

# CREATION-PROCREATION

## AND THE LOSS OF INNOCENCE

"Creation-Procreation and the Loss of Innocence" was a selection of paintings, drawings and prints from Ghanaian-born artists Godfried Donkor and Wiz Kudowor, Spanish Surrealist Joan Miró, Indian multimedia artist Nalini Malani, Indonesian painter Jazz Pasay, China's Wu Xiaohai, Spanish sculptor Eugenio Merino and the US-born, Barcelona-based Anthony Pilley. Given this wide palette of media and cultures, perhaps curator Tasneem Salam's concerns were not so much to provide a logical dissection of the title's themes but rather to telegraph an emotional, impressionistic response. This intention was framed by Salam's decision to tie the works of each of the eight artists to a text, song lyric or poem that she had selected and printed prominently on the gallery walls.

Salam views the loss of innocence as a corollary to the evolution of human creativity, a give-and-take between the things we learn and the things we must give up as a result. Of the 13 works in the exhibition, only Malani's three pigmentary prints, which see the chrysalis of humanity's fall in the human ability to create, offered a clear response to this central curatorial question.

Accompanied by lines from the Mexican poet Octavio Paz's *Blanco* (1967), Malani's prints appeared in the last of the gallery's three small rooms. *Childhood Fears* (2009), in which two distressed figures manically flee from a flying beast, recalls Nick Ut's iconic Pulitzer Prize-winning 1972 photograph of a young girl running down a road after being scorched by a South Vietnamese Airforce napalm attack. In *Sense of Touch* (2009), scribbled ink insects and botanical forms creep in repetitive lines over rose-pink splotches of ink. Each has a nucleus from which a human form emerges, suggesting cell formations or genetic experiments, markers of mankind's self-made advancement through science. *Games of War* (2009) seems a violent culmination of post-atomic bomb angst: airplanes swerve chaotically over an abandoned, or destroyed, red-cratered planet.

While Malani invites the viewer into the nightmares of the postmodern child, Wu's untitled charcoal sketches explore the loss of innocence as an inevitable part of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Both artists' works pique a sense of isolation from a paradise lost.

The perspective lines in Wu's *Untitled I* (2007) force the viewer to observe this naively rendered scene from above: a child sits writing and another bends, face hidden, drinking from a water fountain in the center of a playroom. A chair has fallen on its side, a train track emerging from a dark tunnel is visible in the large window and a framed picture of a woman with windswept hair hangs crookedly on the wall. Salam subtitles Wu's grouping with the same line of Paz's poem that frames Malani's work, "The unreality of the watched makes the watching real," and the line pervades the composition with commentary on the nightmarish, unresolved narratives put forth by the artist.

Pasay's painting *Third Day of Creation* (2005), an explosion of earthy tones with blue and sulphurous yellows



**JAZZ PASAY,**  
*Third Day of  
Creation*, 2005,  
acrylic on canvas,  
145 x 145 cm.

Courtesy the artist  
and Tasneem  
Gallery, Barcelona.

splashed across the canvas, is a vividly expressive response to the moment when God separated earth from sea as described in the Bible's book of Genesis, helpfully quoted beside the work. Be that as it may, the painting lacks the gravity and discursive insight delivered by other works also concerned with religious narratives and mythology. It is unfortunate, and it does not reflect well on the curator, that explicitly sensuous and expressive work such as Pasay's seems lightweight in the context of the curation. Merino's pop art-style depiction of Osama Bin Laden's face swirling from the mouth of a tiny genie's lamp in *Genio* (2008) proposes that the writing of origin stories still occurs in the realm of advertising and the media—that man is essentially a mythmaker in search of the barbarians, a people who, as the accompanying lines from the poem by Constantine P. Cavafy read, "were some kind of solution."

While Salam's form of intertextuality often served to channel the meaning of the works, it could only have functioned advantageously and consistently if the curator was clear about what she wanted the viewer to understand. And the digressive exhibition catalog suggests that she is not. It is a shame that the strength and clarity of the ideas put forward by Malani, Wu and Merino were somewhat diluted by the chaotic diversity of the artists and their approaches to the mammoth theme.

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