

# JUSTIN NUYDA

## PILLAR OF PHILIPPINE'S MODERN ART

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

**F**ilipino visual artist Justin "Tiny" Nuyda was born in 1944. He is regarded as a pillar of the Filipino modern art and is a co-founder of the legendary Saturday Group (through which he enjoyed many years of friendship and camaraderie with his contemporaries and literary greats). This was a loose organisation that would attract an entire generation of artists. Some of these eventually became National Artists such as HR Ocampo, Cesar Legaspi, Vicente Manansala, Ang Kiukok, Jose Joya, and Benedicto Cabrera. Other artistes drawn to the group were Federico Alcuaz and Juvenal Sanso (whenever in town), Mauro Malang Santos, Ed Castrillo, Onib Olmedo and Sym Mendoza and even writers Rod Paras-Perez and Leo Benesa. He is a graduate of the University of Santo Tomas College of Fine Arts and Design (1966) and was one of the first batch of Thirteen Artists awardees — a distinguished list of who's who on the art scene that included Danilo Dalena, Angelito Antonio, Mario Parial and Romulo Olazo.

Alongside art, Justin Nuyda is also a lepidopterist specialising in Filipino butterflies. Having started collecting butterflies at the age of seven, he has described over a hundred species and subspecies. This passion for jewelled insects and the terrain they thrive in has served as a major inspiration for his works over the past fifty years. The colours of the butterflies have had a great influence on the artist's work. "I have my own choices of colours but a lot of times, I prefer the natural colour combinations evident in butterflies. There are colours that are real but do not look right," said the artist. He slants towards more natural, earthy tones, warm yet not bright and luminous.

The enigmatic Nuyda has been painting for nearly five decades and the discipline he subscribes to has a cerebral quality to it. While it's hard to pin point the exact kind of art he creates, it's breathtaking all the same. A highly regarded modernist, the artist has crafted a brilliant, lyrically surreal brand of art. From his ethereal abstract compositions to the magical landscapes borne from his 'Mindscape' series, Nuyda has elegantly put on display his complex musings. His abstractions are wavers on the brink of reality; from surreal to real, turbulent to placid and barren to beautiful.



Technically adept, he is able to humbly translate his stylised subject visually with ease — an excellent display of his deft hand. A cerebral artist, Nuyda's concern is to explore and challenge the boundaries of the mind. He uses visual techniques and definitions to explore these boundaries and present his own vision of the landscapes of his mind. With a combination of lengthy lively brush strokes and striking colours, the landscapes Nuyda commits to his canvases are reflections of his observations, experiences and his perspective.

The process of creating the artist's magical works first starts with priming the canvas with as much as seven coatings, followed by painting it with waif-like strokes that are both robust and delicate, invoking a solid slate and the fluidity of butterfly wings floating over the horizon. He learned a lot of this from the late National Artist Cesar Legaspi who had a special fondness for him. He then scrapes the paint to create a

gradient feel. Nuyda's colours are illusions of movement, going backward and forward. However, he only uses white for blending the vivid colours on his canvas. Nuyda's body of work demonstrates his considerable skill and imagination in reconciling the geometric and organic.

Nuyda's first exhibition was held at Solidaridad Galleries in 1968. He was already doing his Search Mindscapes theme. In fact, this is where he met National Artist Benedicto "BenCab" Cabrera who lent him an easel when he was installing.

As the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and various challenges that came with it, Nuyda weathered a storm of his own after being diagnosed with stage four cancer. Ever the artist and observer, Nuyda found himself inspired as he recuperated from the intensive treatments while on lockdown, particularly by the outstanding quality of care he received in the hands of his doctors.