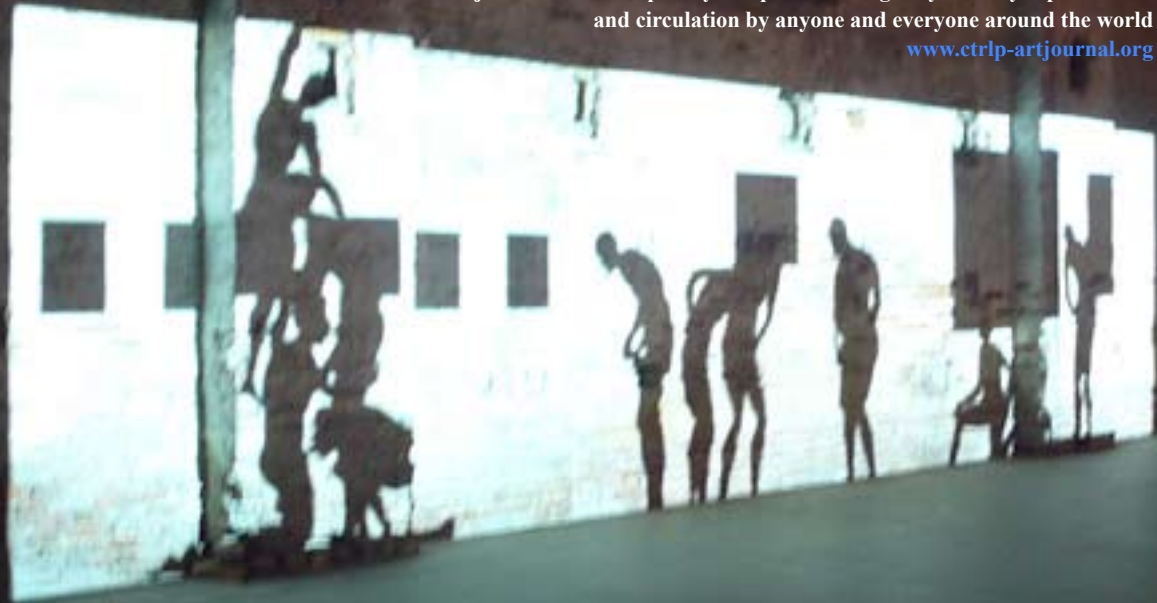


Ctrl+Pdf

Journal of Contemporary Art

A journal of contemporary art published digitally for easy reproduction
and circulation by anyone and everyone around the world
www.ctrlp-artjournal.org



Uploaded Issue No. 15
October 2009
Essays 94 to 106
ISSN 1908-9805

Editorials
Dealing with the Art Market/P1
Flaudette May V. Datuin

Art and the Market: Pining for a Breather?/P3
Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez

The Philippine Modern:
Conceiving a Collective Category/P33
Parick D. Flores

Prized Possessions:
The Promise of the Contemporary
in Philippine Art Competitions/P46
Jay Giovanni Bautista

Review
The Brave New Works of 13A/P49
Renée Alphonso

About Ctrl+P's Contributors
and Editorial Board/P51

Issue Editors
Flaudette May V. Datuin
Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez

Editorial Board
Flaudette May V. Datuin
Varsha Nair
Judy Freya Sibayan

What Does "Recovery" Look Like in the Art World?
Or Surviving the Next Art Market Bubble/P6
Irene S. Leung

Re-framing the Biennale: 2010/P11
Gina Fairley

The 53rd Venice Biennale
Fare Mondi, Making Worlds/P15
Eliza Tan

Object Lessons/P20
Patrick D. Flores

Signs of Wonder/P22
Joselina Cruz

Lisa Yuskavage/P23
Gerry Coulter

Flashing Emin: Critical Analysis of
"Spectacular" Contemporary Arts/P28
Kubilay Akman

The Artist's Reserved Rights
Transfer and Sale Agreement/P32
Seth Siegelau

Dealing with the Art Market

In 29 April 1989 one of the eight white porcelain urinals based on Duchamp's 1917 'ready-made' and issued in 1964 by the Galleria Schwarz in Milan was bought for US\$68,750 at Sotheby, New York against an estimate of \$2,000-2,500. According to Eileen Channin in her book *Collecting Art* (Craftsman House, 1990), it was one of the high points of the Andy Warhol sale. Ironically for Duchamp, his urinal—through which he aimed to demonstrate that art objects had no intrinsic artistic value in terms of labor and material costs—became the art object he never intended it to be.

"The buyer's *need* for the object and exchange of this sum for it determined the *value* of that need and the value of the urinal, the art object," writes Channin. "The value in the market then is the value of the need any single person has for an object. Price is dictated by supply and demand." This observation is concretized in local terms by an anecdote that Tina Fernandez, one of the speakers in the *Ctrl+P* forum on the art market held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines a few months back, relates:

A collector walks into the gallery and asks: "do you have a Borlongan, Santos or Justiniani?" I asked: "are you familiar with their works?" And they said "no but a lot of my friends told us to buy and we are just starting to collect." Why don't you do this, I suggest, why don't you browse through the gallery and tell me what works attract you or which works you find beautiful. At that time, there was an exhibition, but the labels were deliberately omitted. After following the suggestion, they totally ignored the Borlongan, Santos and Justiniani, and chose instead two paintings from an artist they never heard of before.

"A lot of collectors don't know why they buy, what the artwork is all about, they do not know what is beautiful to them," Fernandez elaborates. Or as Channin observes, critical valuation has little to do with art market values or the price a buyer is prepared to pay according to how badly he/she needs and desires to acquire an object, egged on, as the Fernandez anecdote shows, by scant information from friends and peers. And since art market valuations behave in "a less theoretical manner," as Channin puts it, it is a pervasive perception that the art market of dealers, auction houses and collectors has "hijacked" the arts' reward and value system. As curators, critics and scholars (including this writer) opined during the *Ctrl+P* forum, the art market revs up, overheats, sputters if not come to a complete stop, then revs up again exuberantly and at times, irrationally—without the proper curatorial and critical framework on how to view art beyond its commercial value. There is need to "create" informed collectors through education, Fernandez insists, and this is why she established Art Informel, a semi-commercial-cum-workshop-cum gallery space she formed out of a family residence with a group of artists.

For Irene Leung, what has been missing is a "robust debate about monetization—where does art practice intersect with money?"—a question that, as Kubilay Akman suggests in his critique of the media-and-market savvy Tracey Emin, must take "account of the social, cultural and artistic structures that produce, reproduce and make it as art in a dynamic process." Gerry Coulter does a similar maneuver by recuperating the controversial nudes of American painter Lisa Yuskavage. Lashing out at macho critics, Coulter reminds us of an important theoretical point contributed by feminism: seeing, looking and reacting to works, especially those that are couched in a visual idiom traditionally associated with male expression and creativity, is value-laden, and in this case, highly gendered.

The tension between theoretically clueless criticism and un-theoretical commercial viability, on one hand and theoretically-informed critical valuation and legitimation, on the other, understandably creates anxieties to art historians, critics, artists and curators

who believe their professional endeavors should transcend market concerns, appealing instead, to aesthetic, philosophic, or even ethical and moral concerns. No less than Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, guest- and co-editor for this issue expressed such anxiety, by prefacing her editorial with a disclosure about her soiled image of the art market and a recounting of her painful encounter, in 1994, with “vultures” who were circling her grandfather’s, National Artist Cesar Legaspi’s, deathbed knowing that their investment will multiply at his passing.

Marina Cruz, a young rising star whose success in art fairs and auctions Legaspi-Ramirez describes as “dramatic” expressed at one point during her talk in the forum: “Are we less ‘good’ because we are commercially successful?” All she desires (perhaps naively, as another panelist points), she says, is for her work to be appreciated by the different publics—from the most knowledgeable of insiders to the least initiated art world ‘outsiders,’ the people who, driven by curiosity, take the time to stop and look at the works she was documenting outside her house. The fact that collectors buy her works is a stroke of luck she is humbly grateful for, but like other artists present in the forum, she values critical validation and recognition equally, if not more, than her commercial success.

Joselina Cruz in her talk, on the other hand, took the *Ctrl+P* forum brief to task for what she perceived as unproblematized observation that boundaries are blurring between biennales/triennales, on one hand and art fairs, on the other. The first Philippine curator to join an international curatorial team in the biennale mode, Cruz insisted that while both have validation powers, the latter are more open-ended, more price-driven. Biennales, on the other hand, are more rigorously framed by a theoretical and critical mentality, even if such criticality is often compromised and limited—as she relates in her essay on her experiences curating the most recent Singapore Biennale—by logistic and contextual givens. Caught between what Gina Fairley describes as “a schizophrenic ricochet between the institutional white cube and the raw (un)familiar site, which has increasingly become a marketing chip to identifying and growing these events to local and international audiences” and layered “with a trend to package these exhibitions with other events,” the biennale’s critical and self-reflexive edge, start to blur—exactly the point of the *Ctrl+P* forum brief and call for papers.

For Eliza Tan, the Venice Biennale similarly offers nothing perspectively fresh, although she took diligent note of the good pace, narrative roundness and accessibility, and the hushed, un-ostentatious character of works in the curated segments. And in a more optimistic vein, Patrick Flores hailed the Gwanju Biennale as having a more robust theoretical frame and discussion, which was absent, he writes, in other eight biennales that opened in the same season of the year in Asia. Contributing to a section of Gwanju Biennale called *Position Papers*, he centered on four germinal figures on Southeast Asia, one of whom, Raymundo Albano, pioneered the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) collection. The contributions of Albano along with other lively minds of the early 70s to the 80s, most of whom are still active today (Sibayan, Pastor Roces, Chabet, to name a few) are reckoned with in Flores’ other essay in this issue—a reprint from the catalogue on the survey exhibition on the CCP collection, “Suddenly Turning Visible.”

