

(/)

[Home \(/\)](#) [About the PCIJ \(/about/\)](#) [Stories \(/list/stories/\)](#) [Blog \(/blog/\)](#) [Multimedia \(/list/multimedia/\)](#)
[Books \(/list/books/\)](#) [Disaster Aid \(/yolanda\)](#) [MoneyPolitics \(http://moneypolitics.pcij.org/\)](http://moneypolitics.pcij.org/)

Google site search

Go!

i REPORT

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2008

Mad over money

CROSSBORDER

Even in Singapore, Pinoy artists are bankable

by Prime Sarmiento

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH, 2008

SINGAPORE — Twelve years ago, Francisco ‘Kiko’ Escora was already happy when a painting of his fetched P3,000 at an exhibit in Manila. But today Escora must be ecstatic; his works are being snapped up not only in his home country, where they now average P70,000 a piece, but also in places like Singapore, where Escora paintings are bought for S\$4,000 each, or a cool hundred grand based on a P30:S\$1 conversion.

This is despite the fact that Escora’s paintings, which can at times deal with dark and sexual themes, aren’t the type that one hangs in the living room to match the color of the sofa (which is often the main criterion for someone looking for art). As the 37-year-old artist himself admits, “My work is not for everyone. My paintings have to be viewed by the right audience.”

Yet even here in conservative Singapore, his provocative work has not been wanting of buyers. And this arts writer Parvathi Nayar attributes to the new breed of art collectors in Singapore. “They are young professionals like lawyers, bankers, doctors, and corporate executives who studied abroad and know the value of having original art in their home,” she says.

These collectors are looking for paintings that are different and not merely pretty. Pwee Keng Hock, managing partner of Utterly Art Gallery, one of the first to bring in and popularize contemporary Filipino art in Singapore, also explains that the Filipinos’ exciting brushwork and strong themes appeal to art lovers here.

Indeed, aside from Escora, the works of other promising Filipino artists are now popular in Singaporean art circles. In the last three years alone, various galleries here hosted well-received exhibits of paintings and sculptures done by the likes of Cultural Center of



GARIBAY'S Soloista. [image courtesy of Utterly Art]

In this issue:

the Philippines' (CCP) Thirteen Artists Awardee Emmanuel Garibay, Ateneo Arts awardee Rodel Tapaya Garcia, and Art Association of the Philippines Juror's Choice Elaine Roberto-Navas.

But Keng Hock admits there's another reason why paintings done by Filipino artists — especially the younger set who are still in the early stages in their career — are attracting collectors in this prosperous island state: "It's the value-for-money factor. They respond well to that."

Art as investment

Philippine art thus presents an alternative for investors looking for quality art but cannot afford to purchase Chinese and Indian paintings. As Nayar observes, "Filipino art is still at its affordable stage" — meaning, this is definitely the right time to buy works of the up-and-coming Pinoys. This is why collectors aren't balking at spending more than US\$2,000 to purchase an Escora or a Garibay, believing that they can sell them at higher prices later.



Such faith isn't unfounded, given the performance of Filipino art in the 2006 auctions held in Singapore and Hong Kong. In a Sotheby's auction, 24-year-old Winner Jumalon's "Face of Man" sold for over US\$20,000 — nearly 10 times more than its original estimate of US\$3,250. At a Christie's auction, the gavel went down at US\$37,000 for "Absurdity of Being" by Geraldine Javier, who likes exploring death, misery, dysfunctional relationships, and emotional violence in her works. The final price of "Absurdity" was 16 times more than the original estimate of US\$2,300 in the Christie's auction.

TAPAYA'S Parable of the Smart Lawyer. [image courtesy of Utterly Art]

This is, of course, hardly the first time that Filipino art is creating a buzz in the international scene. Works by masters such as Fabian de la Rosa, Benedicto Cabrera (popularly known as Bencab), and Anita Magsaysay-Ho have been featured in prominent auctions both in Singapore and in Hong Kong, with their works selling for millions of pesos. The Singapore Art Museum itself has its own collection of Filipino art.

