

# DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES: RONALD VENTURA'S HUMAN STUDY

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In black and white, the images of Ronald Ventura leap at the viewer from the gallery wall which coincides with the dimensions of the work itself. This amazing mural-size work measuring 144 x 96 centimeters entitled *Human Study* is one of the three winners of the 2005 Ateneo Art Awards, with the artist chosen for the workshop in Sydney, Australia.

*Human Study* is executed, not with oil or acrylic paints, but with graphite on canvas. What makes it a black-and-white painting and not only a line drawing is the use of canvas for ground, its extraordinary range of tones, from dark grays to luminous whites creating the illusion of volume and perspective, as well as the richness of its significations. The terse, laconic title is laden with ironies when, thematically, the work itself could refer to the contemporary hell in which humans live.

In the work, the setting for the various figures is a stone chamber which may also appear like an improvised stage in an absurdist theater or a sordid hall in a prison-house where mysterious encounters take place. The walls are streaked with grimy stains and shadowy tonal oscillations create a constant, subtle movement denying the static. The first of the dramatis personae is a nude female lying on the single piece of furniture in the room, a dining table draped realistically with a white cloth, although with eerie suggestions of hidden clutching hands. On the table along her feet seems to be a formal drawing exercise of a fruit (possibly the biblical apple) rendered from faint outline to full volume while beside it are rows of similar fruit, but much reduced in scale, with tiny shadow, an abstracting diversion.

It is the female nude herself, lying supine on the table which also serves as her bed that draws our attention irresistibly. Classical in her proportions, she displays a flawless form from her high breasts to her smooth pubis and her legs and bare feet extended in a tense, straight line beyond the table. Preternaturally, light seems to emanate from her body rendering it a radiant, luminous white against the envolving grays. But, alas, the splendid young woman does not exist in an ideal virtuous world. For her face is ruthlessly obliterated by a bar code, suggesting commodification, while bottles of alcoholic drink intermingle with her hair. She has apparently fallen into dissolute ways and to the deceptively pleasurable numbing of the senses in anodyne, and is now bearing its consequences. But more notable, however, is that she does not lie inert and passive, succumbing to a vegetal existence. Indeed, as in a state of suspended animation, her body floats above the table (a long shadow marks the space beneath it). But she makes an effort, even on a subconscious level, not to lose her moorings in the world altogether, for her right hand presses down upon the table to seek a gravitational anchor.

Now, our modern Sleeping Beauty is, like in the traditional folktale, visited by Prince Charming on his horse. Noble of face and bearing, the visitant strikes a messianic and commanding pose. However, his horse belies his true character: its two Janus-heads face in opposite directions, signifying the ambiguity and futility of his mission, whether for good or ill. He is immobilized by his false hobby horse, one head smooth-maned, the other rough and wrinkled; its four legs, likewise, are a ludicrous assemblage of machine parts. Will she awaken at his call even if his presence no longer holds the luminous purity of his original folktale appeal?

There are two other figures in the strange scenario. These two male figures have completely lost their moorings. The one on the left floats in a transparent plastic bubble in which he is helplessly entrapped, thrown willy-nilly in space without succor. Above him in a horizontal position, the other figure, a nude, also encased by transparent stuff that grows from his body, seems to lunge towards the riding male, their foreheads almost touching, bar codes springing out of

their heads. He, too, is irrevocably lost, his body claimed by King Commodity and reified into a wooden marionette: his arms are cleanly cut away at the sides like a puppet figure and his loss of human agency is signified by his legs surgically disjointed above the ankles. Meanwhile, in the ground below are tiny, shadowy soldiers in perpetual warfare which can only result in the victimization of humans and their alienation from their essential humanity. What adds to the elegiac effect of the work is the style itself which feeds on the perfection of the classical but subverts its values to reveal its dark underside—ideal beauty betrayed by commodification and the widespread plague of vice, betrayal and war that has eroded human existence.

