A Duad in



FRANCIS NG

& RONALD VENTURA

A collaborative project by Artesan Gallery + Studio and LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore





FOREWORD

Roberta Dans

Director, Artesan Gallery + Studio

Shortly after Ronald Ventura's first exhibition *Antipode: Human Study* at Artesan in June 2007, I had introduced the idea of a collaborative exhibition to both artists, Ronald Ventura and Francis Ng. They were very receptive and enthusiastic about the idea and later that year, they met each other in Singapore. Francis took Ronald around, which included a visit to the newly built and opened LASALLE school.

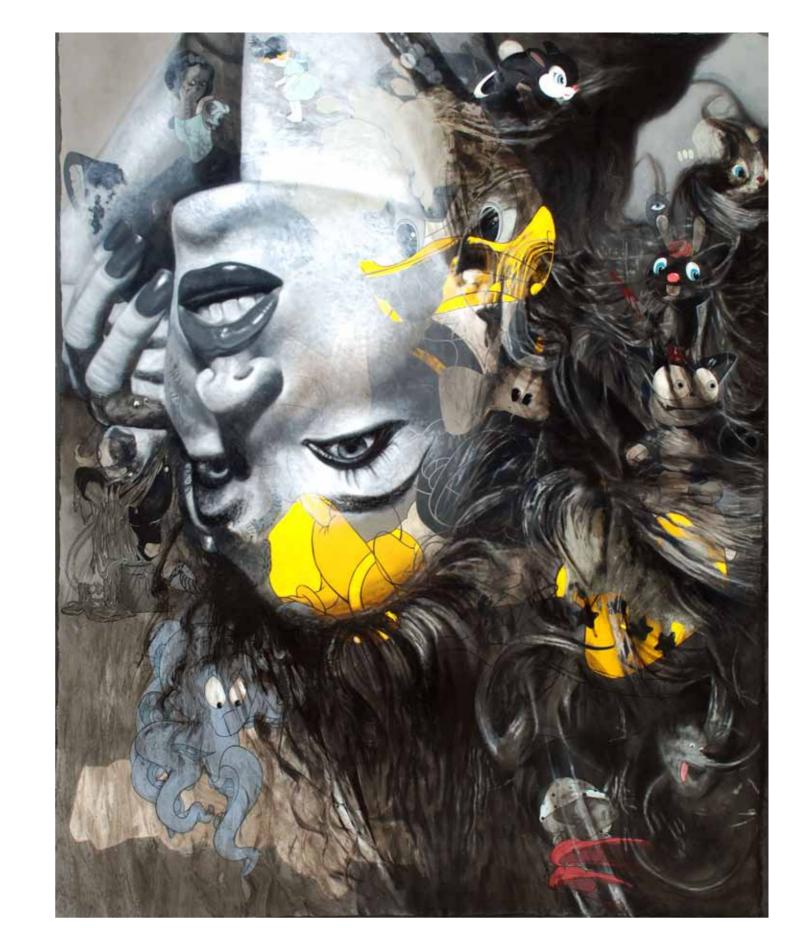
"An amazing building!" were the words that Ronald exclaimed when he returned. At that time, we had not appointed a venue for the show.

Both artists' careers have moved forward since then and the resulting event is an even more fantastic amalgamation of creativity than originally envisaged. And as serendipity should have it, the venue is at the same amazing building Ronald saw two years ago – a building that represents contemporary art with the vibe and energy it deserves, at the LASALLE College of the Arts, in McNally Street.

Artesan is dedicated to its ideas and motivations to initiate projects that bring in new energy and ideas to the art community in the region. We believe that our imagination should know no bounds, and our own resolute role is to constantly look for the catalyst that will rouse and stir that passion and energy in the artists and the community. Two years in the making, *A Duad in Play* exemplifies this energy, and we hope that the public will derive great pleasure, excitement and insight in this important artistic alliance.

I would like to thank LASALLE College of the Arts for their collaboration, for believing and sharing in the project and its ideals; particularly Teo Rofan and her team from the Institute of Contemporary Arts, whose contribution and efforts have been indispensible.

We are also grateful to the Philippine Embassy, the National Arts Council and the Lee Foundation for their support and recognition of this significant event. Enchantment by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010



FOREWORD

Milenko Prvacki

Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts Interim Director Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts

One of the main objectives of the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore is to bring seminal works from Southeast Asian contemporary arts that create discourses to Singapore. With the recent suite of new works the Philippine artist, Ronald Ventura and Singapore artist, Francis Ng created in their visual dialogues *A Duad in Play* added another dimension to our foray into collaborations between artists and organizations since our galleries open in the new campus last year 2008.

Bringing together two established artists in the region, this exhibition signifies the collaborative ties of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, LASALLE and Artesan Gallery + Studio momentously held in conjunction with the celebration of 40 years of bilateral ties between Philippines and Singapore.

A Duad in Play is not about the pair of artists committing to emulating and aligning with each other, but it is rather an impassioned series of visual dialogues distinguishing them in their practices. As artists, Ventura and Ng are essentially different, who while having been led by motivations that diverge into contrasting ends apply various processes to contemporary art. Simultaneously, there is an inexhausible list of dissimilarities we draw from them, by the virtue of their differing cultural background, ie different languages, different passports, different sense of time and space etc. The list goes on! So how the two artists and dialogues will in actual fact come to play in the gallery as their common playground, will be the part the audience will see.