Jay Bautista’s essay on Philippine competitions rounds out—though in a less scholarly and critical vein—the material on the Philippine art world. It contains historical information that may prove useful to the uninitiated as well as anyone who is unfamiliar with Philippine art history. Along with the brief review of the Thirteen Artists Awards by Rina Alphonso, which the CCP bestows on young artists nominated and deemed promising by a panel of jurors, Bautista’s essay tells us that, critical as we may be of competitions and awards, they remain influential shapers of careers, artistic directions and values, even as they are beset, as Legaspi-Ramirez recounts in her experience as juror, with the infrastructural and logistic constraints that similarly limit resource-rich blue-chip events like the biennales and triennales.

As I write this, the CCP is holding a necrological service for the National Artist Awards, believed to have “died” because tainted by the unprincipled intervention of the state led by an unethical leader and her cohorts. Questions of creative autonomy, respect for peer-initiated process, and *delicadeza* vis-à-vis presidential prerogative empowered

by law are among the list of tangled issues that are played out in the expressions of righteous indignation from Philippine art world luminaries, including former recipients of the Awards originated by the much-maligned one-time patroness of the arts, Imelda Marcos. Just as we—cultural workers, writers, scholars, artists—are concerned with the high-jacking of valuation and rewards by the art market, we are equally indignant at the high-jacking of our creative entitlements and prerogatives by an unprincipled state. This just goes to show that, no matter how we may try to confine our scholarly and creative work to intangibles—aesthetics, art history, criticism, theory, art production, artistic competence and vision—we cannot avoid “contamination” by forces from finance, politics and economics. At the same time, these intangible pursuits cannot be merely reduced to commercial terms, for they have a function as mechanisms quite independent, and even critical of any commercial and political efficacy.

Art history and its allied disciplines thus function contradictorily by simultaneously establishing commercial worth and asserting autonomy and freedom from market forces, as the art historian Katherine Mansfield (*Art History and Its Institutions*, Routledge, 2002) observes. On one hand, art history supports the commercial status of art by certifying attribution, age, style, medium of work and displaying, authenticating and establishing expert opinion on art works; on the other hand, art history has developed and systematized methods and categories related to “form,” “style,” “originality,” “freshness,” and “innovation,” thus facilitating aesthetic appreciation that defy commercial quantification. The very demand for originality and novelty for instance, creates an aura of divinity and glamour around a small group of favored artists, which gets intensified when repackaged and disseminated through media sound bytes, public relations spins, catalogues, auctions, art fairs, biennales, thus further increasing the collectors’ desire and need to possess them, even despite or maybe because of efforts to sabotage the mechanisms of the market, as the Duchamp example shows.

One key to “dealing with” the art market and making sense of this tangled web of contradictions foregrounded by this modest collection of essays, is supplying or making available good, substantive and substantial information on works and artists—the kind of information that can be accessed through Art Informel’s initiatives aimed at creating a group of more engaged collectors, and the kind of knowledge that can be gleaned in Flores’ attempt to write an initial survey of local state-initiated art collecting framed by a vernacular modernism, in Coulter’s and Akman’s assertion of theoretical points on reception and art production via critiques of critics (Coulter on Yuskavage), and a current market darling (Akman on Emin), and even in Seth Seigelaub’s rather tongue-in-cheek mobilization of the language and framework of international law in his draft of an agreement form outlining the rights and responsibilities of artists and dealers. And bearing in mind that art making, art history, theory, curation, and art production are inescapably linked to objects with market value, what we should aim for is a principled negotiated practice, one that can only be sustained and achieved, to borrow from Cruz and Leung, with an undiminished sense of wonder, a capacity to imagine better futures, and a self-reflexivity

EILEEN LEGASPI-RAMIREZ

Art and the Market: Pining for a Breather?

I must confess that it was with much trepidation that I agreed to co-edit this issue on art and the market. In the interest of full disclosure, let me just say that I didn’t always have such a soiled image of those who made up the financial backbone of the artworld. Having grown up in a household that had a hand in furthering a would-be National Artist’s early struggling years (when going full-time was not at all an imaginable option) provided a generous dose of pragmatism about how art and commerce inevitably encounter each other. But even then, it was already off-putting to see how my grandmother and mother (the defacto art dealers in the clan) found themselves having to maneuver around those who postured as art lovers only to shamelessly bargain down the seasonal living of those who craft the art that would ultimately find a space in some stately home, office,

or gallery. It did not help that when my grandfather was dying of prostrate cancer in 1994, I'd tenuously explored the possibility of following in my mother's footsteps, only to find out that the vultures (who were unabashedly banking on how their 'investment' in Cesar Legaspi would double in value upon the public announcement of his passing) were circling around the family holdings so menacingly there was hardly room to move. So, pardon me please if I'm not so readily able to share the optimism of New York Times critic Holland Cotter, here cited by Irene Leung about the artworld getting back to the making rather than the hyping of art (aka the bogus claim to being able to reduce the validation of art to auction figures, collector profile, museum outings, and such).

The artworld does in fact operate amidst the contestation and collusion of agents within it. And by agents, I do invoke here the entire spectrum—from those who make work to those who encounter it in some degree of public engagement or other—even within a private space where the art is no longer up for grabs but merely there for contemplation or as intended object of covetousness masquerading as public educational tool. Art really makes for the strangest bedfellows—note how edge and safe haven occupied the same physical space in the Singapore Art Biennale (SAB) as mentioned in Gina Fairley's account *Re-framing the Biennale 2010*. SAB's physically situating its parallel art fair literally in the bowels of one of its main sites is, to some degree, replicated in the recent Philippine art fair which literally positioned non-selling agents of the artworld at the fringes of the Bonifacio Global City's The Tent.

One is tempted to ask, is this what it has come down to then? The once heady power-wielding and presumably less market-implicated institutions like museums and cultural centers merely orbiting around the moneyed as mere satellites in the cosmos?

Specifically in the case of the Philippine artworld where the intersections between collectors-dealers-curators constantly get crossed, with catalogues primarily getting self-published, exhibitions self-curated and promoted, and too many artists producing work primarily for auctions, the indications are troubling at the very least. In a world where everyone gets to have a say, which voices will ultimately drown out the rest? How do such savvy ways to circumvent the webbed systems of art valuation bode for the making and meaning-making around art? In one sense of course, the dispersal of power is welcome given the decentralization but then that also too easily tips over to populist excess. How will this juggling of roles and fence-demolition play out in an environment where the field remains dramatically uneven between those who look at art as the last bastion of imagination and unfettered thought vis-a-vis those who perceive it as just another economic cog to be left to the workings of an already discredited invisible hand that reduces it to pesos and centavos?

Kubilay Akman, in *Flashing Emin, Critical Analysis of "Spectacular" Contemporary Arts*, posits that the artists implicated in exercises in specularization subject themselves to "harming the innocence" of the production process, wherein they lose the possibility of making art that is more than passing fancy in this highly mediatized world. His text begs the question: is the gallery floor always a scene of a crime then given this daily ritual of instrumentalization? Does art in fact die when it becomes consumable monetarily or becomes of use to those in power? Ergo, can such art be rescued from this plight by being physically effaced or literally destroyed? To my mind, such questions are particularly pertinent to us in the Philippines, in that locally, even the 'bad boys' are constantly under threat of being defanged by rabid hoarders only too eager to render the discordant mute.

The next question perhaps would be, if all 'critical' art is removed from the center, doesn't the gap get merely filled with the palatable and toothless? Enough recent undertakings both in institutional and alternative spaces hereabouts demonstrate this bind—occupy or abandon? Undermine or forfeit? To this now admittedly cynical mind, the luxury of keeping to an either-or posture is precisely untenable because the stakes are too high.

In the end, perhaps art's saving grace rests in its being a largely speculative endeavor. Precisely because the compass is constantly being reinvented and tweaked, the mechanisms are just almost always difficult to get a handle on. Thrust into the difficult position of evaluating some 50 portfolios for the recent Thirteen Artists Award, we three

judges found ourselves ultimately constrained by such non-art considerations as the sluggishness of the institutional structure, the unwillingness of members of the artworld to articulate or merely sit back and grunt at the results of such exercises, even the banal consideration of how portfolios were put together to begin with. The fact really is, there are no hard and fast rules and this is in no small due to the fact that the more presumably invested quarters in the artworld are either too lazy, too hermetic, or too defeated to wager—how many artists, collectors, gallerists, even curators actually take the time off from their nuanced interests to keep up with what’s being written and said about art, or visit each other’s studios/spaces, or ask tough questions about their own practices?

It shouldn’t be too surprising then that the idea prevailing in the public imagination is an artworld still merely constituted by quarters that vote with their billfolds. And yet, Gerry Coulter reminds us in this issue of *Ctrl+P* (with his text on the nudes of Lisa Yuskavage) that we do in fact, weigh in with such non-monetary acts as reading, how the “failure of beauty” cues us into the gaps and fissures that make for art that does not run away from the possibility of difficulty.

