THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

An Alphabet of HUMAN RIGHTS

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Reflections on human rights from 12 Filipino artists and graphic designers
The good news is that, human rights is again, in the eyes the vast majority, relevant, not that it ever was not.

The bad news is that many, especially among those in positions of great power, see it as an inconvenience, a frivolity, and a hindrance to progress, order, and the elimination of criminality.

Maybe this betrays a general lack of understanding or appreciation of human rights. Or perhaps it reveals a chasm that separates the values and realities of the poor, the middle class and the rich. Human rights, after all, have to be balanced against other interests such as security, economic progress, and governance.

The irony is that these interests are not mutually exclusive. Lost in the rhetoric and rage that permeates all sides is this fact: the assault on human rights is an assault on the poor. It is the poor’s fortunes that ultimately defines how safe and secure our communities are, how inclusive economic growth is, and how effectively and genuinely our leaders are able to serve and govern.

To value human rights is to uphold every person’s life and right to live with dignity. This includes the right of children to education, shelter, and care. It includes women and the members of the LGBTQ community’s right to not be discriminated on the basis of their gender; their right to participate in politics, civil service, or the private sector; and ultimately, to self-determination. To value human rights is to believe in the sanctity of life and stand up for our freedoms: to speak, to assemble, to be free from abuse, even and especially from the State.

Human rights define our humanity, and maybe the challenge of moving forward on this issue must begin by a return to the basics.

"The Weight of Words: An Alphabet of Human Rights", then, is a call to reflect on the basics, and to again contemplate on the meaning and value of human rights.

This book brings together professionals in the visual arts and graphic design industry, each of them choosing a letter or two to connect to a concept in human rights.

The hope is that, through these letters, words and art, the universal truths about human rights can again be revealed, shared, and reflected upon to ultimately reaffirm that human rights is not the cause of the chasm — it is the bridge that unites.
a firm and strong commitment backed by **ACTION**
in pursuit of a cause...  (continue to letter 'I')

— Wesley Valuenzela
BARBED WIRE symbolizes human captivity, degradation, and torture. It is a tool of division. It can separate or confine. It can also protect those within, or exclude those outside.”

— John Ed De Vera
“This piece was inspired by an abandoned playground I pass by in Quezon City. I tried to capture what may have been a place of fun with kids laughing and running around, now lying rusty and deserted. It made me wonder if the parents of the CHILDREN that used to play in that area became afraid for their security because of the recent killings happening in our society.”

– Kevin Roque
Can the elected elite truly serve the people? Or will they only act for personal gain, whether deliberately or unconsciously?

Can the people ever truly elect one of their own to govern?

Despite our rights, how easy is it for those in power to silence those who defy or oppose, justifying their actions as taken for the greater good?"

— Keith Dador
“I chose to present the idea of **EMPATHY** by creating an artwork that was laser printed on multiple layers of clear acrylic sheets. The sheets were stacked and positioned in a way that required the viewer to stand at a specific location in order to see the ideal image. That particular and exact spot represents the viewpoint of another person.

People who make the time and effort to seek these spots when dealing with others, are more accepting of the differences and diversity that exist among all of us. A person with empathy is innately more respectful, and is unlikely to do anything that will hinder another person from enjoying his or her inherent rights.”

— Jom Masolabe
is for **FREEDOM**.

Every living person has the right to be born **FREE** and equal with others.

It is about **FAIRNESS** in the rewards that we work for, to **FIGHT** for what is right, and to **FLOURISH** in what one chooses to live by.

It is for **FEMINISM** where women stand equal with men.”

— *Palma Tayona*
“Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of the Indian independence movement against British rule. He was a lawyer who lived a humble life. We chose him because of his political and scholarly analysis of his principles, practices, and beliefs.

We were particularly enamored by the ‘Mahatma’ title which was bestowed upon him by his people which translates to ‘Great Soul.’ It serendipitously fits the ‘G’ theme of the whole artwork including the word ‘Gentle’ from one of his famous quotes. We then juxtaposed a portrait of Gandhi along with these ‘G’ letters and the iconic ‘salt march’ scene in the background.”

— Ang Gerilya
HUMAN RIGHTS for me is a never ending fight from the moment we are born until we die.

We all have human rights, and children have the same general human rights as adults. The child walking a tightrope symbolizes the struggle to balance our rights. Above the child are clouds with some of the basic human rights. Despite the protection of our rights in the law, we still suffer from poverty, homelessness, abuse, neglect, and unequal access to education.”

