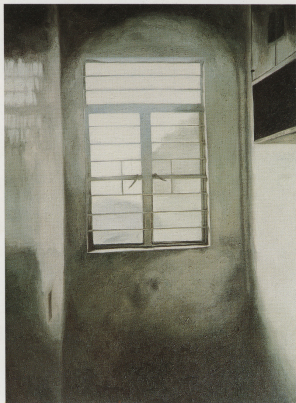


Yasmin Sison-Ching
Miha and Her Cat
 2003
 Oil and acrylic on canvas
 122 x 122cm



Exhibition dates: 17 July - 2 August 2003

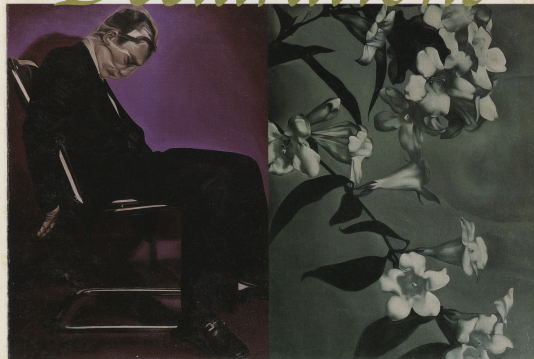
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Silent Declarations

GERALDINE JAVIER

NONA GARCIA

YASMIN SISON-CHING



above
 Nona Garcia
Ambient Still 3
 2002
 Oil on canvas
 122 x 91cm

cover
 Geraldine Javier
Six Plots to Murder
 2002
 Oil on canvas
 122 x 182cm

Cast with an ominous air, the works in *Silent Declarations* seem to tell us that there is no idyllic paradise to run to, either on earth, or inside our minds. Indeed, the foreboding tone is not unexpected of Filipino expressions, but what sets the work by these three young artists apart is its brooding sense of quiet aloofness. Given the context of Filipino aesthetics, so heavily invested in the form of social realism and commonly associated with a particular brand of *Pino*y passion, this cool detached silence is disconcerting if sensually alluring.

These confident, masterly paintings are barbed with challenges. Each image is simultaneously certain yet enigmatic, allowing for a complex range of readings. Expressions drift vaguely from the emotional register, forcing the viewer to study the images more intimately, to bring to them personal associations and meanings. It is by no coincidence that some of these images should seem oddly familiar. They originate from popular visual references, hinting at scenes from film classics, ubiquitous kitchen sink dramas, or glossy fashion editorials from women's magazines.

Clearly, these young women are sophisticated and well read. Most of all, they are informed by a worldview that is fiercely discriminating, uncompromising and uniquely feminine in stance. In their paintings, they display a preference for visual irony and an appetite to hunt for serious game. They are versatile and agile, skillfully and unabashedly appropriating, recombining and reinventing images drawn from a range of media sources. They comprehend the potent power of sublimated commercial imagery; and are willing to acknowledge its functions and meanings while ever ready to turn the implications on their heads, concocting ravishing images brimming with unsettling implications.

Together, **Geraldine Javier**, **Nona Garcia** and **Yasmin Sison-Ching** represent a distinct energy in contemporary Filipino art, a generation of young artists who are quietly carving out new territories in contemporary art-making. Their grasp on contemporary culture combines a unique blend of urban, streetwise savvy with the cosmopolitan, heavily influenced by local pop culture and Western media sources. Underscored by a fresh, pulsating energy, their messages are no less profound, overlaid with deep introspection and seriousness of thought. Through a series of mischievous plots, their commentaries bite with sarcastic wit, replacing the strident polemics attributed to their predecessors with a paradoxical lightheartedness.

Through their conceptually oriented training at University of Philippines (UP), each artist has acquired a preference for intellectual engagement in place of immediate emotional response. In life, they have learnt the sober realities of living in violent flux. Growing up in the aftermath of Martial Law, they bear little memory of a flourishing Philippines and are ever conscious of how Asia's first democracy has lagged and been left behind to crumble in the wake of its own political maelstrom.

