



BREAD & CIRCUSES

ALFREDO ESQUILLO

19 MAY * 18 JUNE 2022

SILVERLENS

SILVERLENS

BREAD
&
CIRCUSES

ALFREDO ESQUILLO

[EMAIL](#) [WHATSAPP](#) [WEBSITE](#)



An Air-Conditioned Hell

Bread and Circuses, a solo exhibition by Alfredo Esquillo creatively adapts the theory of mass culture as social decay from the book of the same title by American author and theorist Patrick Brantlinger. The phrase *Bread* (panem) and *Circuses* (circenses) was first coined by Roman poet Juvenal, it was used by Brantlinger to summarize the eventual decline of heroism among the Romans after the Roman Republic ceased to exist and the rise of dictatorial Roman Empire consequentially began. Applying Brantlinger's study as an in-depth parallelism to current Philippine society, Esquillo points out two things that the Roman Emperor distracted the people by keeping the populace happy—a full stomach and staging huge spectacles at the plazas and coliseum. Esquillo vividly compares the Roman Empire to Philippine modern society dating back the 70s up to the current affairs influenced by television and social media—as we are witnessing disinformation and revision of history.

Through paintings, sculptures, and installations, Esquillo exactly recreates, as he artistically essays recurring signs and symbols concurrent in both with politics, culture, and technology, in relation to misappropriated policies of our former and incumbent presidents. As we have been endowed by sheer short memory of the past, Esquillo assiduously reminds us, as his bespoke images haunt us, that unless we become more learned from our past, we cannot charter our destined future with hope.

As we prepare ourselves for a new elected leader, who will either be determined to get us out of the quagmire or further sink us deeper in the social quick sand, Esquillo situates the complex context we are collectively facing. He lets us understand ourselves vis-à-vis the ongoing efforts to revise history that Martial Law did not happen. Esquillo's critical artistic renderings, as well as his endowed political learnings, are similar to banging our heads to the walls desperately for the first time in order to make us realize our own misconception.

In *Road Rage*, Esquillo compares the Roman Empire with the morsels of oppression in Martial Law—as the distraction of chariot race with television during the 70s—were one and the same. Done in oil on canvas, *Road Rage* shows the comparison of spectacle of chariot racing to the imposing television shows as Marcos was always ministering on boob tube.

Continuing the Marcosian dictatorial tactic during the seventies is *Nutribun at Pene*. Esquillo literally points out we were manipulated by the late dictator as he was feeding us while killing people and plundering the country.



Nutribun was a bread product designed by USAID which Marcos adopted to solve childhood malnutrition during the seventies. Nutribun grew its popularity since it was similar to pan de sal. There was a trade-off, however, as he was distributing the bread he was killing or abducting political activists heightened during this difficult time.

Using clay figures (as molded by Esquillo's son, Yahsky Kayumanggi), Esquillo lambasts the First Lady for saturating us with gyrating women in experimental sex-oriented films at the same period she was squandering the people's funds in the name of culture. She was also greedily shopping for art and shoes for her own personal consumption abroad.







Continuing the discussion on the relationship of surfaces and the truth that was Marcosian is *Walang Kukurap*. During Martial Law, the color box was signal that an impending news is about to break—either Marcos was appearing or end of programming for the day—for the television station. Etched on the television screen is the warning *Walang Kukurap* calling us to be vigilant, as it could be a warning of bad things to come—manipulated vote count or an important announcement in Malacanang—enough to dupe the people. We have to guard against revision of history disguised by the beautiful images displayed but they are blindly brainwashing the viewers. The Marcoses were so beguiling that we were deceived that they were made to look good to the Philippines yet they grabbed the ownership of ABS-CBN from the Lopezes ABS-CBN further losing their rights to broadcast. This was again repeated when President Duterte did not renew their franchise to operate during their term.

Martial Law was all about attention and creating a seductive image even if the basis is economical corruption and moral theft. The First Lady was aware what seemed like Edifice Complex and created buildings and institutions everywhere. She took care of the overall image in the name of art and culture, while President Marcos made it happen by committing human rights abuses and plundering us dry backed by his military ruling. That is what you have to understand with beauty, your attention is commandeered by shared hues. It disarms you and seduces you that things are desperately better for you. Even though it is not.

Well-versed in iconography, Esquillo sculpts *Tree of Knowledge and Ignorance* tackling how horrendous technology can make our lives artificially easier or can personally ruin us. Active in the social media platform, Esquillo knows this as it exists as requirements of present day yet he abhors qualified fake news as a complimentary given.

As a responsible netizen, it is inevitable to shy away from social media as it has been source for fact-checking and acquired learning. Esquillo believes we just have to be vigilant in using digital application.

