

Reflexive Spirituality and Ecological Eschatology: Situating Landscapes in Glenn Bautista's Abstractions

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ABSTRACT

Local literature on abstract landscapes has not only been cursory and sparse but has also drawn dominantly from abstraction's tendency to underscore the modernist idea of the individual. As a result, these works have rarely been discussed in relation to matters beyond the self—such as others in society and ecology. This is striking, as literature on landscape painting in general often render the art historical category in relation to humanity's links with nature and other human groups. In an effort to address these gaps, this study uses the concept of spirituality in examining Glenn Bautista's abstraction, articulated through his delicate forms of landscapes. While spirituality is known to emphasize the person's self-reflexivity, it shall serve as a lens in surfacing the role of the artist's practice in his search for the sacred and his understanding of the entanglement of humanity and the environment, specifically in the context of ecological destruction through the theological notion of eschatology. In the process, this study will forward the concept of landscape not as a genre, but as a medium, employed by the artist to understand, construct, and present himself a human in relation with other humans, the Divine, and the planet.

Keywords: *abstraction, ecology, eschatology, landscape, spirituality*

Barrenness pervades the deserted land. Lacking any trace of inhabitation nor history, the landscape appears empty while it is not. The fractured earth is present—or making itself seen—through elevated formations that were left behind after lumps of land have presumably collapsed and fallen into earthen bowels. The light that subtly glows from below is ember-like, delicately illuminating the scene with the littlest energy the world can muster. Titled *Mandalascope* (1975), the painting imagines the apocalyptic future as (already) devoid of human agency and one

that centers on the imminence of the death of the Earth. Curiously, the fissures on the ground seem to trace concentric circles and rays that project outward from a center—contours that are resonant of the Buddhist meditation aid and artform hinted by the work's title. Drawing from an abstracted form of the *mandala*, which is generally believed to be a cosmic model representing the spiritual (Xu 182), the landscape is lent with a mysterious, even mystical, aura. The piece, painted by Filipino Methodist artist Glenn Bautista (1947–2014), gives a glimpse of how the artist alludes to intimacies between spiritual thought and ecological destruction, if not a spiritual way of approaching that final historical moment.

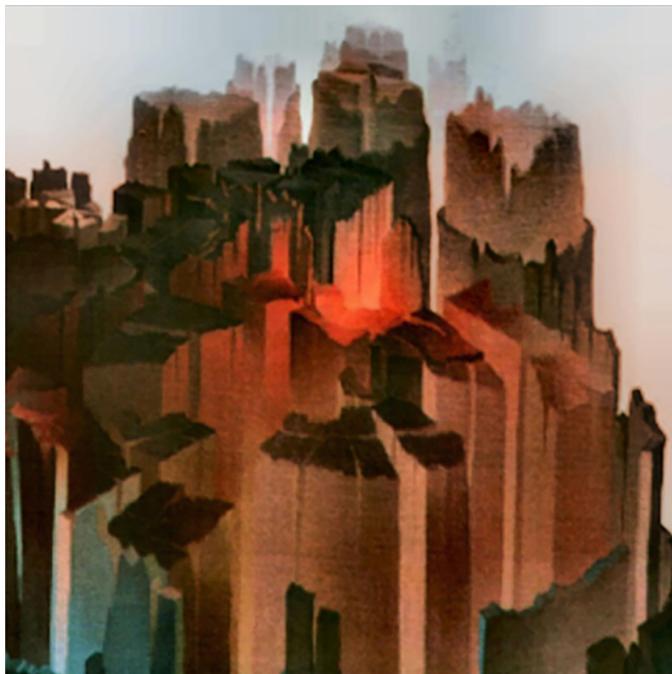


Fig. 1. *Mandalascape* (1975), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist's estate.

Over the years, Bautista's artmaking practice plied multiple forms, content, and media. But a common thread among his works, evinced by *Mandalascape* (1975), is the depiction of landscapes, mostly rendered in his tenor of abstraction. Recognizing such breadth and depth of discourse on abstraction, this study operationalizes this art historical category by viewing it in "its self-conscious and historically defined

formulation” in the Philippines (Lugue 18). Abstraction has been conceived as a set of stylistic idioms and processes of making, typically involving gestures of deletion and departure to arrive at certain essences. It has likewise been defined as a liberating and critical mode of expressing and understanding the self (through gestural expressiveness or “free play,” or personal experimentations on the logics of form), the world (through reinterpretation of one’s surroundings, or commentary to modernity and its manifestations, such as industrialization), and one’s relationship with others/Other (through mediation of a culture, or evocation of spirituality) (Lugue 50). Among these tropes, the most prominent—if not the *telos*—in Bautista’s abstraction is spirituality, defined in this paper as his personal search for the sacred. In the history of this artistic stream, abstraction has long been entangled with spirituality (Turner 110; Mercer 16), a position explained in local writings by dwelling on how the mode has been used to conjure forms and moods that can invite contemplation and prayer (Joya 14; Reyes 204, 208, 211; Zaballero 12; “Liongoren”) and, in rare occasions, on how it has been a form of spiritual practice in itself (Reyes, *Conversations* 121).¹ By “situating landscapes in abstraction,” this study lends the sites and spaces in the artist’s paintings with these qualities and juxtaposes them against discourses on spirituality, attributed to the mode of making employed to create them.

Additionally, in “situating landscapes in abstraction,” the study refrains from viewing landscape merely as a *genre* of painting, which tends to calcify the art historical category with particular attributes, most dominant of which is its conceptualization as a “pure” and “absolute” representation of natural spaces. Such essentialist view contributed to historicizing landscapes within inherited canonical narratives.² Resisting this, the study construes landscape as a *medium*. This draws from visual studies scholar J.W. Mitchell’s seminal 1994 essay “Imperial Landscape,” where he argues that landscape painting is a means to understand how artists, as parts of larger milieus or projects, have perceived, contemplated, and imagined the world around them (5). Landscapes are sites of construction of the artists’ social and subjective identities and are veils in naturalizing certain relationships in society (1, 30).³ These ideas resonate local literature on the topic, specifically on how the production of landscapes shapes and are shaped by dynamics of power—the hegemonies and social inequalities—in society (De La Paz 9–11; Zafaralla 64; Lasay 310–12, 356).⁴ Mitchell’s ideas were rearticulated by art historians who examined

how landscape painters framed their relationships not only with other human groups but also with nature (Cheetham 49), and how they expressed their role in the environment through their works (Cosgrove xvi). Landscape paintings have been scrutinized to be reflective of humanity's othering of and perceived dominion over nature (Thomas 1; Lasay 356, 368), reinforcing attitudes that demonstrate neglect of the environment as caring for it is superseded by humanly concerns (Weidinger 101; Lasay 313–14).⁵ Drawing from these scholarly efforts, treating landscape painting as a *medium* demands that nature be treated as a focal point in making sense of these artworks. This provides grounding for viewing Bautista's abstractions not only through the lens of spirituality, but also through his relationship with others and the planet.

