

**Pavilion of the Philippines
at the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

Sa kabila ng tabing lamang sa panahong ito / Waiting just behind the curtain of this age

Commissioner: National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), and the Office of Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda

Curator: Carlos Quijon, Jr.

Exhibitor: Mark Salvatus

Venue: Arsenale

20 April – 24 November, 2024

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Bird trills flit past us. A sudden tremor announces a thunderstorm's imminent landfall, or the mechanical rumbling of an engine of a plane flying low overhead. Curtains of translucent textile calm the light that cascades into the space of the pavilion. The sound of breath is discernible as instruments transform it into the rich density of drone or bright staccatos of pulsing sound. A keener ear will hear pursed lips vibrating, varying intensities against instrument mouthpieces that create music in the ambient air. Gigantic stone formations stretch this scene: crests peeking behind curtains, peaks adorned with brass instruments.

Sa kabila ng tabing lamang sa panahong ito / Waiting just behind the curtain of this age is a solo presentation of the work of Mark Salvatus (b. 1980). This theater of textile, stone sculptures, and soundscape stages an encounter with Mt. Banahaw, a three-peaked forested mystical mountain located on the boundary between Laguna and Quezon, and Lucban, the artist's hometown. In the navel of the pavilion, a video documents musicians traversing the mountain, each accompanied by their choice of instrument. Each musician starts with an improvisational reverberation of lips, approximating the shape of their mouths and the sound they make when playing their instruments. Then we see each instrument suddenly transform into contraptions of mossy branch and twisted twigs. The mumbling vibrations of each musician's mouth become music, natural matter and milieu their medium.

Through this newly commissioned video work, a mise-en-scène of textile panels and fiberglass boulders, and a reworking of an existing work, Salvatus explores the ethno-ecologies of Mt. Banahaw—how the surrounding more-than-human world interfaces with cultural imaginations: from how people perceive and act on the environment to how environmental considerations shape cultural life. For the Philippine Pavilion, Salvatus prospects the centrality of Mt. Banahaw in the cultural life of Lucban, from a revolution that aimed to encourage the native folk to find their own vernacular way of religious discernment, a history of marching bands and musicians and their place in a postcolonial regional modernity, a film of mystery and joy, to Salvatus's very own practice of assembly and salvaging that discloses a planetary political spirit.

The pavilion's title is taken from Apolinario de la Cruz (popularly known as Hermano Puli) who founded a religious brotherhood for the natives. In a speech rallying the members of the brotherhood in anticipation of an armed confrontation against the Spanish military and ecclesiastical authorities,





Puli declared that the “abrupt events” that were about to transpire “can be anticipated by the faithful through certain signs.” Puli advised them to always discern the “meaning of the times” and that “Victory [is] just behind the curtain of this age (Nasasa kabila nang tabing lamang sa Panahong yto).” As the pavilion’s titular trope, “Sa kabila ng tabing lamang sa panahong ito” signals imminence. It alludes to a liminality which, in Puli’s turn of phrase, anticipates an anticolonial or even postcolonial condition. The mystical is placed in the affective horizon of advent and anticipation, a space wherein something is yet to take place, a promise is yet to be fulfilled.

The pavilion is an assemblage of vernacular and popular histories that sketches out the contours of the contemporary at the cusp of a post-pandemic world. It weaves together Salvatus’s ongoing research on the vernacular histories of Mt. Banahaw and Lucban, convened from family archives, popular materials, and different historical moments and mythical motifs. It looks at several trajectories of discourses on millenarian renewal that converge in Mt. Banahaw as mystical topos: from ecological crises; the cosmic and cosmological aspects of extraterrestrial life; ideological imaginations in anti-colonial movements; to accounts of earthly transformation and reconfiguration and how these are embodied in imaginations of locality and the vernacular lifeworlds of musicians and other cultural actors based in Lucban, including Salvatus himself.

Sa kabila ng tabing lamang sa panahong ito / Waiting just behind the curtain of this age plays out the potency of Puli’s *tabing*: through and beyond the curtain of this age is a planetary kinship despite distance; an inalienable intention toward the more-than-human other, the alter, the foreign; and a sympathetic scenography that situates us in this shared mystical world.

