

## **Austria Explores New Ground in Latest Exhibit**

Julio Jose Austria dips into a personal discovery of new landscapes in his tenth one-man show titled “New Frontiers.”

The exhibit showcases 10 paintings, products of Austria’s residency at the Vermont Studio Center (VSC), after receiving a full grant for the 2008/2009 Asian Artist Fellowship, U.S.A.

In his new line of work, Austria explores the idea of isolation without exulting in its political, geographical and psychological nuances and solipsism. According to him, he sees his stay as a retreat: “While at VSC, I had thoughts of staying away from the reality — politics, Philippine art scene, culture, family, friends, relatives, everyday life— my reality, which I had been used to.” The current paintings focus more of Vermont’s *mise en scene* rather than Austria’s soliloquies as seen in his previous exhibitions.

Chronicling his stay in Vermont in snapshots of the local landmarks and places he frequented there, Austria waltzes from his affinity with cityscapes and the strident metropolis (as embodied by his previous works) to the docile arms of the countryside— drawing inspiration from images of inconspicuous street signs and bridges to towering russet trees and moss-tainted brooks in the springtime.

One could sense the solitary ways of understanding a new ground in his paintings, dealing with the metonymic absence and presence of tangible things, as well as recollections. This is prevalent in the aptly titled “Far Away from Home.” “There’s nobody I could depend on but myself,” he comments.

In one of the paintings called “Cold Silence,” Austria waxes poetic on how a late night walk brings him closer to nature and the stillness of things: “I remember feeling the cold weather from the tail of winter to the birth of

spring, looking up to the stars, listening to the flow of the river and the silence of the night.”

Austria lets us look through this experience without feeling like a voyeur, revealing his new-found relationship with the place in such a way it doesn't lose its novelty. He does so without the pretensions of being an artist sleeping in a foreign land.

Style wise, some of the paintings indulge in vast spaces and block objects like in “Ice Breaker” depicting a fire hydrant ducked in a mantle of thick snow. This visual style fluctuates to bold, esoteric lines meandering across the canvas and layered strokes alluding to his recent exhibition (This Way Out). The palette remains subdued, being dominated by beiges, roses, mints and grays.

Austria majored in Painting at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila and is affiliated with the Anting-Anting Art group of Cavite, his hometown. Just last year, he was a finalist in the Annual Art Competition hosted by the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP). He recently held a solo exhibit titled “Colored Identity” at the Museum of Young Art in Vienna, Austria and did a group show in England and Germany as part of the Young Art Philippines Exhibit Tour 2009.

“New Frontiers” runs from October 22 to November 13, 2009. Hiraya Gallery is located at 530 United Nations Avenue, Ermita, Manila. For more information, you can call 523-3331 or email [hiraya@info.com.ph](mailto:hiraya@info.com.ph) or visit the website [www.hiraya.com](http://www.hiraya.com)