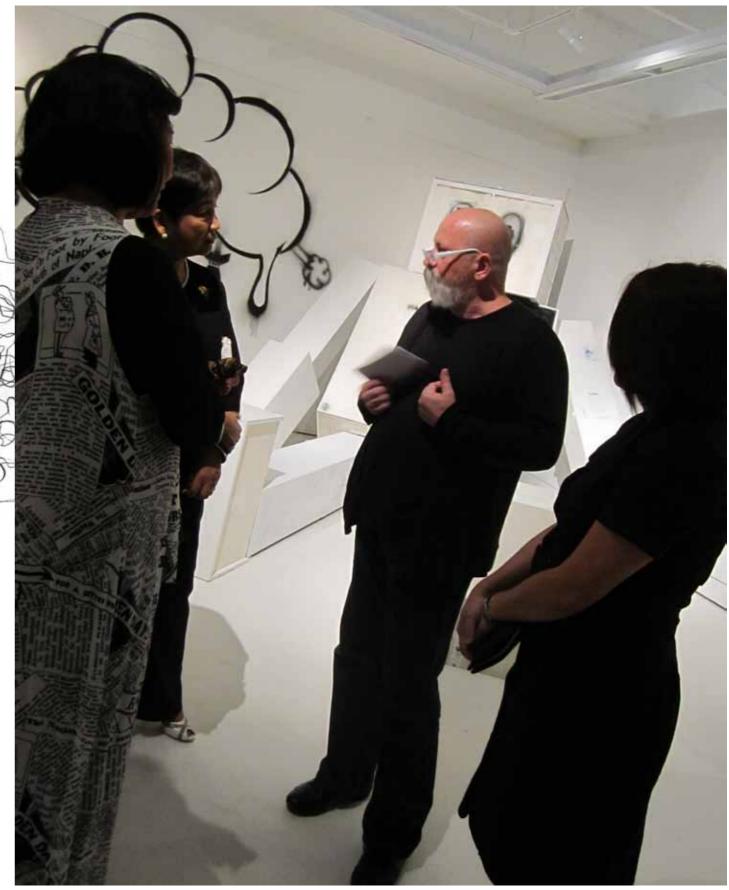
On behalf of the Institute, I am pleased to co-present and co-curate the exhibition with our Artesan counterpart, Roberta Dans whose dedication to the arts materializes in this collaboration and exhibition.

My congratulations to Ronald Ventura and Francis Ng for their sophisticated play of differences and possible parallels in *A Duad in Play*.



▲ Sketches by Francis Ng, 2010

Milenko Prvacki with Philippine Ambassador to Singapore, HE Minda Cruz during opening night









erhaps one of Francis Ng's more publicly displayed art projects locally is the work *I Was Here* (2005), the just under 9 metre long familiar phrase cast in reinforced concrete has been presented at the sites of the Esplanade, the Arts House, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore Management University, Singapore Art Museum, National University of Singapore Museum and LASALLE College of the Arts. As it toured the island, framed by buildings of cultural heritage and art production, the words more customarily scrawled as a provocation and resistance against the imperviousness of architecture and indifference of city life to the individual appears at first as the artist referencing himself, but upon deeper reflection is a challenge to the nature of space and the artist's attempt at calling attention to the underlying tensions of an urban landscape.

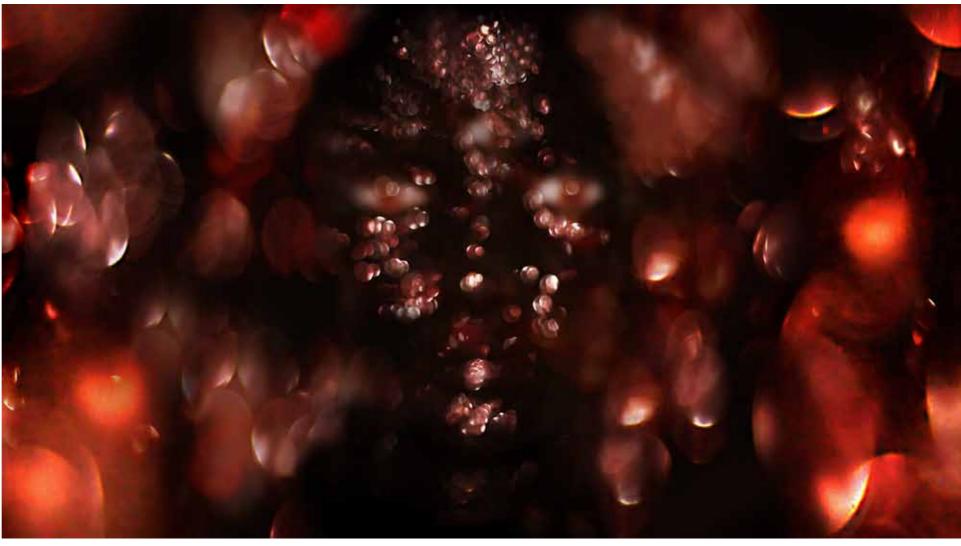
The multi-disciplinary artist who works in painting, sculpture, photography, video and mixed-media in fact rarely makes an appearance in his works that often in navigating conceptual dichotomies slips in between architectural and material constructions, and more conventional forms of art production. An early work *Delocating Margins* (2001) in a way sets the stage for his investigations of space - the imposition and encroachment of expanses by construction, and in turn the spaces that construction creates. The installation at 8 Loke Yew Street introducing road debris collected from sites of construction, renovation and demolition one is so well acquainted with and habitually dismisses in a city that seems to ceaselessly reconstruct itself with clockwork regularity, into the bare and aged shop house, is to be experienced rather than merely viewed. While it invokes questions about the nature of the constructed, and in this case deconstructed, experience of the city, it also points to the more enigmatic topic of the occupation of space, and the fleeting sense of rich potential and private imaginings experienced in the momentary transition between one construction and that which succeeds it.

16:9, Inertial by Francis Ng Mixed Media, Single Channel Projection 2010



I WAS HERE (past work) by Francis Ng

Arguably where *Delocating Margins* is a critique of modernity's restless pursuit of the ever new, Ng's works may be read as aesthetic and material analyses of opposites, less as a means to reconcile them as to test their limits and limitations. In this new body of works, Ng produces a series that experiments with the notions of artifice and nature. In the video triptych *Inertial* (2010) a face appears and dissolves in and out of a black void, establishing the binary structure and rhythm that frames the series. In dialogue with the video are three 'paintings,' *Variability* (2010), in an unexpected blend of cement and Chinese ink, bringing the gritty construction material into a relationship with the refined pigment of the literati where it can be examined and appreciated in a different light. Concrete, a recurring material in Ng's work, is transformed from purely



Inertial
by Francis Ng
Single Channel Projection
2010



Impetus by Francis Ng Mixed Media 107cm. X 166cm. 2010



Variability 1, 2 and 3 by Francis Ng Mixed Media 69cm. X 122cm. each 2010

functional to aesthetic form. Yet it is the ubiquity of these materials that precisely resists their aesthetic appreciation at initial encounter. The raw material is an impediment to the transcendental art experience, even if it is part of a larger production process from which lofty dreams of towering skyscrapers and gravity defying architecture are made from. The introduction of such 'base' materials into the gallery space and as art is what American sculptor Richard Serra is well known for, as he and other minimalist sculptors have been wont to explore industrial elements of steel and rubber, in order to yield an awareness of space and the individual's relation to it. The resistance to the conventions of sculpture, as in the case of Serra's controversial *Tilted Arc* (1981) at the Federal Plaza in New York, is conceivably a means to uncover fundamental assumptions than a valorisation of the humble status of the materials used.