The expansion of the category landscape beyond the bounds of a *genre* allows it to include those that cannot be definitively categorized as "pure" and "absolute." This shall include landscapes that act as backdrops to specific figures and scenes, blurring the line that divides landscape and genre paintings, which have been conventionally treated as two distinct art historical categories. The blurring of distinctions, which this study observes to be an inclination among local literature, may convey the inseparability of humanity from nature that surrounds it (Lasay 362), as well as affirm the key role of backgrounds in experiencing and making meaning out of a work, from being mere subsidiary to the figures that inhabit them (318).⁶ The category landscape shall also include landscapes that were figments of the artist's imagination and those that can be discerned as landscapes devoid of the artist's intent (i.e., paintings that appear to have semblances of space unintentionally). Through the expansion of what could be construed to be part of the category, landscapes are considered products of human perception and construction, both from the perspective of the artist and the viewer.

Drawing from the discussed frames of thinking, the study construes Bautista's abstraction as a practice of creating delicate forms of landscapes by breaking down the appearances of places that he has experienced or imagining spaces that may appear beyond this world. His abstraction is his means of expressing and making sense of his relationship with the Divine—that is, his spirituality—and by extension, with others in society and the environment. This is evident in his early works, characterized by their distinctively Protestant themes, and became more overt in his

student competition pieces where he broke down elements of specific scenes from his life into simpler abstracted forms. In the ethereal landscapes that he conjured in the succeeding decades, he did not need to deliberately depict religious elements to surface traces of his spirituality. Summing up Bautista's practice of painting on canvas, art critic Alice Guillermo writes: "There always lingered a trace of the religious in his paintings, either visually, as a solitary Christ figure in unfamiliar landscapes, or as a mood in mystical or supernatural atmosphere" (*Uncommon Art* 20). Guillermo also wrote that the artist's landscapes can be read as "ecological warnings" (25). With these statements as entry points, this paper deepens the discussion on the potential of Bautista's practice for delving into the concept of spirituality and how this converges with ecology and, later, the context of the apocalypse, which can be seen in *Mandalascape*. In fact, the theological notion of eschatology, which shall be discussed in a later section, is core to environmental studies because the destruction of the world imagined in the former is what renders actions to safeguard the ecology urgent.

This study on Bautista's practice directly converses with and contributes to local literature on landscapes constructed through abstraction (at times called abstract landscapes). This set of literature has been cursory and sparse, mostly in the form of monographs and short-scale writings on individual works or artist practices. They notably draw from the modernist idea of the individualized self and dominantly inclined towards analyzing these artworks as the material translation of how artists remembered experiencing their surroundings (Asa 12–13; Benesa, "Sanso's Pale Moon" 25; Zaballero 12) and as fragments of their inner selves (Torres, "Because It Is There" 342; Galang 576; Guillermo, "Two modes").⁷ In this tendency, the contemplative calmness or the tumultuous chaos that can be observed from the abstract landscapes are interpreted as symptomatic of certain aspects of the life and creative practice of the artists, such as memories, childhood, psychological states, migrations, preferences, convictions, trauma, unconscious, and the like. Some relate the works with spirituality (Zaballero 12; Torres, *Nena Saguil* 9).⁸ This general tendency understandably stems from the aesthetic sensibility afforded by abstraction as a stylistic tenor lodged on modernism, which espouses a strong consciousness and preferentiality for the individual as its site (Todorov 10; Cosgrove xxi). With the dominance of this tendency, rarely have there been discussions on these works' potential to point to matters beyond the self, such as the larger society

and the planet.⁹ This is interesting because, as discussed previously, a body of literature on figurative landscapes says otherwise and interprets these artworks in relation with other human groups and nature (Gaynor and Mclean 4; Mitchell 2).

In response to this tendency, the study aspires not to negate the set of local literature that espouse such tendency; in fact, it attempts to invest on the concept of spirituality—even if it is largely known to emphasize the person’s self-reflexivity—because the study believes that its pervasiveness and influence as a worldview can in fact aid in understanding how humanity relates with others and nature, as gleaned through art. In this regard, this paper turns to the discussion on Saguil’s abstraction, which has been interpreted by critics Leonidas Benesa, Emmanuel Torres, and Patrick Flores to figure and imagine the dynamic life force of the cosmos (Benesa, “Nena Saguil” 27; Torres, *Nena Saguil* 108; Flores). In particular, Torres noted forms that resemble elements in nature as he interpreted spiritual concepts in Saguil’s works (*Nena Saguil* 108, 112, 140). This is perhaps grounded on the entangled relationship between the Divine and nature through the concepts of “God’s nature” or “God in nature” (Novak 3) and on the multidimensionality of an artist’s responses to nature (i.e., aesthetic and spiritual) (Elkins 2). Although sensitive to natural forms, his interpretation mystifies nature, which is treated only as a starting point, showing how the artist’s practice transcends the realm of the material toward the “life of the spirit” (Torres, *Nena Saguil* 9), moving away from earthly concerns. This paper addresses this gap by examining Bautista’s practice of abstraction through the concept of spirituality, viewed from a historical perspective, and the eschatological perspective it offers about humanity’s relationship with others and the environment.

Reflexive Spirituality as Search for the Divine

Existing writings on Bautista tend to portray his practice to have been driven by his spirituality, oftentimes conflated with his religiosity. This paper proposes a more historical understanding of spirituality, establishing its distance from earlier literature on abstraction and the artist’s practice.¹⁰ The meaning of spirituality has undergone changes since it was first used in Christian writings during the 5th century, where it meant “to live a life according to the Spirit to which [the Christian] was initiated on the day of his [sic] baptism” (Leclercq 280–81). Its meaning would later gesture to the interiority of a Christian until the beginning of the 20th century,

when the idea found its way into non-Christian discourses. In these contexts, it began to refer to “the individualistic and subjective core of universal religion,” in light of the blooming modernity in society (Huss 49); this was further informed by other developments, such as the New Age and other kinds of practices, including esoteric ones. Because of its strong individualistic slant, the word surpassed the boundaries of a single religion and became widely associated with the secular and the profane. Writing on the difference between religiosity and spirituality, sociologist Brian Zinnbauer observes that the former refers more to the development of one’s relationship with the Divine and a commitment to the beliefs and practices of organized religion, while the latter is achieved through personal individualized experiences (Zinnbauer et al. 901–03).

Zinnbauer also explains that there have been criticisms on the seemingly oppositional nature of religiosity and spirituality. A conception of spirituality that is narrowly focused on the individual fails to appreciate its cultural context (903), and a static view of religions overlooks the nuances and possibilities of change within these institutions (904). Seeking to understand the distinction of these concepts while still recognizing their entanglement, this paper follows Zinnbauer’s proposition, which is informed by psychologist Kenneth Pargament’s definition of spirituality as “a search for the sacred”, in viewing the concept as “efforts to find, conserve, and transform the sacred in their lives” (Zinnbauer 909). This makes spirituality distinct from, yet crucial to religion, which, for many, is the broader concept that covers beliefs and practices with both sacred and secular ends achieved through sacred means, including ecumenical social justice and charity efforts and personal prayers for the health of someone (910–11).¹¹

The active search of the individual for the sacred gives room to the reinterpretation of their religious identity, affording spirituality its reflexivity. As conceived by sociologist Kelly Besecke, “reflexive spirituality” is the “constant awareness of the ever-increasing variety of religious meanings available in the modern world” and the act of “seek[ing] spiritual wisdom by intentionally but critically assimilating those meanings into one’s own spiritual outlook” (171). Although Besecke imagined this idea in relation to faith’s openness to scientific ideas, reflexivity in spirituality may also apply to traditions and worldviews offered by other religions and belief systems, to which Bautista’s *Mandalascape* alludes.

