

RYAN VILLAMAE

Return, My Gracious Hour



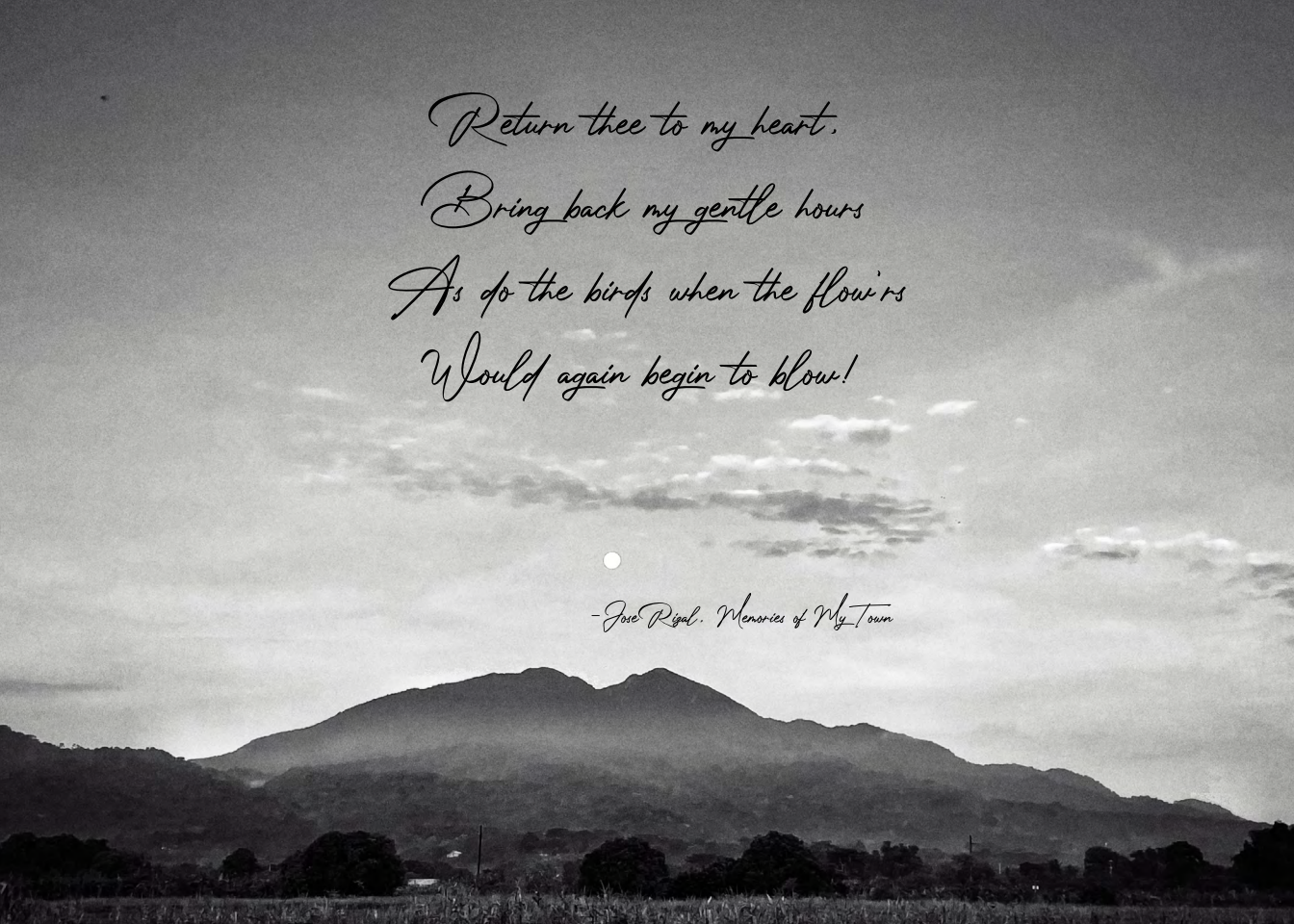
RYAN VILLAMAEL

Return, My Gracious Hour



9 January - 3 February 2024

[website](#) [email](#) [whatsapp](#)

A black and white photograph of a landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall grasses. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills and a large mountain range. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and a small, bright sun or moon is visible in the center of the sky. The overall mood is serene and nostalgic.

Return thee to my heart,
Bring back my gentle hours
As do the birds when the flowers
Would again begin to blow!