— June Digan
must be grounded in INFORMATION based on truth and the lessons from history...  (continue to letter ‘O’)

– Wesley Valuenzela
“The scale is a universal symbol of justice. But it also calls to mind questions of balance itself. How does one balance the desire for human rights against other goals? Are societal goals, like peace and security in the community, higher than the interests of the individual? Are these goals mutually exclusive, and does the pursuit of one justify the disregard of human rights?”

— Dan Matutina
“Martin Luther King was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement. He is best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using the tactics of non-violence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs and inspired by the non-violent activism of Mahatma Gandhi.

We went with a very striking banner of the word ‘KING’ to denote not just his name but also as a ‘king’ or a champion of human rights. It was also very important to us that we put his iconic quote ‘I have a dream’ beside the black community rally to imply not only his ‘dream’ of equality in America, but the whole black community’s as well.”

— Ang Gerilya
“My two pieces for the letters L and W are supposed to be viewed together. When I started on this project, extra judicial killings were not yet in my mind. I was just thinking of ‘Love’ and ‘War’ as polar opposites.

Now, when I view the finished pieces against the background of the government’s ongoing crusade against drugs, and how it has devastated thousands of families, deprived children of their parents, and is used to justify the casting aside of human rights, I realize that both Love and War are concepts that can occupy the same social space.”

— Lala Gallardo
"The piece is created by red candle drippings and forms the face of Marcos on a framed glass. Beyond the irony of the infamous former president now encased in wax, I found the process to be contemplative and hopeful, and a metaphor for prayers that seek justice for victims of Martial Law."

— Meneer Marcelo
N is for Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo

“More than a century has passed since our National Hero wrote these masterpieces. And yet, it seems like we have not learned, nor heeded his words. We keep making the same mistakes, and continue to rush forward blindly, without appreciating the need for planning and preparation as prerequisites for genuine nation-building.”

— Electrolychee
...so as to help form a meaningful OPINION, that questions as much as it enlightens."

— Wesley Valenzuela
“Peace is what every man, woman, and child must Possess.

Power comes from peace, and not might. Prosperity grows more meaningful in peace. A free Press helps inform the People to decide what is right and just.”

— Palma Tayona
“Most of the time, those who are in power are the ones who bend the rules, adding more injustice to an already broken system. When an abuse of power becomes evident, it's our right to QUESTION authority.”

— John Ed De Vera
“R is for REVISIONISM.

It has been said, ‘History is written by the victors.’ For those who lived through the horrors of Martial Law, the creeping and sly attempts to change the past by distorting facts and trivializing the State’s systematic acts of injustice are insulting and cruel.

We must resist all attempts to place a veil over our eyes. We must always remember. And we must pass the memory to our children, and they to theirs.”

#NeverAgain  #NeverForget

– Keith Dador
“STUDENTS play a vital role in society and how it is shaped generation after generation. Being young, students are free to be more reckless, fearless, discontented, and hopeful. Our history shows how these attributes make the studentry, as a movement, critical to social change. Often, as in the time of martial law, it is the students who are first to challenge authority.

This piece was inspired by students. I used two round tables to represent collaboration, which is another key to a better society.”

— June Digan
“Man is the only creature capable of consciously and deliberately harming another for no reason whatsoever. What does that say about us? Who are the animals?”

— Dan Matutina
“I thought that the importance of is best shown by how an ant colony works.

For this project, I started with a single queen and bred fire ants for 6-8 months. I then built an ants nest by making a U-shaped acrylic container filled with hydrated coco peat to observe the growing colony.

It was fascinating to watch how every single ant did their part for the good of the colony. They provided a perfect metaphor for the challenge that faces us. We must all recognize that the protection of human rights is a collective mission, and one that will not be truly possible unless we all work together.”

— Jom Masolabe
“Does the end justify the means? Does the quest for peace and security justify the State's use of violence?

The piece explores the idea of violence. White symbolizes purity and safety while black symbolizes harm. The wooden pieces represent humanity and society. As the black ink slowly drips on the stack of wooden blocks, the surface paper underneath it eventually breaks, causing the blocks to fall mark the blank white paper underneath. The resulting splatter is a visual representation of violence.”

— Electrolychee
“W is for War, particularly today’s so-called war on drugs. I am a mother and my son is at a very impressionable age. I want him to know that it’s not simply a case of the police ‘killing bad guys.’ He has to learn that everyone has rights, even the ‘bad guys,’ but it’s hard to make a 6-year-old boy see something that goes beyond black and white. Still, I have to do what I can to make him understand.”

