

ART

THE

JAPAN

FOUNDATION,

MANILA

ARCHIVE

A Collection of Essays
on Philippine Contemporary
Visual & Performing Arts

ART ARCHIVE 01

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The Japan Foundation, Manila
ART ARCHIVE 01

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The Japan Foundation is the only institution dedicated to carrying out Japan's comprehensive international cultural exchange programs throughout the world. With the objective of cultivating friendship and ties between Japan and the world through culture, language, and dialogue, the Japan Foundation creates global opportunities to foster friendship, trust, and mutual understanding.

With a global network consisting of its Tokyo headquarters, the Kyoto office, two Japanese-language institutes, and 24 overseas offices in 23 countries, the Japan Foundation is active in three areas: Arts and Cultural Exchange, Japanese-Language Education, and Japanese Studies and Intellectual Exchange.

Established in 1996, the Japan Foundation, Manila has been fostering friendship and ties between the Philippines and Japan for more than two decades through various cultural activities. Moreover, through the Japan Foundation Asia Center's program, which was established in 2014, the Japan Foundation, Manila has been implementing activities under the new policy called the "*WA Project*" ~ Toward Interactive Asia through "Fusion and Harmony," which makes the activities of the Japan Foundation, Manila more diverse and encompassing.

This first volume of *ART ARCHIVE* brings together ten writers from the Philippines, putting forth a diverse set of perspectives about contemporary visual and performing arts in the archipelago. While the Japan Foundation has regularly published books about art and culture in Southeast Asia, this is only the second time since the opening of the Japan Foundation, Manila office that we have published a book focusing on the current state of contemporary art in the Philippines.

We hope that this much needed publication will serve as a resource for our readers interested in Filipino art, thereby contributing constructively to the dialogue on contemporary art in the region. We would like to express our gratitude to the contributors, editorial team led by Patricia Tumang, and The Public School Manila (Branding & Design Studio) for their painstaking labor on this publication.

Lastly, we would like to thank you for the continued support and encouragement of the myriad art and culture projects we have realized in the Philippines, and we look forward to many more projects in the coming years.

New Trajectories of Contemporary Visual and Performing Arts in the Philippines

words by

PATRICIA TUMANG

Similar to other post-colonial nations, Philippine contemporary art has emerged from and evolved in response to an ever-changing political and socio-economic landscape. Since the country was first colonized for over 300 years by Spain (1521-1898), followed by a half-century of American occupation (1898-1946), an invasion by Japan during World War II (1941-1945), and the two-decade dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-1981), Filipino artists have grappled with works that address the complexities of Philippine identity, oppression, nationhood, war, religion, and capitalism.

Western and European artistic traditions were introduced (and copied) during Spanish colonial rule, from early 17th-century religious artworks and images in Philippine churches to the academic style of painting (Romanticism, Impressionism, and Realism) popularized by 19th-century master Juan Luna (1857-1899) that subsequently influenced genre painters like Fernando Amorsolo (1892-1972), whose pastoral, rural themes and conservative style have become synonymous with Philippine painting until the present.

With the advent of Modernism in the late 1920s — sparked by Victorio C. Edades' groundbreaking 1928 solo exhibition at the Philippine Columbia Club in Manila that challenged Philippine Classicism and fortified the Modernist movement in the decades to come — Philippine art underwent an immense shift in tandem with the political and economic upheavals of World War II. When Ferdinand Marcos came to power in 1965, he and First Lady Imelda Marcos oversaw efforts to redefine, rebuild, and institutionalize Philippine art.

The late 1960s to the 1970s was a prolific period for Philippine visual art, dance, theater, and performance. New private and public institutions were erected to showcase these art forms, among them the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), which ushered in a modern vision for Philippine art championed by Imelda Marcos. The massive 220-acre CCP complex consists of the Leandro Locsin-designed Theater of Performing Arts (now Tanghalang Pambansa) — which houses several performing arts, theater, and exhibition venues like the CCP Museum — and the Folk Arts Theater (now Tanghalang Francisco Balagtas), among others. Eventually, the CCP would acquire several resident Philippine dance companies, including Ballet Philippines, from which a number of dancers branched out from to form their own independent dance companies.

Under the Marcoses' reign, investment in the arts had flourished. Art patronage grew among Philippine high society, and government museums, banks, corporations, and major hotels acquired sizeable art collections for display. The major art movements that emerged from the 1970s were Social Realism and Conceptual Art. Roberto Chabet, the CCP Museum's first director (1967-1970), and other conceptual artists and practitioners rejected fixed notions of art and art-making in favor of a temporal, conceptual, and process-based approach to art, while artists like Benedicto "BenCab" Cabrera and Jose Tence Ruiz believed that art should reflect the real conditions of everyday life. These new expressions found favor over Abstraction, which was heavily promoted by Imelda Marcos in a move away from figuration post-World War II, and is associated with Filipino artists Arturo Luz and Fernando Zóbel.

Since then, there have been many shifts in the Philippine art market, particularly in the capital of Manila, where the art scene is anchored. In the 1990s, Philippine art was made more accessible with the incarnation of SM Artwalk, a row of art galleries on the fourth floor of Megamall, a major shopping mall in

Metro Manila. Today, the unofficial “Gallery Row” can be found along Pasong Tamo in Makati City, where prominent art galleries like Silverlens and Finale Art File are located.

From a local shopping mall to the world stage at the Venice Biennale, where the Philippines has participated in the 56th and 57th International Art Exhibitions after a 50-year absence, Philippine contemporary art has truly gone global. Many Filipino artists are gaining prominence overseas with international exhibitions, prestigious awards, participation in art fairs, and auction sales. Philippine modern and contemporary dance has found a foothold outside of traditional companies and styles, likewise for Philippine contemporary theater and performance, with new festivals and groups challenging Western traditions and performing in alternative spaces.

The Japan Foundation, Manila’s *ART ARCHIVE 01* is the first book in a series that explores current trends and concerns in Philippine contemporary art, with the first volume focusing on the visual and performing arts. As a primer, it will introduce readers to the practices and movements in Philippine contemporary visual and performing arts over the past decade, as well as the various contexts from which they have emerged.

Featuring essays by contemporary artists, performers, art writers, curators, journalists, and experts in the field of Philippine contemporary art, dance, and theater – and also a directory and illustrated maps of Philippine art and cultural institutions mentioned in the essays – the book seeks to illuminate the current state(s) of visual and performing arts in the Philippines.

The book’s editorial vision is guided by the desire to investigate how Philippine artistic practices and movements have been shaped by notions of and collisions with “the local” and “the global.” How do Filipino artists respond to or create works in the current political and socio-economic climate? What kinds of works emerge from independent artist-run spaces versus institutionally supported work/exhibitions – and is this distinction important? How do artists and performers respond to and challenge Western standards and definitions of “the contemporary,” as well as the demands of the international art market?

The goal isn’t to provide an exhaustive survey of Philippine contemporary visual and performing arts; instead, the book offers a compilation of insights and articulations – an art archive – that tackles pressing questions and concerns that Filipino artists, performers, and groups contend with today as they create and

mount/exhibit works that inspire, engage, and provoke.

ART ARCHIVE 01 is divided into three sections – *Retracing Histories*, *Movement & Performativity*, and *Redefining Contemporary Visual Art*. It opens with *Retracing Histories*, which features essays that recount over 50 years of Philippine art history. *Movement & Performativity* explores intersections of Philippine modern dance, performance, and theatre. *Redefining Contemporary Visual Art* examines the development of Philippine contemporary art and art-making in today’s globalized economy.

We begin with Ringo Bunoan’s essay, “EXCAVATING SPACES AND HISTORIES: The Case of Shop 6,” which recalls a censored 1974 group exhibition that led six Filipino artists to exhibit in a temporal space called “Shop 6.” Citing the unpublished writings of Joy Dayrit, who had chronicled the 1970s Manila art scene, Bunoan’s essay provides an inside look at the early stages of Conceptual Art in the Philippines.

Around the same time, a large number of Filipino artist groups and collectives began to organize and exhibit protest works in response to heightened political turmoil during the reign of President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986). In her essay, “VISUAL ARTS AND ACTIVISM IN THE PHILIPPINES: Notes on a New Season of Discontent,” Lisa Ito-Tapang writes about the development of Social Realism, an art movement characterized by images and messages of social protest, as seen through effigies, murals, exhibitions, performance art, and cartoons.

Mayumi Hirano considers another significant development that took place when Filipino artists began to organize their own art festivals in the 1980s and 1990s. Her essay, “BRIDGE OVER THE CURRENT: Artist-Run Festivals in the Philippines,” delves into the history of two significant artist-run festivals in the country – the Baguio Arts Festival (BAF) and Visayas Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference (VIVA ExCon) and how they set a precedent for today’s contemporary art and performance festivals.

The artist-run phenomenon is also the focus of Marika Constantino’s essay, “reFLECT & reGENERATE: A Community Conversation About Organizing Ourselves,” which captures the energy and rationale for artist-run spaces that emerged in the 1990s and have shaped the course of Philippine art in the following decades.

The next section, *Movement & Performativity*, explores new developments and issues in contemporary theater, performance-making, and dance. Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco’s essay, “UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY IN PHILIPPINE THEATER,” explores why and how Western

dramaturgical traditions influence what “being contemporary” means in Philippine theater.

In “MAPPING OUT CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN THE PHILIPPINES,” Rina Angela Corpus takes readers on a journey of Philippine contemporary dance from the formation of traditional dance companies to modern-day independent companies and groups that embrace a fusion of dance styles and experiment with innovative forms that intersect with multiple disciplines.

Sarah Salazar-Aronson and Ness Roque-Lumbres, core members of the Manila-based contemporary performance collective Sipat Lawin Ensemble, share about the collective’s beginnings and their embrace of alternative performance spaces and experimentation in their manifesto, “S A _ L A B A S / O U T S I D E R S: A Brief History of Why/When/Where We Wo What We do in Performance.”

The final section, *Redefining Contemporary Visual Art*, continues to extrapolate on what it means to be “contemporary” in today’s global art market. In “FILTERS: A View of Recent Philippine Contemporary Photography,” Irwin Cruz explores the medium of photography and its meteoric rise in the Manila art scene.

Jewel Chuaunsu profiles the careers and works of six Filipino artists working abroad in her essay, “GLOBAL FILIPINO CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS,” and how, despite their distance from the Philippines, these artists still embody and express works that capture a strong sense of national and cultural identity.

Closing the book is Duffie Hufana Osental’s essay, “CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART IN CEBU,” which takes readers out of the Manila-centric art scene and into the vibrant city of Cebu, where contemporary Cebuano artists are breaking free from traditional styles and embracing alternative visual platforms and aesthetics.

The aim of *ART ARCHIVE 01* is to engage readers in a dialogue on relevant topics, trends, and practices in Philippine contemporary visual and performing arts in the 21st century. In line with the Japan Foundation’s aim of carrying out comprehensive international exchange programs throughout the world, *ART ARCHIVE 01* is published in a digital format for accessibility and distribution on a global scale. It is meant to be used as a resource to foster cultural exchange and knowledge sharing for artists, educators, curators, museum-goers, galleries, performing arts spaces, and art and cultural institutions in the Philippines and abroad. ■

words by
RINGO BUNOAN

ART ARCHIVE 01



Fig. 1

Parallel to, but not completely estranged from commercial galleries and museums, artist-run spaces are shaped by the needs and aspirations of their time. For my generation in the Philippines, artist-run spaces were a means to survive. With nowhere to show our works after we graduated from college in the late 1990s, opening up our own spaces was the only way we could pursue art. Operating outside the usual limitations imposed by commercial or institutional settings, artist-run spaces allowed artists to test new ideas and propose new ways of thinking about art. Most artist-run spaces are however short-lived and barely mentioned in official narratives. When I started archiving Philippine art in 2007, one of the first areas I looked into were artist-run spaces, gathering and reconstructing their histories that need to be retold.

In the summer of 1974, six Filipino artists – Joe Bautista, Roberto Chabet, Rodolfo Gan, Yoli Laudico, Fernando Modesto, and Boy Perez – opened an exhibition entitled, *Basta Hindi Ganon 'Yon*, which loosely translates to That's Not How It Is, in a gallery called K-Lahi at the Fiesta Carnival in Cubao, Quezon City. Quezon City, at that time, was the capital of Metro Manila, with Cubao as its main commercial and entertainment area. The Fiesta Carnival, located in the Araneta Center, next to Rustan's Department Store, offered a permanent venue for the rides and games that usually popped up on seasonal fairgrounds.

Their exhibition, scheduled to run for over two weeks, was brought down by the artists themselves soon after it opened on April 19. The gallery owner was scandalized with the works, which included, among other things, a suspended

bamboo pole with a pillow, a wall covered with greased newspapers, a small refrigerator with collages and photographs of then President Ferdinand Marcos in moldy Gerber bottles, and most infuriating of all to the owner, the “Kotex all over the place.”¹

Two years prior, in 1972, Marcos declared Martial Law in the Philippines and imposed the Anti-Subversion Act, initially drafted in the 1950s to counter Communist groups, particularly the Hukbalahap in Central Luzon, and later on revised it to include all organizations that went against his government. Rebellion, sedition, conspiracy, and association with the Communist Party of the Philippines and other outlawed groups were seen as subversive acts, which were punishable by imprisonment, imposition of fines, sequestration of property, and even death. According to the human rights group Amnesty International, around 70,000 people were imprisoned, over 30,000 were tortured, and more than 3,000 were killed during the Martial Law years from 1972 to 1981.²

During this period, Filipino artists started to form collectives with strong socialist leanings informed by the dogmas of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung), which were bolstered by the rhetoric of Jose Maria Sison, chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Groups such as the Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto (United Progressive Artists and Architects or NPAA) and Kaisahan issued manifestoes that called for art that reflected “the true conditions of society.”

Representations of protest and resistance, workers and the masses were favored over “high art.” In their search for national identity in Philippine art, they rejected and commanded a necessary break from modern art, particularly Abstraction, which was seen as part of the dominant Western culture that was supported by the Marcoses through the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP).

The six artists in *Basta Hindi Ganon ‘Yon* operated independently from these groups, perhaps even deliberately distinguishing themselves as different, but definitely not less radicalized. A month after their one-day exhibition in Cubao, they once again opened shop, this time at the Kamalig shopping arcade along Taft Avenue in Pasay City. The sympathetic owner of the arcade, upon hearing about the artists’ “censored” exhibition, gave one of the vacant stalls to the artists for free while it wasn’t being rented. They called the 16 x 11 feet space Shop 6 after the six artists; they also assumed the stall was No. 6, but it was actually not. The chaos and confusion that marked the formation of the group also propelled their calculated program of weekly exhibitions of experimental works that, due to their nature, were rarely given public view.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 1 Joe Bautista standing next to the sign of their exhibition Shop 6: *Early Works / Circa 1975*, Rizal Park, Manila, Philippines, 23 May 1975. Courtesy of Ringo Bunoan.

Fig. 2 Yoli Laudico, *Basta Hindi Ganon ‘Yon*, K-Lahi Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines, 1974. Courtesy of Ringo Bunoan.

Fig. 3 Exhibition Shop 6, CCP Main Gallery, Manila, Philippines, 1975. Courtesy of Ringo Bunoan.

Fig. 4 Judy Freya Sibayan, *Lemon Cake*, Shop 6, Sining Kamalig, Quezon City, Philippines, 1974. Courtesy of

Ringo Bunoan. Fernando Modesto at his solo exhibition in Shop 6, Sining Kamalig, Quezon City, Philippines, 1974. Courtesy of Ringo Bunoan.

Shop 6 staged a barrage of “works, constructions, situations, environments, and other exploratory projects”³ not only within the confines of their temporal space in Kamalig, but also spilling over to the parking lot, parks, public spaces, and even in other artists’ exhibitions, where they would secretly insert their works as a form of critical intervention. From the original six artists, the group expanded to include other artists, and the series of weekly solo presentations culminated with a massive outpouring for the *101 Artists* group show.

Some of the works featured in Shop 6 include Yoli Laudico’s punched out instant ID photos with missing heads and a canopy of tissue paper that covered the ceiling and extended to a pipe drain; Danny Dalena’s assembly of rusty pots and pans and grid of burning mosquito coils laid on the floor; Fernando Modesto’s hanging bananas and craft paper-covered walls; Joe Bautista’s tree project and grid of mongo seeds Scotch-taped on the shop’s glass window; Roberto Chabet’s paper scraps, scratches, and hanging rattan; Judy Sibayan’s parked yellow Volkswagen with leftover pie, Magnolia Chocolait bottles, and a metronome; and Joe Mendoza’s crumpled wires, mannequins, and a plastic doll playing with shit on a piece of plywood.

In a rare published article by an unnamed author on Shop 6, it was described as having a “free-for-all atmosphere...There was an overuse of scrap materials – by-products, recycled works, discards. This is perhaps due to almost everyone’s concern for process and materials and a quality of appearance that is not polished or elegant. To cynics, Shop 6 is just another showcase for *pakulo*, a place for gimmicks or simply ‘rubbish.’ But judging from the one-man exhibitions, gimmickry was hardly a concern; the works were results of hard work, and perhaps harder thinking. The shows at Shop 6 are directed towards other artists who may still think that art is a commodity wielded in oil and brush. It is one big gesture questioning the basic foundations of art. The works are hardly commercial in nature, they’re simply seen for what they are.”⁴

Shop 6 was, however, cast in a different light by critics of conceptual art. Social Realist artists in particular saw the work as derivative of Western art and judged it as apathetic to the prevailing political and social injustices in the country at the time. Roberto Chabet – who led Shop 6 and was the founding museum director of the CCP, the Modernist bastion founded by the Marcoses – became an easy target for the Social Realists. It did not help, too, that Chabet was a vocal critic of shallow politics and propaganda and was known to lash out insults and biting criticism in public. This led to a clear divide between the two schools of thought, creating deep tensions that festered throughout succeeding generations of artists.

By the late 1970s, Shop 6 artists eventually disbanded and pursued divergent paths. Some turned to more stable careers or at least shifted to more financially viable art forms in order to support themselves and their families. Chabet remained steadfast and committed to a conceptualist practice, passing on its philosophies to his students in the College of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, through an unorthodox manner of pedagogy that deserves a study on its own.

The drama between Social Realism and Conceptualism was well played in Chabet's own classroom, which became known in the college as the *Dirty Room*. He also reclaimed various spaces within the university, such as the abandoned kennel at the old Veterinary Medicine building and the waiting sheds around the campus as alternative spaces for his students to experiment and test ideas.

In between and after classes, they would also congregate at Nanette's, a cheap eatery outside the campus where they would continue their discussions. Once in a while, he would tell them about Shop 6, recalling artists and works with remarkable precision and obvious fondness during lengthy storytelling sessions fueled by spirits and beers.

Decades after, in a more formal interview I conducted as part of a special research project I initiated for Asia Art Archive in 2008, Chabet described Shop 6 as the alternative to the CCP. Preferring to distance himself from the mounting political turmoil that came with the job at the CCP, he resigned in 1971, a year after its opening, and turned over the position to artist Ray Albano, who continued overseeing conceptual programming at the CCP. If there was a person who should be tagged as a cultural corroborator of

Art and politics should not be seen as separate because in reality they have always been tragically entangled and governed by a feudal system of patronage.

the Marcoses, it was not Chabet but actually Albano, who stayed at the CCP until his death in the mid-80s, well after the end of Martial Law.

This conveniently overlooked fact, along with many other hazy details, all became evident as we archived the works of Chabet. People's memories may fade and allegiances may change, but surviving documents are powerful witnesses to a story that finally after 40 years has a chance to unfold, through the few published articles, grainy black and white photographs from the artists' own archives, fragments of interviews, as well as official documentation from the CCP, which we laboriously compiled as part of The Chabet Archive. Among the most telling set of documents that we gathered were the personal notes and diaries of Joy Dayrit, a writer and close companion of Chabet, who chronicled the

activities of Shop 6 and other art happenings in Manila in the 70s.

Dayrit's unpublished writings, which we had access to only after her sudden death in 2012, were the closest thing to a Shop 6 manifesto, if the group ever had one. Although knowing Chabet, they would most probably laugh at and reject the thought of pinning themselves down and defining their gestures into a kind of mission-vision statement. As noted by Dayrit, "Shop 6 unpredictability is seen in its seemingly delinquent performance, making what was first improper acceptable. To the aware audience. But to call Shop 6 'unpredictable' is to give it an inexact description it may not accept."⁵ She also rejected the idea of Shop 6 as a group, stating that "to confine Shop 6 into a group, is to give it a common behavior which it does not have."⁶



Fig. 6

In an inspired passage, which requires a full quote, Dayrit wrote:

"The underground is alive and well/the creative underground/Shop Six/(6)/a growing number of 28/originally Shop #6 - Kamalig/once upon a time Liwayway Recapping Company/a growing number of 28/was once 14/was once 6/was once just an idea/Shop Six/(6)/different artists with different temperaments working with different mediums sharing one common idea/art in relation to art/art not for its own sake but for the sake of the artist/art that questions more than it answers/offering alternative points-of-view/a point of departure/a point of reference/a beginning more than an end/a transitory stage towards a more meaning Philippine school/a school that embraces internationalism/a universality that isn't questioned but accepted as a natural ideal/flashforward/flashback/flashforward/discoveries: the hardware, the market, the rejects, the commonplace, etc./rediscoveries: children's toys, native materials, painting, sculpture, film, words, etc./...I dreamed...of a gallery dedicated to art and the artists...committed to their aesthetic development and not to the business of art...of artists who loved

their craft and had a healthy respect towards its ideal...of a new collector...of a new writer who'd speak a new language...idea: a group of renegades—an architect, an artist, a sculptor, an illustrator, a designer, an environmentalist, a carpenter, a builder, an engineer, a filmist, people—their family and some friends—hie-off to build their concept of utopia."⁷

Dayrit's words remain relevant especially today as the Philippine art scene is experiencing an unprecedented economic boom and infusion of capital unseen since the days of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. The overwhelming success of the 2017 edition of Art Fair Philippines shows that Philippine art has become a highly lucrative and fashionable industry, netting millions of pesos in sales over its five-day run. It must be noted, however, that all this art market frenzy is happening amid declarations of Martial Law from our current President Duterte. In these highly volatile times, artists need to reflect once again on the role of art in society. Art and politics should not be seen as separate because in reality they have always been tragically entangled and governed by a feudal system of patronage. For artists today, these questions remain: What is art? What is it for? Whose interests does it serve? Is it for art, for the artists, or for the pleasure and amusement of the art collector? ■



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Fig. 6 - 7 Exhibition *Shop 6*, CCP Main Gallery, Manila, Philippines 1975. Courtesy of Ringo Bunoan.
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- ¹ Joy Dayrit, "Notes on Shop 6" (unpublished notes).
- ² Jodesz Gavilan, *Martial Law 101: Things you should know*, Rappler, August 15, 2016, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/142723-martial-law-declaration-philippines> (accessed January 30, 2017)
- ³ Press release of the first Shop 6 exhibition at Sining Kamalig. The clipping is part of the Shop 6 documents in The Chabet Archive at Asia Art Archive. <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/SpecialCollections/Details/4>
- ⁴ *101 Artists - Incidents at Shop 6, Marks*, May to October 1974, Vol. I, Nos. 2-4.
- ⁵ Dayrit, "Notes on Shop 6."
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1

The trajectory of arts and activism in the Philippines has been shaped by the social, political, and economic shifts of the past five decades, which have been characterized by cycles of repression, revolt, and regression after the EDSA Revolution or People Power I (1986), a series of public demonstrations that led to the removal of President Ferdinand Marcos' administration (1965-1986), and EDSA II (2001), which overthrew the government of President Joseph "Erap" Estrada (1998-2001).

Since 2010, changes in presidential power have contributed to a new chapter for art and activism. This period marked the end of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's nine-year term (2001-2010), the second Aquino administration under President Benigno Aquino III (2010-16), and the start of President Rodrigo Duterte's administration (2016-present). The past two presidential administrations have been largely propelled into office through a popular vote. Each candidate promised change for the Filipino people, but has been unable to enact substantial reforms for socio-economic transformation to uplift the lives of the marginalized majority.

In the arts and culture sector, a national controversy erupted in 2011 over the premature closure of the group exhibition, *Kulo* (Boil) at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). It centered on artist Mideo Cruz's installation, *Poleteismo* (Polytheism, 2002), which juxtaposed religious and popular images to criticize idolatry but was accused by segments of the Catholic Church, particularly the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and Pro-Life Philippines, of being "blasphemous."¹

In 2009, the discontent that had been long on the rise surfaced in 2009 when President Arroyo chose not to proclaim composer and music scholar Ramon Santos as National Artist, the highest distinction given to a Filipino artist. This happened again in 2014, when Aquino excluded film actress Nora Aunor from the roster.² Both instances were criticized as capricious exercises of presidential prerogative threatening the integrity of the awards process.³

Whether these controversies are repeated under the current administration of President Rodrigo Duterte remains to be seen. But if there is anything that history teaches us, it is that Filipino artists refuse to remain passive amidst censorship, poor governance, and social injustice. This essay traces some current developments over the past five years to longer traditions of Philippine art and activism, reflecting on how the current milieu continues to pursue and expand the possibilities for socially-engaged art.

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¹ Corazon S. Alvina et al, eds., *Pananaw: Philippine Journal of Visual Arts* (Ateneo Art Gallery and Pananaw ng Sining Bayan) 8 (2014): 153.

² Dexter San Pedro, "PNoy: Nora Aunor not deserving of National Artist Award because of 'drug conviction,'" *Interaksyon.com*, July 1, 2014, <http://interaksyon.com/article/90251/why-was-nora-aunor-not-proclaimed-a-national-artist-p-noy-answers-question>.

³ Marya Salamat, "Artists' group rejects Aquino's justification for Nora Aunor snub," *Bulatlat*, July 2, 2014, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/07/02/artists-group-reject-aquinos-justification-for-nora-aunor-snub>.

TRADITIONS OF POLITICAL DISSENT

The visual arts have contributed to social movements in the Philippines, enriching protest, dissent, and even revolutionary struggles over the past 50 years. Expressions range from Realism to agitational propaganda to revolutionary art.

Many popular examples of Philippine protest emerged during the Marcos dictatorship, such as Antipas Delotavo's iconic *Itak sa Pusong ni Mang Juan* (*Dagger in Old Juan's Heart*, 1978). Alice Guerrero Guillermo, however, identifies other phases of protest and revolutionary art before the period of Martial Law (1972-1981). Allegory and Realism in painting marked the first phase from the late 19th-century Propaganda Movement to the Philippine Revolution of 1896-98. The second phase featured anti-colonial satire of the graphic arts during the American colonial period in the early 20th century. The third phase after World War II

was dominated by editorial cartoonists and painters that expressed an emerging nationalist consciousness and explored "proletarian art" through modernist styles.⁴

The term Social Realism is most associated with the phase from the late 1960s to the 1980s, when heightened nationalism and political resistance to the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos produced the organizations and "movement for socially committed art."⁵

The ranks of progressive artists and cultural workers grew within the Student Cultural Association of the Philippines (1959), the Cultural Bureau of the activist youth group Kabataang Makabayan (1964), the Nagkakaisang Progresibong Artista at Arkitekto (1971-72), and Pangkat Sining (1970).⁶

Marcos' imposition of Martial Law in 1972 led many cultural workers to go underground. Nonetheless, new

organizations like the Center for the Advancement of Young Artists (1976), Kaisahan (1976), Lingkod Sining, and Buklod-Sining continued to explore expressive and popular forms of artistic resistance. By the late 1970s, Guillermo used the term Social Realism to describe their collective practice, a "school of movement in art which exposes the true conditions of society as based on the artist's keen observation of reality and proffers alternatives for human development."⁷ Patrick D. Flores notes how this wave of artistic politicization and nationalism, represented by Kaisahan's commitment to national identity, also resonated with other "kindred initiatives across Southeast Asia" during the 1970s.⁸

From the early to the mid-1980s, the resurgence of the mass movement against the dictatorship led to new formations and consolidated many artists against the

Marcos regime. Based in Manila were the Tambisan sa Sining (1980), Alyansa ng Artistang Bayan (1981), Binhi, MASKARA, and Concerned Artists of the Philippines or CAP (1983), Artista ng Bayan or ABAY, and Salingpusa (1985). ABAY, often collaborating with community theater groups, produced visual materials and props for mass mobilizations, street theater, and campaigns.⁹

The post-EDSA I period saw the founding of the underground revolutionary organization Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan (1987), and the feminist Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan or KASIBULAN (1989).

