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# NUS MUSEUM

presents

## Semblance/Presence | Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr.

Singapore, 20 June 2012 – NUS Museum presents artworks by Filipino artists Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr.

The exhibition *Semblance/Presence | Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr.* opens at NUS Museum on 29 June 2012 and runs till 13 January 2013.

Combining Jose Rizal's "Quiapo Fair" (first published 1891) and artworks produced in collaboration by artists Renato Habulan\* and Alfredo Esquillo Jr.\*\*, *semblance/presence* traces the life-worlds of Plaza Miranda, which fronts the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene (Quiapo Church), one of the main churches of the city of Manila. In particular, it unravels the annual feast of the Black Nazarene, which brings millions of people together in a celebration of faith and the complex persona of Mang Lauro - a mystic both artists have been observing in and around Plaza Miranda since the 1980s.

\* Renato Habulan (b. Manila, 1953), having established himself as one of the Social Realist painters that emerged from the period of Martial Law in the Philippines, masterfully presents the poignant human condition amidst varying themes of social justice and religious imagery. He constantly explores the dialectics where the master and slave, native and colonial, lowlander and the ethnic collide in controlled tension. In the transition of incorporating mixed media alongside his works in oil on canvas, the sentimentality to the condition of man remains, as there continues to be a presence of anonymous people who bear daily injustice with fortitude, dignity and indomitable hope; as those who 'stand erect amid the ruins'.

\*\* Alfredo Esquillo Jr. (b. Quezon City, 1972) expresses a passion for content in his themes, leaning more towards a socially relevant repertoire in exploring the interstices between the mystical and social in the Philippines – as a site where gender roles, poverty, materialism and religious faith converge. Using his attention to detail to translate them into works on canvas and sculptures, he views his work as more personal, using symbolisms in the gestures and overall context of his subjects. His style remains largely influenced by an early attachment to magical realism, whilst his themes have reflected a preference to the introspective dealing more with life's meaning and pondering on the essences of existence.

Tessa Maria Guazon who interviewed both artists for the exhibition, describes the process they went through for this exhibition as follows: "Artists Alfredo Esquillo and Renato Habulan map the contours of faith by way of the Black Nazarene feast and the locus of its devotion, Plaza Miranda. The journey takes them to Manila districts, to places whose names obliquely refer to images of heaven and hell. The places they visit are worn by time, ravaged by floods, overwhelmed by traffic and crowds. These sites however, are again enlivened by their art. Significantly, these way stations craft their art and endow their voices and vision introspection and vigilance."



Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr., *Mga Hinirang* (Chosen People), film still, 2012

The kind of intimacy both artist express for their subjects and the manner in which they engage the intricacies of Quiapo, leads Prof. Patrick Flores to observe: “The artists painstakingly and keenly explore the talismanic properties of this sight of the multitude and the devices of their rituals imitating Christ and therefore becoming intimate with his pain and transcendence. Habulan and Esquillo paint the image within an image; this is the first moment of reflexivity. The second comes with the performance within these layers of images, the passage that is marked by the procession, or the coming together of people for an event that is but a phase in the long duration of the route of a *panata* or vow.”

“As a literary and visual encounter”, adds Curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, “the exhibition broadly considers how Plaza Miranda acts as a site for numerous interests, ranging from political and cultural discourse to established traditions of fortune telling. As such, *semblance/presence* connects both artists and their materials (which include paintings, films and mixed media installations) to not just as something being observed, but also to the conditions of their observations, where the very act of observation becomes an end that at once implicates but also detaches. In many ways, a key conceptual struggle that both artists and this project had to deal with was: to what extent can any act of observation ever remain unmediated...?”

## Credits

Curated by Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, NUS Museum. The exhibition catalogue will include essays by Prof. Patrick Flores and Tessa Maria Guazon from the Department of Art Studies, University of Philippines-Diliman.

The exhibition is co-organized by



and supported by



## Media Enquires

For more information on ***Semblance/Presence | Renato Habulan and Alfredo Esquillo Jr.***, media interviews, gallery tours or high resolution images, please contact

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## Exhibition Details

Exhibition period: 30 June 2012 – 13 January 2012

Venue: NUS Museum  
University Cultural Centre  
50 Kent Ridge Crescent  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore 119279

Opening hours: 10am – 7.30pm (Tuesday – Saturday)  
10am – 6pm (Sunday)  
Closed on Monday & Public Holidays

Admission: Free

## **About NUS Museum**

NUS Museum is a comprehensive museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 7,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The *Lee Kong Chian Collection* consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art; the *South and Southeast Asian Collection* holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the *Ng Eng Teng Collection* is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the *Straits Chinese Collection*, is located at NUS' Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

NUS Museum launched the NX Gallery in 2006. It is conceived as a contemporary art venue to showcase emerging artistic trends in Singapore, Southeast Asia and beyond, as well as to encourage critical curatorial and museum practices. For the NUS Centre For the Arts and the NUS Museum, these aims afford an emphasis in partnerships within the University and beyond, underscored by the recognition that art and culture form a powerful nexus that connect different disciplines and institutional interests. Past exhibitions organized at the NX Gallery include *Picturing Relations: Simryn Gill and Tino Djumini* (2007), *Strategies Towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art* (2008), *Bound For Glory: Wong Hoy Cheong* (2008), *Jendela: A Play of the Ordinary* (2009), *Illuminance | Agus Suwage and Filippo Sciascia* (2010), *Cingondewah | An Art Project by Tisna Sanjaya* (2011) and most recently *Writing Power | Zulkifli Yusoff* (2011)