



Aninag  
31 x 22 inches  
Acrylic on Paper  
2020

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**ART CUBE GALLERY**  
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# REPASO

EMMANUEL GARIBAY

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STUDIO NARRA



## **Gifted to Take**

Manny Garibay on 500 Years of Christianity and The Cross We All Bear

Marking 500 years of Philippine Christianity, the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (better known as the CBCP) selected the theme and slogan "Gifted to give". The year's celebrations drew the attention of Emmanuel Garibay, a Filipino social realist and scholar of theology who maintains a critical eye on how religion is organized in the Philippine context. Garibay's works in this latest exhibition--large scale canvases, portraits on wood and paper--highlight not only how the year's celebrations hide the extractive and violent colonization that made Christianity possible, but how the institutions that sustain Christianity also miss its underlying messages towards creating a more just and equal society.

Long-time followers of Garibay's work might recognize the themes and narratives in this series. Here we see some familiar scenes: the exile of Eva and Adan from the proverbial garden, allusions to the rape of Maria Clara, the callousness and incompetence of the elite and the exploitative behavior of those in power, all set against the backdrop of the suffering of the common tao. While Garibay paints a temporal bridge between the beginning of the end of Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines and the tensions we are experiencing under this current macho-fascist regime, one comes away not of linearity, but of repetition.

By repeating themes however, Garibay continues the discourse around the centuries-long struggles taking place since the violent beginnings of Spanish conquest, underscoring how particular narratives really do cycle across history. He recasts the roles of the powerful, but maintains those of the exploited. Tragic plot lines are unpacked, all driven by the social fragmentation and alienation faced by Filipinos over the last five centuries. With brutal frankness, Garibay links our alienation to problems in which we have built and exploited Christian institutions; our exploitation in turn connects to the legions of faithful these institutions have created.

Frankness and brutality in Garibay's work are not rendered through the visceral shock and horror that tends to characterize abstract expressionism and realism - genres often deemed suitable for tackling the ugliness of a sick society. There are no performative splashes or daubs of paint to illustrate the pained state of the painter, no caricatures of familiar figures; what we are faced with instead is an unsettling calm that suggests how this state of perpetual warfare and extraction is and may forever be our status quo.

Using anachronisms to highlight current issues is not new to Garibay's practice, where the timeless and the static mirror two sides of a shared story, shedding light on social realism's frustration with stagnancy. Whether he is working on wood, paper, or canvas, Garibay's compositions are able to accommodate medieval depictions of the underworld alongside contemporary institutions. Several large scale canvases feature or allude to Maurizio Cattelan's Comedian (better known as the banana duct-taped to the wall of Gallery Perrotin, at Art Basel in Miami), seen most pointedly in *Batas*, an erotic portrayal of Adam and Eve. In a somewhat obscured section of the canvas however, one might notice a shadowy rendering of Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses bearing the stone tablets upon which the ten commandments were carved. While the sculpture might play a supporting role in the composition, it lays bare a narrative of what it might mean to ignore, overlook, or even mock a system that supposedly functions in the best interests of a society.

In this way, *Batas* shows the tenuous conditions of having laws that remain malleable, despite being set in stone. The presence of the snake, the avant-garde artwork, and the classical sculpture expose the problems of being governed by constructs, such as language, allowing the law to be manipulated to work on one's behalf - for better or worse, for good or evil. While in Cattelan's hands, the banana reduces arts and cultural institutions to a laughing matter, Garibay uses it as a device to illustrate how past and present, classical and contemporary overlap, with one chasing the other in an endless cycle that has neither beginning nor end. The snake eating its own tail, to borrow another allegory.

His brush reworks it again in *Sakop*, in which an infantilized indio nestles between the knees of a protective caucasian friar, and again in *Tagapundar*, a layered portrait of false idols and fallen heroes, referring to the futility of thriving in the banana republic that has supposedly come to full fruition through the gifts of Christianity. By placing Comedian in such strategic positions on these canvases, Garibay also shares in the work's commentary on what happens when art and artists fail to act politically, as beacons for speaking truth to power. Instead, under colonized conditions like those of the Philippines, politics is reduced to the subject of an artwork. It might take the absurdity of a banana taped to a gallery wall to point out the emptiness of certain artistic gestures.

For their engagement with the static and anachronistic, Garibay's works can be said to function as portraits rather than landscapes or tableaus. As portraits, they reveal the character of a nation reckoning with its colonial past, its abusive relationship with organized religion, and the ensuing failure to separate church and state. Garibay continues the anachronistic thread with three portraits of plague doctors: Namnam, Bitbit, and Salot. The image of the plague doctor crystallizes the intersecting narratives of betrayal and colonial collaboration - a foreboding portrait of the Philippines reclaiming its title as "the sick man of Asia".