16:9, Inertial by Francis Ng Mixed Media, Single Channel Projection 2010



Re:Act by Francis Ng Metal Sheet 121cm. X 121cm. 2010

Ng's final piece in the series 16:9 (2010) is part of a continuing exposition on the idea of the monumental that sculptures aspire to. As in his recent works The_I_in_You (2008) and The Death of Matter (2008), the awe-inspiring monument is at once both formidable and orchestrated from rudimentary forms. The installation references what Ng terms as 'modular monumentality,' where grandeur can be constructed and also contrived. In the case of 16:9, the installation presents the experience of the monumental in fragmented form. The fragment suggests the larger whole that the monument is itself dependent upon it. In The Death of Matter presented at the front lawn of the Singapore Art Museum, scrap aluminium compressed into blocks are stacked upon each other, painted black and seen to be gently smouldering; and in The_I_in_You, clinical and shiny metal I-shaped supports are stacked to emulate conventional sculptural form. The significance of these pieces are less in the final shape cut against



Variability by Francis Ng Mixed Media 2010

the background and the weight of their presence, as their divisibility and the possibilities of their configuration. As in the work of another minimalist American sculptor Carl Andre who produces sculptural forms out of identical units of objects in wood, metal and cement, Ng's sculptures and installations restage the surroundings they are in, framing space or occupying space to generate physical relations and dialogue.

While it may be said that works utilising materials, such as Ng's have found their space and place in the art context even if they still do from time to time occasion questions of their elementary constitution finding its way into gallery spaces, what is significant is the continual exploration of the conceptual formulations that frame sculptural forms and installations in contemporary practice and their interventions into public and aesthetic realities. The challenges that Ng's works face in their production, the spaces they occupy and their negotiations aesthetic and logistical, have to be read as part of a larger context, and despite the simplicity of the duality of artifice and nature, construction and deconstruction, monumentality and modularity, lightness and weight, the visible and obscured, what finally is revealed is their inescapability from the other, including the apparent dichotomy of art and what lies beyond it.

June Yap is an independent curator and writer based in Singapore.



Detail from Inertial by Francis Ng Single Channel Projection 2010



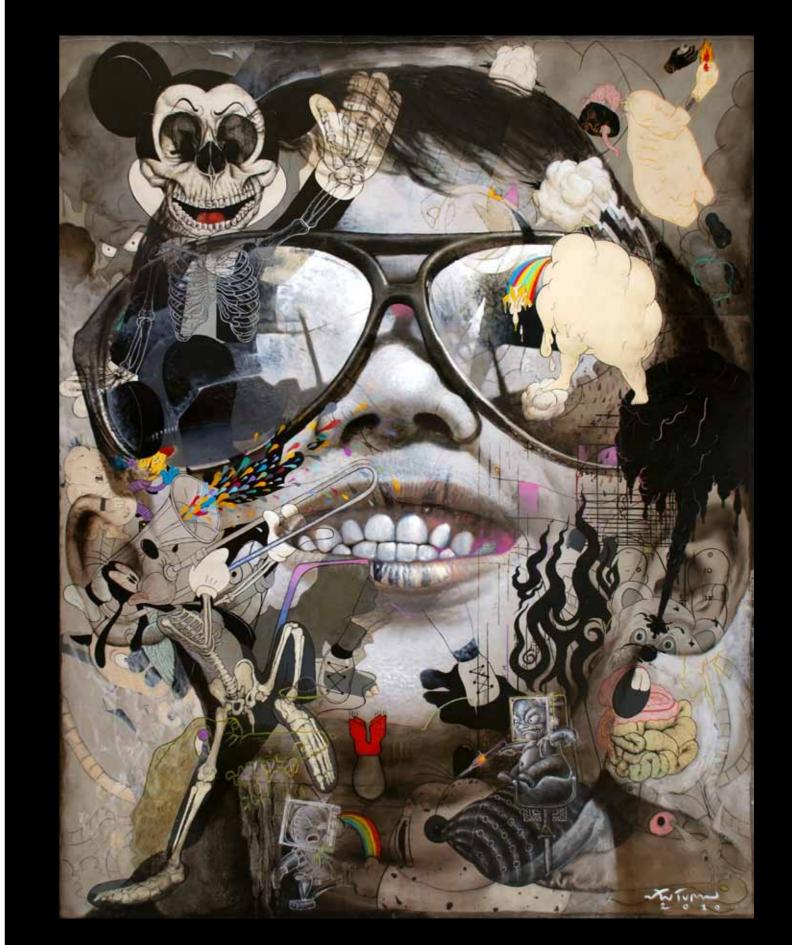
Collision by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010



n this exhibition, Ronald Ventura continues his exegesis into the synthesis of commodification and the posthuman, taking seriously and in jest the notion of play. Folding together toys, religious icons, war machines, animal parts, animated/storybook characters and human bodies, Ventura explores 'play' as a part of his oeuvre with particular interest in its relation to art, value and meaning-making.

