



BARBER'S CHAIR (AFTER MICHAEL WOLFF)  
2006  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 122 CM

## ELAINE ROBERTO-NAVAS B. 1964, THE PHILIPPINES

### EDUCATION

1987 - 1991 University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines, AB Fine Arts,  
Major in Painting  
1981 - 1985 Ateneo de Manila University, College of Arts and Sciences, Quezon City, Philippines,  
AB Psychology

### AWARDS

2004 & 2002 Honorable Mention, Philip Morris, Singapore Art Awards  
1995 Honorable Mention, Philip Morris, Philippine Art Awards  
1995 & 1994 Jura's Choice, Art Association of the Philippines, Art Awards

### SOLD EXHIBITIONS

2008 GARAGE SALE, Finale Art File, La'o Building, Makati City, the Philippines  
2007 GATED3, Finale Art File, La'o Building, Makati City, the Philippines  
2006 ARTIFACTS, Finale Art File, Megamall, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2006 PLASTIC, Library Art, North Bridge Road, Singapore  
2004 ABOUT FACE 2, Finale Art File, Megamall, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2004 GATED, Substation Gallery, Singapore  
2001 LANDSCAPES, Finale Art File, Megamall, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2001 WALLFLOWERS, West Gallery, Makati City, the Philippines  
2000 BEAR ESSENTIALS, Artolio Space, Singapore  
2000 FACE VALUE, Artolio Space, Singapore  
1997 COTTON FIEND, Lopez Museum, Pasig City, the Philippines  
1996 GATES, Gallery 130, Alabang Town Center, the Philippines  
1995 LIFE PAINTINGS, West Gallery, Quezon City, the Philippines  
1994 STILL LIFE, Soul Spaces, West Gallery, Pasig City, the Philippines

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2008 HEADLIGHTS, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Malaysia  
2005 SINGAPORE ART SHOW, Singapore Management University, Singapore  
2004 CANCELLED METAPHORS, Art Center, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2003 FIVE, Art Center, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2003 GUILTY PLEASURES, Art Center, Pasig City, the Philippines  
2002 WHITE ON WHITE, University of Philippines, the Philippines  
2000 CRACKS AND ABYSSSES, Art Center, Pasig City, the Philippines  
1999 ROUTES, Substation Gallery, Singapore  
1999 VESPARTIO, Artolio Space, Singapore  
1998 VIEWS FROM ELSEWHERE, Art Center, Pasig City, the Philippines  
1997 THE MITER BOX, The Plumbing Trap, God and Other Matters, West Gallery, Quezon City, the Philippines  
1996 40" X 10", Recent Works, West Gallery, Quezon City, the Philippines  
1995 9" X 12", Recent Works, West Gallery, Quezon City, the Philippines  
1994 ART MANILA, Shangri-La Plaza, Pasig City, the Philippines  
1993 FEAR AND DESIRE, Main Gallery, Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Philippines  
1993 SUBJECT-OBJECT, OBJECT-SUBJECT, Philizon Life Museum, the Philippines  
FIGURES OF SPEECH: FIVE ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION, Alliance Francaise, the Philippines



AVULSION (AFTER MICHAEL WOLFF)  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 122 CM

FRONTS  
STAIRS  
2006  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 122 CM

EXHIBITION DATES: 18 JUNE - 5 JULY 2008

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ELAINE ROBERTO-NAVAS  
STANDING ROOM ONLY

VALENTINE  
WILLIE  
fine art



## STANDING ROOM ONLY

BY LENA COBANGBANG

"Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves, and not anything else, and by the immobility of our conceptions of them." (Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*)

And these things are all part of our daily rituals that gradually accumulate, we are so accustomed to the way we choose things to function that they become an extension of our limbs, our bodies; things that we used to own, owning us back for our dependence on them. Hence, these things take hold of our remembrance.

