

Cabinet of Queeriosities

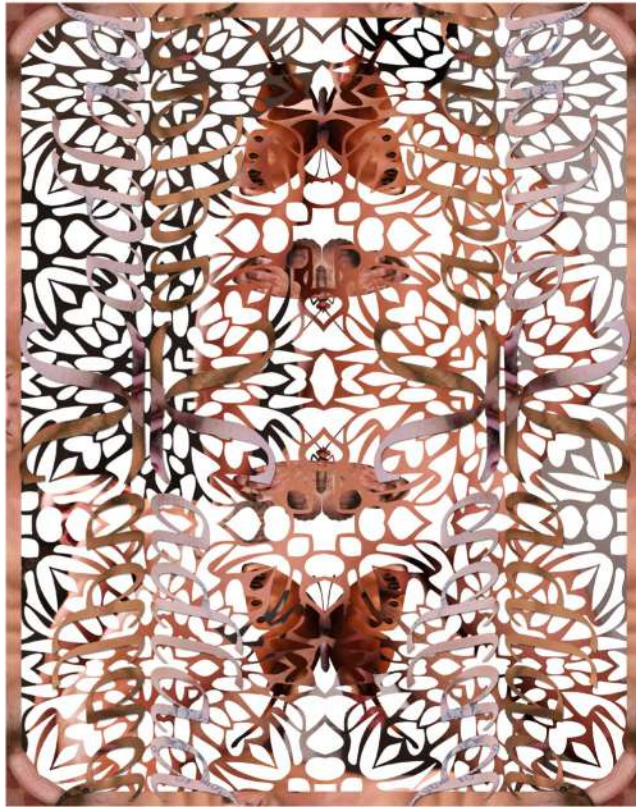
The Art of
JULIUS PONCELET MANAPUL

Curated by
MARISSA LARGO




worldpride
Under License from InterPride

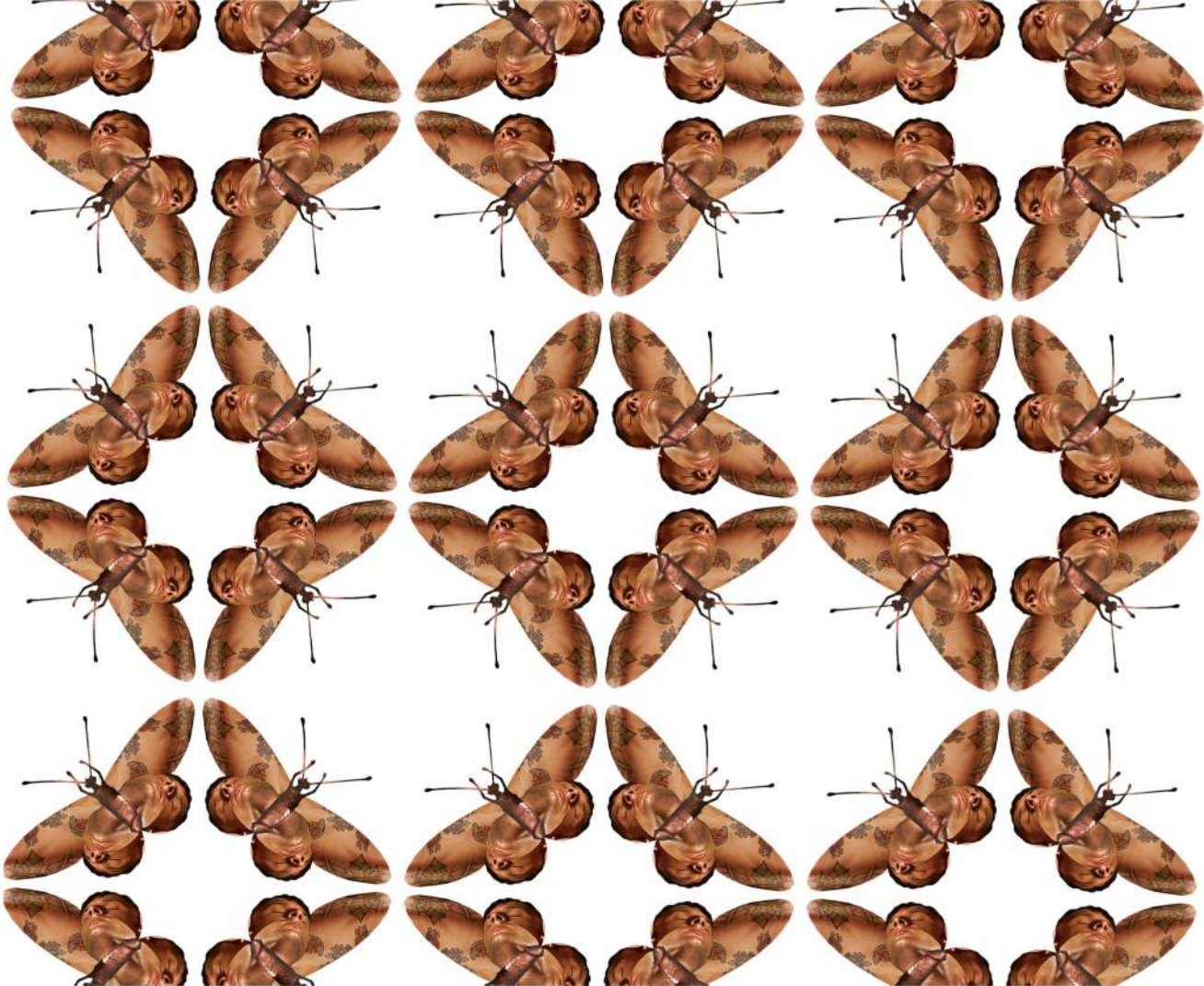
2014 • toronto • ontario • canada



Queerious Text: Ladlad, 2014. Collage and paper cut.

Julius Poncelet Manapul was born in Manila, Philippines in 1980 and immigrated to Toronto, Canada in 1990. He attained his Bachelors of Fine Arts in 2009 from the Ontario College of Art and Design University. He completed a one-year residency in Paris, France and earned a Professional Art Studio certificate from the Toronto School of Art in 2011. Julius completed his Masters of Visual Studies at University of Toronto in 2013. His work addresses themes of post-colonialism, immigration, sexual identity, and identity construction. <http://juliusmanapul.blogspot.ca/>

Marissa Largo is a second year PhD student at OISE University of Toronto. She holds an honours degree in Visual Arts and a Bachelors of Education from York University and has a Masters degree in Art Education from Concordia University. In 2013, she was awarded the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for her doctoral project on contemporary Filipino/a Canadian visual artists. www.marissalargo.com



***The Cabinet of Queeriosities* (2014)**

is a new body of work by Philippine-born, Toronto-based visual artist Julius Poncelet Manapul. This exhibition, consisting of installation, sculpture, animation, digital collage, and mixed media, interrogates the artist's experiences of racialized and diasporic queerness in an age of globalization.

A central motif of this body of work is Manapul's queer butterflies. Viewers are presented with seemingly innocuous images of lovely winged insects. How-