Ventura looks into the paradigm of toys, generational shifts becoming palpable in tracing every so often the current fashionable toys for children. The playthings and characters in vogue vary from season to season, coming in later years to epitomize and define a generation. With it comes a variation of perspective, the artist noting that visual images that would have scared older generations are met with nonchalance, delight, even coos of 'cute' by kids of the twenty-first century. If yesterday's monsters have become today's toys, the artist plays with and conflates this further, turning yesterday's toys into contemporary monsters that are smooth, glossy and, depending on one's perspective certainly, quite chic. An astronaut with a human skull, multiple gun barreled-hands and donkey-headed shoes. The lustrous body from a teddy bear piggybank with the head of a Sto. Nino sprouting little horns. The sizeable red robot with human hands, human organs and, when its robotic head is split open, reveals a human one. A young boy, donning a plastic pair of sunglasses, who grins widely at the images of the skulled Mickey, the anatomically revealed Goofy and the blobs that spit limbs, organs and starred rainbow.

High At Five I by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010





High At Space I by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010



High At Space II by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010



Lunatic: Dog by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin 28cm. X 73cm. X 38cm. 2010



Lunatic: Mouse by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin 28cm. X 68cm. X 24cm. 2010

Ventura's works and its density of layered images point to something deeper than a customary rite of aging that viewpoints signal. If the amalgamation of elements, if these monstrous bodies as it were have become relatable and indeed buyable, as they are, it is because there is something identifiable in it in current conditions—the condition of the posthuman. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, the editors of the book Posthuman Bodies, write, 'posthuman monstrosity and its bodily forms are recognizable because they occupy the overlap between the now and the then, the here and the always... Posthuman bodies...are of the past and future lived as present crisis." Indeed, in the present and continually unraveling posthuman age, bodies are becoming more and more easily modifiable and as 'mix-and-match' as accessories. Technology, increasingly seen as essential extensions of identity, marches humans into an era of consumer-happy cyborgs. The posthuman is one easily altered—it is a screen, a projected image,² a mirror,³ a window display. Posthuman monstrosities comprehend the body as plaything, packaged in the slick veneer of commodity and technology where the image is both foremost and fleeting. Posthuman monstrosities are posthuman toysthe posthuman itself.4

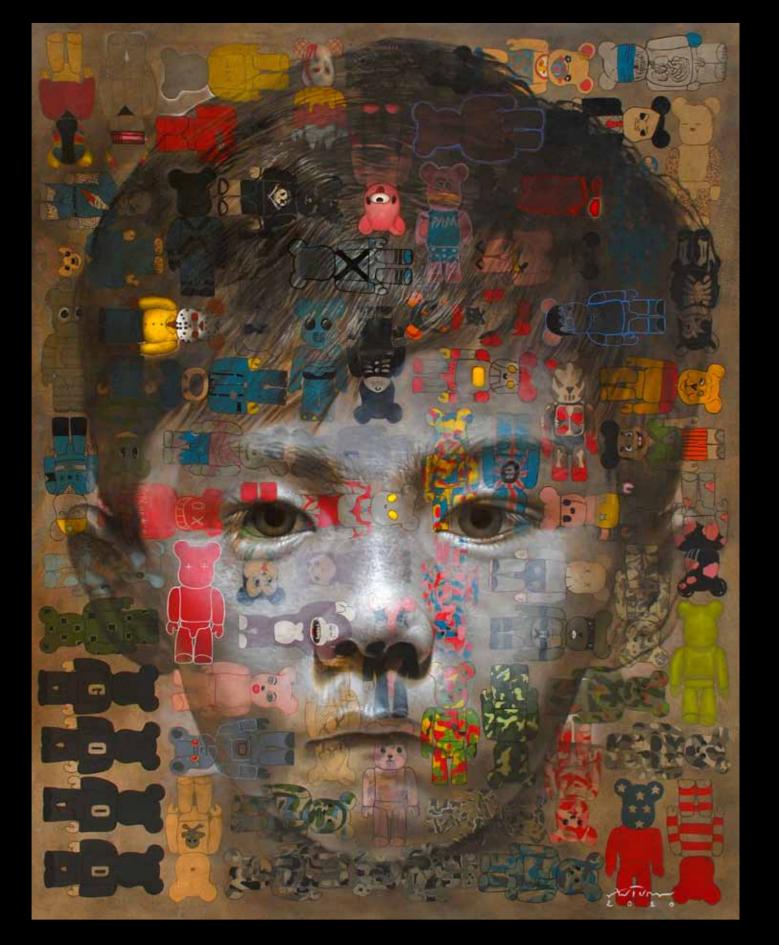
> Lunatic: Mouse by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin 27cm. X 68cm. X 24cm. 2010



Lunatic: Skull And Guns by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin 31cm. X 67cm. X 42cm. 2010



Lunatic: Pig by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin 31cm. X 65cm. X 36cm. 2010







Immortal I and II by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 60.96cm. X 91.45cm. 2010

Though the posthuman may be one that is 'played' upon, this should not undermine the significance of this play, play being an essential element of culture.⁵ Ventura, however, teases the longstanding notion of its triviality in connection to the solemnity of art. The jumbled assortments which make their way into Ventura's canvases or bandied together into sculptures in play present the artist's provocation to the system which deifies his objects. Ventura himself questions of the works, 'Are they still toys? Or is it art?' Surely, he is, as many are, highly conscious of his rising status as an artist. Utilizing this to expose the art world as game and one taken in the utmost of seriousness, Ventura questions how value systems operate and how the correlating monetary worths are established. Indicative of his challenge is his displacement of the museum learning showcase, the diorama, into his ahistorical symbiosis of motley elements marked by presence and play. While the play world is not ordinary or real life, neither is art nor its white walled setting. Though one is evidently more valued than the other, the play world of the artist is its combination and exception—an elevated platform, a creative realm beheld in rapture, though one translatable into and desired as merchandise.

