

ROMULO OLAZO

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THE TRUTH IS STILL IN THE BEAUTIFUL

Introduction

BEVERLY YONG

I first encountered the work of Romulo Olazo in 2003, in an exhibition we held of an important collection of Southeast Asian art. It was a single acrylic on paper painting from his *Permutation* series, a composition of clean white lines bending into overlapping shapes against a jet black ground. I was completely seduced, and rather taken aback. It was a beautiful surprise to find, in the rich and very diverse context of regional art I had to date experienced, this eloquent answer to the hard demands of modernist abstraction. Here was the epitome of many of the qualities I have personally sought in abstract painting – the clarity but also open-endedness of mathematical and philosophical thought, a bold originality without pretensions, a seeming effortlessness with form that cuts with the directness of musical harmony.

I remained curious about Olazo's work through the following years, aware only of his seniority and that he was best known in the Philippines for an earlier series called *Diaphanous*. Wanting to learn more about Olazo, I was disappointed not to be able to find much information or come across more of his works in current publications or exhibitions in the region. We decided eventually to address this by approaching the artist himself for an exhibition.

I discovered the great respect he commands among his peers and juniors. His innovations as both a printmaker and a painter earned him the acclaim of a number of important critics of regional stature. In 1981, Leonidas V. Benesa, Rod. Paras-Perez and Emmanuel Torres hailed him as one of the “five outstanding living artists” in the Philippines – he was the youngest of the group which included Ang Kiukok, Cesar Legaspi, Arturo Luz and Napoleon Abueva. The impact of his work, especially of the *Diaphanous* series, is clearly expressed in the following words from Marian Pastor-Roces:

“...complex statements and passionate working impulses animate the Olazo paintings he calls *Diaphanous*... These paintings, visual synonyms to the name Olazo, established his reputation. And with reason. Each, all have the unmistakable qualities: elegance, restraint, sensuousness, an almost exquisite contemplative air...”

Olazo seems to be saying (that) painting – and all of art – has valuable affinities with the world of idea, with thought, with sustained, systematic procedures, with intellectual order. And these affinities enthrall even as the paintings titillate the eye...”

Indeed, one is hard-pressed to think of equivalents to Olazo's key series in terms of bravado, articulacy, complexity, purity of intent, monumentality and sheer artistic success, in the field of Southeast Asian modern abstract art. How did Olazo come to abstraction and the approach he developed? I tried to probe him about the possible influences in his work and found out that, having studied art in the Philippines and only travelling out for exhibitions, he was driven really within that context; that while he is obviously well-versed with the work of artists and art movements in the West, he was not attempting to situate his own art within that tradition. Instead he cites the interest in abstraction and new methodologies, and ideas about modernism that had begun to take root among his seniors and contemporaries, as well as his own discoveries in printmaking, as starting points.

Faced with the actual body of works in the artist's collection, I wondered how these might be best put into context and form an introduction of Olazo's work to the region (for the exhibition comes not only to Kuala Lumpur, but travels on to Jakarta). In his son, Jonathan Olazo, I found the perfect co-curator (for to address a career of over forty years cannot be the lone privilege of a fresh pair of admiring eyes). Jonathan of course belongs to a different generation of artists, but shares his father's appreciation of the complexity and profundity of the problems of painting and art-making, and his understanding of his father's work creates a bridge between earlier modernist concerns and the issues of “post-modern” contemporary practice.

Any chronological overview would have been ambitious, and also skewed in view of the works available. The exhibition instead explores Olazo's approach to and interest in form, and draws on what his work can teach us about the principles and possibilities of abstraction and the processes of art-making. The works selected for the exhibition represent mostly his *Diaphanous* and *Permutation* series, but also prints, life drawings of nudes, still life, landscape and abstract watercolour and pastel studies and paintings on paper. For Olazo is both a traditionalist and an innovator, believing in the importance of the study of the visual world as well as in the creation of new forms and structures of seeing. In all his work, the search for what Jonathan calls “the beautiful form”.

Olazo's career has shown how fruitful it can be to pursue the possibilities of even one type of form, developing his own language in myriad compositions using different material strategies. Like musical variations, there is no sense of repetition. The very logic behind his later *Permutation* series aimed to prove that endlessness of possibilities, the wealth of responses different shapes and arrangements can provoke. Every line seems new, at every corner embarking on a fresh journey. In the play of light in *Diaphanous*, our eye and our senses play endlessly through the veils, shapes, crossings.

I borrow a quotation from the Philebus of Plato used by that great early champion of abstraction, Alfred H Barr, Jr:

‘Socrates: ...I will try to speak of the beauty of shapes, and I do not mean, as most people would think, the shapes of living figures, or their imitations in painting, but I mean straight lines and curves and the shapes made from them, flat or solid, by the lathe, ruler and square, if you know what I mean. These are not beautiful for any particular reason or purpose, as other things are, but are always by their very nature beautiful, and give pleasure of their own quite free from the itch of desire; and colours of this kind are beautiful, too, and give a similar pleasure.’

(Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1936)

We would like to thank the Olazo family for their enthusiasm and support in making this exhibition possible, especially Mrs Patricia Olazo for her tireless efforts. We hope that this exhibition plays its part in bringing to light the work of Romulo Olazo in the wider Southeast Asian art context, and the role it has played in the history of our modern art. Surely, this is long overdue.

Romulo Olazo – Pleasurable Variations in Light and Form

VICTORIA T. HERRERA

In the field of non-figurative art in the Philippines, the name of Romulo Olazo is synonymous with the word *Diaphanous*. The term specifically refers to a series of prints and paintings he started to develop in 1972. It is as distinct in etymology as the artist's medium, techniques and approach to abstraction. Originating from the Greek words *dia* meaning "through" and *phainein* meaning "to show," Olazo's compositions in this series are veritable visions of light. They have been likened to dragonfly wings, sheets of gossamer veil or gauze, and even a symphony. Taken together, we are led to visualize delicate, fragile, and even ephemeral compositions. But this is only one aspect of the artist's wide range of works. Olazo, as he is known in the local art scene, has worked with various media and techniques. He is acknowledged for his deft skill both in figurative and abstract art and is an accomplished printmaker and painter.

Olazo has had a long career, spanning over forty years. He first joined and won a local art competition in 1963. But it was not until ten years later, in the early 1970s, that he received significant recognition. In 1971, he was among three young Filipino artists selected to represent the country in international print exhibitions held at the Pratt Institute in New York and the 2nd Indian Triennial in New Delhi. Olazo's innovativeness was further acknowledged in 1972 when he became one of the recipients of the 13 Artists Awards. Granted by the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), this continues to be one of the major awards for young upcoming artists. That same year, he and fellow printmaker Rodolfo Samonte held a two-man show that received critical reviews in the use of the technique of serigraphy. Although he already held an executive post in a leading advertising agency, Olazo resigned from his regular job in 1974 to work full-time as an artist. In the same year, he joined the Saturday Group of artists. Their weekly gatherings gave him time to hone his skill in figurative drawing, whether they were contours of landscapes or of the female nude. It was also in this group that Olazo forged close ties with fellow artists Hernando R. Ocampo, Cesar Legaspi, Ang Kiukok and Malang Santos.

Olazo in Context

Olazo was part of a vibrant period in Philippine art in the 1960s and 1970s. Modernism had already found stable ground in representational art in the 1960s. The first generation of modernist painters, among them Victorio Edades, Diosdado Lorenzo and Vicente Manansala were his professors at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), then considered as the stronghold of

Modernism. Olazo singles out Lorenzo, a great watercolorist, as having the most influence on him. Another generation of visual artists explored modernist aesthetics further to capture the impact of socio-economic changes in an urban landscape. Often referred to as the Neo-Realists, painters such as Fernando Zobel, Hernando R. Ocampo, Arturo Luz, Nena Saguil, and Cesar Legaspi developed their respective figurative styles along the lines of stylized and planar forms. Interestingly, these same artists were also among the first to explore non-figurative styles in geometric or gestural and expressionist modes.

The Art Association of the Philippines (AAP, founded in 1948) was entering its second decade in the 1960s. By this time, its annual art competitions had gained a reputation as a venue for new talents. In the aspect of the art market, the AAP annuals also contributed in encouraging a new generation of art patrons. Categories in the competition have changed through the years, reflecting the trends and directions visual art practice has taken. For example, stylistic categories such as "Conservative" and "Modernist" paintings were created in the 1950s to lessen the tension among artists identified with each style. The "Non-figurative" category was later included to encourage a growing interest in abstraction. Aside from painting and sculpture, new categories of medium were later included – e.g. printmaking, photography, and mixed media.

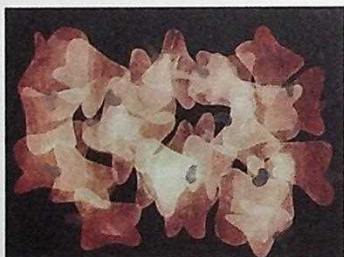
Printmaking achieved a highly respected status as a fine art medium in the 1960s. Manuel Rodriguez, Sr. and Rodolfo Paras-Perez returned from their studies in the United States in 1962. Both pursued their respective programs to promote printmaking. Paras-Perez specialized in color woodcuts which were exhibited in limited editions. Rodriguez's influence has been more in the area of training and for this reason he has been called the "Father of contemporary printmaking." He conducted workshops in fine art schools and in his own Contemporary Graphic Arts Workshop. He is considered a mentor to most of today's established printmakers, among them Olazo's contemporaries Virgillio Aviado and Raul Isidro. In 1968, the Philippine Association of Printmakers (PAP) was founded by this new generation of graphic artists. It remains an active force in the local art scene and continues to encourage more practitioners in the graphic medium. Olazo and his wife, Patricia, also helped promote printmaking. They set up 101 Print Workshop in 1981 in their residence to provide space for and assist printmakers in the production of editions. Although this was short-lived, they were able to produce a portfolio of original works by contemporary artists.