Bautista's grounding in his religion is clear. He was born and raised in the Methodist faith. His father, Rev. Ignacio Bautista, was a church minister in the United Methodist Church (UMC) for almost four decades, and his mother, Eugenia Angeles Bautista, was a deaconess. Bautista has said that his first experiences of artmaking were "requirements from church staff and from [his] own father" ("Interview with Byron King"). For eight years, he and his family lived at the Central Church parsonage near Luneta where and for which he produced many of his early works. Due to his milieu, his artistic practice during his teenage years in the mid-1960s understandably delved primarily on religious—Protestant—material. Specifically, his paintings depicted narratives derived from the Scriptures, alongside the diversity of the Protestant community and the innocence of children. In these works, he breaks down the entire picture plane into shapes that cut across each other. This resulted in the surfacing of various elements, whose presence may be overt or were merely alluded to by how the colors were arranged. In some parts, the monochromatic hues result in the blurring of the distinction between figures and what can be incipiently construed as abstract landscapes that envelop them. Resembling the form of cubism that Vicente Manansala (1910–1981) was known for, Bautista called his stylistic idiom "transparent prismatic cubism," referring to a "more curvilinear than geometric and . . . [possesses a] luminous, stained-glass effect" (Guillermo, *Uncommon Art* 19).

In *The Event* (1965), Bautista renders the nativity scene in Bethlehem with obvious representation of the characters of the story, together with hints of the three magi, the north star that guides them, the angels frolicking around, and washed-out silhouettes of a crucifix, the Earth, and the Bible that subtly merge with the colors of their environment. Submitted by the artist to the World Christmas Art Competition, organized in New York under the auspices of the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature, the work bested 64 other entries from various countries. Bautista explained what this work means for him:

The Birth Scene is the event designed by God to usher into the world the Kingdom of Heaven. The faint outline of the world, cross, and Bible suggest that the translation of the event into human experience has not proceeded far enough. But modern man need not accept defeat! The three Wise Men and their modern counterparts are still persistently

pointing to the Star of Bethlehem as the one sure hope of peace. (qtd. in Guillermo, *Uncommon Art* 20)

In this interpretation, the faintness of the outline of the elements that is brought about by the mingling of the figures and the landscape is used by the artist as a visual device to forward his theological commentary and estimation of human experiences then. Using the Biblical ideal—that is, the Kingdom of God—as measure, the artist exemplifies his Protestant worldview in this abstracted piece.



Fig. 2. *The Event* (1965), tempera on board. Image courtesy of the artist's estate.

Bautista's prismatic cubist style can be likened to the stained-glass windows that adorned the space where he was raised and his religious community congregated. Ravaged by the events of World War II in Manila, the Central Church, designed by Juan M. Arellano (1888–1960) was reconstructed in 1949 following most of the original design (Borje). The massive stained-glass window behind the altar—donated by Asuncion Perez and her family in memory of her husband, Cirilo Perez, who was killed during the War (Borje)—depicts the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps entranced by its beauty, Bautista chose the structure and its windows to be the subject of a number of his works during the period, whether as

requested by his minister father or out of his own whimsy. As windows offer a view of the outside, the abstracted stained-glass effect in the early works of Bautista conveys his perspective then: looking outward to the world through the tinted glasses of the ideas and virtues promoted by his religion.

Bautista would find himself shifting perspectives in the years to come—something that can be glimpsed in his art. For almost a decade, the artist refrained from depicting deliberate Protestant imageries in his paintings; it was only in his solo exhibition in December 1976 titled “In Search of the Divine” at the Sining Kamalig in Manila, that religious figures reemerged. Unlike his works in the mid-1960s, his paintings in the mid-1970s liberally depict figures that represent various



Fig. 3. Reproduction of Bautista’s drawing of the interior of the Central Church, as reproduced in the cover of *The Philippine Ecumenical Review*, January 1965. Image courtesy of the artist’s estate.

images of God and Mary, at times referencing Western Catholic art. Considering the title *Fabriano's Mother and Child* (1976), the artist may have drawn heavily from the composition of *The Quaratesi Madonna* (ca. 1385–1427) by Gentile da Fabriano (1370–1427). In both paintings, the Madonna is seated at the center, with approachable eyes that do not seem to exactly meet those of the audience. She wears a white veil, and a long blue gown, while she holds the Infant Jesus on her lap. The Madonna and child both bear halos behind their heads. On both sides of the painting are figures that appear to be angels who gaze at them. Even the frame of Bautista's painting is patterned after the Renaissance work. However, unlike the reference, the mother in Bautista's piece was painted in gauzy tones, with parts dissolving within the landscape behind her. One of the seventeen oil



Fig. 4. *Fabriano's Mother and Child* (1976), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist's estate.

paintings exhibited, the work was created through the use of dry brush techniques to produce its intricate layers of forms (Guillermo, *Uncommon Art* 29). As a result, the figures rendered in the works look as if they were apparitions to the similarly gossamer landscapes painted with them. Guillermo described these works as “luminous, ethereal paintings delicate icons in gently modulating hues in which the mortal traces of the artist’s hand were carefully effaced” (29).

The gauzy tones that allow the blurring between the figure and the landscape behind it is also present in *Unto Us a Child is Born... Unto Us a Child is Given* (1976). Framed in a quatrefoil, the painting centers on the Infant Jesus floating in the air, with a serene look on his face, two arms outstretched, wrapped with a cloth from his chest down to his feet. It is clearly influenced by the imagery of one of the infants

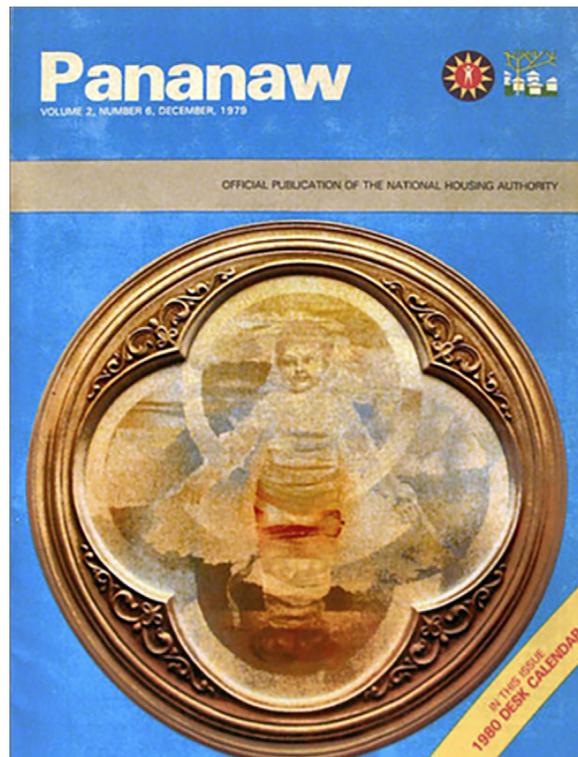


Fig. 5. Reprint of the oil on canvas work *Unto Us a Child is Born... Unto Us a Child is Given* (1976), published in journal *Pananaw*, 1979. Photo courtesy of artist’s estate.

in the 1487 glazed terracotta wreath wall plaques by Italian artist Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525) that adorn the Ospedale degli Innocenti, a foundling hospital in Renaissance Florence. Guillermo points out that the infant is wrapped with seven bands, said to be the “seven threads” that constitute the “weft” of creation,” according to the Hindu book *Rid-Veda* (32). This eclecticism cuts across cultures and time periods, which was pointed out by Benesa in 1979 when he said: “Bautista transcends [the folk sensibility of religious art in the country] by erasing the boundaries that set one religion apart from another” (Benesa, “Transcendentalists” 79).