Questions of Impetus

Let us say outright that there will always be poseurs and hucksters on all fronts—artists who pad CVs, collectors who negotiate down prices on the premise of keeping works for themselves, dealers and PR hacks who play up credentials that ultimately do not count in the long term. But precisely because there is still enough currency behind the idea that art is the ultimate realm of creation, a domain from which emancipatory ideas emerge unhindered to some degree or other by norm and acceptability, the still implicit notion is that art needs to be held to a higher standard irreducible to merely self-gratification, eking out a livelihood, and accessorizing condominiums.

Note the treacherous terrain for instance that gets treaded upon with the fairly recent attempt (in the Philippines anyway) to invoke the paradigm of cultural industry to peg the production of art to quantifiable percentages of GDP. Unfortunately, in an environment where hammer prices and spin are taken as gospel truth, the only cold fact is that the only real dupes are those that refuse to do their homework and merrily ride the wave borne on mostly flawed information and self-aggrandizing though professionally crafted must-see events which still a bevy of exhibitions and literature ultimate are.

Further, when artists refuse to speak, they effectively hand over the reins to those who may or may not have any investment in honoring the creative impulse much less keep to some palpable barometer of integrity. Thus we find ourselves in the anomalous situation where collectors, donor institutions are allowed to invoke market value to keep from paying taxes but artists are reduced to pinning value based on materials used; inevitably, we will continue to ask—how does one know what art is worth? Hopefully we get to the realization sooner than later about how truly slippery such an endeavor is—what is one to latch unto really of relevant google links? Twitter citations? ‘Bejewelled’ bodies at glitzy openings and art fairs? Number of warm-bodied globe-trotting curators singing paeans and gone artist-wooing?

“Is audience a dirty word?”, critic Gina Fairley gets asked in a recent public forum in Sydney. And in invoking a resounding ‘no’ she hints at the possible gains of risking failure and rejection that we in turn find in Patrick Flores’s piece *Object Lessons* from his experience as one of the curators of the recent Gwangju Biennale, or even in Joselina Cruz’s “dismal” rate of success in resisting the baggage that came with becoming one of three curators of the 2008 SAB. This vacuum-visibility dilemma is not at all a monopoly of the visual arts as seen in the continuing tangling for the ‘indie label’ among those genuinely interested in crafting an alternative film language and those merely looking for a quick buck. And yet we have not even begun to talk about how ‘going international’ has become a definite route toward earning a local audience upon a film’s homecoming post-festival roadtrip. By going straight to auction, are the visual artists merely following suit? On what terms do we attempt to engage?

Perhaps undeniably so, this question about making sense of art in such uncloyingly reductionist terms is never going to be going the way of rocket science. And this is even

amidst such utopic conditions as full disclosure (who is collecting what and why should they be inhibiting themselves from specific venues for valuation—exhibit programming, judging, etc.) and a seamless information system that allows contending ideas to get to the people who need to hear and digest them most. Leung speaks of how art is ‘rudderless’ particularly in the ideal world where the ultimate arbiters would be the makers of art themselves who might in fact choose to be intractable. But hope floats or all artmaking would cease. Thus the only tenable way to keep the artworld honest would be if all agents would enter into the fray, boldly if not inerrantly speak rather than succumb to merely working out of each other’s comfy and self-interested nests. There are no pat answers but at least attempting to journey toward them is genuine gain.

What Does “Recovery” Look Like in the Art World? Or Surviving the Next Art Market Bubble

IRENE S. LEUNG

News about General Motors re-emerging out of bankruptcy in just one month sent all the media pundits scrambling for words. With 27,000 fewer employees and 13 fewer car plants, it somehow acquired a new sheen—“smaller, leaner, tougher.” I for one, feel that we are all our own individual GM companies—we have become leaner and tougher through the hard times. But is there a comparable example in the art world?

With the overnight vanishing of wealth and the near-collapse of the credit markets, some, like Holland Cotter, art critic of the *New York Times*, breathed a sigh of relief that artists are once again left alone to make art rather than being picked over by “cadres of public relations specialists” (i.e. the critics, curators, editors, publishers and career theorists) driven by dealers, brokers, advisers, financiers, lawyers and... event planners.¹ Granted, the art world has not and will probably never embrace speculative investment. But surely some of us would miss the frequent art fairs and biennales. Yet who is to say when the stock market eventually rebounds to irrational exuberance, that the critics, collectors, financiers, and dealers won’t contrive to create the next art market bubble? Which art works would become the darling of the market? Which country would be the hotbed of new talents? Who will be the new investors willing to inflate the next art market bubble?

Given that everyone seems to be waiting for a sign to see where the wind blows, the key question is not so much about how to do away with market agents because speculators and investors are here to stay, but how art world depends on its rich patrons and has worked hard to influence what they think and how they invest. We are not speaking of having a Cosimo de’ Medici, but the art world has depended on the collectors, donors, and corporations to keep it alive. What has been missing is a robust debate about monetization – where does art practice intersect with money? Art needs an account balance sheet because art is livelihood. Art is also a subsidy because the art market only supports a small percentage of artists very well while others do not receive much.

The editors of this issue of *Ctrl+P* have rightly pointed out the interconnectedness of ‘art world’ and the ‘art market.’ One simply cannot exist without the other, yet the art market and the art world play by very different rules and thrive on different stimulants. As artists and arts professionals, we seem to always be on the defensive, constantly justifying the role of arts in society. Why must the arts be seen as expendable as corporate jets in times of financial crises? Why are the utilities of arts constantly being questioned, as opposed to, say, Math and sciences? On the other hand, the mantra of “art for arts sake” actually undermines the extraordinarily diverse and complex reasons why we make art and pay for the arts; it denies the social, religious and political functions that the arts serve in human history and continues to do so.

Ostensibly, much of the art market hype could be blamed on the media. Damien Hirst makes headline news, but much else of the contemporary art world has been confined to the art world itself. Could we honestly say the art world has bothered to explain itself to the rest of the world? Instead, it has relied on the ‘public relations specialists’ to compete for the hearts and minds of art collectors. Working artists, and especially community arts groups, suffer the most from the likes of Charles Saatchi and his public relations machinery. Even as the argument that the arts create jobs and bolster the economy has been floating around for decades, it would soon become a cliché because many could say the same about the auto industry or Wall Street.² Would the government ever say that the art world needs a bail out because it is ‘too big to fail’? (Remember U.S. government owns 61% of General Motors now?) Would art world’s collapse cause ‘systemic risk’ to the rest of the world?

Putting the Arts on Trial

What I’d like to explore is whether we have become too accustomed to the inevitability of arts’ existence that we justify it through faith alone? The tangled argument about the arts could be gleaned from a recent public debate held by Intelligence Squared US (IQ2US) that asked: “Is the art market less moral than the stock market?” (3 February 2009) The side that argued against the motion—represented by artist Chuck Close, art critic Jerry Saltz, and auctioneer Amy Capellazzo—lost the debate. In retrospect, the defenders kept trying to explain the value of the art but could not defend the operations of the art market, which is the key issue of the debate. They believe in art so much that they were ill equipped to speak for the art market. Moreover, associating art with morality somehow ended up putting the art world—not the art market—on trial.

It was an interesting twist of logic, for it was not because the organizers of the IQ2US debate were not aware that ‘markets’ do not operate by ‘morals.’ The debate’s chair and its main funder, Robert Rosenkranz, asserts in his opening statement that secrecy and manipulation makes the art market less ethical than the stock market. His argument goes like this: there are rules against insider trading in the stock market, but not in the art market, he said, “the art market is advertising prices at auction that are not real, that are intended really to deceive people about the true state of the market.”

First of all, art does not behave in the same way as other commodities. Chuck Close said he hates to see dealers “talk about art as if they were selling hog futures. It’s another kind of business.” This is precisely the issue: art is a completely different kind of business—one that is infinitely more diverse and complex than any other businesses in the world. Thus, it seems disingenuous for Rosenkranz to throw in the red herring that there is a ‘real price’ in the art market.

Rosenkranz could not possibly frame the debate question out of ignorance of the complexity of market functions—for he has made his fortune in private equity investment. Also, he is an avid collector of contemporary art and is married to Alexandra Munroe, Senior Curator of Asian Art at the Guggenheim. Rosenkranz would know that the art market does not function as market in the classical sense—where prices heavily depend on the equilibrium of supply and demand as well as ‘perfect information’ on the market.

In fact, it has been asserted by an economist that the art marketing process is “rudderless.” As a result, “the imperfection of the available information on prices and transactions does not matter in the sense that better information about the behavior of the market really would not help anyone to make decisions more effectively.”³ Rosenkranz would know very well that pitching the terms “real prices” and “true state of the market” as normative statements was misleading at best. Moreover, the three people who won the debate (who were art dealers and collectors) explicitly stated that they do not want to see the art market regulated. Again, why complain about the ‘lack of morals’ if they actually don’t want the rules changed?

One wonders if this IQUS2 debate was an insidious plot to discourage future investors in contemporary art. For these collectors and dealers know full well the benefits of being free from state interference. Writer and documentary filmmaker Ben Lewis explains why contemporary art is “an ideal vehicle for speculative euphoria.”