The 1970s was a politically charged decade in Philippine history but, ironically, it also was a period when government provided more institutional support for the arts. The creation of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP, inaugurated in 1969) was a significant step on the part of the Marcos government. Directions taken by the state in art patronage, however, eventually became part of its political platform. The Center promoted the forms and styles it wanted the international community to perceive as expressions of Philippine culture. Thus politically oriented expressions were excluded from its programs. In the visual arts, artists exploring abstract and conceptual modes of expression were encouraged through venue grants and other forms of support. The physical space made available to visual artists had a tangible effect on the scale of artworks produced from this period onwards. Large and long gallery halls in the CCP and the now defunct Museum of Philippine Art (MOPA) encouraged artists to explore the expressive possibilities of scale. They began to create large-scale and multi-paneled works. Olazo was among those who responded creatively to the new types and forms of spaces. His first solo exhibition, *The Silkscreen Process*, held at the CCP in 1974 featured a 24-foot silkscreen printed on one roll of paper. Another show on Philippine abstraction was held in February 1978, also at the CCP, which marked the beginning of his series of large-scale *Diaphanous* paintings (7 x 8 feet) rendered in black and white. Positive response from critics and patrons encouraged him to create more for this series.

Outside of state-sponsored venues and activities, the art market particularly in Manila boomed in the 1970s and into the mid-1980s. Several art galleries set up shop in commercial areas within the metropolis. (Most, however, eventually closed after a decade.) Aside from individual collectors, there was a growth in corporate art patronage. The upsurge in the construction of hotels and corporate buildings led to a demand for artworks to decorate interior spaces – from small-scale prints to mural-sized paintings or large-scale sculptures. Lobby areas were much coveted spaces for site-specific works of art. Again, there was a demand for more large-scale works. Exhibitions held in museums then somehow complemented the growing art market.

Exploring Abstraction in Material and Form

Within this socio-political milieu, Olazo matured as an artist. To understand his art is to grasp the vast range of materials and techniques he has experimented with. Rather than working towards specific masterpieces with conventional art practices, his concern has focused on pushing the limits of different materials and processes. The fine art of printmaking is a strong influence in his art. His work experience in advertising and graphic design already signaled his interest in this graphic medium. Olazo first engaged with this process in the 1960s. He would visit the PAP workshop in Leon Guinto St., Manila, and tried his hand in woodcut and etching prints. He also worked at the Print Collections, an art gallery owned by



the late Adiel Arevalo, one of the founding members of PAP. Although the PAP workshop allowed young artists access to its facilities, Olazo decided to have his own press made. He learned different printmaking techniques but developed an affinity with silkscreen, or serigraphy, and collography, or collage intaglio. Both techniques are considered very basic, a quality which appealed to the young printmaker. He found its simplicity almost "natural, just like breathing" and it afforded him to work in an almost spontaneous manner. The printmaking process, generally involves a tedious process not often connected with spontaneity. Yet somehow, Olazo has achieved this quality in his works.

The *Diaphanous* series of prints and paintings evolved in the early 1970s from the graphic process of serigraphy. Olazo first experimented with the pigment. Instead of using the traditional printer's ink that registered flat and opaque images, he used the painter's oil pigments that come in tubes. These have a more translucent quality which when layered achieve different effects of light and texture. Then he experimented further by translating the process from paper to canvas. Like the serigraphs, stenciled patterns were cut out of old newspapers. Pigment is applied either with a brush or by a single run of the squeegee to as many as five layers. This technique may be likened to the old master's way of glazing wherein transparent layers of oil paint are applied thinly over and over until the desired color and saturation are achieved. Olazo emphasized the thin and uneven application of pigment to create variations in texture and value, qualities often related with layers of gauzy fabric.

In his experiments with materials, Olazo improvised a lot. With ordinary transparent plastic, he created a set of ink wash compositions printed in twenty editions. The ink-filled brush is almost tangible since the strokes were immediately photo transferred to a screen using an improvised light box. The gestural and expressionistic brushwork and drippings are a stark contrast from his signature clear-cut forms. Still the overall composition is distinctly his – the uneven texture and overlapping layers.

Conceptual art had a following among Olazo's contemporaries in the 1970s and 1980s. He may not be considered a practitioner but its avant-garde ideas fed his drive to experiment in art processes. One direction conceptual artists took was to almost relinquish control of their work. Thus many adopted the spare and clean look of minimalist art. There was a predetermined approach that could be repeated, even without the artist's physical presence. Working in series and using consistent shapes, some of Olazo's works may be identified with this idea. But this artist would never leave any phase in the production process without his guidance, at the very least. There is a certain physicality in his works that engages the viewer to imagine the artist at work. He admits that this is one aspect he enjoyed, especially in large-scale works which required more physical movement, to put the stenciled forms in place and manipulate the squeegee or brush.

Many visual artists work in series as a way of resolving aesthetic problems. It is no different for Olazo. Although he does not completely abandon earlier series in favor of newer ones; these are drawn together by evolving formalist concerns. The *Permutation* series is an offshoot from the diaphanous compositions but here he used opaque and solid forms. It actually began as a series of twelve handcrafted books with opaque serigraphs printed on each page made out of acetate. As the viewer turns the pages, he or she actually creates a variety of compositions. The concept was considered quite avant-garde then and won him recognition in the 1980 Tokyo Biennale. He later continued this series on paper and canvas. As suggested by mathematical term, Olazo worked on a range of possible compositions as he varied texture, color, shape and opacity. More recent works from this series were rendered in simpler elements – black and white or red and white – with only an outline to define the contours of its hard-edged forms.

SBW#2
1987
SCREENPRINT
76 X 61 CM

SBW#6
1987
SCREENPRINT
76 X 61 CM

KASUY
2004
OIL ON CANVAS
45 X 60 CM

Pleasurable Visions and Illusions of Depth

That distinct shape encountered in Olazo's abstract compositions could not be described in one word. When asked how he arrived at this curvilinear and sharp-edged form, he simply attributes it to chance. Abstract forms have sometimes been related to the medium in which it was executed. In the case of Olazo, can this significant pattern be associated with the form registered as a squeegee scrapes the ink through a screen in one bold sweeping movement? Whatever its origins are, its variations are encountered consistently in his abstract compositions. Even in his figurative works, semblances of this shape are present.

The forms that abound in Olazo's works actually defy simplicity. They are neither regular nor symmetrical. They have an almost organic feel, perhaps, because they are still grounded on nature. These pervade in his figurative paintings and drawings – such as the faceted surface of rock formations; the undulating mountain ranges seen from afar; a cluster of trees; the entangled figures of the mother and child; or even the complex figure of a female nude. *Diaphanous* still life compositions include curvilinear forms such as that of the anthurium, the succulent Philippine mango, and the ripe fruit of the cashew nut. (The latter brings back childhood memories for him.)

Olazo belongs to that generation of abstractionists who continue to treasure the benefits of good draftsmanship. After having established his reputation in non-figurative art, he surprised the art scene in 1978 with an exhibition of nude paintings and drawings. It was then that one art critic, the late Raymundo Albano, described his abstract works as “insinuated silhouettes of the nude” and thus established a complementary link between the artist's abstract and representational works. As one analyses his drawings of female nudes, one cannot help but notice the complexity of some poses, particularly the foreshortened ones. If the limbs, torso, and head were translated into simplified parts, would the figure transform into one of his diaphanous and layered compositions?

The translucent quality in his abstract and figurative works has distinguished Olazo from other artists in the country. This becomes more apparent by his minimal use of color, often in monochromes or in analogous hues. He creates an illusion of depth by dividing the picture plane into horizontal layers, instead of lateral facets. The layered forms are perceived as transparent. This also creates a luminous quality as if light radiates from each layer. A deeper sense of space is thus achieved and further so by manipulating texture gradients between fine and rough finishing.

Experiencing Olazo's works has been compared to listening to music. The completeness of his works – whether printed, painted, or drawn, whether abstract or figurative – lies in the complexity of his compositions. These may be made up of simple forms viewed together, as in a harmonious chord; or a coming together of separate independent melodic parts, as in a polyphonic structure. Either way, he is able to remind us that vision is not merely a mechanical recording of objects and elements. Vision, as Rudolf Arnheim describes, is “the apprehension of significant structural parts.” In his abstract compositions and figurative works, Olazo guides us through a pleasurable visual experience and gives significance to objects and forms we would otherwise not take notice of.

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The Truth is Still in the Beautiful

JONATHAN OLAZO

'For rarely are sons similar to their fathers; most are worse and a few are better than their fathers.' – Homer

I grew up as a painter's son. But I think I grew up as a painter's painter-son too. I realized soon when I became curious of my father's world that he was a great man and a well-loved artist. I was the happy fly and the listening wallflower to his labor and triumphs. In my teen years, fellow printmakers and painters would flock to 101 Workshop, a printmaking studio my Dad and Mom had setup to facilitate doing fine prints for artists. I was a mischievous boy and I would vigorously turn the spindle of Dad's etching press, role-playing as a sailor. My eyes traced with wonder the makeshift crisscrossing of wires in clips in the yard in front of our house, where the printmakers let freshly printed editions hang and dry. And here was where everybody met. They hung out, talked about their work, gossiped about other artists, got into heated debates and learned from each other. I treasure vague memories of Dad being on stage and receiving accolades. I was able to piece together later in life what these ceremonies were about. Etched in my soul are memorable 'subplots' I attached to these. A chicken 'lollipop' cocktail I nibbled during the big award ceremony held in the City Hall of Manila, which I know tasted very good. Another episode is a long wait in a public plaza in Dad's hometown. It was a humid evening of listening to crackling voices over a public address system and having to sporadically stand on a rattan chair just to get a glimpse of Dad. Dad's friends were very much part and parcel of who he is as a painter. You can tell by how his swagger quickens and his laughter turns robust when they meet up. Everybody gave a word of respect and admiration for his work. And he reciprocated. I knew too how Dad kept a private confidence about his work and how good his work is. I say this because a father confides in his son.

I wasn't interested in Dad's job, or at least I feigned that indifference. The resistance was due to adolescent pride trying not to be what my father was. But I gave in. And once I did, I went on asking him questions like: 'how will I be a great artist?' His rebuttal would always be in nuggets: 'to be a great artist you have to be a very good person foremost' and 'a hard working mediocre artist is better than a lazy and talented one'. I would relish these talks because I got a fresh sense of who my father is on a level that comprised a big part of who he is as a painter. It was my art education as well, especially from a man regarded by many as excellent in his art. He often told of his neophyte years, of how exciting and full it was. He would describe in detail favorite and relevant works that he did because they changed the course of his life, artistic and personal.