-Jose Rizal. *Memories of My Town*

At first glance, Ryan Villamael's *Return, My Gracious Hour*, the opening show for the 2024 exhibition year of Silverlens, flirts with the Edenic promise of nature, the seeming longing for it avowed by the title, which was motivated by a poem that Jose Rizal wrote as teenager. Nature is almost always portrayed as pristine, innocent, virginal; humans are always the interlopers. But a close examination of Villamael's body of work reveals nature as something that is inextricably linked to geography, identity and, by extension, people's destiny. Nature is neither background nor battleground, but something articulate, prized, fought over, mapping out hometowns, nations, territories and, for a country that is as a biodiverse as the Philippines, something that defines and delineates it from others.

Drenched in tropical heat and seemingly in the grips of a jungle fever, the gallery becomes a spell-binding space teeming with botanical shapes and forms: evoked as standalone soft sculptures casting big-leafed shadows on the walls, as meticulously-incised specimens superimposed upon historical documents, as ornate, symmetrical cutouts that, with their reflective surface, give off glimmers of light. Nature is employed as a collection of powerful markers, juxtaposed with archival materials produced during the American Occupation. Despite being obscured by the phytogeographic elements, some of the images are visible and the texts legible, written in the language of the colonizers—which we still speak—looking at and writing about the Philippines through their eyes.

This group of works, shadowed by the silhouettes of the anahaw, is neither meant to debunk nor confirm the veracity of the printed materials, but to contemplate on the resulting history we made for ourselves after the country's decoupling from foreign powers—a sovereign entity among nations. As Villamael was working on this exhibition, he thought why certain problems, whether in the absence or presence of a colonial rule, appear to be persistent, chronic, terminal? If the Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon's assessment that it was far more preferable that the government be run "like hell by Filipinos" than "like heaven by Americans," what kind of hellish fires are we exactly dealing with? For the artist, underscored by a few of the documents he selected, some of the dilemmas we are addressing are the same ones that have troubled the country for the past 450 years, just assuming "different forms and structures."

Hence, nature in this exhibition is quoted as a clarifying element, a peg on which to dream a probable start. It revitalizes as it decolonizes: its appearance as part of the landscape is no accident but cultivated through geological time. Natural history trumps over human history. Or another way to put it: human history would not be possible without natural history. Deeply imbricated into the archipelagic fabric, can nature be instructive on how we can generate the cures to some of our collective ailments and perhaps, just like the “verdant shores,” “the simple town,” and “the grandeur of woods” mentioned in the Rizal poem, can beckon the return of the gracious hour?

This gracious hour, as imagined by Villamael, is not an Edenic conjecture, nor is it rooted in the cheap solace of nostalgia, but in the malleability of the contemporary: how the artist, for instance, considers history not as an end, but a means—a medium—through which contact points and direct parallelisms between the past and the post-colonial present may be drawn. Through the agency of art, the eloquent, precise cutouts—of which Villamael is the foremost practitioner—flourishing into stupendous flora provide a continuum in which the consciousness may intervene into something that is dismissed to be an already concluded narrative and, perhaps, prompt to dream of the possible. History, as the exhibition avows, is much a column as it is a scaffold. Within the realm of human wishes and desires, nothing is ever finished.

Invigorated by continuities, endowed with the plenitude of earth, and redolent with the stark, radiant light of the tropics (as opposed to Amorsolo’s beautifying glow), *Return, My Gracious Hour* references the materiality of nature, its variegated shapes and silhouettes, and its indisputable power to enact a marker, a locality, an identifying feature that structures terrains of collective identity and, by extension, shared beliefs in nationhood. Through Villamael’s detailed and tender handiwork—the intimacy of his incisions—the gracious hour is but the the constancy of certain longings and desires: the fevered wish to gain insight into the convolutions of the present, the irresistible summon of a hometown and its renewing capacities, and the recognition of the clash and connection between the human impulse and the prerogatives of nature.

-Carlomar Arcangel Daoana



Keiichi Tomita
AVO
WORLD
GIANT
YEARS
FASHIONABLE & POLISH

EDUISCHA
NEW YORK
FRENCH
CHRIS HILBY

BOB DYLAN

THE SCULPTURE OF MATISSE
AND THE
THE

Matisse Cut-outs
A Great History of Color
49



RYAN VILLAMAEI

Return My Green Home

Inspired by Kaul's poem, "Memories of My Book," this exhibition surreals, appropriates, and reconstitutes American-occupation archival materials, projecting them into suspension from the paper canopies of which Villamaei is the foremost practitioner. Whether viewed in minutes or flashings in the open, the works consider history not as an end, but a means—a medium—through which parallels between the past and the postcolonial present may be drawn.