This eclecticism bares how differently the artist made sense of his faith in relation to his artmaking at that point in his life. “In Search of the Divine” was a personal effort to make sense of God. Even with the depth of his understanding and experience with the Protestant religion in the past, he did not treat the Divine as a static pre-arranged given, but Something/Someone that was to be fully discovered, if not realized. This turn to the self is a significant prerequisite in the artist’s conception of his search for the Divine, as hinted in his 1976 interview, where he claimed that the artist “paints not to make a statement but is always in search of himself much like the show I had ‘In Search of the Divine’” (“Portrait of the artist” 12). This turn in understanding one’s faith aligns with the quotation placed in the exhibition poster, designed by Bautista’s friend Nik Ricio: “In oneself lies the whole world, and if you know how to look and learn, then the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody on earth can give you either that key or the door to open, except yourself” (D’Bayan 19). These were words by spiritual thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti, an influential figure in the practice of meditation that does not prescribe any philosophy or religion (Islam 20) and that is grounded on self-knowledge.

Bautista did practice meditation. Earlier in the decade when he created the works in the exhibition “In Search of the Divine,” he went with a *satsang* (a group of people gathered for the purpose of meditating) for an immersion in the Himalayan tantric culture in Nepal, most likely the Vajrayana Buddhism. A Brahmin *guru* (an enlightened being) taught him transcendental meditation exercises through the repetition of a *mantra*. Bautista recounted this experience in the exhibition:

I entered an almost empty room where my *guru* was seated at the center, meditating. About an arm’s length, I sat before him, likewise, in meditation stance. He asked, me, “What have you got to offer me?”

I couldn't think of anything else, so I thought of saying, "myself?" Right then and there, he slapped me, left and right, repeatedly and embraced me, and said, "You don't just offer yourself?" I felt a burst of energy inside me right after he embraced me. Some serious talk between us transpired after which a "mantra" was whispered to my ears Since then, I went on meditating until I achieved what Betsy [Romualdez] called, "sanyasi." Betsy told me that a 'guru' never touches or does not get touched—much like Christ who was surprised and said, "Who touched me?", when somebody touched Him. ("In Search")

Bautista claimed that after this encounter, he gained extreme alcohol tolerance and the ability to predict the future and to see through the character of a person. In Vajrayana Buddhism, this connection with an authentic teacher is said to help in accelerating one's arrival toward enlightenment (Lundkvist 17). Having extraordinary abilities, which made manifest a certain closeness to the divine, made Bautista fearful and uncomfortable and led him to stop meditating using the *mantra*. Instead, he continued to exercise meditation by focusing his attention only on a light source, such as lamp bulbs and candle before closing his eyes.

Drawing from his experience in Nepal, Bautista created *Atman* (1976) and presented an ethereal landscape of fractured rocks assembled like a staircase that leads to an abstracted head of a Buddha. The latter seems to be a communion of two identical countenances, merging at the *urna* on the forehead, a Buddhist reference that is made more pronounced by the figures' elongated ears. Atop this large rendering of a face, taking the silhouette of the *ushnisha*, the large cranial protuberance which symbolized wisdom, is a figure in *padmasana* or full lotus position. In this painting, the landscape of abstracted geological formation at the foreground somehow becomes the body of the surmised figure, assembling a path that spiritually embodies the process of reaching the meditative state. This imagery is enclosed by a frame that appears to be shaped like a haloed person, with curvilinear formations flanking both sides, resembling locks of hair cascading onto what appear to be shoulders. With these details, the figure that can be discerned in the frame appears more Christian than Buddhist. The merging of these motifs may forward the significance of the gesture of meditation and maybe even prayer in these religious traditions. Also, the subtle reference to Catholic imagery in depicting a



Fig. 6. *Atman* (1976), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of artist's estate.

seemingly Buddhist subject reflects how, amidst the artist's spiritual exploration, the Christian in him still tends to surface.

The eclecticism in Bautista's *Atman* conveys the artist's continuous search for the Divine, which, in the previous decade, was seemingly uncomplicated because it is straightforwardly grounded in Methodist teachings and practice, as he was caught within a system of relations with overlapping spheres of the domestic and the church. In a 1976 interview, Bautista recalled that early period in his artistic practice: "[My father's] appreciation [of art] is on the spiritual level. If anything I did was related to spiritual matters—about God, the Bible, the church, and especially

to help propagate Christ, he would be very happy about it. And they have to express a message” (“Portrait of the artist” 12–13). He added, “During the time I lived with him, whenever I did any painting, I knew that he would appreciate it if it was religious.” As these passages reveal, the notion of the Divine that figured in his works in the 1960s was informed largely by his reverence for his father, which coincided with his faith. This reverence may have been so compelling that he echoed the voice of his father in his art. He shared in the same interview, “I would struggle to perceive my father’s message and I would try and visualize it with a painting It was mere execution. There was no spiritual involvement with the work. I was just a kid” (“Portrait of the artist” 12). Here, he traces how his faith and art evolved a decade later. Declaring his success in drawing out from his self as he made art and demonstrating his criticality of his relationship with his religion, he nurtured a relationship with the Divine that is reflexive and open to other religious traditions, while sustaining his Protestant belief that still formed the foundation of his spirituality.