— Lala Gallardo
“Malcolm X was an African-American Muslim minister and human rights activist. His life exemplified the very thin line that separates civil disobedience and armed revolt, and the difficult choices that activists have to make.

We chose one of his most powerful quotations and focused on this theme throughout the artwork. It was very important for us that we showed an anti-race mixing white rally alongside a portrait of Malcolm wielding a rifle and peeking out the window. We also opted to not write the ‘X’ as a letter, but instead as a symbol, referring in particular to the sniper scope and the crossed arms of an African-American.”

— Ang Gerilya
“More than anyone, it is the YOUTH who are empowered by technology. The keyboard is their tool and their weapon. It gives them tremendous power, unlimited possibilities, and heavy responsibilities. How the YOUTH choose to wield technology will determine humanity's future.”

— Meneer Marcelo
“There must be **ZERO** tolerance for human rights violations. Such transgressions demean our humanity, and makes the world akin to an empty streetscape devoid of people and color.;

In my work, the balloon symbolizes freedom and fragility. If there are no violations of human rights, the balloon character could fly freely on the streets.”

— Kevin Roque
FEATURING ARTISTS’ BIOGRAPHIES

**ELECTROLYCHEE** is a creative studio run by Bru and Maria Nada, the two sisters within the realms of digital (electro) and organic (fyches) imagery. Both visual artists are long-time members of illustrator ng Kabataan (INK). Electrolychee’s clients range from the gamut of big and commercial to small and fulfilling. Electrolychee is featured in publications such as Asian Creatives (Ubies), How Magazine (UK), Kita Magazine (Philippines), The Great Big Book of Fashion Illustration, and Great Graphic Design on a Budget (How Books). Their studio’s 2015 full-color book “Biyaheng Langit: Jeepney Folk Art” on a Budget (How Books). Their studio’s 2015 full-color book “Biyaheng Langit: Jeepney Folk Art” is available for purchase or for download. The studio’s 2015 full-color book “Biyaheng Langit: Jeepney Folk Art” is available for purchase or for download.

**GERILYA** is an artist collective formed in 2008. Its three original members, Jano, Kube, and Zap, hail from the College School of Multimedia Arts. He was part of the Philippines Graphic Fiction Awards. KEITH DADOR is a professional photographer and educator. He runs Catnip Studios, a photography, video, and design consultancy. He has done commercial, advertising, corporate, and editorial work for various clients here and abroad. Keith also teaches photography at Asia Pacific College School of Multimedia Arts. He is part of the photography panel for the Behance Portfolio Reviews Manila in 2015. On the side, he’s an avid cyclist, a cat lover, and a coffee enthusiast. At night, he plays in a noise/post rock band called Legarda.

**JOM MASOLABE** strives to bring ideas to life through thoughtful play of colors, JOM MASOLABE creates pieces that reflect his personal beliefs as well as his passion for arts. His understanding of structure, pacing and rhythm allows him to depict meaningful and thought-provoking concepts. The artist especially enjoys turning static design into pieces in motion, adding fun and even a little bit of whimsy to his creations.

**JON ED DE VERA** is a multi-disciplinary designer, with a penchant for curating, paper-cutting, and experimenting with different and new media. His philosophy of creativity has so far led to finding new ways to push and innovate his craft, unafraid of learning new things and twisting them in his very own creative way. John Ed is currently a creative director at TBWA/SMP, leading the ad agency’s design team. He is also recognized and celebrated by the international design community as @ battey_full on Instagram, or johned.co.

**KEVIN ROQUE** is best known for his intricate pencil drawings with high level of naturalism. His works have dark undertones and are atmospheric in nature which conveys a sense of mystery and nostalgia. Self-taught, he incorporated surreal imagery in his works by using techniques he learned in graphic design, collage, and photography. Later, Kevin devoted himself to the creation of more symbolic visual storytelling by carefully reconstructing personal observations of his immediate surroundings.

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CANVAS’ 1 Million Books for One Million Filipino Children Campaign aims to inspire in children a love for reading by donating its award-winning books to public schools, hospitals, and disadvantaged communities throughout the country.

A child that reads is a creative, empowered, and imaginative child who will learn independently, envision a brighter future, and ultimately lead a productive and meaningful life.

You can help us!
For more information, visit www.canvas.ph, email info@canvas.ph, or find us on Facebook: Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development.

CANVAS, a non-profit organization, works with the creative community to promote children’s literacy, explore national identity, and broaden public awareness of Philippine art, culture, and the environment.

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