Elaine Roberto-Navas' paintings foreground this intimacy with objects, profoundly evoking their association with their previous uses. Her previous exhibition, entitled *Garage Sale*, at Finale Gallery in Manila, showed a window bedpost, a wardrobe haphazardly crammed with clothes, a dining table draped with a cloth. Some of these objects were the personal effects of Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies that eventually found their way into several of his artworks. Through Roberto-Navas' distinctly impeccable *bravura* in handling paint, she has found kinship with Tàpies in underscoring the subject's materiality. More than painting them, she kneads pigment into flesh, turning images into palpable essences.<sup>1</sup>

Her recent paintings are based on a series of photographs by German artist Michael Wolf, of chairs in China that were seemingly abandoned—sitting forlorn, rickety and crooked, mended by some loose rusty copper wire. These chairs under Roberto-Navas' brushwork are so corporeally rendered yet they tend to melt, threatening to crumble by the gravity of their weathering and neglect if not quickly fleshed out, as if obsolescence is catching up with their memorialisation.

Michael Wolf calls these chairs "bastards"—abandoned, and in some cases retolced to exhaust their function, improvised for the barest needs, to conform to anatomy, or rather matter conforms to need. These can be seen in scraps of mattress bound to a tree stump, a dilapidated swivel chair propped on an empty tin drum, a woven mat lain over a neat pile of bricks. Nonetheless, the quick 'winging' from various found materials still offers some brief respite from the quotidian rhythm of work and survival.

Those who labor and sit on these chairs are conspicuously absent, yet these paintings may as well be their portraits. Their craft and ingenuity, their past affluence and their sudden thrift, their misshapen anatomies giving way to gravity and aging can all be possibly gleaned from the very weathering of these chairs.

When chairs were first made, they were meant as furniture solely for the monarchy, or as privileged articles of State. Their descent into commonplace fixtures indicates the spread of specialised skill or labour, and consequently the rise of structures that compartmentalise the different trades arising from such specialisation. The "sitters", in this instance, have mostly melded into their trade as faceless fixtures in the cog of progress. Through history, formal portraiture has been a means of reinforcing the individuality of the sitter, with all the accoutrements of profit and gain. But for Roberto-Navas, such an approach merely states the obvious. Here the chair itself is the subject, its tiredness took as an orientation of its various members, so as to induce from that where the wall lay and the furniture stood, to piece together and to give a name to the house in which it must be living." (Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*)

WALLFLOWERS RED: PART II (AFTER MICHAEL WOLF)  
2006  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 183 CM



CARBIDFLAGED (AFTER MICHAEL WOLF)  
2006  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 122 CM

The house, it seems, is never shown. It somehow still remains a guarded sanctuary, its whereabouts and placating succor intimated intuitively by its unknown dweller. This becomes apparent in Roberto-Navas' series of paintings of gates last year, where the very surface of the canvas—heavily marked and swirled by paint, enunciating the incurred scratches, dents and oxidation of the gates themselves. These paintings become stand-ins for the real thing, the gate itself which distinguishes between the "other" and the "familiar", intrusion from belonging, fortress from a sense of home, a threshold interpolating both exteriority and interiority at the same time. Yet the brilliant luminosity of the paint itself seductively beckons, the surface willing to yield to touch, but only in its tactile suppleness. What can be unlocked are the doors to one's imaginings underneath these striated surfaces, opening up the possibilities of personal narratives, but at the same time, these are book-ended by an ambiguous sense of both disclosure and secrecy, in paintings that hint at the artist's reluctant admission to autobiography.

These paintings of chairs become boldly privy to much speculative spectatorship as these seats are empty of their sitters. Who owned these seats is but a matter of what they may represent. For the paintings to mirror their creator who sits on a work stool as well upon its conception bears the conceit of authorial prerogative.<sup>2</sup> But for the viewer who can only speculate on the after-effects of the mingling of medium and subject matter, the result is either a fascination for the resulting mix or a fascination for the probability of owning the gaze they set upon it, and consequently their interpretation of it.

If these chairs are portraits, they don't however naively pander to a "Dorian Gray" idealism, as they bear the consequences and the historical weight of a rapidly-progressing industrialised economy. For the artist, they best serve her distinct mastery of the medium in their dejected forms, pointing out their "materiality" in their variegated destitution and well-worn-ness, and more importantly the tangibility of painting where all things are bequeathed with a stately affirmation of their existence.



BASTARD BLUE (AFTER MICHAEL WOLF)  
2006  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 122 CM



<sup>1</sup> Her technique, called *agosto*, is from the Italian term *agostare* meaning "to knead dough".

<sup>2</sup> This however, poses a conflict as these paintings are based on another artist's series of photographs. Authorial prerogative is however pressed here as personal view point or interpretation or that undeniable attachment to something which is really none not of a fascination for them.