Those of us expecting socio-political issues from their oeuvre will find its marked absence. Instead, the young contemporary voice is marked by a plurality of expressions—the need to find empowerment by subverting status quo and delineating personal spaces through individual narratives, communicating differing obsessions and interests, those meaningful and inconsequential. In varying inflections and nuances, different relationships and emotional textures reflect a cross-section of cultural or and social backgrounds. Yet beneath this diversity, they are bound together by a simple message, declaring: “this is where we stand.”

At first sight, *To Dead For Dreaming* (2002) shocks and unsettles. With a sprig of chrysanthemum juxtaposed against the image of a girl frozen in position against a battered couch, this painting, coupled with its title, looms with onerous implications. Disturbing yet exceptionally beautiful, the eye is unable to tear away from the work. The visual tension between the two vastly incongruous images spins a web of mysterious drama. The detail of a button hangs poignantly from a loose thread in the right background. Similarly, the figure's head hanging backward, her disheveled hair, suggests pain and suffering. And what of the relationship between this woman and the flower, could it possibly imply the beauty of dying, or perhaps the fragility of life, ephemeral, hanging on a thread? A story is implied; it begs an explanation; yet there are no clear answers at hand. Perhaps it would be helpful to know that the chrysanthemum is a detail drawn from Japanese Ikebana whilst the image of the dead woman is appropriated from one of Lee Miller's World War II photographs.

The reticence of **Geraldine Javier's (b.1970)** work is one of its most powerful aspects. Her paintings have about them a sense of pause, a stretched out silence simultaneously soothing and oddly disturbing. To read Geraldine's work as a reflection on the deeper meanings in life is to romanticize her intention. She is never concerned with immediate implications but rather the alterations or new meanings and identity that an image acquires, the contextual shifts that occur as an image is translated from a differing medium onto canvas. Dark and unfathomable, they rarely allow the viewer an easy access into the trenches of the artist's world of conflicting ideologies. Instead, we are let onto a precarious space, excavating ironies in a realm which only allows for loss, profound engagement on a secluded level where emotions and thoughts are acutely felt but impossible to articulate.

Nona Garcia's (b.1978) evocative *Ambient Stills* series takes us through a nostalgic visit to an abandoned hospital once owned by her family in the early 80's. Born to a family of doctors, her association with the hospital is underscored by tenderness and warmth, away from its ascribed characteristics—clinical, cold, foreboding. It suggests, instead, a private landmark from childhood, a personal playground and study area, recalling the hallways and rooms where she had spent much of her early years waiting for her parents at work.

Based on the photographs the artist had captured nine years after the building had been left behind—a place of healing now in a state of deterioration, undermined by weather and time—the paintings commemorate and evoke on canvas those nostalgic years of growing up. Yet they are cast with a spectre of melancholy. The cold light suggests a damp weight, a brooding emptiness populated by time. It is perhaps that these empty rooms hold within its walls a presence/absence, invoked by a trove of memories other than the artist's heartwarming accounts, untouched by nostalgia; the pain of loss, hope, despair, borne by others who were once present in the patients' wards, nursery, operating rooms, and emergency rooms.

Set within the solitary confines of their interior domain, the women in **Yasmin Sison-Ching's (b.1972)** paintings are attempting a game of hide and seek, and in this instance, the role of seeker is largely in the hands of the viewer. Concealed behind negative spaces embellished by prints that are suggestive of feminine emblems—floral wallpaper prints and fabric designs, this negation is harsh yet refers to a kind of safety, perhaps a mask or a screen in which one identifies with security. However, these implications can be readily turned on their head to suggest a form of entrapment, a locking behind closed doors. Working on the concept of a cocoon, the artist's intervention concerns notions of concealment, celebrating the strength and power which women gain in an inner introverted world, re-emergence and transformation.