ever, upon closer inspection, the butterfly wings are digitally collaged using images of men's bodies, comprised of human body hair, protruding veins, various tattoos, pierced nipples, semi-clenched hands, and faces of men in ecstasy. Most unexpectedly of all, the bodies of the butterflies are fashioned from disembodied penises stylized to resemble the insect's anatomy.

This jarring juxtaposition is a distinctive visual strategy of Manapul. He subverts our visual assumptions and calls us to

look more closely and intently in order to uncover a reality just beyond the superficial gaze. This seemingly disparate and absurd biological pairing of men's bodies as butterflies destabilizes our perception and belies our first impressions. What we eventually come to know is that these collaged images are culled from explicit gay sexual material from the Internet. They are ubiquitous images that are one Google search away, representing hegemonic representations of queer flesh as sexually available, commodified, and objectified.

In his groundbreaking essay *Looking for my Penis* (1991), artist and activist Richard Fung interrogates oppressive representations of Asian men in gay pornography which reinforce stereotypes of the asexual, submissive "Oriental", ascribing to Eurocentric colonial fantasies. Fung contends that pornography illuminates prevailing relationships of domination and subjugation in society. Manapul's queer butterflies align with Fung's analysis: both see pornography as a "site of struggle" for issues of race, sexuality, and representation (p.15). For Manapul, pornography is the perpetuation of homonormative representations in which his diasporic queer Filipino identity is rendered invisible and impossible. Like Fung, Manapul seeks out the possibility of his racial and sexual identity amidst Western discourses of homosexuality.