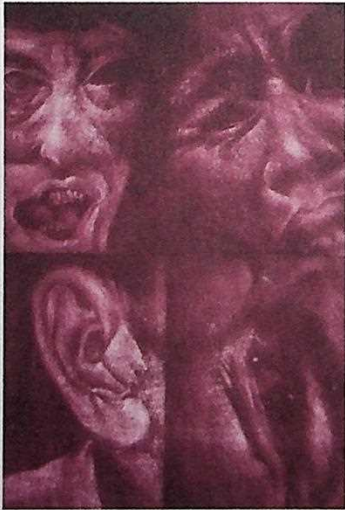
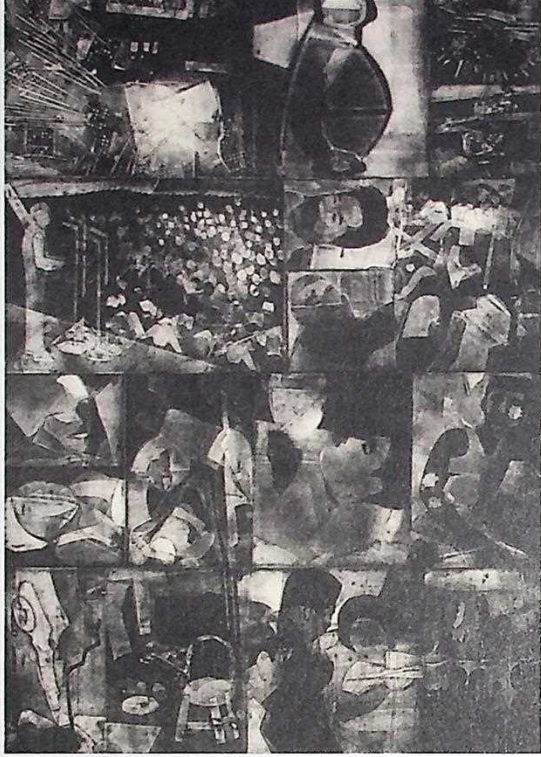
Dad started out as a printmaker. Almost always he would tell how three fine prints proved pivotal and had put him on the 'map' of the Philippine art scene. The first of the three is a collagraph entitled '*listen...*', printed in 1972. Collagraphy is a printmaking process utilizing glued paper and board in which protruding parts would come in contact and ink the paper to be printed on, thus making a mark on it. In my opinion, Dad's technique has an added extra. I did some collagraphs early on as a printmaker, and I could only make very graphic prints with bold lines because I could only manage non-gradient tonal values. Dad's technique, on the other hand, uniquely reproduces subtleties in tones producing final images that look like they have drawn with actual pastel or pencil. His prints evoke volume and mass by a subtle use of light and shadow. I deduce this means his templates are meticulously made to carve out subtle recesses and protrusions. I would like to think,

too, that maybe he has found a new technique to go about this problem, and has kept it a secret! 'listen...' is important for Dad because it won for him a Printmakers' Association Prize, and he would say this was his private commentary on the tense circumstances in 1972. The Philippines was under martial rule. Depicting four portraits in four equal box-grids of a blind man, a head angled exposing a deaf ear, and a deaf-mute, Dad would say he did this work because he felt everybody lived in fear during those times, and nobody dared raise a complaint; which ran contra to a society espousing that very freedom on the verge of losing it. The second of the three is a midsize collagraph entitled 'Plaza Miranda' or 'Shame', printed in 1971. Dad tells how he was moved to tears and disgust by the killing of innocent bystanders and attendees. He switches to introspective calm in the tone of disclosing conspiracy theories in recounting the events leading to the tragedy. The time was before Martial Rule, and Plaza Miranda was the place where the 'Miting de Avance' was held, the ultimate congregating of the opposition party in a final call to vote. The image of this print is broken down into modular picture images of variable sizes laid out in a non-symmetrical grid. Dad explains he wanted to reference the brevity and urgency of news headlines and that he had based the images and its sizes on the actual photo clippings he gathered from newspapers and tabloids. The third of the three is a screen print measuring around 36 inches by 50 feet, done in 1984. Shown as 'Museum Hallway Project – 50 Feet long Serigraph', my take from conversing with Dad is that he wanted to do a print that would interact with the unique setup posed by the exhibition space and that would challenge the limitations he knew of serigraph printmaking. Serigraphy is using a screen and stencil to make a plate and squeegee to ink the screen and make a print on any support was used. What he decided on was to make a continuous print extending to fifty feet that would cover the entire horizontal length of the gallery wall and print out an arcing form without breaks and will flawlessly from end to end of the print. Dad says this is one of the most remarkable artworks he would do, willing himself to take on technical challenges requiring him to unravel absurd solutions. He would say this is what modern art is about, to be intuitive when it comes to experimentation in discovering new things and getting to resolutions of problems arising from the making of artworks. Dad is also proud of this work because he had to use the street outside our house to have enough space to lay out the paper to make the print and for it to dry.

Dad gets praise for all the genres he has dabbled in. A very famous painter he has regard for and considers a senior quipped: 'Will the real Olazo please stand up?' I would surmise this comment is not entirely a positive review, for I would say that art during Dad's time was an unadulterated effort to stick to one style, the style you are attached to, and to do that style over and above for rest the of your entire artistic career. 'Who is the real Olazo?' I, too, would ask myself. I choose to think Dad would answer the inquiry matter-of-factly black and white, and avoid the tongue-tedious grey. Instead of saying 'no, there is no order', he'd just admit there is, and dismiss drawing the nude and the painting of landscapes as practice for his abstract paintings. Ironically, you will catch him commenting that 'you will not be a complete artist if you do not draw the nude, or paint a landscape'. Maybe there is an order but all genres are of importance too? Is it so because to paint abstract is a pre-program for every artist in his right mind to undergo? Is it a rite of passage obligatory to the truly aspiring? Or is it because abstraction is an obvious point of culmination for the variable genres Dad has made mince of? Because no other painter in pre-history has done a *Diaphanous* nor in subsequent history, does the burden of originality make it Dad's style?

I took the liberty of making my postulations about Dad's work with the goal of trying to find a gist that will link the genres. Easily, the buck stops at the mere declaration of – 'the artworks in question are all done by the hand of Olazo anyway! Isn't that justifiable cause?' But I egged myself on to look and look at the pictures to get at that vital gist. And I think the rationales I got to are obvious and mandatory for each and every artist that has reason to be looked up to. One: Dad has his style to get at simplified form. All artists have styles at perceiving and replicating form. Dad's way may seem to be offshoots of styles that influenced him, but isn't that the nature of style and as legal as it can be? You steal in the end and not just copy. And what focuses his perceiving? It is the beautiful form. It may be innate and/or acquired, but Dad knows what is beautiful to him. And I think this is his manner of replicating form; he gets to what is beautiful and negates that which is not; but he is very wary of over-gentrifying. His delivery of line to articulate a form is in accordance with his perfect timing. He is aware that too much prolonging of a seduction destroys the beautiful eventually. Beautiful art for Dad lies in that one spontaneous and finely timed gesture. Two: Dad has his style of using pictorial space. What do I mean? I notice if a 'monolithic' 'object' (a female nude can be a 3-dimensional object?) (I mean monolithic because the image is imposing with regard to the size of the pictorial field and the rest of the elements in the picture are organized just to enhance this object) is the subject for a picture Dad painted, whether it be a rock formation, or a cylindrical nude form, or a massive *Diaphanous* shape, Dad frames in accordance to the scale and size of the pictorial space. The object is allowed to float in its own contrived gravity and negates the mimicry of natural fields of vision and perspective. He crops the negative space so that it will not be spacious and cause too much attention-grabbing, and not be too vacuous (or absent) that the subject is not given ease at being looked at. I think Dad's attitude about layout is still out of the modernist box: the modern is about aiming at a particular autonomy inherent in pictures. It does not aim to mimic the outside world. But it (modern art) takes something from our world and puts it into that other world with its own anarchic physical laws.

At the time of writing, I'm looking at a diptych *Diaphanous* and scrutinizing the painting. I also have a good bird's eye-view of a big painting imaged with overlapping linear shapes called *Permutation*. As a would-be painter, I cannot help myself and interact with the paintings and just ruminate. I have questions, at least three. One. Those gorgeous shapes with sinuous orchestrations, should they mean anything? I have a vague impression of a critique on Dad's *Diaphanous* by a respected lady of Philippine Art which goes something like: 'Olazo's shapes and forms are like wings- angel's wings'. And I would ask Dad if they do mean that, and he would say 'not' – that *Diaphanous* doesn't really signify any material object, but he is accommodating and welcomes any sort of equivocation. I've heard him acknowledge the associations and readings that have been made about his work: 'the forms and shapes are like dancers in choreography', and 'I see the Nude form in Olazo's



PLAZA MIRANDA
1971
COLLAGRAPH

LISTEN
1972
COLLAGRAPH

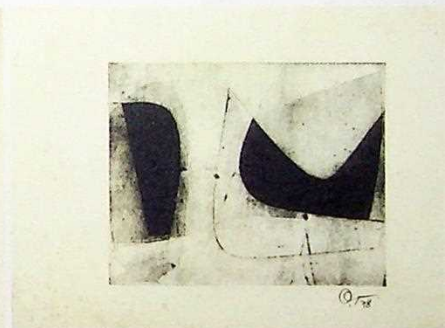
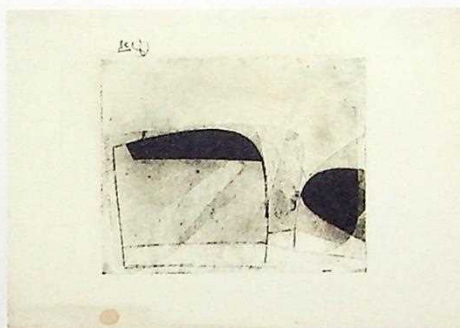
Diaphanous shapes'. I would say Dad is agreeable with the equivocations because they betray 'incidental images'- images that are read and have a vibe when we look at the shapes in the paintings. Isn't it so that Dad's life experiences got in the way of forming his sense of art and taste? And he admits his obvious preoccupation with these: 'Angel's Wings' cull his faith and devotion. Dancers on a choreographed line his passion for drawing the female form. That they look like landscapes from his admiration of formations in the real world. This leads me to my next question of three. Two. What is the *Diaphanous* in relation to the linear progression of Abstract Art? I understand that abstract art has at its core the mission of getting to 'truth'- an inherent questioning of the ability to paint a 'lie' - to make a representation of the actual world- of mimicry. It is a 'disenchantment' of a sort that sees putting under the microscope every gesture, surface quality, and *décor liaisons*, and plays executioner of these wayward qualities of painting. What is the criterion for execution? Modern art is about the new, so it would be anything that is not new. So what makes something new? The new changes always. Circumstantial attitudes determine this novelty. And what about the conclusion made about this forward motion: 'abstract painting was meant to bring forth pure *parousia* of its own essence, to tell the final truth and thereby terminate its course'. (Yve-Alain Bois, 'Archaeology', 'Painting as Model'). I would stake the obvious. *Diaphanous* perhaps in some way has intertwined with the paths of the abstraction of this kind, but now has left the path. I would like to believe at the onset it was in cahoots but jettisoned its later ideals. It ceased to conform to its continuous pragmatic purification and attitude of constant refrain from painting a painting that has already seen a foregone conclusion. And why? I wouldn't say it got stuck in a rut and just couldn't cope and serve that abstraction's linear progression. I think Dad just chose to adhere and champion those 'early' ideals. Ideals, if I may say, that spoke of his era- the era of high-modernist renaissance. *Diaphanous* is about the building up of fragments of forms for a harmonious result. Its main thing is to uphold the classical abstract. And it posits itself for that observance of the awe, believing that truth is still in the beautiful. Which brings me to my last question. Three. What is a *Diaphanous* for me? A *Diaphanous* painting is iconic of an era as well as a matrix of works an artist has done over a period of time. It is relevant to me as young painter growing up in the early 80's.