Governments have had little interest in regulating the trinkets and playthings of the super-rich. Art works are a uniquely portable and confidential form of wealth. Whereas all property purchases have to be publicly registered, buying art is a private activity. And unlike old masters, which are often linked by history to specific places, contemporary art knows no frontiers.⁴

Take for example, in the midst of the financial market bubble, the art market inflation was ridiculously exaggerated: the Chinese painter Zhang Xiaogang saw his work appreciate 6,000 times, from \$1,000 to \$6 million between 1999-2008; while the American artist Richard Prince's work went up 60 to 80 times between 2003-2008.⁵

In some ways, the art market behaves more like executive salaries than the stock market. In appearance, both the arts and executive salaries seem to be based on merit—but the ratio between merit and performance is actually very opaque.

The number is actually “a signaling mechanism,” explains Seth Godin, a marketing expert, regarding the myth of big executive salaries. In order to solicit the best and the brightest, firms compete with each other by engineering a salary structure that attempts to bid higher than a competing firm. Moreover, these firms have a board of directors consisting of executives from other companies, so the salaries of this elite group keep paying each other higher and higher salaries that explode out of proportion compared to salaries of other employees in the same company.

The similarities go further. As executive salaries have been disconnected from performance, so has the value of art been disconnected with other known indicators of value. In a sobering and sometimes sarcastic essay written by Donald Kuspit, an art historian and philosopher, he points out how the irrational exuberance was less about the value of art than it was about the value of money:

The intrinsic value of these paintings has, whatever it is...never [made] them more valuable than the extrinsic value [at which they were acquired] by reason of their exchange value, that is, the money that becomes their equivalent. More crucially, recognized by money, they can no longer be recognized for what they artistically are. Nor can they be questioned and put in historical perspective... The price paid for a work of art becomes its absolute and authoritative value, even if the value the price implies is not particularly clear. It is presented without explanation—the price is the explanation.⁶

Fueled by the illusive promise of exorbitant returns, the art market lost its justification for art and became a market of markets. What Ben Lewis calls “speculating” by the likes of Charles Saatchi may be all too common as an integral part of the art world now. In the late 1990s Saatchi bought the work of young artists, established a museum in which to display it, lent it to public museums, and used his celebrity status to attract media attention. He then sold part of his collection at auctions. The works then came to be associated with the celebrity collector, diminishing the value of the art itself.

Anyone who thinks that all they need to do is to try to outsmart the art market may have random success at best. There have been countless studies by economists showing the low rate of return on art if one were to use it as investment. Analysis of historical data from 1650 to 1960 shows that the real annual rate of return was 0.5% on paintings as compared to 2.5% on government bonds. Another figure was slightly more optimistic, but similar—2% real returns on paintings compared to 3.3% real interest rate of the Bank of England.⁷

This figure is dismal for investors, but what about the figure for working artists? In his misguided defense of the art world (rather than the art market) in the IQ2US debate, Jerry Saltz says “1% of 1% of 1% of 1% of artists actually make money. And even they barely do and usually only for a very short time.” This adds another dimension to our picture – do artists actually benefit from the art market? If not, then how could they make a living in spite of the monstrous alliance between the art world and the financial

market? If we cannot do away with over zealous investors and “speculators,” how should the art world brace for the next art market bubble? What are some of the ways to negotiate such an imperfect rewards system? In our ever-changing consumer culture where we have come to rely on rankings, ratings, pricing, and reckless search for ‘perfect information,’ how do enduring artistic values get through this plethora of chatter and public relation games?

The Reward System for the Arts

The art world is savvy enough not to stick its heads into the sand by avoiding the fact that art needs to be monetized somehow—we are not facing up to the fact that as artists and arts professions, we all have to translate the act of producing (and writing about) art into livelihoods. All of us participate in some form of ‘monetization’ because we expect to be compensated directly or indirectly from the arts. The arts are heterogeneous—some are self-sustaining while others rely on a support structure (i.e. public/private funding, paying audiences). If we count music recording, architecture, film, and design as part of the art world, then these are fine examples of the arts being able to sustain themselves through a business model. But performing arts and visual arts have different challenges in the era of shrinking public and private investment. The arts thrive with the injection of money, but the market goes through random cycles that do not always reward creativity and ideas. So how may we make sense of the reward system? What might be ways to expand it? How do we reconceptualize value creation to seek new connectivities and re-examine our expectations?

First, let’s re-examine the issue of the costs of art. William Baumol, one of the very first scholars who used economic analysis to the arts as an industry, co-authored a book entitled *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (1966). From the perspective of classical economists, the arts, especially performing arts such as live music or theatre, belong to the “technologically unprogressive industries.” Using performing arts as a starting point, Baumol points to the gap between financing performances in the face of inevitable rising unit costs because it is unable to adapt and evolve with technology to make it more efficient or cost effective. Not only that live performing arts do not pay for themselves, but that they would show deficits of increasing size over time. This is what is known as “Baumol’s cost disease”—a concept that seems to have been all but forgotten in the arts literature. Subsequent studies in the 1980s and 1990s show that the book’s prediction was not entirely correct because ticket prices rose much faster than the general price level without causing a drop in attendance. On the other hand, performing arts companies have been cutting costs by reducing the number of artists who perform to cut down on labor costs. Since ticket prices do not match the real cost of the performance, companies resort to subsidies either from the government or from private donors. By relying on subsidies, according to classical economic theory, this prevents market prices from reflecting their true costs.⁸

This actually brings us back to the beginning of the essay about needing better arguments for the arts. The arts are not unique as a ‘stagnant sector.’ Schools, hospitals, and service industries suffer the same fate—wages for these sectors would keep widening despite the rise in wages across the board for other sectors. The theory goes, “sooner or later, the price of concerts, art galleries, haircuts, restaurants meals, college courses, hospital beds, etc. must move steadily upward, so that by the year 2010 or 2020 or 2030 consumers will be spending 30, 40, 50% of their budgets on schooling, medical care, and personal services in general.”⁹

This is a sobering reality because schools and hospitals are accepted as integral parts of social welfare. The wage gap is widening for the arts, but it is stuck between a dysfunctional art market on the one hand, and not being able to fully convince anyone that it is a public good. In the United States, the advocacy group Americans for the Arts just won a temporary battle to override the Senate’s vote by putting \$50 million back into President Obama’s stimulus bill targeted for the National Endowment for the Arts.¹⁰

The war is not over, as they say. In the mean time, private and corporate donors step in to subsidize the true costs—but only during good economic times, and usually with fickle board members or narrow grant guidelines. Moreover, most donors do not provide long-term support, and usually do not work closely with arts groups to create sustainable programs or develop income streams. From the grantseekers' point of view, much effort has to be put into cultivating donors despite limited staff time and resources.

Could the art world ever bare its true costs? It has always struggled with the precarious nature of its own un-sustainability. Moreover, politicians exploit this fissure by calling attention to controversial art that has received public funding. The politicization further distracts us from a robust debate about the values of art in society—the arts' heterogeneity makes it especially difficult to have a coherent voice and an improved set of rationales. On the other hand, the reward system for the arts is not likely to change without concerted efforts on the part of the advocates.

Can the Art World Recover?

I realize this essay states the problem in different ways rather than give answers. But even if there were a Yellow Brick Road, the Wizard of Oz is nothing more than a quack hiding behind smoke screens and tricks. Since the art market has mostly hijacked arts' reward system and subsidies are not easily obtained with fuzzy justifications, let us turn to the issue of value creation. On behalf of art's defense during IQ2US debate, Chuck Close asserts that, "Art is a meritocracy. It is a meritocracy because the final arbiters of what is important are other artists. All the hype, all the spin, all the effort to construct a career out of thin air, all the efforts to manipulate the market notwithstanding."

In many ways, the art world that Chuck Close describes is the ideal world when artists have stable income and their pensions are secured and they would live without critics, curators, editors, publishers, dealers, brokers, advisers, financiers, lawyers and event planners. But consider for a moment if artists could become better arbiters, what would this alternate art world look like? What sort of platform would allow artists to function better as each other's arbiters?

In most industries, competition engenders innovation and spurs productivity. Lessons from recent history tell us that moments of creative fervor come in waves and despite the fact that they were brief and quickly co-opted by the mainstream—these moments usually happen when artists work with each other rather than chase after the art market. In the 1970s in New York, Holland Cotter recalls: "...the energy was collective, but the mix was different...everybody did everything—painting, writing, performing, filming, photocopying zines, playing in bands—and new forms arrived, including hip-hop, graffiti, No Wave cinema, appropriation art and the first definable body of "out" queer art. So did unusual ways of exhibiting work: in cars, in bathrooms, in subways."

We are obviously not going to turn the clock backwards as if the same magic formula still works. For 2010 and beyond, it shall be a different story. Maybe it is time that we take a different look at what is making the world turn now. How could the arts communicate better with different sectors of the society? Are there lessons to be learned from the green revolution? Are there lessons to be learned from the infectious microfinance movement made famous by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus? What about open source software? An exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum entitled "Design for the other 90%" showed how we often forget that 90% of the world's population have little or no access to products and services many of us take for granted. Nearly half of this disadvantaged population does not have regular access to food, clean water, or shelter. So why shouldn't the arts help imagine and create different futures for everyone?

Endnotes

1. H. Cotter, "The Boom is Over, Long Live the Art!" *New York Times*, 15 February 2009.
2. G. Sandow, "The Arts need a Better Argument," *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 February 2009.
3. W. Baumol, "Unnatural Value: or Art Investment as Floating Crap Game," *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 76.2 (May 1986), 10-14.
4. B. Lewis, "The Second Tulip Mania," *Prospect Magazine*, Dec 2008.
5. Cited by B. Lewis.
6. D. Kuspit, "Art Values or Market Values," *artnet*, March 2007.
7. B. Frey, "Art Markets and Economics: An Introduction," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 21(1997): 165-173.
8. J. Heilbrun, "Baumol's Cost Disease," in Ruth Towse, *Handbook of Cultural Economics* (2003).
9. M. Blaug, "Final Comments on the Plenary Session on Baumol and Bowen," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 20 (1996): 249-250.
10. G. Sandow (2009).

