

Drawing Insects and Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

*The article is formed from a dialogue between my drawings of insects and phenomenological writings such as those from Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology is a scheme that privileges the experience in perceiving an object as it presents itself to our consciousness. According to Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, "phenomenology means to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (1962: 58). The drawings selected here are of insects, which made up a special repertoire in my series of sketchbooks. The drawings were done using pen, ink, and watercolour on paper. Here, I establish my personal perspectives on what draws me to the studies in the first place—of my attraction to insects; lines, shape, texture and colour—while viewing artistic process in the richness of phenomenology. I end my article with a note on Heidegger's argument that art is man's saving grace from technological enframing.*

Keywords: *drawing, insect, phenomenology, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer*

I

The art of drawing has been one of the most successful art forms in this modern age or any other century. The manifestation of drawings can range from personal doodling, figurative picture, mixed-media, architectural representation, to scientific diagrams. As an artist myself, the act of drawing has always involved a combination of factors of intrigue and curiosity, a

committed sense of satisfaction, and a dose of hard work. There is no doubt that drawing is a creative and imaginative process. It is, too, a sense of fulfilment of my personal logic of aesthetics. In this article, I would like to present some of my drawings, and simultaneously, speak of the ways of the experience through phenomenological means. To this, I will describe my understanding on art through phenomenological texts such as those from Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). This article does not *exactly* engage a critical analysis of the said figures, but only to the point of using their texts as guidance for my stuttered presentation, as their words lend strength to my phenomenological thinking. I evoke here Nietzsche's saying: "The form of a work of art, which gives speech to their thoughts and is, therefore, their mode of talking, is always somewhat uncertain, like all kinds of speech" (1910: 174). Talking about my works means to walk in unsteady grounds; my anxiety and hesitation are open in the lines of thought I portray, be it in words or in the artworks themselves. Thus, in describing about my works, I tread carefully, hesitantly, on the ground of thinking, of philosophising. Wouldn't in attending a work of art mean that we are called herewith to consider it and grasp it thoughtfully? Hegel's words can shed us some light here:

Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is. (Hegel 1975: 11)

What is this phenomenology that I speak of here? Let us pause a bit for definitions and clarifications before we move on to my drawings. Phenomenology is an idea where we take into view the thing being perceived, and let its essence appear to us as we experience it. The formulation of phenomenology was first conceived by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher. Heidegger—Husserl's student—posits that "phenomenology means to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (1962: 58). Heidegger brings into phenomenology the ontological dimension where he argues for the Being of beings; the manner of essence, which is concealed and covered up by the history of Western metaphysics. In a certain way, Merleau-Ponty contends that phenomenology "is the study of essences, and it holds that all problems amounts to defining essences, such as essence of perception or the essence of consciousness" (2012: xx). Gadamer sees phenomenology from a viewpoint of Husserl, as "bracketing all positing being and

investigating the subjective modes of givenness" (Gadamer 1989: 244). At the same time, Gadamer (following his teacher, Heidegger) understands phenomenology as an extension of a hermeneutics programme, where we celebrate the subjectivity of our understanding of our world, as interpretive creatures that are unable to do otherwise.

In hermeneutic phenomenology, language is privileged, since this is where interpretation of the world occurs and put into words. Heidegger once said, "Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell" (1998: 239). I have attached my drawings of insects with this article, but in letting them speak out, in telling their stories, poetically, we have become the dweller within words. What this means for my article is not just about the study of *being* of my artworks, nor is it just about the *embodiment* of myself with the artworks, nor opening up a *dialogue* of myself with the artworks, but more—in their combinations—to elicit my personal experience; to *think* art even though the subject matter is *only* about bugs.

II

The drawings that are shown here are of my fondness to the shape and form of insects. Ever since I was a child, my intellect has been aroused by insects. I was (and still am) transfixed by their alien ways to my human needs, to the way their texture took their colour and appearance. I am inspired by the grain of their bodies, legs or wings as they move (or standing still) for no reason except for being as they are. Merleau-Ponty once states: "Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them" (1964: 164). The subject that is the insect must have brought something *to* and *from* me, to such an extent that my artistic forbearance gives answer to its resonance, to its calling. I remember the house that I used to live in during my childhood has ample natural resources, unlike the one that I currently live in; a small apartment that is six stories up. In the backyard of this childhood home, I used to entrap them, these grasshoppers or beetles that I found; I then watched the way they crawled or took flight, prodded them with unnecessary objects, even to the point of drowning these poor creatures just for the sport of it.