How? My generation may well be a rebellious one to Dad's generation, but after witnessing the ism's of many a trend, it is an attractive place for anyone who has grown cynical about Cynicism's bag of tricks. It is a place I'd like to be in. Is it okay to deem necessary the ideals and attitudes in this place - take them away from its linear history and put it in my time? I believe it is, as long as my idea of what is art will be given newfound cause and I am privy to a convenience a painter looks hard for in having less doubts of his art lacking reason to exist, for the time being at least.

8 May 2007

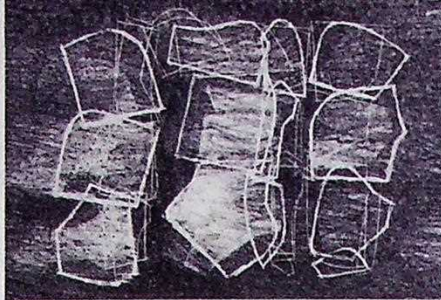
Jonathan Olazo is a practising artist, and a winner of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines 13 Artists Award (1994). Text and art criticism play an important role in his work, and writes on art on occasion.

WORKS ON PAPER

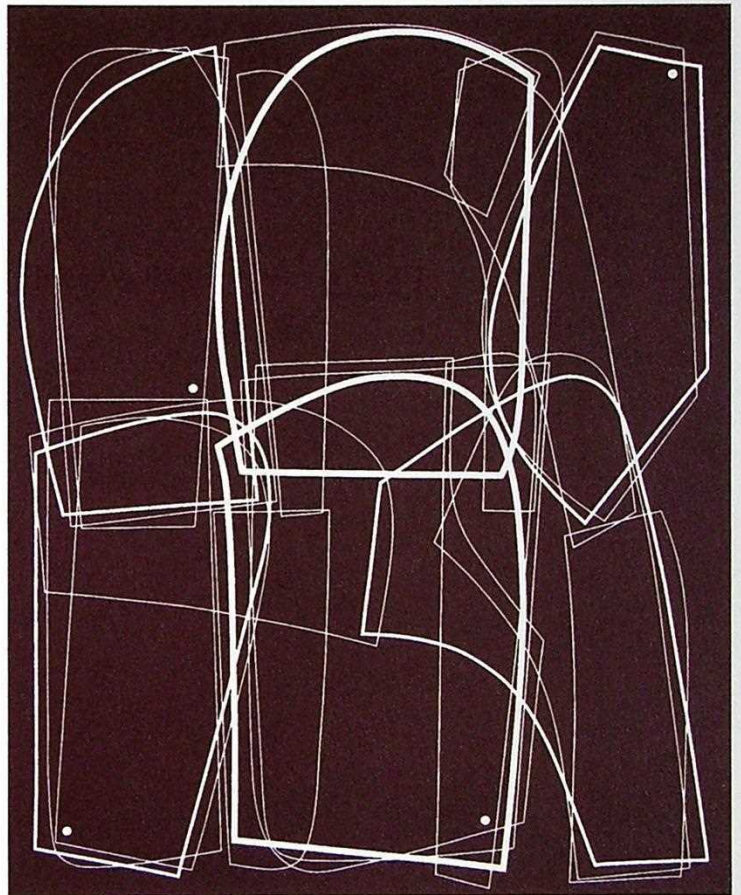


B+W SERIES, A/P
CA 1974
COLLAGE INTAGLIO
23 X 28 CM

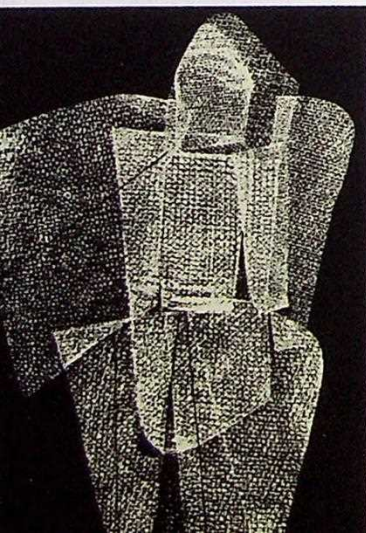
B+W SERIES, A/P
CA 1974
COLLAGE INTAGLIO
23 X 28 CM



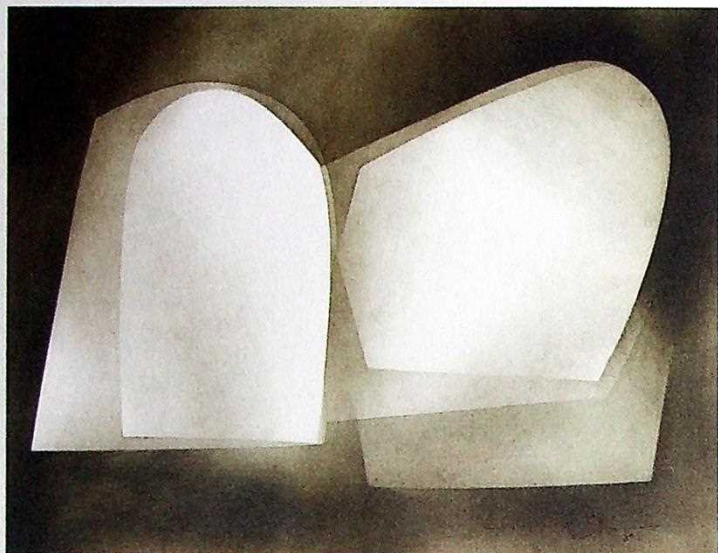
PERMUTATION LP1, 6/20
1995
LITHOGRAPH
21 X 32 CM



