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Luis Lorenzana

Beautiful Pain

14 Sep - 13 Oct 2012

***Beautiful Pain* by Luis Lorenzana**

The SILVERLENS in Singapore Inaugural Exhibition



Image: *Ecstasy*, 2012 by Luis Lorenzana

Words by Mikey Atienza

Joy is not the first word that comes to mind when one looks at the figures in Luis Lorenzana's latest series, **Beautiful Pain**. There is something extreme and potentially violent about the cracks that fissure the human form, about the thorns that spring from or wind themselves around it, about faces sliced open and coming apart. Amid these cuts and incisions, titles like *Bliss*, *Ecstasy*, and *Delight* seem almost ironic. But **Beautiful Pain**, Lorenzana shares, speaks of something more sincere: an "extraordinary joy; a certain kind of joy wherein even if you are totally destroyed inside, you are still capable [of dancing to] life's music."

Paradoxically, violence seems absent from the series. While he seems to subject the figures in his oil paintings to a surreal sort of mutilation, the pain that stems from it is transformative rather than destructive. Instead of breaking the subject down, it unleashes a wild, strange beauty.

There is a playfulness to be found in **Beautiful Pain**, which calls on fairy tale, religion, and the images of childhood to create darkly whimsical dreamscapes. There is life and color in each cut that is made; here and there are half-eaten lollipops, flowers blooming, bubbles floating upward out of a bright, blue tentacular heart. Lorenzana's work is full of surprises, mostly because he creates a pleasant grotesquerie - painted faces, sly smiles, traces of the ethereal, the mosaic, the reptilian - from which the figures

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emerge still intact and miraculously unharmed. They are calm, and they bear no outright expressions of anguish. Instead of struggling, these women stand still, like dolls and saints, or like modest Maria Clara-clad statues. They are perfect specimens of portraiture, expertly positioned even as the artist wreaks havoc on their bodies.

"I still paint very traditionally," Lorenzana says. "Classical painting techniques. Underpainting first, coloring layer by layer. Each artwork done very meticulously." His mastery of conventional methods allows him to play around with what one might expect from traditional portraits. He preserves clothing and posture "in reverence to classical painting practice," but takes his subjects past their physical limits as human figures. There is a pristine quality to the paintings, even as the bodies in them are on the verge of cracking, breaking, and coming undone: "The beauty here is that they are still impossibly alive," Lorenzana says, "and at peace, and unaffected, and detached, vis a vis the pain."

The figures in the paintings have passed beyond suffering. They have transcended it and come out the other side. The idea of bliss or delight, then, is not ironic. Lorenzana is simply encouraging us to look beyond our natural tendency to dread and resist suffering, opening up the possibility that there is a sublime sort of beauty to be found in, or through, such pain.

The subject sitting for the artist has been transformed. The portrait, no longer based or grounded entirely in the material world, is physically distorted. It becomes an expression of "emotions, ideas, thoughts, feelings." The women are simply visual representations of something deeper. Behind each figure, the sky is faded, drained of color, and without dimension or limit. Staying true to traditional methods, Lorenzana uses lead white in order to create a soothing emptiness, a space in which scars can be borne without danger or damage, and in which they are not only marks of survival, but sources of beauty. His use of color is controlled, restrained. As a result, it is more stark and meaningful against such whiteness. Color evokes a sense of joy, even as it creates turmoil.

In fact, it seems as though there is something potentiating inside these wracked bodies, waiting to grow out: leaves and flowers bud among thorns; they sprout out of the ground, out of the women themselves, out of their very faces. From the cuts and cracks, it seems, come beautiful things. The skin parts to reveal a tiny candy garden; it is sewn up again only to drip color onto the ground; it is intricately patterned, brightly colored, multi-hued. All this hints at a rich and fecund interiority that surges out only on the onset of pain. The extraordinary joy is there, and it is perhaps only through breakage that such ecstasy can emerge.

Beautiful Pain by Luis Lorenzana opens on 14 September, Friday as the inaugural exhibition of SILVERLENS Singapore in Gillman Barracks, Singapore. A partner exhibition, similarly titled, by the artist opens in SILVERLENS Manila on 20 September.

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