

FRESH VISION

COLOURS OF THE HEART CURATED BY FRANCO LAUREL

Tell us a bit about your background in the arts?

Can you share with us how you first got interested in art collecting?

I am a Filipino singer, actor for film, TV and stage. My career began in 1996 when I co-hosted a dance show on television. Since then I began acting on film and TV Dramas. My first foray into professional theatre began in 1999 when I appeared in an original Pilipino musical *Rama at Sita* based on the epic Ramayana. Since then I found my calling in theater and won two ALIW Awards for Best Actor in a Musical, the first in 2004 for my work in *Honk, The Ugly Duckling* and in 2009 for *Isang Panaginip Na Fili*, an adaptation of Jose Rizal's El Filibusterismo.

Growing up I had always been surrounded with art. My grand aunt Celia Diaz Laurel is a painter and actress who was once a star pupil of our National Artist, Fernando Amorsolo. I would see her create her masterpieces that are now hanging on the walls in her home and in museums. I am blessed to have one of her remarkable works in my collection. As time went on, I would visit the homes of family and friends and marvel at their collection which made me appreciate art in forms

It was in 1996 when I graduated from Keio University in Japan that I began collecting art. My mother gifted me with a painting by the late Filipino artist Tony Mahilum. Since then I was hooked. I began collecting the works of Mauro "Malang" Santos after my wife gifted me with a piece in 1999. There was no turning back, it was something about his choice of colors and his subjects that drew me in.

Do you have a main philosophy or belief that guides your decisions as an actor, artist, collector and curator?

I have always believed that God gave us talents that are uniquely ours and it is our responsibility to use it for good and be a positive influence to others. Art brings out so many emotions and we are given the gift to bring joy into people's lives. Whatever role I am given to portray or song I am tasked to sing, I make sure to be as authentic and true as possible, I owe it to my audience to give them an excellent performance.

What are you drawn to – your personal artistic tastes and style? Who are your top inspirations, whether in the arts, design, or other fields?

For someone whose wardrobe consists of mostly black pieces, I love collecting artworks that are colorful regardless of style, from abstract, to impressionism to realism such as the masterpieces of world renowned artist Betsy Westendorp and Filipino artists Malang, Edsel H. Moscoso, Martin Honasan, Abi Dionisio, Anton Del Castillo, Sid Natividad, Ftiz Herrera, Nasser Lubay, Demi Padua, Binong Javier, Mark Rocha Padernal, Dale Bagtas, Jack Salud, Aubrey Caabay and Aubrey Fajardo to name a few.

I am inspired by their work mainly because they evoke joy and positivity.

Can you share your thought-process when you select art for yourself, whether to collect for your home or to curate in a project like this? Do you follow a more instinctive, visceral approach; dive deep into research and decide based on a lot of thinking and evaluating; or perhaps a mix of both?

My thought process in collecting art is simple it has to speak to me. It has to strike a positive chord in my heart. It makes me feel better to know if the artist is also worth having in my collection in terms of value. I am not the type of collector who buys art just because a particular artist is popular at the moment. I always make sure to trust my gut instinct.

I use a visceral approach and instinct mixed with research when I am interested in a piece. I always check on the background of the artist and what their inspiration was in creating their pieces. I always ask for the title of the piece and why they named it that way. Maybe it's just me, but I believe that when you acquire their work, you take home a part of them with you, so if they were going through tough and troubled times creating a particular piece, then I usually stay away from those. There is a certain energy that art brings to a home that is why I make sure I acquire art that brings positivity and joy.

**What is the title and/or theme for this curated showcase?
How and why did you decide on this?**

The theme for this curated showcase is Colors of the Heart. The heart does not lie and it expresses so many emotions, the works of Erizal and Ibrahim does that. It showcases emotions that tugs the heart and speaks in so many levels, which makes this curated showcase something to watch out for.

Which artists have you selected to showcase? Why have you chosen these artists?

I have chosen Erizal As and Ibrahim because of their masterful rendition of life and nature in a plethora of color that not only captivates but also makes one think..

