



# *Manifest Gardens*

Aina Zulueta-Valencia

THE  
DRAWING ROOM  
CONTEMPORARY ART

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## INTRODUCTION

Everything in nature speaks of beauty. People have an innate sensitivity to the beauty in natural surroundings, where we are most in touch with our inner selves, where we feel refreshed, alive and at peace. The violence to all the senses of the urban concrete experience is something most people in the cities have grown to tolerate. Being human, and living in tree-less places is not optimal living, I would argue that it is an assault to the soul. During the pandemic, most Metro Manila citizens had nowhere to go – there were dwindling trees, a lack of parks, and few green open spaces in the city that could afford a place of respite and refuge.

The series of paintings in Manifest Gardens are a reimagining of our cities abloom with Philippine flora and trees. A bold and bright palette was lifted from the rare beauty of our native trees, most of which remain obscured from general public knowledge and awareness.



## INTRODUCTION

During the past years when I began this series of paintings, I joined the Philippine Native Plants Conservation Society, a band of very committed academics, botanists, biologists and garden enthusiasts. I consider this time a re-education of our own national ecological heritage - our beautiful, medicinal, resilient and majestic Philippine trees - many now in critical numbers. The bright yellow flowers of the Ilang-Ilang tree, the purple violet blooms of the Banaba, the white and yellow flowers of the Mapilig, and the yellow peach flowers of the Balai Lamok all lent their colors to the dense compositions of the paintings.

At first, the works were purely landscapes. Then slowly I began to add human figures. Nature in the wild, if left unperturbed, is forever regenerating. But in a man-made environment, the care of the human hand is needed. To cultivate gardens, pockets of them, or even to care for a single plant is a humanitarian act for our own personal and communal well-being. It is also a concrete move to recognize our inter-beingness with other life forms.