High At Five II by Ronald Ventura Oil on Canvas 122cm. X 152.4cm. 2010



Die-O-Drama 1, 2 and 3 by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin, 203cm. X 30.5cm. X 30.5cm. 2010







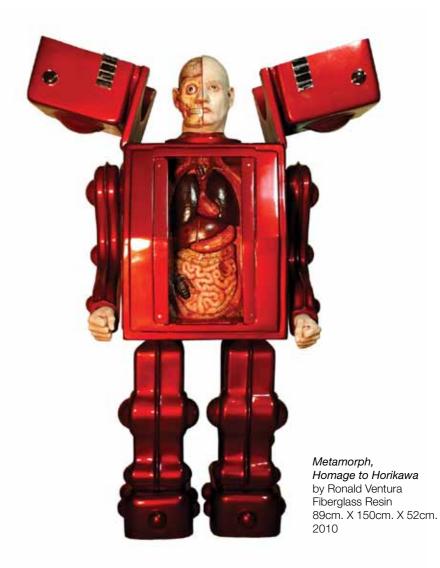
Robot Express by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin, 73cm. X 150cm. X 55cm. 2010



Builder by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin, 52cm. X 90cm. X 73cm. 2010



Power Muscle by Ronald Ventura Fiberglass Resin, 49cm. X 88cm. X 74cm. 2010

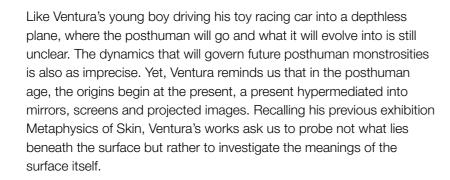


The artist's interest in commodification eminently suits the approach he uses. It may be said that themes of the posthuman are better engaged in methods that may more deeply broach the issues it presents rather than the use of figures in common sculptural materials and paint on canvas. Yet, what would be more fitting than to package it in the easily consumable, take home-able product, especially one with as striking a visage as Ventura's works? Connecting ideas of art, the body and 'thing', the curator Patrick Flores wrote of Ventura's smoothly pleasing paintings, 'This "retinal ravishment" leads us to think that the fluidity of the body is virtually arrested, trapped as fetish, reified as thing.'6 Indeed, even as thing, the posthuman body is revered and, though constantly altered, it is, like much art attempted to be preserved one way or another, inherently indisposable, indispensable. What, after all, could be left? Shedding its shields, breaching boundaries, the posthuman body is a body contaminated, the human 'no longer part of "the family of man" but of a zoo of posthumanities.'7



Skyrocket Heights installation by Ronald Ventura

Note: It is also the title the artist uses to refer to his own entire collection that appears in A Duad in Play.





¹Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, 'Introduction: Posthuman Bodies', Posthuman Bodies, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (eds.), Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 3-4.

²lbid, p. 3.

³Jeffrey Deitch, Post Human, New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1992, np. ⁴I use 'itself' to refer to the posthuman as it is an entity degendered.

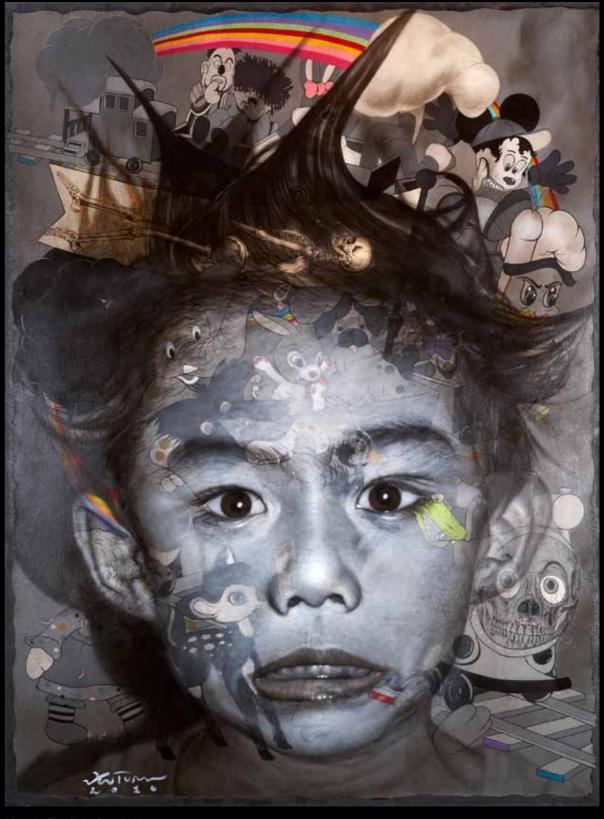
⁵Johan Huizinga, Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

⁶Patrick Flores, 'Thingy', Mapping the Corporeal, NUS Museum and Artesan: 2008, np.

⁷Halberstam and Livingston, 1995, p. 3. This line especially recalls Ventura's sculpture series Zoomanities.

Clarissa Chikiamco is a Manila-based independent curator and art writer.





High At Five III by Ronald Ventura
Oil on Canvas, 91.5cm. X 122cm.
2010



A Play of all Things

By Rofan Teo

o speak of cross-cultural dialogues merely as a growing trend in the increasingly globalised world is possibly an understatement.¹ With a slew of traveling to international festivals, conferences and recently popularized volunteer traveling as common occurrences, these interactions between countries can happen at a national and personal level.

This sets the backdrop for the bilateral ties between Singapore and The Philippines where two established artists from either countries, Francis Ng and Ronald Ventura whose disparate practices come together in A Duad in Play. The exhibition posing visual dialogues, is not merely about enjoying playthings, but rather an investigation of calculated maneuvering of toys and objects of which the artists exploited as though in response to each other's practice. Instead of imitating, the works create modes of exchanges and allowing latitude to divert from urban realities.

Where blogging becomes a routine extension of ourselves in the internet our lives are intertwined with technology. An imposing deadpan of the phenomenon could possibly reside in Ng's earlier work I Was Here (2005), a phrase we use to indicate where we are is created and substituted by a concrete and man-made structure. Consequentially, the cyborg - a partially mythologised creature - which reflects as a product of our society is woven into our imagination. The cyborg embodies the blurring





of boundaries between man, human and animal.² This notion populates Ventura's works with an assortment of characters, which are mananimal and man-machine ranging from zoomorphic humanoid heroes to humanized objects. They portray tumultuous outbursts of imagination creating a disjunction with realities which turn into chaotic montages of monstrosities and the undead. It is a distortion of anatomies from the grafting of body parts and the mixing of man and playthings humans react as a stimulant to happiness, as nostalgic hangovers and as sedatives to numb the senses in *High at Five 2* (2010).