Resilient with the phenomena of earth and the radiant, scorching heat of the tropics, the exhibition explores nature not as a background but as a marker, a locality, an identifying fence that structures rituals of collective identity and, by extension, shared beliefs in rationality.

Return My Green Home, while providing fresh incarnations of previously pursued ideas, is less about nostalgia than it is about the firm of certain longings and desires: the fevered wish to gain insight into the convolutions of the present, the irremediable summation of a hemisphere, and the recognition of the clash and connection between the human impulse and the perceptions of nature.

—Catherine Arceangel Davanza









Memories of My Town, 2023
30 framed paper works and
8 metal powder coated metal leaves

dimensions variable

Suffice it that the Filipino is as yet a child, sometimes naughty, sometimes petulant and rebellious, but still a child, gay at heart, intelligent, gentle, and pliable, who stretches up his hand to us that we may lead him along the path that leads to the manhood of nations.

PHILIPPINE FLORA

Most of the plants of the Philippines are treated in this chapter. The most valuable of these are of the genus and species of the Philippines have been partially translated from a German work. Many of the Spanish volumes, being dating from the nineteenth century, are out of print. For further information the reader is referred to the following: "The Philippine Islands" (John Foreman, N.Y. U.S.A., 1907); "Social History of the Races of Mankind" (A. N. S. 1887); "The People of the Philippines" (Rafael, 1907); "The Inhabitants of the Philippines" (F. v. Schlegel, 1909); "Characteristics of Christian Ty" ("The Census of the Philippines," Vol. I, 1905); "The Axis of the Orient" (Henry Savage Lauder, 1905).



BAWING BRIDGE AND COQUANT GROVE - LUZON

GENERAL DESCRIPTION



A TRAIL, ROAD ON OUTSIDE OF FILIPINO VILLAGE. THE BIRDS ESPECIALLY WELL HERE THE FLORA OF BAWING BOW







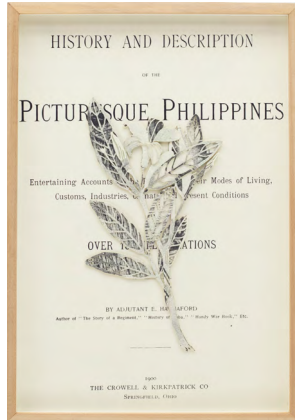
Laziness is another defect with which the native is justly charged, but here again it is not difficult to find extenuating circumstances. The energy of any people is measurable by the stimulus to exertion to which it is subject. The indolence natural to all inhabitants of the tropics has been encouraged in the Filipino by the knowledge that increased effort would entail an increase in the cost of food, rental, and contribution to the Church, giving him no commensurate advantage to himself; this latter condition has been reasonably limited to the acquisition of a slight improvement in his material comfort. Hitherto the Filipino has not had a sufficient incentive to exertion. With worthy objects for which to work; with the possibilities of material advancement and material betterment; with opportunity for mental culture, and with the spread of civilization, may come, or rather surely will come, awakened ambition and quickening of energy. It is not, however—fortunately for the Western nation—possible that a tropical people should exhibit the activity characteristic of the dwellers in temperate climes.

The Filipino is not practical. He has no concern beyond to-day, and is apparently incapable of a sustained purpose, but when one surveys the environment, and political and economic condition, of these people during the past centuries it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise with them. On the other hand the native is very susceptible to guidance and is always willing, and frequently eager, to learn.





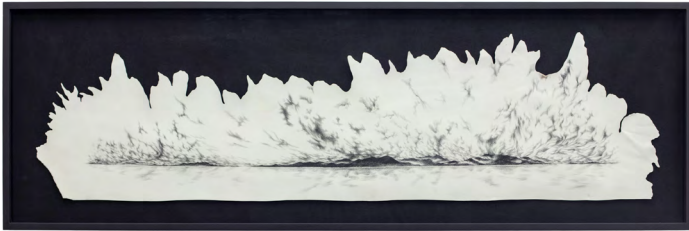












14.1699° N, 121.2441° E, 2024

acid-free paper, charcoal, and wood in automotive finish
frame: 23 x 70 3/4 x 2 in | 58.4 x 179.7 x 5.1 cm
wood sculpture: 3 1/2 x 54 x 7 in | 8.9 x 137.2 x 17.8 cm