Nowadays, my enjoyment of their nature is more laid-back, and colder. Rather than a personal inspection of their working anatomies, I am now looking at insects from a certain distance; the references came from books, and internet pictures. Let it be stated here that I am by nature, very lazy. This article is not about a field study whereby I venture into a site, take a sample of a specimen, place it in a container and then work out elaborate steps

for photographic detailing or any other artistic and scientific pursuit. I am not a coleopterist (a term for a scientist who studies beetles). My work is safe. I am closed from the outdoor activities. I peruse my collection of images from the comfort of a chair and home. Observing a scarab from a still picture means I am able to scrutinise its details and its texture. In the books, the image of the insect is already framed; it is even enlarged for a better perceptual pleasure. However, even in this domestic security, the pictures of beetles do not any less dampen my artistic curiosity. In fact, because of the wide accessibility and resources found nowadays, *I can draw at leisure*. If an image of an insect moves me to draw, then that is what I will do: draw or even colour the drawing. Thus, the phenomenon that is the insect takes its privilege in the form of aesthetics and not about its habitat or its mating strategy. Most of the times, the images simply pile in (somewhere in a corner of my memory) while I wait for the right moment to draw them out. The picture of the insect *calls* me to draw, to replicate again its shape and colour, as I grope with its shape and silhouette, finding satisfaction in the utterance of lines that criss-crossed each other in the way it presents itself to me. If someone wants to ask me the stylisation of my art, then it can be said that my art is to "draw as close to the original" as possible. I would not dare to call it realism, since it is not exactly *realistic*, but yes, there is a close resemblance of my art to the original it is copied from.

III

What is art? It is a long list of answers that have been argued over by many thinkers over the thousands of years we have lived on this earth. Most will agree that art comes with an appreciation of beauty. Others will say that art is a form of practice to describe an event. Some will note of art as man's gratitude towards nature, as the sensuous showing of idea. Or as a way to attain freedom. Hegel once wrote:

... the beauty of art is higher than nature. The beauty of art is beauty *born of the spirit and born again*, and the higher the spirit and its productions stand above nature and its phenomena, the higher too is the beauty of art above that of nature (Hegel 1975: 2).

Art, like philosophy, is what Merleau-Ponty describes as "the actualisation of truth" (2012: xxxiv). Art, as philosophy, is what is generally termed as aesthetics. What do aesthetics

really imply? Heidegger corresponds: "The word 'aesthetics' is formed in the corresponding way: *aisthētikē epistēmē*: knowledge of human behavior with regard to sense, sensation, and feeling, and knowledge of how these are determined" (Heidegger 1981: 78) This makes art more like a game of our sensation. Art is highly subjective; an elusive study that is still—nevertheless—a fun project to capture. This is since art speaks to us in its representation and its will, of its nature; to such a magnitude that it can fill and take away our soul. According to Gadamer:

For of all the things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves. (Gadamer 1976: 95)

But how does art makes its sense to me, personally? Ever since I was a child, I was already engrossed with drawings and pictures. The image of a tiger (childhood's favourite icon) which I have drawn—an animal that is so far away in the wild jungle—becomes near to the neighbourhood of my being, as they come to reside in the centrality of my perception. They hold different kinds of pathways and doors to different realms, realms that I am able to say I am quite near to, but nevertheless, have its own distance. So what if the rendered tiger is missing whiskers or tail? The essence of what I believe—the representation of a tiger that emerges in the school's exercise book—is the manner of art that only I know I *can* conjure. They were, for all matter and purpose, *mine*; fully to discard drawings the next day as new visions materialise, gripping my artistry—to call me again, to draw.

Heidegger writes: "*All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, *essentially poetry*" (2001: 70). Heidegger sees the truth as neither "statement" nor "judgment," but as *aletheia*, a Greek term that stands for "unconcealedness". Poetry here means a founding of truth, where poetic works illuminate the projection of "unconcealedness". If art is poetry, does that mean my drawings speak the rhyming and the stanza of poetry? Yes and no. What it signifies is that art, as a clearing of truth, preserves and moves into what is disclosed by the work, so as to "bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is" (Heidegger 2001: 72). Thus, art is where I locate truly my nearness to the truth as my artwork appears from itself. What is art to me? Perhaps, as a *way* for me to be with myself. More likely, as an event, where I am *called* to participate. As a spectator, art is a

dialectical sensation of ecstasy and kitsch. As an artist? It is a game whereby I participate in the happenings of "lines-correcting". These questions, asked many times, are necessary, so we can suspend a bit the course of this paper, and really perceive the kind of art that the artist is experiencing, is thinking. All art, though they speak of the same language, emit different intonation and depth to various people. It is imperative to go deeper to my sense of how art *is* to me, to contextualise my hermeneutics of it, before we move on next to the "appeal of mediums".

