



MAYA LADYONG
PHILIPPINES

As the enterprising and creative spirit behind My Little Art Place (MyLAP), 36-year-old Maya Ladyong is hardly a novice in the art business.

The small art school she founded six years ago in her grandmother's garage on Wilson Street in Greenhills provides year-round workshops for a steady stream of students as young as 3 and as old as 80.

Maya said her students inevitably challenged her to pursue painting professionally. She had studied Fine Arts at University of the Philippines but ended up working in the call-center industry for four years after school. There she learned the virtue of making customers happy by making sure they got what they paid for.

"Some of my art students were already getting much better than me in terms of technique," she explained, "so I had to force myself to paint and continue learning."

Still, she admitted to a certain discomfort with the business side of art, anxious of being an artist with deadlines and clients to consider, which might get in the way of the joy inherent in the practice of art. In "Succinct," her first solo exhibit in Gallery Big in Makati's LRI Design Plaza, Maya unfolds a collection of works in acrylic that are refreshingly unencumbered by any pretense or self-indulgent melancholy.

"I always tell my students to paint what makes them happy," Ladyong said, "and that belief is something I live by."

When she first started joining group shows a few years ago, her early paintings were pastel-hued children's pieces that were a hit with kids and their mothers. "They always ended up in some boy's or girl's bedroom," she recalled.

Today Ladyong's imaginarium is a mash-up of many influences: magic realism intersects with Zen; Murakami plays footsie with the Wachowskis; and anime meets storybook aesthetic.

Re-imagining origami

In her debut collection, Ladyong thoughtfully reimagines three-dimensional origami by transposing it on two-dimensional space—a rather tricky experiment—by deploying the canvas as a narrative instrument where love and bliss exist as fragments of the temporal, and where both the real and the imagined co-exist in harmony.

Instead of folds and crease patterns, the focal point becomes the transpositive signification of the artist's origami subjects rendered visible in multiple, alternate elsewhere.

Juxtaposed against cotton-candy clouds, serene landscapes of grand mountains, and cheerful sakura, Maya's origamis are joyful introspection on nature's bounty, memory, and the passing of the seasons. Paper planes and folded birds take flight en route to grand adventures. Cut-out dolls come to life, graceful and defiant.

These heroines-cum-self-portraits are some of the artist's more beautifully rendered pieces. Wrapped in resplendent kimonos, often embedded in a sea of flowers, they are neither mute nor subservient but spirits wised by time and the elements.

Larger worlds

It is evident, too, that the artist's many years of teaching children has made her an expert storyteller. Her visual planes are gateways to larger worlds captured in singular moments, like frozen cliff-hanger strips in a complex sci-fi graphic novel that invite viewers to build their own plots and conjure their own characters: a dollar bill on a cherry-blossom branch; golden koi fish in a lotus pond; a pair of paper lovebirds lost in the City of Lights.

Given a choice, Maya Ladyong is clear as to how she hopes her paintings will end.

"I'd rather my paintings find a home where people will talk about them and grow old with them," she said "rather than find themselves in some collector's storage basement.

EDUCATION:

University of the Philippines- Fine Arts, 2000

1ST SOLO EXHIBITION

- ICANS' AT PLAY, December 2013, Immaculate Concepcion Academy, San Juan

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- "Continuum" Artistpace Ayala Museum, Makati City. January 2015
- "Love Show" Gallery BiG, Makati City. February 2014
- "ManilArt13" SM Aura, Taguig City. October 2013
- "Tribute To Joya" Proscenium at Rockwell Tent, Makati City. January 2013