

MAGICAL RINGS

Text by Edwin Janzen

The boxer sports a lurid, bedraggled regalia of gloves and athletic pads, but stares away into space with blank eyes. The boxer's opponent, too, is in rough shape, with eyes—indeed, with entire body—swathed in bandages, head and limbs supported by a scaffold of improvised joists and braces suggesting injuries so fantastic they must be metaphysical. Egged on by a pair of hyenas, everyone is ready for a bout that seems unlikely to happen. Nearby are the figures of two more boxers, their robes like windows into other realms revealing butterflies (recalling Muhammad Ali) and a sunset sky. Not far off are images of gloves, belts and a heavy bag.

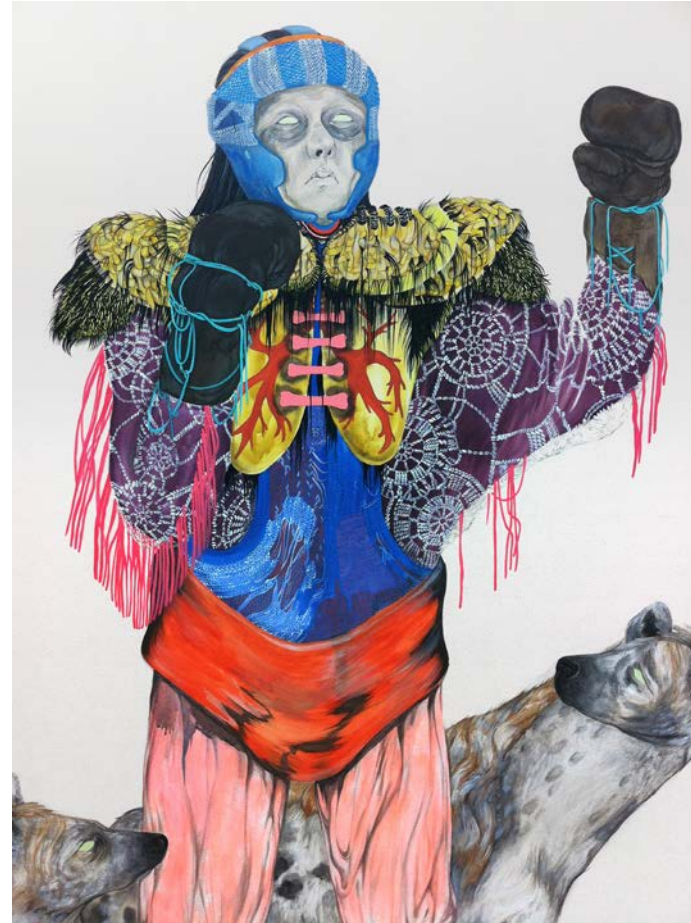
All these propositions, the creations of Montréal artist Marigold Santos, herself an amateur boxer, transport us into a world in which the gritty, sweat-stained boxing gym is revealed as a place of ritual and magic. Indeed, the regalia and talismans—the glittery robes, impractical belts, golden gloves—suggest the accoutrements and symbolism of a religious sect. From amid the boxing regalia, the face of Filipino boxing star Manny Pacquiao stares down at us—but here his presence seems spiritual, as though revealing himself to us from some nighttime realm of possibility.

Conceptually, Santos fixes her work around the attributes of the Asuang, a spirit being from Filipino mythology. Not unlike how the wise women of pre-Christian Europe were scapegoated as witches, Catholic missionaries reinvented the Asuang as a menacing witch-vampire, often represented as a female figure, its face hidden by a tangle of long, black hair. Its most notable characteristic is its “segmented self”—the ability to detach parts of its body, which may function autonomously for a spell before eventual reattachment.

For Santos, who immigrated to Canada in the late 1980s, the self-segmenting Asuang resembles the resilient cultural strategies learned of necessity by migrants and newcomers. Unlike those who live in the place where they grew up, the newcomer must practice a cultural witchcraft of sorts, segmenting her cultural identity, responding to new challenges by attaching and detaching cultural attributes. Of the old, what to keep? Language, religion, cuisine? And of the new, what to adopt? Western apparel? English or French? Perhaps later, as circumstances change, certain of the old “cultural limbs” may be recalled from their limbo and reattached.

For now, baby steps. Got to learn the footwork, like coach tells you. Parallels with dance are unavoidable. Facing her opponent in the ring, the boxer confronts her mirror image, a spirit-double. But will the feet perform as desired? Santos' boxers, with their absurd protective garments and improvised bandages, seem perpetually at the brink of unravelling, decorporealizing,

inadequately constrained against their own segmentation. The art of the boxer, thus, is a performance, a continual, risky ritual of self-invention. Without the footwork, you might as well not exist. You've got to make yourself exist.



Encounter (détail), Marigold Santos, 2012

Marigold Santos pursues an inter-disciplinary art practice involving drawn and printed works, sculpture, animation, and sound. Her imagery arises from folklore of east and west, pop culture, science, and personal myth reconfigured into the supernatural, and considers the particular experience of migration and the fragmented/multiple self.

Born in Winnipeg and based in Montréal, **Edwin Janzen's** work reaches across artistic disciplines to examine how we define ourselves through fantasies about technology. Edwin sits on articule's board of directors.



Encounter (détail), Marigold Santos, 2012

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GOVEN RING

Marigold Santos