



Sabungeros (Cockfighters)

Photographs captured in the Philippines by Douglas Vuncannon

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Statement

Between December 2014 and December 2016, I photographed *sabungeros* (cockfighters) at illegal cockpits on the Visayan Islands in the Philippines. It's difficult to overstate the importance of *sabong* in Filipino culture. A thriving scene of gambling and corruption surrounds the fights, whether in sanctioned super-stadiums or illegal, open-air dirt pits. Critics decry *sabong*'s destructive effects on impoverished communities.

This portfolio offers a glimpse into this unique spectacle while advancing aesthetic and ethical questions—particularly the question of animal rights as viewed across cultures. It operates within the peculiar tradition of subjective documentary photography, with a vigorous, process-oriented strategy. Captured on 120 and 35mm film, these black-and-white images are presented in full frame, without cropping.

Catalogue Raisonné



Romy, Ramsy and Boks

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm panoramic b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 38.5 inches

Description: After winning a significant prize fight, Romy, a “big player” in the Kamputhaw scene, revels with Ramsy and Boks, younger *sabungeros* caught up in the excitement.



Kyky and Cococy

Year Completed: 2015

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 24 inches

Description: Kyky (15) and Cococy (12) are too young to enter the cockpit, but they assist their elders with training, handling and preparing *manoks* (roosters) for prize fights.



Bong and Gaffer Attaching Spurs

Year Completed: 2015

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative strip

Dimensions: 17 x 43 inches

Description: Large, razor-sharp spurs are attached to *manoks* before entering the cockpit. The fights are usually fatal to the losing manok, and the winning rooster is often critically injured as well. Here Bong holds his rooster while a gaffer firmly laces the spur behind the foot.



Berber, Carlos and Isagani

Year Completed: 2015

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 24 inches

Description: Six-year-old Berber, holding a prize-fighting *manok*, stands at the periphery of the *sabungan* (cockpit) with friends Carlos and Isagani.



Gilbert and "Pula"

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 24 inches

Description: Gilbert cradles his *manok*, which he calls "Pula" ("red"), before entering the cockpit. *Sabungeros* generally do not name their roosters. Gilbert was first photographed at the illegal *sabungan* in Kamputhaw in 2014. A year later, Gilbert had left that scene to join the activity at a cockpit closer to his home.



Arnold with Banana

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative strip

Dimensions: 43 x 17 inches

Description: Arnold (50) drinks beer and eats snacks while watching the action at the Kamputhaw *sabungan*.



In the Cockpit, Preparing to Fight

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm panoramic b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 38.5 inches

Description: A tense moment preceding the battle.



Cockpit

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm panoramic b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 38.5 inches

Description: *Manoks* face off.



The Kill

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm panoramic b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 38.5 inches

Description: A *manok* seizes the advantage and delivers a killing blow. Taken from an overhanging tree, this photograph gives an overview of the Kamputhaw cockpit during a fight. Here, raucous bet-taking has suddenly shifted to near-silence at a critical moment.



Sabungeros in the Cockpit

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm panoramic b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 38.5 inches

Description: In the cockpit after a fight.



Manok Surgery

Year Completed: 2014

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative strip (panoramic and standard frames)

Dimensions: 17 x 52 inches

Description: A trained *manok* represents a significant investment of time and money. They are often injected with steroids and clotting agents before fights to improve performance and stanch wounds. Here, on the Camotes Islands, a victorious but severely wounded *manok* undergoes an operation in the hope that he will live to fight again.



Tats Campos with Manok

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A cockfighter at the Kamputhaw *sabungan*.

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Carlos with Manok

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A cockfighter at the Kamputhaw *sabungan*.



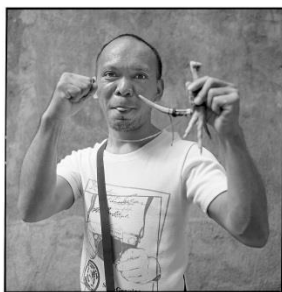
Michael with Manok

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A 21-year-old cockfighter in the Lower Pasil Shantytown (aka the "squatter's slum"), preparing for the afternoon's fight.