PERMUTATION SP 8/25
1990
SCREEN PRINT
445 X 355 CM

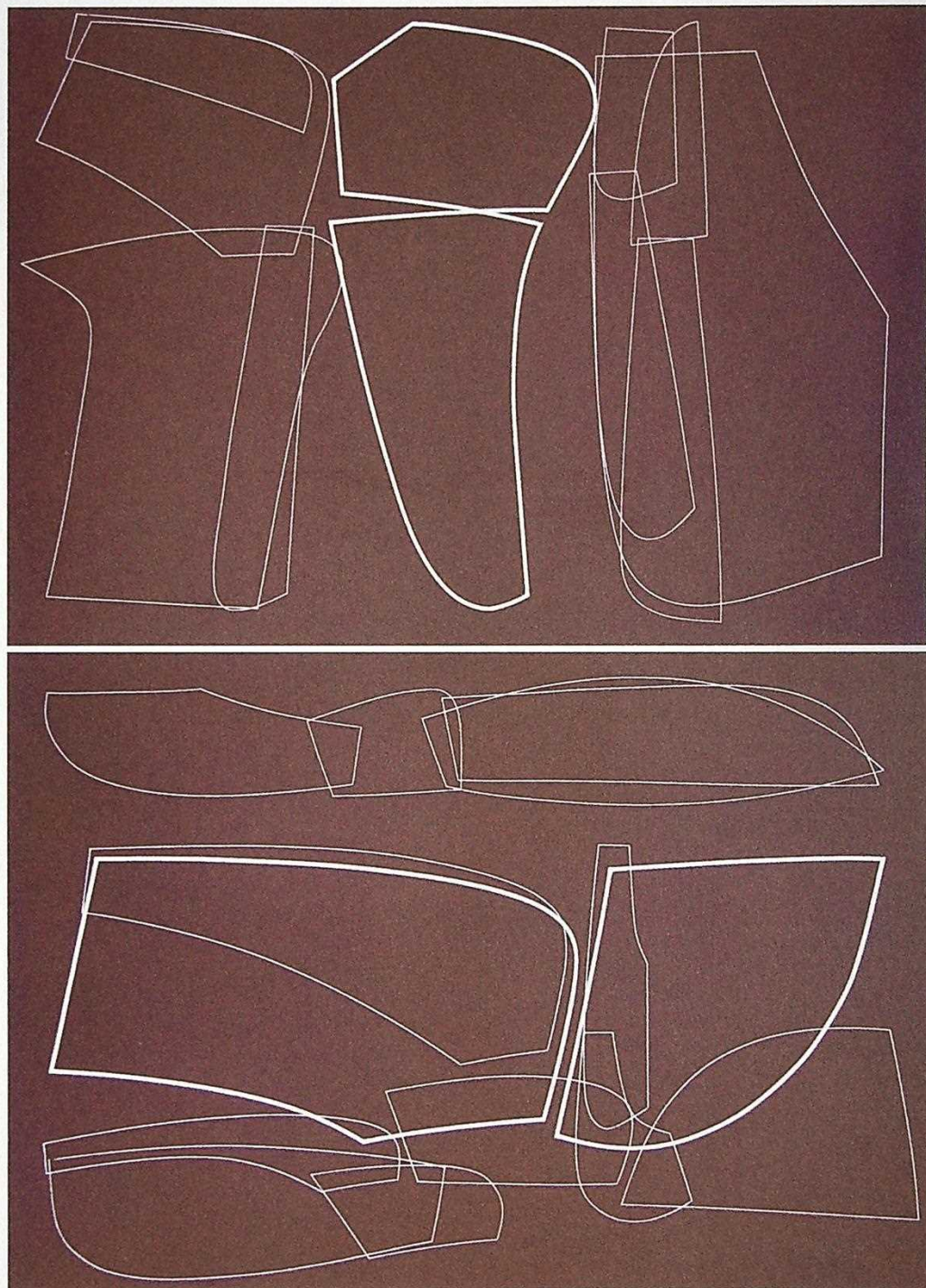


UNTITLED, 8/15
1988
SCREENPRINT
27 X 22 CM



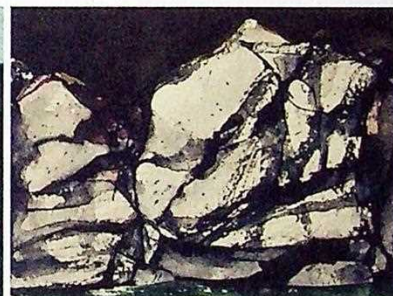
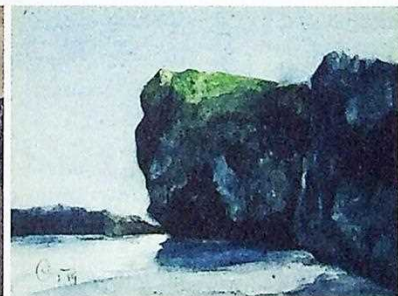
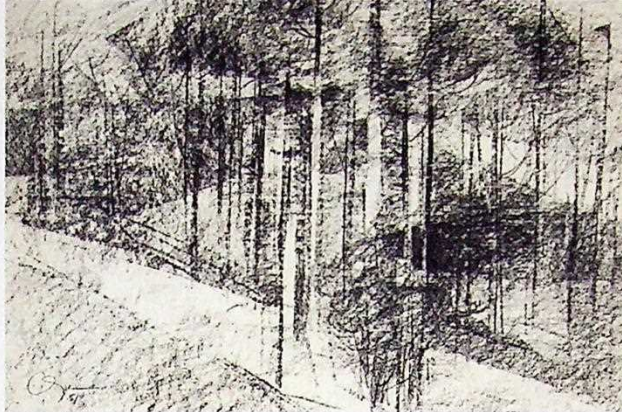
UNTITLED - ABSTRACT FORMS
1980
PLANTIGRAPH
25.5 X 33 CM

MINI - DIAPHANOUS #19
1979
OIL ON CANVAS
28 X 40.5 CM



PERMUTATION SERIES II, NO. 132
1990
ACRYLIC ON PAPER
61 X 86.5 CM

PERMUTATION SERIES II, NO. 131
1990
ACRYLIC ON PAPER
61 X 86.5 CM



LANDSCAPE - BAGUIO
1983
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
30.5 X 45.7 CM

LANDSCAPE - BAGUIO
1983
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
30.5 X 45.7 CM

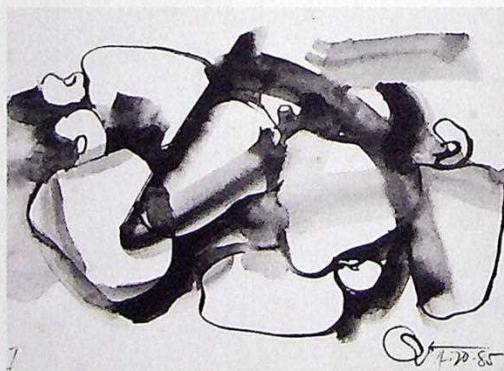
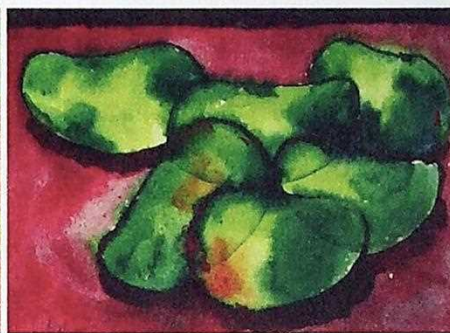
LANDSCAPE - MONTALBAN
1984
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

LANDSCAPE - BALINEN ISLAND
1989
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

LANDSCAPE - MONTALBAN
1985
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

LANDSCAPE - MARIKINA
1994
PASTEL ON PAPER
33 X 48 CM





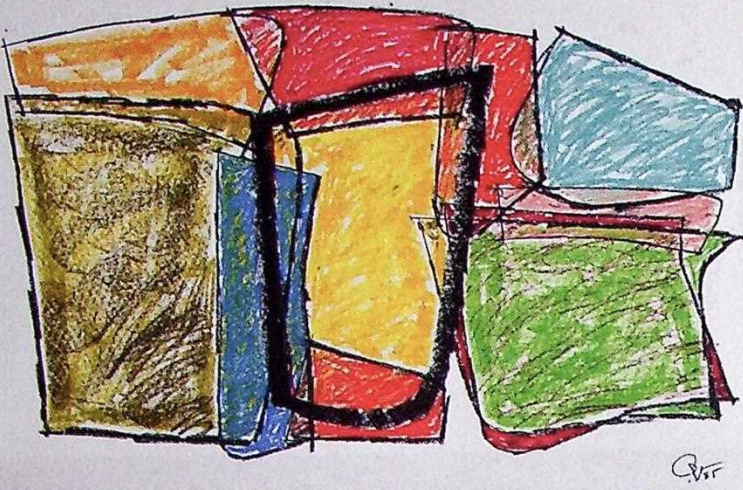
STILL LIFE - MANGOES
1985
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

STILL LIFE - MANGOES
1985
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

STILL LIFE - MANGOES
1985
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

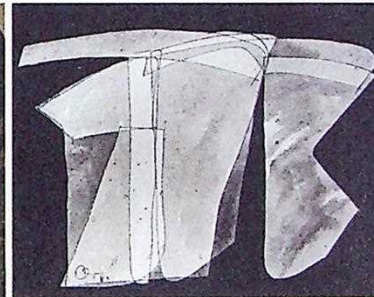
STILL LIFE - KASUY
1985
TEMPERA ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

STILL LIFE - MANGOES
1985
TEMPERA ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM



PERMUTATION SERIES III NO. 4
1991
OIL PASTEL ON PAPER
63.5 X 76 CM

UNTITLED - ABSTRACT FORMS
1985
OIL PASTEL ON PAPER
22 X 28 CM



UNTITLED - ABSTRACT FORMS
1985
TEMPERA ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

UNTITLED - ABSTRACT FORMS
1985
TEMPERA ON PAPER
23 X 30.5 CM

UNTITLED
1975
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
25 X 28 CM

UNTITLED - ABSTRACT FORMS
1980
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
28 X 35.5 CM



NUDE
1968
PASTEL ON PAPER
65 X 51 CM

NUDE
1978
PASTEL ON PAPER
48 X 32 CM

NUDE
1978
CONTE CRAYON ON PAPER
75.5 X 55 CM

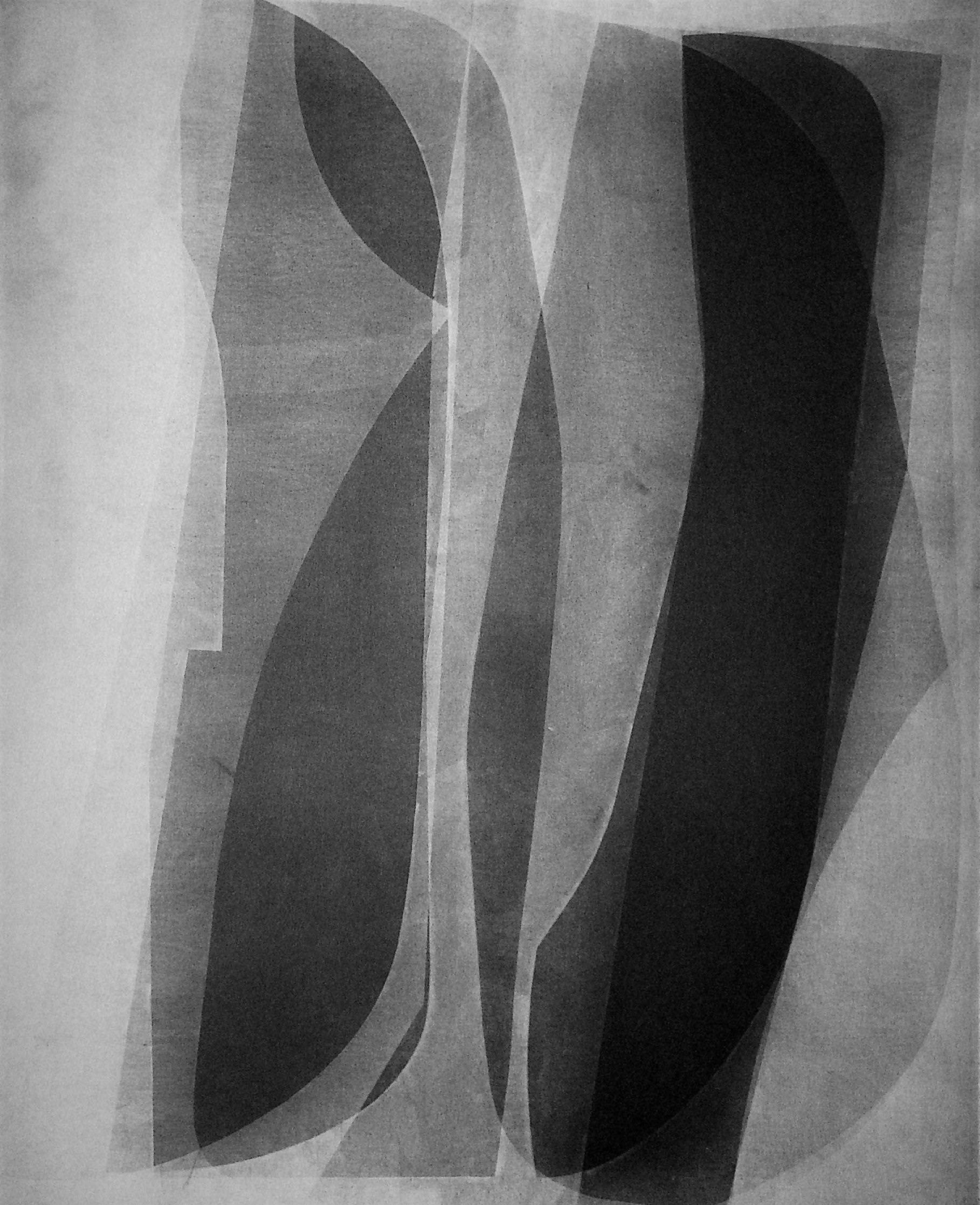
NUDE
1996
CHARCOAL ON PAPER
76 X 106.5 CM



