



*The
Vicisitudes
of Victoria*

New Works
Guerrero Habulan

The Vicissitudes of Victoria

New Works
Guerrero Habulan

Opens June 13, 2013

Ends July 4, 2013

artesan
GALLERY + STUDIO

Copyright 2013

The Vicissitudes of Victoria

New Works: Guerrero Habulan

Published by Artesan Private Limited, June 2013

Edited by Roberta Dans

Catalogue design by EJ Cabangon

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means whatsoever, without the prior consent of the copyright holders, with the exception of brief excerpts and quotations used in articles, critical essays or research.

F o r e w o r d

Many years ago, I took a course called Alpha Dynamics. It was a meditation course in mind training and personal empowerment. Apparently, the majority of adult brain waves are in beta mode, a common yet counter productive pace for most human minds. The course specifically teaches one to slow down one's brain waves through meditation, thus attaining a more controlled rhythm called *alpha*. It is also said that most children's brain waves are in alpha tempo. In this mode, you grasp the world in a slower, more even measure. Everything is clear, focused, and vivid, much like what is seen through a child's eye.

I've often thought and compared artists to children because they have a graphic imagination much attributed to a more relaxed and tranquil mindset, as they can naturally switch to a slower step, and absorbed more stride.

During Guerrero's residency at Artesan in 2012, I observed how he epitomizes the *alpha* in artists, and sees the world plainly. Coupled with this, the artist has an unconventional sense of humour that entralls many who see his work. The young Habulan loves to play with art by grouping incongruous characters and objects to articulate his ideas. More critically, Guerrero does this with such ease, artistic skill and eloquence – many of us don't really grasp his instinctive and creative brilliance. He is an amazing natural, and will express a thought on canvas, as effortlessly as an opera virtuoso sings his aria.

So whilst I often find myself strangely sandwiched between a viewer and an artist, trying to translate the artist's language into a more 'audible and coherent tone', I actually trust Guerrero's works won't need much interpretation. All that one really needs to do is to sit back ... and gaze at them through a child's *alpha* eye. Then Guerrero Habulan's world will start to unfold, becoming even more lively, vivid and clear.

Roberta Dans

Director

Artesan Gallery + Studio



Victoria 1-4
Guerrero Habulan
Oil on canvas
40.64 x 55.88cm
(16 x 22in)
2013

The Vicissitudes of Victoria

Victor Ocampo

Romanian playwright Eugène Ionesco once said that “Realism, whether it be socialist or not, falls short of reality. It shrinks it, attenuates it, falsifies it...” He goes on to say that Social Realism is valid and authentic only if it incorporates imagination and dreams, both of which he also says are the fonts of truth in reality.

Guerrero Habulan’s own brand of Social Realism is very much steeped in imagination and dreams. He has developed a startling visual language that combines elements of the Victorian era¹ – an age associated with cold, grey industrialization with their anti-thesis, with modern pop-culture symbols that are the hallmark of a more liberal, more hedonistic age. He also adeptly juxtaposes these contemporary icons (perhaps epitomizing dream-like evocations of Asia’s economic boom and current techno-revolution), as a way of reminding us that our present era has dramatically altered traditional values, customs and behavior. He tells us, in no uncertain terms that this has happened before, that there was also a great movement during the industrial revolution. However this latest change is an echo and not the same note. Something in the shift today is different, something that moves away from a class-based mentality, traditional morality and organized religion.

Many of the works feature a gray-scale painting of Victoria ornamented by 2-D isomorphic blocks from the classic arcade game Q*Bert. The object of Q*Bert is to jump on every cube to change its color in order to level up. There is no end game and the player keeps jumping until he or she gets tired and falls off. Habulan is perhaps challenging the viewer to consider how acceptance for women in power is a similar never-ending quest.

In another painting, *Sheboom!*, the image of Queen Victoria herself is decked out in ears and playboy bunny tail, surrounded by strange rain in the form of pin-up girls, skulls and bombs – the kind of artwork painted on bombers and fighter planes during World War II. There is a decal of an apple (wisdom) pinned on her nose. Is Habulan saying that underneath the *sturm und drang* of a modern woman is a Victorian lady in hiding (or vice-versa)? Whichever the case, it is clear in the subtext that not recognizing this dichotomy will certainly lead to disaster.

