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Filipino Artist Ronald Ventura on the Ideas Behind His Ostentatious and Immersive New Work



Ronald Ventura inside his man cave, Bobro's World Tokyo Jakarta, presenting his work. Image courtesy of the artist and Yavu

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Ronald Ventura's latest work explores the contemporary world of materialistic excess and raises interesting ideas.

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IMAGES: Courtesy Yavuz Gallery

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Ronald Ventura inside his man cave, *Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta*, presented by Yavuz Gallery during Art Jakarta 2019. Image courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery.

Ronald Ventura is a name that rings with more than just familiarity in the art world. Ventura's painting *Grayground* (2011) set a record for the most ever paid for a work of Southeast Asian contemporary art, when it sold for USD\$1.1 million at Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings auction in Hong Kong in 2011. The artist presented his first US solo exhibition at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, a New York gallery specialising in Southeast Asian art, in 2009, following up with two more exhibitions in 2011 and 2014. He has also shown at institutions such as Fukuoka Asia Art Museum (Japan) and the MOCA Taipei (Taiwan).

Born in 1973, the Filipino multi-media artist is known for his conspicuous layering of styles such as realism, graffiti, cartoons in portraying chaotic scenes. Ventura also pulls from cultural references as disparate as science fiction to Asian mythology to Catholicism.

His most recent work, *Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta* is no different. Presented as a large scale public installation at Indonesia's revamped and rebranded international art fair, Art Jakarta, the work goes beyond being just another bright and shiny Instagrammable attraction at a major art fair. Presented as a multi-sensory booth

simulating an entertainment lounge with an iconic golden sculpture of his pet French bulldog, Bobro, as its entrance, the artwork takes on the experience of living in a world dictated by excess.



(https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RV_Bobros-World-Tour-Jakarta_1.jpg)

External view of Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta, presented by Yavuz Gallery during Art Jakarta 2019. Image courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery.

Speaking with CoBo Social at the fair, Ventura said the work looks at excess, whether through the preposterously golden dog sculpture or the “colour of the stickers I made. It’s like carbon fiber limitations...(with) a sporty look, a racer kind of feel and silver kind of metal.”

He wanted to create the “feeling of racing” through the combination of all these colours. After all, auto racing is one of the most ostentatious and widely accepted displays of private wealth. He also referenced another materialistic obsession of our time—sneakers—as another inspiration for the massive installation.

Presented by Yavuz Gallery (Singapore/Sydney), *Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta* looks like a quixotic man cave complete with a karaoke room where visitors can participate in singing and walls filled with Ventura’s art works including cartoons, comics, anime, text, esoteric symbols and dogs. He draws upon layers of history and pop culture visual imagery, the kind we are inundated with on a daily basis. Yet in doing so, the artist does not dwell on the superficial materiality of

our world but goes deeper, exploring our inner landscape and the diverse voices that define it, be it the social conditioning of excessive living or our forgotten histories.



(https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RV_Bobros-World-Tour-Jakarta_4.jpg)

The karaoke booth inside Ventura's Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta, presented by Yavuz Gallery during Art Jakarta 2019. Image courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery.

Ventura said he used the nostalgic black and whites in the displayed artworks in room to create something that felt classic and linked to the past. He pointed out that "all the happenings in the background is the past."

The artist wanted to produce a "natural expression" without any specific themes in *Bobro's World Tour, Jakarta*, using a blatant display of materialism to create an immersive experience of our very own inner landscape, where you do not just possess your voice, but "a lot of different voices inside you" belonging to your father or brother, for example.

Ventura elaborated further that with any one person "their mind, is like a universe, there's a lot of blackholes, but there's a lot stars. So you just focus on just some stars that make you bigger, but of course there's a lot of small stars around, so sometimes you have to think all of those connections to realize that of course your ideas are sometimes different from the others, but of course, everyone is a muse."

He observed, "The only key here is to accept one's lives or our sins, to understand each other... rather than to close your doors, or to say no."

Perhaps this is why Ventura chose to create this nuanced work for Art Jakarta, a fair built on private wealth and hoping to draw even more interest from an international art world mired in private wealth. Perhaps the internationally renowned artist understands better than most the uncanny duality of materialism and the stars.

About the artist

Ronald Ventura (b. 1973, Philippines) is renowned for his paintings and sculptures that feature complex multi-layering, combining images and varied styles from hyperrealism to cartoons and graffiti. Ventura takes the layering process in his work as a metaphor for the multifaceted identity of the Philippines. Over the centuries, the profound influences of various occupying powers – Spain, Japan, and the United States – along with the underlying indigenous culture, have produced a complex and at times uneasy sense of identity. Ventura explores this historical and psychic phenomenon through a dialogue of images evoking East and West, high and low, old and young – seen, for example, in allusions to Old Master paintings or Japanese and American cartoons. He draws our attention to the "second skin" of cultural signifiers that each person carries with him, however unwittingly. Ventura views skin as an expressive surface – written on with tattoos, concealed under layers of imagery, or exploding outwards to reveal an inner world of fantasy and conflict.

Ventura has exhibited extensively across the Philippines, Singapore, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, USA, Taiwan, and at institutions such as the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, (Japan), Ayala Museum, (Philippines), The Metropolitan Museum of Manila (Philippines), Singapore Art Museum, and NUS Museum (Singapore). A major solo exhibition of Ventura's work, Project: Finding Home, took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei in 2016. Ventura has received numerous

awards including “People of the Year”, People Asia, Philippines (2018); Ateneo Art Award (2005); and Thirteen Artists Award, Cultural Centre of the Philippines (2003), amongst others. His work has been reviewed in The New York Times, and is included in many private collections. Ventura continues to live and work in Manila, Philippines.

Reena Devi Shanmuga Retnam is a Singaporean arts journalist and critic who writes for regional and international media such as ArtAsiaPacific (HK), Hyperallergic (NY) and Artsy (NY). Previously she was a full-time reporter with Yahoo Lifestyle Singapore and TODAY newspaper (SG), breaking stories and exploring issues such as leadership, race, funding and censorship in the Singapore arts scene.

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