IV

All artists have their own set of preferences in their approach to artworks. My personal preferences for artistic mediums are pen, ink and watercolour. Like a pencil, using a pen means I can get into the "drawing mode" efficiently without elaborate setups. A pen is ready for use (as long there is ink in it), while a pencil needs to be sharpened always. There is also the challenge of directly using pen on paper, without a prior outline using pencil. With a pen, since the ink is permanent, all lines need to be abstractly calculated beforehand, to minimise mistakes. Oh, there are mistakes in my drawings. They are everywhere! This is why it is always *disadvantageous* when I try to view my art critically. Experiencing my art means to come into contact with the imperfect "me", this "artist-me" that constantly wishes to demonstrate his act of creation. It is either that or the imperfection comes from my own sense of inferiority, projected as such on the papers—a projection of lines, colours, and feelings. The drawings chosen here did not come from any serious project, but from my personal cold-pressed 320-plus gsm paper sketchbooks; they were rapidly drawn and coloured with minimum fuss.

Even after I have established the lines for pen, and having actualised insects and the location where they reside, the art itself is not yet complete, unless I have grown over-lazy, or I have decided previously that black and white is to be the theme of the day. I need to play with colour and light. A space that looks empty has to be filled with stuff that can highlight my drawings. In fact, there are times when my line drawings arrive *only* for the purpose to paint something over them.

This is when the medium of watercolour comes to the fore. I freely confess here that I absolutely adore watercolour. Any work of art that utilises this medium makes me

linger longer over the works. If the performance of the work is of *such* intensity, my body, my movement, might stop for a while as my gaze takes its shape and light, as my mind *gestures* toward the way (and how) the artist managed to portray it. I stand mesmerised by brilliant works to the point of acknowledging a gist of defeat, even when there is no contest thereof. I am wondering whether any artists feel the same way, as they too confront works that make them sojourn in awe. Is it possible that by having my skills *ready* to be defeated suggests a path where I can turn *away* from jealousy? Such is the art of watercolour that it takes ages of mastery to really *be* with its essences; the flow of the brush as it skirmishes over the paper surface, as both come in contact with ideas materialising from the artist's mind. The phenomena are soothing to me; especially so, when amidst the process, the painting finalises to a certain aesthetic satisfaction. As the soaked brush (that is filled with mixed colours) communicate with the wetness of the paper surface, the artist finds himself enthralled to watch—to experience—the waters mixing and forming in different shapes and ways that can (or might) be predicted.

The bigger the amount of water that is put on the paper, the harder it is for the artist to take control, to rein in this man's most powerful natural resource. A statement: Every wet-on-wet method using watercolour is *always new*. There are times when I made a mistake, when the colour did not blend properly, for example, the purple background found in Photo 1. Personally, I do not think that it turned out quite well, though I am generally satisfied with its overall scheme and layout.

Let us take a look at the image of a male rhinoceros beetle (Photo 2). I have always been fond of the rhinoceros beetle with its distinctive horn jutting out of its face. The drawing itself is copied from Thomas Marent's lush photography book, *Rainforest* (2006: 16). In the caption, it states that it was photographed in Manú National Park. Where was it again? Manú National Park, I found out, is located at Madre de Dios and Paucartambo, Cusco. No, I had never been there though I wish I could go. Thanks to Thomas Marent, I had the chance to know and draw an insect or ten from some place in Manú National Park. Do you know that beetles are the largest group of insects? Even by a very conservative estimation, about 350,000 species of beetles have been described since 1758 (Evans, Bellamy and Watson 2000: 9). With its shiny, reflective skin, the beetle is a thing of beauty to me. Beetle, what a wondrous specimen, especially the scarab beetle! An Egyptian myth extols the virtue of the scarab beetle as a symbol of heavenly things (beetle drawings formed a major part of my sketchbooks).



Photo 1 Scaphara katydid and monogonogastra (2011). Pen, ink, and watercolour on 300 gsm acid free paper, 14 × 10 in.
Source: Author's personal collection.



male rhinoceros beetle
(Dynastinae), Manú Natia
Park, Peru. (Source: Thoma
Marens Rainforest, p.16)

Photo 2 A drawing of male rhinoceros beetle (*Dynastinae*) (2011). Pen, ink, and watercolour on paper, 33 × 24 cm.
Source: Author's personal collection.