“If history starts to become something that can be thrown open to debate only when it has been recreated and recast in narrative form by historians [and I would add curators], should we look at the validity of the language that gives it force...” - Levent Çalikoglu¹

This quote by Turkish curator Levent Çalikoglu has a currency with this issue of *Ctrl+P* and its dissection of the biennale as a global phenomenon. But more pointedly, it points to a recasting of ‘narrative’ as the geography of the biennale has changed suturing, if you like, its very ability to immerse contemporary art practice within a city and its audience with an equally recent phenomenon, the Asian art market. How these exhibitions broker notions of truth, geopolitics and culture as collateral to redefining perception and value requires examination.

We all know the biennale was born with Venice in 1895. It is not its eurocentricity or position as the exemplary *grand dame* that interests me, rather its roots as a tourism initiative of the day. It is almost as though we have gone through the full motion of an inverted bell-curve, returning to that wide arching popularism with expo-style exhibitions hell-bent on attendance figures and crowd pleasers in the face of widespread competition. As the sociologist Pascal Gielen observes, “Afterall, [the biennale] fits easily in a neo-liberal city marketing strategy of so-called ‘creative cities’.”²

To compound this state of crisis, the biennale today is caught between a schizophrenic ricochet between the institutional white cube and the raw (un)familiar site, which has increasingly become a marketing chip to identifying and growing these events to local and international audiences. Layer that with a trend to package these exhibitions with other events and, understandably, their critical edges start to blur. Just look at the most blatant example, the curated art fair Showcase Singapore housed *within* the biennale venue of City Hall. Is it ‘selling-out’ or ‘buying-in’? Furthermore, Singapore has established a trend to pair its biennale with spectacular events such as the World Monetary Fund meeting, the inaugural Formula 1 or the Youth Olympics in 2010. It pivots

on the marketing concept of ‘added value’ where the sincere idealism of curatorial themes has been usurped by opportunism as their *modus operandi*. Is this simply an equation of accountability in today’s climate where funding sponsors and governments hold the ultimate strings? Or is it a more astute understanding of their primary audience post-vernissage? As Çalikoglu suggests, ‘...we should look at the validity of the language that gives it force.’

Crowds versus crisis

Hong Kong’s *Asian Art Archive* reports that today, there are over 60 international biennials and triennials, the overwhelming majority of which began during the 1990s.³ By my count, 25 of those are/were events held in Asia; that is more than one third and growing. That says more about these locations than the art they are showing. Take China for example. Before 1996 it didn’t have a single biennale; it reportedly now has seven. *ArtZineChina*’s report continues, “Four years ago there was only one art district—the 798 in Beijing; now seven cities around this country have art districts and Beijing alone enjoys nine art districts. Art Galleries grew from less than 30 five years ago to at least 300 at present. And five years ago, no more than five auction houses dealt with contemporary art, now at least fifty auctions houses have stepped into the contemporary art market...[In China] 70% of all collectors have emerged in only the last two years.”⁴ This is definitely a growth industry.

Weekend crowds at SHcontemporary08 Art Fair, Shanghai.
Photo credits: Gina Fairley



This explosion is not specific to China. Between 2006 and 2008 the number of art fairs rocketed with 50 held in 2008 alone; 21 of those were held in Asia. Former Editor at *Art Asia Pacific* Andrew Maerke notes that, "... galleries from the Asia-Pacific region still represent less than 1% of international art fair exhibitors."⁵ While this statistic may be true it does not reflect the number of Asian artists *shown* at these events, regardless of the location of the gallery.

What is more interesting than the global power structures of art fairs is the way they are redefining themselves, bridging if you like, biennales and auctions with curated components and commissioned works by 'celebrity artists' featured within their selling halls. Shanghai's SHContemporary, for example, calls theirs "Best of Discovery." The choice of name says it all playing off the speculation or savvy discovery of the new that has skewed the market of recent years. It is a curious tension between elite market drivers and popular interest.

And with the growing trend of biennales and triennials to commission work for institutional collections—one only has to recall that the Fifth Asia Pacific Triennial commissioned or acquired 70% of its works prior to the exhibition's opening—one ponders whether next we will have the 'buying biennale'? One might even ask whether the biennale has

hijacked contemporary art making, so thoroughly massaged and hyped that they have backed themselves into a corner of staged dialogues and price tickets, and art fairs are quickly filling the fissures.

A further interesting trend is the shift in several of these Asian events from a locally focused survey of the 'new' addressing their own art scene to become International exhibitions turning towards global trends. Shanghai, Guangzhou, Taipei, Busan, Gwangju, Yogyakarta and Jakarta have all made this shift, the most recent being the XIII Jakarta Biennale just this February despite starting in the 1960s as a painting show. It indicates to me *where* these art scenes are setting their sites.

Yongwoo Lee of last year's Gwangju Biennale, however, disagrees. He speaks of Korea's embrace of this *biennialisation*: "The biennale culture of Korea has already accumulated 13 years of experience and is constantly expanding, quantitatively. I do not believe that it comes from the system of the biennale or structure of global production it conveys...I anticipate the emergence of a new ideology and international styles of art in the niches of the economic crisis and recess."⁶

Lee believes the needs and local desires of individual nations are driving this beast. If the impact of the GEC can be weathered by these events and offer a reshuffling the deck of speculators, their 2010 versions will be the real barometer to their longevity as a vital curatorial model. It begs the old question to again be asked: Who really are these Asian biennales for and how do we filter their curatorial choices?

Remapping/geopolitics

2008 was the year to catch the Asian biennale and I managed to do my share, regularly opting to see these exhibitions outside the 'opening week caravan.' What became apparent to me were two very different experiences of the same exhibition: One attempting to satisfy global art vernacular; the other trying to grow these events to a local population.

What currency does the voice of the nomadic curator have to this local population, where he or she steps centre stage for a short moment? As 'the biennale' has been deployed across cities and regions, these events increasingly are brokered on themes of social responsibility as witness to



Installation view "Best of Discovery", SHContemporary08 art fair, Shanghai
Photo credits: Gina Fairley

Jing Shijian (China). "Express Train: Shanghai Biennale Station" (2008). Train car, rail, sleepers, video, 45 tonnes. Installation view 7th Shanghai Biennale, 2008
Photo credits: Gina Fairley



the boom of new engagement. The ‘political issue’ is inserted into their artistic agenda to in order to counter their genericism with local triggers. But do they become staged dialogues as a result? How can such themes bridge the cultural gaps between China, Havana and Sydney erstwhile catering to a local appetite? Perhaps the only way to do so is to bring them closer the endorsement of the global art market. Writer Jorinde Seijdel sums it up in his question, “...can biennials really represent an alternative political voice in these neo-political times?”⁷

Take for example the work Michael Rakowitz in the last Biennale of Sydney in the vestibule of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Titled “White man got no dreaming” (2008) it is a model of Vladimir Tatlin’s “Monument to the Third International” using found materials from ‘the block’, the iconic site of urban Aboriginal Australia in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. Rakowitz marries Tatlin’s symbol of revolutionary, visionary architecture of 1919 with Aboriginal housing, itself a failed ideal. Its presence in the AGNSW as symbol of white power is clear. However, the problem arises in that this piece overlays white ideals on black Australia and a culturally-specific issue that has nothing to do with the American Rakowitz. While a clever connection with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s theme “Revolutions that turn,” one wonders whether it is more about contrived tensions endemic to ‘biennale art’ than contemporary revolution.

This choice of curators to frame their exhibitions around historical or politically charged sites using them as a pawn to a reaction is not exclusive to Christov-Bakargiev—it has become the norm. Such tactics then beg the question in the light of Levent’s quote at the opening of this article, what is the more accurate narrative or truth: the contemporary reality of the site or the reality constructed by the works? What could be argued is that biennales today are caught in a curatorial style that the art critic Gardner calls ‘google mulching: type in the word and see what graces the screen’. They have become overworked lessons in connectivity. Recall this run of works that Hou Hanru juxtaposed in the 10th Istanbul Biennale: Hamra Abbas’ karma sutra warriors and Huang Yong Ping’s minaret missile with AES+F’s grunge-glamour war-scape “Last Riot” and David Ter-Organyan’s domestic bombs. Little is left to the imagination. We are left with formulaic contemporary works playing out prescribed geo-political and religious tensions.

So why the necessity to *force* these exhibitions? Is it for press attention, curatorial indulgence, competitive edge or public awe? What could be argued is that these exhibitions have become microcosms of an idea that is quickly usurped by locals once the art entourage has passed. It is a swift shift from polished rhetoric to mobile-phone-moments later to be posted on *Facebook*. The spectacular of the photo opportunity has replaced that of political hype. It is a very different engagement that has the same contemporary status as the latest must-have Gucci bag.