details from *14.1699° N, 121.2441° E*, 2024





Insulae Philippinae, 2023

archival print, watercolor, and wood in automotive finish

frame: 12 x 14 1/2 x 2 1/2 in | 30.5 x 36.8 x 6.3 cm

wood sculpture: 6 1/2 x 40 x 6 1/2 in | 16.5 x 101.6 x 16.5 cm





details from *Insulae Philippinae*, 2023







Fables, 2024

stainless metal finish

62 x 66 1/2 in | 157.5 x 168.9 cm



details from *Fables*, 2024







details from *Pulô series XVI*, 2024



Puló series XVI, 2024

paper (map replica), vitrine with steel base
55 1/4 x 33 1/8 x 18 3/8 in | 140.5 x 84 x 46.7 cm



details from *Pulò series XVI*, 2024



RYAN VILLAMAEL Bio

Ryan Villamael (b. 1987, Laguna; lives and works in Los Baños) is one of the few artists of his generation to have abstained from the more liberal modes of art expression to ultimately resort to the more deliberate handiwork found in cut paper. While his method follows the decorative nature innate to his medium of choice, from the intricately latticed constructions emerge images that defy the ornamental patchwork found in the tradition of paper cutting, and instead becomes a treatise of a unique vision that encompasses both the inner and outer conditions that occupy the psyche—which range from the oblique complexity of imagined organisms to the outright effects of living in a convoluted city.

Villamael was included in several group shows while still pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Painting from the University of the Philippines up to the time of his graduation in 2009. His works have been shown in Manila, Singapore, Hong Kong, the UK, Australia, and Paris. Although his persistence in sustaining a discipline more often subjected to handicraft has been evident from his works, Villamael maintains that his primary interest lies rather on the conceptual significance of craft in the process of creating contemporary art, and continues to recognize the possibility of how his works can still evolve under this light.

He is a recipient of the Ateneo Art Award in 2015 and the three international residency grants funded by the Ateneo Art Gallery and its partner institutions: La Trobe University Visual Arts Center in Bendigo, Australia; Artesan Gallery in Singapore and Liverpool Hope University in Liverpool, UK. He participated in the 2018 Biwako Biennale in Japan and the 2016 Singapore Biennale.



RYAN VILLAMAEI CV

b. 1987, Laguna, PH



Pulô series XIII, 2021

AWARDS

- 2021 *Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award*
- 2015 *Ateneo Art Awards*, Winner
- 2013 *Ateneo Art Awards*, Shortlisted

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Return, My Gracious Hour*, Silverlens, Manila
Locus Amoenus, Esplanade, Singapore
- 2021 *Homecoming / Eventually*, UP Vargas Museum, Manila
Viewing Room: Vista, Silverlens, Manila
- 2019 *Viewing Room: Ryan Villamael*, Silverlens, Manila
Behold A City, Art Fair Philippines, Manila
A Paradise Lost, Silverlens, Manila
- 2018 *Locus Amoenus*, Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila
- 2017 *Epilogue*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2016 *Unknown Land*, La Trobe University, Victoria
- 2015 *Behold A City*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2014 *Isles*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2013 *Territory*, Silverlens, Manila
Kosmik, West Gallery, Manila
- 2012 *Flatland*, Silverlens, Manila
Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 *New Specimens*, West Gallery, Manila
Cut Felt, Silverlens, Manila

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 *Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
S.E.A. Focus, Silverlens, Singapore

RYAN VILLAMAEL

Bio

- 2023 *There Are Always Flowers For Those Who Want To See Them*, West Gallery, Manila
- Essence Distilled: Homage to Arturo Luz*, Silverlens, Manila
- Shrines*, Silverlens, New York
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- S.E.A. Focus*, Silverlens, Singapore
- 2022 *Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2021 *Bukang Liwayway*, Silverlens, Manila
- Imagined Homecomings* curated by Loredana Paracciani, Vargas Museum, Manila
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2020 *Searching Sanctuary*, Silverlens, Manila
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2019 *Christmas Group Show*, Finale Art File
- Impasse*, Tin-Aw Art Gallery, Manila
- Art Jakarta*, ROH Projects, Jakarta
- WXXX*, West Gallery, Manila
- ON/OUT OF PAPER*, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
- 2018 *Biwako Biennale*, Omihachiman City, Shiga Prefecture
- New Specimens*, West Gallery, Manila
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2018 *DIASPORA: Exit, Exile, Exodus in Southeast Asia*, MIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- 2017 *Curated by Federico de Vera*, Ayala Museum, Manila
- Sydney Contemporary*, Carriageworks, Australia
- Seascapes: Tranquility and Agitation*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila
- Art Basel*, Silverlens, Hong Kong
- Shared Coordinates*, in collaboration with Edouard Malingue

