

Sleight of mind

BY SAM L. MARCELO, *Senior Reporter*

Time and again, Patricia Eustaquio has demonstrated her ability to turn mundane materials into objects that surprise and delight. After a residency at Art Omi International in New York, which she became eligible for after receiving an Ateneo Art Award in 2009, Ms. Eustaquio returns with *Last Post*, a spare exhibit that succeeds in communicating the artist's alchemical power.

"Art Omi was very intense for all the artists who participated in it. The critical appraisal, the visits from gallerists, curators, and artists alike were constant, which means we were always talking about our work, and having to rethink it constantly as well," said Ms. Eustaquio in an e-mail interview with *BusinessWorld*. "It's only when you talk about your work that you actually make things clearer for yourself."

Sharp points and angles jut from the exhibition centerpiece titled *Two Campers in Cloud Country*, an installation that looks deceptively massive despite being made of vinyl and cardboard. A photograph of a larger cardboard piece, which she made in New York, hangs on a wall. Somewhere in the foyer, a second, smaller work, still made of cardboard, has crawled up the gallery walls and tucked itself in between ceiling beams, where it lies like a spider in hiding.

Held together by the best wood glue ("stronger than nails," according to the artist), these sculptures will last a very long time. "Your only enemies are fire and water, which will destroy anything for that matter," she said, brushing off concerns about longevity.

For the sake of comparison, the exhibit also includes *Psychogenic Fugue*, a 2008 piece from *Death to the Major, Viva Minor*, the very same exhibit that won her the Ateneo Art Award. Described as a "tour de force" by Ramon "Richie" Lerma, director and chief curator of the Ateneo Art Gallery, the epoxy and lace sculpture a "fossilized shell" in the shape of a piano.

Where *Psychogenic Fugue* appears soft and delicate -- again a deception -- *Last Post* is harsh and jagged. Ms. Eustaquio first experimented with cardboard during a residency in the Netherlands in 2009, a watershed year that also saw her winning a Thirteen Artist Award from the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Her studio in Delft, birthplace of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, was

located in front of a supermarket with a carton bin from which Ms. Eustaquio would collect boxes. "It was cheap -- free, in fact -- and completely disposable," she said. "I liked that."

This exploration of cardboard continued in *Dear Sweet Filthy World*, an exhibit mounted in Silverlens Gallery that was again short-listed in the 2010 Ateneo Art Awards.

The banality and familiarity of the said medium, said Ms. Eustaquio, was one of the reasons she chose to work with discarded boxes. "My concern is really to affect perception," she explained, "and making a work that inherently includes the material as part of its idea or message becomes an effective stage for questioning ways of seeing."

She has performed similar sleights of mind in the past: there was (*Sha Naqba Imuru*) *He Who Saw The Deep*, a boat-form constructed from silk and epoxy, and several "ghost chairs" made from cotton lace and resins.

These forms, Ms. Eustaquio explained, are remnants: "The piece takes form as the textile is draped on the object. The object is then removed leaving only its shell; it is like a snake that has changed its skin and has slithered off elsewhere leaving only a carcass of his former covering."

Aside from installation, Ms. Eustaquio's range includes painting, fashion and production design, and, most recently, photography.

"Are artists magicians?," she asked. "Artists can be anything these days. What's important is questioning the boundaries of perception or categories, or narratives -- and whatever limits people put to things."

***LAST POST* is on view until Aug. 12 at the Ateneo Art Gallery, 2nd level of the Rizal Library Special Collections Bldg., Ateneo de Manila University, Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights, Quezon City. An artist's talk will be held on July 5, 4:30 p.m. For more information, call 426-6488.**