Other regions had their respective organizations, such as Pamilya Pintura (1980), Black Artists of Asia (1986), and Dibuhistang Naghili-ugyon sa Negros (Dihon) in Negros; Hubon Madia-as (1983) in Iloilo and the Kulturang Atin Foundation in Davao.

The visual arts
have contributed
to social movements
in the Philippines,
enriching protest, dissent,
and even revolutionary struggles
over the past 50 years.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

⁴ Alice Guerrero Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001), 17-23.

⁵ Alice Guerrero Guillermo, *Social Realism in the Philippines* (Manila: ASPHODEL, 1987).

⁶ Jose Maria Sison, "Revolutionary Literature and Art in the Philippines, From the 1960s to the present," from a transcript of a guest speech, "Alternative Classroom Learning Experience (ACLE), Philippine Collegian, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, October 15, 2015," last modified March 2017, <https://josemariasison.org/revolutionary-literature-and-art-in-the-philippines-from-the-1960s-to-the-present>.

⁷ Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*, 4.

⁸ Patrick D. Flores, "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines," *Afterall* 34, (Autumn/Winter 2013), last modified March 2017, <https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.34/social-realism-the-turns-of-a-term-in-the-philippines>.

⁹ Leonilo O. Doloricon, "Ang Sining Protesta at ang Kilusang Masa: Isang Istorikong Paglalarawan (1983-1988)," (unpublished thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman, Asia Center March 1994).

SOLIDARITY AND SELF-ORGANIZATION

One lesson gleaned from this history of progressive artist formations is the need for solidarity and self-organization. Guillermo writes that the Social Realists “formed or joined political art organizations or have been associated with popular mass organizations.” Artists therefore went beyond individual expression, embracing causes beyond self as well as more communal forms of involvement and social engagement.¹⁰

ART COLLECTIVES

Progressive artist collectives formed between the early 1990s to 2000s are living examples of these developments in cultural work. These include the Ugnayan at Galian ng mga Tanod ng Lahi or UGATLahi Artist Collective (1992), Alay Sining, Sanggawa, and Tumbang Preso (1994).

Efforts to coalesce on the basis of a shared political commitment to immerse in marginalized communities are seen in Sining Bugkos (1995), a Manila-based alliance of cultural workers and its multidisciplinary regional counterparts, such as the Bicol-based Kaboronyogan Cultural Network and the Cordillera-based Dap-ayan ti Kultura iti Kordilyera.

Contributing to the social ferment before the ouster of President Joseph “Erap” Estrada in 2001 were groups such as Kabataang Artista para sa Tunay na Kalayaan or KARATULA, and Sining na Naglilingkod sa Bayan or SINAGBAYAN (2000). These helped organize “Erap Resign” and OUST Erap Movement chapters among the youth and students in 2001 and are active in organizing grassroots communities. Similarly, the “Gloria Resign” campaign calling for Arroyo’s resignation on charges of plunder and electoral fraud led to broad formations such as the Artists for the Arrest and Removal of Gloria (ARREST Gloria) in 2005.¹¹ It was later renamed as Artists’ Response to the Call for Social Change and Transformation (Artists’ ARREST) to address other concerns, especially in the Southern Tagalog region.¹²

Many of these collectives formed between the 1990s to 2000s still exist today and are active in political campaigns, art projects, and community organizing. UGATLahi, a collective based in the National Capital Region, regularly makes works, such as effigies for demonstrations led by political umbrella group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) or its affiliates since 1999. More access to multimedia and digital film technology from the early to mid-2000s also yielded audio-visual collectives and alternative media groups, which produced materials and coverage of the mass movement’s initiatives and campaigns.



Fig. 5

Fig. 1-4 Kiri Dalena, *Erased Slogans*, 2008, 15 min single-channel slideshow, edition: 3. Courtesy of Kiri Dalena.

Fig. 5 Jovert Aguilar, *The Fake Matrimony*, oil on canvas, 2x3 ft. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.

Fig. 6 Antipas Delotavo, *Kolateral*, 2010, oil on canvas, 60x48 in. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.

But if there is anything that history teaches us, it is that Filipino artists refuse to remain passive amidst censorship, poor governance, and social injustice.



Fig. 6

¹⁰ Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*, 17-23.
¹¹ Dennis Espada, “Destabilizing’ Artists,” *Bulatlat* 4, No. 14 (May 14-20, 2006), last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/news/6-14/6-14-destabilizing.htm>.
¹² Ronalyn Olea, “Police, soldiers dismantle parts of photo exhibit about Bonifacio,” *Bulatlat*, November 30, 2013, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/11/30/police-soldiers-dismantle-parts-of-photo-exhibit-about-bonifacio>.

ARTISTS' ALLIANCES

The practice of convening broad artists' alliances around urgent issues of the day is another lesson learned from the anti-dictatorship struggle. An example is the Free the Artist Movement (1983), which began as a protest against censorship under Martial Law and led to the founding of Concerned Artists of the Philippines.

The past five years saw more issue-based and multi-disciplinary artist alliances being formed to express solidarity on specific advocacies. During the Arroyo administration, Artists for Peace (2001) and Tutok Karapatan or TutoK (2005) condemned the government's support for the US invasion of Afghanistan, and the extrajudicial killings and deteriorating human rights situation, respectively. TutoK gathered broad support from over 200 Filipino artists and mounted a series of exhibitions titled *Perspektiba* (Perspective).

During the Aquino administration, several artists' alliances were convened in response to human rights issues. In 2011, Artists' ARREST and Palayain ang Sining (Set Art Free), an alliance of artists and civil rights defenders, took a stand against the premature closure of *Kulo*, decrying the persecution of creative expression.¹³

Artists supported the "Free Ericson Acosta" campaign when poet and peasant rights advocate Ericson Acosta was detained by the Philippine Army in Samar from February 13, 2011 to February 5, 2013.¹⁴

Their emergence also reflects the crisis of governance. In 2013, Artista Kontra Korapsyon or Artists Against Corruption (AKKSYON) was convened to condemn the administration's use of "pork barrel" and other discretionary funds for government officials that could be used for patronage politics, graft, or corruption. Artists for Kidapawan (A4K) formed as a quick response to the state's violent dispersal of a rally in Kidapawan, North Cotabato on April 1, 2016, which was led by thousands of farmers and indigenous peoples asking for rice aid to tide over the spell of drought, and had left three people dead and over 100 wounded.¹⁵ This grew into the Sama-samang Artista para sa Kilusang Agraryo (SAKA) in June 2017.

The rise in extrajudicial killings of suspected drug addicts under the Duterte Administration since 2016 prompted artists, and cultural and media workers to convene Respond and Break the Silence Against the Killings (RESBAK) in January 2017. Finally, Artists for Peace was reconvened in February 2017 to support calls for the resumption of peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front (NDF).



Fig. 7

Jose Tence Ruiz (in collaboration with Danilo Ilag-Ilag and Jeremy Guiab et al.), *Shoal*, 2015, installation. Photo by Andrea D'Altoe.

¹³ Ina Alleco R. Silverio, "Artists decry censorship, repression as CCP yields to pressure" *Bulatlat*, August 10, 2011, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2011/08/10/artists-decry-censorship-repression-as-ccp-yields-to-pressure>.

¹⁴ Ronalyn Olea, "UP artists reiterate call for release of Ericson Acosta," *Bulatlat*, February 11 2012, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2012/02/11/up-artists-reiterate-call-for-release-of-ericson-acosta-2>; "DOJ drops charges against political prisoner Ericson Acosta," *Bulatlat*, February 1, 2013, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/02/01/doj-drops-charges-against-political-prisoner-ericson-acosta>.

¹⁵ Ronalyn Olea, "Artists vow to continue solidarity with drought-stricken farmers," *Bulatlat*, May 3 2016, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2016/05/03/artists-vow-to-continue-solidarity-with-drought-stricken-farmers>.

¹⁶ Jose Maria Sison, "Revolutionary Literature and Art in the Philippines from the 1960s to the Present," last modified March 2017, <https://josemariasison.org/revolutionary-literature-and-art-in-the-philippines-from-the-1960s-to-the-present>.

¹⁷ Aldwin Quitasol, "Art not just for art's sake, a challenge to cultural workers." *Northern Dispatch*, as republished in *Bulatlat*, August 12, 2013, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/08/12/art-not-just-for-arts-sake-a-challenge-to-cultural-workers>.

ACROSS GENERATIONS OF ARTIST-ACTIVISTS

Individuals, working alone or in collaboration with organizations, expanded the range of socially-engaged art with their respective practices, themes, and concerns. Many from the earlier generation of Social Realists, such as Antipas Delotavo, Pablo Baen Santos, Orlando Castillo, Leonilo Doloricon, Edgar Talusan Fernandez, Renato Habulan, Nunelucio Alvarado, Federico BoyD Dominguez, Rey Paz Contreras, and those who emerged from the 1980s to mid-1990s, such as Emmanuel Garibay, Mark Justiniani, Karen Flores, and Elmer Borlongan, remain active in the art scene through exhibitions and projects. Jose Tence Ruiz's metal and velvet installation, *Shoal*, was among the works in the Philippine Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, the country's second time to participate since 1964. Others have passed away, including Papo de Asis in 1995, Jerusalino Araos in 2012, and Gilbert Torres in 2016.

The generation yielded by the political struggles of the mid-1990s to 2010 includes Mideo Cruz, Iggy Rodriguez, Renan Ortiz, Buen Calubayan, Leslie de Chavez, Rowena Bayon, Jef Carnay, Buen Abrigo, Frances Abrigo, Kiri Dalena, Manolo Sicat, Cian Dayrit, Racquel de Loyola, Teta Tulay, Mervin Pimentel, Aldrein Silanga, Cristanto de Leon, Archie Oculos, and many more. Some, such as Antares Gomez Bartolome, J. Pacena, and Con Cabrera, are also involved in curatorial practice.

Alongside the artist-activist collectives united by shared political ideals and the sense of collectivism they helped propagate are formations dedicated to specific practices, such as film, sound art, street art, shadow play, multimedia art, murals, and alternative publications. Examples are the Rizal-based Neo-Angono Artist Collective (2004), Pilipinas Street Plan (2006), Ang Gerilya (2008), Windang Army Labor Aesthetics or WALA (2014), and TALA Photo Collective (2015). Several are involved in supporting campaigns, issues, and advocacies of the mass movement.

Revolutionary art in the cities and the countryside also yielded significant works, according to NDF consultant Jose Maria Sison. Major projects include the illustrated *komiks* (comics) version of Amado Guerrero's landmark text, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, in 1981 and 1998.¹⁶ Artists that joined the ranks of the New People's Army (NPA) include Parts Bagani of Mindanao, Leyla Batang, and the late Artus Talastas. Their works appear in underground publications, such as *Ulos*. Several were shown publicly, such as Bagani's exhibit at the UP Faculty Center (2007) at University of the Philippines, Diliman and Talastas' posthumous exhibit, *DeKalibre*, at University of the Philippines, Baguio (2007).¹⁷

ART AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE

Another lesson learned is that five decades of political struggle helped bring the practice of activist art both within and beyond traditional avenues for exhibition, such as galleries, museums, and art fairs. Streets, public spaces, and communities of both the rural and urban poor are considered as vital channels for reaching the country's most marginalized sectors.

Sison recalls that the years under the Marcos regime yielded a rich repertoire of visual paraphernalia that could be deployed covertly, such as protest graffiti, *perydikits* (wall periodicals), and sticker-posters. The resurgence of the open mass movement and cultural groups in the cities in the early 1980s prior to EDSA I and Marcos' ouster produced many types of protest visuals, including masks, cartoons, graphic designs, placards, streamers, effigies, and large-scale murals.¹⁸

Many of these forms continue to be deployed as objects of disobedience. They are now disseminated and amplified to the public through digital technology and alternative or social media. The visual works that emerge from grassroots artist spaces and practice are encountered most often in what is described as the parliament of streets. Integrated with demonstrations and protest actions are creative and usually ephemeral forms of expression that chronicle the messages and struggles of the people.

The largest protest action of the year usually happens in July during the Philippine President's State of the Nation Address (SONA). The SONA delivered before Congress is countered by nationally-coordinated actions from grassroots organizations. These thousand-strong protests are showcases of visual protest through streamers, placards, outdoor photo exhibits, murals, headgear, and the like.

The themes of such works historically revolve around longstanding socio-economic issues and problems: the struggles of workers and peasants for jobs and land, the youth for education, and indigenous peoples for self-determination. Issues across sectors, such as human rights, environmental protection, gender and women's rights, and the need for peace and social justice are also represented. Other prominent subjects are graft and corruption in Philippine government and the state's subservience to the dictates and policies of nations, such as the United States.

EFFIGIES AS SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Effigies — paper-mâché sculptures paraded and burned during rallies — are a visual centerpiece of SONA rallies, and have been for nearly two decades. They serve as caricatures of the ruling classes and the state, represented by the president. The effigies made by UGATLahi with BAYAN since 1999 distill complex issues into symbols for people to remember, serving as barometers for the state of the nation.

The SONA rally effigies of President Aquino III reflected the discontent over the past six years. The first, *Noynoy Magician* (2010), was, contrary to tradition, not burned to challenge the newly-sworn in President to make real his magical promises of change.¹⁹ The people's frustration over the lack of change was conveyed when the same effigy was "recycled" and turned into an image of Aquino as a two-faced monster that engaged in "sweet-talk and the sell-out of the country" in *Phoy Two Face* (2012).²⁰

Other representations were of Aquino as a rotten egg²¹ in *Giant PeNoy* (2011), as a glutton feasting with the country's elite²² while the nation starves in *Pigging Out* (2013), as a thief or "hold-upper"²³ due to the controversial "pork barrel" and Disbursement Acceleration Program in *Aquino HoIDAPer* (2014), and as an ineffective leader comparable to the dilapidated Metro Rail Transit 3 train in *Noy on MRT* (2015).²⁴

Aquino was criticized by groups for welcoming US foreign economic policy and military exercises. The national labor federation Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement) collaborated with UGATLahi to portray Aquino as a 10-foot "US Pitbull" (2012)²⁵ and as a lapdog pulling a war chariot straddled by former US President Barack Obama (2014).²⁶

They also made effigies of him as the "Pork Barrel King" (2013) and the Grim Reaper (2015).²⁷ When President Duterte pushed for the controversial burial of Ferdinand Marcos in the Libingan ng mga Bayani, UGATLahi and human rights group KARAPATAN made a horned effigy of Marcos for the 44th Martial Law anniversary protest (2016). Other cultural organizations based in NCR, Southern Tagalog, and Southern Mindanao also produce effigies for their respective actions.



Fig. 8

Effigies — paper-mâché sculptures paraded and burned during rallies — are a visual centerpiece of SONA rallies, and have been for nearly two decades.

Fig. 8 Effigy of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as Hitler, 2006.

Fig. 9 Effigy of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, 2009.

Fig. 10 Phoy TwoFace, 2012.



Fig. 9

¹⁸ Sison, "Revolutionary Literature and Art in the Philippines."

¹⁹ Jerrie Abella, "First in 9 Years: No effigy burned during SONA," *GMA News Online*, July 2010.

²⁰ Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, "Two-faced effigy to mark PNoy's 3rd SONA," news release, *Bayan*, July 20, 2012, <http://www.bayan.ph>.

²¹ Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, "Artists to parade Giant PeNoy for PNoy's 2nd SONA," news release, *Bayan*, July 24, 2011, <http://www.bayan.ph>.

²² Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, "#SONA2013 effigy: Find out who's 'pigging out' with Noynoy as the nation goes hungry," news release, *Bayan*, July 18, 2016, <http://www.bayan.ph>.

²³ Anne Ednalyn Dela Cruz, "Artists channel protest through music, poetry, and art," *Bulatlat*, August 1, 2014, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/08/01/artists-channel-protest-through-music-poetry-and-art>.

²⁴ Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, "Protest effigy: Aquino and the MRT," news release, *Bayan*, July 25, 2015, last modified March 2017, <http://www.bayan.ph/2015/07/25/protest-effigy-aquino-and-the-mrt>.

²⁵ Marya Salamat, "On Labor Day, workers take Aquino to task for pushing working people deeper into poverty," *Bulatlat*, May 2, 2012, <http://www.bulatlat.com>.

²⁶ Marya Salamat, "Unwelcoming Obama: Protests set to hound US President's state visit," *Bulatlat*, April 26, 2014, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/04/26/unwelcoming-obama-protests-set-to-hound-us-presidents-state-visit>; "Laughter, hoots at Obama-Noy effigy escort its journey to Mendiola" *Bulatlat*, May 1, 2014, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/05/01/laughter-hoots-at-obama-noy-effigy-escort-its-journey-to-mendiola>.

²⁷ Chantal Eco, "Top 15 Sining Biswal na Nagsalarawan ng Pakikibaka ng Mamamayan," *Manila Today*, January 4, 2016, last modified March 2017, <http://www.manilatoday.net/top-15-sining-biswal-na-nagsalarawan-ng-pakikibaka-ng-mamamayan>.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

MURALS FOR THE WALLS AND FOR THE STREETS

Murals are paintings or works directly executed on walls. The recent interest in graffiti, street art, and murals over the past decade proved to also be a channel for activism. Groups like Ang Gerilya (The Guerilla) helped popularize murals with progressive or nationalist content, such as their mural at the PHILCOA (Philippine Coconut Authority) overpass depicting 19th-century revolutionary leader Andres Bonifacio and the Katipunan (2012).

Murals helped amplify the calls of grassroots organizations, such as the Manilakbayan ng Mindanao (Manilakbayan of Mindanao) led by leaders of indigenous peoples, Moros, religious sectors, and farmers in Mindanao since 2012. As a form of protest, the *Lakbayan* (Journey) from the periphery to centers of political power dates back to the 1980s: a march of hundreds to bring the voices of the rural marginalized to be heard in the cities. In 2015, the calls to stop militarization and human rights violations in the lands of the Lumad indigenous peoples was portrayed in murals by Ang Gerilya, Artists Circle, and Sim Tolentino.

Street murals – large paintings on canvas, cloth, or plywood, which serve as streamers or backdrops for demonstrations – are a mobile form of art for the moving crowds popularized by ABAY and other groups in the mid-1980s. This tradition continues through works, such as the send-off mural for President Arroyo's nine years by

UGATLahi, CAP, and KARATULA over the Mendiola footbridge (2010); AKKSYON's satirical *Spoliarium* in the Luneta Park rally against pork barrel (2013); the SONA rally murals by Buen Abrigo and Sining Bugkos covering the Ever Gotesco Commonwealth footbridge (2013); and the mural for the Mendiola massacre anniversary protest in January 2017.²⁸

The street mural became the SONA's visual centerpiece for the first time in 2016, when BAYAN commissioned the large-scale *Portraits of Peace* to portray the "People's Agenda for Change" addressed to incoming President Duterte. Its six panels portrayed the themes of national industrialization, land reform and agricultural development, progressive social policy, sovereignty, human rights and peace, and people's governance. The mural was a collaboration between a composite team of artists from Sining Bugkos, KARATULA, Tambisan sa Sining, UGATLahi Artists Collective, and Sining Kadamay.²⁹

EXHIBITIONS, PUBLIC ART, AND INSTALLATION

Artists continued to engage with art spaces as avenues for exploring questions about political struggle. Venues like the Jorge B. Vargas Museum and the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) were open to group exhibitions on themes related to activism. At the Vargas Museum, the

worker-peasant connection was drawn through the shows, *Kapital: Tribute to Labor* (2010) and *Lupa: Tribute to Land* (2013), which delved into conditions fueling current labor and agrarian unrest, respectively. The polar sites of struggle and power, from the parliament of the streets to the very seats of power in Malacañang Palace, were explored in the exhibitions, *Signs of the Times: The Placard Project* (2011) and *The President's Office* (2013).

At the CCP, the need to remember the dark times of the Marcos dictatorship was expressed through exhibitions, such as *ReCollection 1081: Clear and Present Danger (Visual Dissent on Martial Rule)* by the Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development (CANVAS) in 2012. The challenge of remembering the injustice of the past through public art is addressed by sculptor Toym Imao, who had created sculptures and installations in 2014 and 2015 responding to human rights violations under Martial Law violations, which were displayed at the UP Palma Hall steps and the Bantayog ng mga Bayani.

These acts of remembering extended to commemorating the lives of progressive or revolutionary artists and Filipinos. The exhibit *Artista ng Bayan* (People's Artists) at Sining Kamalig in 2010 paid tribute to 12 departed artists³⁰ that "used their art in their struggle for a better society"³¹ while several 2015 exhibits for

Bonifacio@150 celebrated the life of Andres Bonifacio, who formed the Katipunan that led the armed resistance against Spain from 1896 to 1898.³²

Exhibits also channeled artists' solidarity and protest over the increasing number of activists being unjustly arrested and detained. The arrest, torture, and detention of 43 health workers in Morong, Rizal in 2010 was explored in roving shows, such as *Fact Sheet 43* and *Lunas (Solution)*.³³ KARAPATAN organized artists to portray the faces of political detainees, estimated at around 543 as of 2016, in the exhibit, *Portrayal* (2015). In 2016, their exhibit, *Sa Timyas ng Paglaya*, showcased crafts and artworks by 16 political detainees, including Alan Jazmines, Eduardo Sarmiento, Voltaire Guray, and Juan Paolo Versoza.

The potential of public art to convey the state of agrarian unrest and human rights was demonstrated through open exhibits at public sites of struggle. Ten years after the Hacienda Luisita massacre on November 16, 2004, advocates led by Luisita Watch and the Unyon ng Manggagawang Agrikultura (Union of Agricultural Workers) staged a commemorative protest march and transformed the walls of Central Azucarera de Tarlac's Gate 1 – fronting the site of the massacre – into an open art gallery through an outdoor exhibition of graffiti, poetry, slogans, wheatpaste murals, photograph reproductions, and installation art by Salvador Alonday, Buen Abrigo, Frances Abrigo, Jez Aznar, and Leeroy New, among others. Curated by Antares Gomez Bartolome, the wall works were destroyed and whitewashed hours later by security personnel.³⁴

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²⁸ Janess Ann J. Ellao, "Artists Unite, Bid Goodbye to Arroyo," *Bulatlat*, July 3, 2010, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2010/07/03/artists-unite-bid-goodbye-to-arroyo>.

²⁹ Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, "From effigy to mural: art for change," news release, *Bayan*, July 22, 2016, last modified March 2017, <http://www.bayan.ph/2016/07/22/from-effigy-to-mural-art-for-change>.

³⁰ Ronalyn Olea, "12 People's Artists Honored in Exhibit," *Bulatlat*, October 30, 2010, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2010/10/30/12-people%E2%80%99s-artists-honored-in-exhibit>.

³¹ These were National Artist Amado V. Hernandez, Carlos Bulosan, Ma. Lorena Barros, Emmanuel Lacaba, Romulo Sandoval, Adeline de Leon, Monico Atienza, Leo Rimando, Papo de Asis, Racquel Aumentado, and Alexander Martin Remollino.

³² Marya Salamat, "Celebrating Bonifacio150 with protests," *Bulatlat*, November 29, 2013, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2013/11/29/celebrating-bonifacio150-with-protests>.

³³ Anne Marxze Umil, "Artworks of Protest Against the Sufferings of the 43 Health Workers," *Bulatlat*, July 3, 2010, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2010/07/03/artworks-of-protest-against-the-sufferings-of-the-43-health-workers>.

³⁴ Marijoe Monumento, "#HLMX | Leeroy New et al, "whitewashed" in Hacienda Luisita" *Manila Today*, December 5, 2014, last modified March 2017, <http://www.manilatoday.net/hlmx-leeroy-new-et-al-whitewashed-in-hacienda-luisita>.



Fig. 17

Fig. 11-16 Portraits for Peace. Courtesy of Efren Ricalde.

Fig. 17 Renato Habulan, *Banaag ng Liwanag*, 2010, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.Fig. 18 Pablo Baen Santos, *Labor and Monkey Business*, 2010, oil on canvas, 6 x 7 ft. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.

PORTRAITURE

Portraiture and comics were also a means to pay tribute to Filipino activists and revolutionaries. *Louie Jalandoni, Revolutionary: An Illustrated Biography* (2015) explores the form of the graphic novel in this account of Jalandoni's transformation from clergy from a landed Negros clan to a revolutionary and current head of the National Democratic Front's negotiating panel.

As the civil war between the Philippine government and the communist forces yields more casualties, portraiture becomes a means to memorialize the faces and lives of those fighting in the frontlines. Marches and works, including a large-scale portrait by Aldrein Silanga, honored the death of NPA commander Leoncio "Ka Parago" Pitao on June 28, 2015.³⁸ The wake of a rebel and writer Wendell Mollenido Gumban, killed in an encounter two days before Duterte announced a unilateral ceasefire in 2016, was adorned with a portrait by Tambisan sa Sining.³⁹

These are several of the many rich forms and practices that collectives, alliances, and individuals have employed over the past years — practices expanding an already a long tradition of protest art in the Philippines.

The challenge to continuously document and reflect on the significance of these initiatives to the present crises, especially in the regions, persists yet is possible given that we are living in an increasingly interconnected milieu. These initial notes on a new season of discontent in the Philippines hopes to contribute to a still unfolding story of how art and activism assume a critical role in capturing and articulating the political imagination of the people. ■

PERFORMANCE ART

Performance art in the streets was one way for artists to underscore the need for government accountability in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in 2013, one of the strongest typhoons to hit the Philippines in recent decades, affecting around 11 million people from the Visayas. Groups commemorated the first anniversary of the disaster through a series of synchronized performances titled *Kalig-on* (a Bisaya term for strength or determination), including "Taong Putik" (mud people) walks and street plays led by Sining Bugkos, TINDOG People's Network, Boyet de Mesa, and Nicolas Aca, among others. These were held in public areas and schools across eight cities between October 2014 and the papal visit of Pope Francis in January 2015, helping generate media attention.³⁵

CARTOONING

Political cartoonists employ caricature to issue scathing commentary on current events and personalities, pursuing a tradition of satire in Philippine graphic arts dating back to the early 1900s.³⁶ Renan Ortiz's regular *Salungguhit* cartoons appearing in the alternative online magazine *Bulatlat* is an example of this. The power of comic strips for humorous commentary on daily life can be seen in Manix Abrera's *Kikomachine*.³⁷



Fig. 18

³⁵ Dennis Carcamo, "Performing artists to do 'mud walk' for Pope," *Philippine Star*, January 15, 2015, last modified March 2017, <http://www.philstar.com/nation/2015/01/15/1413182/performing-artists-do-mud-walk-pope>; David Lozada, "Mud Walk: Pope Francis asked to fight for Yolanda victims," *Rappler*, January 15, 2015, last modified, <http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/80875-mud-walk-pope-francis-fight-yolanda-victims>.

