

# "Mysticism and post-colonial moorings in Hadrian Mendoza's stoneware" December 18, 2015 GMA News by Filipina Lippi

[January 03, 2016](#) / [Hadrian Mendoza](#)

Virginia-based Fil-American stoneware potter [Hadrian Mendoza](#) has been creating artworks with many voices.

His solo exhibit, "A Round of Daydreams," opened in Ayala Museum's ArtistSpace on December 5 and will next be shown in a private showroom of Galleria Duemila until next year.

The 65 artworks in the exhibit include post-colonial images of Bulol, the iconic wooden rice god of the north; wall-bound heads that display both ancient and post-modern visages essayed with a global sense; cubistic bamboos that balance and defy gravity (like Asian resiliency); and recent works titled "Tree of Life" and "Dancing (Blood) Moon" that dazzle with mysticism, their fire soaring beyond the limits of the functional art works that Mendoza is known for since he began honing his craft under the mentorship of master potter Jon Pettyjohn in the Philippines in 1997, and since he first touched clay while taking up art studies at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in 1996.

"What I learned in life and from doing art is that life is for living now. An imagination of what happens after life is a daydream," he explains. To some observers, to soar is to daydream. And to balance, the original title of his exhibit at ArtistSpace, is a political act and also a necessary pause to understand mysticism and the unknown.

## **Tree of Life**

Each of his six series of the 21 x 21 inch "Tree of Life" is a real vase that can hold water. "For me, their images float between the real life and the after-life," says Mendoza, who began making the series a year and a half ago, when a vertical cylinder that he conjoined with a wheel-like shape on top of it reminded him of a tree.

"I made branches and fruits by punching random holes, added glass that gave a touch of floating bubbles, gay brightness, and the element of air on the [top] clay part of the tree. After firing, the heavy coat of porcelain slip on the clay's surface looked like a storm or wind the tree has endured – it was a poetic piece," he recalls.

## **Dancing Moon**

Mendoza's "Dancing Moon," a set of 12" x 12" wall pieces, depicts a full moon's dramatic transition into nothingness. The moon is made of green beer bottle fired into ox-blood stoneware splashed with brushstrokes of white porcelain slip. Like a pond of green haze, the glassy moon reflects the red color of its background.

"I began making my moon series in 2014, when I found out that glass melts, drips uncontrollably, and its color becomes brighter when fired into clay. The first time I made this series, the initial piece reminded me of the pulsating moon that I once saw when I was young and drinking with friends at the beach," recalls Mendoza.

### **Dancing bamboo**

His "Dancing Bamboo" series are perfect vases whose sections dart from left to right, then shoot upwards at sharp angles. "For me, they represent balance, evolution, growth, and reaching out. I made them by tilting the weight of several sections from one side to the other. Despite the stressful tilting, they turned out balanced and centered," says Mendoza, adding, "I've been doing variations of the bamboo, but in early 2015, I was challenged to reconstruct the bamboo with a risky balancing act."

### **Modern warriors**

Mendoza's "Warriors" are wall-bound heads. Minimal lines suggest eyes and lips. Rings and bones pierce sculpturally detailed noses. Colorful cords cascade from them like long hair. "I wanted to bring out the ancient and tribal warriors of the past. Some are hairy, others are bald, suggesting generations of people," Mendoza explains.

"Different skin tones and hair colors suggest multi-races. They are united by the culture of nose piercing that young people in modern times have adopted. It is the effect of the Internet era, of well-travelled young people who respect and almost embrace all cultures. In this era of globalization, keeping one's culture is also a challenge. As a Fil-American who has rediscovered the Philippine culture but is back in the United States again, I have to deal with different cultures and at the same time keep my own (cherished and chosen) cultural space. The Warriors is how human beings negotiate with globalization."

### **Eternal Bulol**

Mendoza's Bulols have sculpted tattoos. They are tall, they look peaceful and they surprisingly stand strong and still on small bases.

Explaining how he has appropriated the Bulol as a source of what is authentic and original in a neo-colonial, neo-liberal, busy, dizzying, and negative world, Mendoza says, "I have become a tattoo artist to my Bulols, engraving carvings and not making mere lines on them – exactly the way I would have decorated my body if my skin was a blank canvas once again." The mummies of ethnic groups in northern Luzon have tattoos, but the bulols in the same area are not at all embellished.

“I risked creating tall bulols on a small base, their knees jerking forward or backward, their hips carrying the weight of their bodies, not too far off from the base so they would not fall, lean, and tilt. And I gave them a peaceful look – to tell about mental and physical balance,” he adds.

Mendoza’s “Bulol in a Spin,” its head touching its feet, forming a circle with a 20-inch diameter, is the artist’s ultimate poetic license to morph his own bulol, making it his own authentic platform to essay what is good and evil, what is imagined and real in art.

### **His personal myths on love sealed in stoneware**

Mendoza has started making art works about love and how different individuals negotiate in the name of love. “Fertility Gods and Goddesses” are two sculpted figures, their organs etched in the fold of their clothes, and they sway with orgasmic delight. “Third Eye” is a tall and slim figure with a red heart. It is part of a 40-inch piece with a head that looks like a mushroom or penis, while underneath is a face with minimal lines. Etched on the swaying body are V-shaped breasts and an inverted V for the organ.

“It is Mendoza’s best show yet,” assesses his mentor Pettyjohn.

Mendoza, who teaches at The Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia, graduated with a degree in business management at the University of Mary Washington in 1996. He studied at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in Washington and was part of the Pettyjohn-Mendoza School of Pottery in Makati City in 1999, a landmark institution for serious Filipino potters that unfortunately closed in 2009.

In Manila, he organized the first network of Southeast Asian potters after he received the Toyota Foundation's Network Program Grant in 2007. This led to a show featuring 38 Southeast Asian potters at the Ayala Museum in 2009.

Mendoza organized a second group show of ASEAN potters at FLICAM Museums in Fuping, China in 2012; and the third Southeast Asian Ceramics Festival and Exhibition at The Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia in October 2014, after receiving the “Humanities Fellowship Grant” from the New York-based Asian Cultural Council. He became a resident-artist of Virginia’s Workhouse in March 2010. — **BM, GMA News**

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