In drawing the rhinoceros beetle—but of course—the colour was rendered differently than the original image. There is just *something* about the quality of watercolour that appeals to my artistic impression. It is heavily water-reliant and protrudes transparent results. To understand a bit of my creative process, I just simply draw the beetle directly using a black pen (too lazy to outline with pencil), and then wash it over with watercolour (using a mix of ecoline ink). To make sure that the black ink will not get spoilt by the water, permanent ink is used. I must confess another history. I am a big fan of comics. Now that I have said it, it comes more apparent why black pens are being generously employed in my sketchbook. It

seems like all my rigorous experience of reading millions of drawing lines in comics have formed a pillar into my artistic skills. "What makes art great is not only and not in the first place the high quality of what is created." Heidegger continues: "Rather, art is great because it is an 'absolute need'" (1981: 84).

Please witness Photo 3. Do you see the seven insects scattered as they are in the greenish branch of a tree? Take a look at its dark background. By the suggestive darkness, we can assume that the image is taken in the black of the night. I would like to agree—since the effect of the splashing of black ink resembles the darkness of the night—but what if the original image that it is copied from is taken in daylight? What if the darkness comes from the dense forest, with its impenetrable network of leaves that collaborate to defend sunlight from coming through? But what if the darkness that is portrayed in this manner comes from the artist covering up his mistakes? Accidental splotches of pen lines here and there? There is just something comforting about the existence of black colors, as if they are born not to simply "shroud", or to "mystify", but to gather "blanketness" for the user's wits. Blacken the background, and blunders won't be (hopefully) noticed! Back when I studied Fine Arts in a certain local university, I was told that using black is not allowed (especially in water colouring technique)—as if by using it, the overall scheme of colour gets "muddied", and turns the concluding painting into an uneven artwork. This is naïve. There are certain advantages of this type of rule, for they attempt to instill creativity in colour mixing but still, colours are there for the artist to experiment with!

V

We must remember that the scanned drawings themselves come from the cave of my sketchbooks. They are not exhibited anywhere, everywhere. To observe the drawings mean to open up a bookcase, take out a sketchbook and open it up. It is only thus that my drawings can be viewed and experienced. While my paper here pursues the mind as it perceives a work of art, my body too must not be neglected. How else can I locate these sketches without moving my body across the room to the whereabouts of my sketches? Not to mention that it is through my body that the brushes move, and gesture forth to the papers, and leave out a trace of my imagination, just as much as they too, leave a trace to my body, and the space where my body moves. Merleau-Ponty reminds us of the body:



Photo 3 Some insects found in a tree (2011). Pen, ink and watercolour on 200 gsm acid free 25% cotton paper, 42 × 30 cm.
Source: Author's personal collection.

A system of possible movements, or "motor projects," radiates from us to our environment. Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. ... For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 5).

In experiencing the artworks from the sketchbooks, they come alive and speak back my involvement with them. This engrossment with the process of their creations is not about revealing mystery, but more to recall back the experience of weakness and strength of the artworks, as age grows and time has eaten away a part of my memory. An artist sees his finished artwork in a critical view for flaws in his technique; lines that looked just fine the previous night might come to light as over-exaggerated the next evening. I am reminded of Nietzsche's observation:

"These many little traits and finishing touches afford him pleasure one day and none the next, they exist more for the sake of the artist than the art ; for he also has occasionally need of sweetmeats and playthings to prevent him from becoming morose with the severity and self restraint which the representation of the dominant idea demands from him" (Nietzsche 1910: 174–175).

Art is play. Gadamer is right when he sees art as the self-movement of going forth and back, that does not pursue any particular end or purpose except for being *as* they are. In the activity of art, we only have to "play and go along with it," making us a participant in its festivities (Gadamer 1986: 23–25). It is no fun if there are no rules that the artist has to adhere to. Every work of art comes into being with regulations that are set beforehand by the artists, as they play mind-games with their skills and ego.

If an artist has decided that still life will be the subject matter for the rest of the whole year, then, it is the kind of principle that the artist has to live by. If the reader takes a closer notice to my artworks exhibited here, the reader will notice that there are certain rules that outline the composition of the artworks. For example, I am a bit apprehensive in using pencil and eraser to start drawing outlines. The pen lines are usually employed only for foreground (the insect) while the background is reserved for watercolour to "space out".

Photo 3 is more ambiguous since the black lines cover both insects and background. In Photo 2, pen strokes are used for the line hatchings of rhinoceros beetle's body, but none for the leaf where it rests. Sometimes, only outer bodies of insects have lines, whilst their shadows and environment (Photo 1) are free from the pen marks. Even though this technique that privileges the foreground can be useful in creating contrast, these differences of ways to handle art have already turned into a game for the artist. Not only am I able to play with lines, a certain depth can be allowed to come forth at the same time. In fact, coming to grips with my art, depth is just a *symptom* of the diversion of edges and shapes. In the game of lines, it is not merely about reproducing the original; they are the genuine lines. The line, as Merleau-Ponty and Paul Klee rhymes, "no longer imitates the visible; 'it renders visible'; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 183).