³⁶ John A. Lent, *The First One Hundred Years of Philippine Komiks and Cartoons* (Tagaytay City: Yonzon Associated, 2009).

³⁷ Dee Ayroso, "Ph, EU cartoonists find humor despite violence, life risks, censorship," *Bulatlat*, May 12, 2015, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2015/05/12/ph-eu-cartoonists-find-humor-despite-violence-life-risks-censorship>.

³⁸ Chantal Eco, "Top 15 Sining Biswal na Nagsalarawan ng Pakikibaka ng Mamamayan," *Manila Today*, January 4, 2016, last modified March 2017, <http://www.manilatoday.net/top-15-sining-biswal-na-nagsalarawan-ng-pakikibaka-ng-mamamayan>.

³⁹ Marya Salamat, "A hero called Wanda," *Bulatlat*, August 8, 2016, last modified March 2017, <http://bulatlat.com/main/2016/08/08/a-tribute-to-wendell>.



Fig. 1

International art festivals have proliferated in Asia over the past 20 years in an effort to introduce contemporary artworks from different countries to local audiences. Often led by government initiatives, these so-called biennales/triennales are employed as a strategy to encourage cultural tourism, drive commerce, and promote the status of a global city. Leading international curators are invited to present fresh perspectives and contribute to international discourse while engaging the interest of the local public.

Festivals of contemporary art in the Philippines challenge the typical organizational scheme of art festivals by presenting alternative approaches. Often initiated autonomously by artists, Philippine art festivals extend beyond the simple but essential need to converge,

interact, and experiment together – they become a process through which new works develop, and the roles and positions of artist, curator, and audience shuffle organically.

Attendees accustomed to methodically curated exhibitions might feel surprised by the constant changes and the close interpersonal networks that characterize these artist-run festivals. But it is this *bahala na* (whatever happens) Filipino spirit that allows space for trial and error, unknowns, and constant innovations of artistic expressions. Despite the limited financial resources of these festivals, artists from other parts of the Philippines and other countries make pilgrimages and congregate with the desire to witness, experience, and take part in the artist-run phenomenon.

CONTACT POINTS

Soon after the People Power Revolution in 1986, two legendary artist groups – Baguio Arts Guild and Black Artists of Asia – were founded, and they initiated independent art festivals that have since transformed the contemporary art scene in the Philippines.

When prominent visual artists Santiago Bose and Benedicto Cabrera (known as BenCab), among others, returned to the Philippines after years of living abroad, they settled in Baguio, a mountain city in Northern Luzon, where Bose was born and raised. Upon returning home, Bose recalled the sense of mistrust among Filipinos after the Marcos dictatorship and urged people to form organizations that strengthened a sense of community and solidarity.¹

Baguio-based artists likewise recognized the need for empowerment, and the Baguio Arts Guild was established in 1987 by Bose, BenCab, filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik, and sculptor Roberto Villanueva. The creative community grew rapidly beyond the boundaries of the city, and “powered the biggest, unprecedented meeting of artistic minds ever, the Baguio Arts Festival (BAF).”² BAF used art as a platform to tackle issues of rapid modernization in Baguio, which impacted the environment and the cultural values passed down by the indigenous peoples in the Cordillera mountains. Artist and line producer Rica Concepcion, who witnessed and documented every edition of BAF with her partner, the late Egay Navarro, since the very beginning, shared her memory from the early editions: “I remember almost not sleeping because of so many activities all day, all night long. In the beginning the festival was less organized, but the artworks were more intense and wild. The works had statements. It was not just like to perform or shock people, but there was a story behind the work.”³ Baguio became an energy field that created “the pressure off the center.”⁴

Around the same time in Bacolod City in the Central Visayas, Black Artists of Asia (BAA) was formed in 1986 by socially conscious Bacolod artists, such as Nunelucio Alvarado, Charlie Co, Norberto Roldan, Dennis Ascalon, and Lilibeth La’O, who had been rallying together since the time of Martial Law. Together, they launched a festival called Visayas Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference (VIVA ExCon) in 1990. “With the Baguio artists, we shared the advocacy of holding festivals rooted in the local communities,” said founding member Norberto Roldan.⁵ “It was about organizing ourselves, and asserting our presence in the region in parallel to what was happening in Manila, the sole art center.” Structured around two pillars of exhibitions and a conference, the first VIVA ExCon in Bacolod gathered 48 artists from Bacolod, Cebu, Iloilo, Dumaguete, and Baguio. “As it turned out, VIVA answered such a hunger

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Fig. 1 Pages from the exhibition catalogue of Lake Naguri Open Air Exhibition, 1992. Published by the Executive Committee of Lake Naguri Open Air Exhibition (Feb, 1993), Saitama-ken, Japan. Courtesy of Mayumi Hirano

Fig. 2 Photo of Santiago Bose from the Bose Family Collection. Courtesy of Tin-aw Art Management, Inc.

Fig. 3 Tatsuo Inagaki, *Found Objects in Bacolod*, VIVA ExCon 1992. Installed at Bacolod Public Plaza. Photo by Tatsuo Inagaki. Courtesy of Mayumi Hirano.

Fig. 4 Live painting installation at VIVA ExCon 2014. Photo by Meds Medina.

Fig. 5 Photo of Benedicto “BenCab” Cabrera. Courtesy of the BenCab Museum.

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Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 5



Fig. 4

Despite the limited financial resources of these festivals, artists from other parts of the Philippines and other countries make pilgrimages and congregate with the desire to witness, experience, and take part in the artist-run phenomenon.

for exchange, the biennial meetings became more of a conference than exhibits,” Roldan said.⁶ Since then, VIVA ExCon has been held every two years, hosted by different cities within the region, and is considered to be the oldest artist-run festival in the country still operating today.

While in different locales, these two festivals happened simultaneously and were motivated by the urge to address specific social and political contexts of the regions, and also of the nation. Instead of following the trends of the West, artists found the need to “look inwards” in order to create contemporary art truthful to one’s roots and environment; attention was directed to the use of local and indigenous materials, and forms based on local traditions and current situations.”⁷ While these artistic experiments were deeply intertwined with the social and political fabric of post-Marcos Philippines, both festivals attracted a number of international participants. The second VIVA ExCon in 1992 entitled “Art and the Indigenous Elements” welcomed nine artists from Japan, and the fourth BAF entitled “Cross currents (Salubungang Agos)” in 1993 welcomed 46 artists

from Japan, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, the United States, and England.

After VIVA ExCon 1992, some Filipino artists, including Lilibeth La’O, Kidlat Tahimik, Charlie Co, Dennis Ascalon, Norberto Roldan, Roberto Villanueva, and Santiago Bose,⁸ were invited to join the annual Lake Naguri Open Air Art Exhibition in Saitama, Japan (est. 1990) later that year, and some Japanese artists went back to BAF the following year. Mutual hospitality was a significant element in continuing international exchanges for these independent art festivals with a limited budget, as Charlie Co remembered.⁹ The festivals provided mutual support for adventurous collaborations dealing with site-specific, ephemeral art and improvisation. An example is Roberto Villanueva’s site-specific installation work in the small mountain village of Naguri, Japan. He constructed a 25-meter bamboo bridge in collaboration with local Japanese artists and residents. It generated a “revelation and a revolution of consciousness...about an opportunity to make a systematic turnabout in worldviews.”¹⁰ Artistic experimentations with

unique temporality and space opened up new methods in creating artworks for young artists at the time. For instance, Japanese artist Tatsuo Inagaki, who participated in VIVA ExCon 1992 and BAF 1993, recognized the crucial influence of these festivals on his artistic practice that explores possibilities of “communication, fieldwork, and anthropological approach.”¹¹

BAF lost its magnetic energy after the sudden loss of Villanueva in 1995 and eventually closed after the passing away of Bose in 2002. After 1993, VIVA ExCon restructured to focus on strengthening its inter-island networks throughout the Visayas region. In 2014, under the direction of artist Manny Montelibano, VIVA ExCon resumed international artists’ participation, marking the start of ongoing exchanges with artists from Korea. After the Iloilo edition in 2016, the next VIVA ExCon will be held in Roxas City, Capiz in 2018, under the direction of Norberto Roldan. Its main goal is to continue deepening intercultural dialogues and to galvanize the diverse artistic communities in the Visayas.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

As a living organism,
festivals evolve and proliferate through
time, challenging the notion of static
self-identity through collective process.

Joseph Inking, *Barrelata* (left) and *Spill* (right), tarpaulin print, 2014. Installed at VIVA ExCon 2014. Photo by Meds Medina.

Fig. 7 Opening night performance at VIVA ExCon 2014. Photo by Meds Medina.

Charlie Co (left), 2014 VIVA ExCon Festival Organizer, artist, and owner of Gallery Orange, pictured with Manny Montelibano, 2014 VIVA ExCon Festival Director and artist. Photo by Meds Medina.

Pages from the exhibition catalogue of Lake Naguri Open Air Exhibition, 1992. Published by the Executive Committee of Lake Naguri Open Air Exhibition (Feb, 1993), Saitama-ken, Japan.



Fig. 8

Often initiated autonomously by artists, Philippine art festivals extend beyond the simple but essential need to converge, interact, and experiment together—they become a process through which new works develop, and the roles and positions of artist, curator, and audience shuffle organically.



Fig. 9

EXTENDING THE FLOW

Today's globalized world has given rise to new generations of festivals. Here, the gravity is found in Manila, where the uncontrolled invasion of capitalist economy is speeding up the hybridism of both the local and the global.

Sipat Lawin Ensemble — a site-specific, independent performance company — approaches this present construct of the world as their stage by challenging traditional theater concepts, roles, and spaces. Started as a loose structure of performers and crew, Sipat Lawin Ensemble was officially incorporated in 2010, and today the company is composed of artistic director JK Anicoche with six core members — Alon Segarra, Adrienne Vergara, Sarah Salazar-Aronson, Meila Romero-Payawal, Ness Roque-Lumbres, and Claudia Enriquez. Its aim is to create theatrical works that explore new strategies, ideas, and relationships to break down the notion of theatre into three basic elements — actor, act, and audience — and performing out in the real world. Having no fixed stage, their works blur the boundaries between calculation and improvisation, acting and responding, and fiction and reality — even letting audiences determine the story by designing pieces as open source performances online.

Since 2013, Sipat Lawin Ensemble has been organizing the Karnabal Festival. “There were so many festivals in the Philippines,” said Artistic Director JK Anicoche.¹² “But our works and performance did not fit in any existing festivals or any paradigms.” Sipat Lawin Ensemble exercises new forms of performance to shift the mindset and attitude of working for community to working with community. “Even TV programs are doing interactive work with audiences in the street. It's the rise of ‘show time,’ so there is a need not only for new expressions but also for discussions, a need for a festival or space where we can be together. It's that simple.” Presentations, discussions, and mentorships make up this “development” festival, which is structured to take place every three years. It differs from the so-called triennale because it emphasizes the time span of three years as one cycle to encourage participating artists to develop multiple perspectives and evolve their work over that course of time. Throughout the process, supportive groups are formed so that artists can also become each other's audience. “Someone is thinking about your work somewhere else, that's the kind of solidarity we create,” said Anicoche.

Overseas artists, as the part of an exchange program with the Karnabal Festival, are also given the three-year time frame to develop their projects. This requires a significant degree of commitment, unlike with most international festivals, which are fly-in-and-out engagements. Sharing his experience with Karnabal, Japanese artist Riki Takeda, who has been participating since 2015, said, “It's rare to let artists spend three years to develop a project. I don't know any other festivals of this kind in Japan or even in Europe. Also, the local artists are willing to help out. We talk serious and stupid things, and I appreciate this kind of environment.”¹³ By focusing on the concept of collectivity, Karnabal challenges the existing discourse of community that “implies a boundary between inside and outside, which implies inclusion and exclusion”¹⁴ in its future-oriented perspective. Karnabal is concluding the three-year program in 2017 and will be reborn as a new festival in 2019 in an ongoing endeavor to further innovation, deepen connections, and become more socially and politically engaged.

A newer example, WSK: The Festival of the Recently Possible, has created a “living laboratory” to experiment, innovate, and renew multiple expressions of sound, media, and technology-based art.¹⁵ Organized by Sabaw Media Art Kitchen, an artist collective formed in 2006, it originally began as a two-day experimental festival in 2008. The festival's title is derived from the abbreviation of *wasak*, a Tagalog word meaning “shattered or splintered,” suggesting its intention to break away from fixed categorizations of visual art, music, technology, and engineering. Though it has a conventional platform of showcases, including live stages of experimental music and exhibitions of artworks, the festival focuses on creating workshops to share ideas, mutually learn, collaborate, experiment, and improvise.

Participating artists from the Philippines and abroad live

together under the same roof for up to two weeks prior to the festival. During the time, project plans can change organically. “It's not just an event, but we make friends and get to know each other. It's more of an exchange, it's not a typical biennale type, it's not just to show and then you don't know the person. It's more homey,” said Tengal Drilon, director of the festival.¹⁶ This self-organization has led to collaborations and dialogues that inspire new networks with art and cultural institutions, independent organizations, and local artist communities. Though Drilon describes WSK as “not a super huge festival,” it successfully inspires and connects creative and playful minds, and also explores the potential of expanding existing spaces, radiating dynamic energy throughout the city.

Formed from personal networks, WSK is planning to restructure itself as a biannual festival with smaller gatherings in between and to partner with similar festivals in Southeast Asia and beyond to form new cultural alliances.

CROSSING CURRENTS

As a living organism, festivals evolve and proliferate through time, challenging the notion of static self-identity through collective process. In the Philippines, the Baguio Arts Festival, VIVA ExCon, Karnabal, and WSK are examples of innovation and partnership, acting as a bridge to explore innovative artist initiatives and new possibilities within the local and the global arena. Friedrich Nietzsche said, “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal.” These Philippine art festivals build bridges without knowing a final destination, prioritize process over output, and give way to diverse, fresh perspectives that defy neat categorization, allowing artists to develop and create new and exciting possibilities. ■

¹ Jonathan Best, “Excerpts from An Interview with Santi Bose,” in *Espirito Santi: The Strange Life and Even Stranger Legacy of Santiago Bose* (Makati City: Water Dragon Inc., 2004) PP. 42-56.

² Gemma Luz Corotan, “In the Mountains. Art thrives,” in *Sunday Standard* (December 3, 1989), 2-3.

³ From an interview by the author in Quezon City, February 2017

⁴ Dave Barradas quoted in Corotan's article in *Sunday Standard* (December 3, 1989), 2-3.

⁵ From an interview by the author with Norberto Roldan in Quezon City, February 2017.

⁶ M.A. Cecilia Locsin Nava, “Viva Story” in *VIVA ExCon 1990-1996: The Contemporary Visual Arts Movement in the Visayas* (Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 1998), 3-8.

⁷ Georgina Luisa Olivares Jocson, “The Impact of Black Artists in Asia on the Contemporary Art of Negros Occidental and the Visayas Region, and on a Wider Scale, the Contemporary Art Narrative of the Philippines” (master's thesis, LASALLE College of the Arts, 2012), 27.

⁸ *Lake Naguri Open Air Art Exhibition '92 Japan*. Naguri-mura: Executive Committee of Lake Naguri Open Air Art Exhibition, 1993. Exhibition catalogue.

⁹ From a group conversation in Makati City, February 19, 2017.

¹⁰ Nobuo Yamagishi, “Fleeting Impressions From the Open-Air Art Exhibition in Naguri” in the exhibition catalogue *Lake Naguri Open Air Art Exhibition '92 Japan*, (Naguri-mura: Executive Committee of Lake Naguri Open Air Art Exhibition, 1993), 104-109.

¹¹ From an email exchange with the author in February 2017.

¹² From an interview by the author, Quezon City, January 2017

¹³ From an interview by the author, Quezon City, January 2017

¹⁴ Tim Morton, *Thinking Ecology: The Mesh, the Strange Stranger, and the Beautiful Soul*, accessed February 21, 2017, 278, https://www.academia.edu/934516/Thinking_Ecology_The_Mesh_the_Strange_Stranger_and_the_Beautiful_Soul

¹⁵ As curator Dayang Yraola brings to awareness, the definition of the term in the Philippine context is a subject of ongoing discussions, https://www.academia.edu/11627317/Trailing_A_Survey_of_New_Media_Art_Practice_in_the_Philippines

¹⁶ From an interview by the author, Makati City, January 2017.

words by
MARIKA CONSTANTINO



Fig. 1

Artist-led initiatives, artist-run spaces, and artist-managed projects are intrinsic in the ecosystem of Philippine contemporary art practice. Due to its temporal nature, they are often overlooked in favor of studio-based practices, curated exhibitions at museums and art galleries, and in a global art market that places high value on auction and commercial sales. Prevailing norms with traditional gallery and institutional models have led Filipino artists to seek or create non-commercial avenues to put their ideas to the test, prioritizing creativity, community, and collaboration over financial gain.

I have been part of 98B COLLABoratory (98B) – an artist-run initiative and space in Manila, Philippines – since it was founded by artist Mark Salvatus and curator/researcher Mayumi Hirano in 2012. Because of my work directing programs for 98B, my interest in the subject matter stems primarily from pragmatic reasons, but as an independent artist and curator, I'm also interested in the context and application of artist-led initiatives within Philippine art history.

Throughout the five years of 98B's existence, we have worked with a number of local and international artists,

curators, and other creative groups and individuals to build a platform for critical discourse, experimentation, exchange, information, and presentation of contemporary art in the Philippines. We are just one of several artist-run initiatives and spaces that have sprouted in Manila over the past four decades, and our operations have been enriched by the experiences and practices of those that came before us, specifically from artist-run spaces (ARS) that emerged in the 1990s like Big Sky Mind, Future Prospects, Green Papaya Art Projects, Surrounded By Water, and Third Space, which provided venues for experimental, interdisciplinary, and conceptual art.¹

These alternative settings, distinct from what is perceived as “popular” or “conventional,” were essential in the robust development of new possibilities in Philippine contemporary art over the past few decades. ARS had provided fertile ground for the continuous appraisal and consideration of contemporary aesthetics, materials, disciplines, praxis, theories, and relationships independent of commercial and institutional control or influence.

It's less about art than it is about being artists and being human again — and questioning what that means in our current context.

DEFINING WHAT WE DO

Ringo Bunoan – artist, curator, and founder of Big Sky Mind (BSM) – defines ARS as, “Run by artists, non-commercial in nature, and within a physical space.” Lena Cobangbang – artist, curator, and founding member of Surrounded by Water – adds, “Such spaces act as learning centers, where ideas, concepts, problem-solving solutions, and skillsets are shared. Hence, it can be expanded into an artist community apart from being just a hub or lab. In that sense, it is primarily not-for-profit.”

Norberto Roldan – artist and co-founder of Green Papaya Art Projects – contributes his perspective on the definition and evolution of ARS since the 1990s, “...which has evolved over the last 17 years since we started. Today, an artist-run space is about building and sustaining an artists' community. To further it, rather than brandishing independence, we should harness interdependency with other like-minded initiatives.”

Bunoan recounts how merely having a physical space to show works was of primary importance in the beginning because “young artists were not being shown by the prominent galleries at that time. Alternative spaces were needed to meet and congregate. Hence, the physical space is very important for discussions and sharing.”

RESPONDING TO THE CONTEMPORARY ART MARKET

Since the 1990s, ARS have had to adapt to the changes and demands of the contemporary art market, which in recent years have centered on “art fairs, museums pandering to collectors' whims, schools not having a conducive environment for discourse,” says Cobangbang. Collective and community agency, the spirit that characterized early ARS, need to be emphasized. “These artist-run spaces could help fill that gaping hole as connectors or mediators between institutions and the public/community. In so doing, the burden of responsibility/accountability is shared. We need to realize that we are all shareholders in the larger scope of art and cultural development.”

ARS act as facilitators for community building and as catalysts for emerging artists to innovate without regard to art market trends. According to Roldan, “The flexibility, DIY spirit, and nurturing environment these spaces offer produces instantaneous development for interdisciplinary experimentations unburdened by the demand of the market. It is ironic that as the art market expands, the non-commercial spaces remain marginal. I am convinced that artist-run spaces are even more relevant today as a counterbalance to a market-driven art scene. They must continue to assert the importance of their role in the whole ecosystem.”

This, of course, involves a formulation of goals and objectives in order for the necessary programming to ensue. At 98B, we conceptualize projects based on experimentation, community, collaboration, and accessibility. ARS require a fair amount of flexibility and openness to adapt to and evolve with the ever-changing matrix of the art scene. As Green Papaya's Program Director Merv Espina says, “We are sustained by a small community that likes the kind of art that no one else thinks of as art. We aspire to provide a space for critique and experimentation, and have transitioned from being a space for exhibitions to a discursive and performative space. We are a space for good and bad questions, and projects that can both be great or total failures. It's a halfway house for ideas, a space to hang out and have real conversations again, a chance to cook and share meals. It's less about art than it is about being artists and being human again – and questioning what that means in our current context. That community of humans has changed over time.”



Fig. 5



Fig. 3



Fig. 6



Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

BUILDING COMMUNITY

What remains constant among ARS today is the desire to engage, contribute, influence, and inform their communities. “Community relations are vital,” says Bunoan. “For Big Sky Mind, we worked with visual artists from Quezon City and also filmmakers. Although we initially had problems due to the residential nature of the area, [being in] that neighborhood already created an impact. Eventually, others became quite receptive, and it was a happy accident that people were ultimately engaged.”

Though there are benefits associated with having a physical location, maintaining a space involves a number of concerns, especially in a highly urbanized city like Manila. The intangible worth of ARS is not as readily valued in relation to the land or property that they are built on. Rent, regular upkeep, utility bills, and operational costs compound the situation. Gentrification also comes into play when low-income residents and working artists are forced out and displaced because of urban development. “It is unfortunate that artists are booted out through raised rent. Artists are the primary reason why a space thrives, but they are also the first ones to be driven away,” says Bunoan.

Cobangbang elaborates on these concerns: “With Future Prospects (FP) in Cubao Expo (known as Cubao X), the gentrification had been more apparent. The place was once a thriving hub of local shoe shops, but with the coming of big malls and wider availability of cheaper imported goods, it fell into decline with some shops up-and-leaving and the landlord offering these vacant stalls for lower rates. So, enters FP with other like-minded creative entrepreneurs. For those three years that Cubao X was gradually picking up mileage, there had been a change in the administration and with it, higher rentals. The rest of the story is as how it usually ends for not-for-profit spaces.”

A possible way to address these challenges is to encourage communication with various stakeholders. While they may not immediately understand or appreciate the diverse activities of ARS, relaying the reasons, contexts, and motivations could help dispel fears and generate contributions and understanding from all involved.

Cobangbang says, “I think what 98B is doing in/for Escolta in Manila is commendable. The team had support from the immediate community because they saw the real value of what was being done. Another example would be Marikina. I was part of a mini-arts fest organized by Leiz Jimenez under their *Sine Kalye* program. This ran for one weekend with a number of activities like film screenings,

talks, gigs, mural paintings. I did an art workshop with students from a high school in De la Peña, and the response was very positive. They even had a boodle lunch right after that, and this all happened in one of the gazebos along the Marikina Riverbanks. The barangay chairman saw the value in this and pledged to organize/support more activities. What was conveyed was a focus on the community with no intervention/usurpation by corporations or commercialism.”

Roldan also shares a similar experience. He says, “Although the general public may not be involved in actually directing programs of artist-run spaces, sometimes the demographics of a particular locality may influence how programs can take shape. This was true when Green Papaya acted as country host to the US State Department’s smARTpower Program in the Philippines. American artist Mary Mattingly, who was the artist-in-residence of that program, led a workshop on disaster preparedness involving the immediate community of Green Papaya. High school students from the nearby Kamuning High School and architecture students from the University of the Philippines took part in the workshops. So did some out-of-school youth and *barangay* residents.”

As a result of community initiatives, ARS can indirectly contribute to urban renewal. Participation, pride of place, and a sense of belonging often result from this communal synergy and programming. In spite of the government’s dismal performance in providing secure, clean, and communal surroundings for the general public, artists tangentially address this. Noldan says, “Because of lack of government planning and policies governing public domain, we have seen the metropolis [being divided] into rival cities with no walkable sidewalks, no public parks, no public amenities, and an inefficient public transport system. I do not think initiatives like 98B’s *The HUB | Make Lab* were conceived specifically to bring urban renewal to Escolta; what is being enjoyed in Escolta right now is a result of a successful initiative to bring artists and creative startups under a common working system. Very much the same way Cubao X came into public consciousness ten years ago.”

Cobangbang adds, “It is an inevitable but positive outcome. Art instills sensitivity and awareness, so that the people involved in an art/culture project will become more active in taking care of their environment. I think that is what art projects and initiatives are meant to achieve.”



Fig. 9

These alternative settings, distinct from what is perceived as “popular” or “conventional,” were essential in the robust development of new possibilities in Philippine contemporary art over the past few decades.

- Fig. 1 98B COLLABoratory's first exhibition, 2012. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 2 Talk of Resident Artist Chia Chien Ju from Taiwan. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 3 98B COLLABoratory space and merchandise. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 4 Portfolio reviews at 98B COLLABoratory. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 5 98B COLLABoratory publications. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 6 The directors of 98B COLLABoratory. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 7 Talk for *IOIO Inside Out Inside On Show*. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 8 Exterior of the 98B COLLABoratory space. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 9 98B COLLABoratory Library. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.
- Fig. 10 98B COLLABoratory *Express Padala* exhibition at Taipei Expo Park. Courtesy of 98BCOLLABoratory.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Fig. 11 Exhibit opening of *Wearable Portable Architecture* at Green Papaya Art Projects. Photo by Karen Batino.

Fig. 12 SmARTpower Manila, participants working on their layout for *Wearable Portable Architecture*, 2012. Courtesy of Green Papaya Art Projects.

Fig. 13 SmARTpower Manila, artist Mary Mattingly conducting a workshop, 2012. Courtesy of Green Papaya Art Projects.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ARTIST-RUN SPACES

Considering how significant ARS remain today, what additional measures can be activated to ensure relevant programming and sustainability, where artists can engage with multiple communities and institutions while not losing their power?

For Bunoan, specific priorities must be part of the conversation: “Artists must have ‘bargaining power.’ While it may be hard to pull off, there is no other way but to organize ourselves collectively. If we are an organized group, then we are a body, not merely acting as an individual that can be easily dismissed. We will have a say on things like standardized pay, negotiated working hours, legal backup, and contracts. There are bigger issues to contend with like the exploitation of artists. ARS can also encourage more cooperation between artists and the academe, especially in the area of art education. We need a language that can be easily understood and shared. We need more publications. Fundamentally, through ARS we can develop new ways and rethink old systems to make matters more equitable for all.”

While these challenges have felt insurmountable, given the lack of resources and government support/funding, Cobangbang believes that sustaining ARS requires commitment, compromise, and cooperation: “Diplomacy helps since you will be dealing with different kinds of people. In a way, running an ARS equips you more than being enrolled in an arts management course. Most artists I know that have gone through operating and running an ARS learned from experience and through actual work. Of course, some of us had to learn the hard way and live with the consequences of our choices, but that’s all part of it.”

