

February 26, 2013

A labyrinth of broken glass

Hollow blocks were laid down to form a labyrinth. As people walked through this path, they were careful not to fall on the shards of bottles and mirrors protruding from each block. Installed at the second floor is a red nylon cord plunging from the ceiling and twisting down to the floor. In a small room, red fluorescent arrows enkindle a silent but wild confusion -- another journey, another path to take. These are the installations at Roberto Chabet's *Labyrinth* exhibit at Finale Art File.

During the opening on Feb. 12, Mr. Chabet told *BusinessWorld* that he had this idea of constructing a labyrinth over 10 years ago, but he just didn't have the space for it. That is, until Finale was able to accommodate his creation.

Despite criticisms of creating "western" pieces, Mr. Chabet's installation plays with Filipino imagery. The artist said that he liked how his maze reminded people of how Filipinos add sharp objects on their fences to deter robbers. He transformed this often ignored but culturally embedded structure into art by integrating it into a meaningful pattern like the labyrinth.

MYTH AND MEDITATION

The labyrinth fascinated Mr. Chabet because of the story behind it. In the Greek myth, King Minos housed a Minotaur, a half-man and half-beast, inside this complex pattern. The monster was finally defeated by the Athenian hero Theseus with the help of the goddess Ariadne who gave him threads of her clothing to lead him out of the enclosure.

Besides its connection to the myth, the labyrinth's meditative facet also inspired the artist. He explained how the entrance to medieval churches used to be a labyrinth and that this intricate path was a meditative tool.

"When I see people walking (through the labyrinth), maybe because of the nature of the situation, they really have to concentrate," he said, gesturing at how people look down at the sharp pieces as they make their way through the installation. "This is part of meditation."

STRINGS AND ARROWS

When it comes to the nylon string, Mr. Chabet noted that "it's like a labyrinth as well," as you could walk between the spiraling entanglements. The string installation also evokes the myth because Theseus was able to escape his winding imprisonment by using a cord, said Mr. Chabet.

About the third installation, Mr. Chabet explained that arrows often appear in his work, even his drawings, noting that he was interested in the way they pointed to different directions.

Artist Ringo Bunoan, who is archiving Mr. Chabet's work, noted that "If you are a regular viewer of Mr. Chabet's works, you will be able to link these recurring images to his previous shows."

Arrows are also connected to art, said Ms. Bunoan. "Arrows point you to another place, and that's what art does." She summed up Mr. Chabet's exhibit as a "metaphor for winding journeys." "Art-making in itself is such a trip," she said in her exhibit notes, "With artists often going through an exhaustive process of deduction and discovery. The same can be said for viewers of art; they too sometimes undergo a tortuous course in order to really see art." - **Jasmine T. Cruz**

The exhibit is on view until March 2 at Finale Art File at Warehouse 17, La Fuerza, 2241 Chino Roces Ave., Makati. It is open Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

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