Now considered a major art hub in the region, Singapore has been developing a steady market for paintings and sculpture. It was only in the last three years, however, that Singapore galleries have been showcasing contemporary Philippine art more frequently. In December 2006, the Manila-based Galerie Joaquin set up shop in Singapore and has taken to identifying itself as the first space in the city state that is dedicated to featuring artwork from the Philippines. Today, aside from established painters such as Arturo Luz or Bencab, Singapore-based collectors are also keen on relatively fresh artists like Escora.

Provocative themes

It's a good thing that Singapore's straitlaced censors have yet to train their hawk eyes on paintings. It could well be because they are simply busy monitoring those who cross the line in the mass media. Otherwise, works like those of Escora may not even see the light of day here, since he likes sensual themes like longing and desire — and this is a country where people have trouble talking about sex publicly.

- Time for change (/stories/time-for-change/)
- A 'feel-good' only economy? (/stories/a-feel-good-economy/)
- Surviving sans a financial safety net (/stories/surviving-sans-a-financial-safety-net/)
- Beware of those false profits (/stories/beware-of-those-false-profits/)
- Game on-or off? (/stories/game-on-or-off/)
- Video: Gambling nation (/stories/gambling-nation/)
- Video: Even in Singapore, Pinoy artists are bankable (/stories/even-in-singapore-pinoy-artists-are-bankable/)
- CROSSBORDER Even in Singapore, Pinoy artists are bankable (/stories/even-in-singapore-pinoy-artists-are-bankable/)
- Coming home (/stories/coming-home/)
- How not to carve a future (/stories/how-not-to-carve-a-future/)
- The making of a master carver (/stories/the-making-of-a-master-carver/)
- Enhancing the 'electronic' in e-commerce (/stories/enhancing-the-electronic-in-e-commerce/)

Garibay, a former political activist and pastor, also made his name through social realist paintings and explorations of political and religious themes – touchy subjects here. Recently, however, Garibay has turned his attention to harlequins, musicians, and the family, all of which he portrays in vivid color.

Galerie Joaquin Managing Director Jack Teotico observes, though, that buyers in Singapore – locals and expats alike – seem to have a stronger preference for figurative paintings, unlike in Manila, where buyers buy both abstract and figurative art.

He adds that in Manila, buyers maintain a high respect for the masters, even though the younger artists have also begun to have a following. One explanation is that the masters’ works are a more prudent investment, and are guaranteed to appreciate by as much as 10 percent to 40 percent a year. At the Manila branch of Galerie Joaquin, paintings by Luz, Juvenal Sanso, Carlo Magno, and Federico Aguilar Alcuaz are very popular. Says Teotico of their patrons: “They know that if they put money in that painting, it can’t go wrong.”

Auctions do jack up art prices, but Teotico says that in general, it is more expensive to buy a Filipino’s work in Singapore instead of Manila only because of the overhead costs, which include import taxes, plane fare, and higher rents. This explains a disparity of, say, P30,000 between the price of an Escora that is bought in Manila and one purchased in Singapore. A Garibay can already have a price tag of over P100,000 in the artist’s homeland, and so buying it for the equivalent of P130,000 or so here would not really be so bad.

Still, when asked to compare the art markets of Singapore and Manila, Teotico comments, “Singapore is more challenging because there we (Philippine art) have to compete with the best of art from all over the region. So we have to put our best foot forward (here).”

But despite a growing market for their work here, only a few young Filipino artists have decided to reside in Singapore. Even many of those whose paintings are coveted by collectors here remain in the Philippines, where they apparently draw their inspiration to create. Still, nothing bars their works – and often they themselves – from traveling, and Singapore has become one of their favorite stops.

“Filipino art is the new wave in the Singapore arts scene,” observes Nayar, who has seen Vietnamese and Burmese art thrive here. Whether Philippine art will enjoy the same fate in the competitive Singapore market is still a matter of speculation.

Posted in: Business and Economy (<https://old.pcij.org/list/stories/business/>), Crossborder (<https://old.pcij.org/list/stories/crossborder/>), i Report (<https://old.pcij.org/list/stories/ireport-all/>), Special Interest (<https://old.pcij.org/list/stories/special/>), Stories (<https://old.pcij.org/list/stories/>)
Tags: visual artists (<https://old.pcij.org/tag/visual-artists/>)

