Macoy Coching

Words by Kristoff Peralta

I was commissioned by ArtPlus Magazine, to author three artist profiles for their coffee table book, Ode to the Abstract, that was launched in November 2021. The two other profiles are Fred Tan and Joy Rojas.

Marco Coching, known to everyone as Macoy, grew up in a family of artists. He is the grandson of the late Francisco V. Coching who is a National Artist for Visual Arts and regarded as one of the pillars of the comics industry in the Philippines—referred to as the Father and Dean of Philippine Comics.

As a child, his grandfather would fetch Macoy from their home and take him to the big house of his grandfather that was filled with an impressive exhibit of paintings and illustrations. He was always in his grandfather's studio and would observe him draw. The house became Macoy's playground and served as a formative structure in his growth as an artist. His grandfather would encourage him to draw and would pay him up when he finishes a drawing, which would later on inspire him to be an artist. When he was about ten, watercolor became his first medium of choice in painting that eventually got him to win first place in a postcard making contest organized by UNICEF and McDonald's.

Macoy's childhood was mostly shaped by his relationship with his grandfather, which influenced his dream of becoming a comic artist and writer just like his grandfather. But when he had the chance to visit and see the Fernando Zobel exhibit at the Ayala Museum, a moment of awe and inspiration gripped him when he saw an abstract work for the first time. That's when he knew he wanted to be an abstract expressionist himself.

Carrying this new passionate vigor for art, Macoy would later on take up a Fine Arts degree in University of Santo Tomas, where he worked on his craft for years. Eventually, he found work as a commercial artist. When he was still an emerging artist, he faced the typical expectations, disapprovals, and doubts received by an artist. Macoy only used to paint landscapes and portraits of flowers but was criticised for the overuse of repetitive subjects. There were pressures and criticisms for him to create and develop his own art style but he remained unbent to these views and continued to

create despite. He found himself reinventing, experimenting, and breathing new life to forms, colors, textures, and techniques.

Macoy was able to forge his path in abstract expressionism, and developed his oeuvre around surreal abstract. He was a proven success when he sold fifteen works out of his twenty paintings in his first ever solo show in 2010, and became known for his glow-in-the-dark paintings. It started with his fascination with neon colors and luminous paints, which he experimented with using blacklight. Using this distinctive technique, he harnessed the ability of colors to change in different variations that light reveals. The result was a breathtaking work on the movement of light and colors known as luminous art.

In his fifth and sixth solo exhibitions, *Luminous Abstractions* (2018) and *Lights in Motion* (2020), respectively, Macoy studied the transient effects of light—a balance between being striking and subtle—which created elaborate and elegant compositions, and made a careful examination of the profusion of colors and patterns. In producing his pieces, he was reminded of the distinctive yet intangible energy surrounding a living body—an artist's impression of an aura. He was also drawn to the notion of temporality and memory. In his latest solo exhibition, *In Rhythmic Waves*, he experimented on the use of metallic colors particularly of gold.

Hypnotic, rhythmic, gentle, iridescent, timeless: his luminous works are charged with a mysterious and surreal meditation where time stands still as a terpsichore of colors comes alive. Macoy elevates light into a transcendental experience as he breathes life into his works with a graceful and otherworldly attempt. It sneaks up like a sleight of hand, almost magical and spiritual.

For Macoy, of course, he would describe his art as a little out of this world. Perhaps, it was his grandfather's out of this world stories that would inform his works. His grandfather would always tell him stories of heroes with talismans. It is his hope that through his art and his success as an artist, he can continue the legacy of his grandfather whom he owes his life as an artist. Like his grandfather's fantasy stories, Macoy's works tell of a fantasy world that almost always transcends one in another world. But more than that, his works are his expression of his identity, an accumulation of his complex emotions, memories, and desires that confronts and eludes his reality.