

David Medalla
Locus Solus. Omaggio ad Arthur Rimbaud

Opening Saturday 2 December 2017 at 6 p.m.

2 December 2017 – 18 February 2018

Curated by Lorenzo Bruni

On Saturday 2 December 2017 at 6 p.m. the Galleria Enrico Astuni will be presenting the solo show by David Medalla, an artist originally from the Philippines, titled *Locus Solus. Omaggio ad Arthur Rimbaud*, curated by Lorenzo Bruni. The show will be rounded off by works linked to the project “Mondrian Fan Club”, a project that Medalla has been working on since 1992 together with Adam Nankervis, an artist originally from Australia. The show was conceived and carried out in September and October 2017 while Medalla was the guest in Bologna for a special residency programme specifically designed for him by the Galleria Enrico Astuni.

The *Locus Solus. Omaggio ad Arthur Rimbaud* project by David Medalla, curated by Lorenzo Bruni, consists of paintings, drawings, performance photos, and large installations of neon tubes specifically made for the occasion. These works, which are being exhibited together for the first time, represent the summing up of a lengthy inquiry, begun more than fifty years ago, into the dialogue between poetry, literature, and the visual arts. In the show there are brought together memories of Medalla’s journeys to Italy and Europe from the 1970s onwards, the result of his participation in various international shows, as well as his detailed knowledge of literature, from Arthur Rimbaud to Feodor Dostoyevsky and Dante Alighieri’s *Divina Commedia*. The various lyrical implications, as well as historical, artistic, and political facts that are raised by the “individual narratives” on show, revolve around two opposed yet complicit poles. One can be found in the large wall installation titled *M’ Illumino D’ Immenso*, and freely inspired by the figure of the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, and which consists of a luminous drawing in different colours made from neon lights that dialogue with a tactile ceramic composition made by the Bottega Gatti in Faenza. The other pole, instead, is represented by such different interventions by the artist, together with Adam Nankervis, as the *Mondrian Fan Club* project, undertaken in various parts of the world, among which Bologna. These latter works will be exhibited in a special installation in such a way as to create, not an archive, but a platform for dialoguing in which thoughts about the role of the viewers and that of the artist, and about the idea of a work as a vehicle for ideas and images, can be undertaken without any judgments about predetermined values.

The curator Lorenzo Bruni and David Medalla took part in a long conversation about the conceptual aspect of the *Locus Solus. Omaggio ad Arthur Rimbaud* project. Here are some parts of it which might be useful for an understanding of the approach by the artist, not just to this show, which has been specifically conceived for the Galleria Enrico Astuni in Bologna, but more in general to the artist’s idea of art as “the ethics of knowledge”.

LB: Over your long career a recurrent element seems to be the wish to make various cultural visions live together with the aim of celebrating the meeting of various levels of analysis and implications. This is not only present in the performances that you undertook in the 1970s or the foam sculptures *Cloud Canyons - Bubble machines auto-creative sculptures* that you produced at the end of the 1960s, but it is also a constant factor in your actions, poetry, and pictures since the 1950s when you were still a student in the Philippines, and in which you were already making references to the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Rimbaud, and Dante Alighieri. So a journey to Europe, after your stay in New York, was not only an obvious step but one that could almost be taken for granted...**DM:** *The reason it seems that my work has so many references to Western culture is that there is more documentation of the works I have produced in the West, but I also did many things during my three journeys to Africa too. I have also lived in India, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Malaysia. The work I did in those places was completely ephemeral, apart from one or two things that by chance left a material trace. But they were all precious for me in the same way they were for the people I met there, because they recounted what I saw and with whom I constructed them and acted together with.* **LB:** So your aim is to establish a site-specific dialogue with the context in which you go to work in, and you give more importance to the temporality of the experience than to its spatial effects. *A Stitch in Time* – a part of which you presented at the last edition of the Venice Biennale, curated by Christine Macel – is in fact a work in progress in which you invite people to stitch their thoughts on a piece of fabric, making a mental rather than physical photograph of the show, of the community and of its dialogue with the outside world. How did the type of action employed in *A Stitch in Time* come about? **DM:** *This performance was carried out in various countries and, therefore, used various languages. It is a work concerned with time. The time that people pass while stitching their thoughts and the time in which these thoughts are observed by the public in that and successive moments. It deals with potential collectivity, but also with the importance that people give to concentrating on themselves. Even when we undertook *A Stitch in Time* in Bologna a year ago, for the show you curated and titled 66/16, people continued to sew even though there was a lot of confusion at the opening because they had been led into another meditative dimension. The interesting thing about this work is that it is global and does not have a single physical venue. At the same time, each work is a portrait of an unrepeatable context both for those who intervene and for the materials employed. For example, the colour of the fabric can be changed each time and I choose it according to the context. For Bologna it was a pink tulle, while for the Venice Biennale I chose a white fabric. In this group action there are no political, aesthetic, psychological or linguistic preclusions and limits because I involve everybody.* **LB:** Is it collective and not just intimate poetry? **DM:** *Yes, my research is linked to the world of literature. Since the 1960s, in America I am known more as a poet than as a visual artist, but for me there is no difference. The show in Bologna titled *Locus Solus. Omaggio ad Arthur Rimbaud* represents, for me, the way for causing to coexist the work done by words, images that have been dreamt of and made real, and the participation of the public in the thing that we could call living culture. [...]*

David Medalla (Manila, the Philippines, 1938; he lives and works in the world). He was already active as an artist in the 1960s and, often ahead of the times, he has touched on many of the art researches that have characterised the second half of the twentieth century, among which Fluxus, Minimal Art, Kinetic Art, happenings, and Participation Art. His work cannot be ascribed to any particular trend unless to the idea of “time specific” works that reflect on the dialogue between various cultures. After many shows in New York, in 1964 Medalla moved to London where he co-founded the Signals Gallery in which international Kinetic Art was exhibited. Here, until 1966, he edited the issues of the

GALLERIA ENRICO ASTUNI

Bologna

“Signals News” periodical. In 1967 he started up “Exploding Galaxy”, a space that, thanks to a flow of international artists, musicians, poets and dancers, became a significant creative force in the social and cultural revolutions of the 1960s. From 1974 to 1977 he was the president of “Artists for democracy” and the director of the Fitzrovia Cultural Centre in London. He collaborated at various times with the mythical curator Harald Szeeman on, among others, the show *Weiss auf Weiss* in 1966 at the Berne Kunsthalle; *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* in Berne and London in 1969; and at Documenta 5 in Kassel in 1972. Among the main international group shows he has recently participated in, mention should be made of *Viva Arte Viva*, the 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, Giardini and Arsenale (2017); the *Hepworth Prize for Contemporary British Sculpture*, The Hepworth Wakefield, Yorkshire (2016); *Tate collection*, Tate Modern Switch House opening (2016); *66|16*, Galleria Enrico Astuni, Bologna (2016); *The 8th Asian Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT8)*, Queensland, (2015); *Unidades y Continuidades*, kurimanzutto, Mexico City, (2015). *Live in your Head*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2000); *2nd Johannesburg Biennale*, South Africa (1998); *L’Informe*, curated by Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, Centre Pompidou, Paris (1996); *Live/Life* curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Musée d’art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1996); *Flux attitudes*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1992).