The title of this exhibition is in reference to sixteenth and seventeenth European *Wunderkammer* or *Kunstkammer*. These cabinets of curiosities contained and displayed wonders from the natural world such as shells, preserved animals and insects, and human made artifacts,



Butterfly Cloche, 2014. Digital collage, velum, found objects, glass cloche.

like works of art. These collections, often procured from colonial territories, represented the travels and tastes of European elites and were meant to edify its viewers (Impey & MacGregor, 1985). The cabinet of curiosities is widely attributed as the precursor to the modern museum, which even today carries the same colonial logics of collecting, categorizing, decontextualizing, and exhibiting for edification.

Manapul's allusion to the historical collecting practices of colonial elites echoes the fetishization, exoticization, and idealization of particular queer bodies, as elevated in gay pornography. This

is seen in his *Butterfly Cloches*, assemblages containing his queer butterflies perched on white-washed sticks. Some house Ken dolls – iconic pop cultural images of white masculinity – which demonstrate for Manapul “perfect specimens”, and together with the butterflies, perpetuate a homonormative standard to which all gay men are held. The glass cloche in horticulture is intended for the protection of plant life. Manapul ironically appropriates the cloche as a preservation and display technique to highlight these lifeless objects for what they really are: social and cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. Asian, gay, and masculine are not antithetical concepts as colonial histories of racial discrimination and popular representations would have us believe (Eng, 2001).

In the animation, *Queerious Patterns*, Manapul symbolically expresses his sexual subjectivity as a diasporic, gay Filipino man. The opening scene of the animation consists of the queer butterflies statically arranged on a stark, white background in symmetrical formations, creating a radiating pattern. As the animation progresses, hints of life emerge as the butterflies begin to flutter their wings and finally take flight. We see a similar ornamentalized arrangement of butterflies as the wallpaper motif within the closed gallery spaces. Visual culture and queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz asserts that utopian potentiality can be found in the ornamental. Influenced by the philosophical writings of Ernst Bloch, Muñoz contends that the ornamental in art, which resides outside of function, possesses “a certain surplus that allow the viewer a rare



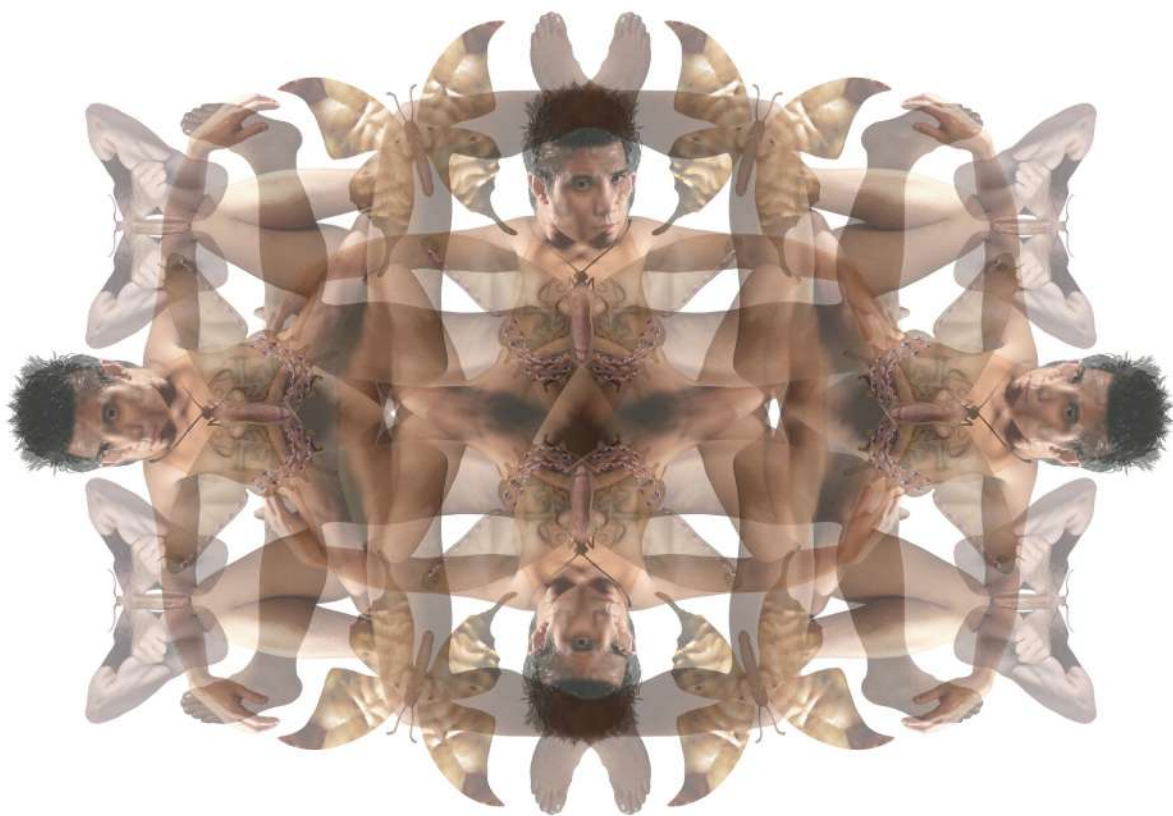
Queerious Patterns, 2014. Animation.