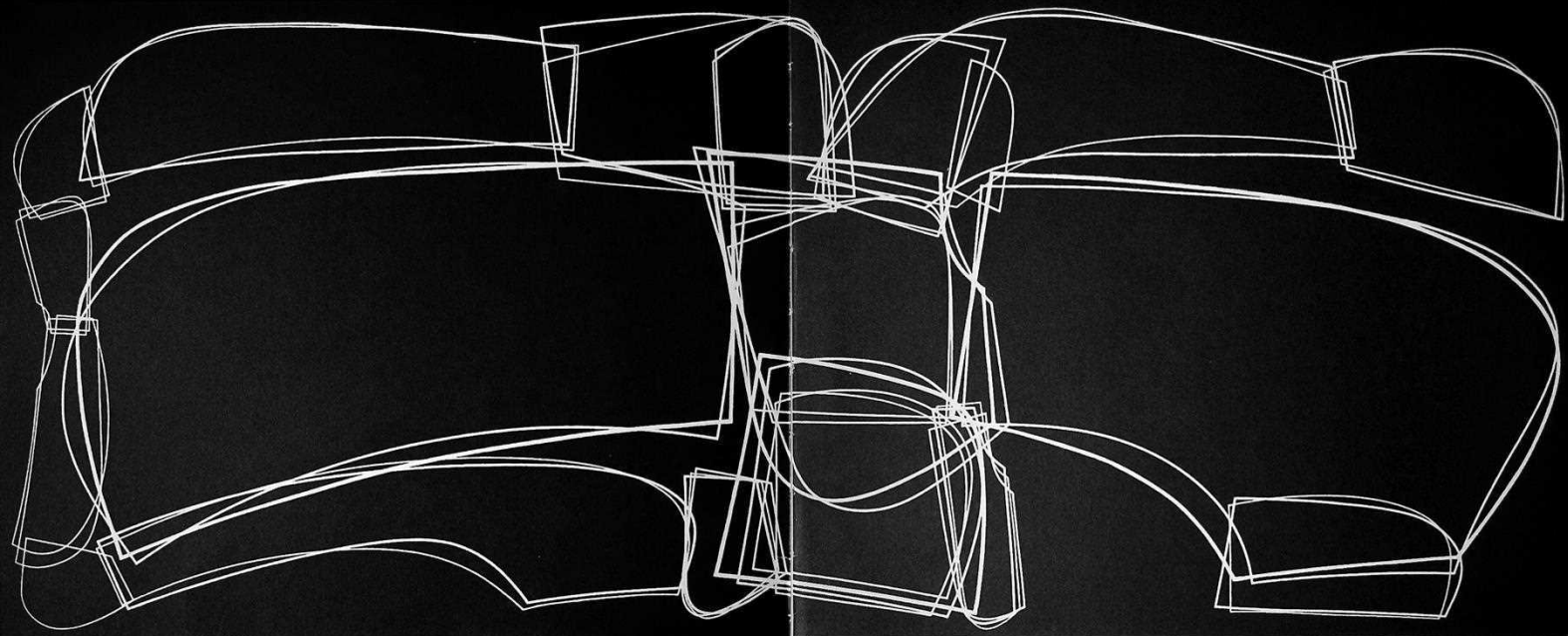
PAINTINGS

DIAPHANOUS 177
1979
OIL ON CANVAS
94 X 78 CM





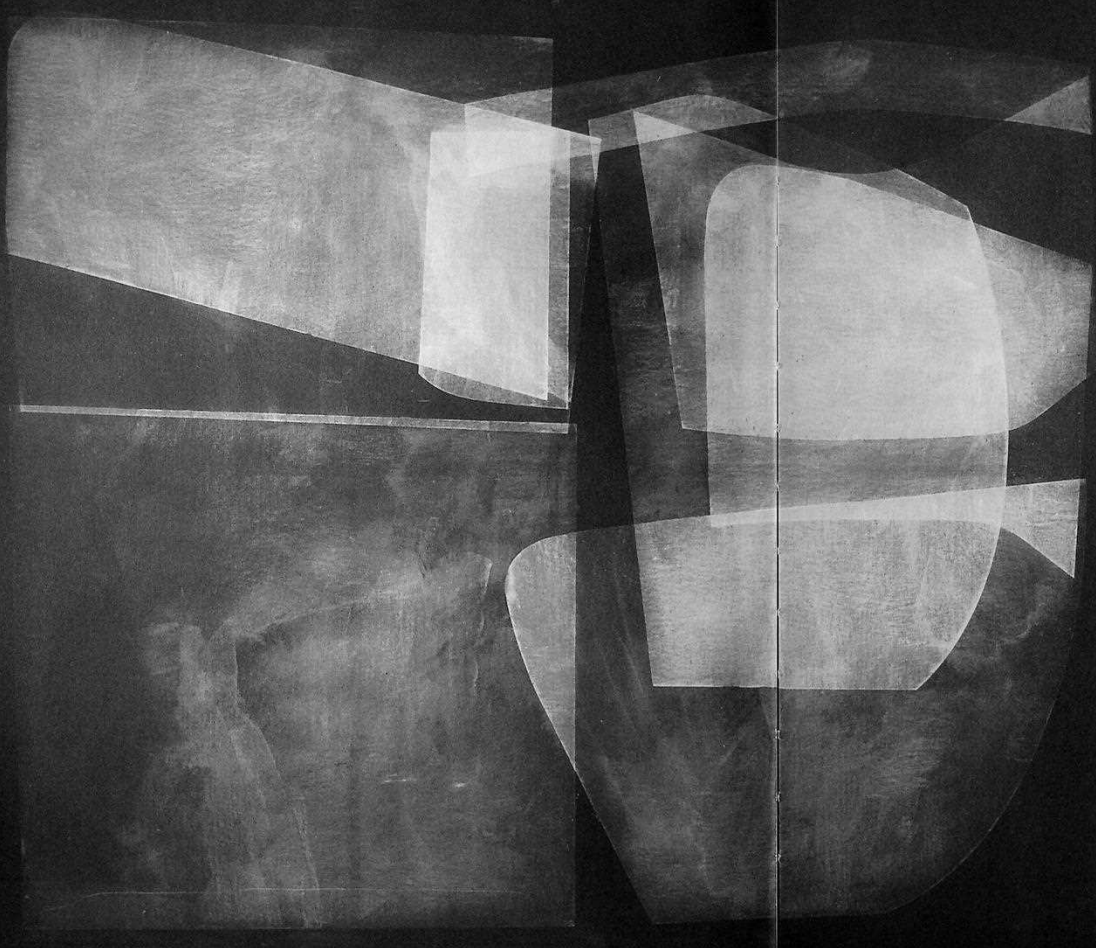




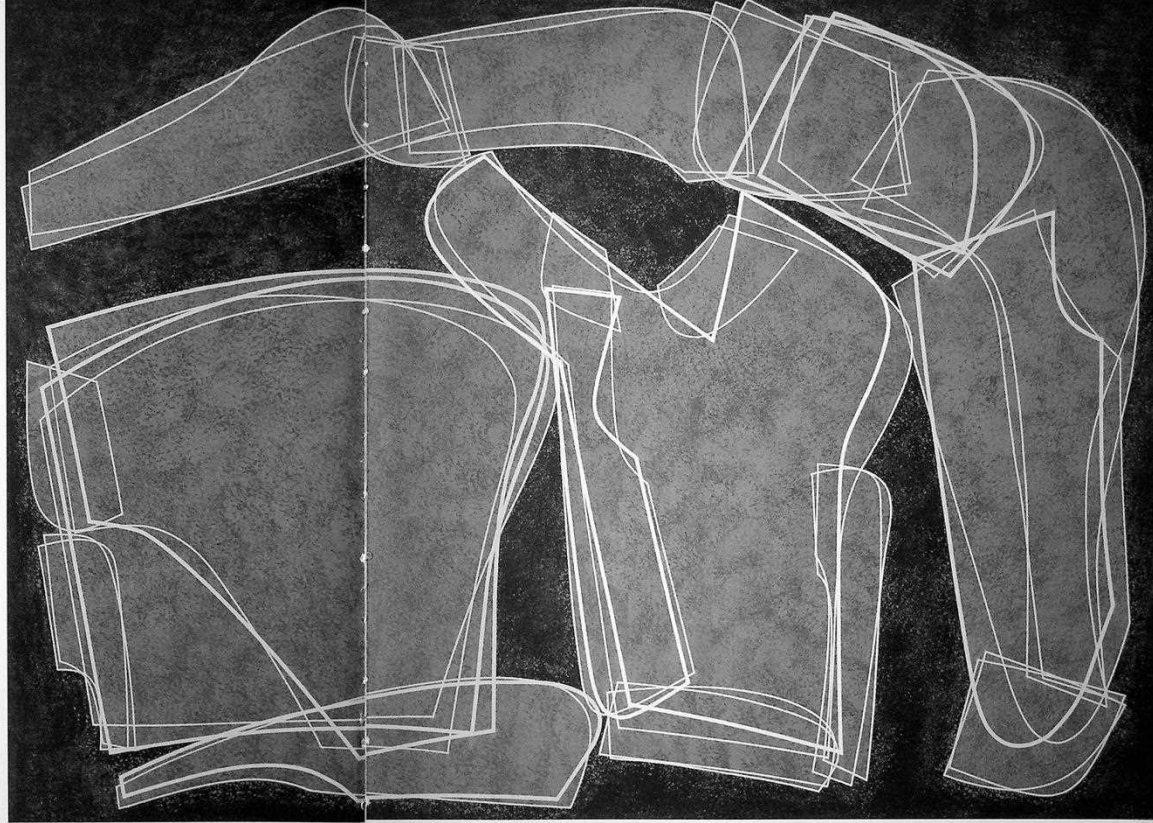
PERMUTATION SERIES 9 NO. 116 (B) - 1990
1004
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
122 X 305 CM