In reflecting technique, one develops a keen sense of one's methods for future reference. This recalling back is different than a stranger/observer; he or she is only able to view the results of the artworks, unlike the originator of the artwork who perceives the *process*. When Gadamer states that "someone who has produced a work of art stands before the creation of his hands in just the same way that anyone else does" (1986: 23–25), he is a bit incorrect. There is a distinctive difference between the producer and the spectator: the artist can recall the experience that is entombed within the artworks whereas the audience of the work of art cannot. The recalling is more of how we recall back our gesture that is trapped in the artworks we produced. There are more at stake here than just a fondness for the form of insects. Sometime ago, I have decided that in my lifetime pursuit of the arts, my vocabularies of human shape and gesture have played a huge formation to my creative skills, to the detriment of other genres such as the art of machines and animals. There are, of course, some inspired moments where I draw cars or futuristic tanks. But they are few and far between. My architectural foundation (which I didn't finish!) back in the university days meant that I have drawn many buildings, whether as sketches or for technical presentations. Drawings of insects or other invertebrates? It is very rare. Nowadays, it is in my meagre intention (other than transfixing it) that by drawing insects, I can gain access to some of the technical proficiencies as to their anatomies. Tapping into the mode of "drawing-insects", I have found out years ago, is quite easy; my childhood formation was full of times *playing* with insects. Unknown insects are named anew by the strength of their colour or the scale of their bodies to other insects. I remember when I was a kid, I called the commonly termed "cotton stainer" type

as "*Gagah Berani*" (Malay language for "Strong Brave"). How was I to know? How would I know it is known scientifically as *Dysdercus fasciatus*? Looking back, naming and calling out the named is an excellent phenomenological pastime since it is the experiencer, having experienced the taste of the texture of the named, named one according to his sight within the cultural framework of his language. Naming gives power to the namer just as much as the artist gains power over the subject through his depiction of the subject. There is a certain kind of essence—mysterious, unknowable—that is captured and trapped in the named and the drawn. The insects themselves are products of such exquisite creation that by rendering them on papers, I am able to connect to the fantastical, the surreal, as insects come to serve as some sort of monster or alien entities when their forms are embroidered (don't their forms are already *always* exaggerated?), pulled and pushed to the might of pens and inks. Take note of their grotesqueness—e.g. Belostomatidae or "giant water bugs" and *Bocydium globulare*—I am not sure whether this last one really exists!

But even if my art is copious from other sources, does that mean my artwork is mere "fiction" to the reality that it imitates? No, of course not. As the drawing comes to an end, the artwork that I have created comes into life as its own. This is not about projecting illusion of space just for the mere sparks of it; my artwork itself has found its own medium where it speaks its own version of truth. Did not Heidegger say of an artwork as "a happening of truth at work?" (2001: 35). Or that: "Art is truth setting itself to work" (2001: 38). Here, Heidegger is thinking about the conflict of the "world" and the "earth" that is brought forth in the working of truth—the Openness to being—in artwork.

Phenomenological thinking undertaken in this paper cannot be confined to the scientific empirical method. *There is no systematic empirical investigation that can capture the essence of experience, none.* The essence of being cannot be apprehended by scientific method or mathematical calculations. *Only through profound questioning, poetic thinking and radical interpretation can the essence of being be understood.* The essence of being is not easily caught; this is why great thinkers like Heidegger, Bachelard and Ibn 'Arabi refer to the art of poetry to capture the fleeting essence of thought. When Bachelard attempts to psychoanalyse flame in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1964), clearly this is something that no scientific empirical research can fathom. *How could fire have a psychological state to work from?* However, through *phenomenology as poetic imagination*, this can be achieved. Taylor Carman is aware of this, which is why when introducing Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, he writes that phenomenology, "describes the basic structures of human experience

and understanding from a first person point of view, in contrast to the reflective, third person perspective that tends to dominate scientific knowledge and common sense" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: viii). Empirical science lacks the proper set of tools to understand God, ethics, freedom, metaphysics, and beauty. The Russian poet and filmmaker Tarkovsky regards in *Sculpting in Time*: "For the empirical process of intellectual cognition cannot explain how an artistic image comes into being—unique, indivisible, created and existing on some plane other than that of the intellect" (1986: 40). This is the reason why existentialism (Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Sartre) exists in the first place; as counter narrative to science's deficiency in the question regarding *what it is to be*, existing human.

