

**Romolo Valencia**

b. 1940, Kilauea, Hawai'i, lives in Honolulu, O'ahu  
exhibited in *Biennial III*

*left to right*

*Recuerdo, 2009*

*Saka-saka (Bare-footed), 2010*

*Diana, 2009*

color monotype, solvent transfer, color pencil, tape,  
transparency film for copiers

Whatever the combination of traditional and/or digital techniques that I apply in my mixed-media work, the focus remains the same...this impassioned expression of personal images that emerge during moments of quiet...images of a particular time, place(s) or person(s) remembered, and images of small special moments from my everyday experiences... continue to reflect fragments of my quiet thoughts/feelings.

## ROMOLO VALENCIA

*Born 1940 in Kilauea, Kaua'i  
Lives in Honolulu, O'ahu*

Romolo "Ray" Valencia discovered by chance an interest in drawing when he was a young child growing up on Kaua'i, the son of immigrant parents from the Philippines who worked for the Kilauea Sugar Plantation. Valencia was not yet school age when a male grade school classmate of an older sister gave him a book of drawings he had done. Valencia was fascinated and asked the boy to teach him how to draw, so they spent many hours after school drawing together and making carvings out of bits of wood from a nearby thicket of hau trees. Valencia's school didn't offer formal art instruction, and he wasn't aware then that there were artists, so he never thought about pursuing art as a career in life. He drew for his own satisfaction and for the occasional project at school.

While attending high school as a boarding student at Mid-Pacific Institute in Honolulu, Valencia had his first opportunity to take an art class in his senior year but had to forgo it to complete other curricular requirements. He yearned to go to art school on the mainland, but his family and advisors didn't encourage it, so he enrolled at the University of Hawai'i—Manoa as a Spanish major. Nevertheless, he also took the basic art courses because he often contemplated transferring to the art department, which he did as a junior, receiving a B.A. degree in art in 1963.

Valencia had also participated in the R.O.T.C. program at the university and out of a sense of practicality intended to pursue a career in the military, entering the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant after graduation. Stationed in West Germany in 1964-66, Valencia obtained art supplies and made a few small paintings as gifts. He occasionally

went to art exhibitions and just before leaving Europe drove to Spain, where he visited his first art museum, the Prado in Madrid, an experience which rekindled his interest in becoming more involved with art. After a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1966-67, during which he made black and white ink drawings on scraps of paper using the stump of a piece of rope as a brush, Valencia returned to Hawai'i and was stationed at Fort Shafter. When he left military service in 1972, Valencia knew that he could only be happy doing something related to art and enrolled under the GI bill in the applied arts training program at Honolulu Community College. He worked part-time in the college's instructional resources center making signs for various programs and offices, and after graduating in 1975 was hired as a graphic artist by the Payless store on Dillingham Boulevard in Honolulu. Since 1980 he has worked as the graphic artist for Honolulu Community College, producing the posters, brochures, course schedules, banners and other pieces of graphic art for the college's programs.

In the late 1970s Valencia started going to art exhibitions in Honolulu but didn't think about showing the work he was making quietly for himself at home. In 1980-81 he took two semesters of photography from Stan Tomita at Honolulu Community College, an experience which expanded his interest in the expressive potential of photographic images in an art context. He wanted to find a way to incorporate photographs, especially the candid images he had been taking of his family, into his art works. Fortunately, he discovered the transfer technique involving the application of a solvent to a photocopied image allowing it to be rubbed or transferred from the original piece

of paper onto another surface. It was also about this time that a tragedy in his family added impetus to his pursuit of being an artist. The death in 1983 of a sister-in-law from cancer at a relatively young age shocked Valencia into the realization that time is precious and if he was serious about his art he needed to work harder at producing work and having it seen. In 1984 he participated in his first exhibition, a group show at Mid-Pacific Institute, and in the following year he had his first one-person exhibition at the Gallery on the Pali in Honolulu.

By the mid 1980s Valencia had taken up the medium—monotype—which he has transformed into something uniquely his own, augmenting the monotype base with phototransfers, drawing and other techniques. Valencia had studied monotypes in exhibitions, experimented with it on his own and found himself receptive to the process. In essence monotype consists of applying oil-based inks to a smooth plate, usually of aluminum or plexiglass, and running it through a printing press which transfers the ink image to a sheet of paper. This method produces a single, unique impression, hence the name "monotype," although sometimes it is possible to obtain one or two fainter additional impressions, called "ghosts," depending on the heaviness of the inks. Monotype's directness and spontaneity, which are related to the qualities of drawing and painting, suited Valencia's interests and sensibility.