Sheboom!
Guerrero Habulan
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 122cm
(60 x 48in)
2013





In all of his work Habulan mixes seemingly disparate symbolism very effectively to deliver his message of dissonance, his own contribution to the rich and evolving aesthetic of contemporary Social Realism

Somewhere Over The Rainbow
Guerrero Habulan
Oil on canvas
193 x 243.84cm
(76 x 96in)
2013



Two other paintings deal with domestic servitude in some way. In *Directive*, a woman dressed as if she was on the staff of Gosford Park controls a robot that is also dressed like a servant. It is a not-too-subtle reminder that technology cannot always liberate women from slavery. *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* is a visually complex work where a “little brown sister” is sitting like a little lap dog on her mistress, while her faceless master in Imperial military fatigues looks on. She sings the popular song of longing, but only the family dog seems to listen. Around them an imaginary war rages, while above her head, the outline of an imaginary Y-Wing from Star Wars shoots down a paper airplane. All are metaphors for a simmering hidden conflict.

The last work, *The Tea Party is Over*, ostensibly shows a young girl playing with a dollhouse. On her head is a robotic Mickey Mouse in the style of disc jockey “Deadmau5” (Joel Thomas Zimmerman). The “mau5head” has been shown on the cover of most of Zimmerman’s albums. Fans often attend deadmau5 concerts sporting their own copy of the mau5head. The girl dons

Directive
Guerrero Habulan
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 122cm
(60 x 48in)
2013

a “mau5head” and the dollhouse represents, perhaps the traditional homemaker role that the girl is rebelling against – the future that she clearly does not agree with.

In all of his work Habulan mixes seemingly disparate symbolism very effectively to deliver his message of dissonance, his own contribution to the rich and evolving aesthetic of contemporary Social Realism. He celebrates the great shift to our digital, hyper-connected age yet warns that something is being lost and that perhaps we need to stop and look beneath the surface of progress. He calls us to meditate on the consequences of where we are going and the speed by which we are getting there. After all, the consequence of a society not able to handle dissonance is a rain of bombs falling from the cold, grey sky.

¹Victorian morality refers to the dominant social mores, which prevailed in the United Kingdom during Queen Victoria's reign in the late 19th century. The shift in mores toward Victorianism affected all facets of life. The pillars of the ethos were Religion, Morality, Elitism, Industrialism and Improvement. Industrialization saw the growth of a burgeoning middle class, whose growth played a significant part in impacting cultural norms, lifestyles, values and morality.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_era

The Tea Party is Over
Guerrero Habulan
Oil on canvas
152.4 x 122cm
(60 x 48in)
2013



A b o u t t h e A r t i s t :

Guerrero Z. Habulan, (born 1980, Malate, Manila) familiarly known as “RG” is a figurative artist who grew up surrounded by his artist father’s colourful artistic life: visiting artists’ studios, mingling with like creative minds, learning to draw instinctively even well before he went for formal training. He finished *Fine Arts in Visual Communications* at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City whilst concurrently winning several awards whilst a student. Habulan continues to be supported under the patronage of Dr. Cuanang, of Manila’s most foremost art patrons and collectors. He is also a member of the popular art collective *Sianviaje* of Antipolo City, Rizal, Philippines.

Habulan is a young social realist with a sharp sense of humour that purposely lightens the load off the sordid truth. Guerrero continues his artistic career – mapping the realities of tradition and progress into a symposium of delightful colour, fantasy and reality. The artist possesses an incredible natural talent and artistic technique that promises to perpetually spellbind his audience. *The Vicissitudes of Victoria* is his second solo exhibition in Singapore, and is a culmination of his residency at Artesan Singapore in early 2012.

Acknowledgements:

Victor Ocampo

Smita Karunan

EJ Cabangon

Roberta Dans

Catalogue Published by

artesan
GALLERY + STUDIO

All reproductions courtesy of the artist

An exhibition held at

artesan

GALLERY + STUDIO

328 North Bridge Road
#01-26 Raffles Hotel Arcade
Singapore 188719
Tel 6338 5818

We are also located at:

Artesan Gallery + Studio
793, Bukit Timah Road
#02-01 (cor Sixth Ave)
Singapore 269765
Tel 6469 7818

www.theartesan.com

roberta@theartesan.com