Interestingly, his landscapes appear to have been more actively engaged in his works. From exhibiting the stained-glass aesthetic that conveyed Bautista’s perspective as a Protestant, the landscapes in his later abstractions were no longer mere backdrops but became devices that contribute to the meaning or framing of what appears to be a central foregrounded figure. Specifically, the gauzy tones of the works in the “In Search of the Divine” exhibition serve as metaphor for his search for the Divine, his spirituality. In his efforts to comprehend the Divine through his engagement with other belief systems, his elegant images of the Divine elide the opacity of understanding something fully, and his figures continue to fleet in the abstracted landscapes of limitless horizons that gain prominence in the picture plane. This slipperiness of the Divine reflected in Bautista’s works shows how his very process of making abstractions is a spiritual practice in itself—an act of venturing out and making sense of one’s ever-evolving spirituality.¹²

Ecological Eschatology in Depictions of Decay and Destruction

During the first half of the 1970s, Bautista refrained from depicting any figure related to religion and tended to exclusively render landscapes. But amid this absence, abstraction as a mode of imagining and creating gave these environments of decay and destruction a spiritual, if not almost mystical, aura. This study examines the

relationship between Bautista's spirituality, notably grounded in Christianity, and nature, as gleaned from these apocalyptic landscapes. Over time, many religious belief systems began to speak about the contexts of their theologies and grew more conscious of how they mediate the relationship between humanity and nature. In Christianity, for instance, historian Lynn White Jr. questions Western theology's role in the ecological crisis (Baring and Molino 1), as it promotes the anthropocentric idea that humanity has dominion over nature and tarnishes its sanctity (White 1205). In 1985, ecotheologian H. Paul Santmire wrote about the "spiritual motif" and "ecological motif" in classical Christian thought about nature. "Spiritual motif" refers to the Christian theological worldview where one's highest aspiration is the spiritual, transcendental, and other-worldly—that is, rising toward God above—eclipsing earthly concerns or leaving behind material things, including nature (Santmire 20–21, 25, 29). This dichotomy between God and nature echoes environmental historian Donald Worster's postcolonial critique of Christianity, where he contends that religion denied "to nonhuman entities a soul or indwelling spirit" and that it "stripped from nature all spiritual qualities" (Worster 29). He claims that Christianity, through colonization, severed nature from its original links with spirituality, which was palpable in precolonial pre-Christian communities. On the other hand, the "ecological motif" is principally understood as the worldview that acknowledges humanity's intrinsic entanglement with and rootedness in the earth, and its loss of identity if removed from the land (Santmire 26, 29). According to Santmire, both motifs shaped the history of Christian thought, and, likewise, influences Bautista's abstractions.

From 1971 to 1972, Bautista pursued a two-year bachelor's program in fine arts at the Brooks Institute School of Fine Arts in Sta. Barbara, California, through the aid of a Crusade Scholarship under the auspices of the UMC. James Jarvaise, one of the teachers in the institute, advised him to take nature as his reference and to translate the imagery through his own lens. "[Jarvaise's] focus was more philosophical than visual. He wanted us to go inward in search of our inner-self, rather meditatively," Bautista recalled (qtd. in D'Bayan 15). This tendency became definitive in his process of creating landscapes in the grammar of abstraction, which Jarvaise was also known for. Inspired by a tree stump that almost tripped him on the walk back to the Brooks Institute (15), Bautista's painting, *On My Way to School* (1971) presents a seemingly cylindrical object, optically and unevenly sliced by subtle gradients of

color, suggesting crooked divisions that project outwards. Aside from resembling the roughness of the surface of a tree bark on its right side, it also seems to depict the physical cracks and losses along the growth rings caused by dryness and decay in the stump. The figure is placed in what appears to be an otherworldly, yet industrial, setting that is dominantly colored with browns in a variety of subtle gradations tracing rectilinear shapes in the background. With the presence of decay in the imagery, the work can easily be given an ecological reading. The artist recalled that *On My Way to School* was a “well-liked piece,” which made him decide to include it in his university’s annual year-end exhibition in 1971 (D’Bayan 15).

Bautista has reflected upon the concept of decay in an earlier sketch. In 1969, he made *Riches in Heaven*, which shows several chipped planks and a brittle, rolled up leaf riddled with holes. On top of the composition is the label “illus. decaying object,” and a quotation from the Scriptures, which states, “Matthew 6: 19–21: Do not save riches here on earth, where moths and rust decay, and robber break in and steal.



Fig. 7. *On My Way to School* (1971), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of artist’s estate.

Instead, save riches in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. For your heart will always be where your riches are.”

This passage exemplifies the dichotomy between material and spiritual things. Material riches decay, whilst riches in heaven do not. This approach to life was said to be exhibited and lived by the artist. As art writer Julie Daza wrote in 1971: “Bautista believes there is only one justification for painting[:] the expression of one’s self. All other motives[:] the quest for fame, fortune, success, to please a patron or an art critic, are secondary and not worth considering” (Daza). Bautista himself also stressed this when he said in an interview, “what I sold [from my paintings] I had to live with until the next show . . . I don’t paint to sell or paint because it sells. How can I do that? I’ll be violating myself” (“Portrait of the artist” 13). It is clear that the artist was not motivated by material wealth.

A few years later, the motif Bautista produced by reinterpreting the decaying tree stump would be expanded by the artist to cover the entire picture plane—a change in perspective on the subject matter that can now be interpreted to be that of destruction, materialized through the depiction of dry, fissured, fractured land, glowing from within, as if otherworldly. Titled the “*Inner Light*” series, these abstractions, which include the enigmatic work *Mandalascape* (1975) described earlier, were developments of the “wood-scape” motif that Bautista began working on earlier in the 1970s. This series was presented in the exhibition the artist mounted in August 1975 at the Metro Gallery at the Lor Calma Building in Makati. The forty paintings in the exhibition, each in 50.8 cm by 50.8 cm square format, were airbrush executions of ethereal landscapes, which, although varying in formation and perspective, all glow from within. These were said to be offshoots of his experience of the subtlety of embers that he observed at the Matuod Beach in Batangas (D’Bayan 18). *Matuod Beach* (1975) demonstrates Bautista’s rendering of the light from embers by using warmer hues at the foreground of the work, which emphasizes contrast against the cooler hues that appear to glow from inside the core. The breaks on the ground appear to be similar to the artist’s radial depiction of a tree stump, punctuated with water pumps, which are more common in the regions. Torres said in a lecture in 1975: “The wonder of [Bautista’s] early paintings is still there, as he celebrates the mystery of mood and transforms the commonplace and the discarded into glowing magical life in dark emeralds, pastel blues and grays,



Fig. 8. *Matood Beach* (1975), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of artist's estate.

and reds smoldering like embers, conjuring a vision that has a detached, somber air about them” (“Recent Developments”).

Similar to *On My Way to School* (1971), *Matood Beach* references nature and the environment of an actual place, rendered in Bautista’s creative tenor. The spaces conjured by Bautista in his paintings have been read by various art critics with reference to spirituality because of the subtle light coming from within the translucent landscapes. Art writer Alfredo Roces writes, “Glenn Bautista’s paintings straddle the world between the spiritual and the surreal. Carefully rendered with precise craftsmanship, his paintings, nevertheless, take on the appearance of free and spontaneous undulating forms that echo the rhythms of Nature” (“Foreword”). Roces traces the root of this artistic tendency to the artist’s “religious background” tapped “for his own aesthetic ends” from being “the son of a Methodist minister.”