The rich and colorful narrative of ARS will continue to develop, fueled by undercurrents like the desire for artistic and cultural equity. Espina says, “Attending an independent project space for a talk about a weird topic or community-science-project-as-art, you only come away with a head full of (new) ideas and maybe a few new friends (and enemies).” With each activity, another seed is planted; with each event, another dynamic is activated. This continuum (at times unstructured, frequently ad hoc, typically organic, and most often in perpetual evolution) provides respite, growth, and much needed interaction. It is from this position that contemporary art practices are able to reflect and regenerate. ■

¹ Merv Espina, “The Philippines: An Abridged Report on Contemporary Art Practice,” 2014.



Fig. 1

In 2011, the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) staged an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, billed as *Haring Lear*.¹ Several adaptations of this masterwork had already been mounted: Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen's intercultural *Lear*² and *Lear Dreaming*,³ and Dulaang UP (DUP)'s *Lear*,⁴ directed by Tony Mabesa in 2015. However, it is only in the PETA adaptation that the entire ensemble – including the king's three daughters Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia – consisted of male actors. Adapted by National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera and directed by Nonon Padilla, the play is set in a dystopian Philippine future and has a strong nationalist stance. The national anthem at the end offers a glimpse into the country's authoritarian regimes, particularly during the Martial Law era.

A friend from PETA asked for my take on this adaptation and if the piece could represent the contemporary in the Philippine theater. I did not have

definite answers then. Examining the themes of *Haring Lear*, it could be inferred that contemporary theater in Manila is rooted in social criticism. This is because many contemporary theater artists in Manila are influenced by the country's longstanding history of social activism; high school and university professors of drama and theater claim Metro Manila as an important site of social protest and activism.

There are different ways of understanding "the contemporary" in Philippine theater: by looking at current theatrical activities taking place in Manila; surveying the number of commercial, professional, and semi-professional theater companies across the country; and taking note of popular genres. The two most popular genres in Manila are the play (original and adaptations) and the musical. Though most of the musicals staged in Manila are imported from Broadway or the West End, local artists are also staging original musicals. Local theater companies also regularly stage children's productions.

Manila's theater scene is diverse, but there's a dominant trend of adhering to Western dramaturgical traditions, which brings up issues of inauthenticity and cheap imitation. Many scholars have been ambivalent about this close association with Western thought and practice, including the late James Brandon, a pioneering scholar in the field of Asian theater studies. In his book, *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (1967), Brandon dismisses Filipino theatre identity as inauthentic, due to the "dearth of indigenous theater in the islands."⁵

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Fig. 2

- Fig. 1** PETA, *The Care Divas*, Melvin Lee as Chelsea, 2011. Courtesy of Philippine Educational Theater Association.
- Fig. 2** Dulaang UP, *The Silent Soprano*, Natasha Cabrera and Via Antonio as Margie/MeiMei and Chika. Courtesy of Dulaang UP.
- Fig. 3** Dulaang UP, *The Silent Soprano*, Margie/MeiMei (Natasha Cabrera) rehearses a song with Ricky (Joel Molina), 2007. Courtesy of Dulaang UP.
- Fig. 4** Dulaang UP, *The Silent Soprano*, Chika (Via Antonio) outlines the do's and don'ts of being a domestic helper in Hong Kong, 2007. Courtesy of Dulaang UP.
- Fig. 5** PETA, *The Care Divas*, Ricci Chan as Kayla, 2011. Courtesy of Philippine Educational Theater Association.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

ENTANGLEMENT

Manila's theater scene, however, is much more complex. Some have remarked that the performing Filipino, for instance, is a master imitator. Some have also asserted that the imitation is almost the same as that which is imitated (or an "almost perfect" replica). Anthropologist Fenella Cannell sees mimicry as a subtle and ironic means of accessing the power of the imagined Western world.⁶ Likewise, scholar Lucy San Pablo Burns explains that such consciousness challenges and overturns the equation of the one that mimics and the one that is mimicked.⁷ Thus, the mimicry is not just simple imitation, but rather a complicated strategy of aesthetics and poetics.

Considering all these scenarios, contemporary theater in Manila is very much entangled. Generally, entanglement is a condition of juxtapositions. It's also about the blending or mixing of different elements together. Theater artists in Manila have become adept in employing techniques of mixing and matching performance genres and forms that range from Western (colonial) influences to archipelagic encounters (traditional performance genres from other regions or islands).

An example is DUP's *Rizal X*,⁸ staged at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater in 2011 for the 150th birth anniversary of Jose Rizal. The production is an entanglement of performance genres (contemporary dance, hip-hop, songs, video installation, and oral interpretation) and other art forms (film, poetry, dance, theater, and installation art), based on what director Dexter Santos described in the play's program as "fragments." Another example is *Sa Wakas (Finally)* by

Andrei Pamintuan (also the director) and Ina Abuan, originally staged in 2011 at the PETA Theater Center. This musical weaved the songs of the now defunct band Sugarfree. Both *Rizal X* and *Sa Wakas* may be thought of as a sort of liminal entity – a between and betwixt, neither here nor there – or as scholar Richard Dyer points out, "neither original nor copy."⁹

Looking at the works of many local theater artists, there seems to be a degree of comfort with entanglement, even if they do not intentionally recognize it as part of their artistic endeavors. Entanglement connotes the danger of being entrapped in a muddled situation, often producing a sense of disorder and even chaos. Entanglement certainly has its own limitations, especially since many theatre artists unintentionally overuse pastiche or fragments in their theater making, resulting in sensationalizing their chosen subjects.

In Doreen Fernandez's book *Palabas* (1996), she says, "It is Philippine life that fires our playwrights. They do not need to hear of the latest trends in writing techniques in order to want to write a play in like manner. Instead, their themes invade their craft – and they reach for techniques to fit."¹⁰ Fernandez adds that in the thematic concerns of Filipino playwrights, directors, and actors, "the vitality of theatre is in its urgency."¹¹ By urgency, Fernandez posits that theater in the Philippines is used to represent specific social concerns, providing insightful commentary on the state of things during the particular time period of a given play.

THE PROBLEM PLAY

In an attempt to actively engage in social discourse, contemporary theater in Manila follows the lineage of “the problem play.” A 19th-century term, the problem play is a drama that tackles social issues rooted in Realism. Scholar Richard Hornby asserts that there are problem plays that do the opposite – instead of illuminating social realities, the performances come off as glib and cheap.¹² Hornby adds that these plays are easily comparable to television melodramas, and the topical issues presented are editorialized.¹³

Many contemporary productions in Manila are not cheap, of low value, or without merit. But there have been failed attempts to present social issues that lack complexity. Two examples come to mind: DUP’s *The Silent Soprano*¹⁴ staged at the Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater in UP Diliman in 2007 and PETA’s *The Care Divas*¹⁵ originally staged at the PETA Theater Center in 2011.

The Silent Soprano is an original Filipino musical in English (with some Tagalog words inserted in song numbers and dialogue). The musical touches on the life of Margie (alternately played by Natasha Cabrera and Laura Cabochan), a domestic helper in Hong Kong who is transformed into a Canto-pop superstar. In order to win the hearts of Hong Kong nationals as a pop star, Margie has to be Cantonese. Plastic surgery and a Cantonese name (Mei Mei) are prerequisites to stardom. Canto-pop star Mei Mei is not allowed in public without her managers and, thus, gets the alias “the Silent Soprano.”

Margie is a performer par excellence in mimicking, and she is also a domestic helper, shown hidden away from sight without the ability to speak for herself. For this reason, her performative nature is undermined. The musical attempts to comment on the stereotyped realities of two types of Filipinos working in Asia: domestic helpers and other professionals.

The Silent Soprano is the work of a male librettist, composer, and director, and while seeming to support the Filipina in her attempt to challenge Chinese and East Asian economic power in the play, the musical is rife with Filipino nationalism and patriarchy, as Margie sacrifices herself for husband, family, and nation. Thus, women are silenced so that others may benefit.

Most recently, PETA staged another musical about domestic helpers: *The Care Divas*. The musical was such a sensational hit that it was restaged in November 2011, April 2012, and February 2017. Inspired by a true story, *The Care Divas* follows the adventures of five Filipino caregivers that moonlight as drag queens at a nightclub in Tel Aviv during the second *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation. Their struggles are complicated by their identities as *bakla* (gay) in a predominantly Jewish nation.

Tolerance and acceptance are the core themes of this musical, which are attached to a “universal” hyper-feminine

sensibility. However, as scholar J. Neil Garcia points out, tolerance is not benign: it implies that something is fundamentally wrong with the other person.¹⁶

In the musical’s final number, there is a call for the destruction of fences and walls. Clad in their beautiful couture gowns, exaggerated headdresses, and high-heeled shoes, the five “divas” subvert the walls of their oppression. The symbol of *harang* (fences) is a matter of pride and a call for acceptance, not necessarily for recognition and respect. But, acceptance, argues Garcia, is not much better: it implies that it the “hetero-normal” has the right to accept the other person and not the other way around.¹⁷

While the musical embraced tolerance and acceptance rather than a radical defense of difference, it failed in its attempt to humanize the contexts of migrant work and homosexuality. Here, transnational labor is feminized and based on the myth of the *bagong bayani*: the feminine sacrifice that sustains the family and improves their impoverished life back home. The choice of the *bakla* (gay man) as the domestic helper is not really the issue, but it’s this feminization of transnational labor that becomes problematic.



Fig. 5

BEING CONTEMPORARY

In 2012, the journal *PAJ: Performing Arts Journal* published two special issues on the concept of “the contemporary” under the title, *Being Contemporary*. In one issue, a roundtable discussion among Western performance and theater artists – such as Robert Wilson, Roselee Goldberg, Kenneth Collins, and Richard Schechner – on the contemporary resulted in two recurring idioms: iterability and effective historical consciousness. In other words, contemporary artists on the other side of this planet are unanimous in proclaiming that “the contemporary” invokes the possibility of repetition and dissociation. They declared, “Repetition at its best is the state of the art.”¹⁸

For theater and performance artists in Europe and in the United States, “being contemporary” entails the reinvention, remodifying, reexamination, and reenactment of forms. Most contemporary works are reincarnations of particular performances, which scholars have attributed as the historical avant-garde. However, the repetition of these performances is not really the same. When looking at the concept of iterability, the term “reiteration” is a combination of the word *iter* (denoting

change) and the prefix *re*, which refers to repetition. Another way of describing it is that the contemporary repeats the same or similar theatrical forms in an attempt to create something different.

Given this, “the contemporary” in Philippine theater has and will continue to contend with possibilities of repetition and dissociation. The repetition plays out in themes that affirm the social and cultural landscapes of a particular time period, which have been explored in many contemporary theater works since the advent of *drama simbolico* (symbolic drama), or nationalist plays that critiqued colonialism at the turn of the 20th century. The dissociation plays out in the reflexive transference of these social issues into more nuanced positionalities and embodiments. ■

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¹ *Haring Lear*, by Bienvenido Lumbea (adaptation of *King Lear* by William Shakespeare), directed by Nonon Padilla, Philippine Educational Theater Association, PETA Theatre, Quezon City, January 2012.

² *Lear*, by Ong Keng Sen (adaptation of *King Lear* by William Shakespeare), directed by Ong Keng Sen, The Festival of Perth, Australia, 1997.

³ *Lear Dreaming*, by Ong Keng Sen (adaptation of *King Lear* by William Shakespeare), directed by Ong Keng Sen, Drama Theatre, School of The Arts, Singapore, 2012.

⁴ *Lear*, by William Shakespeare (translation by Nicolas Pichay), directed by Tony Mabesa, Dulaang UP, Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater, October 2015.

⁵ James R. Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁶ Fenella Cannell, “The Power of Appearances: Beauty, Mimicry, and Transformation in Bicol,” in *Discrepant Histories: Translocal Essays on Filipino Cultures*, ed. Vicente Rafael, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 223-258.

⁷ Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

⁸ *Rizal X*, by Katte Sabate and Chic San Agustin, music by William Manzano, directed by Dexter Santos, Dulaang UP, Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater, Quezon City, July 2011.

⁹ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰ Doreen G. Fernandez, *Palabas: History of Philippine Theatre* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Richard Hornby, “The Social Problem Play,” *The Hudson Review* 51, No. 4: 751-758.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *The Silent Soprano*, by Ricardo Saludo, music by Arnel De Pano and Vincent De Jesus, directed by Alexander Cortez, Dulaang UP, Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero Theater, Quezon City, September 2007.

¹⁵ *The Care Divas*, by Liza Magtoto, music by Vincent De Jesus, directed by Maribel Legarda, Philippine Educational Theater Association, PETA Theater, Quezon City, December 2011.

¹⁶ J. Neil Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Robert Wilson et al, “Being Contemporary,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, No. 1 (2012): 93-110.

words by
RINA ANGELA CORPUS



Fig. 1

Over the past five years, contemporary dance in the Philippines has experienced a robust awakening because of experimentation and exploration beyond ballet and modern dance styles. Dance companies across the country, such as Dance Pull, UP Dance Company, Airdance, and Daloy Dance Company have staged performances either independently or collaboratively, adding vitality to the Philippine dance scene in the 21st century.

Avel Bautista, founding member and manager of Airdance, defines contemporary dance as a “fusion of styles, a recognition of the fluidity of techniques, and a medium to express a story or a thought.”¹ Contemporary dance in the Philippines remains volatile

and motley in its ongoing emergence, as its makers, performers, and their audiences continue to rework what the contemporary means in these ever-changing times.

This essay highlights six major dance groups in the country that have had a steady stream of performances locally and abroad through their performances and events, mapping out a new landscape of Philippine contemporary dance in recent years that includes multimedia and multi-disciplinary intersections with film, literature, politics, social discourse, and history.

¹ Ruth Jordana Pison, “Dancing a Nation: Philippine Contemporary Dance and Narratives of the Nation,” *Philippine Humanities Review* 15, no. 1 (2013).

A BRIEF HISTORY

The roots of contemporary dance in the Philippines can be traced to modern dance, which was previously a staple in most dance companies and schools in the Philippines and abroad. For one, Ballet Philippines, formerly the Alice Reyes Modern Dance Company, was known for its original modern dance pieces choreographed by Reyes, namely *Amada*, *Itim-Asu*, *Rama Hari*, and *Carmen*. Its former resident choreographer, Agnes Locsin, was known for her neo-ethnic dance that melded indigenous dance forms with modern and ballet sensibilities, such as with *Igorot*, *Bagobo*, and *Encantada*. Denisa Reyes, pioneer of NeoFilipino, dances under Ballet Philippines and has also contributed an extensive body of work for the company.

A number of dancers and choreographers have emerged from the major ballet companies that have since established or developed their own groups and companies within the idiom of contemporary dance: Enrico Labayen founded The LAB, Projekt Group, now renamed Labayen SF in the United States; Myra Beltran founded Dance Forum in the 1990s; Dwight Rodrigazo set up his own Dance Pull Company in Bacolod City; and Ea Torrado founded Daloy Dance Company in 2014. Moving away from the mainstream of dance to the margins of independent exploration seems to be the trend behind the flourishing of contemporary dance in the country.

Challenging established ways of knowing and doing dance, as well as seeking independent ways of producing outside of mainstream cultural networks that receive institutional and financial support have paved the way for a new direction in Philippine contemporary dance. Understandably, some contemporary dance groups still rely on corporate-commissioned performances for their bread and butter (i.e. Airdance and Daloy), but these groups in general work in the margins of major cultural institutions and labor under the tutelage of their homegrown and inventive exploration, and aesthetic experimentation.

Working in collaboration and partnership, these groups have produced two important initiatives in the contemporary dance scene, namely Contemporary Dance Map and the Wifi Body Festival, offering a venue to discover emerging talents in the field and to showcase the hard work of dancers and dance-makers that continue to shift possibilities and expectations.

Guided by themes from social discourse, history, and literary and visual inspirations, contemporary dance in the country is continually evolving in new directions, encompassing a *mélange* of persuasions and perspectives.



Fig. 2

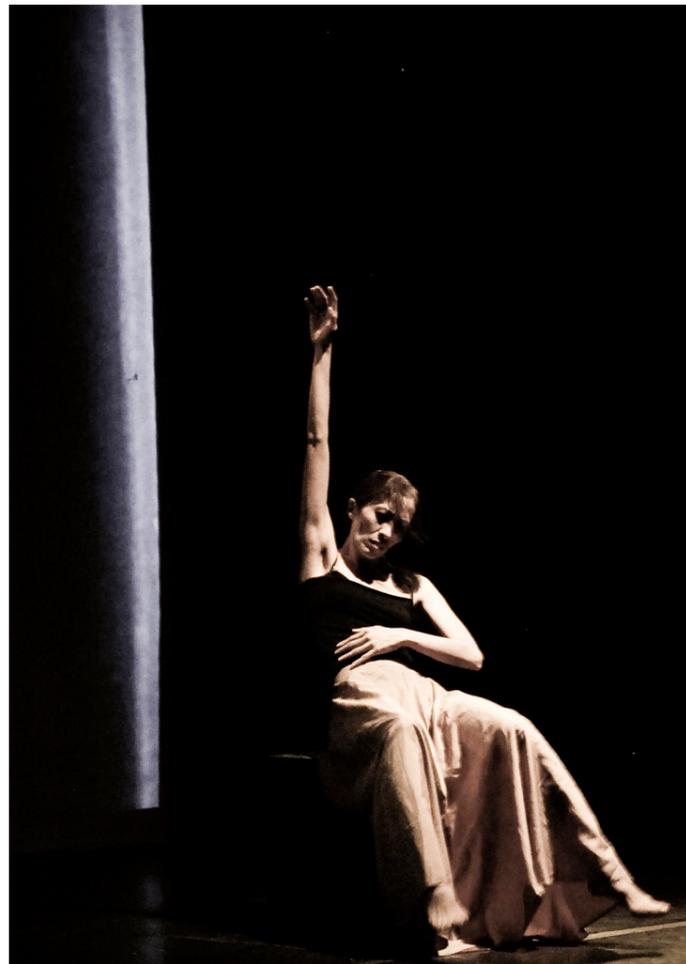


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

MYRA BELTRAN'S DANCE FORUM

Myra Beltran is at the helm of Dance Forum and a pioneer of contemporary and independent dance in the country. A former Ballet Philippines dancer, she subsequently danced in ballet companies in Germany (1981-82) and Yugoslavia (1982-86). Upon returning to the Philippines, she danced with Enrico Labayen's The LAB, Projekt Group. In 1994, she started choreographing as an independent artist and in 1997, she opened her studio that became a space for alternative dance in the country.

Beltran also initiated two contemporary dance initiatives: Contemporary Dance Map in 2005 and Wifi Body Festival in 2006. Both became important platforms that showcase Philippine contemporary dance practice.

Beltran's choreographies include the full-length solo, *Star Maiden*, which marked the opening of her dance studio in 1997. Her group works include *Itim Asu: 1719-2009*, which was based on Virginia Moreno's drama, and *Nutcracker Swit*, a Filipino deconstruction of the Christmas ballet in collaboration with filmmaker Sherad Anthony Sanchez.

Known for her articulate space-claiming and exploration of contemporary dance aesthetics in the Philippines, Beltran has won the Alab ng Haraya Award from the National Commission for Culture and the Arts in 2001 and Tanging Parangal from the City of Manila in 2007.



Fig. 5

Fig. 1 Daloy Dance Company's *Unearthing* performed at dance.MNL Festival 2016 before it toured to the Setouchi Triennale and Asia Performing Arts Market in Japan in 2016. Photo by Adrian Begonia. Courtesy of Ea Torrado.

Fig. 2 Denisa Reyes served as Ballet Philippines' Artistic Director for two terms and created many notable works for the company. Courtesy of Ballet Philippines.

Fig. 3 Myra Beltran's *Star Maiden*. Courtesy of Myra Beltran.

Fig. 4 Myra Beltran's *Itim Asu*. Photo by Teresa Barrozo. Courtesy of Myra Beltran.

Juana and the Sacred Shores (a dance film) was directed by Antonne Rafael Santiago and choreographed by Aisha Josephine L. Polestico. It premiered at UP Film Institute on December 5, 2017. Courtesy of UP Dance Company.

UP DANCE COMPANY

Known as the resident dance company of the University of the Philippines' College of Music, UP Dance Company (UPDC) is the official performing group of dance majors in the state university.

One of UPDC's functions is to represent the university in local and national functions, as well as international dance festivals in Hong Kong, Macau, and Beijing. Likewise, it performs annually at the UP Abelardo Hall or the University Theater to showcase dance majors' recitals. Angela Lawenko, the current Artistic Director, is a graduate of the UP Dance Program, and Prof. Basilio Esteban Villaruz, its Artistic Director Emeritus, is a prominent dance critic and historian in the country.

The company has premiered modern ballets with socially relevant librettos, such as *Mariang Sinderela: Ang Bagong Bayani* (1996), choreographed by Angela



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Lawenko and Joelle Jacinto, which tackles the issue of sex workers and OFWs in Japan; and *Higanti* (2004), choreographed by Ava Villanueva and Joyce Comia, a local deconstruction of the classic Giselle tragedy using the narratives of the *sakada*, or sugarcane plantation workers, in Negros province.

In recent years, company members and choreographers have incorporated film elements, most notably in *Juana and the Sacred Shores*, choreographed by UP dance major Aisha Polestico in collaboration with film student Antonne Rafael Santiago, which is the first work by a UPDC member specifically choreographed for film. There are also exquisite literary interpretations, such as *A Wanderer in the Night of the World*, an hour-long contemporary piece unique for its staging as both performers and audience were on the proscenium stage. The work was inspired by the

poetry of National Artist for Literature NVM Gonzales and choreographed by senior dancers Sarah Maria Samaniego, Gebbvella Selga, Al Bernard Garcia, and Michael Barry Que.

Among UPDC's resident choreographers is Elena Laniog, who has developed a distinct technique that manifested in her works for UPDC's repertoire, such as *Wings of 44*. UPDC's other current resident choreographer is JM Cabling, a graduate of the company who has bagged a notable choreographers' competition hosted by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts' Sayaw Pinoy in 2013. Cabling's winning choreography, now part of the UPDC repertoire, is *Flight*, a piece based on his research of the indigenous Binanog dance ritual of Panay Bukidnon.

UPDC has annually participated in the Wifi Body Festival and Contemporary Dance Map, collaborative initiatives of various contemporary dance companies in the country.

Contemporary dance
in the Philippines remains
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Fig. 8



Fig. 10

Fig. 7 *A Wanderer in the Night of the World* (2016) was choreographed by Michael Barry Que, Gebbvelle Ray Selga, Al Bernard Garcia, and Sarah Maria Samaniego. Courtesy of UP Dance Company.

Fig. 8-9 *Ang Unang Aswang* was choreographed by JM Cabling (based on the play written by Rody Vera) and premiered on February 25, 2017 at the College of Architecture Amphitheater, University of the Philippines, Diliman. Courtesy of UP Dance Company.



Fig. 9

Fig. 10 Dwight Rodrigazo. Courtesy of Ballet Philippines.

AIRDANCE

One of the most active performing dance groups since its founding in 2001, Airdance is known for their continued presence in contemporary dance and the aerial arts. Airdance has consistently participated in major dance festivals in Manila, including the Wifi Body Festival, Contemporary Dance Map's International Dance Day celebration, and the Fringe Manila Arts Festival. The group also widely performs for corporate events. Their aesthetic styles include shadow play, hip-hop, ballet, jazz, aerial silk, and hoop.

Airdance's achievements include winning the grand prize in the Mindanao Modern Dance Competition in South Cotabato and the Best Young Contemporary Dance Theater Company Award in 2004. Airdance also won Best Dance Company (Modern) in the prestigious 2007 and 2008 ALIW Awards.

The group has presented in international dance events, including the World Expo in Japan (2005), (E)motion Dance on Screen Festival in Indonesia (2005), and the M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival (2014) in Singapore.

Part of Airdance's mission is to build a community of dancers, dance-makers, and enthusiasts. Since its founding, it has offered regular classes and annual summer workshops that are open to the public.

One of Airdance's acclaimed works is *Indios Bravos* (2006), directed by Paul Morales and choreographed by Dwight Rodrigazo to the libretto of Nicolas Pichay. The work explored the ties between 21st-century overseas Filipino workers and 19th-century *Ilustrados* to engage in a discourse on history and nationalism. In 2016, Airdance staged *Body of Work*, a reprise of the company's repertoire with choreographies by Ernest Mandap, Ava Villanueva, Avel Bautista, Mia Cabalifin, Rhosam Prudenciano Jr., and Jed Amihan.

DANCE PULL COMPANY

The brainchild of former Ballet Philippines and Airdance member Dwight Rodrigazo, Dance Pull Company was founded in 2006 in Bacolod City, Rodrigazo's hometown. Experimenting with what he calls the "pulling technique" during his Airdance days, Rodrigazo started his own dance school and company outside of Manila to hone his method, which he describes as "a movement contraction from the inside." The name "Dance Pull" was inspired by his homegrown movement technique.

One of Rodrigazo's choreographies that employ his technique is *Karga Tapas*, a powerful and vigorous contemporary depiction of sugarcane plantation farmers from his native Negros. A group dance using masculine movements that mimic the laborious and heavy-set frame of the farmers' corporeality, *Karga Tapas* has been performed at the Wifi Body Festival, as well as in Ayala and Trinoma Malls.

Another noteworthy work by Dance Pull is *La Elle S'en Va* (*There She Goes*), a 20-minute duet that sketches the dualities and vagaries of a feminine character.

Choreographed by Dance Pull's Associate Artistic Director Xiao Mitchao, this work won the second prize of the Yokohama Dance Collection EX in 2015.

Another notable Dance Pull work is *De-Ling*, a surrealist choreography in collaboration with Bacolod visual artist Moreen Austria. Directed by Dwight Rodrigazo and choreographed by Xiao Mitchao with the libretto by Nicolas Pichay, it was presented by the Silliman University Culture and Arts Council in February 2017 during Philippine National Arts Month.

Rodrigazo has also spearheaded the C-MAP (Composition and Movement Analysis Program) for choreographers and dance teachers, with the support of World Dance Alliance Philippines since 2013. Geared towards instructing dance-makers and physical education teachers of any dance genre on the art of choreographing dances, Rodrigazo's C-MAP has enlivened the state of dance pedagogy and teachers' training in the Philippines.



Fig. 11

DALOY DANCE COMPANY

Founded in 2014, Daloy Dance Company is the youngest contemporary dance company in Metro Manila. Spearheaded by Ea Torrado, a former dancer with Ballet Manila and Ballet Philippines, Daloy is a dance theater collective that draws from experimentation, contact improvisation, and a rethinking of performance aesthetics in the Philippines.

Their important works include *Canton*, a group dance inspired by the harsh conditions of young female sex workers in urban poor areas of the country. Drawing from physical theater, *Canton* is a kinetic collage of how women are driven to sell their bodies for a packet of instant noodles, known in the vernacular as “canton.” *Canton* first premiered as a solo piece at the Ho Chi Minh International Dance Festival 2014 and later was presented as a group piece at Fringe Manila 2015.

