

heavenly bodies

gregoryhalili

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COMETS OF LIGHT AND LONGING

Gregory Halili creates a cosmos of images in Heavenly Bodies

Words by Floy Quintos

In these new works, Gregory Halili's inspiration is recognizable enough to comprehend at once: Comets, those celestial bodies with a nucleus consisting of ice, gas and dust. When passing close to the sun, the nucleus warms, and in a process called outgassing, produces the comet's most distinguished and fascinating feature, a visible tail of light. Science simplifies, explains, perhaps even makes mundane, what is essentially, a phenomenon, a mystery and source of endless fascination. Even the most simplistic and accessible explanations leave us in wonder. Dutch astronomer Jan Oort believed that comets originated from "a spherical shell made up of trillions of icy bodies believed to lie far beyond Pluto's orbit." It must come as surprise to find out that this shell—known as the Oort cloud—is a "theoretical concept" rather than an actual celestial body or place.

Halili's comets can claim no such fascinating theory of their origin. His very own Oort cloud was a potent mix of ennui and anxiety brought about by the worldwide pandemic in 2019. Though he was safely stuck at home, with his wife and young daughters, Halili was not insulated from the cycles of sickness and death that ravaged the world as it did his friends, family and the artistic community. Moved by both his own fear and the persistent will to create, Halili looked to the comet for inspiration.

For many indigenous and traditional societies, the sighting of a comet is a portent of impending change, of transition, even revolution. The same can be said of Halili's current works which mark a radical departure from his previous body of work as a miniaturist.

In an art scene that favors wall-sized, large-scale works, Halili chose the more intimate and meticulous discipline of a miniaturist painter. His years of study in the US allowed him to visit and re-visit museums where he was drawn to works in the small scale. Just as he studied Holbein and Vermeer, so too did he pore over Western medieval illuminated manuscripts, Byzantine texts, Mughal empire paintings, Persian works on paper.

Back in the Philippines, he discovered Damian Domingo, Letras y Figuras, filigree jewelry, pina and jusi embroidery. An important discovery that would impact his work were the small genre paintings done on mother-of-pearl, popular souvenir and decorative items in late 19th-early 20th century Philippines.

Miniaturismo combines a wealth of Western and Eastern artistic traditions that allow the painter to work with, or master the skills of, the jeweler, the gem cutter, the goldsmith, the ebeniste. Thus, there has always been an all-pervading sense of Luxe about miniatures. A miniature does not proclaim ownership and status in the same way a large-scale work does. Instead, the pleasure of a miniature is more tactile and personal. Miniatures captured the likeness of a loved one, the camal pleasure of the erotic, the memory of secret pleasures or treasured times. Painted on ivory or silk, encased on crystal or gold and set with precious stones, miniatures were considered jewels to be held close to one's person and admired in secret.



of choice. He painted on the luminescent surfaces of Philippin mother-of-pearl (some in their natural state, others cut and shape into small panels), crystals, baroque pearls. But his choice of subject (meticulously painted eyes, skulls carved in low relief) and the manner of execution (clinical, almost photographic renderings in oil) negate the lyrical romanticism inherent in the genre. Here instead were objet both sensual and macabre, tactile and precious meditations on the ver

The seven works that make up *Heavenly Bodies* may seem a radica departure from Halili's earlier ouvre

But the difference is only in scale. Look closely and you will find that his

A consummate collector and lover of objects both natural and man made, Halili uses his finds as tinder for his comets' blazings. The artistic process is a dynamic meditation on the very nature of Change. Halili first selects the objects from his vast inventory. Time has already transformed these through rot, weathering, fire and insect damage. Now, they will be arranged, re-arranged, attached, broken apart, fused together until they find their place within the comet's structure. In the process, the meaning and purpose of the objects have already been transformed. Now, they not longer exist as singular objects but as parts of a greater, more mysterious whole. The assemblages themselves are not static. Halili has mounted the works in a manner that allows them to revolve and evolve even as

he inevitability of Change is the only theme that binds these works. And rankly, I am hard-pressed to even try and put into the words the theme and meaning of each individual work.

So densely has Halili layered his symbols and meanings that individua titles seem superfluous. What awaits the viewer is not so much a search for meaning and cohesion, as it as gradual discovery of Halili's world view.

