

## Curatorial Statement

### *Paradigm Traps*

Jigger Cruz returns with a body of work that challenges perception rendered in his signature style. Tubes of oil paint squeezed onto the canvas, spray painting and decisive, confident strokes create a rough and thick three-dimensional surface that meets in a grid of colored lines, a nervous tangle. Strips of color overlap, travel parallel or intertwine pushed by the artist's impulsive gesture.

While this struggle of colors and lines, the result of a passionate and energetic action, is generative of a new image, at the same time it destroys the image lays underneath. In fact the dense, compacted, and impastoed surface, partially or totally, hides a figurative background: normally, in Cruz's works, representations of subjects from Flemish or Renaissance art repertoires.

Albeit frayed and mutilated, in some works the original image, survives his interventions; at other times, however, the realistic representation is completely distorted and destroyed, making it difficult to identify the initial subject. Swept away by the artist's destructive force, the underneath image undergoes a sort of primitive expression of violent psychic energy, so overwhelming as to be at the same time the principle of death and life. And, like an equally primitive "fear of emptiness", his energy fills the whole canvas. The painting explodes, overflows from the frame's margins, covered with color, sometimes burned and corroded.

Radically different from the "painter" who, placed in front of the easel, delicately transfers minimal quantities of color and reality, Jigger Cruz' relies on action as the essence of creative process and, like in a shamanic ritual, his proactive intervention on the canvas represents a complete, involving and all-encompassing artistic practice.

Deliberately playing with the ideas of disfigurement and vandalization, through his thick oil layers and color tangles, Cruz reviles and destroys those familiar images painted on the background, making the destruction an integral part of his art aesthetic understanding. Cruz' assemblages of recognizable objects and dark forms, intertwining into each other, lead to a reflection on the very matter of painting. Encrypting linearity, his tangled colored vortexes decipher the paths of a new mapping, unhinging the universally accepted culture' fixed points. Thrown into a dizzying displacement, oriented by new cardinal points, the observer loses any known landmarks, and finally embraces new alternative ways of perception.

Such a dense, energetic process gets many layers to its conception. And while Cruz' decisive actions are the translation into art of his dissent versus the common sense and an obvious way of reading reality: his intense energy also arises from the reaction to a specific cultural environment. Like many Filipino artists of his generation, Jigger Cruz carries the burden of a cultural complex deriving from domination and colonization. His concerns extend to the social conditions of his homeland particularly on Catholicism, the dominant religion in the Philippines.

His gesture can be seen like a reaction to the dogmatic vision imposed by the colonizers centuries ago, and that molded and was the premise for many of the conflicts and contradiction of Filipino contemporary society. Cruz cancels with his gestural painting and "colonizes", the icons of Baroque culture. Obscuring and canceling the whole painting space, he erases the symbols of a culture which perpetuated its universal supremacy.

But the obsession of his signs extends far beyond the frame, slipping into a fractal collapse to infinity. Endlessly reiterating its power, Jigger Cruz' refusal extends towards any pre-imposed culture and, becoming a protest against any blind truths, the rejection of colonial culture' imposition corresponds to the rejection of any bourgeois culture' dogma.

At the same time, if destroying the Western traditional subjects is Cruz' way to comment on the weight of history, from another point of view, it represents his struggle of detaching himself by Western art; which, with its historical narrative, is inevitable in his practice. Significantly Cruz does not completely erase the original images.

Still his gesture, his act of rebellion, functions as a statement that breaks the rules of traditional art. Cruz' operation is the premise of a cathartic renewal, that, passing through subtraction and abstraction, becomes an action of self-affirmation. The result is the genesis of a germinating chaos leading to unveiling a new reality. In being cathartic, his pictorial denial has become for Cruz almost a religious ritual.

This exhibition, continuing Cruz's latest developments, features a color palette subtly de-saturated, almost tending to cool tones, which smoothly depart from the artist' typical use of bold, vivid colors. From the original aim of producing contrasts and shock, Cruz' palette guides us into a more discreet and minimalist atmosphere, perhaps turning from an explicit dialectic with the external world towards an introspective dimension. Smoothly flowing onto a reflection on his own aesthetic, a more self-referential phase, he blunts the original vehemence, allowing his art the state of a statement, still questioning itself to find its own relevance.

Curator: Michela Sena