Who are these women? How old are they? What do they look like? What is offered to the eye is akin to a broken dialogue, a sentence in mid air, waiting to be completed. The everyday is evoked through the visual clues supplied by the artist. Each canvas suggests a domestic interior—a kitchen, the living room, or a storage area in a state of flux, simultaneously active and inactive. Quiet but haunting in their mundane solitary activities, they are reclusive *mise-en-scenes* replete with emotions, thoughts and intrigue. In the role of the viewer, we are instinctively possessed by the urge to uncover the hidden image, invariably ascribed with the guilty pleasure of a relentless voyeur in an attempt to complete the missing link, unravel their thoughts with what little information we have at hand. We are denied access, uncertain of what goes on behind these concealed spaces.

Geraldine G Javier
born 1970, Philippines

education

1997 Bachelor of Fine Arts Major, Painting,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
1991 Bachelor of Science in Nursing,
University of the Philippines, Manila

exhibitions

2002 Portable Multiples, *Plastique Kinetic Worms*, Singapore
Feast of Conversations, *Atelier Frank and Lee*, Singapore
Mainstream, *Surrounded By Water Gallery*, Philippines
2000-2 Faith + The City: A survey of Contemporary Filipino Art,
A touring exhibition to Earl Lu Gallery (Singapore),
National Art Gallery (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) ABN-
AMRO House (Penang, Malaysia) Chulalongkorn
University Gallery (Bangkok, Thailand) and Metropolitan
Museum of Manila (Manila, Philippines)
2000 Tales of Bagdad, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*
Larawan ng Artista Bilang Filipino, *Vargas Museum*
UP Diliman
1999 Daily Planet, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*
Today Show, *CCP Guillermo Tolentino*
Topology of Signs, *CCP Main Gallery*
Coordinates, *Boston Gallery*
Kitchy-Kitchy Koo, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*,
Angono Rizal
1998 X-Prints, *Jorge Vargas Museum*, *UP Diliman*
Re-Prints, *Australia Center*, *Australian High*
Commission, *Makati*
View from Elsewhere, *Art Center*, *SM Megamall*, *Artwalk*
Crossroad (Terminal Baggage), *Australia Center*,
Australian High Commission, *Makati*
No Preservatives Added, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*,
Angono Rizal
1997 Wittgenstein's Duck Rabbit, *West Gallery*, *West Ave*,
Quezon City
Thesis Class Exhibition, *Fernando Amorsolo Building*,
UP Diliman
1996 Hospital Diaries of an XX (discovery series),
Hiraya Gallery, *Manila*
Mula Filibustero Hanggang kay Marimar, *Jorge Vargas*
Museum, *UP Diliman*
New Territory, *Faculty Center Galleries*, *UP Diliman*
Picture Show, *Dominador Castaneda Hall*, *UP Diliman*
Delatang Pino; Yes the Filipino Can! *Hiraya Gallery*,
Manila
Brain School for Babies, *UP Faculty Center Galleries*,
UP Diliman
1995 Painting By Numbers, *CCP Manila*

Nona M Garcia
born 1978, Philippines

education

2001 Bachelor of Fine Arts Major, Painting,
University of the Philippines, Diliman

awards

2000 Grand Prize, *Philippine Art Awards*
Juror's Choice, *Philippine Art Awards*
Finalist, *Metrobank Young Painters' Annual*
National Competition

