An abstract oil painting by Manuel Ocampo. The composition is dominated by a large, textured face in the center, rendered in shades of beige and light brown. The face has a single, dark, almond-shaped eye. To the right of the face, there are vibrant, swirling strokes of blue and green. Below the face, there are more textured, wavy lines in shades of brown, orange, and red. The background is a mix of light and dark tones, with some areas appearing more like a sky or a landscape. The overall style is expressive and gestural, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, layered texture.

MAY 3 –
31, 2025

NAWARA

Manuel Ocampo

THE
DRAWING ROOM
CONTEMPORARY ART

Nawara

In my work, I explore the Philippines as a living, breathing entity—a nation contorted by the weight of history, identity, and socio-political turbulence. Through surreal anthropomorphism, I reimagine the cartographic silhouette of the archipelago as a protagonist in its own mythos, embodying contradictions, struggles, and the haunting specters of colonialism, and domestic decay. Each painting interrogates the duality of the nation's soul, oscillating between farce and tragedy, the sacred and the profane.

Two examples from this series: "Alpine Mirage" and "Infernal Sovereign" illustrates an attempt to stage a narration of our post-colonial haunting. "Alpine Mirage" depicts the Philippine map bathed in saccharine pink, draped in Swiss attire—a pipe-smoking figure perched in an alpine dreamscape. The absurdity of this European caricature clashing with the tropical archipelago critiques the performative adoption of foreign ideals, a legacy of colonial mimicry. The upside-down cross, cradled like a scepter, invokes a subversion of sanctity—a nation grappling with fractured faith, where borrowed iconography masks a search for self-definition.

In "Infernal Sovereign," the map transforms into a crimson devil, horns piercing the sky, wings casting shadows over a village teeming with cockroach-ridden homes. Here, the nation becomes both predator and prisoner—a symbol of systemic rot, where power corrupts and the marginalized are relegated to a pest infestation. The devil's gaze is not merely malevolent but tragic, a mirror to the cycles of exploitation that hover over the land like a cursed inheritance.

Together, these works are not mere maps but visceral diaries. They ask: What monsters have we nurtured? What masks have we welded to our skin? Through grotesque beauty and disquieting humor, I confront the viewer with the nation's fragmented psyche—a body politic forever dancing on the edge of reinvention and collapse. This is not a portrait of a country, but a seance with its ghosts.



