

Bekhbaatar Enkhtur

BOLOGNA

Though it is often said works of art are meant to outlive us, for Bologna-based Mongolian artist Bekhbaatar Enkhtur, every material has an inevitable impermanence

that ought to be encouraged. In his words: "Everything in the universe is simultaneously temporary and eternal; their form continuously changes, but their essence remains." Heavily informed by Tibetan Buddhism, which proliferated in Mongolian society beginning in the 16th century, and the nomadic ethos, his site-specific and ephemeral productions in raw clay, aluminum, pewter, and wax invite reflections on transience and mortality.

Based on a Mongolian folktale about a lost foal longing to return home, Enkhtur's outdoor installation *Cavalli* (2020) comprises approximately 60 raw clay sculptures of horses that he dispersed across three villages in the northern Italian province of Belluno. The artist began working with raw clay in 2017 and soon found that the material "naturally sculpts and shapes itself," gradually becoming independent from him with a life of its own.



Detailed installation view of BEKHBAAATAR ENKHTUR's *Cavalli*, 2020, clay sculptures, 60 × 80 × 35 cm each, at "Una Boccata d'Arte 2020," Borgo Valbelluna, Veneto, 2020. Photo by Camilla Glorioso. Courtesy the artist; Fondazione Elpis, Milan; and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins/Havana/Rome/Sao Paulo/Paris.

Unfired and exposed to the elements, the sculptures gracefully undergo an uninterrupted process of decay. "Eventually, the works are discarded, but in reality, their essence resides in the spaces where they were created," the artist explained.

That we are not our bodies but our essence—consciousness, spirit, soul—is an integral component of Buddhist philosophy and Enkhtur's practice. In *Vulture* (2021), Enkhtur references the funerary custom of sky burials, where a deceased body is placed on a mountain to decompose or be dispersed by scavenging birds, reflecting Buddhist teachings on reincarnation. A delicate, barely visible linework engraving of flying vultures on two wax panels, another ephemeral material, *Vulture* recalls the intimacy of witnessing a being's passage to another form.

While on a residency at Kora Contemporary Arts Center in Lecce, Italy, Enkhtur was conceiving a new work about the Silver Tree of Karakorum, an infamously ostentatious drinking fountain embellished with silver lions and gilded serpents that gushed wine, mead, and milk in the Mongol Empire's 13th-century capital. His still gestating ideas reveal how nothing earthly is permanent, suggesting that it is, after all, better to be surrounded by formless souls than soulless forms.

NICOLE M. NEPOMUCENO

Nicole Cason

LONDON/MANILA

To create her two-meter-tall *Exoskeleton* (2020–) canvases, Manila-born Nicole Cason covers sets of venetian blinds in monochromatic paint and rolls them through an etching press,

indexing the entire object. The jagged slats in the resulting images caught my attention, and, getting closer, I found a captivating translucency to the individual bands. But beyond the printed



NICOLE CASON, *Untitled*, 2020, oil on canvas, 200 × 130 cm. Courtesy the artist and Silverlens Gallery, Manila.

layer—nothing. *Exoskeleton* conjures windows that are generous in proportions but not so revealing in view, interplaying visibility and invisibility as tactics of control, evasion, and protection. These ideas had informed Cason's *Camouflage* (2017) series. Composed of overlaid, abstract forms, the earlier monoprints explore the history of the titular pattern in the Philippines, where, in the late 19th century, American soldiers exchanged their navy uniforms for khaki gear, turning the land into insidious cover for their invasion.

The abstract shapes in *Camouflage* reappear in parts of the *Exeunt* (2019–20) collages that Cason presented at her graduation exhibition for her master's degree in painting at London's Royal College of Art. The series begins with a photo of the lush greenery in Cason's childhood garden in the Philippines; in the lower corner is a murky space distorted by digital noise, referencing the pond that Cason fell into before her late father rescued her. Cason cut duplicates of the photo into amorphous patches and reassembled them in increasingly abstract compositions. "Each completed collage becomes a part of a library, a personal catalogue of the same moment accessed differently," she explains in her artist statement. The garbled scenes reflect a time out of reach.

In *Bilao* (2020), Cason simultaneously looks to the past and future. Imprinted in black are the *bilao*, or shallow baskets, that the artist wove together from the slats initially utilized in *Exoskeleton*. The *bilao* has been used to serve food to large groups since the Philippines' precolonial era, and, for Cason, is a symbol of the country's cultural resilience and shared belief in the value of community. Upcycling a domestic device for privacy, the blind, into one for gathering, she peers through the connections severed during the pandemic, and underscores the relevance of togetherness long into the future.

CHLOE CHU