The large work can be related to individual paintings which extend the themes of Ventura. Of these are *Temptation* showing a nude standing girl who puzzlingly examines the apple proffered by the serpent in the garden of Eden and the irony of the technological @ of computer technology which is stamped upon her pubis. This image which combines the biblical and the contemporary alludes to the commodification and corruption of woman in the new forms of cybersex. In another work, a pious man carries a Christ figure on a cross, their identities merging in a cult of suffering without release or enlightenment—a reflection of Philippine society and its religious emotionalism in a floundering economy.

Ronald Ventura first attracted attention in his magnificent male nudes, ivory-skinned upon rich sepia tones, thoughtful and languorous in a setting of urban decay. These unusual images gave rise to a heightened engagement in gender issues in art, particularly the deconstruction of gender as construct, being a system of traditional and culture-bound ideas and affects to which the individual is introduced from birth, as well as an allegorical critique of the conditions of men and women in our times.

## RONALDO CRUZ VENTURA



Born 12 June 1973

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Congressional Subdivision  
Tandang Sora  
Quezon City 1116  
Philippines

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1993 Bachelor of Fine Arts  
Major in Painting  
University of Santo Tomas



The ATENEART AWARDS are presented annually by the Ateneo Art Gallery, the premier museum of modern Philippine art, as part of its mission of bringing modern and contemporary art into the national consciousness.

Given to Filipino visual artists under the age of 35, the Awards are bestowed on three individuals or collectives who, in the opinion of the Jury, and based upon a public solo or group exhibition held between 1 May 2004 to 1 May 2005, have made an outstanding and significant contribution to the definition and development of modern art in the Philippines.

Ronald Ventura, one of the three who received the Awards this year, was selected by Filipino-Australian visual artist Maria Cruz and Jo Holder, Director of the Cross Art Projects to be the recipient of the Ateneo Art Gallery's and the Philippines' first Visual Art Studio Residency Program in Sydney, Australia.

The Cross Art Projects, in association with the Ateneo Art Gallery, is pleased to offer this unparalleled opportunity to Ventura to bring his art to an international audience via the East-West confluence that is Sydney, and to expand the appreciation, and understanding of contemporary Philippine art overseas.



ATENEART  
ART  
GALLERY

THE CROSS  
ART PROJECTS

### AWARDS

2005

ATENEART AWARDS  
(1 of 3 winners)

ATENEART GALLERY STUDIO  
RESIDENCY GRANT (SYDNEY,  
AUSTRALIA)

2003

13 ARTISTS AWARD  
Cultural Center of the  
Philippines (CCP)

JURORS' CHOICE AWARD  
Philip Morris Philippine Art  
Awards

2001

ARTIST OF THE YEAR  
Art Manila Newspaper

2000

HONORABLE MENTION  
Metrobank Art Competition

FINALIST  
Philip Morris Philippine Art  
Awards

WINNING ENTRY  
2000 PAP Print Competition

1999

FINALIST  
Taiwan International  
Biennial Print and Drawing  
Competition

JURORS' CHOICE AWARD  
Winsor & Newton Painting  
Competition

1998

FIRST PLACE  
National Commission for  
Culture and the Arts and  
the Philippine Association  
of Printmakers Lithograph  
Competition

JURORS' CHOICE AWARD  
Philip Morris Philippine Art  
Awards

SECOND PLACE  
Drawing Category, Diwa ng  
Sining

1993

JURORS' CHOICE AWARD  
Art Association of the  
Philippines Art Competition

HONORABLE MENTION  
Metrobank Art Competition

1992

HONORABLE MENTION  
Metrobank Art Competition

1990

FIRST PLACE  
Shell National Students Art  
Competition

### SOLO EXHIBITS

2005

"RECENT WORKS"  
29 Sep to 3 Oct 2005  
Big & Small Art Company at  
the Singapore Art Fair