ALPINE MIRAGE

Oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cm, 2025



THE APPARITION

Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.4 cm, 2025

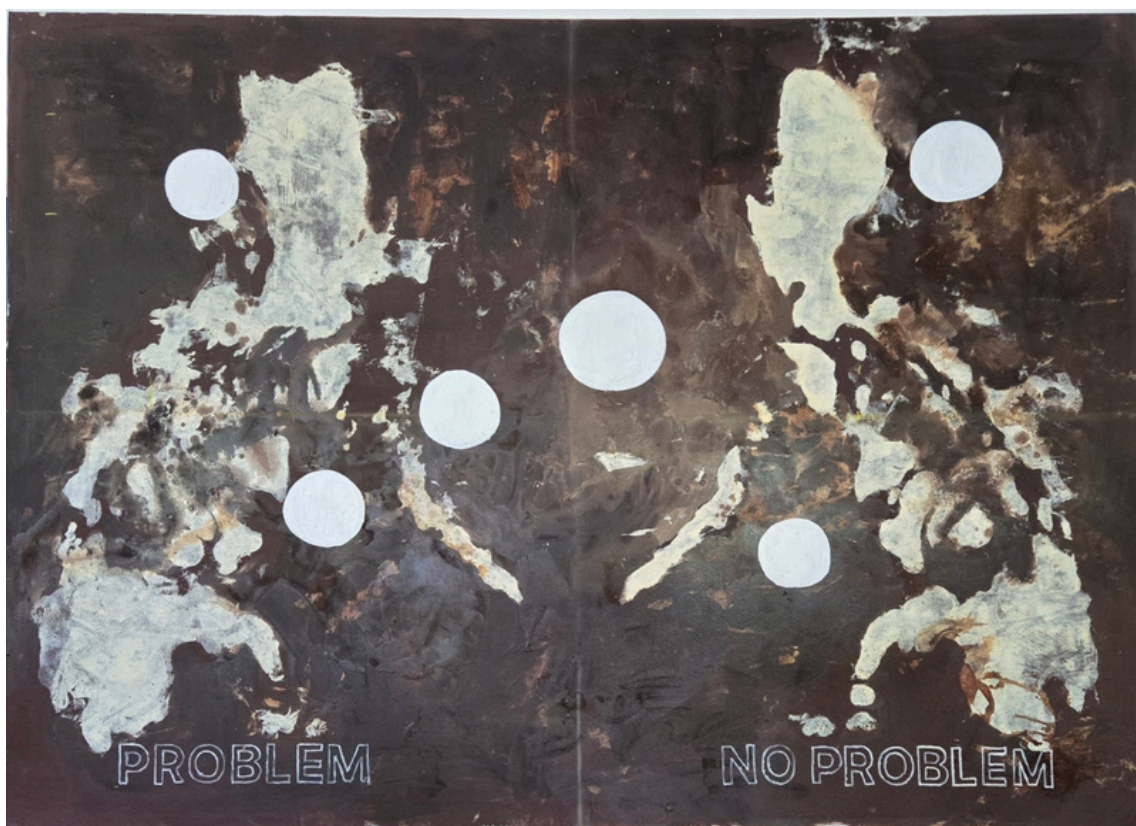


MARCHING FORWARD TOWARDS THE IRONY DOORMAT

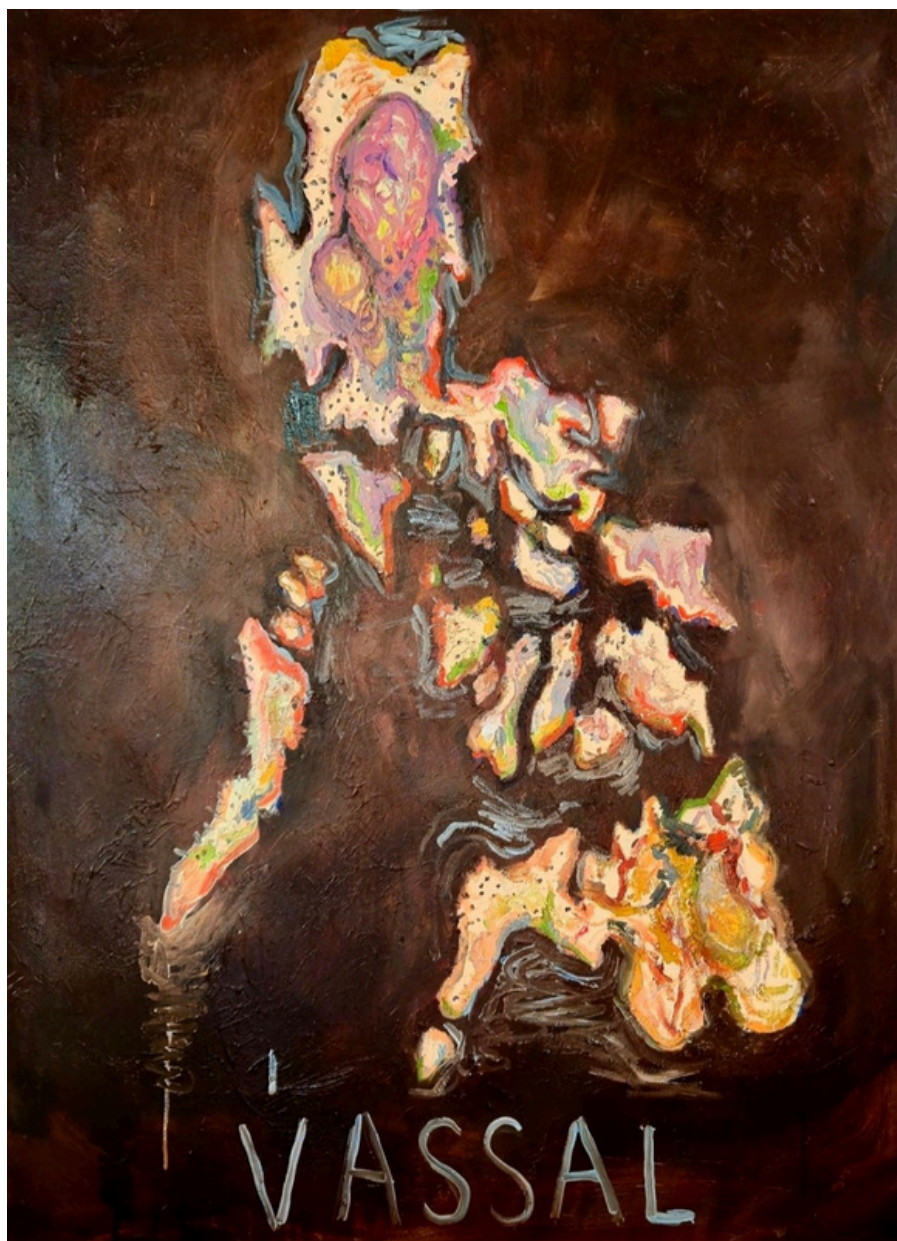
Oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cm, 2025