Another work of note in Daloy’s repertoire is *Unearthing*, which was inspired by somatics – trance improvisation drawn from the *babaylan*, Philippine pre-colonial shamans and healers. Chanting and intuitive movement marked this piece, which premiered at the 2015 Karnabal Festival and was later presented at the Dance Manila Festival at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the Setouchi Triennale 2016 in Japan.

Dysmorphilia is a group piece that questions our culture’s obsession with bodily perfection. With costumes by artist Leeroy New that show protruding somatic abnormalities in the dancing body, *Dysmorphilia* was first performed at the PETA Theater Center as part of The Imaginarium, a multi-arts festival of the absurd.

Daloy Dance Company offers contemporary dance classes and workshops at the PARC Foundation studio in San Juan, Metro Manila. Daloy also regularly hosts workshops on contact improvisation with international guest teachers in Manila.

Fig. 11-12 Daloy Dance Company’s *Canton* and *Himalaya* performed during the company’s US Tour in October 2016. Courtesy of Ea Torrado.

Fig. 13 Daloy Dance Company’s *Unearthing* performed at dance.MNL Festival 2016 before it toured to the Setouchi Triennale and Asia Performing Arts Market in Japan in 2016. Photo by Adrian Begonia. Courtesy of Ea Torrado.

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Fig. 12



Fig. 13

CHAMELEON DANCE THEATRE

The Chameleon Dance Theatre (CDT) was founded in 1989 by Jojo Lucila and Ida Beltran. Presently under the artistic helm of one of its longtime dancers, Jun Saagundo, CDT has explored a vast arrangement and interpretation of dance styles, including folk, abstract, modern, jazz, and pop culture dance.

The group has also worked with guest teachers and choreographers to widen their versatility, such as Nonoy Froilan, Edward Malagkit, Joy Coronel, Corazon Inigo, and theater directors Anton Juan, Bart Guingona, and Tony Espejo.

Under one of CDT’s former artistic directors, Raul Alcosoba, the group has performed site-specific works in the ruins of Quezon City Memorial Circle as part of Contemporary Dance Map in 2010. Alcosoba also choreographed *Der Karneval der Tiere* and *Crossing Borders*, both performed at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Under Saagundo’s direction, CDT performed its 25th anniversary production, *Pas de 25*, in 2014.

CDT members have been granted scholarships at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, and the American Dance Festival. CDT has performed in Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Malaysia, and North America. ■

words by

SARAH SALAZAR-ARONSON
 and
 NESS ROQUE-LUMBRES
 of SIPAT LAWIN ENSEMBLE
 and KARNABAL FESTIVAL

ART ARCHIVE 01



Fig. 1

CONTEXT: ZEROES TO 2000-X

We begin by arriving in a shared moment. Different shades of discontent¹ led some theater practitioners to abandon the typical path of working on television/advertising jobs during the day while working on “serious” productions by Shakespeare or Tinio² at night. “The Theatre,” as a Philippine institution and as an industry, had lost its allure to a number of young practitioners. Misfits began organizing themselves to create new spaces³ for what they believe are the functions of the theater that they desire. They began managing themselves, too, by taking on the economics of mounting performances with their own hands.

Our own performance collective, Sipat Lawin Ensemble (2010-Present), was born from this wave. We started as a reunion group of a few theater arts alumni of the Philippine High School for the Arts (PHSA), a government-funded, specialized boarding school in the rainforest of Mt. Makiling, Laguna, built in the 1970s as a project of First Lady Imelda Marcos. The school was originally envisioned as a “world-class,” state-of-the-art training ground

for Filipino artists, being part of Imelda’s ideal to highlight Philippine art as internationally competitive: a flawed nationalism, framed by Western standards.⁴

We started mounting productions to allow different generations of theater graduates to work on our dream plays featuring Western and Filipino classics. However, no longer isolated high up on a picturesque mountain, we began to dream bigger, messier dreams. Our interest in drama and theater shifted towards questions of performance and performativity, social and political functions of theater, new modes of production, and so on. Inspired by lack of funding, we reveled in being (quite literally) outsiders. We couldn’t afford to rent theaters, so we took our performances elsewhere – to bars, living rooms, and anywhere people would have us. We began devising our own works, played by our own rules, and just figured things out along the way.

We soon identified this distancing from the center, the mainstream, or the commercial as being “independents.” This label opened up a floodgate of questions: Independence from what, for whom, and why?

¹ Consequential national and global events that characterized the first two decades of the 21st century – global/national political and economic turmoil, technological advancements, the Internet, the globalized free market, urban development, and so on – ushered current shifts in performance-making in Manila. In Metro Manila, we breathe the contradictions of modern urban life. The usual suspects are here. The exponential worsening of everything – traffic, pollution, poverty, corruption. All this, while tangible markers for “progress” arrive – malls, 24/7 delivery, Uber, bike lanes. The metro is a growing hodgepodge of tangled electric lines and tall glass buildings. Look up and see billboards promising you a better life with the latest non-surgical face lift. You’re seeing this from down below, while you’re exchanging sweat with strangers, struggling to keep your balance while standing in an overcrowded bus. The sweltering heat exacerbated by vehicle fumes and roughly 12.8 million people sharing this megacity, and apocalyptic floods during annual storm cycles...How does one create in these conditions?

You turn on the radio, the TV, or browse through Facebook, and see that politics are good enough for primetime entertainment. Petty politicians are bickering while larger, scarier decisions are made behind closed doors. Times get darker. Modern-day slavery still exists through poor labor conditions,

the blood of our farmers still drip on the soil they till, overseas workers face appalling work conditions, extrajudicial killings on the regular, corporate and state violence, and so on, and so forth.

Ultimately, the question of contemporary performance only matters if it interrogates the direction of our troubled times.

² Rolando Tinio is a National Artist for Theater and Literature.

³ A) actual places for creation like rehearsal studios and alternative performance venues; B) a conceptual space, a place in our minds where we are free to think.

⁴ An excerpt from www.phsa.edu.ph: “Amidst the forest of Mt. Makiling, the young former President Ferdinand E. Marcos yearned for a people born to greatness and envisioned a society worthy of the heritage of the Filipino people.

“Thus, under his governance, the National Arts Center (NAC) atop Mt. Makiling was conceptualized as a tribute to the Filipino artists. On the 7th day of April in 1976, the National Arts Center was formally dedicated to the pursuit of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Since then, the NAC played a pivotal role in the cultural upliftment of the nation through the development of young talents.”



Fig. 2

Fig. 1 Kolab Co, *Mourning Guriz* at the Jorge B. Vargas Museum, 2015. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.

Fig. 2 Illustration from *Karnabal: Performance and Social Innovation festival zine (Vol. 1)*, 2016. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.

Fig. 3 Illustration from *Karnabal: Performance and Social Innovation festival zine (Vol. 1)*, 2016. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.

Inspired by lack of funding, we reveled in being (quite literally) outsiders.

It was the festival's Year Zero. An exorcism, a release, and Sipat Lawin's dive into festival management and curation. Far from polished, Karnabal evoked the feeling of the *perya* (fair) – ragtag, do-it-yourself, touring carnivals with suspiciously dangerous roller coasters, spinning teacups, squeaky Ferris wheels, and a night market complete with BINGO booths and other cheap thrills. These wonderlands take only one night to set up and vanish right after the fiesta. Families, couples, and *barkadas* (groups of friends) flock to the *perya* and take it all in, night after night, before it disappears, not to return until the next fiesta.

We considered Karnabal as a festival of “def.-defying” (definition-defying) works. Sipat Lawin invited fellow misfits and offered alternative spaces for performing. Conditions for presenting the performances were imperfect. Outside the safety of black boxes and prosceniums, artists performed without theater lights and sophisticated sound systems, dressing rooms and backstage areas, elevated stages and platforms, air-conditioning, and sometimes without a roof. We needed to seek alternatives to these performance festival “must-haves.” The mode of production was also different. Producing a not-for-profit festival meant that aside from being undermanned, those of us already working for the festival

THE FESTIVAL: KARNABAL

It is in this context that we approached the artists of Karnabal Festival, which was launched in 2013 – not through the lens of Global Contemporary Performance or the History of Philippine Theatre, but as journeys of personal uncertainties, emerging from the lived experiences of artists and practitioners that are still in the thick of creating “the contemporary” in Philippine performance.



Fig. 3

needed to juggle our time with other jobs that pay the bills.

All this wasn't new to independent artists that have developed works inside their houses, and rehearsed in between odd jobs or after working hours. Rather, the embraced rawness/imperfection of our DIY festival made it apt for experimentation.

Then, a week before the festival, Super Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan hit the Philippines, wreaking havoc on the Visayas region. This raised questions on the necessity of a festival that celebrates contemporary performance in the Philippines. What is it for?

In 2015, the festival relaunched with its three-year thrust as “Karnabal Festival: Performance and Social Innovation.” Karnabal 2015 was the year for Discovery, 2016 was for Development, and 2017 was a call for Divergence.

Embracing the spirit of experimentation, Karnabal shifted towards becoming a development laboratory. One of the intentions was to celebrate what these imperfect conditions have nurtured, and how artists have survived despite (or because of) these disruptions. It was important to create a shift in mindset: from thinking that their processes are not ideal to considering processes existing outside conventional creation spaces as valid, fruitful, and beautiful.

Karnabal's curatorial team of independent artists was also formed. Sipat Lawin's Artistic Director JK Anicoche and core member Sarah Salazar-Aronson oversee the whole festival; performance-maker Eisa Jocson focuses on the

⁵ Community (excerpt from Wikipedia): *Communitas* is a Latin noun referring either to an unstructured community in which people are equal, or to the very spirit of the community. It also has a special significance as a loanword in cultural anthropology and the social science...*Communitas* is characteristic of people experiencing liminality together. // A group of people who come together or inhabit a given space at a given time, and are characterized by a specific [set of] culture[s], consciously or otherwise.

performances, as well as international exchange programs with Australian playwright David Finnigan; and Sipat Lawin's core member and actress Ness Roque-Lumbres co-curates idea exchange platforms with Salazar.

The new thrust was a challenge to the makers. For which community/ies⁵ are your works for or from? Can we involve the community/ies in the process and/or performance? Can we go beyond addressing “what's here” and “what's now” and ask, “Why here, now?”

LOCATING THE CONTEMPORARY: TIME

To understand the “contemporary” as a specific experience is to decolonize time and validate our unique realities. It means we must consciously delink from the assertion of Universal Time⁶ because in Universal Time, The Rest Of Us are constantly left behind. This is why it is imperative that we claim our experiences, our performances, as contemporary. We begin with the makers that – listening to the “current” or movement of the present – turned recent events and transformations into points of interest.

In 2015, Sipat Lawin Ensemble presented *Gobyerno* at the Jorge B. Vargas Museum at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Inviting playing audiences to create, perform, and film their ideal governments, the work employed both the language of theater and cinema by activating audience agency as an opportunity to question and exercise citizenship. The six-year global project explores performance as rehearsals for revolution and collective action. *Gobyerno* was first prototyped in South Korea for Festival Bo:m 2015, in collaboration with Seoul-based contemporary theater company Creative VaQi. In each iteration of *Gobyerno*, Sipat Lawin has collaborated with artists or community leaders in a given location to contextualize the work. It has also been performed at festivals in Honmoku, Japan, and Darwin and Castlemaine in Australia.

For some Karnabal artists, the present means transitions in their practices. Kolab Co. is a company composed of classically trained actors and directors that are former members of Tanghalang Pilipino, the resident theater company of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. They are

⁶ The supposedly objective/scientific time, based on astronomy and physics, which has been an “othering” tool that justified Imperialism, slavery, and colonial violence against “savages” that needed Western “civilization” and “modernity.”



Fig. 4

Meanwhile, cultural worker, community organizer, and visual/performance artist Boyet de Mesa's *LAB KO TO* evokes the weighted history of Philippine-American neocolonial relations, all in 15 minutes.

And then, there's the remarkable Anino Shadowplay Collective. Established in 1996, Anino is the longest-running contemporary independent collective in the Philippines. Anino's group of multimedia artists deal with Filipino identity through projected images and hybrid theatrical styles. Their aesthetic, like Philippine culture itself, borrows from a wide canvas, taking influence from Filipiniana (Philippine materials) universal pop imagery, and "international" experimental art.

In 2013, Anino performed their existing work *Arkipelago*, donating their share of the tickets to victims of Super Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan. Karnabal 2015 opened with *Arkipelago 2: A Story of Intima-Sea*, a visual narrative culled from collective memory that celebrated the life of Anino artist Don Salubayba. In 2016, they collaborated with Japanese artist Natsuki Ishagami for *Somato*, a simulation of a revolving lantern created by and through the audience's visions.

currently discovering their own collaborative performance-making process, which they call "machinating."⁷ Their *Mourning Gurlz* is a reinterpretation of Wilfrido Maria Guerrero's *Eye of a Needle*, in collaboration with visual artist Wire Tuazon; and *Happy P.* is "pillaged" heavily from Oscar Wilde's short story, *The Happy Prince*.

Playwright/director/translator Guelan Luarca, actress/dramaturg Ness Roque-Lumbres, and actor/sound artist Christopher Aronson collaborated to create *The Mousetrap: Anti-Hamlet*, in a struggle to emancipate from the "deadly theater"⁸ that haunts them. Teresa Barrozo, after being immersed in scoring, designing, and composing for TV, film, and theater, is currently pursuing her practice as a sonic artist. *This Too Shall Past* activates listening as performance with audiences navigating through a series of installations, and *We Are What Movies Told Us We Should Be* is a film built from ephemeral sounds and transitory thoughts.

Other works of note have taken years to develop. Adrienne Vergara's *Yen Yen de Sarapen* was born from her history as a character performer in Disneyland and the plight of mascoteers in the Philippines. Sarah Salazar-Aronson and Bernadette Uy's *Warning: Adult Content* was developed through Uy's eight years of working as a writer for an online private industry. Issa Manalo Lopez's *I* is an auto-ethnographic solo performance mapping Lopez's personal and political history from her birth to the present.

Duration of pieces varies as well. Bunny Cadag/Vera Maningning's *24 Hour Soul Preservation* is a durational solo of Maningning's 24-hour fast while continuously singing.



Fig. 6

⁸ In the seminal 1968 book, *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre*: *Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, director and cofounder of the Royal Shakespeare Company Peter Brook coins the term "deadly theatre." An excerpt: "The Deadly Theatre can at first sight be taken for granted, because it means bad theatre. As this is the form of theatre we see most often, and as it is most closely linked to the despised, much-attacked commercial theatre it might seem a waste of time to criticize it further. But it is only if we see that deadliness is deceptive and can appear anywhere, that we will become aware of the size of the problem."



Fig. 5

LOCATING THE CONTEMPORARY: SPACES

To locate the present, we must also look into the spaces of our time—where and how the festival, the artists, the processes, and the performances exist.

The last iterations of Karnabal have happened at Manila Collectible, a gift/tour shop; the Jorge B. Vargas Museum, which exhibits visual art; Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio Teatro Papet Museo, a puppet theater and museum; and at numerous cafés, restaurants, and homes at the University of the Philippines, Diliman and UP Teachers Village, which we've dubbed the Maginhawa Art District.

By displacing performance from its traditional/conventional home, the festival presents itself as a space for reinvention, for starting anew—a transitory point, where artists and audiences can reflect on the world they come from and where they want to go next.

Some works have gone even farther. Yokohama-based artist Riki Takeda's *The Octopus is an Octopus, but it is "_____"* is an ongoing research project in various grassroots communities in the Philippines from Baguio, Navotas, Palawan, Tacloban to Subic. Takeda has performed his research as a work-in-progress in Manila, Japan, and China. Staged in Christopher Aronson's own home, *Play-Cebo: The Experience Experience*, problematizes the idea of play through a collaboration between Aronson and his cousins, whom he grew up with in their family's ancestral home. From 2015-2016, Chikara Fujiwara developed the first version of

Fig. 4 Sipat Lawin Ensemble, *Yen Yen de Sarapen*, 2015. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.

Fig. 5 Chikara Fujiwara, *Engeki Quest in Marikina*, 2016. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.

Fig. 6 Sipat Lawin Ensemble, *Mousetrap Anti-Hamlet* at Papet Museo, 2016. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.



Fig. 7

Fig. 7 Sipat Lawin Ensemble, *Gobyerno* at Jorge B. Vargas Museum, 2015.

Fig. 8 Sipat Lawin Ensemble, *Yenyen de Sarapen*, 2015. Courtesy of Jorge B. Vargas Museum.

Fig. 9 Sipat Lawin Ensemble, *LOVENot*, 2013. Courtesy of Sipat Lawin Ensemble.

While the festival challenges artists to engage new/old community/ies and spaces when they develop their works, a lot of artists that actively create with community/ies haven't been able to present their works in the festival. Some are busy doing work with community/ies or cannot bring their community/ies to the venues due to transportation costs, and sometimes there's just no urgency to perform at a festival.

Thus, the form of engagement becomes an artist-specific challenge as they think of who their works are specifically for and/or how their chosen community/ies are involved in the work's process and performance.

As a response, the range of audiences for the shows have widely varied. JK Anicoche's *Vincent* was a one-on-one massage with an invited audience in Anicoche's own room. Eshei Mesina and Mixkaella Villalon's *Beastmode*, recently turned into a documentary film, was developed during Karnabal. Its first performance study was a viral video that reached thousands of people online, with the audiences as the work's subjects. The Scenius Pro's *HEAR, HERE!*, a musical for the hearing and non-hearing, involved both communities from the process to the performance.

Some artists, like Karnabal co-curator Jocson, exist in multiple spaces. She is based in Manila, but her practice is supported by different programs and institutions, mostly in Europe,⁹ where sustained, long-term development of works are made possible by different platforms like grants, residencies, and work-in-progress showings.

⁹ Mousonturm in Frankfurt, Zurich Theatre Festival in Zurich, Tanzhaus nrw in Dusseldorf, and Beursschouwburg in Brussels, to name a few.

his *Engeki Quest* outside of Japan. The "flaneur style tour-project" guides audiences through an idle journey alone or in pairs, using the quest's choose-your-own-adventure book and leading them to unusual moments in the streets of Marikina.

Naturally, development of these kinds of work take shelter in alternative spaces – streets, homes, cafes, and even online spaces. The work and the people are changed by the spaces where collective (re)imagination and "making" happens. In 2016, Karnabal released a zine featuring some of these places, where meetings and rehearsals take place, including Bahay na Masigla, Duyan ng Magiting, and 33 Guerrero.



Fig. 9



Fig. 8

THE POSSIBILITIES OF TOGETHERNESS

Shifting into a development platform, Karnabal asks artists to counter and re-encounter the time-bound and space-bound restrictions of being a performance-maker in the Philippines. Emphasizing process and feedback, performance-makers and their audiences are encouraged to take risks, fail, learn, and risk again. Initially, this may run against some of the artists' practices and the discipline of presenting a perfect and finished work. However, the festival insists on the value of prototyping and giving feedback while presenting an ongoing work as a performance itself.

This emphasis on process also challenges audiences' viewership. How do you view, understand, and receive an ongoing work? How do you value it, and what value does it have on audiences to see a work-in-progress?

This is a question the festival directly addresses through the Blank Ticket Concept. Audiences determine the ticket price after the performance, based on their perceived value of the show and their economic capacity. It is an experiment on new ways of producing new works. Artists and audiences are accountable to each other. It is not "pay-what-you-can" – it's an active exchange, a dialogue that seeks to create an inclusive and sustainable ecosystem.

However, sustainability remains a big question in performance-making and festival production. Funding for these types of works remains scarce in the Philippines. Karnabal has received support from the National

Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the only grant-giving body for the arts in the country. Some of the funding the festival seeks comes from overseas, such as The Japan Foundation Asia Center.

Beyond funding, both Karnabal and Sipat Lawin exist only through free spaces, borrowed equipment, shared resources, hundreds of loving volunteers, and the generosity of a whole network of performance-makers.

Before the festival, there are talks, gatherings, and work-in-progress previews, where performance-makers see one another's works, give feedback, and talk about their practices. This cultivates a sense of togetherness among the artists, who share insights and resources in the spirit of reciprocity and generosity. And this is the dream for Karnabal as a Contemporary Cultural Laboratory: to sustain performance community/ies beyond the festival through gatherings, workshops, and other forms of exchange.

And so, this is us, here, now, navigating through our shared histories, celebrating differences to forge something beyond them. Always asking: who, why, and how. Always looking for alternatives to redirect ourselves, the nation, and beyond towards better ways of being, performing together and performing togetherness.

This is us as community/ies of possibilities, searching for ways to sustain a practice of movement within Our Constricted Space in Time. ■

words by
IRWIN CRUZ

ART ARCHIVE 01



Fig. 1

Every day, an estimated 50 to 70 million photographs are uploaded online to the photography application, Instagram¹ – roughly 700 photographs per second. This deluge of images shows no signs of ebbing. Have apps and camera phones killed photography as we know it?

This was the very premise of *Traces*, a June 2015 photography exhibition staged at Finale Art File, a contemporary art gallery in Manila's "Gallery Row." It explored the effectiveness and function of photography in a digital age where images are instantaneously made, seen, shared, and even trashed.

The show caught the attention of a few art writers,² but in Manila's carousel of art exhibitions it hardly stood out. However, it did have one particular significance: the exhibition gathered some of the most active and experimental photographers and photo artists in Manila's contemporary art scene today, including Wawi Navarroza, Veejay Villafranca, Jake Verzosa, Tammy David, MM Yu, Jay Yao, and Poklong Ananding.

It is not often that these avant-garde photography practitioners are assembled together on one occasion. They are a fixture at local and international art festivals and occasionally appear separately or in small groups in Manila art gallery calendars. In the Philippines, a country of 100 million people, however, the art scene they dwell in – mainly anchored in Manila – remains surprisingly small, much like its audience, though this is fast changing. Exhibition spaces for photography remain few, and photography competes with genres such as painting (which is more bankable) and installations (often a crowd pleaser) for exhibition slots.

The photographers from the *Traces* exhibition are not part of a formal collective, though one can say they belong to a small, loose circle. Their work is as varied as the subjects that they gravitate toward. Bound together only by their loyalty to photography, their ties over the years were formed through intersections of editorial assignments, photography workshops, and art gallery

The practice of photography in Manila has two strands: contemporary artists that use photography as medium, either exclusively or by extension, and the work of photojournalists, whose aim is to capture images for news stories.



Fig. 2

openings, specifically at Silverlens Galleries in Makati City, just several blocks away from Finale.

Photographer Isa Lorenzo co-founded Silverlens Galleries in 2004 with Rachel Rillo after Lorenzo graduated from the New School's Parsons School of Design in New York City. In its early years, before it branched out fully to exhibit multiple mediums of contemporary art, Silverlens exclusively showed works by Filipino photographers, including Navarroza, David, and Verzosa. At Silverlens, they found a venue to showcase photographs unconstrained by strict editorial assignments. Silverlens also ran a photography library, and hosted photography workshops and art talks from local and visiting practitioners. It also spearheaded the visibility of Filipino artists overseas, showcasing photographic works at art fairs in Hong Kong, the United States, and France, which included Verzosa and Navarroza exhibiting at Paris Photo and Art Basel Hong Kong. Above all, Silverlens staged finely curated shows, which exposed the works of photographers such as Navarroza – currently a represented artist – to the wider public and to international collectors.

DEFINING CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

The practice of photography in Manila has two strands: contemporary artists that use photography as medium, either exclusively or by extension, and the work of photojournalists, whose aim is to capture images for news stories. If there is a poster-child for the former, it is Navarroza. Shown and published internationally, she is one of the most active proponents of experimental photography in the Philippines today. One of her most recognizable early works is her 2007 homage to Frida Kahlo, where she posed in self-portraits as the famed Mexican painter in the series entitled, *100 Years Between Us (Frida Kahlo)*. Experimenting with portrait painting as photography, the series explored the dynamics of the gaze, of both the subject and the viewer.

Navarroza's portfolio extends to dramatically staged photos of landscapes, from the rocky coastlines outside Cadaqués in Catalonia, Spain to the slopes of a Hawaiian volcano, which were taken during her extensive travels. Perhaps the most exciting work she has done so far was not a single photograph, but instead was a photography book that took two years to produce and resulted in

both a solo exhibition and a photographic archive. *Hunt & Gather, Terraria* was the second installment to *Ultramar*, a photography book project that had its beginnings in Madrid, where Navarroza visited the city's Palácio de Cristal, or Crystal Palace, which used to function as a greenhouse for plants collected from the Philippines.³

Returning to Manila after graduate studies in Spain, Navarroza initiated a call out to the public to forage for plants and soil from where they are living. These specimens were carefully itemized before being arranged together in terraria that Navarroza would later photograph for her 2013 solo exhibition at Silverlens entitled, *Ultramar, Part II: Hunt & Gather, Terraria*.

The exhibition was just one aspect of the project. Much like a plant, the project would bear more fruit, this time as another photography book edited by publisher and editor, Clara Lobregat Balaguer, and produced by The Office of Culture & Design. Alongside the terraria prints, information about these endemic plants were compiled into a book with essays by writers from Spain and the Philippines, and whose cross-indexing was fantastically rendered by designers

working in three continents. What resulted from this crowdsourced action was a mapping of Manila and its overlooked flora. With this project, Navarroza proved that a photographer is not limited to her camera as her lone instrument.

Navarroza also runs Thousandfold, an artist-run space for photography that has organized FotoSemana, an international photography festival in Manila. So far it has had two editions. In 2015 and 2016, FotoSemana lined up a week-long series of master photography classes, slide projections, and portfolio reviews alongside parallel photography exhibitions in various galleries in the city. Capitalizing on the wide network Navarroza had built through the years, FotoSemana also brought in overseas photographers, such as Nicolas Combarro, who mentored and interacted with local photographers. Thousandfold also promoted photo books at public presentations and through sales at its bookstore.

Jay Yao is another contemporary photographer whose practice is conceptual in its approach. Like Navarroza, Yao has gleaned inspiration from his travels, which have left a footprint on his large-scale works, from cloudscapes taken



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

through the window of a jetliner to shots of a walk through the temperate rainforests outside of Vancouver, Canada. A notable project was *Homecoming* (Gallery VASK, 2013) and *Homecoming Too* (Artinformal, 2014), where he asked Filipino fashion designers like Leslie Mobo, Joey Samson, Rajo Laurel, and Brian Tenorio to return to their hometowns and dress ordinary men, women, and children on the street in their irreverent clothes for one-of-a-kind photoshoots.

Poklong Anading is more widely known as a versatile conceptual artist whose works vary from video to sculpture. His street photography includes images of found objects, such as circular used rags and roadside rubble. But his most iconic photographs belong to his monochromatic *Anonymity* series (ongoing since 2004), where reflected light hides the face of his subjects. Anading's *Counter Acts*, a two-meter wide lightbox print and one of the largest photo works from this series, was selected for the Guggenheim UBS Global Art Map Initiative, which included transpacific traveling shows in 2013. It is now part of the Guggenheim Museum Collection in New York City.

Navarroza, Yao, and Anading dabble primarily with conceptual art photography, but there is another group whose work has been widely shown in exhibitions and festivals. These are photojournalists, such as Veejay Villafranca and Tammy David, graduates of a World Press Photo-funded training program. A recipient of Ian Parry and Joop Stewart grants, Villafranca is a news photographer who has covered some of the most urgent social issues today, from urban poverty to HIV/AIDS. Represented by Getty Images, his work has made it to the pages of esteemed publications, such as the *International Herald Tribune* and *The Guardian*.