Each of the works in *Heavenly Bodies* is a universe that is constantly in shapeshifting mode, inviting the viewer to come up close and discover for themselves the objects Halili has assembled. Many of the comets reveal decidedly Feminine/Angelic images, embellished with the floating, cloudlike flourishes from old architectural details. Layered onto the crevices and folds of their robes are objects and evocations of a vanished Classical world: Botticelli's eternally rising Venus, the triumphant Saint Michael of the Castel San Angelo, the doomed Laocoon and his sons devoured by serpents. These mix with Filipino objects: tourist art woodcarvings, fragments from old santos, metal work from *carrozas*, glass lamps—all evoking a sense of nostalgia for the religious processions Halili witnessed as a boy growing up.

Most beguilingly, Halili has incorporated his own miniatures. Peer into a crystal facet and you may yet find a tiny image of the Virgen de Guadalupe staring back at you. Each comet can also be likened to a pilgrim's shrine or altar overflowing with *ex votos* and other mementoes of gratitude for miracles of faith. But in these comet-shrines, angels mix freely with daemons and the sacred lies comfortably with the profane.

Halili's comets, having been bom out of the worldwide pandemic, can also be seen as spaceships, vessels, flying arks. In these, Halili has contained all that the pandemic has failed to destroy: Hope, Faith, Love, Will, Relationships, Art. In the end, these are the only things truly worth saving. Halili gathers these remnants of a world changed by cataclysm, contains them in his comets of light and longing, and sends them nurtling bravely into the unknown.

