and important passage that is more than an escape” (2009, p.128). Manapul’s ornamental aesthetic illuminates the ways in which categorization and containment of identities are elusive. His queer butterflies point to something else beyond themselves, away from the functional and scientific, and outside of normative time and space.

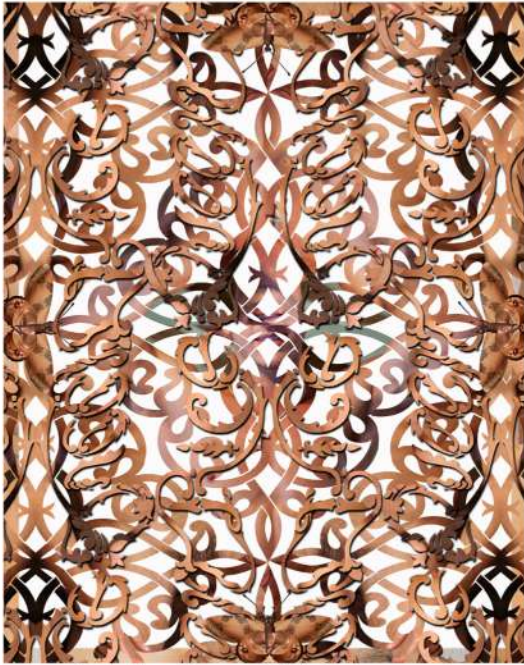
These queer butterflies do not conform to the entomologist’s taxonomic classification; instead, they dance in synchrony and circle beyond the frame of the screen and gallery into infinity. As in the animation, the ornamental pattern of the wallpaper dissolves and the butterflies make their escape into the physical realm. Although sourced and produced through highly technological means, they



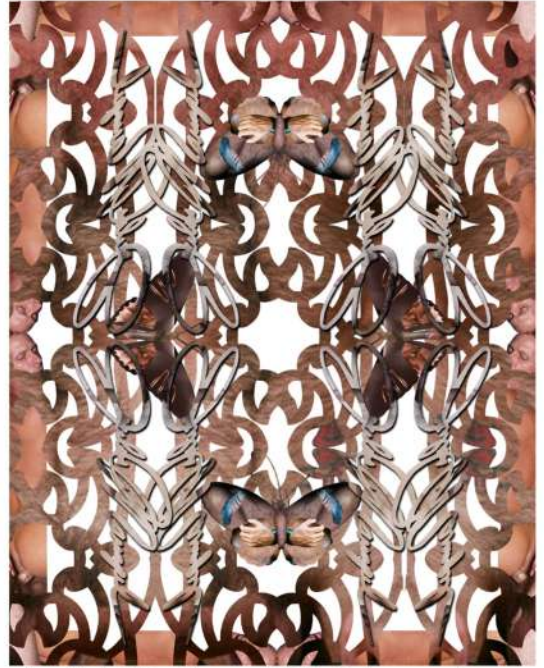
Queerious Hybrid 1, 2014. Digital collage, paper sculpture, mannequin.



Homonormative Diaspora 1, 2014. Digital collage and print, printing with archival ink.



Queerious Text: Rice Queen, 2014. Collage and paper cut.



Queerious Text: Julius Manapul, 2014. Collage and paper cut.

are imbued with a sense of human tactility in the careful act of cutting. Manapul hand cut the printouts of the butterflies, thus freeing them and giving them life outside the two-dimensional and virtual. Like the artist's subjectivities, they resist easy categorization and capture. These queer butterflies are literally impossible to pin down. If colonial relations are dependent on the subjugation and classification of the "Other", then Manapul's denial of taxonomical imperatives rejects dominant constructs that aim to contain difference.

