

Lovay Fine Arts

David Medalla – 18 September – 11 November 2026

Lovay Fine Arts is pleased to present an exhibition dedicated to pioneer Filipino artist David Medalla (1938–2020). The exhibition focuses on his late works from 2009 to 2020. Built around the ***Sand Machine, Baguio 1 (1963–2017)***, at once ephemeral and endlessly in motion, the exhibition unfolds as a wandering through time and space, echoing Medalla's own itinerant life and practice. From the late 1970s, Medalla developed his “synoptic realism,” a highly personal approach bringing together memories, friends, artists, historical figures, mythology, and political events across a variety of mediums.

Medalla continued to reactivate ideas originating in the 1960s and 1970s, treating them as ongoing processes rather than fixed historical objects. ***The Sand Machine (1963–2017)*** presented in this exhibition—consisting of a motor-driven rotating arm and beads along a thread that continuously traces and erases patterns in a bed of sand—embodies a commitment to impermanence, transformation, and long-duration experimentation. Those philosophical reflections remained fundamental throughout his career as well as his interest in ecology, interaction between humans and nature, and meditation. Always linking the wider world to the personal, Medalla also drew on childhood memories of the Philippines nature.

Creating masks has been a long practice since the 1970's when Medalla began making masks in connection with his “Impromptus”, a spontaneous series of performances. The ***cut-out masks (Untitled, c. 2000–2018)*** showed here are made from faces cut directly from magazines and newspapers spanning various themes such as nature, commercials, gay porn, politics, or arts. At the same time appropriation, collages, portraits, costumes and performance props, those masks were often activated through performances.

The ***Post-Stroke Drawings (2016)*** were created following Medalla's stroke that same year and stand as a testament to his inexhaustible creative energy. These autobiographical works accumulate self-portraits, texts, historical references, poetry, political figures, friends, and childhood memories. In these drawings, we move simultaneously between Manila, London, and Mount Makiling, encountering his father, Harald Szeemann, Jean Tinguely, Kim—the orphaned protagonist of Rudyard Kipling's 1901 eponymous novel—and many other characters.

In the ***Sirens series (2017–2019)***, photographed by his longtime partner and collaborator Adam Nankervis, Medalla is seen in his bed adorned with ephemeral materials such as cut-out masks, flowers, or ribbons. Through these modest performative interventions, Medalla connects the intimate with the outside world. For example, *Sirens | Homage to Mei Lanfang* pays tribute to the celebrated Chinese Peking opera performer, known for his *dan* roles—female characters traditionally performed by men—and often referred to as the “Queen of Peking Opera”. Here, Mei Lanfang becomes a figure through which Medalla explores gender fluidity and the instability of identity. In the *Sirens* series, the artist, then in his late seventies, is addressing, toward the end of his life, questions of vulnerability and metamorphosis.

Biography

David Medalla (Manila, 1938–2020) developed a polymorphic and experimental practice over more than six decades, spanning kinetic art, participatory performance, ephemeral works, painting, drawing, and installation. From the beginning, his work resisted fixed categories and conventional notions of the artwork as a stable, autonomous object. The breadth and freedom of his practice have influenced several generations of artists and curators.

After leaving the Philippines in 1960, Medalla settled in London, where he co-founded Signals (1964–66) with Gustav Metzger and Guy Brett, an avant-garde art gallery for experimental and kinetic art. They exhibited kinetic artists from Europe, US and Latin America, including Mira Schendel, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Jesús Rafael Soto and Takis.

His celebrated *Sand Machines* and *Cloud Canyons* of the early 1960s embody his ethos of art as a living process, governed by chance, impermanence, and natural forces. The “biokinetic” *Cloud Canyons* (bubble machines) are sculptures that continuously generate soft columns of soap foam, whose forms constantly transform and disappear. If Gustav Metzger’s central concern was *Auto-Destructive Art*, Medalla’s was, conversely, the idea of the *Auto-Creative* sculpture. In this respect, the *Sand Machines*, producing a constantly erased and reinvented drawing in motion, are an ode to both impermanence and long duration, to meditation and human relation with nature.

Soon after these first experiments, Medalla was included in Harald Szeemann’s landmark exhibitions *Weiss auf Weiss* (1966) and *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) at Kunsthalle Bern. He maintained a long-standing relationship with Szeemann, as well as with other major artists, such as Jean Tinguely.

A committed cultural activist, Medalla founded Artists for Democracy in London in 1974, connecting his participatory art practice with anti-imperialist action. In 1989, Rasheed Araeen featured him in his groundbreaking exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain* at the Hayward Gallery in London. The exhibition challenged the exclusion of artists of African and Asian descent from dominant narratives of British art history and included artists considered today as major figures such as Frank Bowling, Mona Hatoum, or Lubaina Himdi.

Works such as *A Stitch in Time* (1968) exemplify Medalla’s participatory practice. Visitors were invited to sew personal objects, messages, and materials onto pieces of fabric, transforming spectators into active participants in the creation of the work. First conceived in 1968, this work was subsequently presented by many curators including Hans Ulrich Obrist, Okwui Enwezor, in significant international exhibitions and institutions such as the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1996), the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997), and the 57th Venice Biennale, *Viva Arte Viva* (2017).

Throughout his life, Medalla led an itinerant existence, living and working across the world. For more than six decades, the continuity in Medalla’s practice lies less in a particular medium than in an understanding of art as an evolving, collaborative and transformative process; for him, art and life were deliberately porous and part of a vital energy flux.

Recent Retrospectives

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2024–2025
Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2025
Muzeion, Bolzano, 2022
Bonner Kunstverein, 2021–2022

Selected Public Collections

The MET, New York; MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; National Gallery Singapore, Singapore; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; M+, Hong Kong; Museum Reina Sofia, Madrid; MAMCO, Geneva.