There is poetry in the way Esquillo engages in his contemporary images. In *Decline and Fall of an iTallano Empire* appears another parallel imagery of Roman Empire going down the drain—as seen in a toilet bowl stuffed with Marcos gold bars hidden behind. Esquillo is with full confidence in showing both declines as somewhat prophetic and of our own making.

In the manipulation of information, shit becomes gold. The literal throne of shit eventually becomes the throne of power.







In a no-holds-barred revelation, *Dictatorial Insemination* takes a serious pun at political-dynasties. With an in-your-face sensation, Esquillo ponders creative reality that has happened at the back of our minds. A dictatorship consistency, a conjugal lineage that persist to haunt us now that their direct offspring are on the verge of continuing the leadership fallacy. Electing a son of a dictator is a slap in the face to those who were killed and disappeared during Martial Law. Only Esquillo can present the truth as if it is a repeating nightmare.

The Marcoses invented as it institutionalized a general culture of impunity delaying the justice of the poor. If one is poor, one is abused and taken for granted. As a people, we are still trying to establish who and what we are however Marcos and Duterte are the fire who will strengthen to define us as a people.

Rounding up other basins of graft is *Upon This Rock I Will Build My Bank* which refers to the colossal deceit of public funds started with the Catholic Church dating back Spanish times. How the Catholic Church became evidently corrupt, using the Roman column to symbolize the Empire, Esquillo wittily morphs it into a church offertory donation box used during masses. One of Esquillo's strengths is retracting what is Filipino in a post-colonial context.

Pompas Y Vanidades literally means "poms and vanities" is a critique against myth-making and selfies. Through social media, Esquillo dwells on the death of criticality as it paves a new mass lifestyle based on clicked likes—a free for all plaza where anyone can build their own monuments of self-importance where fools can be kings and queens or the next Philippine President.

Being a Martial Law baby, Esquillo strikes back effectively how emperors and dictators manipulate the lives of their people—politics, media and culture—and controlled our destinies as a people and how we never learn from the mistakes of the past because we had our stomachs full and our eyes distracted.

Esquillo insinuates in us that we never learn and to move forward we must strive to reclaim the past—as we fought for freedom of expression, accountability and transparency—in the streets and in the last national election.

Words by Jay Bautista

**BREAD
AND
CIRCUSES**

ALFREDO ESQUILLO









Pompas Y Vanidades

2022

oil on ethylene-vinyl acetate, wood mirror frame

76h x 43.50w x 14d in

193.04h x 110.49w x 35.56d cm

EMAIL WHATSAPP

Tree of Knowledge and Ignorance

2022

cement, metal, bamboo, acrylic

120h x 58w x 26d in

304.80h x 147.32w x 66.04d cm





Road Rage

2022

oil on canvas

60h x 84w in

152.40h x 213.36w cm

Framed: 62h x 86w in

157.48h x 218.44w cm

[EMAIL](#) [WHATSAPP](#)

