

J.

**or (A Remembrance of Things
To Come)**

VICTOR BALANON

artesan

GALLERY + STUDIO



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J or (A Remembrance of Things To Come)
Victor Balanon

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F o r e w o r d

*There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to
find the ways in which you have altered yourself.*

– *Nelson Mandela*

I first saw Victor’s artwork in 2008 during a group exhibition of Filipino artists entitled *Futura Manila*, held at the now defunct Old School in Mt. Sophia Road, Singapore. He had created a graffiti work that was central to a huge room and towered above smaller walls dotted along its left and right panels. It was fantastical, imaginary and entitled *Manifesto Destino Bastardos*. I left with an impression of how distinctive his works were. Not only were they potent, they completely veered the viewer from one’s own world, exuding a a sense of alienation, strangely combined by transformed energy.

Three years later, we invited Victor for a residency stint at Artesan’s Bukit Timah studio. We arranged to line the gallery walls with full lengths of canvas simulating bare naked walls. There he created yet another world of the strange and the unknown.... losing himself in his imaginative universe of monochromatic heroes and foes in an artwork, entitled *Ante Bellum (Before The Chaos)*. Shortly after, Vic left his job with a Japanese animation company, and became a full-time artist. Balanon proceeded to have shows at Artesan in 2013 (*The Somnambulist*), 2014 (*A Nation of Ulysses*) and 2015 (*Project: Pandora*), and continued to work with other major galleries in the Philippines and abroad. His return to show once again in Singapore is well overdue, and we are thrilled to welcome Victor back.

Roberta Dans

Founding Director
Artesan Gallery + Studio

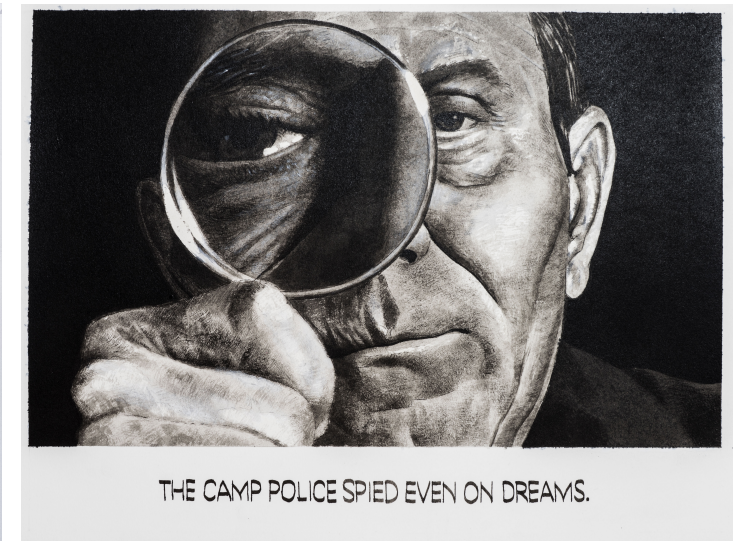
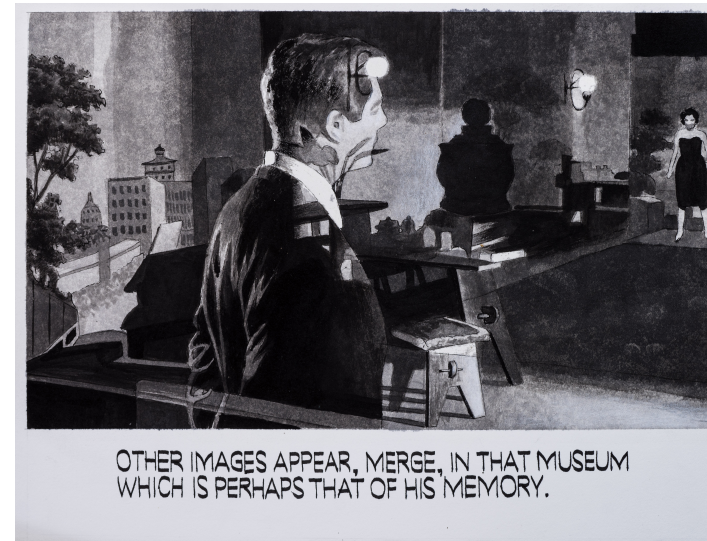
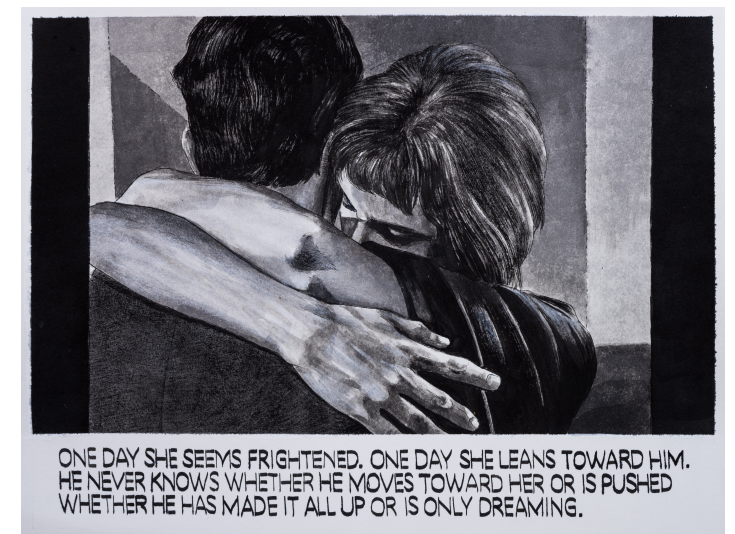
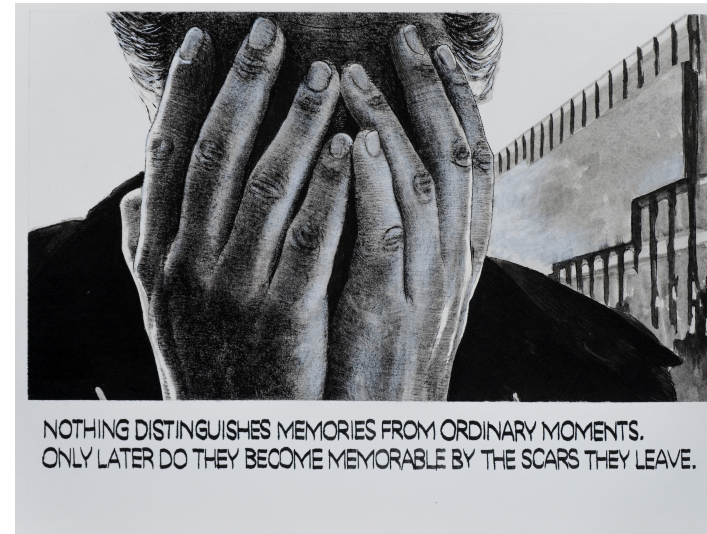
J (or A Remembrance of Things to Come)