The ***Queerious Text Series*** further demonstrates Manapul's interest in subverting perception and dominant representations through the ornamental. Curvilinear designs are cut from the same source material as the butterflies. Embedded within the lace-like designs are words

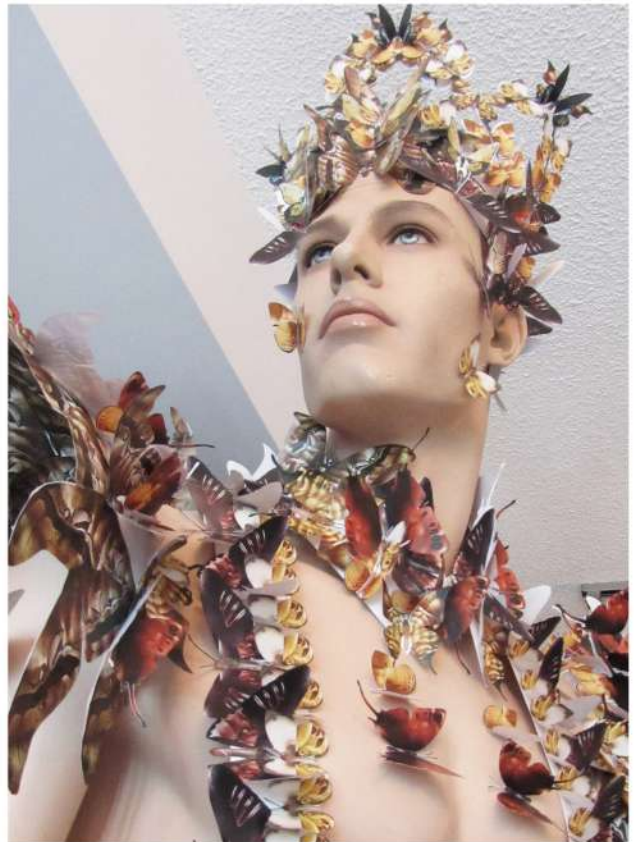
that have pejorative provenance such as *bakla* (Tagalog term that describes homosexuality, effeminacy, and cross-dressing), *bading* (a more polite version of *bakla*), and *fudge packer* (an English homophobic slur). However, by ornamentizing these words, Manapul subverts these potential sources of traumatic feelings and reclaims them as part of his own aesthetic. The negative spaces within the designs are painstakingly cut away, allowing the light to flow through and cast intricate shadows. By refiguring them into decorative motifs, the words are remade and simultaneously serve as reminders of pain that loom in the shadows, but like rays of light that seep through, also communicate the possibility of hope and transformation. Filipino American scholar Martin Manalansan (2003) suggests that

bakla is characterized by “processes of transformation” and “shifting of selves that are not moored to any fixed category” (p. ix). Manapul’s ornamentalization of these linguistically fluid words reflect the desire to disrupt static identity classifications in favour of an emergent subjectivity that is performed and remade through aesthetics.

Manapul devotes one of the text compositions to *Ladlad*, a LGBT political party in the Philippines, whose emblem is a butterfly. This sense of hope and transformation is also evident in his self-portrait series, **Homonormative Diaspora**, in which Manapul adopts poses from queer magazines. The poses are repeated, abstracted, and turned into decorative patterns. His butterflies are superimposed upon his ornamentalized body, conveying a desire to break from convention and normative expectations.

A butterfly’s astounding life cycle from a lowly caterpillar to a colourful creature capable of flight makes it a common metaphor for transformation. Ornamental aesthetics signify a surplus or excess that goes beyond the present and everyday (Muñoz, 2009). They contain what Muñoz would call “utopian potentiality”, or in other words, a feeling or opening that extends past the politics of the present. Queer aesthetics, especially those that are found in the ornamental, have a role to play in envisioning transformation. Manapul’s investment in utopia comes from the belief that the world can be better for him as a diasporic gay Filipino in the midst of western normative values. For him, art is a way of imagining transformation.

Chiseled, white male mannequins inhabit two of the enclosed gallery spaces. Visible only through the vitrines, they allow viewers to return the dominant gaze. They are clothed in fantastical outfits composed of hundreds of intricately cut and assembled queer butterflies of various patterns and sizes. These **Queerious Hybrids** are formal and conceptual amalgams. Mina Roces (2005) argues that throughout Philippine history, dress in the political sphere was mobilized to communicate notions of gender and power. The iconography of dress was influenced by centuries of Spanish colonial rule and decades of American imperial dominance and did not ascribe to the



Queerious Hybrid 2, 2014. Digital collage, paper sculpture, mannequin.