EMAIL WHATSAPP



Upon This Rock I Will Build My Bank

2022

cement, metal, wood, acrylic

156h x 80w x 40d in

396.24h x 203.20w x 101.60d cm

EMAIL WHATSAPP

Nutribun at Pene

2022

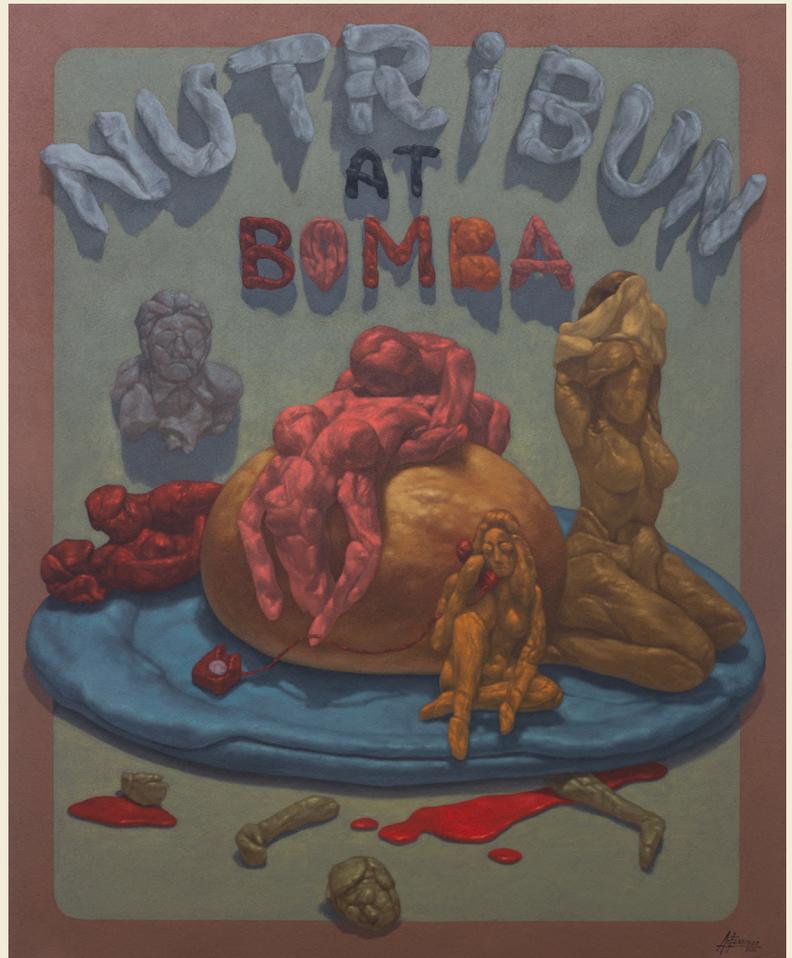
oil on ethylene-vinyl acetate

60.75h x 48w in

154.31h x 121.92w cm

Framed: 62h x 50w in

157.48h x 127w cm





Dictatorial Insemination

2022

cement, acrylic paint

49h x 11.75w x 43d in

124.46h x 29.84w x 109.22d cm

EMAIL WHATSAPP

Walang Kukurap

2022

oil on canvas, plastic varnish, and wood

65h x 49.50w in

165.10h x 125.73w cm





Decline and Fall of An iTallano Empire

2022

cement, acrylic paint

29h x 22w x 17.50d in

73.66h x 55.88w x 44.45d cm



Alfredo Esquillo



Listen to Alfredo Esquillo's studio tracks on Spotify

ALFREDO ESQUILLO, JR. Bio

Filipino artist Alfredo Esquillo (b. 1972)'s illustrious 25 years career in art scene includes dozens of major shows, numerous awards and participation in prestigious residency programs.

Equipped with a remarkable technical virtuosity in oil painting and continuing drive to experiment with his medium, his works have been avidly received in contemporary art. Esquillo delves in the periphery through the folk religious, the pre-colonial indigenous, and the fresh visual language of the young. He is known for his unique ability to profoundly combine imagery endowed with compelling realities and deep historical implication. He has brought in the idea of reinforcing deeper political and social bearings through combination of images. He prompts his audiences for self-reflection that recognizes the significance of human agency and spiritual discernment. Esquillo currently lives and works in Manila.

He is currently active in spearheading collaborative and community-based artist-led initiatives in the peripheries of the art scene.



ALFREDO ESQUILLO, JR.

Bio

b. 1972, Manila



Nagmumurang Bilihin, 2020

SELECTED AWARDS

- 2004 *Award for Continuing Excellence (ACES)* Metrobank Foundation
- 2000 *Thirteen Artists Awards* Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila
- 1996 *ASEAN Art Awards*, Fourth Prize, Bangkok, Thailand
Philippine Art Awards, Juror's Prize, Manila
- 1995 *ASEAN Art Awards* First Prize, Jakarta, Indonesia
Philippine Art Awards, Juror's Prize, Manila
- 1993 *10th Metrobank Foundation Painting Competition*, First Prize, Manila
- 1992 *Ugat Lahi/Haribon Foundation On the Spot Painting Competition*, First Prize, Manila
- 1991 *PLDT-GTEPDC Visual Art National Painting Competition*, Second Prize, Manila
- 1989 *Fr. Diego Cera On The Spot Painting Competition*, First Prize, Manila

FELLOWSHIP GRANTS/RESIDENCIES

- 2004 PROJEK MAGER, Group Residency Project with Anting Anting and Matahati, Rimbun Dahan, Kuala Lumpur
- 2001 3-month art residency project at Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka
- 1999 2-month art residency project at the Vermont Studio Art Center, Vermont