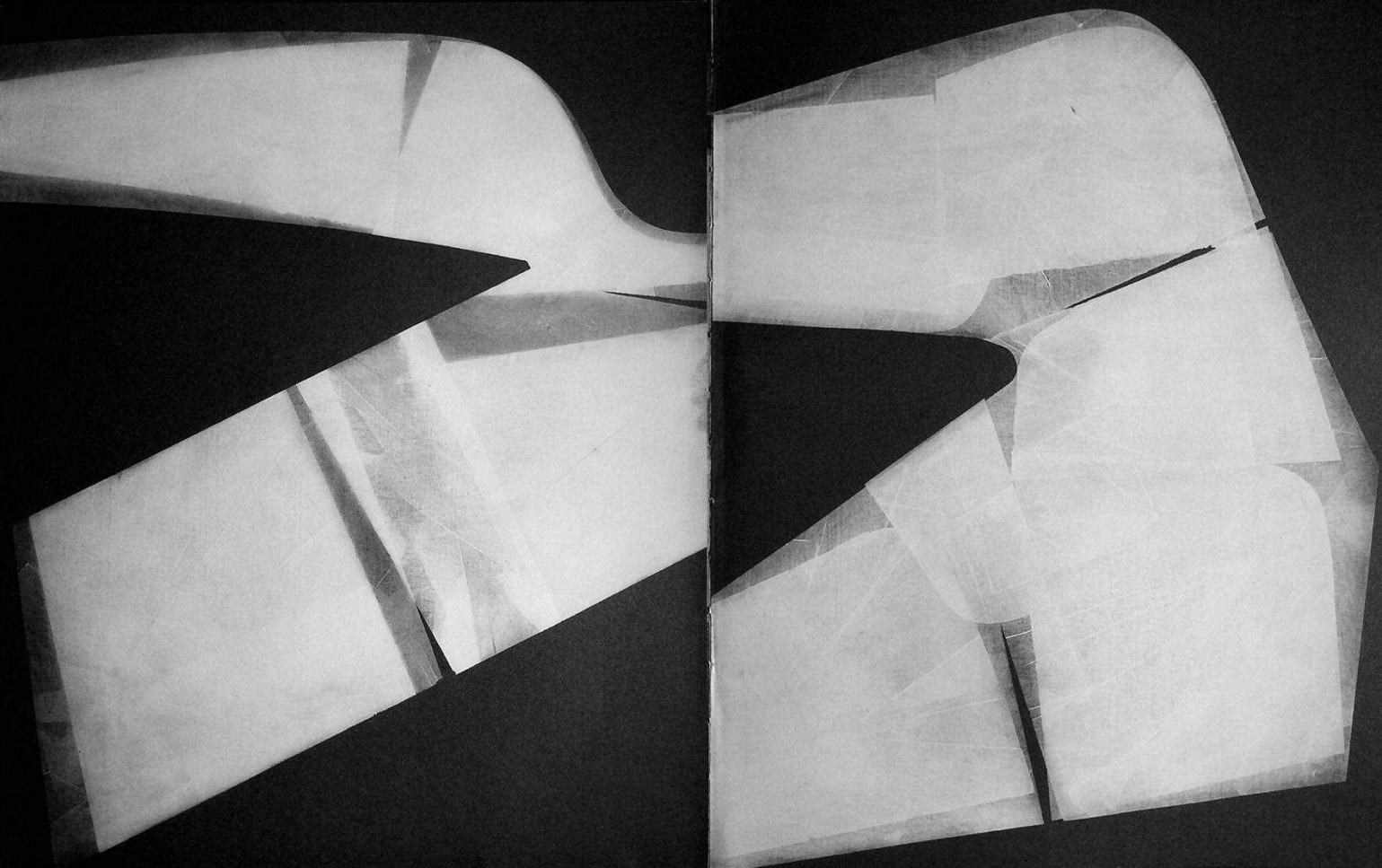


DISPARANOUS II - 1990
100%
ON DA CANVAS
24 X 36 CM



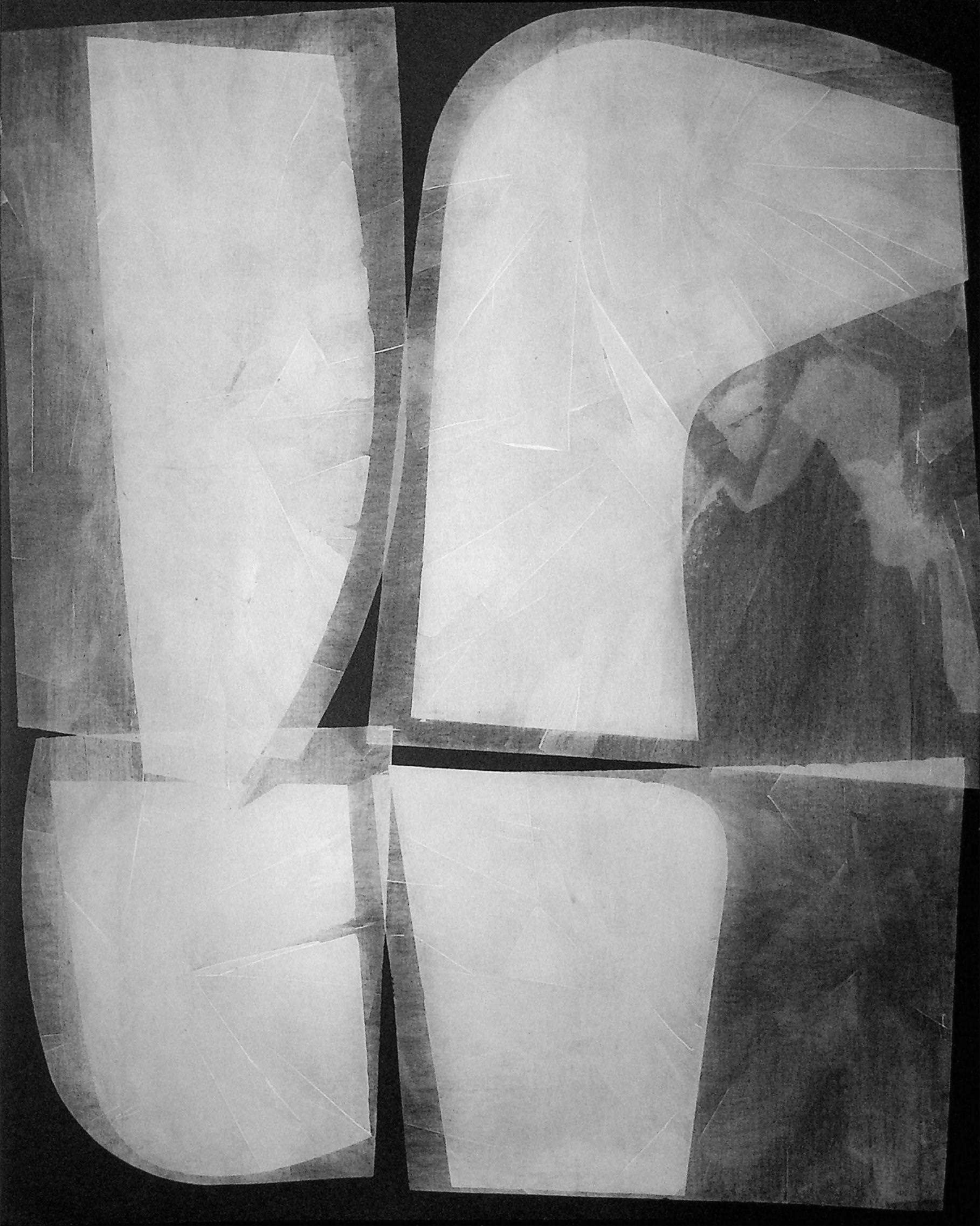
DIAPYCNUS B - XX
2017
OIL ON CANVAS
210 X 140 CM

