

## Josephine Turalba



From Performance: **Mighty ballistic**

### Artist's Statement

In fact I have always been intrigued by the critical discourse of the sixties and seventies of juxtaposition of opposites. In my work: it is life versus death, and how from death emerges life, and how the concept of violence, war and death possess aesthetics capable of creating life. In projects like *Mighty Ballistic* (2007), *Diwata* (2009) and *ReDress* (2010), my inspiration and research coexisted simultaneously on two pillars: my personal trauma due to the loss of my father who lost his life violently due to greed and organized crime. The second pillar is a trip to Egypt, where I came to know about the ancient scarab symbol/God (called Khepri, aka Lord), where it is symbolized and referred to as the «lord of life who comes out of death». Through observation, the Egyptians found that the female desert scarab looks for some organic excreta (symbol of death) and rolls it with its «limbs»

to make a perfect ball, while laying her eggs (symbol of life). The eggs become deeply embedded within the ball, that looks like a perfect sun (the God Ra); in due time, the numerous nymph scarabs come out of the ball (hence the Lord) as if the sun exploded with life, a life that comes out of death. The legend/myth intrigued me to develop a concept where an utmost pleasure in life --represented by fashion and glamour-- can be created out of material that is linked in the universal memory with death, parody and satirical in the extreme cases.

The Egyptian ball/disc that explodes with sudden life is also very similar to the Persian Phoenix rising from dust: a mythical and mystical firebird of the ancient mythology, with a fire spirit, that abruptly comes to life of 500 years. The mythical entity builds its nest from rubble and twigs, gathers incense, cinnamon and rests itself on the twigs, then with its last breath



Composite Diwata

and the sacred scent burns together with its nest, down to ashes. Shortly after, out of the ashes of death a young Phoenix rises from the dust.

As I live with the legacy of my father and the diamond of a mother he has left us, I rise with my artworks as a Phoenix, here to live another 500 years, with as much (if not more) fire and brilliance as my inspirational predecessor. Perhaps, my work must be seen in its entirety and its passionate process, rather than like a piece of inanimate object. This concern with death and what it can bring forth lives in myself and in my practice, as it does in all of us.

**Bullet Proof, Proof of Life: The Works of Josephine Turalba**

Trauma, especially that which psychologists refer to as “malignant trauma” arising from atrocities inflicted by humans on fellow humans is so overwhelming, so overflowing with meaning that

it is beyond language, and beyond precise and measurable meaning. Leaving a person drained of life and her sense of humanity, malignant trauma is resistant to processing as memory and as idea, and becomes retrieval only through extraordinary means and circumstances.

In the work of Josephine Turalba, this extraordinary means comes in the form of glamour and commercial fashion - “an utmost pleasure in life” that she appropriates and counters by fashioning dresses out of shotgun shells - dresses that cannot be worn in ordinary life and by ordinary mortals. Beyond the mundane and the everyday, these dresses can be donned only by the goddess –Diwata–, who walks the streets of a crowded city, goes through a desolate landscape overgrown with weeds, and most recently, parodying the catwalk on a fashion runway. In the various guises and through various walkways, Diwata as body, as place and as metaphor acts as the



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mediator linking the living and the dead, the past and present. She is also witness, the one that gives voice to deep resentment and sorrow, embodying the artist's belief, one that is almost impossible to imagine and understand: that "violence, war and death possess aesthetics capable of creating life." It is a conviction that finds its metaphor in an animal myth and life form: the phoenix rising out of the ashes and the female desert scarab (which the artist came across in a recent trip to Egypt) that lays its eggs in perfect balls the scarab creates out of excreta (symbol of death). In due time, numerous nymph scarabs emerge out of the ball, which looks like a perfect sun (the God Ra) exploding with life. Just as nymphs burst out of excrement, so can life burst out of bullets. And just as the desert scarab builds its nest from waste and the phoenix from rubble and twig turned to ash, so does the artist. "Living with the legacy of my (murdered) father and the diamond of a mother he has left us," she emerges and imagines herself back to life from the ashes of unspeakable loss and trauma, with as much fire and brilliance, through her art.

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1- Ryan LaMOTHE. "The Absence of Cure. The Core of Malignant Trauma and Symbolization." *J Interpers Violence* 1999; 14; 1193. Downloaded from <http://jiv.sagepub.com> at Australian National University on October 17, 2008. La Mothe also sites five interrelated causes: (a) shock associated with the loss of expectation of help; (b) loss of control over the integrity of one's body; (c) loss in the belief that the other is obliged to respond to a cry; (d) loss of trust associated with the experience of betrayal; and e) loss of an other's commitment to recognize, respect and respond to one's desires and needs

*Josephine Turalba*

*Born November 27, 1965. lives and works in Manila, Philippines.*

*Josephine Turalba is an interdisciplinary artist who incorporates painting, photography, video, sound and installation to explore her subject matter. She received her MFA in New Media from Transart Institute at Universität Krems in Austria in 2009.*

*Exhibitions Include: 12th Cairo Biennale, 2010; Constructing Secrets, Thoughts & Memories: Aspects of Postmodern Practice, 2010; Gallery of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Manila, 2010; The World Next Door, Malta Contemporary Art Center, Malta, 2009; Tutok SONA Edukasyon, Manila Contemporary, Manila, 2009; Tutok Krisis: Kalunasan Anong K Mo? Blanc Art Space, Manila, 2008; 08.08.08 Britania Art Projects, Quezon City, Manila, 2008; Open Season, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, 2008; Hidden Tales, Ricco Renzo Gallery, Makati City, Manila, 2008; Trajectories, Wooloo Productions, Chelsea Gallery Space, New York, 2008; Josephine Turalba, Corredor Gallery, Universtiy of the Philippines Diliman, 2007; Exploits on the Dining Table, PowerPlant Mall, Rockwell, Makati, 2007; Josephine Turalba: Paintings & Photographs, Lopez Museum, Pasig City, Manila, 2007.*



**ReDress**