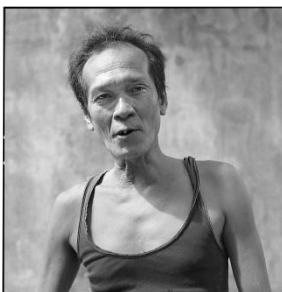
Ondo Caballero with Chickenfoot

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: This gaffer holds a severed foot from a *manok* killed in a fight. The spur will be removed and reused.



Romy Redux

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: Romy, who works as a carpenter, is shown two years after first being photographed. Often a boisterous prankster, he is known as a “drunkard” in Lower Pasil.



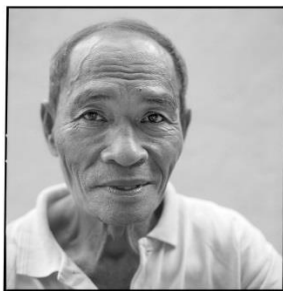
Adam Caravalleje

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A cockfighter at the Kamputhaw *sabungan*.



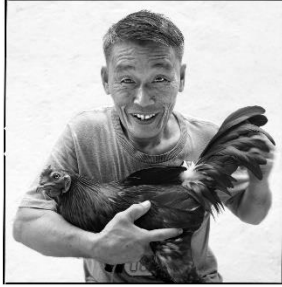
Rolian, 68-year old Sanbungero

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: An older cockfighter at the Cabangahan *sabungan*.



Jun with Manok

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A *sabungero* at the Cabangahan cockpit.



Danilo, 21-year old Sanbungero

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 inches

Description: A young *sabungero* at the Cabangahan cockpit.



Dinoniso, Sabungan Vendor

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negative

Dimensions: 24 x 24 x inches

Description: Dinoniso, ice cream vendor at the Kamputhaw *sabungan*. The cloth under his shirt pads the weight of the cooler he slings over his shoulder.



Robert Quizon, Sabungan Butcher

Year Completed: 2016

Medium: pigment on paper from 120 b&w negatives

Dimensions: 33 x 17 inches

Description: *Manoks* killed in combat are swiftly collected by hard-working butchers. They are then quickly defeathered and boiled three times in fresh water. Some Filipinos refuse to eat them because they fear this process doesn't completely remove hormones, steroids and clotting agents.



Christopher with Manok ("MAN")

Year Completed: 2015

Medium: pigment on paper from 35mm b&w negative

Dimensions: 17 x 24 inches

Description: Preparing to enter the cockpit in Pit-os, Christopher holds aloft his *manok* with aplomb. *Sabong* is a source of masculine pride throughout the Philippines.

Locations

Kamputhaw *Sabungan*

This illegal cockpit is in a walled-in private lot in metropolitan Cebu City. *Sabong* takes place every Sunday afternoon, though it is sometimes interrupted by police raids. The Kamputhaw neighborhood was the primary focus of this project.

Lower Pasil Shantytown

A dense honeycomb of interconnected, ramshackle dwellings, known as the "squatter's slums," Lower Pasil is a staging area for *sabungeros* who fight at the nearby Kamputhaw cockpit.

***Sabungan* in Cabangahan, Consolacion**

In the idyllic hills above Pit-os, *sabong* takes place in a covered cockpit next to a graveyard. Fights are held every day except Sunday, when activities move down to Pit-os. Though this *sabungan* is illegal, it is apparently protected from police interference by the local community councilman, who is involved in its operation.

Pit-os *Sabungan*

A government-sanctioned cockpit in the urban outskirts of Cebu City. "Pit-os" means "hardship" or "claustrophobic." Like many areas of Cebu City, gridlocked traffic, pollution and overpopulation torment residents.

***Sabungan* on the Camotes Islands**

An insular community cockpit on rural Pacijan Island, 63 km (39 mi) east of Cebu City in the Camotes Sea.

Technical Information

These full-frame images were captured on 120 and 35mm negative film with the *Hasselblad 500 C/M*, the *Hasselblad Xpan* and the *Nikon N90s*. The *Xpan* can make standard (36mm x 24mm) or panoramic (65mm x 24mm) exposures.

Acknowledgments

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***Self Portrait with Nayz Cabading
Cebu City, the Philippines. 2014.***

35mm b&w negative

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