Villafranca's documentary work, the outcome of years of coverage on the ground, reveals deeper layers. *SIGNOS*, for example, is not just about communities ravaged by flooding and destructive typhoons amplified by climate change; its diaristic storytelling exposes the multiple tragedies climate refugees face long after the storms have gone — bureaucratic wrangling, prolonged deprivation, and susceptibility to trafficking and prostitution.⁴

Villafranca belongs to a generation of documentary photojournalists whose work has shed light on multiple facets of Philippine society. Villafranca's *Faith above Fate* reveals how religion and superstition remain steadfast in modern-day Philippines.

Tammy David's commissioned work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and local editions of *Esquire* and *Forbes*. Many subjects she had photographed — businessmen, politicians, and beauty queens — are constantly under the public gaze. Her camera, however, manages to refract a certain tentativeness and vulnerability

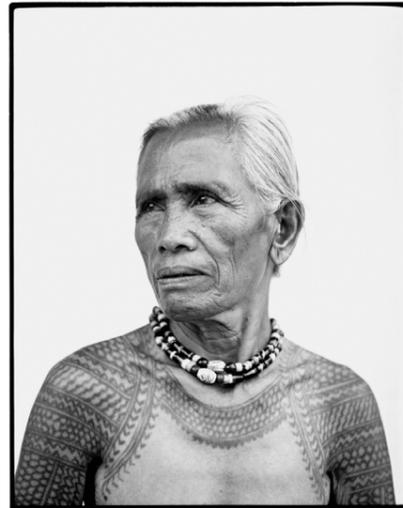


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

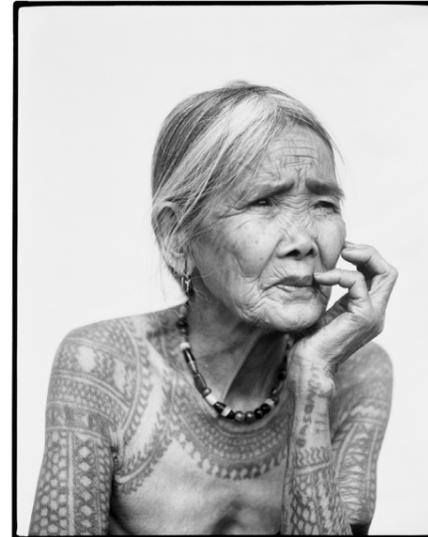


Fig. 8

in her subjects. Under David's lens, her subject's glow reveals a personality as immediate and relatable as our own. This is very palpable in her *Crown and Country* series (Manila Collective, 2010), where she documents the Philippines' national obsession with beauty pageants.⁵

Photographer Jake Verzosa has documented the country's basketball culture, as well as the endangered practice of Kalinga traditional tattoos in the highlands of Northern Philippines, specifically through stylized Avedonesque portraits of Kalinga elders. Gelay Concepcion's *Reyna de las Flores: Manila's Golden Gays* (Finale Art File, 2015) photo series, part of which appeared in *Traces*, brought to light the vitality of a group of gay seniors at the Home for the Golden Gays as they approach their twilight years. Meanwhile, Geric Cruz's award-winning photo essays are atmospheric and almost film-like in quality, be it a visual retelling of a famed lovers' lane along Manila Bay or kinship amid the pastoral joys of the Philippine countryside.

BEYOND PHOTOGRAPHY

There are also photo artists in Manila whose primary work extends beyond photography. Typifying this is MM Yu, who is both a painter and a photographer. Her distinct signature is vibrant bursts of color that fill the plane, whether rendered as photo prints or in acrylic paint. While her canvases are almost always abstract, her photographs are highly figurative. Her shots are a raw, ground-level survey of Manila as a chaotic, grimy, multi-hued megalopolis. Her snapshots have included piles of rubbish, road kill, tattered sofas, stray dogs, and cheap merchandise sold off the street.

Photographer At Maculangan is a feature filmmaker, actor, and painter, who produces works in still and moving images. Co-owner of Pioneer Studios, a professional photography studio that serves as the site of many photo gatherings and workshops, he is regularly sought after for editorial projects, but every so often he exhibits personal works. His portrait series entitled, *Corners Amplify Low Frequency* (2016), features Thai foley artists and was one of

the featured shows at a previous edition of Art Fair Philippines. Architect Micaela Benedicto recently presented her photo works in the exhibition entitled, *Documenting Absence* (West Gallery, 2016), an elegant and lyrical series of geometric photograms that honors the memory of her former partner.⁶

There are several important figures based abroad that have exhibited photographic work in Manila in the last decade. Video artist Paul Pfeiffer exhibited a meditative set of seashore photographs during *Vitruvian*, his first-ever solo show in the Philippines at the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) in 2015. UK-based RJ Fernandez's

Prix Pictet-nominated series *Moving Mountains*, exhibited in 2012 at the now-defunct Manila Contemporary art gallery, is a stark, bird's eye view of mining activity in the Northern Philippines. California-based Gina Osterloh has exhibited on numerous occasions the photographs of her interactions with paper within a controlled space (Green Papaya Art Projects, 2008; Silverlens Galleries, 2011 and 2015). Frank Callaghan, British-born but now Manila-based, has periodically showed his tense, if not portentous nightscapes epitomized in the project entitled, *Dwelling* (Silverlens Galleries, 2008). Spain- and Dumaguete- based Kristoffer Ardeña used tarpaulin for his Dumaguete prints included in *Tropical*, a commentary on the Philippine countryside idyll (Metropolitan Museum of Manila, 2015).

Czar Kristoff is a rising photographer who is self-taught. His photographs zoom in on the finer details of seemingly banal Philippine suburban scenes. *Configurations*, a photo book produced and co-published by Thousandfold Small Press, uses a parking lot construction site in Laguna province as a base for photographic experimentation.⁷ Influenced by Western European photographers, his photographs are restrained and bereft of the melodrama often associated with the local baroque vernacular.

This overview of contemporary Filipino photographers is a clear indication that photography is alive and well in Manila – but more needs to be done. Scholarship on local photographic practice remains limited. While there is interest among the wider public, Dr. Patrick Flores, Director of the Jorge B. Vargas Museum, doubts “if an aesthetic ecology is emerging. The challenge is to initiate discourse and to foster a critical public sphere that discusses photography.”⁸



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Fig. 1 Veejay Villafranca, *SIGNOS* project, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2 Wawi Navarroza, *Index B.*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 3-5 Poklong Anading, *Anonymity*, 2004-2012, chromogenic transparencies in lightboxes, edition: unique, nine parts each, each 19.7 x 16.9 x 1.4 in. Courtesy of 1335MABINI.

Fig. 6 Jake Verzosa, *Sin-ao Gammod*, 2009-2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 7 Jake Verzosa, *Bogkayon Suyam*, 2009-2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 8 Jake Verzosa, *Fang-od Oggay*, 2009-2013. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 9 Czar Kristoff, untitled, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 10 Gina Osterloh, *Mute Rash*, 2008, c-print, 30 x 38 inches. Courtesy of Green Papaya Art Projects.

Fig. 11 Tammy David, *Cool Down*, *Crown and Country*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 12 Paul Pfeiffer, *24 Landscapes*, 2000/2008, 24 digital C-prints, dimensions variable. Image by At Maculangan and courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art & Design (MCAD).

Fig. 13 Jay Yao, Untitled (Manjuyod Sand Bar, Bais, Negros Oriental), 2014 (Rajo Laurel Interview), Archival Giclée (Inkjet) Print on Archival Paper, 11 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 14 Jay Yao, Untitled (Tiaong Quezon), 2014 (Patis Tesoro Interview), Giclée (Inkjet) Print on Archival Paper, 11 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 15 MM Yu, *In-Transit*, Sit, C-Print, 2005-2016. Courtesy of the artist.

Co-author of the book entitled, *Contemporary Photography in Asia*, Tony Godfrey laments the absence in Manila of a major international photo festival with the scale and size of the Singapore International Photography Festival (Thousandfolds' FotoSemana remains a "micro" photography festival). Godfrey also warns that the web is overwhelming us with images, echoing the message of *Traces*. "I think the big problem with photography everywhere is that we are so deluged with photo imagery via the web. That is the biggest challenge," he says.⁹

However, there are photographers like Kristoff and David, who are adept at using social media platforms, including Instagram for photo research, and who embrace this brave, new digital world. "I see this as progress," Kristoff says. "In the sense that photographers/photo-based artists would be challenged to think and to discuss the possibilities of photography and bring something new to the table." Meanwhile in her most recent show *Post-Truth* (West Gallery, 2017), David mines her Instagram feed and turns a selection of images into a quirky parade of lightboxes.¹⁰

And so, perhaps, the current state of Philippine photography is nothing but a new chapter in the story arc of photography, and we only have to turn the page to see where the story will eventually bring us. ■

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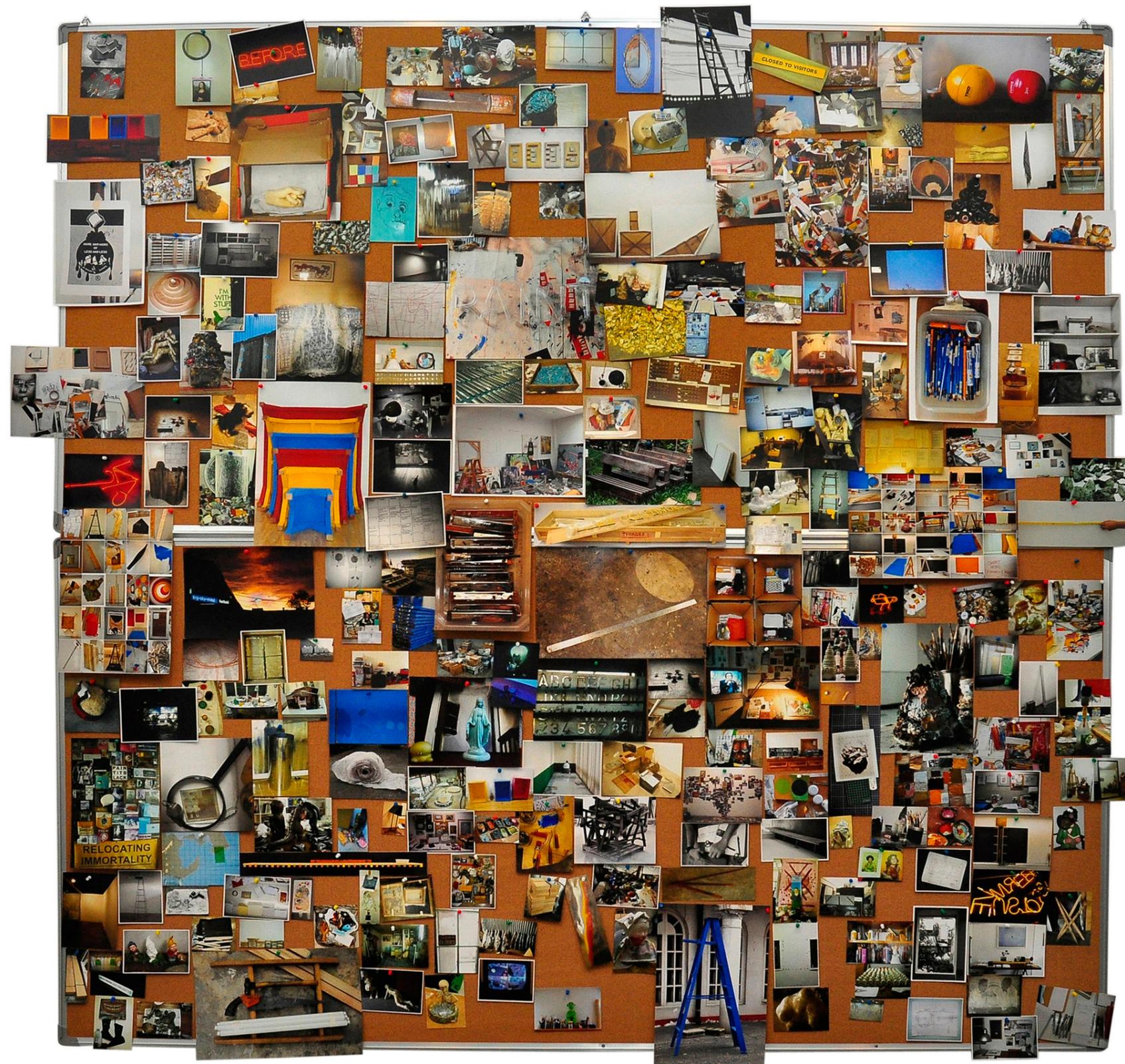


Fig. 15

¹ Instagram Company Statistics, Statistics Brain, last modified September 1, 2016, <http://www.statisticbrain.com/instagram-company-statistics>.

² Katrina Stuart Santiago, "Traces and revelations," *The Manila Times*, last modified June 27, 2015, <http://www.manilatimes.net/traces-and-revelations/195526>.

³ Patricia Tumang, "Through the Looking Glass," *Contemporary Art Philippines*, 2013.

⁴ Veejay Villafranca, e-mail message to author, February 2017.

⁵ Tammy David, e-mail message to author, February 2017.

⁶ "New at West: Gino Bueza, Pete Jimenez, Czar Kristoff, and Micaela Benedicto," *CNN Philippines*, last modified June 16, 2016, <http://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/arts/2016/06/16/west-gallery.html>

⁷ Czar Kristoff, e-mail message to author, February 2017.

⁸ Patrick Flores, e-mail message to author, February 2017.

⁹ Tony Godfrey, e-mail message to author, February 2017.

¹⁰ Lou Albano, "Q&A: Post Truth Photographer Tammy David," *Manila Bulletin Life*, last modified March 23, 2017, <http://mblife.xyz/8767/qa-post-truth-photographer-tammy-david>.

words by
JEWEL CHUAUNSU

ART ARCHIVE 01



Fig. 1

photos courtesy of
JEWEL CHUAUNSU

The past three centuries have given rise to a longstanding tradition of Filipino expatriate artists, ranging from Juan Luna (1857 - 1899) – the first internationally recognized Filipino artist, whose art flourished in Madrid, Rome, and Paris in the late 19th century – to kinetic art pioneer David Medalla (b. 1942), who embarked on his international career in the 1960s and now lives and works in London, New York, and Paris. Following in their footsteps are six contemporary Filipino artists: Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, Pio Abad, Mark Valenzuela, Goldie Poblador, and Lizza May David.

These contemporary Filipino artists share commonalities in their experiences working overseas

over the past two decades. Living, working, and exhibiting abroad have given them access to institutions, facilities, materials, and resources, but it has been a challenge to keep up with the high cost of living and to encourage interest from Western audiences about current Filipino issues, both artistic and political. Relocation has afforded them a critical distance and degree of objectivity, even as their work remains firmly rooted in Filipino cultural identity.

This essay retraces these contemporary Filipino artists' artistic roots and their global journeys as they maintain their artistic practices in both their adoptive and home countries, while increasing awareness about Philippine contemporary art around the world.

Home will always be where you come back to.

Identity is knowing where you belong to.

And there is the need to create

that sense of belonging.



BASED IN BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA & LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA, PHILIPPINES

Artist couple Alfredo (b. 1962, Cagayan, Philippines) and Isabel (b. 1965, Manila, Philippines) Aquilizan moved to Brisbane, Australia in 2006 with their five children to provide for them better educational opportunities. While preparing to move, they gave each child a balikbayan box (repatriate box) to pack their belongings. The contents of these boxes became the basis for their installation entitled, *Project Be-Longing: In Transit* (2006). Presented at the 15th Biennale of Sydney in 2006, the objects arranged in cube formations documented the family's migration to Australia.

It is not surprising that the Aquilizans gravitated to the balikbayan box as a metaphor. The balikbayan box, which overseas Filipino workers use to send gifts to their families back home, is an iconic symbol of the Filipino diaspora. *In Transit* evolved into *Project Another Country: Address* (2008), which is comprised of 140 balikbayan boxes filled with personal items donated to the family by the local Filipino community in Brisbane. The stacked cubes were arranged in the form of an enclosure with an entrance, like a house without a roof. It traveled to Adelaide and Singapore biennales in 2008, as well as to Japan and Israel.

The Aquilizans' own migration experience informs their practice. "Home will always be where you come back to. Identity is knowing where you belong to. And there is the need to create that sense of belonging. These are the issues that concern our practice," they say. They also examine ideas of dislocation, adaptation, collaboration, re-creation, and memory in their works.

The process of collecting personal objects and collaborating with communities is central to their art. Objects, with their accumulated history and sentimental value, embody the experiences and lives of people. The artists have collected shoes, toothbrushes, and energy drink bottles from Japan; blankets from Korea; and used rubber slippers from Singapore, among others. They transform donated materials and found objects into large-scale installation works. Video, photographs, sound, scent, and text are also incorporated into their installations.

The Aquilizans use their art to give marginalized communities a voice. As migrants, they were touched by the

plight of the itinerant Badjao, an indigenous group in the Philippines. Known as sea gypsies, the Badjao dwell in boats or stilt houses scattered along coastal areas in Tawi-Tawi, Sulu, Basilan, and Zamboanga. Ongoing conflict between Philippine government forces and the Moro National Liberation Front has resulted in the group's displacement and forced relocation.

In-Habit: Project Another Country (2012) referenced the Badjao stilt houses. The artists worked with local school groups to build small houses out of cardboard boxes. Another component was a three-channel video work featuring resilient and spirited Badjao children, who make a living on the streets by performing rap music infused with their local language.

Practicing overseas has given the Aquilizans the opportunity to present their work to a global audience, to connect with different communities around the world, and to communicate their artistic vision, which is anchored in their sensibilities as Filipinos. The artists split their time between Brisbane and Los Baños, Laguna, where they continue to rebuild their Fruitjuice Factory Studio. "At the moment, it is beneficial for us to be based in two countries, or should we say, a 'living in between' sort of thing, as our work most of the time entails a lot of traveling and working from one place to another," they say.

Alfredo Aquilizan earned his PhD from the Griffith University in Brisbane, his master's degree from the Polytechnic University in Norwich, England, and his Fine Arts degree from the Philippine Women's University in Manila, Philippines. Isabel Aquilizan completed her degree in Communication Arts at Assumption College in Manila, Philippines. The artists have participated in a number of international biennales, including the Havana Biennial (1997), Asia Pacific Triennial (1999 and 2009), Venice Biennale (2003 and 2015), Gwangju Biennale (2004), Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (2006), Liverpool Biennial (2010), Moscow Biennale (2013), Sharjah Biennial (2013), Setouchi Triennale (2016), and Honolulu Biennial (2017).

Goldie

BASED IN NEW YORK, UNITED STATES

An idea known as the “Proustian phenomenon” proposes that smells can trigger memories. The theory is named after the French writer Marcel Proust who, in his novel *Remembrance of Things Past*, describes a character recalling long-forgotten memories from his childhood after smelling and tasting a tea-soaked madeleine cake.

Christina “Goldie” Poblador (b. 1987, Manila, Philippines) recognized the connection between memories and smells in the aftermath of Typhoon Ondoy/Ketsana in 2009 that caused severe flooding in Manila. In an interview with *The FilAm*, she said, “When faced with loss, the greatest thing we have are our memories. After the typhoon, I had a distinct yearning for the smell and tastes of a place that seemed to have disappeared in one instant.”¹

Poblador decided to study perfumery. She also became interested in glassblowing as a way to make vessels for the scents. For her undergraduate thesis exhibition at the University of the Philippines, she presented a perfume bar with various scents gathered or concocted from the urban landscape. Alongside pleasant bouquets was the stench of pollution and squalor, serving as commentary on the effects of consumerism and urbanization. The scents were contained in hand-blown glass vials made by Poblador herself. For this exhibit, she was shortlisted for the Ateneo Art Awards and was subsequently included in the group exhibition, *Thrice Upon a Time: A Century of Story in the Art of the Philippines*, at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) in 2009.

The artist uses scents to awaken the senses and delve into layered relationships between ecology, spirituality, cultural identity, and femininity. She explains the significance of scents: “It takes us beyond memory and emotion and into the spiritual. In its molecular form, scent is ephemeral and alludes to the spirit through its quality of being invisible but undeniably present. The creation of a perfume is a kind of alchemy, as something becomes a more potent version of what it originally represented in nature. Since discovering perfumery, I have sought to develop a taxonomy of smells that narrate personal and collective memories of my country.”

A lot of her work deals with the representation of the body as subject in sculpture, installation, performance,

and film. “In my glass sculptures, I work from the movement of the body to shape a female nude that is moving – that is alive. In my performances, I embody the spirit of these glass sculptures, bringing the process full circle,” she says.

A work that combines glass, scents, and sound in an innovative way is Poblador’s 2014 installation *May Puno sa Dibdib ng Kamatayan* (There is a Tree in the Heart of Death), which was part of SAM’s *Sensorium 360°* exhibition. Here, she examined the idea of “composition,” as expressed and experienced through smell and sound. After selecting and collaborating on key songs, she translated sonic notes into olfactory ones, creating scent compositions that responded to their musical sources. In the adjoining room, a “keyboard” of 30 perfume notes allowed visitors to recreate the scent compositions or improvise their own.

The experience of living and working overseas has been challenging for Poblador in terms of communicating the context of her work to an audience that knows very little about the Philippines. She had to adjust from having her own glass studio in Manila to working at the New York Institute of Contemporary Glass (Urban Glass). Working part-time as an artist assistant and freelancer, she says, “I constantly look for work that will allow me to continue my practice.” She has applied for an artist green card, but admits the future is uncertain in the current political climate.

On the other hand, she has met a lot of inspiring people, including a women’s art collective, with whom she shares a communal studio space in Brooklyn. “Working alongside other amazing artists of different colors, backgrounds and sexualities has been a fantastic way to grow and learn,” she says. “Doing art residencies and learning about how other people live and make art has changed my work and my perspective as a human being. This is the best part of being an artist overseas and the best part of being an artist in New York.”

Poblador received her MFA in Glass from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 2015. She currently lives in Ridgewood, Queens in New York.

¹ “Christina Poblador’s sweet, scented art show opens March 21,” *The Fil-Am: A Magazine for Filipino Americans in New York*, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://thefilam.net/archives/20746>.

Since discovering perfumery,
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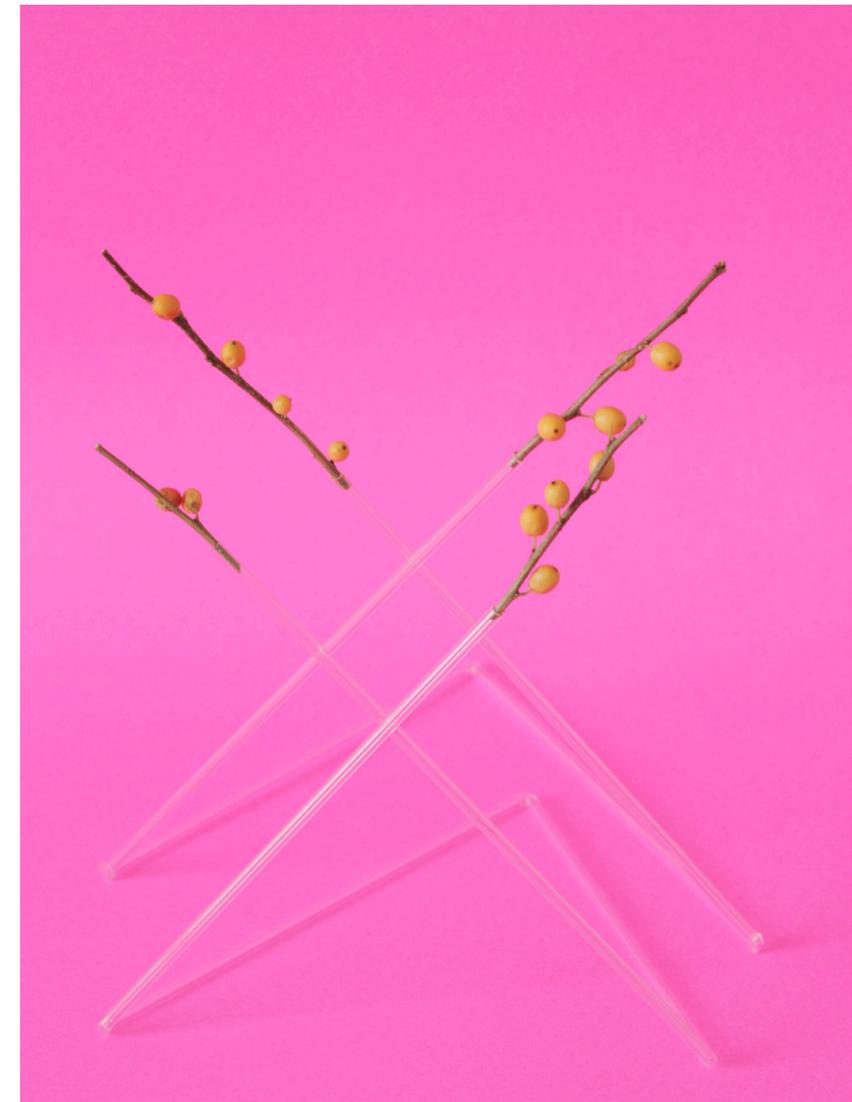


Fig. 3

Poblador



Fig. 4

BASED IN LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

In 2004, Pio Abad (b. 1983, Manila, Philippines) moved to the United Kingdom, specifically Glasgow, to study painting and printmaking at the Glasgow School of Art. Part of the reason for the move was to figure out what he wanted to do with his art practice. His aunt, artist Pacita Abad (1946–2004), encouraged Pio to branch out. “I was making oil paintings then – which is funny in hindsight, as one of the main things that define me as an artist now is that I am not a painter,” he says.

Abad ended up living in Glasgow for five years. Looking back at how his career got its start in Glasgow, he says, “Beyond the industrial grayness was a close-knit art community that was really vibrant and full of possibilities. People who were setting up DIY galleries in their bedrooms when I first moved there have ended up running these same galleries in Frieze, and artists who began exhibiting in these galleries have recently been nominated for the Turner Prize or shown in Venice. For me, having that sense of possibility at that particular stage was crucial in seeing how I can work as an artist.”

Abad moved to London eight years ago to pursue his MFA at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA). The RA’s three-year program was free of charge and allowed him to have a studio in Central London. He has remained in London, where he has been given the chance to present his work to diverse audiences, as well as access many museums and galleries. But there were disadvantages, too. “The cost of living is pretty high so you’re always stressed out about making sure you can cover your day-to-day expenses, not to mention the costs of producing work. It can also be very competitive, which is a double-edged sword. Also, with the speed of gentrification, studio spaces are constantly under threat,” he says.

An arts organization called Gasworks – which provides an international residency program and subsidized studios for artists – gave Abad his first major solo show in London in 2014. He still has a studio in the building. “Their support has been invaluable, and it’s really amazing to be part of such an international community,” he says.

I have always been interested in the possibility of objects behaving like cultural weapons. That even the most benign, most ornamental things can function to enforce a certain ideology, a certain way of living.

As an artist concerned with Philippine history and politics, Abad finds that living abroad provides him with critical distance, which helps him to understand how Philippine events and narratives are connected to other histories and contexts. His practice has been informed by a quote from Walter Benjamin: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”

Abad says, “I have always been interested in the possibility of objects behaving like cultural weapons. That even the most benign, most ornamental things can function to enforce a certain ideology, a certain way of living. This is the main idea that ties my practice together.” He works in a wide range of media, including textile, drawing, installation, and photography, to create artworks that often take the form of domestic accessories such as silk scarves, handbags, and wallpaper.