Alongside this shift in imagery, the concept of decay also finds rearticulation beyond its usual depiction in individual material objects or persons on earth and pervades the destruction of wider landscapes or even the entirety of nature. This apocalyptic reading is reinforced by the images of devastation present in Bautista's other works in the 1975 exhibition, such as *Before Imus* (1975) and *Aquascape* (1975). Seeing the series as commentaries on the destruction of the environment, Guillermo writes, "The oil paintings acquire an apocalyptic cast as futuristic cities of multi-levelled honeycomb ruins glow as though in the aftermath of a holocaust. It may be possible to read ecological warning in these works" (28). Here, Guillermo considers the landscapes as an indictment of the dire conditions of the environment and even a call for action. At first glance, this ecological interpretation of the paintings may appear to be at odds with the worldview conveyed by the passage from the book of Matthew, which instigated Bautista's exploration of the concept of decay—reflecting the contrast between Santmire's "ecological motif" and "spiritual motif." The passage implicitly promotes an acceptance of transience, of immanent mortality and the decay of the material world, including nature. It highlights how ecology used to be ignored by religions in matters relating to eschatology. As theologian Peter Phan argues, the severance of the relationship between the spiritual and nature in Santmire's "spiritual motif" not only applies at present but also until the end times (Phan 4). This dominant stream of Christian eschatological thought emphasizes a new future prepared by God *beyond this world*, upon the coming of the Kingdom of God, turning humanity's back from the present creation, which is treated merely as temporary abode until the New Creation arrives. Fundamentalist Christian eschatology even envisages an apocalyptic destructive end to this world at the enactment of the Parousia or the second coming of Christ (Truesdale 116). Many Christian theologians have underscored the place of humanity in the Kingdom of God, while rarely, if at all, spoke of the cosmos or the greater ecology in matters of eternal life (Phan 3, 5). This encouraged a degree of anthropocentrism (5), where the instrumentalization of nature for ends that would benefit humanity is normalized, and human exceptionalism, wherein humanity is deemed "exempt in some way from the laws, traits, consequences, or destiny of the material world" (Dean 1). Since the knowledge of the future informs how the present is to be lived, this traditional eschatological view has promoted indifference to the condition of nature and escapist utopianism (Williams 205–06).

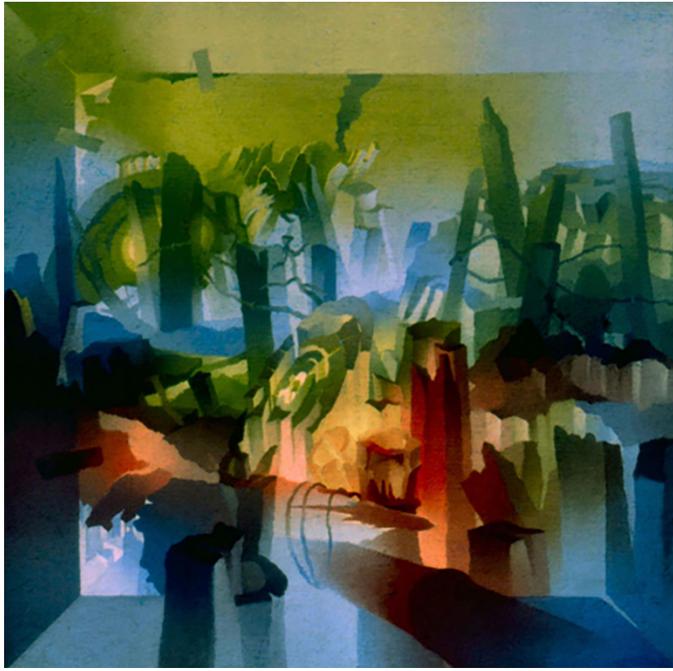


Fig. 9. *Before Imus* (1975), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist's estate.

A year later, Bautista paints *The Cosmic Christ* (1976), which, as this study argues, offers a nascent view of how ecology and eschatology can in fact coincide. Similar to other works in the “In Search of the Divine” exhibition, this piece renders a religious figure dissolving into the abstracted metaphysical landscape of fractured geological formations. Christ’s cloak is made to look like a part of a rock, while his shoulder is traced by the contours of a sharp cliff. The figure gazes at the viewer, with his right hand raised, as if to give blessings. What breaks this apocalyptic imagery is his halo, wrought from flowers and leaves, and stylized blooming shrubberies on each side of the painting. Given its title, the work gives prominence to the image of Jesus as the Cosmic Christ, which, as explained by theologian Richard Bauckham, is “the preexistent One who was active in the creation of all things and remains active in the sustaining of all things in life and order” (35). In Cosmic Christology, the love of Christ, expressed in a myriad of ways, most palpably through his death and resurrection, is extended beyond humanity to also include the physical environment. Although the painting seems to focus on this cosmic image, Christ’s presence in



Fig. 10. *The Cosmic Christ* (1976), oil on canvas. Image courtesy of artist's estate.

this apocalyptic landscape may also be interpreted to illustrate the second coming of Christ, heralding the eschaton. The duality of the images of Christ—the cosmic Christ and His Second Coming—visible in the painting coalesces with the concepts of ecology and eschatology; however, instead of rendering them to be at odds with each other, Bautista unifies these ideas into such an image.

This aligns with Phan's proposition of the eschatological cosmos, wherein he explains (i.e., grounding his claim on Santmire's notion of the "ecological motif") that nature shall not vanish into nothingness during the end times, as the whole cosmos, including humanity and nature, is granted eternal beatitude (10). This stresses nature's intrinsic value and rejects its instrumental use for anthropocentric purposes, as emphasized by the other worldview (11). Later called ecological eschatology, this conception of the end times asserts humanity's continuous partnership with and stewardship of nature as one looks forward to the final transformation destined by God. This eschatological vision bestows humanity with an ethical responsibility over nature, and decenters worldly and spiritual affairs from humanity, which is

treated merely as a part of the whole cosmos. *The Cosmic Christ* bridges Bautista's practice of abstraction with these discourses on ecological eschatology. Following theologian Jurgen Moltmann's writings on ecological eschatology, scholar Ilse Ahn argues that the Cosmic Christ gives way to the understanding that Christ's first arrival through the Incarnate Jesus is the beginning of the "recreation of this transient world in its lasting and true form: the eternal creation" (461). The Cosmic Christ hence evokes the notion of continuity of this world—that the second coming would not overthrow the natural order and annihilate the world but instead is a process of vindicating and transforming it into a renewed eschatological world.

The logic of continuity made possible by the image of the Cosmic Christ means that humanity shall remain in this world, and hence, a responsibility for and a partnership with the environment will continue to exist. This is a reclamation of eschatology that is no longer ruled by fear of a future disaster but is hinged on the concern for continuity and action in the present. In this light, one may read Bautista's 1975 landscapes and spaces bound by the inner glow that comes from the fractured land as not otherworldly or *beyond this world*. Instead, these images, referencing actual places, may as well speak of the same present world where humanity lives, albeit in its transformed eschatological state. These works show how Bautista moves between observation and fantasy, as afforded by the modality of abstraction.

This notion of continuity proffered by ecological eschatology is not at all foreign to Bautista's notion of the end times. Asked in an interview about his thoughts on this final historical moment, he explains, "From the scriptures and from my point of view, nothing ends. This earth is going but will be replaced according to the 'revelations' of Saint John. My guess is it will be the same earth but a transformed one. My spirit too, will live forever. God will decide what form it will take ("Interview with Byron King")." Although there is an acknowledgment of the idea of eschatology dominant in his Protestantism, Bautista also evokes how he opened himself to the Buddhist idea of reincarnation.