While the dynamic merging of anatomies and imagined bodies leads from the contortion of realities, a brief fling with reality and fiction is orchestrated in his earlier work *Kill'* em *All* and *Love'* em *All* (2005) by Ng. The tableau photography narrates twenty-two people who are framed still like objects and architecture. Shot individually the figures with expressions stiff and modular as androids, others - either hyperbolically poised or sanguine in a recognizable yet strange environment. If Ventura's cyborg shows the fleshing out of bodies as various degrees of distortions, the subtle link between human and machine is drawn from

the various eyeglasses in *Kill' em*. These glasses are a playful device his subjects put on to cleverly question the relationship between man and machine, in what appears to be an irreverent staging of the cyborg.

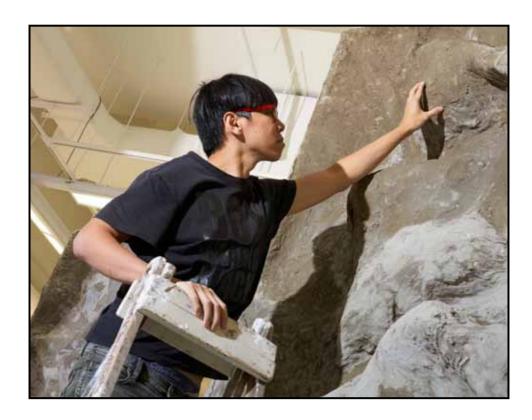
Engulfing the cyborg with 'breathtaking naturalism' and photorealistic qualities,³ is part of a profound investigation of nature and artificiality, as an allegorical critique of material culture in Ventura's works. Art critics identified this style with Mannerism defining tendencies for the bizarre highlighted by elegance and virtuosity.⁴ Like the integration of classical figures and ruins his works are consummate portrayals of the overlapping of old and new, man-made structures and humans, surfaces and interiors as well as the flawless and broken. From assaulting a profusion of signs on the bodies in *Destination* (2008), to Ventura's scattering of dismembered limbs in *Die-o-Drama* (2010), the complicit interfaces of the human with popular culture and commodities in turn commodify the body. Like the eyewear, the solid human torsos are pretensions, alluding to the interchangeability of the body as a mechanized object in a carefully constructed allegory of human fallibility to greed, power and vileness.



Ng brings into play the modern ruin in his works. The construction site is portrayed as 'ruin in reverse', possessing regenerative qualities that cause buildings to rise from debris.⁵ This is characteristic of Ng's oeuvre consisting of photographs of partially constructed buildings and of empty lift interiors. Illuminating the continuous linearity and visual clarity, these spaces which we become ignorant of, re-activate narratives of beings within mythical or real with no obvious indication of time period in *ConstructingConstruction* (2001) and *Spaces_in_spacing* (2008)

Whereas Ventura puts together his inventions of jumbling of body parts and objects as a delightful collapsing of reality and imagination, the new composite work of Ng in this exhibition pays a witty homage to his earlier works of construction materials and man-made structures. *Variability* (2010) features a triptych alluding to concrete comprising a mixture of cement and Chinese ink. The signature photography of man-made structures in Ng's work is reified into a synthetic installation of the rubble 16:9 (2010), fictitiously broken from the natural boulder he photographed. The ruin is a backdrop of which ghostly and semi abstractions of fluids projected on coarse man-made materials are revivified to casting a different light to his present and past works. Here, the cyborg signaling in Inertial disappears and materialises, evoking an ambivalent but cardinal genealogy of humans that situate in a pre-conditioning of human existence, to a present of vital fluids and to cerebral android.

Such an incisive play of materials transforms into vagaries of dramatic plays in Ventura works. The spectacular but queer theatre of objects as surgically incised and severed bodies in *Die-o-Drama* defines a 'consciousness' of 'exposed lucidity' belie an affirmation which has 'not yet begun to exist', The display as a collection of playthings and kitsch replaces the economic value of objects with original meanings. These vague meanings, lead to a barrage of questions relevant to the body in the material world. Amid the muddling of reality and imagination, it





is a maze of investigations into the future eventually ending with both paranoia and anticipation of the human as a thing, or the thing as a human. This parallels Ventura's life-sized robot sculptures that when unshuttered and its interior exposed, betray surprisingly the hidden core of the human. Is the future of robots a melding of humans and machines? What will become of humans if robots are partially human? What is the real thing?

In the end, no fixed image was created in the interchanges of body and thing, of nature and artifice, of humans and objects which Ng and Ventura embarked upon in their interpretations of the future of humans and their environment. The cyborg flickers in our reality yet is reified by the imagination, suggests an uncertain destiny of humans as authentically humans and not machines. It has been said that to create an icon of its time is done through the act of violence of nature and people. While a narrative of certain ruination played out at a moment in time, it is possibly the exchanges that will continue and be remembered.

Endnotes:

¹http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/altermodern/manifesto.shtm

²Haraway, Donna. Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, Routledge: London, 1990 p290

³Flores, Patrick. Thingy in catalogue Mapping the Corporeal,

NUS Museum: Singapore, 2008

⁴lbid

⁵Makarius, Michel. Ruins, Flammarion: Paris, 2004, p180

⁶Derrida, Jacques. Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass, Routlege: London 2001, p309

⁷lbid, p293

⁸Stewart, Susan. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Duke University Press: London, 1993, p559

⁹Derrida, Jacques. Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass, Routlege: London 2001, p2

Teo Rofan is the assistant curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore



A Collector's Viewpoint

I see around me a professional disease of taking everything too seriously.

- Achille Castiglioni

ine is a plain speak counterpoint to the curatorial language employed by the esteemed writers in this catalogue, much like the stylistic contrast between Ventura and Ng. I do hope I may convey a non-curatorial expression of the impact of this ground-breaking show and the ideas it generates.

By any standard, this is a great show. And I am fortunate to see this show in its entirety before writing this. Sometimes lateness (in publishing this catalogue) has its virtue. Kudos to Artesan Gallery + Studio for dreaming up and bringing to splendid fruition this remarkable showcase involving two of the finest young artists in Southeast Asia who have such contrasting styles, is certainly a great bonus. Other galleries, sit up and learn...and weep.