The Collection of Jane Ryan and William Saunders is a project that Abad has been working on since 2012. William Saunders and Jane Ryan were the fake names that former Philippine President Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos used to open a Swiss bank account in 1968. “For the past five years, I have been compiling an inventory of their collection, from Old Master paintings, to English silverware, to Imelda’s jewelry – this collection, which the Marcoses bought using money stolen from the Filipino people, has largely been forgotten by the public, and the Marcoses have exploited this amnesia,” he says. “By compiling this inventory and presenting them through a series of installations, I want to confront the public with the scale of the Marcos loot and remind people of what they inflicted on us as a nation.”



Fig. 5

One of the installations is a series of 97 postcards of the Marcos collection of European Old Masters, which Abad first presented at the UP Vargas Museum in Manila. “The postcards were laid out on a ten-meter long plinth that spanned the length of the gallery in an almost forensic fashion – a monumental body of incontrovertible evidence,” he explains. Abad’s own family history is linked to the Marcos regime. His father, former Budget Secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad, was a student activist who fought to topple the Marcos dictatorship.

In September 2016, Abad had his biggest exhibition to date: *Notes on Decomposition* at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow. He showcased a series of large-scale ink drawings depicting 144 objects that have been auctioned off over the past 20 years, including the sale of the Marcos silverware in 1991 and the Lehman Brothers collection of objets d’art in 2008. There was also his *Not a Shield, but a Weapon* installation consisting of 100 replicas of Margaret Thatcher’s Asprey handbag, which sold for £25,000 at a charity auction held by the disgraced politician Jeffrey Archer. “The exhibition continues my interest in reading domestic objects and decorative artifacts through political histories,” says Abad.

He has been busy juggling different projects in 2017: sculptures based on the Marcos-era myth of *Malakas at Maganda* (the Strong and the Beautiful) for a group show in Paris; showing *Not a Shield, but a Weapon* at Art Basel Hong Kong; and his March 2017 solo show, *Counternarratives*, at Silverlens Galleries in Manila.

Lizza May

BASED IN BERLIN, GERMANY

Filipino-German artist Lizza May David (b. 1975, Quezon City, Philippines) grew up in Germany, where her family settled when she was eight years old. Her work often references the relationship between the personal and political, the private and public. “My artistic interest started from the investigation of my own biography,” she says. “I seek to understand how the family relates to society, to ideas about leaving home.” She investigates issues of labor, migration, and identity in her video works. “To have a camera in hand is quite empowering,” she adds. “It’s a form used to communicate with the world and have a discourse on politics. It creates a document of time, which is interesting to me in terms of the body, identity, and society.”

In *The Model Family Award* (2008), David turned her lens to the OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) experience and how it was represented in the Model OFW Family of the Year Award — an annual competition initiated by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and sponsored by corporations. Glossing over the high unemployment rate and low wages that push Filipinos to work abroad, the award puts a positive spin on the struggles and sacrifices of OFWs by highlighting “model families” that maintained close family relationships despite the distance. The award also served as an effective advertising campaign for corporations that profited from OFW remittances and long-distance calls.

In previous exhibitions, David had considered the appropriation of Philippine modern paintings, particularly those belonging in institutional collections. She engaged with the permanent collection of the Ateneo Art Gallery for *The Incomplete Project* (2013), becoming interested in similarities between the works of Filipino and European Masters and copying the “migration of images” in her own paintings. In *Artist Unknown* (2014), she focused on works with unknown artists or titles in the Cultural Center of the



Fig. 6

I seek
to understand
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to ideas about
leaving home.



Fig. 7

Philippines’ visual arts collection, experimenting with visitors’ expectations of what should belong in museum collections.

After her explorations in time-based media and art historiography, David has returned to painting in recent years. She reflected on how the encounter with the tropical is likened to utopia, as it exists in the imagination and as a social construct, in *Umwelt* (2015). Meanwhile, *Mangrove* (2016) was based on pictures taken by David’s stepfather, a photographer from a small German town, who traveled to the Philippines in the 1970s. He showed his works in the family’s photo shop and asked customers and friends to mark their favorites with colored paper dots. In David’s photo series and paintings, she reworked the memory of how the photographer and his audience viewed and framed the unknown Philippines.

She adds, “I have the privilege of observing the Philippine art scene from a distance, with all its craziness and intertwinement with capital. I hope people in the art scene will open themselves up to other art histories while maintaining their own taste and creativity, without losing themselves in the hype over top-selling names. There must be critical education about the distinction that art is not a marketing event, and its value is not determined by how much it sells at art fairs and auction houses.”

David concludes that the “precarious conditions of an artist’s life affect you wherever you are, regardless of nationality. A compassionate, supportive art scene—whether in Germany or the Philippines—is always needed.”

David studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg (Germany), École des Beaux Arts de Lyon (France), and University of Arts Berlin (Germany). She has had several solo exhibitions in Berlin and Manila, most recently *Mangrove* at Galerie Michael Janssen in Berlin (2016) and *Umwelt* at Galleria Duemila in Manila (2015).

David

BASED IN ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

Mark Valenzuela (b. 1980, Pagadian, Philippines) began his artistic career with drawings and paintings, but also produced sculptural terracotta works in the early 2000s. He had initially researched about terracotta while studying engineering at Silliman University in Dumaguete City. He would frequent the Daro pottery community in Dumaguete to learn more about traditional terracotta processes. In 2007, he had his first solo show at Galleria Duemila in Manila.

In 2011, he moved to Adelaide, Australia to be with his girlfriend, Anna O’Loughlin. According to the artist, working in Australia was vastly different from working in the Philippines in terms of materials and resources. When he was based in Dumaguete, he would make his ceramic works with local terracotta and stoneware clay that he had dug and processed himself. He had started out using mainly terracotta clay until he discovered a stoneware clay source. Through experimentation, he figured out how to process and fire it.

“My kiln in Dumaguete consisted of a pile of terracotta bricks that I would reconfigure for each firing,” he says. In Adelaide, he used commercial clay and glazes and fired his works in electric kilns, although he also built a wood-fired anagama kiln, which he uses once or twice a year. “The availability of a wide range of ceramic materials in Australia has enabled me to explore different techniques when working with clay and take new directions in my work,” he says. “However, I never would have been in the position to do this without that period of working in Dumaguete.”

Valenzuela has had opportunities to exhibit in Australia since moving there. In 2016, he curated and participated in an exhibition with Riel Hilario and Wawi Navarroza for the OzAsia Festival. He was part of the Australian Ceramics Triennale on two occasions. Shortly after moving to Australia, Valenzuela and O’Loughlin founded Boxplot, an arts project aimed at providing visual artists from Australia and Southeast Asia with opportunities for collaboration, exhibition, and exchange. The project began with a series of independent exhibitions held in alternative spaces in Adelaide. Boxplot has since focused on curating exhibitions in partnership with art spaces in Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

For me,
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as the making
of each individual piece.

Valenzuela has always conceived of his work as an installation. “A single work may consist of many ceramic pieces that interact with each other and connect to form a broader narrative,” he says. “For me, installing my works in a space is just as important as the making of each individual piece.” He has continued to incorporate and increasingly integrate the three core elements – painting, drawing, and ceramics – in his installations. He is also interested in exploring new mediums and has started to incorporate video in his exhibitions.

A 2015 Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Awardee, Valenzuela’s art practice is centered on “forms of conflict and resistance, and points of tension between the individual and the collective.” His preoccupation originates from his own background, having grown up in army base camps in Zamboanga del Sur, Mindanao. “The universality of these themes means that my work is not dependent upon being in a particular location,” he says. Valenzuela focuses on the ways in which power and dominance are obtained and maintained, using the idea of mythmaking to “interrogate the process by which certain belief systems and histories are prioritized in service of a

dominant cultural identity, while alternate histories or beliefs are marginalized, and in time, forgotten.” Works such as *Mythopoeic Inventions* (2014), *How to catch a shapeshifter* (2015), and *Blindspot* (2015) specifically address this concept of mythmaking.

Recent works, including *Violently* (2016) and *New Folk Heroes* collection at Art Fair Philippines 2017, use action figures and superheroes to investigate machismo and fanaticism, looking at the ways in which gender norms and notions of masculinity are constructed in popular culture and how they are used to gain dominance and generate violence. “I also wanted to create tension between the idealized figure of the superhero and the darker reality of vigilantism,” he says, adding that the works are tied to the current sociopolitical context of the Philippines.

For now, Valenzuela is based in Adelaide, but he plans to keep studios in both Australia and the Philippines in the future. He still returns to the Philippines three or four times a year. “This is an expensive habit, but I don’t think I could live in another country if I did not have the opportunity to frequently return home,” he says. ■

- Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, *In-Habit: Project Another Country*, 2013. 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan, originally commissioned by the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation. Courtesy of Jewel Chuaunsu.
- Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, *In-Flight: Project Another Country*, 2009. Asia Pacific Triennial, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art. Courtesy of Jewel Chuaunsu.
- Goldie Poblador, *Ikebana Bright Orange*, 2016, glass, scent, plants, 8 in x 5 in x 4 in. Courtesy of Jewel Chuaunsu.
- Pio Abad, *Every Tool is a Weapon if You Hold it Right XXV* (2015), unique acid dye prints on hand-stitched silk twill, 100 x 100cm. Courtesy of the artist and Silverlens Galleries, Manila.
- Pio Abad, *Every Tool is a Weapon if You Hold it Right XXV* (2015), unique acid dye prints on hand-stitched silk twill, 100 x 100cm. Courtesy of the artist and Silverlens Galleries, Manila.
- Lizza May David, #2 (2016), oil on canvas, 90 x 60cm. Courtesy of Jewel Chuaunsu.
- Lizza May David, *The Mangrove Collection* (2016), photo series. Courtesy of Jewel Chuaunsu.
- Mark Valenzuela, *Terraformers* (2015), ceramic, concrete, terracota shards, string. Courtesy of Melvyn Calderon.



words by
DUFFIE HUFANA OSENTAL

ART ARCHIVE 01



Fig. 1

The city of Cebu – and by extension its metropolitan area, including the cities of Mandaue and Lapu Lapu – has long held an important place in the narrative of Philippine history and the development of its art and culture. Indeed, the image of the Santo Niño at Cebu’s Basilica of the Holy Child is one of the first significant examples of ecclesiastical imagery in the Philippines, given as a gift from Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and seen as a symbol of the country.

Given Cebu’s long history and informal status as the Philippines’ “second city” – a label that Cebuanos are likely to reject – one would assume that the Cebu would be at the forefront of the Philippines’ dynamic contemporary art scene. Cebu has nurtured the talents of furniture designer Kenneth Cobonpue and fashion designer Monique Lhuillier, and it’s also home to a bustling film industry, which includes Bigfoot Studios and the International Academy of Film and Television on Mactan Island. Creativity is the lifeblood of the city. Its geographic location in the center of the Philippines has

paved the way for shared cultural and linguistic links with the Visayas and Mindanao.

The city is in a strategic position to uniquely contribute to Philippine contemporary visual art, but the Cebu visual art scene has, in many ways, become stagnant. Cebu’s most recognized artists – Romulo Galicano and Orley Ypon – have established dedicated practices and a niche in Manila, and its art writers and critics, such as the late Reuben Cañete, have also found an audience in Manila’s art scene. While new galleries have sprouted up more recently, the Cebu art market has informally been governed by artists selling directly to collectors without gallery representation. Though this system is being challenged, the lack of an extensive gallery and institutional network has led to an unfortunate decline in artistic recognition and impact beyond the region.

The Cebu art scene faces many hurdles, and confronting these challenges requires an understanding of the local art environment and what it means to be a Cebuano artist.



Fig. 2

Fig. 1 Mark "Kidlat" Copino, *Pangamuyo, pangandoy sa itom nga iring* (Balay-Balay Series), 2016, acrylic on canvas, 31 x 46 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2 Orley Ypon, *Adam's ribs*. Courtesy of Qube Gallery.

Fig. 3 Mark "Kidlat" Copino, *Biyahe* (Balay-Balay Series), 2017, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 91 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 4 Mark "Kidlat" Copino, *Tingkatug* (Balay-Balay Series), 2017, acrylic on canvas, 91 x 91 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

THE GODFATHER OF CEBUANO VISUAL ART

The development of visual art in Cebu can be traced to Martino Abellana (1914-1988), a prominent painter and founder of one of Cebu's two fine art schools at the University of the Philippines Cebu (the other is the University of San Carlos). Abellana studied under National Artists Fernando Amorsolo and Guillermo Tolentino, and his classical oeuvre reflects their influences. His paintings capture rural landscapes in tropical hues, with heavily precise academic compositions and, in the case of human figures, classical anatomy. His paintings of farmers and fisher folk served to define a type of approach known in Cebu as Traditionalist.

Abellana was a peer of the Modernists, including Vicente Manansala. The Philippine modernist art movement had quickly burgeoned after artist Victorio C. Edades' landmark 1928 solo exhibition at the Philippine Columbia Club in Manila, which was viewed as a challenge to mainstream conservatism. While the Modernists aligned their deconstruction with the developments of the West, such as Cubism, Abellana preferred to fine-tune his craft to near memetic perfection, focusing on elements such as light and its relation to form. Abellana was different from Amorsolo in his choice of subject, eschewing the idyllic nature of the maestro in favor of depicting the hard labor of rural life.

Abellana's influence on contemporary Cebuano artistic practices cannot be understated. Both Galicano and Ypon use highly-stylized academic compositions in their respective practices, reminiscent of Abellana's aesthetic. Both depict their subjects in some form of labor, turning large canvases into showcases in academic form, anatomy, light, and shadow. Their success has encouraged Traditionalists to stick closely to this method. While this certainly allows technique to shine through, it also gives the impression that the works are interchangeable. Galicano and Ypon stand out through their sheer talent, and together with Abellana, have created a market within and outside of Cebu for their aesthetic, which they call Realism.

THE QUEEN CITY'S ROOTS

Cebu is at the heart of the country's first contact with Western culture through the arrival of Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. This was also where Magellan met his end while intervening on behalf of the newly-Christianized leader of Cebu, Rajah Humabon, in a dispute against his rival Lapu-Lapu on the nearby island of Mactan. Cebu was the first capital of the Philippines – then called the Spanish East Indies – before losing that status to Manila in 1571. Since then, Cebu has had a somewhat understandably acrimonious relationship with Manila.

One reason may be language. People in Cebu speak Cebuano (also called Bisaya), an Austronesian language that is related to – but different from – Tagalog. A recurring source of cultural tension is the declaration of Tagalog as Filipino, the Philippine national language. This has led to locals perceiving a division in mindset between those that speak Tagalog and those that speak Bisaya. Within the art scene, it can be common for these "outsiders" to be regarded with suspicion.

THE MALL MARKET

The prevailing Realist aesthetic leaves little room for anything else. Kenichi Wani, a contemporary Filipino-Japanese artist who grew up and lives in Cebu, says that this cycle has fostered an unsupportive atmosphere that has stunted the growth of the Cebu art scene. "They're the ones who really started it all. But you won't see any of the older guys in our shows," he says. "They're clannish, exhibiting mostly in malls." By malls, he means the only market platform that, up until very recently, was available to artists in Cebu: the mega malls of SM and Ayala. "If you have the money, you can exhibit. They don't market for you though. They'll provide you with some help, like posters around SM."

This leaves the act of selection and curation to commercial mall entities instead of trained art professionals. SM City Cebu has a dedicated art space that was modeled after the Art Center in SM Megamall in Manila. For decades, in a city lacking in museums and exhibition spaces, it was the only platform for artists to mount exhibitions. Local artists became their own marketers, and the Traditionalist cycle continued through this system, which encouraged collectors to see art in the same vein as the interior design pieces being sold in nearby shops. Within this ecosystem, it also became difficult to procure art supplies, with variety limited by the kinds of paintings that were popular.

It also did not help that many of these Traditionalists have started their own "academies," essentially informal apprenticeships informed by the Traditionalist aesthetic.

In time, however, this system has led to a confrontation between the Traditionalists and younger artists, such as Wani, who bill themselves as the Contemporaries. "They're trying to achieve perfection in their craft, and I respect that," says Wani. "What we're trying to do, however, is deconstruction, which they don't get. I mean, in one of our openings, one of the Traditionalists blurted out, this is prostitution of art!"

The Contemporaries have adopted new media practices and techniques that clash with the Traditionalists – many of whom are gatekeepers at prevailing Cebu art institutions. Mark Anthony Copino, known by the moniker Kidlat, is a street artist influenced by American stencil artist Logan Hicks, whom he encountered on the Internet. Kidlat's Traditionalist professor at the University of San Carlos refused to approve his thesis proposal on street art and stenciling techniques, which ultimately led to Kidlat dropping out. This did not deter the artist, who has gone on to help establish two Cebuano street art collectives: Ubec Crew and Junks Collective. Having now used his street art techniques in gallery exhibits, Kidlat says the art scene in Cebu is "...unsupportive. But really, the streets are where I can work on my life thesis."

Cebu's artistic community is stirred by this debate, which is effectively a repeat of the old-versus-new narratives throughout Philippine art history, including the pre-World War II clash between Victorio Edades of the new-guard Modernists against the Conservatives Fernando Amorsolo and Guillermo Tolentino.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Therein lies
the biggest challenge
of the Cebu art scene —
to define itself on its own terms
and not just in relation to Manila.



Fig. 5

CEBU'S ART GALLERIES

Sensing the need for alternative visual art platforms, galleries in Cebu are slowly altering the local art landscape. Founded in 2013, Qube Gallery has successfully represented Cebuano artists at international art fairs, such as Art Fair Tokyo and Art Kaohsiung. The professionalization of art exhibitions and global exposure of local artists could pave the way for local collectors to support emerging contemporary Cebuano artists. The brainchild of gallerist Maris Holopainen, Qube Gallery's aim is not only in professionalizing the Cebu art scene, but also providing opportunities for Cebuano artists to engage in dialogue with other artists around the country.

Qube Gallery is located in one of Cebu's creative cores, sharing a compound with other creative companies and has a balcony with commissioned contemporary murals by Cebuano street artists. Qube represents both Wani and Kidlat. Wani, in particular, had a successful showing at Art Kaohsiung in December 2016. His paintings of deconstructed humans in fantasy environments and his series of resin toy-sculptures are novel and innovative. Qube professionalized his approach by providing him access to a curator, which is not common practice for the majority of local artists that work directly with collectors or exhibit only at malls.

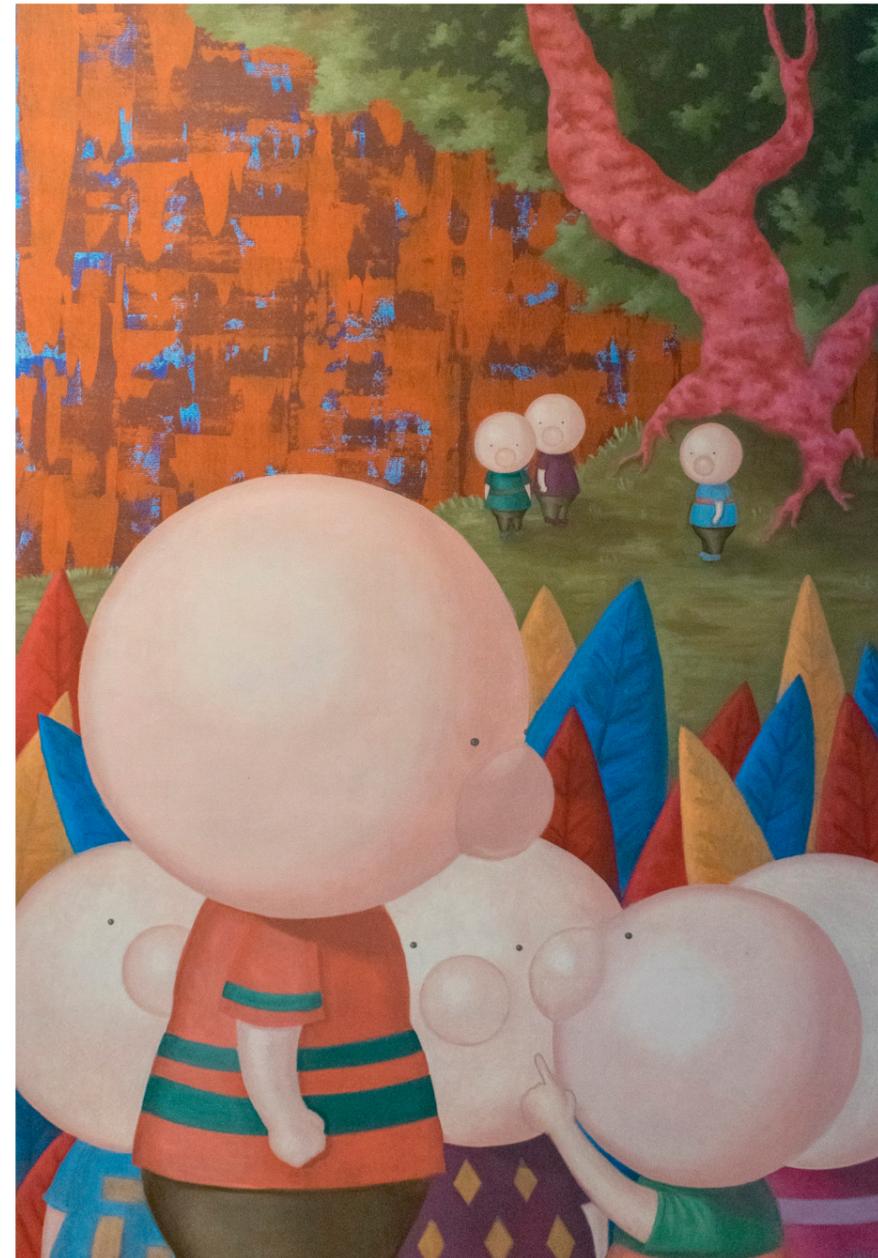


Fig. 6

Fig. 5 Kenichi Wani. *Striped Vivi*, 2016. Courtesy of Qube Gallery.

Fig. 6 Kenichi Wani. *First Drive*, 2016, oil on canvas, 61 x 46 cm. Courtesy of Qube Gallery.

CHALLENGING THE MANILA PARADIGM

Outside of the malls and new galleries, Cebu lacks contemporary art museums and regularly scheduled art events. Though Cebu did participate in the 2008 Visayas Islands Visual Arts Exhibition and Conference (VIVA ExCon), it doesn't receive as much prominence as other Visayan cities like Bacolod, Iloilo, Dumaguete, and Roxas. The climate is changing, but many perceive Cebu as lacking bigger opportunities for the more talented artists. The temptation to leave the city is strong.

For instance, Cebuano painter Darby Alcoseba, one of the winners of the 2013 Metrobank Art and Design Excellence (MADE) Award, has chosen to exhibit and work primarily in Manila. When he met with artists back home in Cebu, he stressed the importance of finding success in Manila. Holopainen also admits that some Qube-represented artists, such as Wani, either have second jobs or a supportive family network that allow them to continue living and working in Cebu.

The primary question that Cebuano artists wrestle with concerns identity — do you really stop being a Cebuano artist if you do not live in Cebu? Many Traditionalists seem to think so, and are not shy to point out that the “contemporary” approach is as alien as Tagalog.

Therein lies the biggest challenge of the Cebu art scene — to define itself on its own terms and not just in relation to Manila. This dilemma is sure to earn the ire of Cebuano artists, but it also forces them to examine the potential of their city as a thriving artistic hub with a unique aesthetic sensibility that could stand to make a bigger mark across the region — and, eventually, the world. ■

¹ All artist quotations are sourced from email exchanges and conversations with the author, January 2017.

CONTRIBUTORS

RINGO BUNOAN

Ringo Bunoan is an artist, researcher, writer, and curator based in Manila, Philippines. She led Big Sky Mind, an independent artist-run space, from 1999-2004; initiated special research projects on artist-run spaces and conceptual artist Roberto Chabet for Asia Art Archive; co-founded King Kong Art Projects Unlimited in 2010; and was lead curator of *Chabet: 50 Years*. In 2014, she co-founded artbooks.ph, an independent Manila bookstore focusing on Philippine art and culture. She is the editor of the Roberto Chabet monograph published by King Kong Art Projects Unlimited (2015). In 2016, she curated the Marker exhibition for Art Dubai, focusing on artist-run spaces in Manila. She received her BFA in Art History from the University of the Philippines in 1997.

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Rina Angela Corpus is an assistant professor of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines and is currently based in Melbourne, Australia. As a dance scholar, she has authored two books on dance—*Defiant Daughters Dancing* (2007) and *Dance and other Slippages* (2014)—both published by the University of the Philippines Press. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Dance at the University of Melbourne.

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Jewel Chuaunsu is a writer and editor based in Manila, Philippines. She is the managing editor of *Art+*, a bi-monthly Philippine visual art and lifestyle magazine, and frequently writes about art, travel, food, and interior design. She received her BA in Humanities from Ateneo de Manila University.

MARIKA CONSTANTINO

Marika Constantino is an artist, freelance writer, educator, independent curator, and researcher based in Manila, Philippines. She has participated in significant exhibitions in the Philippines and abroad, and has contributed to numerous international art publications. She is Executive Director of 98B COLLABoratory and coordinates the undertakings of the First United Building Community Museum in Escolta, Manila. She received her BS.Arch. from the UP College of Architecture and majored in Art History at the UP College of Fine Arts.

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Irwin Cruz is a journalist based in Manila, Philippines. His work has appeared in *Town and Country Philippines*, *Businessworld High Life*, the *Financial Times Weekend*, the *Bangkok Post* magazine, and *Colors*, among others. He received his MA in European Media from Merz Akademie, the Stuttgart design school, and pursued postgraduate studies at Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid.

MAYUMI HIRANO

Mayumi Hirano is a writer, educator, and researcher based in Manila, Philippines. She is the head of educational programs at 98B COLLABoratory, which she co-founded in 2012. She was the assistant director of Koganecho Area Management Center in Yokohama (2008-2013), where she headed the international artist-in-residence programs and curated the annual art festival Koganecho Bazaar. Hirano was a fellow of Nippon Foundation's Asian Public Intellectuals (2013-2014) and an Asia Art Archive Researcher in Japan (2007-2008). She received her MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in New York.

LISA ITO-TAPANG

Lisa Ito-Tapang is an art writer, researcher, and independent curator based in Manila, Philippines. She teaches art history and theory as a faculty member of the Department of Theory of the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts (UPCFA) in Diliman, Quezon City. She is a member of the Young Critics Circle Film Desk and the Concerned Artists of the Philippines. She received a BA in Fine Arts at the UPCFA and is completing her MA in Art Studies at the UP College of Arts and Letters.

DUFFIE HUFANA OSENTAL

Duffie Hufana Osental is a Carlos Palanca Award-winning art writer and editor based in Manila, Philippines. He has written about Philippine visual art for a variety of publications, including *Rappler*, *BusinessWorld*, and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. He was previously editor-in-chief of *Art+*, a bi-monthly Philippine visual art and lifestyle magazine, and worked in the Education Department of Ayala Museum. He has a BA in History from De La Salle University.

