

A solo exhibition by Filipino artist, **RODEL TAPAYA**

The Ladder to Somewhere

ARNDT Singapore at Gillman Barracks

5 April 2013 – 30 June 2013 – Exhibition Opening April 5th 6.30 to 9 pm.



Rodel Tapaya
Like a bird that leaves its nest is a man who
leaves his home, 2013
Acrylic on canvas
183 x 274,5 cm | 72.05 x 108.07 in

ARNDT Singapore is pleased to announce the inclusion of Rodel Tapaya among its exhibiting artists. The renowned Filipino painter is slated to hold his solo exhibition entitled, *The Ladder to Somewhere*, at its spaces in the Gillman Barracks in Singapore in April 2013. The exhibition will revolve around the intersections between disparate realms and notions of the earthworld and skyworld and its mortal and immortal inhabitants. Tapaya will be doing what he does best in referencing Philippine mythology, folktales, and legends and their overlaps with history by linking fact and fantasy from different sources with shared themes or subjects.

Rodel Tapaya was born in 1980 in Montalban, Rizal, situated a few kilometers away from Manila. After winning an international painting tilt, he pursued intensive drawing and painting courses at Parsons School of Design in New York and from the University of Art and Design in Helsinki prior to graduating from the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines. Since then, he has had several solo exhibitions hosted in Berlin, Beijing, Hongkong, Tokyo, Singapore, and Manila. He has also been represented in several international art fairs and expositions. Tapaya is best known in Singapore for being the winner of the prestigious Asia-Pacific Breweries Foundation Signature Art Prize given by the Singapore Art Museum in 2011. Since 2008, he has lived and worked in the province of Bulacan, the Philippines.

Tapaya's works, mostly depicting a set of narratives, are filled with alluring colors and vibrant figures. For his folklore paintings, Tapaya has explored and studied Philippine legends and mythologies for more than eight years. Before developing his penchant for this genre, he painted under various modern influences. Blending this training with the appropriation of traditional painting forms continues to be his working

framework. In one of his large acrylic on canvas work entitled, *Like a bird that leaves its nest is a man who leaves his home*, Tapaya ponders on the theme of flight and connects this with ideas of self-assertion. It tackles moving away from comfort zones towards courage zones to achieve certain life goals. The main image is that of *Pangudyawon*, a man who, like Icarus, wished to become a bird so that he can escape an unfortunate situation. Inset is the story of the star girl who went to earth to bathe when a man took her wings and is then forced to live as the wife of a mortal. We are also presented a depiction of a man who was born with just his head and is helped through life by birds.

Tapaya's tableau often calls to mind the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and a few other narrative painters. However, Tapaya masterfully succeeds in creating a unique style owing mainly to the peculiarity of Philippine folk literature. The viewer's eye may revel in the riot of colors and gain insight with his capricious imagination. In an interview with the Philippine Daily Inquirer after winning the Signature Art Prize, Tapaya explained he had always considered "narrative painting" as his strongest suit and had always sought to tell moral tales when he paints.

Along with his subjects, Tapaya has adopted a succinct visual language that plays with associations triggered amongst the juxtaposition of elements present in the paintings. The artist turns the figures of his characters, mostly gods and fairies, into phantoms; haunting a civilization where they have dominion over but don't fully belong. This ghostliness is very much in tune with the sense of the contemporary myth-making that permeates many of the artist's recent works. Just as his paintings have always drifted between figuration and abstraction, his figures occupy the midpoint between past and present and their liminal appearance itself becomes the subject. Grand themes of love and war are now comfortably conveyed by the painter in his big canvasses. Such is his rekindling of a recurring allegory on forbidden love, the legend of Luna and Mar (Moon and Sea) in his work, *Full Moon*. In *The Guardians*, he paints an eight-headed monster in-charge of guarding the heavens. The fallen leaves in this painting suggests desolation and massive deaths during wartime.

The set of works for this exhibition best illustrates why Rodol Tapaya's work has often invited comparisons to Latin-American magic realism. Akin to this genre, the uncanny atmosphere of Tapaya's work is heightened by the mundane treatment of the enchanted scenes he depicts. Yet their surreal quality is so persistent as to suggest that the reality he conveys is an alternate one, a place where folk history and fable can mix seamlessly alongside tales of the present time. That Tapaya succeeds in combining these disparate elements in one unifying language is a testament to his skill as an artist, but it also points to a story-teller's concern that would be out of place in a book or in oral transmissions, since it is the drama of the images he conveys that takes primacy in his compelling and captivating works.

Geronimo Cristobal, Jr.

The Ladder to Somewhere marks the first collaboration with Rodel Tapaya who will also show at ARNDT's Berlin premises in 2014 and the second project of ARNDT Singapore, after its opening in January.

ARNDT Singapore is a project space, viewing room and Asian office for internationally renowned art dealer Matthias Arndt.

The Singapore premises is situated in the new art destination, Gillman Barracks, which is located in the center of Singapore that houses galleries and creative businesses, as well as the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) opening in 2013.

ARNDT Singapore stages shows of leading international artists as well as projects and curated shows featuring Southeast Asian art. In its Singapore office ARNDT will further develop both private and corporate collections and artist management in the Asia-Pacific Region.