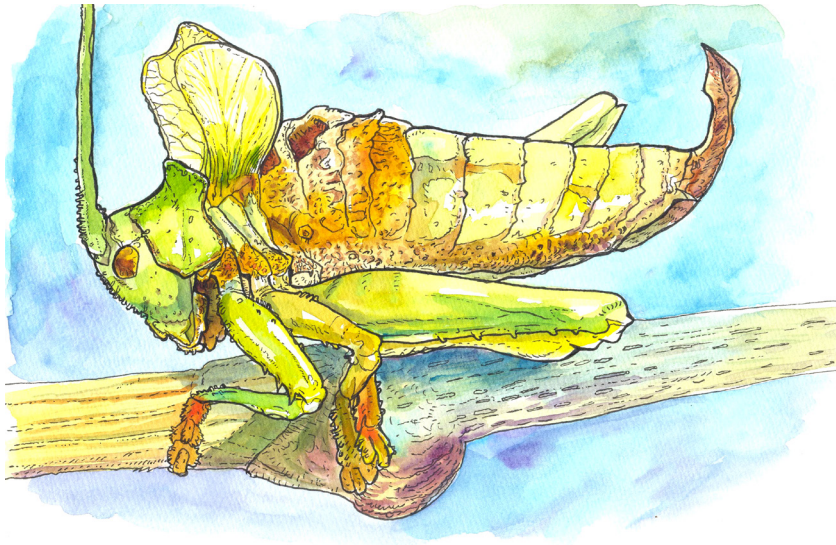
If any phenomenological aesthetic can teach us, it is that artwork experienced is not just a modification of reality but "regards what it experiences as genuine truth" (Gadamer 1989: 83–84). "But if the concept of art is defined as appearance in contrast to reality, then nature," Gadamer writes, "no longer represents a comprehensive framework. Art becomes a standpoint of its own autonomous claim to supremacy" (1989: 82). Gadamer has a point. Yet, even as my artwork posits its own autonomy, it is still referred to as "representationalist art". The arts that are attached to this article—when looked from my personal perspective—have become more real than the one I copied them from, to such a degree, that the originals have become forgotten, relegated to dusty memory. It is as if I have siphoned the mysteriousness of the original picture, drunk its ambrosia, and cut off relationship with it. It is either that or I am not interested to be reminded by "perfections" of the real, not after I have "leeches" its essence through the imperfection of my drawings.

When I draw something, there comes before the drawing a sort of *spiritual-gesture*, the kind that projects just before the drawing act as it gropes with the environment and the subject, to give path for me for the actualisation of what will be drawn. This is a very special kind of gesture that is invisible to everyone except to the artist, if he or she even realises it first. We must understand that the spiritual-gesture happens in a most automatic response. When an image comes to my attention—the kind that inspires me to copy and draw—my brain starts to fill out ways to copy the picture into a different plane. At the same time, my body too moves of its own accord, not exactly physically moving, but more of being bodily receptive to the flow of lines that I will endeavour into the future copy. My mind projects invisible lines tracing down the lines of the picture, letting the lines shaping the picture touch my experience—of holding mediums like pens that are able to create lines—as they nudge my artistic sensibilities to imagine *how* the image will take its form when copied. It is an

interesting kind of inspection; the more I look further into the detailing and its space, the more inward I become, as if a certain dimension pulls me in, the kind of dimension that gestures out to entrap the picture and hold it close to my sense and skills. I imagine this can happen not just to a painter or sculptor, but also to a musician or even a film director.

When can we know the painting has finished its due course by the artist? Are there any specific guidelines to what we call the "final touch-up"? Do I know the final lines to my artwork? These questions are very hard to answer. The lines move mysteriously sometimes, as if they collaborate independently in their own majestic world of pathos, while singing of their shapes, making request from my consciousness of their presence. Perhaps these art-lines too have lives of their own—the more the drawing finalises, the lesser these art-lines give attendance to their shape. If, in drawing a katydid (see Photo 4), I add another five lines of ink somewhere, would that really affect the overall structure? That depends on where I put the lines, the depth and distance between a shape of a katydid and the corner of the paper. What if the lines are put in parallel to the branch where the katydid sits? Would they affect the drawing any less? I am not so sure. However, the best question would be: Would I do that? The answer is no. The drawing of the katydid insect is, after all, *finished*. This is what my artistic sensibilities say to me, and to this, my body nods in recognition.