Grounded on the principle of *dharma*, Buddhism believes that the universe is "unending and beginningless . . . oscillating in a 'cyclic existence' of creation and dissolution" (Apple 109), moving in "successive declines and renewals, ad infinitum" (King 173). Hence, unlike conventional Christian thought, Buddhism maintains the

understanding that there is no absolute or ultimate eschatological event that causes the destruction of the entirety of the cosmos (177). Eschatological time is not seen as a linear time (Phan 3), but rather cycle, as in the *mandalas* that are subtly hinted by the motifs present in the landscape in the *Cosmic Christ* and *Mandalascape*. His “guess” conveys his positionality as a non-theologian, but this also demonstrates his personalized understanding of the cosmos which is both founded on Protestantism and engaged with other religious traditions. This exemplifies Bautista’s reflexive spirituality.

Bautista’s interest in epistemologies from other religious traditions, enabled by his reflexive spirituality, is also evident in his 1990s series “*The New World*,” where he returned to the subject of eschatology after more than a decade. Unlike the *Cosmic Christ* that includes a figurative image of Christ, the works from this series of abstractions render landscapes in dark shades of emerald and blue, creating semblances of fluid lands and atmospheres. One of the paintings, *The Rival Conceptions of God* (1993), recalls a book chapter of the same title by Protestant novelist C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* (1952), where he shows that despite his devout Protestantism, he sees hints of the truth about the order of the world



Fig. 11. *The Rival Conceptions of God* (1993), oil on canvas. From the author’s archive.

and beyond in other religions. In Bautista's *Rival*, this variety of perspectives are suggested by the grids in the painting that serve as nuanced lenses through which we differently view a dynamic landscape being stirred and swirled, unraveling to reveal the renewed eschatological world.

Conclusion

In the late 1960s, Bautista began envisioning what he would call the ideal community framework for the Filipinos. Aspiring for communal self-sufficiency, he, alongside his friend Edgar Saban, designed preliminary spatial layouts for communities that blended in agricultural elements mainly found in rural areas into urban lifestyle. Within the perimeter of these layouts are common areas where members of the community can plant crops, rear fish, and relish the bounty of nature in the world provided by God. Although traces of anthropocentrism may still be observed here, the community framework also stresses human connectedness with, if not dependence on, the environment, one that echoes Santmire's "ecological motif." Inspired by his immersions in Cagayan, which led him to realize that "Filipinos like to touch the earth with their hands" ("Some Casual Thoughts"), Bautista intended for the framework to ignite a desire in his countrymen to return to a closer intimacy with nature. For Bautista, our alienation from nature stems from modern urban and economic development where "the measure for success is limited to the banal terms of the material" and "the concern for non-quantifiable returns like fresh air, clean and unpolluted environment . . . is placed at the least consideration, if at all" ("Growing Fear" 166). This condemnation of human greed for the "material" echoes the passage from the Book of Matthew, which in turn dovetails with the Buddhist sense of detachment. Although the community framework can still be assessed through various lenses, Bautista's proposal demonstrates his growing awareness of the state of the environment and how his spirituality helped in framing this understanding.

Placing this venture by Bautista alongside his abstraction makes apparent the depth of his spirituality, which has already been pointed out by earlier literature on the subject (Benesa, "Transcendentalists" 17; Guillermo, *Uncommon Art* 20). But what the study contributes to this discussion is how the artist's spirituality had the humility to challenge itself and its inherited knowledges; the broad-mindedness to venture into the new or the seemingly different; and the pervasiveness of the relationships

that surrounded and shaped the artist. In surfacing these ideas on spirituality, this paper has shown the potential of abstraction to underscore the self, but one that is not limited to its own sphere but instead connects with those beyond itself. In doing so, this paper has brought to the fore how Bautista's landscapes do not merely mirror the artist's selfhood but also serves as a medium through which he understands, constructs, and presents himself as a human being intertwined with the Divine, his family, the church, and the planet and society at large, including the eschaton. Bautista's practice of abstraction evokes how his landscapes form what art historian Steven Adams (2019) calls "new forms of spatiality where space not only has its normative x-axis spreading laterally across the material landscape, but also a psychic, largely imaginary y-axis extending upward to the heavens and down into the earth's bowels" (2).

Notes

- 1 The understanding of abstraction's potential to express and understand one's spirituality is mostly due to its long history of interlacing with the concept in the manifold manifestations of this mode of making, such as in East Asia, pre-War Europe, and locally, in the Philippines (Turner 110; Mercer 16; Joya 14). In local literature, this is most evident in how works of local abstractionists have been interpreted in spiritual terms through the formal elements present in their abstractions (Reyes, "Diwa" 204, 208, 211), and how these works have been interpreted as invitation for contemplation and prayer (Zaballero 12; "Liongoren"). On rare occasions, some local painters seem, rather cursorily, to be aware that their practice of abstraction is a spiritual practice in themselves, as in artist Lee Aguinaldo's (1933–2007) process of confining colors in his paintings, which he claimed to be a "Zen exercise" (qtd. in Reyes, *Conversations* 121).
- 2 In European landscape painting, on the one hand, the landscape genre is conventionally known for its ornamental and subsidiary role in Italian Renaissance paintings (Goodchild 8, 15–16; Pächt 37–38) and relatively subordinate position in the hierarchies in art academies of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (Boime 211, Wolf 8). On the other hand, in Chinese landscape painting, it is conventionally considered to have a superior and scholarly reputation in the literati tradition, alongside calligraphy and poetry (Turner 114).
- 3 Primarily drawing attention to the context of colonialism, Mitchell asserts how landscape painting stood for the colonizers' "prospect of endless appropriation and conquest" (20), which treats nature as mere property to be seized and owned, hence exploited.
- 4 Local literature on landscape painting in the Philippines demonstrate an attentiveness to the relationships in the context that shape how and why artists made these paintings and formed them in such a way. Art historian Cecilia De La Paz (1998), for instance, highlights the sociopolitical contexts of the local art ecology during the various chapters of colonial experiences of the country in her discussion of landscape and genre paintings in the Jorge B. Vargas Museum collection. She ties the artworks, seen as products and commodities, with the patronage relationships that were powerful in the art market and society during each period of the country's colonial history (9–11). Art writer Paul Zafaralla (1999), writing on the landscape and genre paintings in the 50th anniversary exhibition of the Art Association of the Philippines, also probes the formal elements in these artworks and how they show how the artists were informed by their social contexts. For instance, the frail and spindly quality of the discernable forms in the abstraction of artist Arturo Luz was linked to alienation in modern society (64). Artist-writer Fatima Lasay (2008), in her essay on the landscape and genre paintings in the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas collection, reads landscape as an image of a site through which sociopolitical order then defines the contours of the urban space depicted by the artists in their paintings (310–12). She further writes that landscape painting is reflective of the "ideological hegemony between people and state, and other forms of social inequality such as gender and ethnicity" (356).
- 5 For these scholars, aside from colonialism and imperialism, operative among the landscape painters was the pervasive thought that nature is inanimate, spelling its intrinsic difference from humanity (Thomas 1), and anthropocentrism, where the instrumentalization of nature for ends that would benefit humanity is normalized. This can be gleaned in the position of nature in the process of industrializing human societies as gleaned from the aestheticization of pollution in several Impressionist landscape paintings (Weidinger 101). These discourses between landscapes and nature have also been present, to some limited degree, in local literature. On the one hand, both De La Paz and Zafaralla lightly touched on how landscapes operate as an expression of nostalgia for the green, lush, and clean spaces that the country used to have before they have been marred by urbanization, pollution, and other relevant issues (De La Paz 9; Zafaralla 67). On the other hand, Lasay wrote that "landscapes are products of our relationship with the environment and that landscape paintings are the picture languages of that relationship" (368). Adding a more specific bend to this claim, she wrote about human dominion over nature, and she asserted that a