By Cocoy Lumbao

"The text is no more commentary for the image than images are illustrations for the text", was the advice given by Chris Marker to his readers during the introduction of one of his photo essays, *Le dépayé*. Marker, a French writer and photographer, would become more known as the avant-garde filmmaker, whose works attempt to re-purpose cinematic conventions for his own mode of expression, which plot-wise were philosophical, and structurally, essayistic. One such work is the short film *La Jetée*, produced in 1962. And his manner of interrogation-of 'rupturing the bond between image and text'-is what had made it become an indispensable reference for any kind of poesis that would include both pictures and words.

La Jetée thus becomes the theorist's film, the philosopher's film, and the storyteller's film. For the visual artist, it is the ultimate slideshow, strategizing to defeat the demanding economy of sci-fi by editing together black and white photographs against a taut narration. For an artist such as Vic Balanon, it is the shaper of consciousness. If the word/image tandem has become an uncontrollable epidemic in new media, *La Jetée* is ground zero. In Balanon's world of black-and-white, captioned, cinematic drawings, it is an inevitable subject to tackle.

Victor Balanon's work is one of the few phenomena in art that have, throughout the years, portrayed a consistent subject matter: film and its visual landscape. His drawings declare themselves as part of a single project, which is the continuous extolment of the spectacle of cinema—an anachronistic tribute to the old form, especially in the glory days of noir. This period in film exhibits a signature look, and so does Balanon's art, which tries to sustain the dominant mood of uncertainty and suspense. His works are not transferences from one medium to another but are manifestations, or more accurately—investigations.



Pen & Ink on paper,
22.8 x 30.4cm (9 x 12 in)
2020



HE RECITED HIS LESSON: SINCE HUMANITY HAD SURVIVED,
IT COULDN'T REFUSE TO ITS OWN PAST THE MEANS OF ITS OWN SURVIVAL.
THIS SOPHISM WAS TAKEN FOR FATE IN DISGUISE.