Can you share with us the first time you encountered the works of Erizal and/or Ibrahim and what it is that moved you to follow their practice since that first encounter?

I will never forget the first time I encountered the work of Erizal, it was love at first sight at the Art Fair Philippines in 2017. Out of all the pieces in the fair that year it was Erizal's work that captivated me the most, unfortunately I got to the booth a day too late as the piece was already sold. I could not stop looking at it. Since then I followed Erizal on Instagram and would stalk his feed to see his masterpieces hoping that one day I would own one. I always look forward to seeing Erizal's works at Art Fair Philippines every year. At this year's fair, I saw what I wanted but I was literally 2 minutes late when I arrived at the booth cause I saw a piece that I really liked but somebody beat me to it. It was the right size and the color palette that I was looking for. I am glad it is hanging in someone's home now, but I always believe that the right piece will come in the right time.

I came across Ibrahim's work via the Instagram account of Gajah Gallery. I was drawn to his attention to detail and the colors he used in creating his pieces. It intrigued me

Why have you selected these works to represent them? What do you know of each artists' practice? How do you interpret these works? Why are these works by Erizal and Ibrahim important to highlight particularly at this moment in time to you? What message would you like to convey?

Erizal's artistic style is unapologetic. He creates his masterpieces with vigor, where he has the superb ability to use a plethora of colors stroke by stroke painting to his own rhythm where the outcome is a unique interpretation of life as he sees it. One can stare for hours and bask in the grandeur of his masterpieces. His works make you think and in my opinion is important in collecting art.

When I look at the works of Ibrahim, I immediately feel something about it, his use of colors and the way he puts it all together, it is like a beautiful song that continues to play over and over again tugging at one's heart. His method of painting is what drew me to his works. He allows his emotions to articulate what he is feeling inside to create one outstanding piece after another. It is the same principle I use when I look at paintings. I feel what I see in his masterpieces.

I believe it is important to highlight the works of Erizal and Ibrahim at this time because their creations bring a positive light in our world today. This global pandemic causes so much anxiety and stress and seeing their works takes all that away. I find art therapeutic and what better way to add beauty and color into one's life than by basking in the splendor of their masterpieces.

How did it feel putting on a curator's hat for this project? Did you come across any challenges or surprises in the process?

I found it very interesting and challenging at the same time. It is not easy selecting the pieces from so many of their outstanding works.

What advice would you give other people you may know who are fascinated by art collecting, but are daunted or intimidated by the process?

My advice to anyone collecting art is to follow your heart and your instinct. You will know right away if the piece speaks to you. Art is subjective, what is beautiful and captivating to you may be different to someone else. Make sure to research on the artist and their background before acquiring a piece. Do not be dictated on trends and popularity because at the end of the day it is going to be a part of your collection. It will be a part of your home life and for some, work life. You will want to own something you love and appreciate.

Without a doubt, there is an abundance of artistic talent in the Philippines. But what inspired you to delve into Southeast Asian art? Have you noticed any significant differences or similarities among Filipino artists and artists from neighboring countries?

I have to give Gajah Gallery credit for that. If I had not seen that particular work of Erizal at the Art Fair Philippines in 2017 then I wouldn't have been exposed to the amazing talent of our Southeast Asian brothers and sisters. It opened my eyes to so much more beauty in the world Southeast Asian art. I have not seen any other artist in the Philippines that does what Erizal and Ibrahim do. The unique way of creating their works intrigued me and made me want to explore more of what our neighbors from the Southeast Asian region have to offer.

The similarity between the Filipino artists and our neighboring countries is their passion for their craft. No one can question the passion and dedication the artists have in uplifting art in our region to world-class status.

With all the historic events happening in the world today, how can art and design contribute significantly to humanity to you?

With everything happening in the world today, what we need is an avenue for us to escape and fill our lives with positivity and beauty. That is what art and design does, it uplifts our souls and continues to spark joy in our lives, which is integral for our mental health and well-being.