

Fragile Grandeurs
God Bless Our Home by Dondon Jeresano

In his body of work, Ronald "Dondon" Jeresano has been positioning the familiar shanties of the city within the privileged spaces of art and civic institutions as a way to highlight, converse about, and critique their contradictions. This unnerving juxtaposition ("unnerving" because images of poverty so casually co-exist in such hallowed spaces) is once again the governing theme in his latest solo exhibition, God Bless Our Home.

Reminiscent of the signage that hangs in some Filipino houses, the term "God Bless Our Home" indicates the prayer to be protected from sinister forces that may potentially threaten what we consider as our most private refuge. Surrounded by the trappings by Western civilization (the frescoes, the statues, the pillars), the shacks appear to be beseeching of the same benevolence. Their intrusion in these places of prestige is stark and unavoidably exposed. Any moment, it seems, they are about to be demolished and leveled off (as they would be in real life), their state of precarity part of the makeshift character of their fragile shells, providing the merest protection to the soul and body from the elements and demolition.

But just like how they dominate the lands they occupy, these shanties betray a certain level of confidence: they will not easily be moved. In fact, they look like they are finally part of the space that has so long excluded them, that they will not stop bothering conscience as the viewer observes the grandeur that surrounds them. In a way, these paintings by Jeresano visualize the kind of metropolis Metro Manila has developed into: a commingling of gated enclaves and sprawling depressed communities, of glittering malls and patched-up sari-sari stores, of the perfumed elite and the unwashed many. In some cases, they are separated only by a span a river, a crossing in the highway, a turn in the street.

For his mixed-media works, Jeresano depicts faces of common men and women amid the tapestry of found and painted objects, reminiscent of the DIY, makeshift architecture of informal settlements. In their wish to have their own home, to build a family, to exercise their faith quietly, they are just you and me. The only thing is that they have to make do with what's available, free, and on-hand, never mind if these materials are a jumble of junks and discards.

In painting images of poverty within these ornate, gilded, and towering halls, Jeresano is, by extension, bringing it to the conversation of and on art, which is imagined to be as a democratized space, the so-called last bastion of freedom. His works are no passing token gestures on social realities but a sustained effort to frame and present them amid and against our extravagant comforts. Occasionally, they feel like an indictment against our pleasures. But if art is true to its vision of inclusion, what we avert our eyes from need to gain prominent attention. God Bless Our Home offers that seat on the table.

-Carlomar Arcangel Daoana





LARO NG BUHAY
Oil on Canvas
48 x 60 inches
2021



HIMBING SA GABI
Oil on Canvas
48 x 36 inches
2021



SABAY SA AGOS

Oil on Canvas
60 x 36 inches
2021



SILID

Oil on Canvas
36 x 24 inches
2021



God Bless Our Home, Oil on Canvas, 84 x 160 inches, 2021



BISNES 2
Oil on Canvas
11 x 23 inches
2021

BISNES 1
Oil on Canvas
20 x 20 inches
2021



BISNES 3
Oil on Canvas
12 x 12 inches
2021



HARONG (Series 1)
Collage
8 x 12 inches
2021



HARONG (Series 2)
Collage
8 x 12 inches
2021



HARONG (Series 3)
Collage
8 x 12 inches
2021



HARONG (Series 4)
Collage
8 x 12 inches
2021



HARONG (Series 5)
Collage
8 x 12 inches
2021