This synergy is perhaps best illustrated by the scale of Beijing’s art gulches or, a more specific example, Shanghai Gallery of Art’s ritzy location in the same building as the elite boutiques of Armani and Hugo Boss along Shanghai’s fashionable Bund area. In the words of academic Thomas Berghuis: “The power of cultural capital lies in its trouble-free expenditure, in its potential to be easily consumed. Chinese art now is comparable to Chinese takeaway: quick stir-fries, suitable to all tastes”⁸

Has the audience attention span become that eroded it needs constant stimulation or does this clutter of spectacular and scale and reflect a different reading of space within Asia where societies are more densely compacted? It is an interesting question and one that should be considered outside Western museological standards.

What struck me most visiting Shanghai Biennale was the number of people clustered around the video

Visitor’s watching video work at Shanghai Biennale 2008.
Photo credits: Gina Fairley



Poklong Anading. "Untitled (caskets)"
 Detail. Clear cast resin. XIII Jakarta
 Biennale 2009. Venue: Grand Indonesia.
 Image courtesy the artist.



Notes:

1. Levent Çalikoglu, catalogue essay, "We are history's hybrids" for the exhibition *Hybrid Narratives* at Akbank Sanat, Istanbul [Turkey], September 2007
2. Pascal Gielen, "The Biennale: A Post-Institution for Immaterial Labour" published in *Open*; <http://www.skor.nl/article-4113-en.html>
3. Asian Art Archive, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/onlineprojects/bitri/en/index.aspx>
4. Zhu Gi's article from *ArtZineChina* published in *Art in Asia* No. 8, 2008, pp. 158-159.
5. *Art Asia Pacific Almanac* 2009, p. 88.
6. Yongwoo Lee, "Discourse production frame and biennale culture", published in *Art in Asia* (Korea), Jan 09, p. 68.
7. Jorinde Seijdel, editorial *Open5*, 2009, <http://www.skor.nl/article-4058-en.html>
8. Thomas J. Berghuis, "China: We Love You!", *Ctrl+P*, Issue No. 11, March 08, p. 30.
9. Dana Friis-Hansen, *TransCulture* catalogue essay p114, published in Lee Weng Choy's article "A Taste for Worms and Roses," Published by Artspace Sydney critical issues series 7, 2006. p. 9.
10. Brian Holmes <http://www.skor.nl/article-4112-en.html>

installations, diligently watching them from start to finish. They were hungry for this media. Maybe it indicates a generational shift; most artists working today have only known a life with mobile phones, music videos and computers. Should we then be so critical of their fracture within an exhibition environment, when it is clearly a mapping of *now*?

Next time you go to a biennale take a look at the audience as much as the art; it is only in understanding this that we can face these exhibitions with a more appropriate criticality. This idea brings and returns us to art fairs and the kind of hunger that feeds and fuses contemporary art events in our current global climate. I was astounded to see crowds snaking their way around the museum waiting to get in to view the Shanghai Biennale just days after record crowds had attended SHcontemporary art fair with the vigour of a flower or motor show as a popular weekend outing. The contemporary art audience is being redefined and perhaps so too are these events to reflect this. I recently gave a lecture on this topic at the National Art School in Sydney and a student asked, "Is *audience* a dirty word?" Is it? I would profess it is king because without an engaged audience these art works fall hollow.

1997 : 2008 : 2010

The American curator Dana Friss-Hansen wrote, "...[work] which often engages the metaphoric possibilities of common, locally available objects, reflects upon the shifting constructions of order, categories, and meaning—part of the complex, layered experience of so many Asian lives." (9.)

While Friss-Hansen was specifically referring to the work of artist Simryn Gill, it has a synergy to this conversation and to works such as Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan's that adapt well to a biennale vernacular for their ability to touch local audiences and more recently, Poklong Anading's work in the XIII Jakarta Biennale (JB09). Anading's installation at the Grand Indonesia Mall expanded his "Casket" series (2008-09), discarded packaging cast in resin. In the context of this ritzy Western-styled mall, Anading challenged notions of reuse and aspirational society, a pun presented as a 'climbing wall.' And with the fading trend of the past decade to place galleries within malls, it also comments on the commodification of art. JB09 gets it right in the placement of work specific to its audiences and venues and with great clarity its curators also tackled the commodification of the biennale.

In the light of today's economic crisis it should be remembered that it was the economic and geopolitical conditions following the 1997 Asian Economic Crisis under which most of these Asian biennales were formed and flourished. My curiosity is perked to see what the 2010 editions of these events will present with a winding back of budgets and deflating spectacular. I return to the question I posed at the start of this article: as the market recedes but popular interest in contemporary art continues to have a ferocious appetite across Asia, how will these events morph and fuse to cater to popular demands? To conclude with Brian Holmes statement, "Neoliberalism is dead. Now we have to wake up to the world of regions"¹⁰ seems most apt.

The 53rd Venice Biennale *Fare Mondi, Making Worlds*

ELIZA TAN

Venice, 5 June 2009—High tide has submerged a width of pavement near the Rialto, where one of the Venice Biennale opening parties was held just the night before. A woman squeals at the novelty of the sight and has her souvenir picture taken against a misty backdrop of looming piazzas and vaporettos chugging across the dark canal. Stray groups of tourists loiter around the detritus-strewn square, fresh beers in hand, ready for yet another night of revelry. “What a pre-apocalyptic vision.” A friend turns to me to suggest, pointing to a distant piazza from which strange blue lights and blaring dance music emanates. “It’s almost as if everyone’s out to have their last hoorah in this postcard city, this fast-sinking skeleton of a nostalgic world.”

Curated Sections: The Arsenale and the Giardini

Rescuing the observable present for the future is Director Daniel Birmbaum’s prescription for this year’s Venice Biennale: “When *Fare Mondi, Making Worlds* brings back expressions from a recent past, it is never for nostalgic reasons but in order to find tools for the future and to make possible new beginnings.” Nostalgia aside, such a curatorial agenda delivers no surprises from the outset. The utopian impulse underlying Birmbaum’s statement rings like an old adage, coupled with all too familiar rhetoric on art production in a state of globalization. *Making Worlds* addresses the relevant but in a far too sweeping and general sense without actually inspiring anything perspectively fresh or, for lack of a better word, ‘new’; more of an emphasis could also be made on the re-making, and not just making of worlds. In this respect, Robert Storr for the previous biennale, had adopted a far more triumphant and tempered approach with *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense*, challenging a re-adjustment of our attitudes towards art, the non-linearity of history and contemporaneity.

To Birmbaum’s credit, the curated segments of the Arsenale and Giardini flow at a good pace, providing narrative roundness and accessibility. The exhibition at the Arsenale begins and ends neatly with Anya Zholud’s site-specific installation and drawings, which quietly expose the building’s electric cables, allowing invisible communication processes to assume a materiality. The overall tone of the exhibition remains clean and consistent throughout, with a modest but solid selection of works which mostly shy away from ostentation. It is likely that this owes partially to the \$1.4 million biennale

budget cut this year, but it is quite a relief to see a somewhat less spectacular biennale for a change, where works can just ‘be’, in concert with a privileging of ideas and forms. Richard Wentworth’s phenomenological experiment with walking sticks on glass panes, for instance, exemplifies a restrained elegance and poetic pragmatism, as does Ceal Floyer’s concise and deceptively simple *Overgrowth*, a magnified projection of the miniature Bonsai tree.

Even larger scaled works appear reserved; Michelangelo Pistoletto’s roomful of ornately framed mirrors, the relics of his performance *Seventeen Less One* where the artist smashed the surfaces with a mallet, makes a strong but not radical impact. Lygia

Richard Wentworth. Untitled (2009)
at the Arsenale. Photo credits: Eliza Tan



Pape's rare *Ttéia I, C*, comprising of translucent blocks of curtained light in a pitch dark room won the artist a special mention under the *Re-making Worlds* prize category, and is an exquisite visual treat. Displaced quotidian matter and events otherwise make up the material of works such as Tamara Gricic's life rafts, floating outside the Arsenale to its own soundtrack, or Sara Ramo's video of a series of little events unfolding against a non-descript red brick wall.

At times, works seemed too directly illustrative of *Making Worlds*, or too literal; Pascale Marthine Tayou's *Human Being*, a hybrid re-creation of a small African village, is one example. Anawana Haloba's street advertising kiosk, which addresses the double standards of G8 foreign aid policies and free trade agreements, comes across as an ambiguous crossover between a DIY project and make-shift recycling centre. In contrast, Gonkar Gyatso's *The Shambala in Modern Times*, a re-presentation of traditional Thangka paintings using "cutesy" stickers and icons of popular culture, combines visual innovation with subtle, yet effective social-political commentary.

Paul Chan's captivating *Sade for Sade's Sake* in the Arsenale revives the ancient theatre of rhythmic shadow-play in his invocation of the Marquis de Sade's writing. This concept is elsewhere reiterated, albeit to a different effect, in Hans Peter Feldman's mesmerizing *Shadow Play* in The Palazzo at the Giardini. On the overall, the placement, pairings and juxtaposition of works across both the Arsenale and Giardini establishes relatively neat symmetries and there is some satisfaction to be derived from such curatorial coherence, even if this transpires into a bland presentation.

National Pavilions

Artists' showcases from participating countries proved, as usual, to be the mainstay of opening day discussions. Setting the stage for Miwa Yanagi's darkly ambivalent and uncanny *Windswept Women: The Old Girl's Troupe*, an unreservedly hysterical affront to the proverbial, libidinally-driven "old boys club," is a black, carnivalesque tent shrouding the Japan Pavilion. Inside the tent, giant-sized black-and-white photographs of monstrous looking women with twisted bodies shriek and stomp against what appears to be primitive-futuristic landscape. A miniature version of the black tent sits in a corner, and one is invited to stoop and peer in to watch a video of this nomadic tribe, outcasts performing their private rituals. Compared to the highly color-saturated, futuristic fantasy of Yanagi's perfectly manicured and uniformed *Elevator Girls* from the mid-90s, "pretty" is clearly not the point here. A surreal but memorable installation tethering on the bizarre, *Windswept Women* plunges into the fictional re-creation of society and power hierarchies, extending also the theatrical macabre of Yanagi's *Fairy Tale* series, an inversion of stories such as Snow White and Cinderella.