exhibitions

2000-2 Faith + The City: A survey of Contemporary Filipino
Art, A touring exhibition to Earl Lu Gallery
(Singapore), National Art Gallery (Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia) ABN-AMRO House (Penang, Malaysia)
Chulalongkorn University Gallery (Bangkok, Thailand)
and Metropolitan Museum of Manila (Manila,
Philippines)
2001 RX Critical Remedies, Norberto Rolando and Nona
Garcia, *Lopez Memorial Museum*, Manila
Surrounded, *Main Gallery*, *Cultural Center of the*
Philippines (CCP), Manila
2000 True Confessions, *Art Center*, *SM Megamall Artwalk*,
Metro Manila
Lighting Show and Other Incidents, *Big Sky Mind*,
Metro Manila
Dog Show, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*, *EDSA*,
Metro Manila
Philippine Art Awards, Singapore Art
Museum, Singapore
Grey Matter, *West Gallery*, *West Avenue*,
Metro Manila
Makiling sa Tabi ng Dagat, *Cultural Center of the*
Philippines (CCP), Manila
Philippine Art Awards, Metropolitan
Museum of Manila, Manila
The Heavy Quiet, *Big Sky Mind*, *Metro Manila*
Makiling sa Likod ng OE, *Surrounded by Water*, *EDSA*,
Metro Manila
Panic Attack, *Surrounded by Water*, *EDSA*, *Metro*
Manila
Panimula, *Ayala Museum*, *Makati*, *Metro Manila*
Fat Over Lean, *Gallery MSG*, *Xavierville*, *Quezon*
City, *Metro Manila*
Peripheral Vision, *Ayala Museum*, *Makati*, *Metro*
Manila
Topology of Signs, *CCP Main Gallery*
May Nakita Ako, *Ayala Museum*, *Makati*, *Metro Manila*
1999 Pillows, *Corrador Gallery*, *College of Fine Arts*, *UP*
Diliman, *Quezon City*, *Metro Manila*
Bakart, *Corrador Gallery*, *College of Fine Arts*, *UP*
Diliman, *Quezon City*, *Metro Manila*
Ikawto, *Ayala Museum*, *Makati*, *Metro Manila*

Yasmin B Sison-Ching
born 1972, Philippines

education

2001 Master of Arts, Art Education,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
1994-97 Bachelor of Fine Art, Painting,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
1992-93 Certification for Professional Education,
University of the Philippines, Diliman
1988-92 Bachelor of Arts, Humanities,
University of the Philippines, Diliman

exhibitions

2003 Interior Domain, solo exhibition, *FINALE Art File*,
SM Megamall Artwalk
2002 Stick Em Up, solo exhibition, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*
Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
Feast of Conversations, *Atelier Frank and Lee*, Singapore
Utopia, Art Seasons, Singapore
Mainstream, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*, Philippines
Fixation, *Lopez Museum*, Philippines
2001 28 Days, Solo exhibition, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*
Space meeting Place, *Ayala Museum*, *Makati*
Cool Pieties, *Art Center*, *Megamall*
Surrounded, *Cultural Center of the Philippines*
Kitchen Sink Drama, solo exhibition, *British Council Library*
2000 Faith and the City, *Earl Lu Gallery*, *La Salle-SIA College of*
Arts, Singapore, *Valentine Willie Fine Art*, *Kuala Lumpur*
Grand Royale, *Big Sky Mind*
Video Take, *Openbare Bibliotheek van Leuven*,
Brussels, Belgium
True Confessions, *Art Center*, *SM Megamall*
Dog Show, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*, *EDSA*, *Mandaluyong*
into the Rabbit Hole, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*, *EDSA*,
Mandaluyong
1999 Cracks and Abysses, *Art Center*
Dog Show, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*, *EDSA*, *Mandaluyong*
The Today Show, *Cultural Center of the Philippines*
The Incredible Lives of Alice and Lucinda,
Surrounded by Water, *Angono*, *Rizal*
Topology of Signs, *Cultural Center of the Philippines*
Coordinates, *Boston Gallery*, *Boston*, *Cuba*
X-Prints, *Australia Center*
No preservatives Added, *Surrounded by Water Gallery*,
Angono, *Rizal*
Crossroads: Terminal Baggage, *Australia Center*
Views from Elsewhere, *SM Megamall Artwalk*, *Mandaluyong*
Inner Child, *Ayala Museum*
Breaking Apollonians, *Filipino Artists: 1975 to the present*,
Alliance Française de Manila
1996 Apple Pickers from Japan, *Discovery Series*, *Hiraya Gallery*
Dangerous Metaphors, *Artwalk*, *SM Megamall*, *Mandaluyong*
Delatang Pino; Yes, the Filipino Can!, *Hiraya Gallery*
Mula Filibustero hanggang kay Marimar, *UP Vargas Museum*
Powder Room, solo exhibition, *West Gallery*, *SM Megamall*
1995 Paintings by Number, *Cultural Center of Philippines*