OCCUPIED TERRITORIES
Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.4 cm, 2025



PROBLEM - NO PROBLEM
Oil on canvas, 200 x 270 cm, 2025



VASSAL

Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.4 cm, 2025



THE STAIN

Oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cm, 2025



BANK CONFETTI

Oil on canvas, 200 x 270 cm, 2025



THE VISITATION

Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.4 cm, 2025



Manuel Ocampo has been a vital presence on the international art scene for over twenty-five years, known for fearlessly tackling the taboos and cherished icons of society and of the art world itself. In recent years, his works have featured more mysterious yet emotionally-charged motifs that evoke an inner world of haunting visions and nightmares.

The process of artistic creation is often a central concern, with many works making ironic commentaries on notions of artistic inspiration, originality, and the anxiety of influence. The artist himself is frequently the subject of parody and self-mockery; sometimes he appears as a buzzard, a kind of cultural scavenger, or assumes slightly deranged alter egos.

Ocampo had solo and group exhibitions at the 1992 Documenta IX, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (1992), the Sezon Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo (1991), and the biennials of Venice (1993, 2001) Gwangju (1997), and Berlin (2001) to name a few.

Ocampo's work was recently included in the exhibition, *Possession III*, at the Lancaster Gallery at Coventry University, Coventry, UK (2014), in a solo exhibition at the Carré Sainte Anne, Montpellier, France (2013), and in the Asia-Pacific Triennial, Brisbane, Australia (2012–2013). In 2015–16, his work will be showing in the traveling exhibition, *Come as You Are: Art of the 1990s*, opening February 8 at the Montclair Art Museum.

In 2017 Ocampo participated in *Spectre of Influence*, an exhibition at the Philippine Pavilion during the 57th Venice Biennial. His recent exhibitions include the 11th Asia Pacific Triennale, Brisbane, Australia (2020), and *It Doesn't Matter What It Means As Long As It Is Taking Up Space* at DISKUS, Aalst, Belgium (2024).

Descriptions of the Works

ALPINE MIRAGE | depicts the Philippine map bathed in saccharine pink, draped in Swiss attire—a pipe-smoking figure perched in an alpine dreamscape. The absurdity of this European caricature clashing with the tropical archipelago critiques the performative adoption of foreign ideals, a legacy of colonial mimicry. The upside-down cross, cradled like a scepter, invokes a subversion of sanctity—a nation grappling with fractured faith, where borrowed iconography masks a search for self-definition.

THE APPARITION | Through the shadowed aperture of Henri Matisse's fractured modernist portal, "French Window at Collioure" (1914), the viewer is drawn into a nocturnal reverie where history bleeds into the spectral present. The window's abstract planes of midnight blue and obsidian black frame a haunting vision: the archipelago of the Philippines emerges crudely in milky white, its contours smudged like a ghostly residue—a phantom cartography evoking colonial erasure, forgotten narratives, or the stubborn persistence of memory. The map hovers ambiguously, neither fully material nor entirely ephemeral, its form suggesting a spill of moonlight, a stain of bodily absence, or the afterimage of violence. Below, an empty glass sits on the floor, its rim catching a sliver of ambient glow—a vessel drained, a silent witness to thirsts unquenched or histories swallowed whole. Here, Matisse's fractured modernism becomes a stage for postcolonial hauntings, where geography is both ghost and wound, and the act of looking transforms into an uneasy reckoning with what lingers in the dark."

