

Artist's Favourites

By Amy & Enzo Lien Camacho



Recently, we have been reassessing our relationship to art-making, taking stock of what really matters amidst the tangle of frustrations, disappointments, and pleasures. Often we find it challenging to retain what is liberating in art, knowing how easily it is captured by a toxic industry. It is exhausting to navigate the structural contradictions of a professionalised contemporary art field that is bound in equal parts to radical imaginaries on the one hand, and to wealth on the other. Still, we

continue to find meaning in images, objects, and other sensory experiences. We immerse ourselves in material experimentation and play with different modes of perception. This helps us feel our way through the world and allows our frustrations, disappointments, and pleasures to sink into our bodies so that we might better understand and learn from them. The making is part of the thinking, part of the questioning, and while some of this might end up in captivity, some of it always escapes.

Photo: Amy Lien & Enzo Camacho

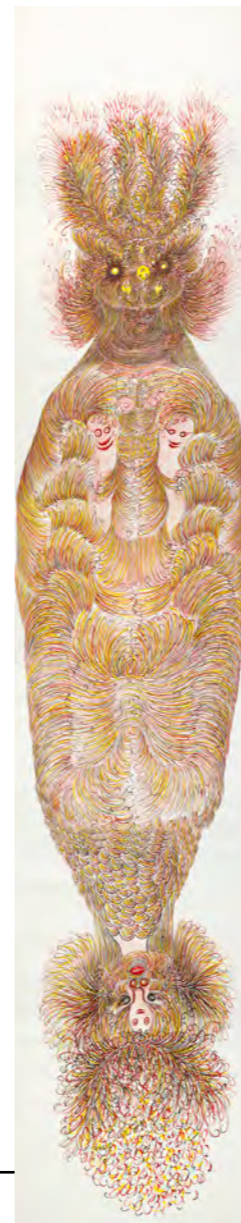
Guo Fengyi, Qigong Drawings

Guo Fengyi began making drawings in the late 1980s, at the age of forty-seven, after she was forced to leave her job as a chemical analyst at a fertiliser factory due to the onset of severe rheumatoid arthritis. As a way of healing, she began a disciplined practice of qigong, an ancient system of movement, meditation, and breathing that is meant to bring one's life energy into balance. During her meditations, Guo began to see visions – first an image of a simple yellow Buddha, then of never-before-seen ancient underground tombs in and around her

hometown of Xi'an, China, and after that, of the Bermuda Triangle, the pyramids of Giza, and the Statue of Liberty. She has said of her practice: "I draw because I do not know. I draw to know." The drawings – on journal pages, calendar paper, as well as monumental scrolls measuring up to six meters – inspire us not because they feel shrouded in esoteric mystery, but, on the contrary, because they feel open, generous, and somehow relatable. Eliciting a more holistic framework for art, they fold into a life practice of seeking knowledge and understanding – breath by breath and stroke by stroke.

Born 1942, died 2010 in Xi'an.

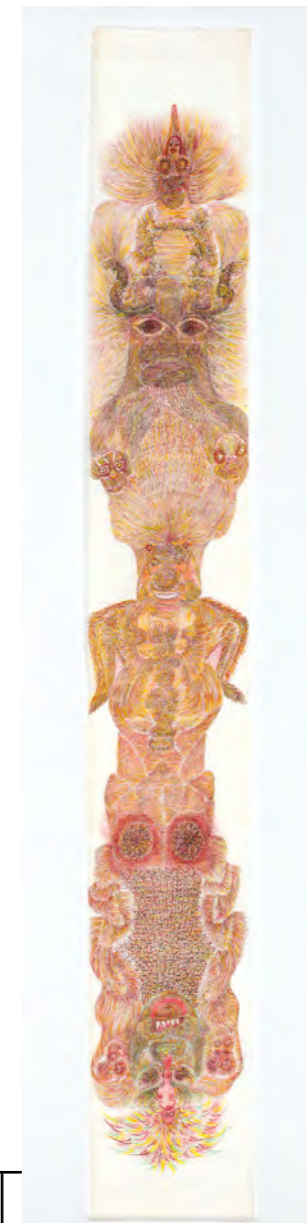
Nüwa, 2005
Ink on Xuan paper
413.5 x 70 cm



Tang Dynasty Princess Wencheng, 2004
Ink on rice paper
400.5 x 70 cm



Avalokiteshvara
undated
Ink on Xuan paper
189 x 68 cm



Statue of Liberty
2003
Ink on rice paper
505 x 97 cm



Courtesy: Gladstone Gallery

Alfonso Ossorio, *The Angry Christ*

We have been making repeat visits over the last several years to Negros, an agricultural island in the Philippines, to study a Catholic mural painted by the queer Filipino-American modernist Alfonso Ossorio. Situated in the company chapel of an industrial sugar mill and surrounded by endless hectares of sugarcane fields, this depiction of the Last Judgement appears like wildfire. We like to imagine what it might be like for someone in the local community to consume this image every Sunday, what effect this could have on the mind, body, and spirit. In his letters to Freud, the writer

and mystic Romain Rolland wrote that all religious experience is rooted in a kind of “oceanic feeling”, a dissolution of the boundary between self and world (an idea that Freud would later take up in *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1929]). Ossorio’s mural feels truly oceanic. But what is most provocative to us is the way this mystical excess seems to gain a particular kind of charge – something that feels more insurgent – when set against the necropolitical backdrop of the sugarcane plantation. Though the artist never gave it this title, the mural has come to be known as *The Angry Christ*. We can sense why.