simple opposing symbolism of traditional/national on the one hand, and modernity/western aesthetics on the other. Similarly, Manapul disrupts the binaries of male/female, modern/traditional, and colonized/colonizer by creating hybrid iconography through dress. The “butterfly sleeves” (which has a quite literal meaning in Manapul’s rendition) of a *terno*, the Filipina formal dress popularized by Imelda Marco and later, Lady Gaga, are combined with aspects of the *Barong Tagalog* (a formal men’s shirt), along with a *Maria Clara*-inspired skirt silhouette. These colonial influences are coupled with Manapul’s reinterpretation of indigenous regalia of the Ifagao, Cordillera, and Ati Peoples to signify a non-essentialized, gender-fluid, diasporic subjectivity in the midst of the homonormative gaze. Hybridity, here is the hallmark, not only of Filipino culture, but also the artists’ creations and the artist himself.

Cabinet of Queeriosities (2014) is a proud Affiliate Event under WorldPride 2014 Toronto. The inclusion of Manapul’s work in this celebration of global queerness is important in communicating that queerness is not a universal experience, but is mediated by race, gender, language, culture, and other subjectivities. Manalansan (2003) advocates this position and calls for a transnational turn in queer studies that accounts for difference and diaspora. For diasporic gay Filipino men like Manapul, multiple displacements and tensions with regards to belonging, identity, and notions of home are experienced on a daily basis. These are often unaccounted for or glossed over by globalized discourses of queerness,

which purport solidarity and pride at the expense of difference. Manapul’s artistic intervention in WorldPride is a rich and compelling expression of his experiences from the margins of the margin in the global city. **By Marissa Largo**



Butterfly Pattern, 2014. Digital Collage, velum, archival ink.

References

- Eng, D (2001). *Racial castration: Managing masculinity in Asian America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Fung, R. (1991). *Looking for my penis*. Retrieved from <http://www.richardfung.ca/index.php?/articles/looking-for-my-penis-1991/>
- Impey, O. & MacGregor, A. (Eds.). (1985). *The origins of museums: The cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe*. New York: Oxford University.
- Manalansan, M. (2003). *Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Roces, M. (2005). *Gender, nation, and the politics of dress in twentieth-century Philippines*. *Gender and History*, 17 (2), 354-377.



Julius Poncelet Manapul and Marissa Largo would like to give thanks to:

Allen Zhang of Studio 386: realstateinc@gmail.com
for his support and the generous use of this new art space.

Roy Richard for his vision and dedication to the project.

To our wonderful volunteer gallery prep team: Denise Santos, Michael Reyes,
Patricia Abuel, Dorothy Manuel, Jerome Parayno, Voula Maragos, Madison
Maragos, Laura Ann McPhie, Curtis Reason, and Lawton Clinton.

To our committed team of gallery attendants: Loisel Wilson, Marie Sotto,
Toni Largo, Justin Abeto, Shakil Salim, Cristina Ribseiro Vicente, Neda Omidvar,
Chia Shin Koh, Eduardo Scatolin Palazzo, Françoise Cadigan,
and Jackson Eidelberg,

To Dr. Robert Diaz, Dr. Roland Coloma, and Eunice Chow for their
critical insights, expertise, and editing of the curatorial essay.

Juliet Manapul, Christophe Poncelet, Glenn E. Morrison, Louie De Leon, Shama
Ahmed-Connoy, Maria Joy Manapul, Francis J. Manapul, Rachel Richey, Steve
Moody, Gilles Chatel, and P.J. Smith for their love and continuing support.

Thank You & Maraming Salamat!



2014 · toronto · ontario · canada

AFFILIATE EVENT

Cabinet of Queeriosities

The Art of Julius Poncelet Manapul



386 Ontario Street

Saturday June, 21st to Friday June, 27th, 2014.
OPENING Saturday, June 21st, 7-10pm

GALLERY HOURS

Sunday: 12-5pm

Monday to Thursday: 10am-6pm

Friday, June 27th: 10am-5pm

ARTIST/CURATOR TALK

Tuesday, June 24th, 3-4pm

GUIDED TOUR

Thursday, June 26th: 3-4pm

CLOSING EVENT

Friday, June 27th: 7-10pm

WorldPride Toronto Listing
<http://www.worldpridetoronto.com/festival/events-calendar/2014/cabinet-of-queeriosities-847>



#cabinetofqueeriosities



<https://www.facebook.com/events/632232126873845/>



<http://juliusmanapul.blogspot.ca/>