MARCHING FORWARD TOWARDS THE IRONY DOORMAT | This provocative piece juxtaposes innocence and critique through a vivid, surreal tableau. A procession of "white" art student toddlers marches boldly across a vibrant pink backdrop, their youthful determination contrasted by the whimsical yet charged symbolism surrounding them. Beside them, a lush flower arrangement in a vase evokes themes of growth and fragility, a delicate counterpoint to the scene's underlying tension.

Leading the march, a toddler steps defiantly onto a doormat emblazoned with the word "IRONY"—a literal and metaphorical trampling of superficiality, perhaps questioning the disconnect between artistic idealism and societal realities. Juxtaposed over the figures, and dominating the canvas, looms a map of the Philippines rendered in dark brown reminiscent of excrement, its form smearing across the composition like an unresolved stain. This jarring choice challenges perceptions of cultural marginalization, casting a shadow over the otherwise playful narrative.

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES | This haunting reinterpretation of the 18th-century *Murillo Velarde Philippine Map* transforms colonial cartography into a spectral narrative. The archipelago emerges as a tapestry of ghostly faces—some twisted into demonic visages, others reduced to skeletal remains—etched into the terrain like echoes of forgotten histories. The dark green backdrop, evocative of submerged depths, contrasts violently with fiery orange arrows that crisscross the composition, suggesting trajectories of conquest, displacement, or migration.

At the top, the text "OCCUPIED TERRITORIES" blazes in sulfurous yellow. Below, "MJO", is inscribed upside-down. The inverted date "1925" anchors the work in a liminal space between historical specificity and timeless critique, perhaps alluding to the cyclical nature of history. The painting synthesizes elements from art history's darker traditions. The grotesque faces recall James Ensor's *carnival hellscapes*, while the skeletal motifs echo *memento mori* symbolism. The arrows' dynamism draws from militaristic precision critiquing colonial cartography's role in domination. The inverted signature and date destabilize authority, mirroring Dadaist anti-art gestures or the subversive irony of Francisco Goya's *Black Paintings*.

By reimagining the *Murillo Velarde* map—a colonial artifact—as a haunted relic, I aim to interrogate the violence embedded in territorial claims. The demonic faces embody the dehumanization of conquest, while skulls memorialize erased voices. The arrows' trajectories, both destructive and directional, question whether they chart progress or predation. The work's tension between beauty and horror invites viewers to confront history's unresolved wounds.

Like the cursed paintings of folklore, *Occupied Territories* refuses passive observation. Its disquieting imagery and destabilized authorship challenge viewers to decode its layers—a cartography of resistance where geography and memory collide. Inverting the artist's name and date, MJO anonymizes critique, suggesting that the true "author" of such histories is collective trauma itself.

PROBLEM - NO PROBLEM | The painting presents a provocative exploration of perception, duality, and the subjective nature of societal judgment. By rendering two maps of the Philippines as some sort of Rorschach blots—one oriented correctly and labeled "no problem," the other inverted and marked "problem." The work critiques how identity and legitimacy are often framed through rigid, binary perspectives. The mirrored map, deemed "wrong," challenges notions of conformity, suggesting that deviation from imposed norms is pathologized, while the "correct" map symbolizes the comfort found in accepted narratives, even when they obscure deeper complexities.

The dirty brown backdrop evokes a sense of historical weight or unresolved turmoil, against which the cream-colored maps and stark white dots (as large as plates) create striking contrast. These dots, scattered like celestial bodies or vacant vessels, could symbolize either abundance or absence—resources, voices, or unresolved

histories—that punctuate the national psyche. Their scale demands attention, yet their ambiguity invites reflection: Are they markers of neglect, sites of potential, silent witnesses to contradiction or just formless thought forms hovering as abstractions?

Ultimately, the piece questions who defines “problem” and “no problem,” urging viewers to interrogate the frameworks through which they assign value, legitimacy, and meaning to a nation’s identity. It is a visual metaphor for the tension between perception and reality, where truth becomes a matter of orientation, and resolution lies in embracing multiplicity over singular narratives.

VASSAL | This piece, “Vassal,” reimagines the Philippine archipelago as fresh roadkill—splayed, visceral, and glistening under the indifferent gaze of history. Rendered in meaty reds, greyish flesh, and pinks against a shiny stained brown, the map is less a geographic marker than a carcass, flattened by the wheels of colonial appetites and neoliberal inevitabilities. The text below, “Vassal,” serves as both epitaph and punchline, a droll tribute to the nation’s recurring role as the highway snack of empires.