"MORPH"  
1 to 13 Sep 2005  
West Gallery,  
SM Megamall, Mandaluyong  
City

"HUMAN STUDY"  
Apr 2005  
SM Megamall Art Center,  
Mandaluyong City

2004

"CONTRIVED DESIRES"  
26 Aug to 7 Sep 2004  
West Gallery

"BLACK CARICATURE"  
4 to 16 Jun 2004  
Big & Small Art Company,  
SM Megamall, Mandaluyong  
City

"DEAD-END IMAGES"  
7 to 17 Jan 2004  
SM Megamall Art Center

2003

"X-SQUARED"  
6 to 17 Jun 2003  
West Gallery,  
Big & Small Art Company

2002

"BODY"  
29 Sep to 9 Oct 2002  
The Drawing Room,  
Metropolitan Avenue, Makati  
City

"VISUAL DEFECTS"  
25 Jul to 8 Aug 2002  
West Gallery

2001

"DOORS"  
19 Dec 2001 to 5 Jan 2002  
SM Megamall Art Center

"THE OTHER SIDE"  
18 Aug to 5 Sep 2001  
The Drawing Room

2000

"ALL SOULS DAY"  
7 to 25 Oct 2001  
The Drawing Room

"INNERSCAPES"  
21 Sep to 3 Oct 2001  
West Gallery

### GROUP EXHIBITS

2005

"CROSS ENCOUNTERS: THE  
2005 ATENEART AWARDS  
EXHIBITION"  
Power Plant Mall, Rockwell  
Center,  
Makati City;  
Ateneo Art Gallery,  
Ateneo de Manila University,  
Quezon City

"IN TRANSIT"  
Big & Small Art Company

2004

"19TH ASIAN INTERNATIONAL ART  
EXHIBITION"  
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum,  
Fukuoka, Japan

"KOREA ASIAN ART FESTIVAL"  
Inza Plaza, Seoul Korea

2003

"13 ARTISTS AWARDS EXHIBITION"  
Bulwagang Juan Luna (Main  
Gallery), CCP,  
Pasay City

"CALENDAR"  
SM Megamall Art Center;  
Big & Small Art Company

2002

"TRESACIDOS: SOFT"  
SM Cebu Art Center

"PHILIP MORRIS ASEAN ART  
AWARDS"  
Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia

2001

"TRESACIDOS: SMALL WORKS"  
The Enterprise Center,  
Makati City

"THE 8TH ANNUAL FIL-AMERICAN  
ARTS EXPOSITION"  
Yerba Buena Center for  
the Arts, San Francisco,  
California, USA

"BALIK GUHIT"  
CCP

2000

"GUHIT I, II & III"  
Ayala Museum, Makati City;  
University of Santo Tomas  
Museum, España, Manila;  
Vargas Museum, UP Diliman,  
Q.C.

"MAD ABOUT LITHOGRAPHS"  
Ayala Museum

1999

"9TH INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL  
PRINT & DRAWING EXHIBIT"  
Taipei, Taiwan

"PHILIP MORRIS ASEAN ART  
EXHIBIT"  
Hanoi, Vietnam

1998

"1ST LITHOGRAPH COMPETITION  
EXHIBITION"  
The Drawing Room



## Ronald Ventura HUMAN STUDY

The exhibition is on view from 5 to 20 November 2005, at THE CROSS ART PROJECTS: A space for independent art & curatorial studies, 33 Roslyn Street Kings Cross Sydney 2011, Australia





**insecured**  
9" x 12"  
mixed media



**VISUAL DEFECT**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**EXPLOTER**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**BASIC 1**  
12" x 9"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**BASIC 3**  
12" x 9"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**BASIC 2**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**UNTITLED 3**  
20" x 28"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper

These unusual images gave rise to a heightened engagement in gender issues in art..



**UNTITLED 1**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**UNTITLED 3**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**UNTITLED 4**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**TOY STORY**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**JACKET**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**JACKET 2**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**SPOTS**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**MACHISMO**  
9" x 12"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**UNTITLED**  
20" x 28"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**WHITE WASH**  
20" x 28"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper



**UNTITLED 2**  
20" x 28"  
oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas paper