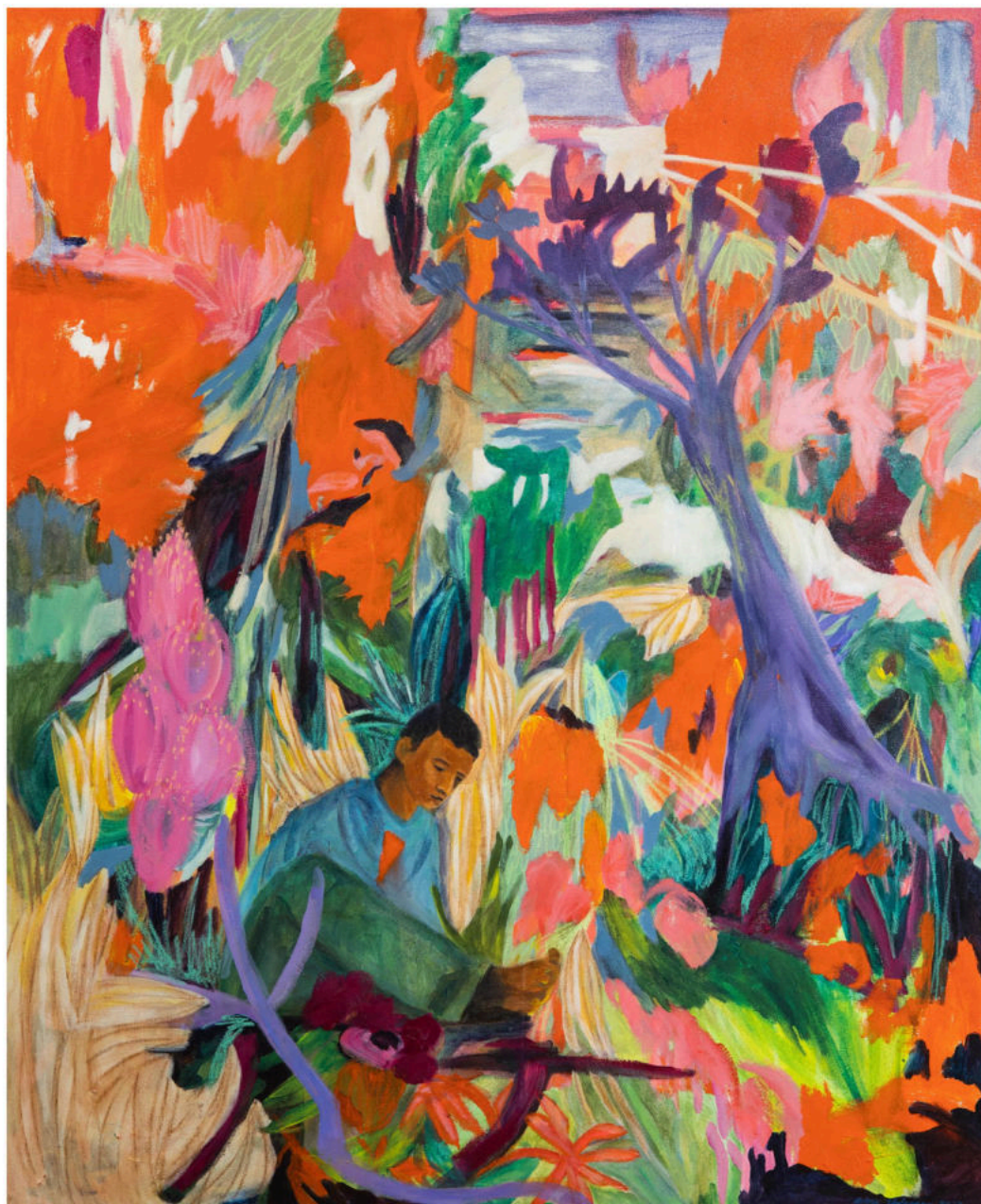




## INTRODUCTION

The solitary human figures amidst the largeness of nature signal a peaceful co-existence with our co-creatures. In painting them, I pose the question - Is it time to reconsider the position of man as having dominion over all living things? To dominate is to control, consume, extract and siphon our natural resources with abandon. How has this stance affected human engagements to the earth thus far? Perhaps it is time to give the notion of dominion a rest, and to allow a more equal, equitable and respectful relationship to nature to take its place.

- Aina Zulueta-Valencia



Nilalang  
Acrylic, crayon on canvas  
152.4 x 122 cm  
2023





Sa Sariling Bayan  
Watercolor, acrylic ink, gouache, crayon on paper  
113 x 183 cm  
2023



Everyday Grandeur  
Watercolor, acrylic ink, gouache, crayon on paper  
114 x 71 cm  
2024