SHE TOO SEEMS TO HAVE ADJUSTED.
SHE ACCEPTS THE WAYS OF THIS VISITOR AS A NATURAL PHENOMENON,
HOW HE COMES AND GOES, EXISTS, TALKS, LAUGHS WITH HER,
FALLS SILENT LISTENS TO HER AND THEN VANISHES.



SPACE WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION.
THE ONLY HOPE FOR SURVIVAL LAY IN TIME.
A LOOPHOLE IN TIME MAY MAKE IT POSSIBLE
TO REACH FOOD, MEDICINE, SOURCES OF ENERGY.



ALL AROUND HIM ARE ASTONISHING MATERIALS:
GLASS, PLASTIC, VELVET.
WHEN HE RECOVERS FROM HIS TRANCE,
THE WOMAN IS GONE.



OTHER IMAGES APPEAR, MERGE, IN THAT MUSEUM
WHICH IS PERHAPS THAT OF HIS MEMORY.



NOTHING DISTINGUISHES MEMORIES FROM ORDINARY MOMENTS.
ONLY LATER DO THEY BECOME MEMORABLE BY THE SCARS THEY LEAVE.



A FACE OF HAPPINESS, THOUGH A DIFFERENT ONE.



OTHERS WERE WAITING FOR HIM. IT WAS A BRIEF ENCOUNTER.
THEY CLEARLY REFUSED THIS SCORIA FROM ANOTHER TIME.

The subject being questioned is the moving image itself, and all the complexities and contradictions that arise from it. In this respect, Chris Marker's *La Jetée* is the perfect vehicle, because it is one that looks at cinema for what it really is—as a series of frames. Minus the illusion of movement, it is simply a succession of photographs. Since it essentially starts with a hoax, a trick, everything it tries to represent becomes suspicious: reality, memory, truth, documentary, and even artistry and authorship.

“*J (or A Remembrance of Things To Come)*” is a retelling of *La Jetée*, not of its plot but of its structure. It is a re-interpretation, through another medium—of pen and ink, and what are being re-interpreted are the ideas behind the image-text conundrum: which has precedence over the other? Which is more reliable to conjure the signified? Balanon, in taking on the role of the ‘unreliable narrator’, exploits these indeterminable jousting between language and visuals by transcribing the classic piece in his own terms, through his own vision and philosophy, being ‘mired by a compromised archive of images and a faulty memory,’ his own thoughts about producing work.

La Jetée is about memory, it is the principal mover of its plot, and memory is described through a certain image, a vague and recurring one.

But Balanon re-establishes the stronghold of Memory as entwined with existing texts—the actual lines narrated in the film—and are juxtaposed with his own collection of images. In Balanon's oeuvre, the strategy employed by the filmmaker is turned against itself, where the dream is transformed into fragments, and where the once hypnotic slideshow is exploded into a single view. Presented in a sequence of 75 drawings, and arranged intuitively to find its own narrative, the film essay becomes poetry through the artist's hands.

Since *La Jetée* has earned critical distinction for having been able to redefine its genre, it is almost inescapable to see other artists try to re-work its form. Undoubtedly, Victor Balanon is one such artist who is equipped to tackle the Markerian poetics where questions about authorship, history, memory, storytelling, archiving, and the ‘text’ are also recurring themes in his projects. And while this new exhibition has homage written all over it, as the artist would readily admit, it is in fact, more than anything, an attempt to respond to the soundness of the strategy—of reinforcing the image through language, or of language bolstering the image's effect, hence the dilemma; in which there could be no better tribute to one's heroes, than to participate deeply and immerse oneself to their work's enigma.



SHE SMILES AT HIM FROM A CAR.

Pen & Ink on paper,
22.8 x 30.4cm (9 x 12 in)
2020



THE CRIES OF THE CROWD BLURRED BY FEAR

Pen & Ink on paper,
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About the Artist



Victor Balanon (born 1972) is a self-taught artist based in Quezon City, Philippines. He started to study dental medicine but left school to pursue his interest in art. He later studied film and animation at the Mowelfund Film Institute in Manila. He has worked as an illustrator creating storyboards, album covers and posters for films, independent comics and alternative music labels; and later as an animator for a major Japanese animation company. He has participated and supported various local artist-run initiatives in the 90's, particularly with the collective *Surrounded By Water*. Currently, he co-organizes a moving-image centered initiative called *Lost Frames* where programs focus on providing a platform for screening video works, discussions and artist talks.

He had his first solo exhibition in 2011 and had more than 10 exhibitions to date. His works has been shown at the Jakarta Biennale, the Manila Biennale, the Jewish Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, the University of the Philippines' Vargas Museum, Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts and the Singapore Art Museum.

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