Presentations from Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand return perennially, and inescapably so, to current affairs on tourism, immigration and identity. The Thai Pavilion's mock tourism company made a rather sketchy and unconvincing impression compared to the delicate yet gravitational presentation by Nipan Oranniwesna and Amrit Chusuwan in 2007. Works in the Taiwan Pavilion, on the other hand, compellingly confront issues regarding the nation's status in relation to China, housing conditions, immigration processes and the interplay of ideological stances against a backdrop of neo-liberalist globalization. Communicating such concerns through personalized expressions and individual narratives, the works provide a timely and pertinent investigation into the possibilities of cross-regional interactions or 'dialogism,' as curator Chang Fang-wei cites. *Foreign Affairs* not only sparks further consideration of the collisions and confluences of intra-regional and inter-continental movement, the presentation also demonstrates the modes of artistic exchange deriving from such conversation.

Through an excavation of local cinematic history, Ming Wong's *Life of Imitation* at the Singapore Pavilion attempts to unpack the singularity of officialised narratives on multi-culturalism while also referring to unspoken yet still persistent cultural stereotypes and stigmatisms. The photographs of demolished theatres, Wong Han Ming's archive of old cinema tickets and the canvases painted by the last surviving billboard painter in Singapore, Neo Chon Teck, succeed in evoking a recognisable sense of 50s-60s nostalgia.

Together with Ming's video works, which employ a versatile cast of multi-ethnic actors, this sense of nostalgia, coupled with the use of clichés and melodrama as an inverse device, also conveys undercurrents of historical and cultural repression. Ming's appropriation of Douglas Sirk's 1959 *Imitation of Life*, for instance, uncovers the slippery layers of racial, sexual and gender constructs, where Sarah Jane, played here by two different male leads in drag, is forced to negotiate her 'blackness' while simultaneously pronouncing her 'whiteness.' Nevertheless, a consideration of *Imitation of Life* should not be a mere regurgitation of post-colonial articulations pertaining solely to dislocated identities, 'third spaces' and localisms. These concerns are as intrinsic as they are important, but it is by extension productive to reflect on how the margins of discourse on historical memory, the 'of' and 'from' a nation, together with the aesthetic forms which emerge as an expression of such, will continue to surface and evolve variously in form, address and content. Entrenchment in the self-same identity complex, a process of infinite mirroring which can be a trapping in itself, is otherwise the risk.

Rather than explicitly underscoring anxieties of 'foreignness,' Pak Sheung Chuen's *Making (Perfect) World* at the Hong Kong Pavilion takes a refreshing approach anchored on the notion of 'place' as an aesthetic gesture, (dis)placement and adaptation as conceptual processes.

Billboard poster painted by Neo Chon Teck at the Singapore Pavilion for Ming Wong's *Life of Imitation*



Showcasing a collection of photographs, video works, objects and small installations which document the subtle interactions undertaken by Pak in locations ranging from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Tokyo, Korea and back to Venice, the artist has mapped a psycho-geography of, and beyond Hong Kong as a harbor and city. Amongst the works, Pak re-imagines the measurement and notion of 'one' sea from out of a public library in New York, linking up every book featuring coastal horizons from cover to cover, to form a shape of a sea. *Waiting for Everyone to Fall Asleep* presents a quiet serenade to the residents of a building in Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po, their activities reflected only through their window lights. The poetics of Pak's personal and self-reflexive gestures in every instance serve as meditations on the unobserved, pointing also to the elasticity of borders and states of cognition. Modernity in Asia, a complex and perpetually transitional trajectory of local and global environments, competing and coalescing cultural forms, is thus contemplated with an open, rather than reductive end. The artist here functions not as a disengaged observer, but as an itinerant participant seeking to negotiate connections between contradicting elements inherent in day

to day life, its micro-politics indirectly creating an outlet for reflection of national and transnational identities.

Works by familiar names, Fang Lijun, Zeng Fanzhi and Qiu Zhijie amongst seven other artists, including the Liu Ding artist group, did not generate much hype at the China Pavilion, a stark contrast from the nation's first participation in 2005, when Cai Guo Qiang bagged the Golden Lion award. Where addressing commerce and a utopian future has been taken up by the Chinese yet again, the Russian Pavilion's *Victory Over the Future* recalls the 1913 *Futurist Opera Victory Over the Sun* by Alexei Kruchonykh, its set designed at the time by Kazimir Malevich. A re-examination of the existing tensions between legacies of the Russian avant-garde, individual and societal behaviors as well as fears of economic or environmental catastrophe beyond the 21st century makes for an



Installation view from the Danish Pavilion at the Danish & Nordic Pavilions, Giardini. Photo credits: Eliza Tan

Bruce Nauman's *Fifteen Pairs of Hands* (1996) at the American Pavilion in the Giardini. Photo credits: Eliza Tan



ambitious showcase of works. Elsewhere, Shaun Gladwell's *MADDESTMAXIMVS: Planet & Stars Sequence* at the Australian Pavilion resonates with an incisive sense of presentness, noteworthy for his ingenuous transpositions of painting and sculpture onto video, addressing the expansive possibilities of medium and material.

The Danish and Nordic Pavilion's creatively curated, post-utopian presentation by Elmgreen and Dragset, *The Collectors*, has gained near unanimous popularity. Staged as a piece of real estate put up for auction further to the 'Death of a Collector,' *The Collectors* presents a cool critique of "living in a magazine;" the epitomized, modernist ambition projected upon contemporary life but which unravels from within—makes for its immediacy. The 'collector's' suicide is evidenced by a body afloat in a pool

before the house. In the Nordic Pavilion, a live male nude lounges on an Arne Jacobson OX chair and a pair of boys sit listening to music together amidst works celebrating a homo-erotic aesthetic but which also simultaneously question stereotyped images of gay men. In the Danish Pavilion, the neighbouring wing of the collector's mansion, objects including Fredrik Sjöberg's *Fly Collection* and Massimo De Carlo's *Porcelain Collection* reveal a portrait of their absent owner. A contemporary rendition on the various identities of 'the collector', the presentation follows in the vein of Walter Benjamin's portrait of the collector as bourgeois, fetishistic, a historical materialist in the literal sense, and an allegorist all at once.

Other highlights of the Biennale include Steve McQueen's video installation for the British Pavilion, a ghostly and melancholic evocation of the Giardini desolate in winter, at a time when it could be said to be at its rawest and most beautiful, uninhabited by the biennale spectacle. McQueen's presentation received a great many more thumbs up from British audiences in Venice this year, as compared previously to Tracey Emin. Since there was a capacity limit and particular screening times at the pavilion, the main disappointment for many during the opening days, was being turned away after queuing for hours for a ticket. *Topological Gardens*, Bruce Nauman's showcase at the American Pavilion celebrates an encore of his contributions to art history, including groundbreaking works from the 60s such as *From Hand to Mouth*, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* (1967), and videos from the 90s. *Days* (2009), Nauman's sound installation for the biennale, comprises an aisle flanked by white sound boards from which emanate

voices pronouncing the days of the week in English and Italian, echoing the conceptual thread running through the spectrum of his work from past to present.

What Else Can We Talk About, Teresa Margolle's piece at the Mexican Pavilion proved to be one of the most talked about works. Addressing a history of crime and violence, Pavilion attendants are seen mopping the floors of the Pavilion with a mixture of water and the blood of murder victims. Given Margolle's reputation for using bodily parts and fluids in her art, one is still left wondering how blood might have been in reality obtained and exported for this heavy work. The piece nonetheless invokes the traces of violence, death's invisibility and the burden of social responsibility through the simple gesture of mopping, here transformed into a powerful political metaphor for the simultaneous erasure and 'staining' of identities.

In the aftermath of the manic opening days of the Biennale, it is perhaps only on hindsight that one can better appreciate the critical resonances of this year's fare and the varying forms of worlds present, past and future which the works seek to express. Yet, I am not entirely certain that any of the works in the Biennale really set out to 'make a world' at all but rather, to hold a globe up to the light and turning that sphere under the light, to scrutinize the world for what it appears to be now in order to understand its present nature. At the Czech Pavilion, Roman Ondák's *Loop* unassumingly questions what we currently perceive in our immediate present and the tendency to borrow from, rather than to invest in a future. Collapsing notions of the present with that of the future, the pavilion replicates its external ecology—the surrounding trees, plants and foliage surrounding the Giardini have been planted inside the pavilion. One might almost walk right through, and past it in a rush to look for what else is on show without noticing the work. That is, until you stop, take in a breath of fresh air and realize that this is the art, the world as it has already been made and its current composition, and how it continues to exist as far as it is re-envisioned according to how we relate to it from the here and now.