The portraits of plague doctors however were not products of the events of 2020; rather, they began making their appearance in 2017, in response to the current administration's campaign promise to purge the country of the drug menace. In this series however, they loom prescient of our current predicament: as hostages to the world's longest lockdown and pawns in a failed experiment "to heal as one" (to borrow the administration's pandemic slogan). This failed experiment in using strongman tactics and reactionary male leadership to manage a health crisis is evident in the image of the "ama", or father figure. In Kaamahan, we see the pockmarked faces and limbs of the clergy, alluding to the hidden abuses, collusions, and hypocrisies of the Catholic church, while Ama draws a clear link to the tragedy of Maria Clara from Jose Rizal's Noli and Fili, having been borne of rape by Padre Damaso, and herself having endured the same from Padre Salvi.

Garibay is firm in his criticism of patriarchy, refusing to hide or downplay its role in these narratives of colonial oppression, with the cloaked, costumed, and often caucasian priest. The female subjects he foregrounds (with the exception of the Eva character in Batas) all wear similar expressions that combine an underlying vindictiveness with apathy - the look of one whose life has been reduced to crumbs and survival, reminding us of the double burden women must bear under these economic and political conditions.

Seemingly at odds with this ongoing critique of Christian institutions is Garibay's persistent faith in painting as method. How, we must ask, can critique be reconciled with a medium so fundamental to the Western European canon and a practice so steeped in the problematic myth of male genius?

Garibay responds to this question by connecting to a sense of self: a self-capable of dialogue with the vastness of surface, whether that surface is wood, canvas, or paper. Painting as method gives the thoughts free passage, from head to hand to surface. Because he does not do studies prior to working, preferring to work intuitively, Garibay is prone to make mistakes, which he then treats as reminders of his humanity. Painting in this sense is not a matter of contesting or resisting techno mediation, but an acknowledgement of the human in the artist.

It is by reconnecting with the human that painters might use the method not only as critique, but as praxis: embarking not on a journey towards art for art's sake, but towards the collective reckoning and awareness it is meant to incite. In this way, these works do not merely document observations - they call for the urgency of self-determination amidst alienation. To Garibay, art is "self-awareness made visual".

The fruits of this self-awareness are made manifest in the slowly shifting discourse around coloniality in the Philippines, a shift propelled in no small part by art and artists. To celebrate 500 years of Christianity may expose a nation's internalized colonialism, which is why painters like Garibay must continue the work of illuminating the shadow archive of these soft power structures, and how they continue to alienate individuals and societies from their essential selves.

So much has been said as of late about what art is meant to do, even as its place in the economy as "nonessential" is being called into question. If art for art's sake may revel in notions of beauty and "self-expression" that teeter on the precipice of the banal, then art that aspires to truth must work to dismantle the structures that continue to exploit us.

-Alice Sarmiento

Alice Sarmiento is a freelance writer and independent curator, finishing her Masters in Curatorial Studies at the University of the Philippines. She is currently a resident of the Young Curators Residency Program, hosted by the Fondazione Sandretto re Rebaudengo in Torino, Italy. Past engagements have included fellowships with the Japan Foundation Asia Center as well as the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany.



**Tanod**  
31 x 22 inches  
Acrylic on Paper  
2020



**Tanong**  
31 x 22 inches  
Acrylic on Paper  
2020



**Gantimpala**  
31 x 22 inches  
Acrylic on Paper  
2016



**Snot**  
31 x 22 inches  
Acrylic on Paper  
2020



**Dayo**  
48 x 84 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021



**Batas**  
48 x 48 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2020



**Ama**  
48 x 36 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021



**Kaamahan**  
50 x 70 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2015



**Sakop**  
60 x 48 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021



Tagapundar  
60 x 48 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021



Hudyat  
55 x 70 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021





**Sa Kabila**  
48 x 84 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2021



**Tanghalan**  
60 x 48 inches  
Oil on Canvas  
2020



**Puder**  
32 x 16 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Namnam**  
31.75 x 22.5 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Bitbit**  
25.5 x 15.5 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2019



**Basbas**  
32.5 x 16 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Pula**  
52.5 x 18.5 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Banal**  
26 x 15.75 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Kapit**  
37 x 17.75 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Padre**  
37.25 x 17.5 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2021



**Impok**  
25.5 x 15 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2019



**Salot**  
26 x 16 inches  
Oil on Wood  
2019



**Kapalit**  
32 x 16 in  
Oil on Wood  
2021

**Emmanuel Garibay (b.1962)**

One of the foremost artists working today, Emmanuel “Manny” Garibay has always had his pulse on the Filipino experience—from its common, everyday struggles to its dark and complex sprawl of history. His visual idiom, while embodying the compulsions of expressive figuration, is uniquely his, showcasing his recognizable long-limbed figures, his hierarchical use of scale, and his vibrant and lyrical color palette. His social realist bent is no doubt nurtured by his days in Salingpusa—a group of firebrand students from the UP College of Fine Arts who believed that the artist’s role is deeply imbricated in society. A master of compression of pictorial and narrative space, Garibay’s approach foregrounds the protagonists of his works to ultimately tell a story: the quotidian affairs of the common folk, the centrality of basketball and Christianity in the Filipino psyche, the unfinished saga of the nation in search of itself.