

Sa Katiyakan ng Pagsikat ng Araw
Archie Oclos

Exhibit Text (Wall)

When visual artist Archie Oclos (b. 1989) learned of his father's passing in 2024, he returned to Brgy. Tinago, Catanduanes, the farming community where he grew up. The journey home required a thirteen-hour drive and a three-hour ferry crossing to the small island facing the Pacific Ocean. It also meant returning to a landscape shaped by typhoons, rural poverty, and the precarious conditions of agricultural labor.

As the son of an *abaca* (*Musa textilis*) farmer, Oclos' relationship to this place is inseparable from the material itself. He remembers removing snails from vulnerable crops as his father manually scraped the abaca pulp, while his aunts and grandmothers washed, dried, gathered, and prepared the fibers. *Sa Katiyakan ng Pagsikat ng Araw* returns this material to the lives and labor from which his artistic origins are founded: through ink works on abaca fibers and installation work, Oclos traces the intertwined histories of family, labor, land, and survival, where everyday objects, animals, domestic spaces, and bodily gestures are imprinted as memory. His own family and fellow townsfolk emerge within these works as subjects of remembrance, their lives embedded in the labor, relationships, and conditions that continue to shape a community where little has changed.

Abaca, internationally known as "Manila hemp," carries histories of colonial trade, global industry, and local survival. Once exported for naval rigging and now used in currency production, the fiber remains vital in Oclos' typhoon-stricken region, where it is woven into ropes that help secure homes. Yet for Oclos, its significance begins closer to home. The fiber carries the marks of generations who cultivated, processed, transported, and depended upon it. Its material history is therefore also a social history, connecting the intimate scale of family to larger structures of economy and power.

The repetition of hands and layered bodies creates a visual rhythm, binding individual gestures into a continuous flow of labor and movement. The rope circles through the lives of humans, animals, and nature, connecting histories and hopes. In Oclos' hands, abaca becomes a material through which these experiences can be remembered and carried forward. *Sa Katiyakan ng Pagsikat ng Araw* attends to what remains: the labor that shaped a community, the losses that alter it, and the hopes that continue to move through the lives of those who remain.

JA Balaguer

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Curatorial Text (Handout)

When visual artist Archie Oclos (b. 1989) learned of his father's passing in 2024, he returned to Brgy. Tinago, Catanduanes, the farming community where he grew up. The journey home required a thirteen-hour drive and a three-hour ferry crossing to the small island facing the Pacific Ocean. Returning home also meant confronting the precarities of a typhoon-stricken town and the rural poverty that continues to shape the community. As the son of an *abaca* (*Musa textilis*) farmer, Oclos' familial roots are inseparable from the land and from the material that has sustained generations of his family. He recalls removing small, pestilent snails from vulnerable crops as his father manually scraped away the abaca pulp. The remaining strands were washed and sun-dried before his aunts and grandmothers gathered and prepared them into fibers. From this isolated town, the abaca was transported through long and difficult journeys to the cities, where it entered wider economies as clothing, bags, home furnishings, rope, and cordage.

Abaca, internationally known as "Manila hemp," carries a history that extends well beyond the communities that cultivate it. Since the colonial era, the fiber has been embedded in Philippine and global economies. When Spain opened Manila to world trade in 1834, Western nations quickly capitalized on its exceptional durability, using it extensively for naval rigging and shipping ropes. Today, Philippine banknotes are manufactured using a blend of abaca and cotton, while Philippine abaca pulp is exported to countries including the United States and Japan for use in currency production. In Oclos' typhoon-stricken region, however, abaca remains intimately tied to everyday survival. Its fibers are woven into ropes used to secure homes against sustained winds and coastal hazards, their strength tested repeatedly against the force of the elements. The material therefore carries two histories at once: the larger histories of trade, industry, and extraction, and the intimate histories of the people whose lives depend upon it.

Sa Katiyakan ng Pagsikat ng Araw, a series of ink works on abaca fibers and installation, emerges from this intimate history. It is Oclos' commemoration of his lived experience, artistic origins, and the community that has shaped his concern for Indigenous peoples and the labor force. In *Mga Palad*, a harvester traverses the wild to collect his crop. The work is often done alone, in remote farms high on hilltops, accompanied by an animal companion. The scene places human labor within a more-than-human environment, where survival depends upon relationships between people, animals, land, and the material being cultivated. In *Katanghalian*, a temporary act of rest sustains the rhythm of labor: rice and dried fish are shared before the workers return to the fields to fulfill their daily quota. The modest return of this labor underscores its precarity. *Sa Hirap at Ginhawa* turns toward the companionship of a husband and wife, whose matrimonial bond becomes a source of strength and hope amid the daily struggle for survival. In *Sa Tahanan at Tahanan Pa Rin*, the commuter bus and humble hut become

inseparable. As one carries the weight of the day toward faraway cities, the desire, and necessity, to return home becomes even more urgent.

The series also attends to the quieter dimensions of rural life. In *Pangako*, a couple shares a woven floor mat, or *banig*, in shallow slumber. Rest does not come easily: the young girl's portrait, clasped closely to the body, subtly suggests a distant relationship or an absence shaped by loss. *Medalya* evokes a similar bittersweet grief, with medals dangling from a clothes hanger. But where is the achiever? The empty frame suggests the promise of a brighter future through education while leaving open the question of whether that promise is enough. In *Gantimpala*, an old woman tends to her goats and pigs, animals that signify wealth in rural communities while also embodying precarity. Raised through years of care, these animals may ultimately become food, their accumulated value providing a means of survival in times of desperation.

In *Mga Rosas sa Hardin*, labor-worn palms and bulging veins are rendered as anatomical buds or blossoms, evoking the effort of planting seeds for future hopes. Oclos' installation works *Barrio* and *Ulan* draw on abaca fibers as both the material of a strong and secure home and a source of its precarity. Rope becomes a force that holds and secures, but also one that binds and traps. Finally, *Ang Mga Akda* presents the people who inhabit this story: Oclos' own family and friends from home, whose lived experiences, struggles, and hopes become part of the work. Like the water buffalo pushing forward under the weight of the plow, the people in Oclos' story push one another forward, negotiating the tensions of the rope that binds them together.

Recently, Oclos' works explore the material as memory: physical media as repositories that capture, preserve, and transmit personal, cultural, and historical narratives. Abaca, in particular, carries intertwined histories of colonialism, labor and class, national and international economies, and the personal and communal experiences of those whose lives and work are entangled with it. Decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and Ramón Grosfoguel have traced how systems of power extend across economic structures, labor, knowledge, and culture. Their work also emphasizes that knowledge is situated: what we know is shaped by where we stand, what we experience, and the histories we inherit. In Oclos' work, abaca gives material form to this situated history, carrying within its fibers the intertwined stories of land, labor, family, and survival.

Despite the forces that have sought to extract, classify, and control both material and knowledge, and despite the loss of a loved one, histories of hope continue to endure and re-emerge in *Sa Katiyakan ng Pagsikat ng Araw*. The repetition of hands and deliberate layering of bodies create a sense of movement and continuity, a body politics in motion. The rope continues to circle through the lives of humans, animals, and nature, carrying histories and hopes with it. Oclos entrusts these histories to the material itself, allowing the complexities of lived experience to be carried forward, shared, and remembered. In the abaca, history is held in the very fibers of the material: the labor of generations, the weight of loss, and the persistence of hope. What endures is memory itself, carried through the material and into the lives that remain, where it continues to be remade, shared, and lived.

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