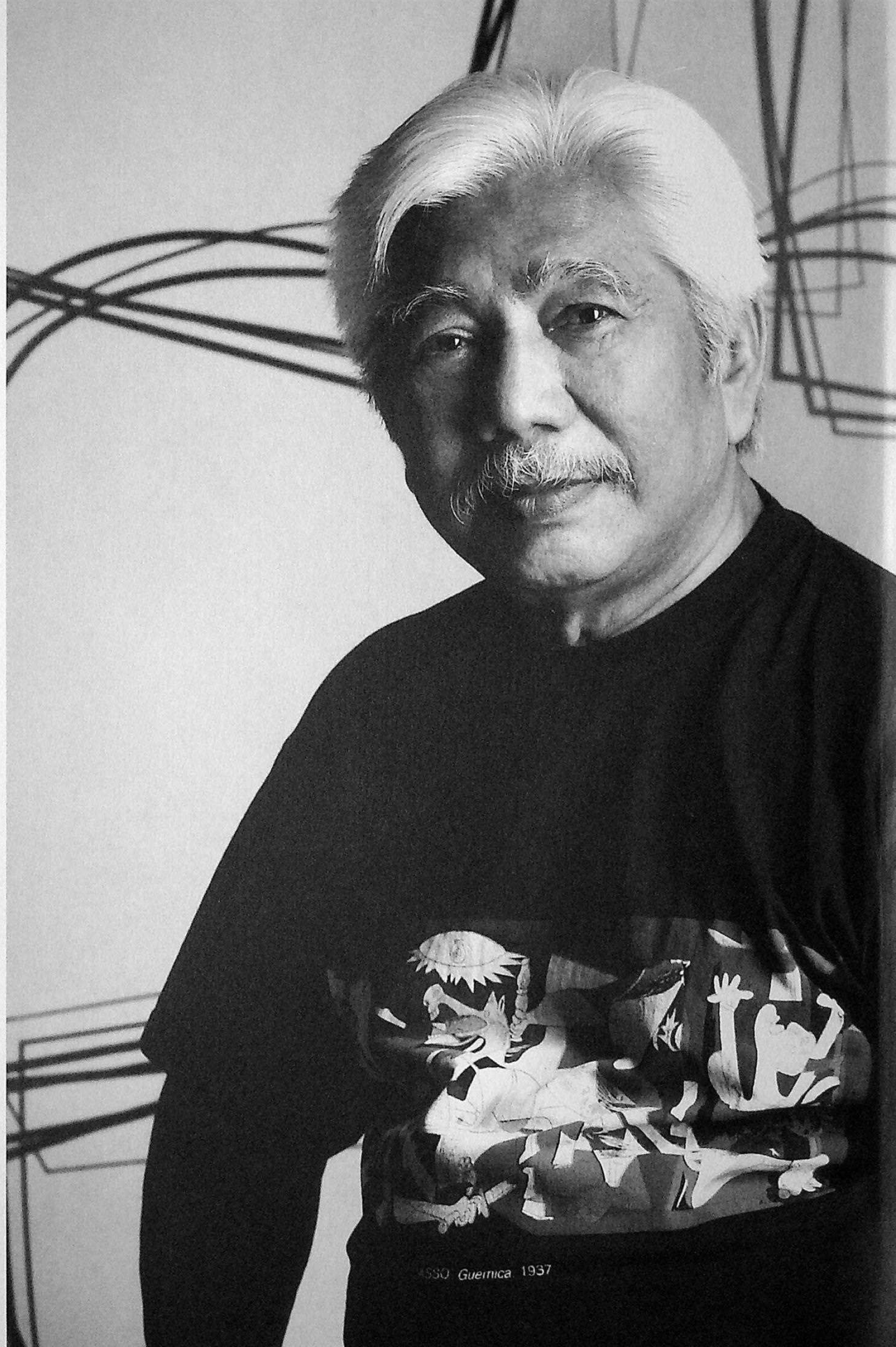




DIAPHANOUS B - CXIII
1994
OIL ON CANVAS
152.5 X 244 CM

DIAPHANOUS B - CXXIX
1994
OIL ON CANVAS
152.5 X 122 CM





ASSO Guernica 1937

ROMULO G. OLAZO

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

1963 - 1968

Active and consistent prize winner in Annual Art Competitions conducted inter-agency by the Philippine Advertising Counselors, Inc.

1969

First participation in a national show – the 22nd Annual Exhibition, Art Association of the Philippines. Of which Alfredo R. Roces notes in his "Light and Shadow" column, "Various names are not familiar to us and yet their works bear watching, such as Romulo Olazo and his "Ruffled Structure".

Early paintings, which are abstract, already show artist's concern for the material of the medium.

Introduced to and became interested in printmaking towards the latter part of the year. Participated for the first time in the 2nd Annual Graphic Art Competition and Exhibition, Philippine Association of Printmakers.

1970 - 1971

Decided that printmaking, a new medium in the Philippines, was the vehicle to break into Philippine Art: Thus continued interest in printmaking, going into experimental media, particularly collage intaglio. Won purchase awards and major prizes at PAP Competitions.

B & W collagraph series first shown in a two-man show at Hidalgo Gallery.

Prints shown at Pratt Institute, New York and II Triennale, India.

1972

Chosen one of the Thirteen Artists by the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Exhibited various explorations in screen printing.

Joined the Saturday Group. Professional contacts with HR. Ocampo, Jose T. Joya, Cesar Legaspi, Rod Perez, Alfredo R. Roces, and other artists.

Two paintings shown at Miladay Art Center from which Diaphanous paintings evolved.

1973

One of three printmakers who represented the Philippines in the XIth Biennial de Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Interest in painting re-awakened by winning third prize in the Miladay Art Center-Abbot Lighter Painting Contest.

Aside from continued interest in printmaking, also active in sketching and drawing with the Saturday Group.

1974

First one-man show at the Small Gallery, Cultural Center of the Philippines, "Silkscreen and its Possibilities." Included a 24 feet serigraph.

Second one-man show at the Luz Gallery featuring Diaphanous paintings and continuation of B & W collagraph prints series.

Towards the end of the year resigned as Executive Art Director of the Philippine Advertising Counselors, Inc.

1975

Made the acquaintance of Vicente Manansala leading to on-the-spot/"paisaje" watercolor sessions and nude drawing sessions.

1976

Interest notably shifting to Diaphanous paintings.

Started research/experimentation on handmade paper as an art medium.

1977

Exhibited the results of studies/researches on handmade paper as an art medium. Included huge cast paper shown at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and at the Ayala Museum.

1978

First big scale Diaphanous paintings in black and white. Significant shows both at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and Museum of Philippine Art.

One-man show of nudes in various media – pastel, charcoal, crayon, ink. Included a life-size nude done in crayon-sanguine and charcoal at Galerie Dominique.

1979

One-man show at Luz Gallery. Continuation of big scale Diaphanous paintings in black and white.

Won an Honorable Mention Award at the 11th International Biennial Exhibition of Prints in Tokyo, Japan.

Renewed interest in printmaking with the possibility of establishing a print workshop. Honored with the Araw ng Maynila "Kalinangan Award" for painting.

Travelled to Tokyo, Hongkong and Taipei.

1980

Participated in several international shows and exhibitions in Hongkong, Indonesia, The Hague, Netherlands, and Fukuoka, Japan. With the Cultural Center of the Philippines, organized a printmaking exhibition-workshop at the University of the Philippines, Iloilo. Started 101 Workshop on a modest scale with the publication of original print folios of Ray Albano, Ang Kiukok, Roberto Chabet, Agustin Goy, Ileana Lee, Fernando Modesto, Nonon Padilla and Ephraim Samson.

Assisted in the repainting and restoration of the Manansala mural at the National Press Club and the 14 Stations of the Cross, University of the Philippines, Diliman.

Selected as one of five outstanding finalists by Mobil Oil Philippines in their Awards for Philippine Art.

1981

First one-man show outside the Philippines with an exhibition of oil paintings at Taipei, R.O.C., closely followed by another one-man show at Luz Gallery, also featuring oil paintings.

Towards the latter part of the year, presented at the Cultural Center of the Philippines Museum Hallway a project consisting of one artwork – a 50 feet long serigraph.

Selected as one of 5 Outstanding Living Artists by critics Leonidas Benesa, Rod Para-Perez and Emmanuel Torres.

1982

Exhibited thirteen large scale black and white Diaphanous paintings at the Main Gallery, Cultural Center of the Philippines. Sizes range from 4 x 8 ft, to 8 x 8 ft, to 8 x 12 ft, the biggest Diaphanous so far.

1983

The year included participation in various international shows, notably the travelling Philippine Graphic Show in London, Trends in Philippine Art in Hongkong, and print shows in Valparaiso, Chile and Dhaka, Bangladesh. During the year, and for his one-man show at the Luz Gallery, introduced mixed media into his paintings.

1984

Travelled and accompanied the art exhibit of eleven Filipino artists to the United States, visiting the cities of New York and San Francisco.

1985

One-man show at Finale Art File which featured monoprints, serigraphs using oil instead of silkscreen print.

Participated in significant international art exhibits: graphic art exhibition in Munich, Germany; travelling exhibit in Washington, D.C., Seattle and Honolulu; and modern art exhibition in Taipei.

Started to teach printmaking at Jose Abad Santos Memorial School (JASMS), High School Department, with the objective of awakening interest in future printmaking visual artists.

1986

One-man show at Luz Gallery reflected continued concern for handmade paper as art.

Encouraged and lent support to several of his printmaking students who participated and won awards and competitions sponsored by the Art Association of the Philippines and Philippine Association of Printmakers. Organized a four-man show of these young printmakers at Finale Art File.

Also, prints of his printmaking class were exhibited at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Museum Hallway.

1987

Series of black and white screen prints shown at Ayala Museum. Following show at Lopez Museum displayed works using a new medium, (at least for him), – acrylic on paper.

Continued to encourage and support young printmakers, with a subsequent class print exhibit at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Third Floor Lobby Hallway, which later became CCP's outreach program for the visual arts, travelling to various schools and universities.

1988

From acrylic on paper, he moved to using acrylic on canvas, but still maintaining his Diaphanous shapes and forms. These works were exhibited at a one man show at Finale Art File.

1989

Highlight of this year was the commissioning of two mural paintings each measuring 7 x 15 feet, by the Republic of Nauru for its Pacific Star Building lobbies.

1990

Mounted his 15th one-man show at the Luz Gallery entitled Permutation Series II. This collection of 28 acrylic on paper works is his linear interpretation of his well known Diaphanous forms. The works are characterized by clear, sharp, well-defined lines. The linear forms seem to float in space and either surge forward or recede backward due to the varying thickness of lines used. His "Permutations", like the Diaphanous series, deal with the theme of creating and building up of forms; but this time, through linear overlappings and not through transparent layerings.

1991

While doing landscapes since 1975, it was only this year that Olazo mounted a one-man exhibit of landscapes done in oil pastel and acrylic. Also started to do oil landscapes using palette knife. The subject is traditional, the approach is impressionistic, the design is abstract.

1992

Started the year with an exhibit of impastoed "Permutation Series", utilizing acrylic on paper.

1994

One-man show with the umbrella theme Black and White shown simultaneously in three SM Artwalk Galleries: Paperworks at the Crucible Gallery, Permutation Series at Galleria Duemila and large scale paintings at the Art Center through Finale Art Gallery.

2000

Took part in Group Show 2000 at the Luz Gallery.

2001

Took part in Group Show 2001 at the Luz Gallery.

2002

Showed works at Drawings at the Luz Gallery.

Exhibited Recent Works (with Ang Kiukok, Ben Francisco and Goy) at Finale Art Gallery.

2003

One-man show Translucencies: Still Lifes in Oil at Galleria Duemila.

2004

One-man show of Recent Works at Finale Art Gallery.

2006

A first time showing with Jonathan Olazo in Olazo & Olazo (Father & Son) at Galleria Duemila.

2007

Works featured in Through the Palette's Eye, The Rico & Melanie Hizon Private Art Collection at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines.

EXHIBITION DATES

20 JUNE – 14 JULY 2007

VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR

AUGUST 2007

PT. BALAI LELANG BOROBUDUR, JAKARTA

CURATORS

JONATHAN OLAZO

BEVERLY YONG

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COLOUR SEPARATION

UNICO SERVICES

PRINTING

PAKATAN TUSEN CETAK SDN BHD

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WILLIE
fine ART

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COVER

DIAPHANOUS B – CXII

1994

OIL ON CANVAS
152.5 X 244 CM



