The Labyrinthian Way

Abstraction, *Pakikiramdam*, and Expressive Arts-Based Research through Jaime de Guzman

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This project explores Filipino painter, potter, hermit, and mystic **Jaime de Guzman**'s (1942–2023) *The Labyrinthian Way* (2010) through abstraction as a methodological and experiential mode of inquiry. An oil-on-canvas work that evokes the archetypal figure of the labyrinth, the painting situates this motif within a distinctly Filipino imaginative and mythological context. Rather than treating ***abstraction*** solely as a formal artistic strategy, the project approaches it as a generative process through which perception, materiality, sensation, and meaning can be unsettled and reconfigured. As Boris Ondreicka proposes, abstraction opens new dimensions of expression, including processes of decay that disrupt the structural integrity of the medium.

The project draws on ***pakikiramdam***, a Filipino mode of intuitive and relational sensing articulated by Virgilio Enriquez and Elizabeth Protacio-Marcelino Pe-Pua, as an epistemological framework for engaging the painting as both aesthetic object and experiential field. The viewer is positioned not as a detached observer but as an embodied participant within the work's symbolic and affective inscape. Drawing from Gerard Manley Hopkins's conception of ***inscape*** as the distinctive configuration through which a thing expresses its particular identity, the project considers the labyrinth as a visual and psychic structure through which inner and outer worlds, memory and imagination, and individual and cultural experience continually intersect.

Using *expressive arts practices* (Knill) as *arts-based research* (Leavy), the project undertakes a process of abstracting *The Labyrinthian Way* through *pakikiramdam,* culminating in creative writing. The resulting text serves both as a creative artifact and as an ***aesthetic response*** to the painting. In doing so, the project proposes an alternative mode of ***art writing*** in engaging De Guzman's work–one that moves beyond formal analysis toward an embodied, culturally situated encounter with the metaphysical, intuitive, and experiential dimensions.



LABYRINTHIAN WAY, JAIME DE GUZMAN, OIL ON CANVAS, 2010


there is still space to be.
An unexplored horizon.
the language of your kind
speaking into
manifestation.
OBSERVING THE WORLD
(observing the self)
The whole Universe
in a seed, in an eye,
bearing witness to the journeys:
you & I.
Everything is nothing.
Fullness in emptiness.
the symbols of your kind
manifesting into words.
the primordial being
that never rests.
the cosmos explore
in a portion of white.
the Circle
go and dig. There is work to be done.
layer upon layer now peeling
like an onion, green in this
direction, the land and its
vegetation.
The Spark
A part of the whole
I AM
the Being. the Jewel
in the Lotus.
a gear that makes the
machine operate
You will return
as you
are.
Can only be channeled in spirit.
You have come
this way before,
You make your way around, the
there is no existence; just
the laws of physics, the spiritual
soul.
Here you have erected
the silver tower.
How high do you
think you'll go?
the square
the descent of the moon
into Spirit.
the Cycle
the ascent of the Spirit
into moon.
Here I have created
the golden root.
How deep can
you meet
your self?
the Beginning / the End

The Beginning / The End

can only be described
in spirals, an intestinal maze

that goes on and on
neatly stacked, one over the other

this cardinal direction, red:
warm earth

and sun, orange to yellow:
light.

green in this direction:
vegetation, flora

the hues of blue to indigo:
the crystal spirit

The other is I. We are not separate.

(our navels connect infinitely)

Layer upon layer now peeling
like an onion, you make your way around

the familiar terrains. There is no difference:
past, present, future. Do not stop.

There is
work to be done.

observing the world observing the Self
the whole
universe in a seed

in an eye, bearing witness to the journeys:
you and I: the square, the circle
the square, the circle

a gear makes the machine
operate, a part of

the whole—
a prism of white

the sorcerer's stone, the Primordial
Being never resting

(The Ascent of Man into Spirit)

Here you have erected the silver tower:
How high will you go?

(The Descent of Spirit into Man)

Here I have buried the golden root:
How deep can you meet yourself?

the language of your kind speaking into manifestation—

the symbols of your kind manifesting into sounds—

There is still
space to be,

an unexplored horizon. Everything is
no thing.

Fullness
in emptiness—

I AM
The Being,
The Jewel in the Lotus.

As you have come from me

(so shall you return to me) —

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