

## Lena Cobangbang *Mine is the soil and the toil for your paradise*

July 11– August 10, 2024



Towards is pleased to present *Mine is the soil and the toil for your paradise*, a solo exhibition by Lena Cobangbang. This marks Cobangbang's first solo exhibition in Canada. This exhibition was organized as part of the 4th Kamias Triennial *Long Distance*.

*"You think you own whatever land you land on..."*

It's amusing that the lyrics to a song meant for children can bear so much truth, particularly withstanding the test of time to bear just as much or even more relevance in these times.

In Lena Cobangbang's body of work, the land has played a central role on many occasions – one might even say that the entire body of work is anchored on land. Either an off-planet view as a map of the world, to a micro-zoomed exploration of a tiny patch of grass, the land portrayed extends to what has been built on its surface, or even the beings that walk upon it on fours or twos.

For the most part, the theory of Pangaea – the supercontinent from around 250 million years ago – holds tight, and it translates into Cobangbang's work as somewhat the "first land puzzle." In the past years, this division of the land has manifested in her watercolour paintings, and quite astoundingly: paintings on puzzles. Hence one can say that she is able to manifest her mullings in both image and in form.

Being a conceptual artist, there has been a lot of what can be thought of as "simplicity" in her work. Yet when experienced, one cannot help but be pleased to discover that it is actually a very effectively distilled concept, such that minimal embellishments prop up an often clever message sublimely ensconced in the frame.

"Mine is the Soil," the artist declares. For the soil is of the land, and from the soil ideas spring up. At the same time, ideas cannot be expressed without effort, not without toil. The exhibition is of the land, and to explore it, to reconfigure and to rearrange it for things to make sense: for your utopia – is to walk the land, therefore is to labor – "the Toil for your Paradise."

The breaking up of Pangaea in a way frames the entire world as a singular archipelago. Perhaps this is worth considering, as writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant (in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist) remarked how "... idea of the archipelago – as a place where we can begin to understand and resolve the contradictions of the world – should be propagated."

By painting land – both factual and ideal – using watercolor, Cobangbang straddles that notion of archipelagic resolution. Furthering this interrogation are works in various mediums and presentations that evoke and stem from land-bound situations. Yarn as grass as maps, or painting as a sign as a sign, or an object on fire as various imagery — this set of works is but a microcosm of both the possibilities and expanse of the land as interpreted through art.

As the planet fulfils each day through a rotation of twenty-four hours, the land remains. In the bigger picture, we are all part of a singular entity, and land – wherever, however – belongs to all of us. Lena Cobangbang here presents a study on that which has been tearing us apart, but actually is what can and should be bringing us all together.

–Koki Lxxx

**Lena Cobangbang** (b. Philippines, 1976) studied Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines in Diliman QC. Her work is broad-ranging, moving across video, installation, and found objects to embroidery, cookery, performance and photography. Integral to her art practice is doing collaborations with other artists, such as with Yasmin Sison under the created fictional identity as Alice and Lucinda; and with Mike Crisostomo as The Weather Bureau.

Apart from making art, she writes and works as an independent curator. A part of the seminal artist collective Surrounded By Water, her art practice extends to doing art administration and exhibit organizing, having been a fellow at the 2008 HAO Summit for emerging artists, curator and art managers in Asia in Singapore in 2008, and having undergone an artist/curator research residency exchange between Green Papaya Art Projects and Pekarna Magdalenske Mreze in Maribor, Slovenia in 2010. She was also part of the touring exhibit Bastards of Misrepresentation, curated by Manuel Ocampo which has been held in Berlin, Hamburg, Bangkok and New York and the Manila Vice show in Sete, France.

In 2005, she was nominated for the 3rd Ateneo Art Awards. She received the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2006 and was one of the participating artists in the 2008 Singapore Biennale.

She did curatorial projects for galleries Pablo, Post Gallery, Galerie Anna, Galerie Roberto, Art Anton, and Secret Fresh in Manila, Philippines. She was part of a residency program hosted by Langgeng Art Foundation in Jogjakarta in 2016, and is a participant in the first Manila Biennale in 2018.