Upon entering the ICA gallery, one is immediately engulfed by an otherworldly static-infused sound introducing the multi-media work of Francis Ng. Much has been made of the architectural forms of the concrete monoliths, which, if the atmosphere were not so ominous, actually reminds me of blocks of local public dwellings. The crackly static more than once caused me to glance upwards, half expecting some debris to fall off, making me an unwilling participant in a performance piece. The looped video projecting onto the bare faces of three of them



culminates in, well, a face, eyes wide staring. Drawing further on the analogy, the rough-hewn surfaces, despite their foreboding nature, actually invite palpation, much like our concrete HDB homes welcoming residents and even the odd tourist. The other three hanging works, which shows off Ng's versatility with various mediums, invite quiet contemplation of their form and meaning. Not quite Zen, but as restrained, passive yet intriguing as you can get in contemporary art.

After Ng's aural and tactile assault, Ronald Ventura's works seem a welcomed visual relief. For a brief moment at least. Then his alternative universe swallows you up, regurgitates, gargles and spits you out onto a world of his making, emerging more Alice than Astronaut. *Mapping the Corporeal* in 2009 was just a foretaste of what this otherworldly talent is capable of. In this part of the show, Ventura makes full use of the space to explore the concept of play and playthings and how time often blurs the distinction between devices of death and destruction and of play.

His hyper-realistic renditions on canvases of humans (notably young boys with overactive imaginations) and their playthings, body parts, Disneyesque characters and a whole menagerie of creatures, both



fantastic and real, make for very compelling viewing. This wonderfully macabre (two words which should otherwise not be used together) dramatis personae includes skeletal Mickey Mouses, Donald Ducks, Snow White and Thumper the rabbit with a bloodied kitchen knife. (I cannot remember whether Bambi features in any of the paintings; if not, we know why). A personal favourite is the skeletal Mickey doing a rainbow 'teh-tarik' with a sawn-off skull in each gloved hand. The infamous description of Singapore by William Gibson in 1993 as "Disneyland with the death sentence" springs to mind, but I am almost certain Ventura did not intend this in his work.

Ventura 's fiberglass sculptures leave one without a doubt as to his compliance with the title of the show and the play/plaything and death/ weapon metaphors. His two life-size robots and two tanks with human organs artfully built into them show off his febrile imagination to great effect, as do his dioramas (cheekily called Die-o-Drama because of their narrative nature). I note with wry amusement that the exposed belly of the red robot has a grenade where the appendix is supposed to be. One also cannot forget the graffiti on the walls, the strongest thematically of which is the one with the television-headed Adam and Eve beneath the Tree of Knowledge which has oddly mechanical branches.

After the visual and intellectual overload from immersion in Ventura's flamboyant work, going back to Ng's contemplative work provides a much needed stillness. Ng's subdued work makes Ventura's even more stunning; and Ventura's exuberant works make Ng's stillness even more tenacious and dauntless. In this way, the works of these two artists play off each other, highlighting each other's strong suit. Finally, as one stands in the middle of the gallery, Ventura's *High at Five* confronts Ng's *Variability* series across the space, as if in silent debate of the state of the world, in a language that can only take place between two artists.

Ventura and Ng are not only true to their own highly personal styles, their styles seem to mirror the perceived identities and personality traits of their respective home countries' populace. As such, this collaborative effort also speaks of diplomacy, and sensitivity, not only between the two artists, but also between two identities, of two very different cultures. It can be said that *A Duad in Play* is a fitting climactic conclusion to celebrating forty years of diplomatic ties between the countries of Singapore and the Philippines .

- Dr Colin Lim Private Art Collector



Francis Ng Teck Yong

(b. Singapore, 1975)

"Every space, owns a presence, now or once in the past." – Francis Ng

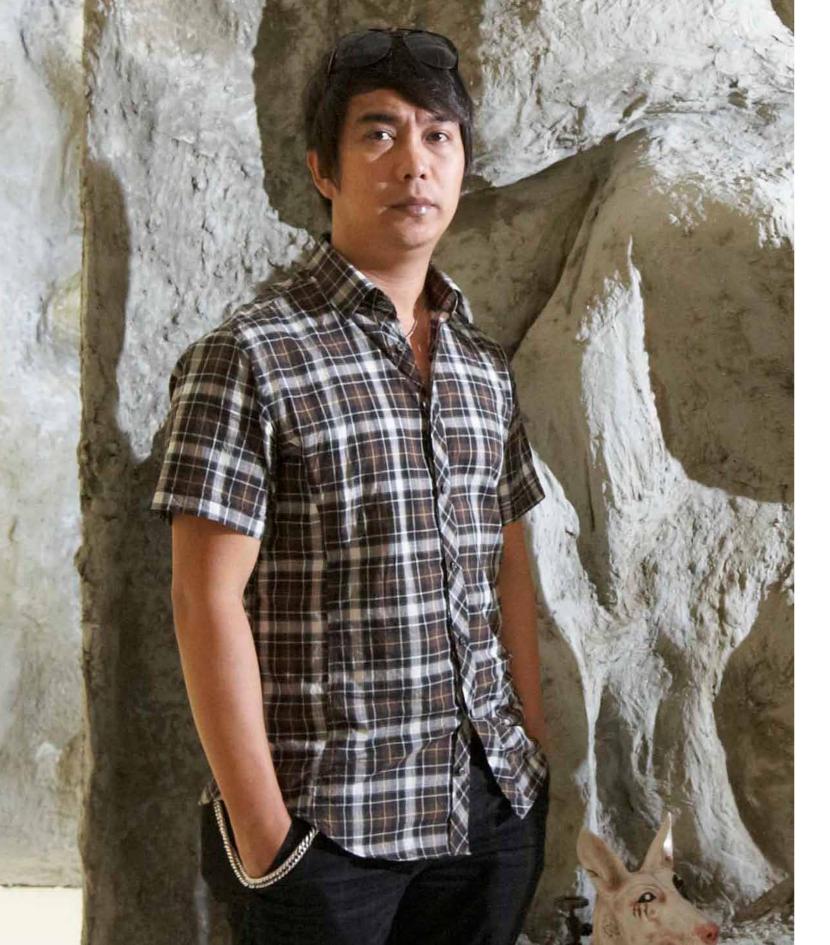
Multi-disciplinary in approach, Francis Ng is an artist who constantly strives to stretch the potential in his art and engage in an intellectual dialogue with his audiences. In his creative explorations, his strong intellectual framework can manifest in conceptual works that are installation and photography based; or in a combination media that demonstrates his artistic repertoire in relation to contemporary issues surrounding art-making. Adept at harnessing the expressive space offered by these different mediums, he has created platforms on which he invites audience to respond to a myriad of spatial and identity concepts in a rapidly changing urban environment.