The spiritual-gesture seeks not only to plan the ways to work out an artwork, but also seeks to finalise itself. Even the artwork calls forth this gesture for finalising the work. If I feel that the art is not finished, I will come back to the artwork again and again, until my mind says it is finished (or if I have grown weary of it). The last act of finishing an artwork of an artwork cannot be perceived by any outsiders (though they can try to guess). Merleau Ponty argues: "The painter's world is a visible world, nothing but visible: a world almost demented because it is complete when it is yet only partial" (1964: 166). Nothing could be farther from truth. My artwork is clearly demented; the realism that it seeks to attain dissipates just as it achieves its final form. In the attainment of realism, the figure strives instead to be incomplete, like the incompleteness of the branch in Photo 3, for example. Nevertheless, it stays finished. Only my conceptualisation and my historical relation with the drawing *know*. The knowing artist gestures, and he gestures to the deep resources of his knowledge—to hunt for the understanding of the *givenness* of the subject drawn, just as much for his artistic competency. My *towardness* to an artwork of my creation means I am able to piece my experience—the gist of it, anyway—as the artwork calls me up and reminds me of its defect. Defect? Yes, what I see in my arts are flaws that could have been remedied if only I had done something



Katydid.
Amacayacu National
Park, Colombia.

Photo 4 A drawing of katydid (2010). Pen, ink and watercolour on paper, 33 × 24 cm.
Source: Author's personal collection.

else, composed differently or coloured otherwise. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why art haunts its originator. Just as the act of painting turns the artist into a state of ecstasy, there too arrives in this mode, anxiety for the artwork's reception, not only from the eyes of the artist, but his close friends or even exacting critics. Strange, that a creation of work demands such inferiority after so much pride in its creation. Perhaps, in this strife between inferiority and pride, it is only here the artist is able to sense his *belongingness* with the artwork he produced. The artist is so easily wounded by his artistic conception. Maybe, after working hours on a project (that is never ultimately finished), there is just simply too much of our spiritual-gesture entombed within the artwork.

Spiritual-gesture serves too as thread for the dialogue, between me, art-essence, and the artwork being produced. This happens since in the act of drawing out on a paper, the state of concentration necessary to finish the work equals to the intensity of my spirit as it gestures forth toward the paper. After an insect has been illustrated, this toward-ness binds me to the painting's essence. Unless something happens to me—an accident whereby I lost my memory—the *bind is permanent*. The gesture-spirit that lays trapped within the artwork knits the past, present and the future of my dialogue with it. Gadamer has spoken about this, when he says:

The essence of what is called spirit lies in the ability to move within the horizon of an open future and unrepeatable past. Mnemosyne, the muse of memory and recollective appropriation, rules here as the muse of spiritual freedom. (Gadamer 1986: 10)

The spirit that gestures forth to my artwork, and to another artist's artwork can only arrive when it is collected, gathered in the memory. Here, memory plays an important role in the justification of how the artwork can be experienced. When I leave my finished (or unfinished) painting for one week, or two months or three years—my getting back to its presence means our rapport gets knitted back. It knits us back to a certain dialogue that was lost, forgotten and now; remembered back.

VI

I have always been interested in artists' studios or in whatever environment they worked from, their methods, equipment that they use or anything whatsoever that can give direction to the origin of their ideas. Perchance, the reader too might be curious to know my working environment. Please look at Photo 5. It is nothing like the pictures of renowned illustrators with expensive and elaborate setups like, for example, the excellent photo collection of comics artists and graphic illustrators in their studio found in Greg Preston's *The Artist Within* (Preston 2007). It is very far from the awe-inspiring messiness found in Francis Bacon's creative leftover. (Which is a chaotic masterpiece: Over 7,000 items can be found in Francis Bacon's studio, including 570 books, 1,500 photographs, 100 slashed canvases, 1,300 leaves torn from various books, about 2,000 artist's materials plus 70 drawings). My "studio" is quite

timid, rather. It is located in my living room. The table where I draw is not exclusively for my creative outlet: It is shared with other domestic activities—temporary place for groceries, car-keys, place for dining. The table is a clutter, actually. Food, junk, mineral water, spoon, glasses, and books—they all add up to the festival of temporary but perpetual messiness. Nowadays, the table is shared too with my youngest child's paraphernalia. Milk, baby bottles and napkins somehow ended up there, in their progress to be "somewhere else". Often times, the table is also used as a place for study, if not by me, then by my eldest daughter or my wife. For an object that is already eight years old, the table has been (and continues to be) such a remarkable tool in my small apartment. *The table endures.*

My working materials are quite simple: Pen, Indian ink, sketchbook and watercolour are so easily prepared and set up. We are mobile—the tools and me. Water is available from nearby kitchen sink or from the bathroom. I am not exactly a model of cleanliness and discipline; the color palette itself has not been fully washed for the past four years. I use only one or two brushes per session, and they do not have the range of multiple sizes.