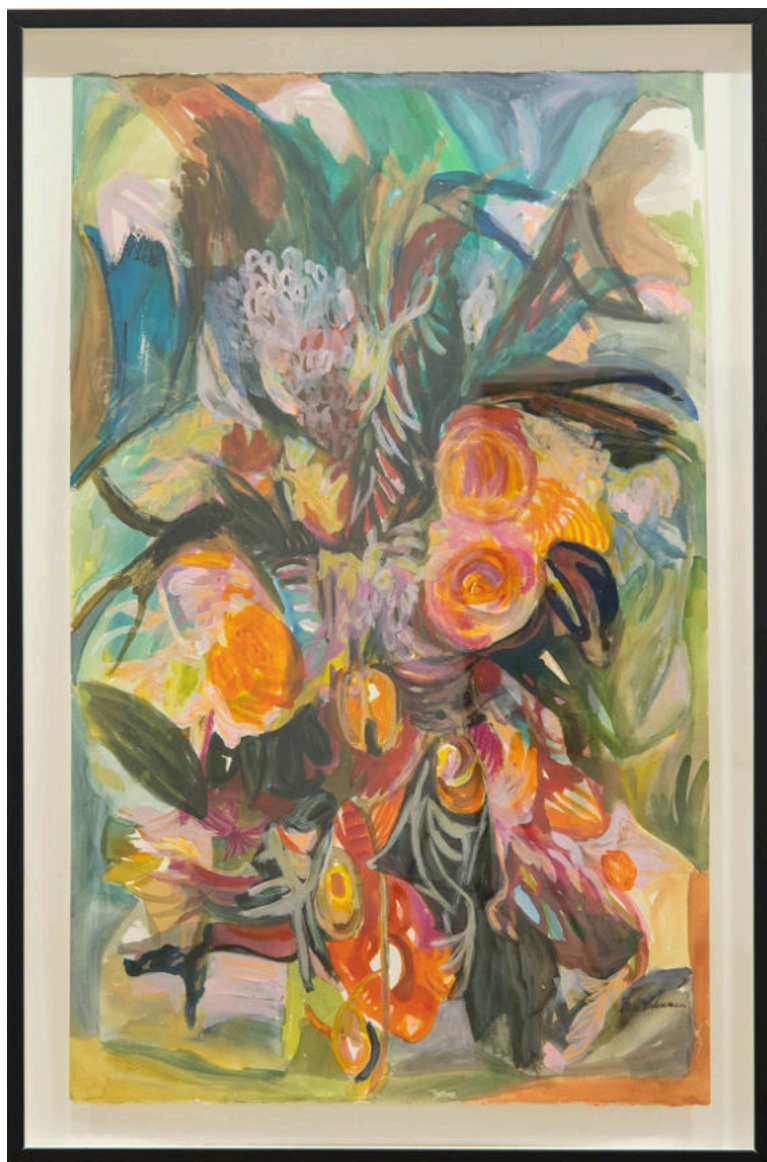
Resting in Majesty

Watercolor, acrylic ink, acrylic, and crayon on paper

114 x 71 cm

2024





Profusion  
Watercolor, acrylic ink, gouache on paper  
114 x 71 cm  
2024



The Greatest Show  
Acrylic on canvas  
152.4 x 183 cm  
2024





In the Service on Men  
Acrylic on canvas  
152.4 x 122 cm  
2024



What is Now Missing  
Acrylic on canvas  
152.4 x 122 cm  
2024





Padayon  
Acrylic, water-soluble crayon on canvas  
152.4 x 122 cm  
2024



Finding Katmon  
Acrylic, crayon on canvas  
152.4 x 122 cm  
2023





If Nature Had Human Rights

Acrylic on canvas

152 x 244 cm

2024



No Festivals for Me  
Acrylic on canvas  
152.4 x 183 cm  
2024





Mother gouged  
Watercolor, acrylic ink, crayon on paper  
114 x 216 cm  
2024



## FURTHER READING

It has been said that we are now moving from the era of the Anthropocene - a time characterized by this oppressive abuse of nature without fear or care of consequence of the earth's limited and precious resources - to a new era of the Symbiocene. Coined by Australian philosopher Glen Albrecht, the Symbiocene emphasizes the human imperative to engage all living things in a way that respects and recognizes each one as vital for survival. A symbiotic way of life therefore begins with the realization that we must live in harmony - in cooperation and in mutuality with plants, trees, the seas and mountains, the birds and butterflies and all other living things. The natural world has its secret workings and intelligences. It has developed through the millennia in which we can learn from and emulate. Nature, given the chance, can save us all.

According to the Public Parks and Open Spaces (A Planning and Development Guide published by ASSURE, PIEP and PALA), "The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum of 9 square meter of green open space per person.





## FURTHER READING

According to the Green City Index, Metro Manila currently has 5 square meters per person. To reach the WHO standard, Metro Manila will need to add 52 square kilometers of green open space, roughly the size of Manila and Makati combined."

In making the paintings, I mean to reflect on what we are losing from one day to the next, as well as create a hopeful gesture of what is still possible given the present ecological state. Growing pockets of green together as a citizenry can build living green corridors, to support a symbiotic way of life for ourselves and the creatures who co-inhabit our city.

### **From the Painting Studio to the Garden**

Painting gardens led me to begin building a real garden. The idea of artists in civic practice entering the public realm appealed to me. After almost two years, a garden for children was born.



## FURTHER READING

The Children's Play Garden in Rizal Park, Luneta is a playground and mini arboretum of some thirty newly-planted native trees that opened last November 17, 2023. This was completed as part of my thesis for an MFA at Lesley University, Cambridge USA. This work is an artistic gesture. A living art form made in collaboration with many groups and individuals. This serves the need for children to play freely amidst nature. They learn more about our native trees, as well as caring and protecting our rich ecological heritage.

I believe that art is expansive, transformative and viable. Serving the community in spaces such as galleries, museum, as well as the public realm. Bringing focus to the most pressing problems in our highly-urbanized world today.

Aina Zulueta-Valencia  
March 5, 2024





Scenery from different gardens, where the artist drew her inspiration from.

Planting a native Bignay tree in Luneta Park

2023

Photo courtesy of the artist



Scenery from different gardens, where the artist drew her inspiration from.  
Close up shot of flower in Burnham Green, Sign about Gatasan Dagat plant  
2024

Photo courtesy of the artist






Scenery from different gardens, where the artist drew her inspiration from.  
The Children's Play Garden, Burnham Green  
2024  
Photo courtesy of the artist

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