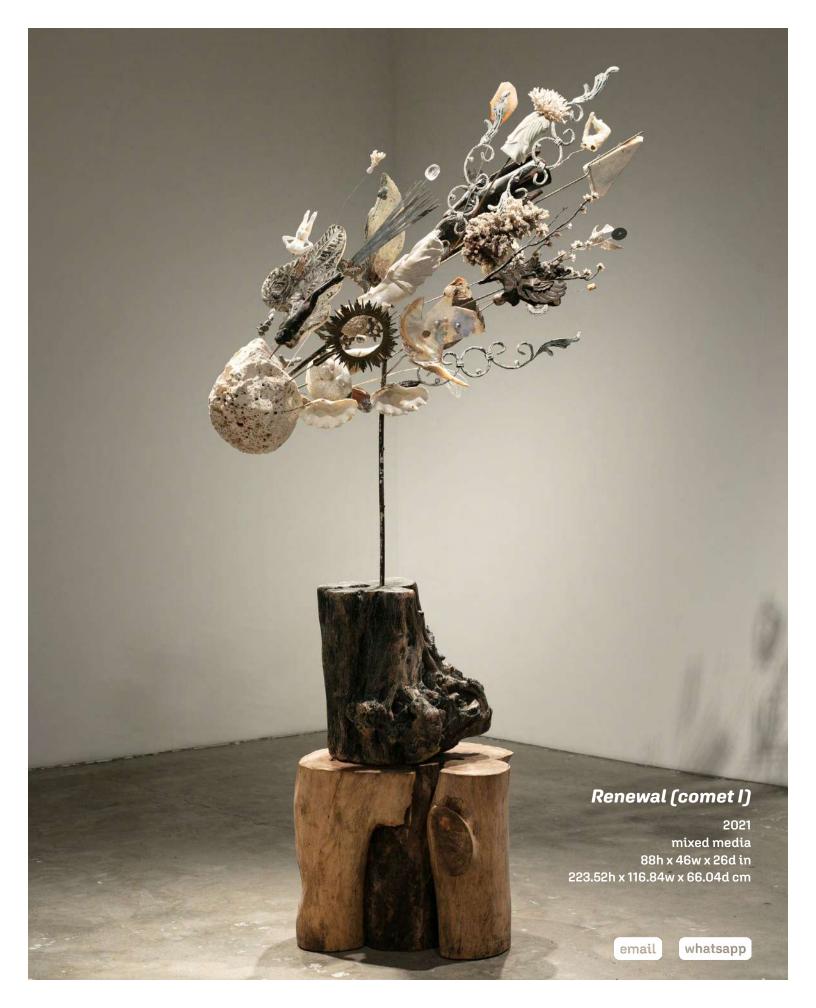






















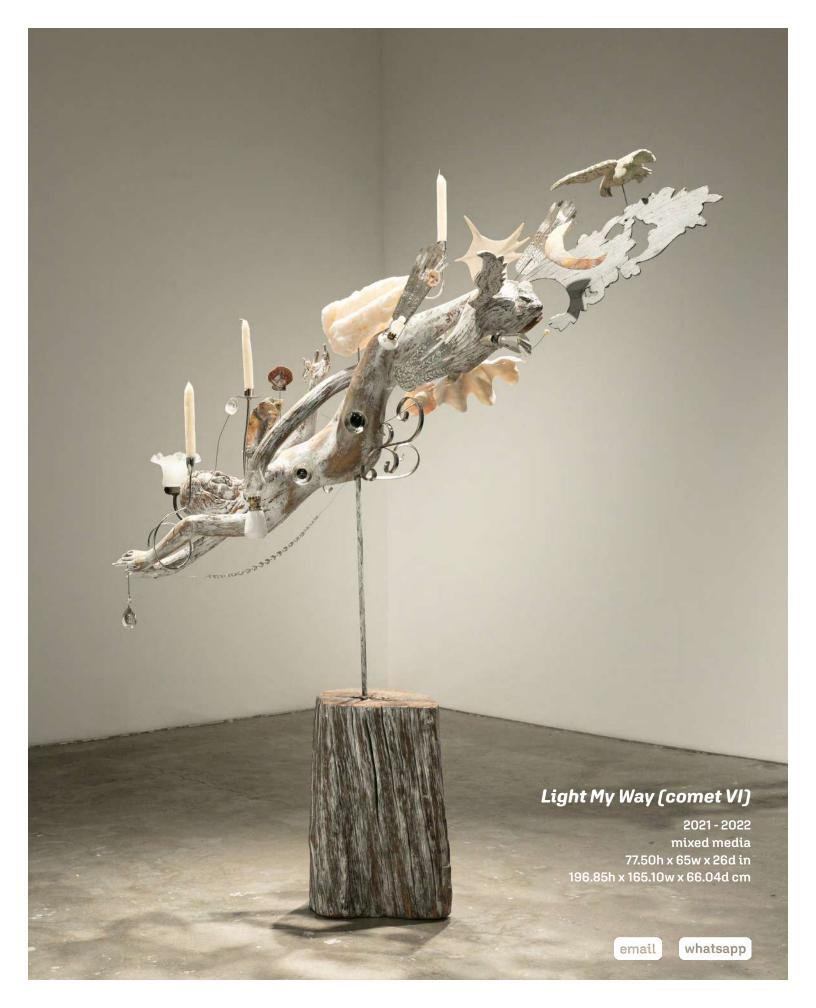




















This new body of work was born during the pandemic, when the world seemed to be in standstill and coming to an end. It was an age of uncertainty and darkness, with no light in sight.

Time seemed to have stopped during those two years

It was a time in isolation

As an artist, it was also the perfect time for self-reflection, experimentation and creative exploration

I had set out to challenge myself and learn a new language unfamiliar to me, to follow a path and hope to find light at the end of the tunnel. Wha started out as curiosity, has led me to a path of surprising discovery.

Heavenly Bodies is a series of sculptural works inspired by celestia objects, particularly the comet.

I deeply believe comets as symbols of life, death, rebirth, and cycle. They follow an arc of cosmic trajectory from the emptiness and darkness of space to becoming a celestial wonder of lightness and fire around the sun, inspiring those who have seen them. Witnessing a comet is an eternal moment that will be forever ingrained in one's mind.

These new sculptures were created using objects, ranging from discarded shells in my studio to authentic and valuable objects found throughout Manila. These were collected years before the pandemic while others were sourced online during isolation. Using objects as my medium is similar to finding comets. Both rely on chances of discovery, persistence, patience and a little luck.

sculpture. While the traditional approach in building sculptures have preplanned creative stages to the final state, my pieces start with a solid foundation and then were built up with layers, creating, destroying and manipulating objects to interact with each other. Time is my ally in revelation. Many objects do not make it as time goes by. It's like looking at a finished painting when I think I'm done, only to discover the mistakes and changes that can be done. It is birth and rebirth of materials. It is objects cycled to form a new meaning, from a cosmic chaos and order to a new celestial body. It's a body of work that inspired and saved me to create during the darkness of pandemic to a new beacon of hope.

Artist statement by Gregory Halili

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GREGORY HALILIBIO

Gregory Halili (b. 1975, lives and works in Manila) carves and paints mother-of-pearl shells, creating *memento moris*. Halili received his B.F.A. from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He returned to the Philippines in 2013 after 25 years in the United States. Halili's work focuses on the art of miniatures with interest in the notion and idea of memory, life, death, and cycle.