In the act of drawing, so attuned was I to the drawings at hand, the cluttered objects that reside in the vicinities of my sight turn..."invisible". The books that are in front of me, that I peruse often, turn as *mere* objects of unnecessary convictions. Merleau-Ponty posits: "I say of a thing that is moved; but my body moves itself, my movement deploys itself. It is not ignorant of itself; it is not blind for itself; it radiates from a self..." (1964: 162). My body here is not just an instrument to control pens, but as something that *gathers* a world of drawing. When a mood to draw passes, I take a glance at my surroundings and take note of their visibility. If, for instance, an object draws my attention to its façade—a drink, for example—I will yield my body to its direction. Other than that, I simply resume the art activity. It is not that the objects around me turn *really* invisible, but in the placement and hierarchy of artistic pursuit, they turn ghostly because of the *level* of usefulness that they radiate out. The focus to draw on paper is really strong. In the lull of the focus, things remind me again of their usefulness. The convenience of the painting set-up is done in such a manner that I can fully engage with tools that are nearby. In the intensity of the drawing activity, the painting tools are comparable to parts of my body. We have become One—tools and me. Anyone who does not think this as part of a game has no knowledge whatsoever to the inner working of an artist. Brush used implies simply this: That it is *played* out.

VII

Even when the work itself is drawn using pen, ecolines or watercolours on paper—a work that might represent a sense of a beetle or a wasp—we must never forget that the materials which fulfil the existence of the beetle or the wasp in front of me arrive from the guise of technological advancement. There is no single material employed that has been created by my own hands. Pen, Indian ink, synthetic-nylon brush, palette, Daler-Rowney watercolour, cold-pressed papers, the chair where I sit, the cluttered table; they all came from industrialised, mechanised productions that are sold and distributed massively. Truly, we live in the age of commercialism. Has art too become just another form of technological communication?

Martin Heidegger, in his influential essay "*The Questions Concerning Technology*," speaks of the *gestell* (enframing) of the ever-oppressive technology whereby natural resources come to serve as *bestand* (a standing reserve) for man to wait for his perpetual command and misuse (1977). In this state of *gestell*, men too get called up as "standing reserves" for technology to tap as mere resources. Here, man and natural resources like coal and ocean waves are mere energy to be stored, waiting for the click on the switch for further usage. Reading into this sort of literature can be disheartening. However, it is the kind of depression that is necessary and strangely uplifting; the mechanistic triumph of Big Brother (Orwell 1984) or to the malevolent technocracy of Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985), they tell the story of a society that is dominated by modern technology, but they are the kinds that lend creative strength to the soul. "It is by lending to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings," writes Merleau-Ponty (1964: 162). The artist builds the world, but in the process, the world dominates the techniques of his impression. In the modern age, we have become technologically chained but only in art can our spirit soar. This is what Heidegger believes. These readings into technological "imprisonment" serve only as a small reminder to the function of arts—which is to nurture and shelter our emotional bodies. It is to remind me and the readers again on the possibilities of beauty—glimmered as it is in the strife between human emotion and the technological ways of being—as ways for us to slip into the abyss of being.

There is no way, right now, for my art to escape the idealist technology Heidegger spoke and warned of. The rendering of insects in the sketchbooks have to go through certain machinery—a scanner, a computer—just so that it can be digitised, and attached to this article. In their pixelated forms, nevertheless, the essence of the drawings still remained the gesture I



Photo 5 My working environment (2012).

Source: Photograph by Nurul Lina.

have laboriously put into. Art challenges man to manifest his will just as much as it cultivates the awkward humility in us. Gadamer once wrote how "all artistic creation challenges each of us to listen to the language in which the work of art speaks and to make it our own" (1986: 39). Yet, "meditation on the beautiful in art now slips markedly," says Heidegger, "even exclusively, into the relationship of man's state of feeling, of *aisthēsis* (1981: 83). I am neither want to contend that my drawings are means to transform the spectator's perception into becoming "ethically better", nor are they enabling mankind to save themselves in the face of cybernetic networking. The drawings, as I have presented here, *are here* for my personal use,

in that they are there to soothe—in the process of artistic competency—my soul, and *only* my soul. The words, spoken here, are to attack the walls of my experience and to bring to its release. If the drawings—in the drawings' plight to calm—radiate beauty and pleasure to the eyes of readers and spectators alike; I have nothing better to say, but that I am *pleased*. And isn't that, ultimately, the *raison d'être* for an exhibition—this paper too—subsists?

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