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 (upcoming) *Bread and Circuses*, Silverlens, Manila
- 2021 *Saysay*, Eskinita Art Gallery, Makati, Philippines
- 2019 *Phase / Out*, Srisasanti Syndicate, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2018 *Continuing Spirit: Alfredo Esquillo*, Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila
Balik-Loob, Silverlens, Manila
- 2017 *Potensiya*, West Gallery, Quezon City, PH
- 2016 *Continuing Spirit*, YOD Gallery, Volta Art FairN, New York
- 2015 *Transfigurations*, Arndt Fine Art Berlin, Germany
Aninag, Art Fair Philippines, Special Exhibit, The Link, Makati City
- 2014 *Habeas Corpus*, Galerie Sogan & Art, Art Stage Singapore, Singapore
- 2013 *Turning Inwards*, Artissima 2013, Present Future Section, Italy
- 2011 *Kalooban Narratives*, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Manila
- 2010 *Exodus*, VWFA Singapore, Singapore
Bato-bato sa Langit, SLab, Makati
- 2008 *Reclamation Project*, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati
- 2007 *Bahay-bahayan*, West Gallery, Manila
- 2006 *Enero Nueve*, Boston Gallery, Manila
Pasyonista, Nineveh Art Space, Laguna

ALFREDO ESQUILLO, JR.

Bio

- 2005 *Autoheater*, West Gallery, Manila
2004 *Third World*, Nineveh Art Space, Laguna
Dysfunctional, West Gallery, Manila
2003 *Tragikomedie*, West Gallery, Manila
High, Pinto Gallery, Antipolo
2001 *Banig Icons*, West Gallery, Manila
1999 *Recent Works*, Red Mill Gallery, Vermont Studio Center, Vermont, U.S.A.
1997 *Masa Kultura*, Hiraya Gallery, Manila

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 *Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
2020 *RE:View 2020*, Bencab Museum, Baguio, PH
Ortigas Art Festival, Estancia Mall, Manila
Art Fair Philippines, Silverlens, Manila
Songspiels and Tragicomedies, Bellas Artes Projects, Manila
2019 *Art Jakarta*, Kohesi Initiatives of Srisasanti Syndicate, Jakarta, Indonesia
Celebration of Compassion, Srisasanti Syndicate, Jogjakarta, Indonesia
Simulacra, The Substation, Singapore
2018 *Art Fair Philippines*, Silverlens, Manila
2017 *Mutable Decay* Eskinita Art Gallery, Manila
Ang Babae at ang Dragon, Kalye Koletib, Pinto Art Gallery, Manila,
Rebelasyon, Kalye Kolektib, JStudio, Art Fair Philippines, The Link, Makati
Ring the Bells that Can Still Ring, YOD Gallery, Art Fair Philippines, The Link, Makati
2016 *WASAK! Reloaded*, Arndt Fine Art, Berlin, Germany
WASAK! Filipino Art Today, Arndt Fine Art, Berlin, Germany
2013 *THE PHILIPPINE CONTEMPORARY: To Scale the Past and the Possible*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila City, Philippines
Beyond the Self, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Northern Territory Australia
2012 *Semblance/Presence*, Two-man exhibition with Renato Habulan, NUS Museum, University Cultural Centre, National University of Singapore, Singapore
Chimera, The Collectors Show, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
Beyond the Self, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, Australia
Maelstrom VWFA Singapore, Singapore
Post No Bill Manila Contemporary, Makati City, Philippines
Imagining Identity: 100 Filipino Self-Portraits (A Selection from the Paulino Que Collection), Finale Art File, Makati City, Philippines
2011 *Beyond the Self*, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia McClelland Gallery & Sculpture Park, Victoria, Australia
Monumental, Manila Contemporary, Makati City, Philippines

ALFREDO ESQUILLO, JR.

Bio

- El Guernica: Deconstruccion*, Ayala Museum, Makati City
- Bisa: Potent Presences*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila
- 2010 *Soundbyte*, Tin-aw Art Gallery, Makati City
- 2009 *Figuring The Times, Philippine Paintings 1996 - 2009 (A Selection from the Paulino Que Collection)*, Finale Art File, Makati City,
- Post-Tsunami Art South East B(l)ooming*, Marella Gallery, Milan
- Things Said Amongst Us*, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta
- 2006 *Tipon*, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila
- 2005 *Incarnation, Disarming Figurations in Philippine Art*, National Museum, Manila
- CP BIENNALE: Urban/Culture*, Bank Indonesia Museum, Jakarta
- 2003 *The American Effect: Global Perspectives on The United States*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 2002 *Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art*, Japan Foundation Forum/Tokyo Opera City Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2001 *Who Owns Women's Bodies*, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila
- 1999 *1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale*, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan
- 1998 *At Home and Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists*, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, U.S.A.
- 1996 *Delatang Pinoy:Yes! The Filipino Can*, Hiraya Gallery, Manila

EDUCATION

- 1993 Bachelor of Fine Arts Major in Painting, University of Sto. Tomas, Manila City

ALFREDO ESQUILLO

Copyright © Silverlens Inc. 2022

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.

JAY BAUTISTA

Text © Silverlens Inc. 2022

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

inquiry@silverlensgalleries.com