His work has appeared in numerous exhibitions and shows, including the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin; The Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio; The Hammond Museum and Sculpture Garden in Salem, New York; Ayala Museum in Makati City; Jorge B. Vargas Museum at the University of the Philippines in Quezon City; West Gallery in Quezon City; Silverlens in Makati City, and; Nancy Hoffman Gallery in New York City. In 2016, Halili was one of the Filipino artists who presented in the Singapore Biennale.



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GREGORY HALILI Bio

b. 1975, Manila, PH



A Moment's Afire, 2020

AWARDS

New Jersey

Nostalgia, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

2002

AWAR	DS
1998	Millennia of Philippine Art, Outstanding Young Filipino-American Artist
	United Nations Postal Administration, design for 21-cent stamp
1994	Art Institute of New Jersey, Outstanding Visual Artist
	"Trenton Times" (New Jersey), All Academic Team
1993	Governor's School of the Arts Scholar (New Jersey)
	Who's Who Among American Students
1991	AAA Nationwide Poster Contest, First Place
1990	NASA Mars Settlement Contest, Honorable Mention
1989	Citibank Calendar Contest, First Place
SELEC	TED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2022	Heavenly Bodies, Silverlens, Manila
	The Oceans That Separate Us, Fatima University, Valenzuela City
2020	Glass Horizon, Silverlens, Manila
2017	SaLang #5: Phenomenon, Project Space Pilipinas, Lucban, Quezon
	<i>Echo</i> , Silverlens, Manila
2015	Memento, Silverlens, Singapore
2014	Memento, Silverlens, Manila
	Memento, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
2013	Reflections, West Gallery, Manila
2012	LOVE and LOSS, Silverlens, Manila
2011	In Search of Paradise, West Gallery, Manila,
2010	Still Life, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2007	Orchids, West Gallery, Manila
2006	Moment of Sanctuary, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	<i>Relicarios</i> , Jorge B.Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Manila
2005	Relicarios, Ayala Museum, Manila
	Homage to the People of the Philippine Cordilleras - II, West Gallery, Manila
2004	Orchids, Project Space, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	<i>Homage to the People of the Philippine Cordilleras</i> , Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
	Homage to the People of the Philippine Cordilleras, West Gallery, Manila
	The Butterfly Collection, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
2003	After Amorsolo, Jorge B.Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines, Manila
	Butterfly Collection: Bamboo Series, West Gallery, Manila
	Conversation in Contemplation, Project Space, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Conversation in Contemplation , Jorge B. Vargas Museum, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Manila
	Watercolors in Miniature, South Brunswick Public Library, Monmouth Junction,

The Butterfly Collection, The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio

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2015

Bazaar Art Jakarta, Silverlens, Indonesia

HEY! Modern Art & Pop Culture/Act III, La Halle Saint Pierre, Paris

Miniatures: Small Contemporary Works, University of Wyoming Art Museum,

	Nostalgia II, West Gallery, Manila
	<i>Miniatures</i> , Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2000	Miniatures, West Gallery, Manila
1999	Butterfly Collection, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	<i>Miniatures</i> , Consulate General of the Philippines, New York
1998	West Gallery, Manila
	Project Space, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
SELEC	TED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2022	Phylogeny of Desire, curated by Ronald Achacoso, MO_Space, Taguig
	Fukuoka Art Fair, Tokyo Art Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo
	<i>Art Fair Tokyo</i> , Tokyo Art Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo
2021	The Circle, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Hitherto IV: Lamentations, Project Space Pilipinas, Manila
	S.E.A. Focus, Silverlens, Singapore
2020	Placuna Placenta, National Museum of the Philippines, Manila
	Anticipating the Day, Silverlens, Manila
	Searching Sanctuary, Silverlens, Manila
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
2019	The Circle, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	WXXX , West Gallery, Manila
	EXPO Chicago, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
	Taipei Dangdai, Silverlens, Taipei
2018	Re:View 2018, BenCab Museum, Baguio
	Art Miami, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, Miami
	16.52 SQM Open Sea, Galerie Ora-Ora, Hong Kong
	SaLang, West Gallery, Manila
	Countercurrents, Silverlens, Manila
	Art Basel, Silverlens, Hong Kong
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
2017	Curated by Federico de Vera, Ayala Museum, Manila
	DARK AND STORMY NIGHT: Gothic Influence in Contemporary Art, Lehman College Art Gallery, New York.
	ArtStage Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia
	Shared Coordinates , in collaboration with Edouard Malingue Gallery & ROH Projects, The Arts House, Singapore
	<i>Translación,</i> Inaugural Exhibition, Curated by Gary-Ross Pastrana, Silverlens, Manila
2016	Singapore Biennale: An Atlas of Mirrors, Singapore
	Tiny Treasures, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila

