



Dialogue I, oil on canvas, 2016

“The shared experience,” said Thomas Daquioag, when asked what drives him to the canvas, adding that his creative life is essentially built on “a continuous study about life and the constant struggle for survival.” For Daquioag, everything matters under the sun and his subjects are usually seen struggling to break through the difficulties of urban situations, in a narrative that weaves Filipino colonial mentality, political trends, world history, and even mythology.

“Self-expression through visual art is the best way to liberate what I feel inside and my concerns about our society,” he says. The cinematic scenes he presents reflect his humble musings on the prevailing issues in society today, such as the environment. But the overarching idea that remains a common thread across his work is the evaluation of justice and what it means in the greater picture.

This fascination with justice is, ironically, the fruit of his exposure to inequality. A keen observer even at a young age, Daquioag was curious

often underappreciated.

“I started the *Superhero* paintings as early as 2007,” he says. “I still like it. It just happens that it was painted in a different context. It’s a series of portraits of workers who contribute to our nation’s economy, the rich, the poor, the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

He continues to do the same, always looking to use each canvas as a platform to draw attention to crucial issues and encourage critical thinking among his viewers. “This is my

His earlier works always led him to reimagine the laborers and re-present them as the silent heroes that they are, often overlooked and underappreciated.

10th solo show. I don’t just make pretty works but more on things to think about in life. Like our mortality or what is the role or function of the artists to society? What can we contribute? What mark do we leave before we exit this world? I try to challenge expectations by working passionately so that they can gain something out of it, *bahala na si Batman*,” he adds.

In addition to painting, Daquioag is

THOMAS DAQUIOAG

ON MORTALITY AND THE IMMATERIAL

STATEMENTS ON THE CANVAS

By HANNAH JO UY • Images by PINGGOT ZULUETA

about the poverty he witnessed, the negative perceptions, and the social ills typically prevalent within the metro. His heart ached for the people who suffered within the system, and at the same time his mind dissected the stories behind what others may have relegated to an economic statistic and this led him to a portfolio that showcases his insights on society today. His earlier works always led him to reimagine the laborers and re-present them as the silent heroes that they are,

also active in performance art, eager to share his statements to audiences in a three-dimensional manner as well. Having traveled all over the world to perform over the years, he continues to do performance art whenever he can accommodate it with his painting projects noting that the variety keeps him on his toes. “It’s good to balance things, when it comes to the process of art-making. It keeps me grounded. We still have regular invitations as a group at TAMA (Tupada Action and Media Arts) among local and international art event organizers such as CCP Nipaf, and Paersche.”

For his highly emotional paintings, however, he continues to implement a meticulous process, drawing compositions and studies and cultivating a visual repertoire of people, places, and things that have gripped him. Daquioag has also since incorporated found objects in his work. “I’m getting my subjects from where I live, Bangkal (Makati), taking random shots from my cellphone while walking,” he says.

His concern for his surroundings has led him to his latest exhibit, “Heirlooms,” which opened last March at Art Elements. The show takes a unique turn as a critique on nostalgia and the Filipino people’s affinity toward trinkets as a bridge to the past. “Heirlooms” spotlights the Filipino passion for ownership of beautiful objects—its life extending beyond the lives of the original owner themselves,” he says. “Depending on their attached value, whether perceived or assigned to the objects. There is always someone somewhere who covets them. There are always residues of the object’s former owners.”

Exhibiting 15 works in total, Daquioag offers an eclectic mix of works with some as recent as the past few weeks, and others dating as far back as several years, perhaps as a nod to the unique element that time imposes upon an object.

The show came into fruition following Daquioag’s observation in the thrift shops near his home. The area has long been a hub for second-

hand wares, drawing people from all over the metro eager to look for new treasures and trinkets at a lower price. “Everything is interactive, especially here in Bangkal. Because even if this isn’t an exclusive village, everyone here has struggles to pay rent and we have to work to survive and pay bills and expenses. It’s mainly focused on the importance of the collaboration process.”

In the fascinating scenes Daquioag weaves, we see objects, submerged in water, as signifiers in the chronicle of people’s lives. In his own way, the artist urges viewers to see these ob-

jects as secret keepers, divulging the most intimate details of its previous owners. But while he fuels our imagination of the previous owner by adding layers to their character through his visual compositions, the very fact that these random objects have long since left their possession notes the futility of the meaning we attach to them and our imminent mortality.

“Heirlooms” is on display at Art Elements, SM Aura Premier, McKinley Pkwy, Taguig, 1634 Metro Manila until April 20.
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