RYAN VILLAMAE

Bio

- Gallery & ROH Projects, The Arts House, Singapore
- Translación*, Inaugural Exhibition, Curated by Gary-Ross Pastrana, Silverlens, Manila
- 2016 *Singapore Biennale: An Atlas of Mirrors*, Singapore
- Art Stage Jakarta*, ROH Projects, Jakarta
- Art Basel*, Silverlens, Hong Kong
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2015 *In Transit*, CCP, Manila
- Secret Archipelago*, Palais De Tokyo, France
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- Art Basel*, Silverlens, Hong Kong
- 2014 *Bookends*, Blanc Gallery, Manila
- Art Taipei 2014*, Silverlens, Taipei
- Makiling X*, Corredor Gallery, Manila
- Tabletop*, Altro Mondo Manila
- Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2013 *Still*, Blanc, Manila
- Art Taipei 2013*, Silverlens, Taipei
- Fundacion Broke*, Art Informal, Manila
- Ateneo Art Awards 2004 - 2013: A Restrospective*, Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila
- Relikt*, Silverlens, Singapore
- 2012 *Ley Hunting*, Silverlens, Singapore
- Silverlens Gallery*, Art HK 12, Hong Kong
- Incidental Pleasures*, MO Space, Makati City
- 2011 *X-Mas Show*, Manila Contemporary, White Space, Manila
- Working in Progress*, curated by Adeline Ooi,
- A Three-Man Show*, Silverlens, Manila
- On the Radar: 6 New Symptoms*, Curated by Gary-Ross Pastrana, Silverlens, Manila
- 2010 *12 x 9*, West Gallery, Manila
- 2009 *Atat*, Tin-Aw Art Gallery, Manila
- Degree Exhibition 2009*, Corredor Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines, Manila

RYAN VILLAMAEEL

Bio

- 2008 *Pre Thesis Deliberation: Symposium Series 2008* Curated by Virginia B. Dandan, Corredor Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Manila
- 2004 *Ingress / Egress (Philippine High School for the Arts Senior Exhibition)* GSIS Gallery, Manila

EDUCATION

- 2004-2009 University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Major in Painting
- 2001-2004 Philippine High School for the Arts,
Mt. Makiling, Los Baños, Laguna
Major in Visual Arts Program

PUBLICATIONS

Daoana, Carlomar Arcangel, "Ryan Villamael's Paper City." The Philippine Star. 18 February 2019.

Calasan, Pierre A., "The Everlasting Gaze." Town and Country Magazine. November 2016. p. 24.

Jaucian, Don. "Filipino Artists Triumph at the Singapore Biennale." CNN Life Philippines. Accessed 4 November 2016. <http://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/arts/2016/11/04/singapore-biennale-2016.html>

Jaucian, Don. "Studio Visit: Ryan Villamael." CNN Life Philippines. Accessed 2 November 2016. <http://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/arts/2016/11/02/studio-visit-ryan-villamael.html>

Othman, Syahida. "Philippine Artists Draw Inspiration From Nature and Fishermen for the Singapore Biennale." Channel News Asia. Accessed 12 October 2016. <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/philippines-artists-draw-inspiration-from-nature-and-fishermen/3201084.html>

Basa, Eva Mcgovern. No Chaos No Party. 2016.

Ateneo Art Awards. Catalogue. 2015

Art Taipei Catalogue. Taiwan Art Gallery Association. 2013

RYAN VILLAMAEL

Copyright © Silverlens Inc. 2024

All rights reserved.

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

CARLOMAR ARCHANGEL DAOANA

Text © Silverlens Inc. 2024

All rights reserved.

No part of this essay may be reproduced, modified, or stored in a retrieval system or retransmission, in any form or by any means, for reasons other than personal use, without written permission from the author.

SILVERLENS

2263 Don Chino Roces Avenue Extension

Makati City, Philippines 1231

T +632.88160044

F +632.88160044

M +63917.5874011

www.silverlensgalleries.com