NESS ROQUE-LUMBRES

Ness Roque-Lumbres is a theater and film actress, performance-maker, writer, dramaturg, and artist-manager based in Manila, Philippines. She is a core member of Sipat Lawin Ensemble and recently co-curated the Idea Exchange Platform of Karnabal Festival 2016, which supports the development of contemporary performance in the Philippines. Recent works include: *The Mousetrap: Anti-Hamlet* with Guelan Luarca and Christopher Aronson (Karnabal Festival 2016); Sipat Lawin's *Gobyerno* (Festival Bo:m 2015, Honmoku Project 2015, Darwin Festival 2016, Castlemaine Festival 2017) and *Battalia Royale* (2013-2014); and Raya Martin's *How He Died is Controversial* (Asian Arts Theater Opening Festival, Gwangju 2016). She has a BA in Filipino Literature from Ateneo de Manila University.

SARAH SALAZAR-ARONSON

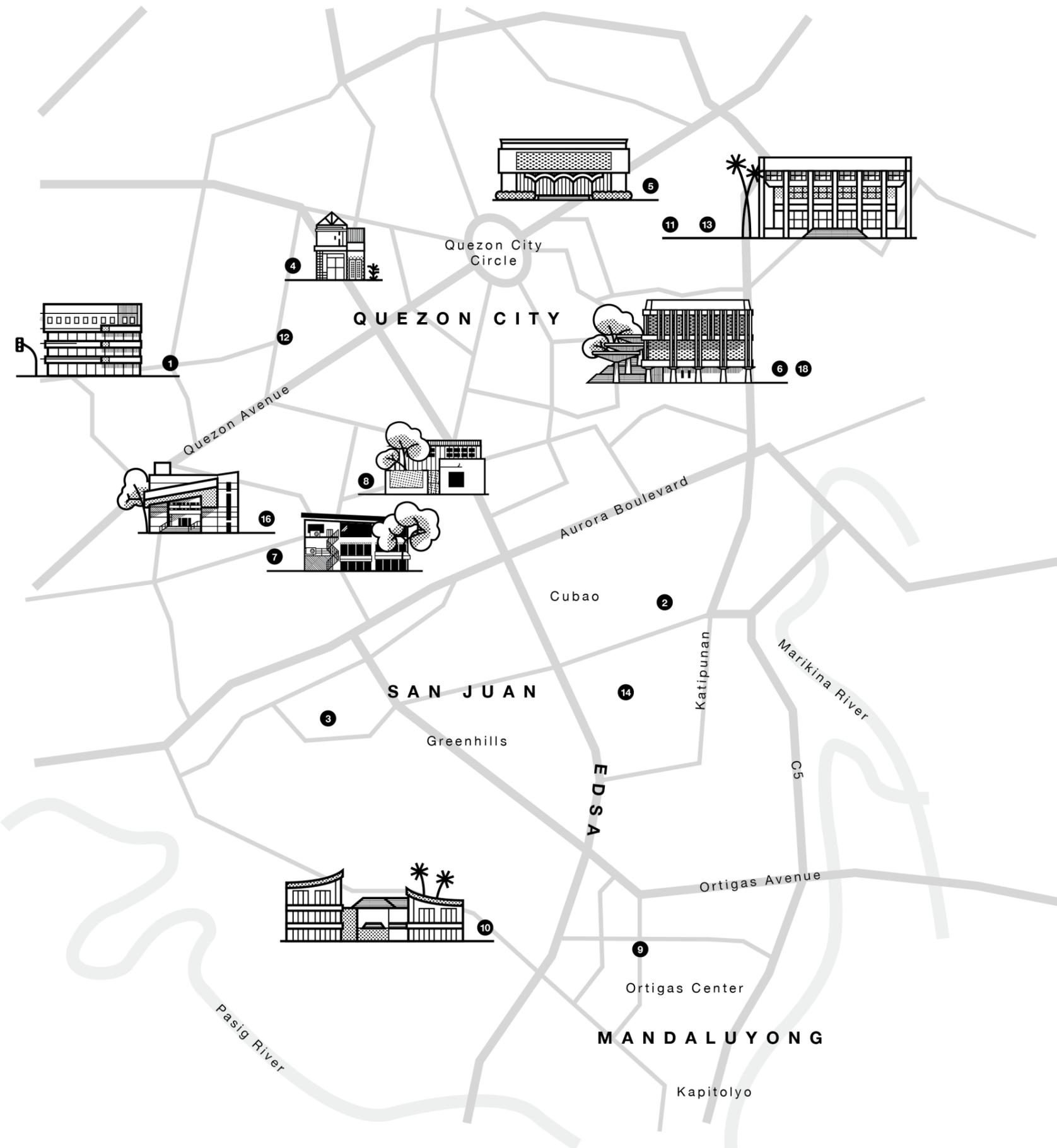
Sarah Salazar-Aronson is a contemporary arts practitioner, and freelance theater-maker and manager based in Manila, Philippines. She is a core member of Sipat Lawin Ensemble (since 2009), and is co-director and one of the head curators of Sipat Lawin's Karnabal Festival. She was a visiting faculty for Art Studies and Theater Arts at the Philippine High School for the Arts (2014-2017). Independently, she has been working with Bernadette Uy on *Warning: Adult Content*, an immersive performance on digital love-making (Asia Triennial of Performing Arts 2017) as part of Sipat Lawin's *Hidden Economies: SERBISYO* project. She received her BA in Art Studies from the University of the Philippines Diliman.

SIR ANRIL PINEDA TIATCO, PhD

Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco is a writer and scholar based in Manila, Philippines. He is an associate professor in the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and was a visiting scholar at the University of Manchester's Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures. Tiatco authored *Entablado: Theaters and Performances in the Philippines* (2015) and *Performing Catholicism: Faith and Theater in a Philippine Province* (2016)—both published by the University of the Philippines Press—and *Buhol-Buhol / Entanglement: Contemporary Theatre in Metropolitan Manila* (2017), published by Peter Lang. He earned his PhD in Theatre Studies from the National University of Singapore.

PATRICIA TUMANG

Patricia Tumang is an arts writer and editor based in Los Angeles, California (United States). A contributing editor of *Asian Art News* and *World Sculpture News*, she was awarded an Arts Writers Grant from the Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation in 2012 to write about the lives and work of contemporary Filipina artists. In 2009, she was a US Fulbright Scholar in Manila, Philippines. She regularly publishes articles, reviews, and catalogue essays on contemporary art, artists, museums, and exhibitions in Asia (with a focus on the Philippines). She received her BA in Cultural Studies from Eugene Lang College and an MFA in English and Creative Writing from Mills College.



North & Central Metro Manila

Dance

1 Airdance

Airdance is a performance company focused on the development of contemporary dance and Aerial Arts, offering a variety of dance classes and workshops in its Quezon City studio.

www.airdance.com.ph

+63 (2) 414 5279

Frisco Place, Unit 303
158 Roosevelt Ave. & Del Monte Ave.
San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Mondays to Saturdays
1:00 PM-6:00 PM

2 Chameleon Dance Theatre

Founded in 1989 by Jojo and Ida Lucila and currently helmed by Artistic Director Jun Saagundo, Chameleon Dance Theatre (CDT) is a dance group that creates new arrangements and interpretations of various contemporary dance styles (Aerial, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Folk Dance, Ballroom, Tap).

Diego Silang St. & 20th Ave.
Cubao, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

3 Daloy Dance Company

Established in 2014 by its Artistic Director Ea Torrado, the Daloy Dance Company is committed to dance as experiential inquiry and explorative practice. The company has worked with notable visual artists in various museums and galleries in the Philippines, and has performed in a range of dance and art festivals locally and abroad, including the Wifi Body Festival.

www.daloydc.com

+63 (917) 620 7052

The PARC Foundation
494 Lt. Artiaga St., San Juan City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Wednesdays to Fridays
7:00 PM-9:00 PM

4 Myra Beltran's Dance Forum

Established by Myra Beltran, a pioneer in contemporary dance in the Philippines, the Dance Forum is one of the first contemporary dance groups established in the Philippines, serving as a venue for dancers and choreographers to collaborate and converse towards the further development of Philippine contemporary dance. The group also initiated the Contemporary Dance Map and the Wifi Body Festival.

www.myrabeltrandance.com

+63 (2) 373 2947; +63 (917) 5269724

38 West Ave., West Triangle
Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

5 UP Dance Company

The UP Dance Company is the resident dance company of the College of Music of the University of the Philippines. The company performs nationwide (including different campuses within the UP System) and also at a variety of international dance festivals in the region.

www.ateneoartgallery.org

University of the Philippines, Diliman
College of Music, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Visual Art

6 Ateneo Art Gallery

The university museum of Ateneo de Manila University, the Ateneo Art Gallery houses and regularly exhibits its vast collection of modern Philippine art by contemporary artists. It hosts artistic and cultural talks and workshops, and organizes the annual Ateneo Art Awards.

www.ateneoartgallery.org

+63 (2) 426 6488

Ateneo De Manila University
Old Rizal Library, Special Collections Building
Katipunan Ave., Loyola Heights
Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines

Mondays to Fridays, 8:00 AM-7:30 PM
Saturdays, 8:00 AM-6:00 PM

7 Big Sky Mind

Originally a gallery and café run by Ringo Bunoan and Katya Guerrero from 1999 to 2001, Big Sky Mind (BSM) has since become a space for artists' projects, installations, and performances. BSM hopes to encourage innovation and diversity in art through collaboration, while also supporting emerging artists. Beyond its artistic goals, the space has become a spot for late-night drinks in Quezon City.

www.facebook.com/bigskymind

Broadway Ave. & E. Rodriguez,
Quezon City, Metro Manila
Philippines

Tuesdays to Sundays
9:00 PM - 5:00 AM

8 Green Papaya Art Projects

Founded in 2000 by artists Norberto Roldan and Donna Miranda, Green Papaya Art Projects is an artist-run space and a platform for artists in various modalities. Green Papaya Art Projects organizes opportunities for artists through residencies and exchange programs, and also serves as a venue for exhibitions, discussions, and performances.

www.sites.google.com/site/greenpapayaprototype2

+63 (995) 302 5262

41B Gener St., Kamuning
Quezon City, Metro Manila
Philippines

9 Lopez Museum and Library

The Lopez Museum and Library is the oldest privately owned and managed museum and library specializing in Filipiniana (Philippine materials). With over 500 works in its museum collection and over 30,000 titles in its library catalogue, the museum's holdings cover 600 years of Philippine scholarship, art, and cultural history.

www.lopez-museum.com

+63 (2) 631 2417

Meralco Ave. & Exchange Rd.
Pasig City, Metro Manila
Philippines

Mondays to Saturdays
8:00 AM-5:00 PM

10 Sabaw Media Art Kitchen

Sabaw Media Art Kitchen is an artist collective aimed towards the development and promotion of experimental forms of art and new media through artistic and academic exchanges and collaborations.

www.sites.google.com/site/sabawmediaartkitchens

+63 (917) 519 1511; +63 (920) 604 5559

Terminal Garden, 566 Shaw Blvd.
Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila
Philippines

11 Vargas Museum

Also known as the Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, the Vargas Museum serves as a site for exhibitions, public discussions, and performances by artists and researchers within and outside of the UP community. The museum houses a permanent collection of Philippine art and memorabilia, and a library of Filipiniana research material.

www.vargasmuseum.wordpress.com

+63 (2) 928 1927

University of the Philippines, Diliman
Roxas St., Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Tuesdays to Saturdays
9:00 AM-5:00 PM

12 West Gallery

West Gallery is a contemporary art gallery that hosts three to four simultaneous exhibitions in its four-room gallery space in Quezon City.

www.westgallery.ph

+63 (2) 411 0336

48 West Ave., Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Mondays to Saturdays
9:00 AM-6:00 PM

Performing Art & Theater

13 Dulaang UP

Dulaang UP, the university-wide theater organization of the University of the Philippines, is a site of collaboration between student and veteran theater workers. Its past repertoire includes Filipino adaptations of theater classics by Shakespeare, as well as plays by National Artist Nick Joaquin and various contemporary playwrights, all presented at the Wilfredo Ma. Guerrero Theater in the UP Diliman Campus.

Palma Hall, Room 136
Roxas Ave., Diliman, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Mondays to Fridays
9:00 AM-4:00 PM

14 Gantimpala Theater Foundation

Gantimpala Theater was founded in September 1992. Its annual production season includes the staging of the Four Classics: "Florante at Laura," "Kanser," "Ibong Adarna," and "El Filibusterismo," plays based on the works of National Artists for Theater and Literature, and original Filipino musicals by new playwrights based on popular fairy tales and Pinoy folklore.

+63 (939) 848 1051

AFP Theater, 3rd Floor, B. Serrano Ave.
Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

15 Kolab Co.

Kolab Co. is a network of independent artists that come together as a strong ensemble of multi-awarded practitioners in the fields of music, dance, education, design, and performance. They play with performances and texts to machinate productions that inspire, disturb, and provoke.

www.facebook.com/wearekolabco

16 Philippine Educational Theater Association

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), seeks to use theater as an instrument for the development of society, through performances such as their popular *Rak of Aegis* and *Care Divas*, as well as educational programs held within their theater and among different communities.

www.petatheater.com

+63 (2) 725 6244

PETA Theater Center, 5 Eymard Dr.
New Manila, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Mondays to Fridays, 9:00 AM-5:00 PM,
Saturdays, 9:00 AM-2:00 PM

17 Sipat Lawin Ensemble

Sipat Lawin Ensemble is an independent contemporary performance group that performs site-specific works in alternative spaces, ranging from the streets of Manila to the Vargas Museum. They employ alternative methodologies in all aspects of performance production. In 2013, Sipat Lawin Ensemble launched the Karnabal Festival to showcase experimental performances and theater works.

www.sipatlawin.wordpress.com

18 Tanghalang Ateneo

Founded in April 1972, Tanghalang Ateneo is the longest-running theater company of the Loyola Schools. It uses the theater to foster eloquentia, sapientia, and humanitas – the pillars of Jesuit pedagogy.

+63 (2) 426 6001

Ateneo De Manila University
Katipunan Ave., Loyola Heights
Quezon City, Metro Manila
Philippines

Events & Festivals

19 Karnabal Festival

The annual Karnabal Festival, organized by Sipat Lawin Ensemble and taking place at multiple venues throughout Metro Manila, brings together independent performing artists and groups in order to explore alternative methods of performance making.

www.karnabalfestival.com

East & South Metro Manila

Art & Cultural Institutions

1 National Commission for Culture and the Arts

The National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) is the overall policy-making body and grants-giving agency dedicated to the preservation, development, and promotion of Philippine arts and culture. The Philippine government enacted Republic Act No. 7356, which institutionalized the establishment of the NCCA in 1992, mandating the formulation of national cultural policies and programs.

🌐 www.ncca.gov.ph

☎ +63 (2) 527 2192

📍 633 Gen. Luna St., Manila Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Mondays to Thursdays
7:00 AM-8:00 PM

2 Cultural Center of the Philippines

The Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) is the leading institution of the arts in the Philippines. Founded in 1969, the CCP has been producing and presenting music, dance, theater, visual arts, literary, cinematic, and design events from the Philippines and all over the world for over 40 years. Its nine resident companies – Ballet Philippines, Philippine Ballet Theater, Tanghalang Pilipino, Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group, the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company, Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra, UST Symphony Orchestra, Philippine Madrigal Singers, and the National Music Competition for Young Artists Foundation – present a regular season of productions, workshops, and performances.

🌐 www.culturalcenter.gov.ph

☎ +63 (2) 833-2125; +63 (2) 832-1125

📍 Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex
Roxas Blvd., Pasay City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Dance

3 Ballet Philippines

With their wide repertoire of works ranging from classical ballet to modern and contemporary

dances (original or reinterpreted from classical pieces), Ballet Philippines is a leading professional dance group in the Philippines. It is the resident dance company of the CCP and regularly holds performance seasons there and in many local and international venues.

🌐 www.ballet.ph

☎ +63 (2) 551-1003

📍 Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex
4th Floor, Roxas Blvd., Pasay City
Metro Manila, Philippines

Visual Art

4 98B COLLABoratory

98B COLLABoratory is an artist initiative aimed at providing resources to local artists towards dialogue and development of contemporary art. Their long-running Saturday x Future Market held in Escolta promotes artists and entrepreneurs. Other programs by 98B include art installations in alternative spaces, artist exchanges, and residencies.

🌐 www.98-b.org

📍 First United Bldg. 413 Escolta St.
Escolta, Manila
Metro Manila, Philippines

5 1335Mabini Gallery

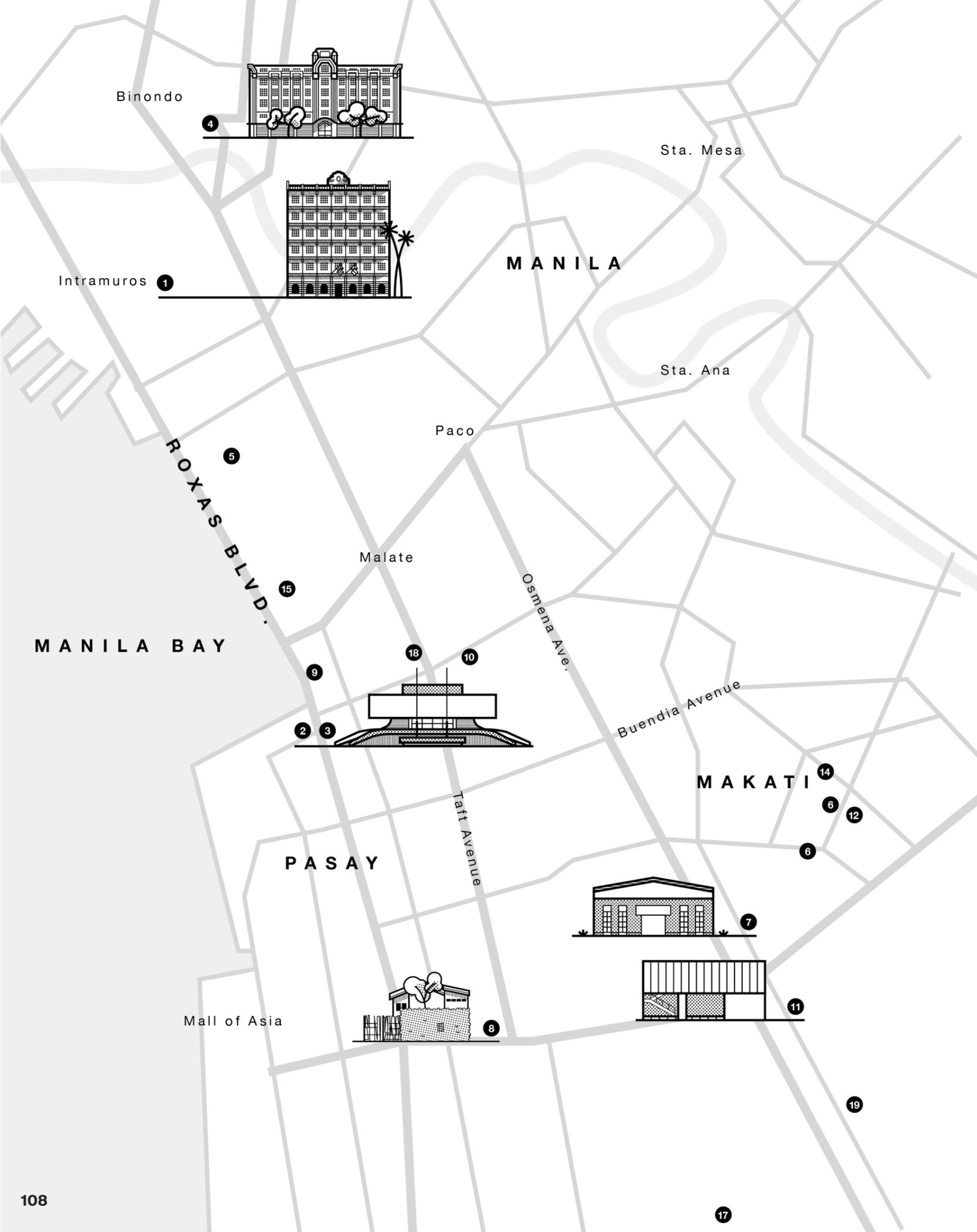
The gallery 1335MABINI is committed to artistic positions and practices that explore mobility, history, and critical engagement with collective memory and politics. In September 2017, 1335MABINI moved to Makati City, while MABINI Projects and Artist-in-Residency Program Manila (AIRPManila) remain actively engaged with the local community in its original location in Manila.

🌐 www.1335mabini.com

☎ +63 (2) 254 8498

📍 2F Casa Tesoro
1335 A. Mabini Street
Ermita, Manila
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Tuesdays to Saturdays
2:00 PM to 6:00 PM



6 Ayala Museum

Located in the central business district of Makati, Ayala Museum boasts a collection of archeological artifacts, such as pre-colonial gold jewelry and trade ceramics. The museum also houses a permanent exhibition of handcrafted dioramas that chronicles major milestones in Philippine history. As part of its regular programming, its calendar of events include temporary international exhibitions, lectures, artist and curator's talks, workshops, and performances.

🌐 www.ayalamuseum.org

☎ +63 (2) 759 6288

📍 Makati Ave. & De La Rosa St.
Greenbelt Park, Makati
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Tuesdays to Sundays
9:00 AM-6:00 PM

7 Finale Art File

Established in the early 1980s, Finale Art File is a renown gallery that has exhibited the works of the country's leading contemporary artists. Its expansive exhibition space features three galleries: Tall Gallery, Upstairs Gallery, and Video Room. Finale Art File also provides art appraisal and documentation services, conducts seasonal auctions, hosts artist talks and forums, and publishes art books and catalogues.

🌐 www.finaleartfile.com

☎ +63 (2) 813 2310

📍 La Fuerza Compound, Warehouse 17
2241 Chino Roces Ave., Makati City
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Mondays to Saturdays
10:00 AM-7:00 PM

8 Galleria Duemila

Galleria Duemila is a long-running commercial gallery specializing in works of fine art by Filipino masters. The gallery also specializes in research involving art history for exhibitions at institutions such as the CCP, as well as publishing material on Philippine art.

🌐 www.galleriaduemila.com

☎ +63 (2) 831 9990; +63 (2) 833 9815

📍 210 Loring St., Pasay City
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Mondays to Saturdays
9:00 AM-6:00 PM

9 Metropolitan Museum of Manila

The Metropolitan Museum of Manila houses permanent exhibitions, the Classical Gold and Pottery Collection, *The Philippine Contemporary: To Scale the Past and the Possible*, and also temporary exhibitions primarily by Filipino artists and groups. The Met has also initiated programs about accessibility of museum displays for visually-impaired visitors.

🌐 www.metmuseum.ph

☎ +63 (2) 708 7828

📍 BSP Complex, Roxas Blvd.
Malate, Manila
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Mondays to Saturdays, 10:00 AM-5:30 PM
Sundays, 10:00 AM-3:00 PM

10 Museum of Contemporary Art & Design

Housed within the De La Salle-College of St. Benilde's School of Design and Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) focuses on an exhibition programming that runs parallel to the school's courses: film, fashion, design, animation, photography, and architecture.

🌐 www.mcadmanila.org.ph

☎ +63 (2) 230 5100

📍 De La Salle-College of St. Benilde's
School of Design and Art
Dominga St., Manila
Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10:00 AM-6:00 PM
Sundays, 10:00 AM-2:00 PM

11 Silverlens Galleries

Founded in 2004 by Isa Lorenzo and Rachel Rillo, Silverlens is one of the leading contemporary galleries in Southeast Asia. Through their exhibition programming, artist representation, and institutional collaborations, Silverlens situates itself as a central figure in the contemporary art dialogue of the region.

🌐 www.silverlensgalleries.com

☎ +63 (2) 816 0044

📍 2263 Don Chino Roces Ave.
Makati City, Metro Manila, Philippines

🕒 Tuesdays to Fridays, 10:00 AM-7:00 PM
Saturdays, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM

Events & Festivals

12 Art Fair Philippines

Spanning four days across multiple floors of the Link Carpark in Makati, the annual Art Fair Philippines showcases galleries and artists from the Philippines and Southeast Asia. In addition to exhibiting and selling art, Art Fair Philippines hosts public forums and lectures on different facets of the art world.

🌐 www.artfairphilippines.com

13 Wifi Body Festival

Wifi Body Festival is annual gathering focused on contemporary dance organized by the Contemporary Dance Network Manila, featuring dance workshops, conferences, and choreography competitions open to dance artists and groups around the country.

Performing Art & Theater

14 9 Works Theatrical

Established in March 2009, the company is dedicated to delivering plays and musicals from both Broadway and the West End. Its ultimate goal is to contribute to Manila's developing theater industry by making theater a stable working environment. The company has staged musical productions, such as *RENT*, *The Wedding Singer*, *Sweet Charity*, and *Grease*.

🌐 www.9workstheatrical.com

☎ +63 (2) 586 7105

📍 National Life Insurance Bldg.
Suite 908-B, 6762 Ayala Ave.
Makati City, Metro Manila
Philippines

15 Actor's Actors Inc.

Founded in September 1992, Actor's Actors Inc. is a performing arts member organization that has produced theatrical works that push boundaries and explore socially and politically relevant themes. Menchu Lauchengco-Yulo, who is widely considered the first lady of Philippine musical theater, is a founding member.

📍 1991 M.H. Del Pilar, Malate
Metro Manila, Philippines

16 Egg Theater Company

Established in 2016, Egg Theater Company produces contemporary plays and theatrical works in the Filipino language using original materials, translations, or adaptations of both modern and classic works geared to showcase the Filipino actor.

🌐 eggtheaterco.wix.com/eggtheatercompany

☎ +63 (917) 804 0762

17 Full House Theater Company

Established in 2014, this group is the production outfit of Resorts World Manila (RWM). In 2014, it was formally welcomed to the fold by the Philippine Legitimate Stage Artists Group (PHILSTAGE). FHTC aims to attract a wider audience to the performing arts.

☎ +63 (2) 908 8000

📍 Newport Blvd., Pasay City
Metro Manila, Philippines

18 Harlequin Theater Guild

Harlequin is De La Salle University's resident theater group, which was established in 1966. The group aims to raise the social consciousness among audiences through theater. The guild specializes in plays, movement, musicals, and poetry readings.

☎ +63 (2) 524 4611

📍 2401 Taft Ave., Malate
Manila, Metro Manila
Philippines

19 Red Turnip

Red Turnip was founded in 2013 by Ana Abad Santos, Topper Fabregas, Jenny Jamora, Cris Villonco, and Rem Zamora. With over 50 years in the industry, they bring their talents and passion together to stage the kinds of productions that are in short supply in the country: contemporary plays, modern stories with an experiential angle, challenging material with the potential for adaptation, and site-specific performances.

🌐 www.redturnip.com.ph

☎ +63 (918) 967 6524

📍 2314 Chino Roces Ext.
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Metro Manila, Philippines

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Published by the Japan Foundation, Manila, ART ARCHIVE 01 is the first book in a series that explores current trends and concerns in Philippine contemporary art. Featuring essays by contemporary artists, performers, art writers, curators, journalists, and experts in the field of Philippine contemporary art, dance, and theater, it aims to illuminate the state(s) of visual and performing arts in the Philippines today.

In line with the Japan Foundation's aim of carrying out comprehensive international exchange programs throughout the world, the book is published in a digital format for accessibility and distribution on a global scale. As a primer, it is meant to be used as a resource to foster cultural exchange and knowledge sharing for artists, educators, curators, museum-goers, galleries, performing arts spaces, and art and cultural institutions in the Philippines and abroad.



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