In photography, Francis has presented a series of unforgettable images that capture the essence of change and the relationship between the individual and his surroundings. Francis was the winner of both the Juror's Choice and the Grand Prize in the 2001/2002 Philip Morris Group of Companies ASEAN Art Awards, the only Singaporean and first photographer to win the Grand Prize. His work offered the sublime and skilful, illustrating his talent in composition, image making through technology and a sensitivity for how objects relate in space and the environment. The purity of his work is not only found in its content, but also his ability to challenge our ideas with complex notions of the ambivalent and the qualitative experience that distils itself in our own struggle to visualise and live contemporary society and contemporary lives. He also went on to clinch the 1st Prize in the 23rd UOB Painting of the Year Competition (Photography Category) in 2004.

In mixed-media work, Francis first presented a massive and physically haunting installation piece titled Delocating Margins in 2001, offering the Singapore public a totally visceral experience of being immersed in a work or art. Thereafter, Francis continued to exhibit thought-provoking installation works such as Contesting Spaces, Congesting Time at the Asian Comments Exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark, Re:place at the President's Young Talent Exhibition and a photographic installation titled *Displaced* at the 50th Venice Biennale (Biennale di Venezia) in 2003. In 2004, he continued to present his works at a number of international platforms such as the Gwangju Biennale. Also in 2004, he took his three-dimensional works out of the gallery by producing the immensely popular public sculpture I WAS HERE, currently exhibiting at the National University of Singapore.

In 2006, Francis was the recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award. Some of his recent participation in both local and international art exhibitions included "Thermocline of Art-New Asian Waves" at the ZKM Museum in Karlsruhe, Germany, Flying Circus Project 2007: Travelogue and the Singapore Art Show 2007. Francis was also invited to participate in the inaugural Showcase Singapore 2008. Since 2008, Francis serves as a member of the Arts Resource Panel of National Arts Council, In 2009. Francis ventured into art entrepreneurship and founded SHOWCASE NUMBER EIGHT //////, a conceptual platform that champions the cause for creative discourses amongst other consultative, academic, mentoring and curatorial positions and services he is currently holding.





Ronald C. Ventura

(b. Manila, Philippines, 1973)

"My work is much like an overflow of different realities, a continuing visual commentary, often juxtaposed with other documents or 'evidence' from science, religion, fashion, history etc."

— Ronald Ventura

It can be said that since Ronald Ventura's first major solo show outside the Philippines, entitled *Mapping The Corporeal*, which opened at the NUS Museum in 2008, his career development and reputation has witnessed a truly stunning success. Highly acclaimed for his acute skill and technique in painting, Ventura is able to combine hyper-realism with fantastical creatures, emblems and icons, often resulting in a collection of works with foreboding elements, layers of yet managing to evoke childish awe and wonderment from its viewers.

For Ventura's sculptures, his latest *Zoomanities* series continue to morph and appear in his recent exhibitions, "waging war on preconceived notions of what sculpture is and what sculptures shouldn't be"¹, making it clear that for every chronicle that appears, these mutant assemblages are crucial to his narrative of artistic expression. To Ventura, three dimensional art have a different usage as a form of expression. They are a necessity to his stage and dramatizes a scene in a story. His stories are often about aspects of modern man and his present values, playing with revered objects, combined with symbols, and commercial toys posed on a miniature stage, as if part of an re-enactment.

Ronald Ventura graduated in 1993 with a BFA, Major in Painting, from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, where he also taught later. He was a finalist in the 1999 Taiwan International Biennale Painting and Drawing

Competition and his work was given the Juror's Choice in the Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards in 2002. The following year, was conferred with the Cultural Centre of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award, a much coveted honour by the art community in the Philippines.

In 2005, the reputable, Ateneo de Manila's Art Museum inaugurated the Ateneo Artists Awards, bestowing a contemporary art prize bestowed on young Filipino visual artists. Ronald Ventura was awarded as one of the inaugural recipients of the award. He was also awarded the Ateneo Art Gallery Sydney Studio Residency Grant, exhibiting at the Cross Art Projects, Sydney, Australia in November 2005. In 2007, Ventura participated as Resident Artist at Artesan Gallery + Studio in Singapore. During the same period, Ronald opened his first solo exhibition at Artesan, entitled *Antipode: The Human Side.* It was during this period when Ventura was invited by the NUS Museum to exhibit, as well as when the idea of *A Duad in Play* was initiated by Artesan.

Also in September 2008, Ventura was bestowed the Award of Excellence by the 9th OITA Asian Sculpture Exhibition Open Competition 2008 in Japan. Since then, Ronald Ventura has not looked back, exhibiting works at the Prague Biennale in early 2009, as well as exhibiting with a strong group of highly reputable Southeast Asian Contemporary Artists entitled *Post-Tsunami-Art: Southeast Blooming*, at Primo Marella Gallery in Milan, Italy.² In late 2009, Ronald opened his first solo exhibition in New York entitled *Metaphysics of Skin* at Tyler Rollins Fine Art. After A Duad in Play in Singapore, Ronald will be holding his first solo exhibition in Europe, at Primo Marella Gallery in Italy, in the middle of 2010. Ronald Ventura's work can also be found in the Singapore Art Museum collection.

¹Igan d' Bayan, Adventures in Skinny Dipping, Metaphysics of Skin, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, NY

²Post Tsunami Art book , bearing the same title of the exhibit, published by Damiani, Italy, and released October 2009. It features 18 top artists from the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia.

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