The composition thrives on irony: a country perpetually told to “rise” now immortalized mid-squash. The brown backdrop? Call it the soil of resilience or the stain of extraction—either way, it’s the same dirt that’s buried us. The entrails of the land spill into the Sulu Sea, while Luzon’s contorted shape suggests a pelvis fractured by the weight of borrowed ideologies. Roadkill, after all, is what happens when something alive wanders into the path of something faster.

This is not a lament. It’s a dark joke scratched into asphalt. The Philippines as a flattened possum, still warm, still twitching with the reflexes of survival. The humor here is the kind that bubbles up in traffic jams and power outages: if you don’t laugh, you’ll scream.

The piece invites viewers to gawk, rubberneck, and maybe recognize the familiarity of the tableau. After all, what is a vassal state if not roadkill served hot on the geopolitical buffet?

THE STAIN | This painting interrogates the entangled narratives of wealth, apathy, and national identity through the visceral juxtaposition of a fragmented Philippine map and a figure emblematic of unchecked privilege. The subject—a corpulent man in a tailored suit, his posture languid and disinterested—embodies the complacency of systems that prioritize accumulation over stewardship. His elbow rests on a safe, a cold monolith of security, while a bulging bank pouch sits on top signaling wealth hoarded rather than circulated.

The archipelago, rendered in discordant hues, drapes across his form like a spectral shroud. Each color fractures the map into contested zones. This chromatic dissonance mirrors the nation’s complex identity—a tapestry of cultures, ecologies, and struggles—overshadowed by the figure’s corporeal dominance.

Here, the body becomes a site of contradiction. The man's boredom—a performance of detachment—masks the violence of indifference.

Technically, the overlay of the map employs translucent layers, allowing the figure to both consume and be consumed by the terrain. Brushwork oscillates between precise corporate sleekness and the raw, uneven textures of the archipelago, inviting viewers to question where humanity resides in this collision.

Ultimately, this work is a provocation: Who shapes a nation's story? Whose security is forged through others' instability? By fusing geography and greed, it challenges us to see beyond the myth of neutrality in privilege, urging a reckoning with the maps we inherit—and those we dare to redraw.

BANK CONFETTI | Behold: the Philippine economy in abstract—a plucked chicken throttled by the invisible hand of capitalism, its banks splattered like confetti at a funeral, while the maps rot in patriotic hues. Even the background's grime whispers, 'Don't worry, your deposits are safe... in our offshore accounts.'

THE VISITATION | In "THE VISITATION," the map transforms into a crimson devil, horns piercing the sky, wings casting shadows over a village teeming with cockroach-ridden homes. Here, the nation becomes both predator and prisoner—a symbol of systemic rot, where power corrupts and the marginalized are relegated to a pest infestation. The devil's presence is not merely malevolent but tragic, a mirror to the cycles of exploitation that hover over the land like a cursed inheritance.

Together, these works are not mere maps but visceral diaries. They ask: What monsters have we nurtured? What masks have we welded to our skin? Through grotesque beauty and disquieting humor, I confront the viewer with the nation's fragmented psyche—a body politic forever dancing on the edge of reinvention and collapse. This is not a portrait of a country, but a seance with its ghosts.

| In "THE VISITATION," the map transforms into a crimson devil, horns piercing the sky, wings casting shadows over a village teeming with cockroach-ridden homes. Here, the nation becomes both predator and prisoner—a symbol of systemic rot, where power corrupts and the marginalized are relegated to a pest infestation. The devil's presence is not merely malevolent but tragic, a mirror to the cycles of exploitation that hover over the land like a cursed inheritance.

Together, these works are not mere maps but visceral diaries. They ask: What monsters have we nurtured? What masks have we welded to our skin? Through grotesque beauty and disquieting humor, I confront the viewer with the nation's fragmented psyche—a body politic forever dancing on the edge of reinvention and collapse. This is not a portrait of a country, but a seance with its ghosts.



THE
DRAWING ROOM
CONTEMPORARY ART

For inquiries, please contact us at:

✉ info@drawingroomgallery.com

📍 @drawingroommanila