Born 1916 in Manila, died 1990 in New York.



Alfonso Ossorio, *The Last Judgment (The Angry Christ)*, 1950
Mural in the St. Joseph the Worker Chapel,
located inside the Victorias Milling Company, City of Victorias, Philippines

© Mary Valledor, Estate of Carlos Villa. Photo: Nora Roth



Carlos Villa, *Artist's Feet*, 1979–80
Paper pulp, feathers; two pieces, each approx. 13 x 38 x 18 cm

Carlos Villa, *Artist's Feet*

In the late 1970s, the artist and educator Carlos Villa made casts of his feet with paper pulp and embellished them with feathers. According to the artist, these feet were inspired by *The Red Model* (1934) by Belgian Surrealist René Magritte, which depicts a pair of bare feet morphing into boots, as well as the ritual shoes made from human hair and emu feathers worn by *kurdaitcha*, shamanic figures of the Aboriginal Central Australian Arrernte group. A second-generation Filipino-American, Villa was adept at foraging inspiration from globally diverse sources and distilling them into charged aesthetic statements. Some of his later work from the 90s

would address issues of intercultural contact in more explicit, personal-historical terms, lending particular focus to the experiences of the *manong* generation, the first wave of mostly single male Filipinos who emigrated to the US in the early decades of the twentieth century to supply California and Hawaii with agricultural labour. But we feel particularly drawn to Villa’s earlier works – which often incorporate feathers, bones, and blood – because they give a sense of how his intellectual inquiries emerged from a deeply embodied place. To us, it’s clear these feathered feet were made by someone who felt the world in a particularly intimate way and wanted to share that feeling. They are a gift.

Born 1936, died 2013 in San Francisco.



Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach, 1988
Acrylic paint, canvas, printed fabric, ink, and thread, 189.5 x 174 cm

Faith Ringgold, Story Quilts

Faith Ringgold's story quilts from the 1980s onwards are endlessly instructive. Coming out of a deeply personal legacy (her mother was a dressmaker in Harlem, and her great-grandmother was an enslaved Southern woman who made quilts for plantation owners) as well as a feeling of affinity with other heritages (her earlier textile works were explicitly modelled after Tibetan *thangka* paintings), these quilts use what is close at hand to create patchwork allegories for life under racial capitalism. Ringgold's earlier paintings already signalled a complicated struggle with the modernist grid, which often sliced up, obscured, and segregated her painted figures. But in these

quilts, the grid is entirely remade, lovingly pieced together from scraps of cloth and imbued with story. One of our favourites is the quilt depicting a young girl's dream of flying over the George Washington Bridge. We are reminded of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter's twist on the word "plot" in her landmark essay "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation" (1971), referring both to uses of narrative, and to the garden plots cultivated by enslaved Africans on Caribbean plantations to grow their own food. Ringgold's quilts remind us that, in the plantation of global contemporary art, story can be both nourishment and "cultural guerrilla resistance" at once.

Born 1930 in New York, lives in Englewood, New Jersey.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York © Faith Ringgold / ARS, NY / DACS, London / Bildrecht, Wien 2022. Courtesy: ACA Galleries, New York 2022

SAKA, Bungkalan LAND (Learning and Demonstration) Project

Sama-samang Artista para sa Kilusang Agraryo (SAKA) is an alliance of artists in the Philippines advocating for genuine agrarian reform and rural development in alignment with a broader network of leftist mass organisations. For some years now, these artists have been collaborating with members of a small farming community to maintain an organic farm site on a piece of agricultural land in Metro Manila that is being claimed both by the community, and the University of the Philippines (who is threatening to develop the site). The initiative is modelled on a militant protest strategy practised by Filipino peasants and agricultural workers called *bungkalan*, by which farmer-activists occupy small

plots of land on legally disputed properties, typically on large-scale plantations, to cultivate their own food crops. Rooted in a wider collective struggle for genuine land reform and food sovereignty, SAKA's Bungkalan LAND (Learning and Demonstration) Project is not exactly an art project. It does, however, radically question and reimagine the grounds of cultural work, nurturing, in Antonio Gramsci's words, "a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality and, therefore, a world intimately ingrained in 'possible artists' and 'possible works of art.'"

SAKA (Artist Alliance for Genuine Agrarian Reform and Rural Development) was founded in 2019.

Photos: Therese Sanico (left); Geff Fortich (right)



SAKA, Bungkalan LAND Project
Collaboration with ARPAK (Artists for Cultural Revolution), 2022



SAKA
No to Illegal Demolition Campaign
2021

AMY LIEN (*1987, Dallas) & ENZO CAMACHO (*1985, Manila) have been collaborating since 2009. Through a variety of mediums such as video, sculpture, performance, drawing, and a constant use of modest materials (such as light, paper, strings, and sticks), their practice often involves an immersive period of research or living within a specific locality, with the aim of addressing traces of labour and capital as entangled with colonialism. The duo has had recent solo exhibitions at 47 Canal (2022), CP Project Space (2019), both in New York, and Kunstverein Freiburg (2018). Recent group exhibitions include 2021 Triennial: "Soft Water Hard Stone", New Museum, New York; Manifesta 13 Marseille; "100 Drawings From Now", The Drawing Center, New York (both 2020).