landscape painting of a place makes its possession imaginable (313), while the presence of traces of settlement may mark ownership of such lands (314). She writes, “landscape painting reflects the dialectic between natural features and artifacts of human habitation and domination, isolating us from the environment in its Cartesian division of subject and object” (356). She was keen in observing traces of humanity’s indwelling in scenes presented in these paintings as gestures of manipulation of nature during their lives. These perspectives are evidence that the discussion on landscape painting’s potential as medium to understand humanity’s position in relation to the environment is already present in local discourses, which the study aspires to contribute to. This is deemed essential, because of the little attention given to landscapes rendered in the abstract tenor. De La Paz was probably limited by the collection of the Vargas Museum that is largely composed of paintings employing the academic style. Zafaralla wrote little on Luz’s abstracted urbanscapes, while Lasay only wrote about the formal qualities and the optical effects of the abstractions by Ang Kiukok (b. 1931, d. 2005), Zobel, and Norberto Carating (b. 1948). Furthermore, the *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* was not able to include this form of landscape, which it delimited to be either “realist, romantic, classical, or expressionist” (Guillermo, Javelosa and Javellana 228).

- 6 The blurring of the line that divided landscape and genre paintings can be gleaned from local literature on landscapes. In their discussion of landscape paintings, De La Paz, Zafaralla, and Lasay opted to include what cannot be definitively categorized as “pure” or “absolute” landscape—on which some art historians and artists, such as Ernst H. Gombrich (107), Kenneth Clark (48), and Wu Tao-tzu (Loehr and Sullivan 261), are seemingly engrossed. This blurring can likewise be observed in the discussion on landscape painting in the Cultural Center of the Philippines’ *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (2019), where Guillermo and her colleagues could not seem to avoid the inclusion of “a boy in a carabao” in the elements that complete the Philippine rural landscape as formulated through the academic style (Guillermo, Javelosa and Javellana 230). Although some may shun such tendency to lack discipline in heeding to defined limitations adjudged by categories of art history, the study suspects that there is innate difficulty in discussing local landscape paintings with the lens of purity because the local discourse did not seem to find it necessary to invest on such an idea. In the discussions, the landscapes seemed inseparable from the figures in the foreground: the people tilling the soil, riding carabaos, lifting water carriers, or aboard boats on water bodies. This highlights the quotidian quality of the landscapes discussed—a character that is commonly understood to define genre paintings (224). Echoing this argument, Lasay writes, “in the Filipino worldview, human beings are perceived as part of nature” (362). This assertion is best substantiated by the local and cultural epistemologies on the environment that she evoked as she wrote about artworks (318, 330). In the rubric of these forms, Lasay did not regard the landscapes subsidiary to the figures that inhabit them; instead, she charged landscapes with vitality by arguing that they play a key role to the experience and meaning making afforded by the painting (318).
- 7 From the discussion of the earliest local exhibition on non-objective painting, writer Magtanggul Asa (1953) related the abstractions of Ocampo and Saguil to spaces as they have been experienced by the painters: the interior of the church for the former, while a childhood sea voyage for the latter (12–13). Decades later, Benesa (1978) examined Sanso’s abstractions with the presence of *baklad* (bamboo fish traps) along the shore (“Sanso’s Pale Moon” 25), while artist Phyllis Zaballero (1978) narrated how Augusto Albor strived to reflect his environment (12). Other texts present the abstractions that figure landscapes as fragments of their inner selves. Torres (1964), retrospectively looking at the artist’s practice after their participation to the Venice Biennale, highlighted Joya’s deep conviction on his abstract style (“Because It Is There” 342), while writer Rosalinda Galang thought about the childhood exile of Norberto Carating to the province in discussing his abstracted works that hint on the underground (576). Guillermo pointed out the “subconscious movements and preoccupations” of Liongoren in his abstractions that were interpreted as minimal abstract landscapes (“Two modes”).
- 8 The concept of spirituality is suggested by the “solemn quality” of Albor’s works (Zaballero 12) and was discussed in more length by Torres when he wrote about Saguil’s “preoccupation with the life of the spirit—with what the soul or psyche, rather than what the naked eye, sees” (*Nena Saguil* 9).

- 9 Among the few local literature that examines abstracted landscapes with ecology is the discussion on the practice of abstraction of Prudencio Lamarroza, whose act of repetition in grid format in the depiction of barren lands and the personified image of a river goddess which the artist called the "Amburayan Queen" was interpreted by Benesa (1979) as the "fecundity of nature" that is "not tampered with or upset by industrial man in his pursuit of 'progress' at any cost" ("Lamarroza" 23). The critic mentioned that the exhibition was paired with a tree-planting activity—a practical supplement that aligns with the advocacy highlighted in the interpretation. Citing the artist's childhood memories along the waterways of the Ilocos Region, Guillermo (2000) wrote about the artist's nostalgia of the clean environment then, which gave way for him to play freely during those early years ("Prudencio Lamarroza" 135–36, 138). The discussion on the relationship of Bautista's practice of painting landscapes through the abstract mode in relation with ecology is another effort to relate such concepts, but will be done in the lens of spirituality.
- 10 The discussion on spirituality in existing local art historical literature on works of abstraction and those where landscapes can be situated in has yet to be grounded on the academic discourse on the history of the concept. And plausibly because of this, many among these are not keen on the nuances of the concept in comparison with those it is closely intertwined with, such as religiosity. Cid Reyes (2008), in his essay "*Diwa*: Brush with Spirituality," for instance, left the concept of spirituality undefined and hence unproblematized, even if he mentioned that "certainly a distinction lies between spirituality and religiosity" (180). He proceeded with the discussion on the concept with examples on religious imageries in artworks alongside those artworks that demonstrate the infiniteness and beauty of the sublime, jumping off from Euromerican ideas that he found to be relevant, however tangential.
- 11 Such distinction between the two concepts and the blurring between the two has been recognized locally, as seen in an article by sociologist Jayeel Cornelio (2011) (5–7).
- 12 On rare occasions, some local abstractionists were observed, rather cursorily, to be aware that their practice of abstraction is a spiritual practice in themselves, as in artist Lee Aguinaldo's (b. 1933, d. 2007) claim that his process is a "Zen exercise" (qtd. in Reyes, *Conversations* 121). What the study wishes to emphasize here and apply in the discussion on Bautista is the idea that abstraction does not promise a reflection of an artist's completed spirituality, which is, in contrary, construed as a work-in-progress that is propelled by abstraction as a spiritual practice.

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