and the science fiction or fantasy novel." In Balanon's vision, then, the conjunction of cinema and art history, while suggesting an engagement with specifically modernist concerns, demonstrates rather the sort of hybrid omnivorousness that characterizes the postmodern rubric. His work is an almost wistful longing for a bygone moment, revisiting the past through its transformative resurrection.



Nameless Hundred XXXIV
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013

BEYOND THE EVOCATION OF THE PARANORMAL,
THE REITERATION OF THE BODY AS A MEANS
OF VISUALIZING MOTION IS, OF COURSE,
A RETURN TO THE FORMAL STRATEGIES
OF MODERNISM.

Nameless Hundred XXXV
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013





Nameless Hundred XXXI
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013

Nameless Hundred XXXI adopts a similar tactic of appropriation. Here, a scene from Ingmar Bergman's 1963 film, *The Silence*, is reworked: young Johan is stuck in a hotel with his oft-absent mother and bedridden aunt; he wanders its deserted hallways on his own, an adolescent *flâneur* observing the denizens of the establishment. Balanon has multiplied the figure of the boy as he walks backwards down a carpeted corridor, capturing the temporal sequence of Johan's bodily gestures in spatial terms. His visage has been erased, the faces of his numerous selves bathed in an eerie luminescence; the work evokes the mood of science fiction, calling to mind various movies dealing with demonic or unworldly children (say, *Village of the Damned*). Beyond the evocation of the paranormal, the reiteration of the body as a means of visualizing motion is, of course, a return to the formal strategies of modernism. It owes a debt to the development of stop motion photography, especially the work of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, as well as the Futurist and Cubist movements. *Girl Running on a Balcony* (1912), by Italian artist Giacomo Balla – who, along with Boccioni, was a key proponent of Futurism – provides a direct aesthetic antecedent: the abstract form of a single female figure is depicted a number of times across the painting, a phantasmal silhouette seemingly traversing the length of the compositional space.

To return once more to Jameson, postmodernism “does not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality; rather, by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period ... it seeks to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects.” Victor Balanon's images, then, are pronouncedly postmodern. They are explicitly citational, cerebral, cryptic. He conjures up cinematic realms in smoky chiaroscuro, reimagining art historical icons in unfamiliar forms. His work is composed of fragments; here are slivers and shards of other texts, other times, other worlds, conceived for the contemporary moment.



Nameless Hundred XXXII
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013



Nameless Hundred XXXIII
Victor Balanon
Ink and acrylic on canvas paper
122cm x 91cm
2013

About the Artist:

Victor Balanon (born 1972, Manila, Philippines) started to study Dental Medicine at the University of the East in 1989. He left school however, a year short of finishing his studies, choosing to pursue and develop his interest in art. A self-taught artist, he has worked as an illustrator creating artworks for film, independent comics and underground music labels. He later studied film and animation at the *Mowelfund Film Institute* producing two animated short films as a result. During this time he has also created a self-published comic-book anthology and started working on his serialized pen and ink drawings. He was invited to be a part of the seminal late-90's art space/collective *Surrounded By Water*, where some of the more prominent, contemporary artists of today have started their practice. He has participated in various groups shows ever since, both here and abroad, handling his time between his day job as a (hand-drawn) key animator and in producing his own art. Currently he is working on an on-going, long-term series of murals. He is self-taught in the visual arts and has started producing video art with animated content. His works have been collected by the Singapore Art Museum. *A Somnambulist Manifesto* is Victor Balanon's second solo show at Artesan Gallery + Studio, Singapore.

Victor Balanon is now a full time artist, and lives and works in Quezon City, Metro Manila, with his wife and 2 kids.

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