Valencia uses the dark-field method of monotype, which is basically a subtractive process. He covers the plate with streaks or bands of oil-based ink applied with rollers. Because the inks do not dry out immediately, this technique invites improvisation, and

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Valencia will often go back with turpentine and rags to manipulate the pigment, inflecting it with gestural strokes, creating highlights or wiping ink away in areas so that the plate is revealed and will print clean, showing the paper when run through the press. One senses in the breadth and vigor of his marks that Valencia delights in the substance and feel of ink and appreciates the medium's elements of chance (Valencia says he never knows what he will get until the plate is printed, and there are many accidents and surprises). Usually he produces ten or twelve monotypes at a time, experimenting with various ways of achieving density and texture. Sometimes he covers parts of the plate with pieces of torn paper which act as masks, blocking the ink from transferring in printing. These create white voids in the monotypes, although often the ink will ooze around and under the deckle of the torn edges and print as dramatic rippling or stippled patterns.

The monotypes serve as backgrounds or starting points for the next stage in Valencia's creative process, which involves a complex mix of hand techniques. Selecting one of the monotype sheets, the artist lets the marks suggest forms and imagery which he may try to enhance with drawing and shading. In considering the overall composition he will also remove things that don't work by lightly sanding away ink and rubbing with charcoal. Similarly, he prepares to lay in his customary photographic elements by burnishing the paper in certain areas so it will accept the solvent transfers. The last stage involves accenting the image with passages of handcoloring, using colored pencil almost exclusively for

the control it gives him but also the connection to his early love of drawing. Recently he has also been using white glue, thinly applied over parts of the image, which allows him to score into or work on top of areas without disturbing what's underneath, heightening the sense of translucency and imparting a lustrous sheen.

The works in this exhibition are Valencia's most powerful to date, densely worked and richly colored, with excitingly tactile surfaces. They are filled with the photographic imagery that has become the heart of the artist's expressive vocabulary and the hallmark of his style. This imagery is drawn almost entirely from photographs Valencia has taken over the years, intimate keepsakes of family, friends and events that have been an important part of his life. Among the recurring motifs are images of the artist's father and mother, now both gone, whose memories he honors for their sacrifice, hard work and accomplishments; their presence symbolizes that the respect and appreciation for their spirit of unselfish giving and love remains a constant within the artist. Religious images—Crucifix, Madonna, cross, angels—provide a connection to his youth on the Kaua'i plantation, where most of the families were Filipino and attended the Catholic church. These were the images that were prevalent around him as a boy, in the home, at church, at funerals. Although Valencia does not consider himself a deeply religious person, these images function as symbols of a deeper/higher spiritual force, a concept which does have strong resonance for him. Leaves from hau trees also invoke memories of Kaua'i, happy times spent fishing at a river lined with hau trees and the carvings out of hau wood he made

with his childhood friend. Valencia also notes that the hau leaves have the shape of a heart and therefore function as emblems of emotion and the spiritual.

Valencia describes his creative process as a kind of meditation, a quiet inward listening by which he explores his innermost feelings and brings himself "closer to being/knowing who I really am," he once wrote in an artist's statement. A work in the exhibition, *Kilauea Side/Anahola*, gives tangible expression to this observation. In the center an image of Anahola mountain, a prominent feature of the Kaua'i landscape, seen from the direction of Kilauea, the area in which Valencia grew up, emerges luminous against the white paper. It is nestled between two broadly inked areas—reddish brown above, deep black below, analogs to the red earth and black volcanic rock of which the island is formed. At the bottom a darkly-shadowed image of the artist, a self-portrait, emerges from the blackness, coaxed from its surroundings by the pushing and pulling of ink. At the top is a large red heart-shaped form opening towards the landscape below. This work, like all of Valencia's works, has the intimate yet surreal character of a dream; the images are fragmented and layered, intriguingly indistinct and mysterious. And although, like a dream, its precise reading may always be elusive, we can respond to and value Valencia's sharing of personal biography and intuition. Perhaps this work constitutes a self-revelation that the artist is and always will be part of the place where he began and that it is the grace and love showered from his family and surroundings that has made him what he has become.