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	Wyoming
	In the Pink, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Art Basel, Silverlens, Hong Kong
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
2014	Art Taipei 2014, Silverlens, Taipei
	Triumph, Ayala Museum, Manila
	Summer, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
2013	Winter Blues, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Forty Years, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Triumph of Philippine Art, Montclair State University, New Jersey
	<i>Triumph of Philippine Art</i> , Fisher Museum of Art, University of Southern California
	Theory and Practice of the Small Painting, Equator Art Projects, Singapore
2012	Women: By, Of, About, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
2011	Project Space: Black and White, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Celebration of Music, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
	All That Glitters, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
2010	REAL(ist), Selby Gallery, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida
2009	Back to Cezanne, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
	Art of the Still Life, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2008	Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2007	Flying the Coop, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Through the Palette's Eye, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila
	New York - Manila - New York, Ayala Museum, Manila
2006	Drawing the Line, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	<i>Visage</i> , Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Circles, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Small Works, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2005	2005 Collector's Show, Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock
	Small Scale, West Gallery, Manila, Philippines
2004	Celestial Boundaries, Montclair State University, New Jersey
	Miniature Portraits, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
2003	Landscape: Unique Views, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Waterscape, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
2002	Celebrating 30 Years, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Small Scale, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Summer, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
	Small Works Exhibit, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
	The Miniature Show, Graystone, San Francisco
	Collector's Show, The Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock
	Winter Orchidarium, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
2001	Celebration of Art, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia
	I Love New York, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

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Living Minutiae, Selby Gallery, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida

Many Moons, Hammond Museum and Japanese Stroll Garden, Salem, New York

Object of Desire II, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

Re-Presenting Representation IV, Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, New York

2000 *Celebration of Music*, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia

1999 *Gateways*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

American Realism, M.A. Doran Gallery, Tulsa, Oklahoma Magic of Venice, Qualita Fine Arts, Las Vegas Nevada Object of Desire, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

Summer Light, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

1998 *Collector's Show*, Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock

64th Annual International Exhibition, Miniature Painters, Sculptors and Gravers

Society of Washington, D.C., North Bethesda, Maryland

1997 *Small Works*, Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia

1996 *Collector's Show*, Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock

Artists' House Gallery, Philadelphia

Small Scale, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

Summer Pleasures, Summer Treasures, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York

CURATED SHOWS

2020 Searching Sanctuary, Silverlens, Manila

EDUCATION

1998 B.F.A., University of the Arts, Philadelphia

PUBLICATIONS

Halili, Gregory & Sioson, Carmencita. "Maker's Musings: Artist Gregory Halili on fatherhood and creativity." Philippine Daily Inquirer Lifestyle. Accessed 20 June 2020. https://lifestyle.inquirer.net/364502/makers-musings-artist-gregory-halili-onfatherhood-and-creativity/

De Veyra, Devi. "Q&A with Greg Halili: Creation is a form of mental exercise that keeps me happy, sane" ANC-X. Accessed 13 June 2020. https://news.abs-cbn.com/ancx/culture/art/06/13/20/qa-with-greg-halili-creation-is-a-form-of-mental-exercise-that-keeps-me-happy-sane

Uy, Hanna Jo. "Echoes From Nature." Manila Bulletin: Lifestyle. 16 January 2017. p. D4

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

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

"Karagatan (The Breadth of Oceans)." Exhibition Catalogue: An Atlas of Mirrors. 16 October 2016. p. 20.

Nollase, Renz. "Through the Looking Glass." Southern Living. August 2016. pp. 12-17

Lucenario, Danton & Quingco, Oliver II. "In the Iowak's Embrace." Discover Philippines. Issue No. 1, Volume II. 2016. pp. 65-68

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Anne & Julien. Hey! Magazine. December 2014. pp. 72-75 Sunderberg, K. "An Eerie Beauty: Gregory Halili's Trompe L'oiel Eyes and Excavated Skulls." Artsy. Accessed 29 November 2014. http://artsy.net/post/editorial-an-eerie-beauty-gregory-halili-trompe-loiel

"Triumph of Philippine Art." Catalogue. Strickley, Sarah A. "Window to the World." Watercolor Magic. December 2007. pp. 2, 46-53

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FLOY OUINTOS

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