

AUG 7 -
10, 2025

ART MOMENTS JAKARTA

Gerardo Tan



THE
DRAWING ROOM
CONTEMPORARY ART

Turntable Paintings

Luminous tones radiate from the grooves of the record disc creating colors melodic to the senses. Each resonance is a scalar sequence of time marking events with moving effects instinctive to the provisional moment: a DJ cutting a music sample in perfect drop to the beat; or, a painter depicting scenes with spontaneous effects that augment the picture's aura. Such hermetic artistry in turn becomes the basis for the work's quasi metaphysical features rendered to abstraction. Comparisons to an aesthetic of primal existential soul exuding, for example, from an exemplary Rothko painting brings to mind upon encountering Gerardo Tan's turntable paintings. To illustrate, pigments are layered in temporal cadence that produce a gauzy impression of overlapping sensations, the foreground blending with the background in a push-pull refrain that dictates the dilation of time with a cross-fade to open space. Presence mixes with absence, as past is to the present, all in synchronic harmony.

Citing the work's aesthetic qualities, and playing to the tune of Pop Art's instant appeal in using readymade goods, Gerardo Tan transforms the record player into a painting machine that creates optimal synesthetic abstractions. His introspective look into the nature of representation facilitates the appropriation of found materials that are coded with cues ready for its ensuing deconstruction. Tan's application of painting's loaded history upon an accessible commodity form in the record discs instigate the mixing of high and low cultures, where the immanent content renders the work's unpacking. Thus, the pigmented grooves seem to have come from the melody pressed underneath – a perceptive segue between music and art.

Putting to mind Tan's working interest with Pop, the colorful concentric rings naturally point to Jasper Johns' Target paintings. Johns' use of found material that tease out the object's hidden meanings echo through Tan's work in his artistic fusion of sound and vision. Sampling further around the circle of stylistic parallels pointing to the turntable paintings, following the format (of the record), the manner (of abstraction), and the content (on music and painting) that lie in close connection to popular culture and art: the collaboration of David Bowie and Damien Hirst for this instance, in a spin painting titled *"Beautiful, Hallo, Space-Boy Painting"* (1995), reverberates throughout with a sense of play and chance, comparing them to being "tracks in time." Not distant from these conceptual concerns would certainly be the avantgarde work of Marcel Duchamp, whose series of rotoreliefs aimed to push the boundaries of illusion towards three dimensional space by adding the element of movement through machines to produce art – a question explored often by Tan in using readymade equipment to paint by other means.

Indeed, conceptual if not stylistic affinities become relative once we see similar patterns occurring between the works. In the spirit of modernist precursors, Tan's concerns focus on process and the translation of various media into newer formats producing a unique form of language. While issues on technique remain present in the works but function as mere cogs in the machine to reproduce meaning.

In *Mirror Painting* (2002), Tan explored the definition of painting as a mimetic technique by capturing the point of view of a brush in the act of painting while being recorded by a video camera that is tied to it. This motion is captured on tape and played back on three monitors at the foot of a large mirror where the apparent “painting” was made and consequently coded into large horizontal strokes of primary colors taken from the artist’s paint kit. Tan made use of a video camera to function as a paint brush to create a feedback loop about the production of images. Thus, the mirror object, the video camera recording, and the act of painting form a matrix of Tan’s rumination on representation. *Skateboard Painting* (2015) functions similarly with a video camera attached to a skateboard while in motion, the interweaving of track marks made in the process mimic a rendition of action painting epitomized by the painterly loop networks of Jackson Pollock, wherein Tan’s project revisits ongoing ideas on iteration and authenticity. To a greater extent, Tan’s investigations extend further on the project *Visualizing Sound* (2017) which succeeded in representing the Philippine Pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2022. Tan, in collaboration with the ethnomusicologist Felicidad A. Prudente and the master weaver Sammy Buhle, translated the sounds produced from the weaving looms into patterns that form a new visual language for the continuous interpretation and production of culture. The result is an interdisciplinary installation of transcriptions, video, and textiles that enable the experience of traditional practices into newer signification. In a recent exhibit at The Drawing Room gallery titled “Splashes and thunderclaps through the eyelids of two shores; murmuring” (2023), Tan’s experience from Venice is expressed through an installation of video and painting, where he sourced the waves coming from the canal as the generator of iterative visual patterns which are then applied on the paintings plus other peripheral processes that turned into a collection of performance, video, and sculptural installation.

Gerardo Tan’s approach to art making is a critique and deconstruction of representation and its conventions. By deferring the task of creation to the machine, using the turntable as a mechanical prosthesis for the analog routine of painting – pigments applied on a surface, leads to Tan’s reflections on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin), particularly on how aesthetic patterns translate into representations of the self as well as the ironic deconstruction of itself, the loss of aura, through technological media. Tan touches upon the pressing issue about the pervasive reach of artificial intelligence and the construction of automated experiences. Today’s interest on machine learning and their influence on creativity, places Gerardo Tan’s work timely and critical in relation to the enigma of the imagination, something which machines still have to learn.

Arvin Flores



Turntable Painting 15
Acrylic on vinyl records, 30.48 cm diameter, 2023



Turntable Paintings

Acrylic on vinyl records, 30.48 cm diameter each, 2020–2025, installation view

GERARDO TAN

Gerardo Tan, also known as Gerry Tan, is a visual artist, curator, and art educator. He finished Bachelor of Fine Arts, Major in Painting, at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman College of Fine Arts (CFA) in 1982 and Master of Fine Arts, Major in Painting, at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1992 as a Fulbright Fellow. He was a professorial lecturer at UP CFA from 1993 to 2000 and the former dean of the University of the East College of Fine Arts from 2002 to 2005. Tan was awarded the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 1988.

As a conceptual artist, Tan explores the nature of art and how forms and materiality can be articulated in ideas and concepts, be it through painting, sculpture, found objects, artists books, or installations. Often referencing and revisiting his earlier work, Tan deals with aesthetic questions related to the reproducibility of images and the spatial and temporal authenticity of a work.

Tan has exhibited at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Jorge B. Vargas Museum, Ateneo Art Gallery, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, and Lopez Museum, among many more institutions in the Philippines. He has participated in several international exhibitions such as the 2nd Asian Art Show in Fukuoka Museum, 1982, the 1st Melbourne Biennale, 1999, the 4th Gwangju Biennale, 2002, and the inaugural exhibition of The National Gallery of Singapore, 2016. He continues to work with contemporary artists making up the Bastards of Misrepresentation that is curated by Manuel Ocampo, which has aggressively and independently been exhibiting since 2010 in Berlin, Germany, Queens New York, and Sete, France.

In 2022, his works were featured at the Philippine Pavilion of the 59th Venice Biennale entitled *Milk of Dreams*, curated by Yael Buencamino and Arvin Flores.



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