Roman Ondák's *Loop* (2009) at the Czech Pavilion in the Giardini.
Photo credits: Eliza Tan



It was late December in 2007 when I got an email from Okwui Enwezor inviting me to be part of a section of the 7th Gwangju Biennale he was directing with two curators in the year that was to commence. I knew of Okwui through his work in criticism, theory, and exhibition making, and I found his disposition toward curation uniquely sharp, responsive, and venturesome. The opportunity to work with him was an important moment in my own efforts in the field, and to renew ties with one of the curators, the Indian poet and critic Ranjit Hoskote, with whom I had worked in the past in exhibitions, conferences, and publications, was something not to be missed.

The invitation also came at a time when friend and colleague Joselina Cruz was appointed as one of the curators of the 2nd Singapore Biennale, which was to open days away from Gwangju in 2008. Yeyey, as the local art world calls her, is the first Philippine curator to be part of a curatorium of an exhibition of the biennale mode. I thought that these appointments were carving out vital space for curators in the country: here, they could practice within a wider ambit and in conversation with denser layers of curatorial and artistic issues.

Also, the Gwangju episode allowed me to pursue other trajectories of curation. I had previous experience with slightly different structures of international curation. For the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, Australia in 1999, I was a co-curator for the Philippines with the Australian artist and critic Pat Hoffie. In the same year, I was the curator of the Philippine Pavilion at the First Melbourne Biennale. And from 2000 to 2003, I worked with eight curators from seven Asian countries for the *Under Construction: New Dimensions* in Asian Art project under the auspices of the Japan Foundation. In these forays, the focus was either representation of an art world or exploration of energy of contemporary art. But for Gwangju, I had more latitude to link up my research in curation in Southeast Asia, my theoretical reflections on contemporary art, and the actual practice of curation within a biennale context under the directorship of a well-known curator from Nigeria based in the United States. Clearly, there was a discernible post-colonial critique in this sortie, but one that would be inflected with a reconsideration of radical political strategy or democratic discourse evoked by the site itself, Gwangju, in which an uprising in May 1980 helped topple a tenacious dictatorship and sparked the minjung movement. The specter of the minjung would be raised by Okwui as a foil to the privileged totem of rupture in Europe, the May 1968 student protest and strike in France. These historical coordinates are salient in trying to understand the foundations of contemporary art or any other critical modernities that partly arose from resistance to authority, norm, establishment, and master narrative. That Okwui was insistent on this thoroughgoing theoretical discussion (workshops, seminars, and a thick catalogue) invested the biennale with a robust theoretical framework, a commitment that was quite absent in the other eight biennales that opened in the same season of the year in Asia. This was an unprecedented ascendancy of exhibition making in the region, prompting some observers to herald an Asian century.

The section for which I was asked to contribute was called Position Papers, which was a series of five small-scale curatorial projects initiated by five curators with divergent persuasions, from the enigmatic to the carnivalesque. We were given a free hand to propose anything; and this liberty was key to conceiving unpredictable, uneven, and idiosyncratic platforms. The section was meant to create another level to the biennale, which consisted of an anthology of the previous year's exhibitions and commissions for specific sites in Gwangju. Our section had a more vertical orientation as it tried to probe certain impulses in contemporary art without regard for the new and the now.

I proposed *Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator*, a discussion of the practice of four germinal figures in Southeast Asia who started out as artists of an avant garde inclination and then became pioneering independent curators in their respective art worlds: Jim Supangkat of Indonesia, Apinan Poshyananda of Thailand, Redza Piyadasa of Malaysia,

and Raymundo Albano of the Philippines. This exhibition of art works, texts, and documentation of curatorial initiations surfaced a range of problematics: the role of the hybrid personage like the artist-curator; the transformation of the trope of curator in makeshift modernities, and the intimation of a discourse of the avant-garde in Southeast Asia.

Okwui titled the biennale *Annual Report*. It was not framed by any theme. In fact, he would say that there is in the present a crisis in thematic exhibitions: the biennale could be an occasion for a pause or an introspection as well as a retrospection. I think my proposal fit into this scheme, because it was in the same vein a way of looking back at the seventies in Southeast Asia, the Cold War, the formation of civil society and democracy, and the heady times of the nineties when exhibitions in Asia and the Pacific began to draft their own cartographies. According to Okwui,

These exhibitions, proposals, processions, and activities can be understood as a chain of traveling cultural worlds and idioms; a network of incommensurable experiments in global culture within the contemporary calendar. Whether originating from a shopping mall, a folk theater, a makeshift display in neighborhood, alternative gallery systems, non-profit institutions, local cultural centers, or the commercial gallery circuit, art fairs, museums, festivals, and a wide array of exhibition systems and spaces, the biennale's goals is to illuminate the adventure-time and everyday localities of contemporary artistic practice... In presenting these exhibitions, proposals, and projects, the biennale does not aim for one singular dominant vision, nor will it assume any sense of grandiose authorship. But by linking together the work of many curators, artists, institutions, and galleries, the objective is to achieve within the biennale a forum of collective authorship.

It was propitious that *Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator* was presented beside the Whitney Museum retrospective of Gordon Matta-Clark, another eccentric artist who intuited everyday life in Manhattan through architectural interventions. With this tangent, the whole notion of conceptualism across art worlds gained new depth, and not because of a provincial articulation from Southeast Asia, a vernacular variation, as it were, but because of an equivalent locution from an alternative vantage.

Ray Albano. *Step on the Sand and Make Footprints*. (a reconstruction).
Turns in Tropics: Artist-Curator exhibition, 7th Gwangju Biennale, 2008.
Photo courtesy of Gwangju Biennale



How can I not ask this: isn't good laughter born from the "wonder of the event?" That is to say, the event where something is becoming and which offers us the experience of, as Michael Serres would say, "the immense, sparkling, holy joy of having to think." (Lomax, 2000, pxii)

When I was asked to work on the second Singapore Biennale, all the missteps that I had seen and critiqued regarding the first, as well as the criticisms that surrounded biennales which I had shored up all these years came rushing to the fore. All the criticisms, especially that of the biennale being staged together with the International Monetary Fund meeting, were problems I was determined to resist and desist. The rate of my success in resistance was dismal.

The circumstances of the curatorial team's coming together was a highly balanced decision, with Fumio Nanjo's continuation as artistic director, being an especially important key at giving the biennale the necessary steam to forge into the second. Nanjo-san was the epitome of the regional internationalist, with as many biennales tucked under his belt as the number of biennales that ran for that year throughout the region. Matthew Ngui was deeply respected by the Singaporean art community as both artist and curator, having been part of important international exhibitions (*Documenta* and *Cities on the Move* to name a few); these made him perfect for the post. Finally, I had some curatorial experience, I was also familiar with Southeast Asia as my specialisation and interest, and more importantly, I had previously worked in Singapore.

With the Singapore Biennale 2008 (SB2008), I found myself with the opportunity to work on a new scale, and with more demanding parameters that had to be thought through more critically and more reflexively. Despite the intense 18 months that we worked on for the Biennale, the space for reflection is still only, ever, after the fact. The months before the biennale were marked by a relentless pace that seemed to be at the heart of the process. I was coiled within a machine wherein days rolled into weeks and weeks churned out months quickly. It was an appalling luxury to find myself immersed and sucked into becoming a mere cog of biennale-making. Rupture is a difficult strategy. And often a strategy that backfires when set within an ossified system. The platform of a biennale is like that of a gelatinous substance. You see yourself and everyone else in place, but very few within can move except with labored motions. The biennale structure allows very few of its proponents the ability for true criticality without sacrificing the exhibitionary aspect of the enterprise. Despite Marian Pastor-Roces's extolling Havana's interesting position (which positioned itself as the Third World Biennale), Havana is still located within the confines of the biennale bind ("Crystal Palace Exhibitions" in *Over Here*, 2007). Biennales do not seem to have the ability to turn into itself and create self-reflexive exhibitions that continuously and successfully question the foundation on which it exists.

Adding a layer to the difficulty of working within biennales is the fact that is Singapore. Singapore is a city with many troubling aspects underneath its shiny exterior, transparency being the least of its virtues. The structure of the city is framed strongly by its government, to quote:

Singapore has constructed a veneer of democracy, development and freedom that largely insulate it from international criticism. While Singapore is a parliamentary democracy in name, the effectiveness of its democracy is undermined by the PAP's rigorous controls over speech and the press. It is perhaps because of their economic prosperity that the people of Singapore do not protest more at their exclusion from the political process. From a human rights stand point, however, the Western-style prosperity of the place makes denials of civil and political rights all the more offensive.¹

While such facts may be fodder for Human Rights activists, it makes for a very difficult position for criticality in art to subsist. So much so that other ideas have to be put into play for the site of the biennale to be activated. Fumio Nanjo's two-edition thematic are, on the surface, seemingly benign conceptual plays on ideas. While I have misgivings regarding the trajectory of *Belief*, as it tends to be concretized on sites of religion and politics, which then become the narrow sites wherein they are critiqued, *Wonder* however is an idea that sits itself within an abstract plane. One could argue that it could have been under any other guise, wonder however sits in both the intellect and the emotion and moves it. And its choice was made to introduce the lengths as which imagination could be stretched through the visual sphere.

Imagination is what the Singapore has been deprived of, as imagination enables individuals to think beyond the possibilities what was presented them. Thus to allow intellect to *happen upon imagination* opens possibilities including that of the seemingly impossible. The Biennale sought to bring a variety of art works which challenged this mindset and spur alternative thinking. Singapore is a peculiarly un-curious city. However, to pique an individual's interest is a singular experience. I have always held on to the Plato's adage that "philosophy begins with wonder." Wonder asks questions. It deepens curiosity and allows the intellect to function and reach across actions which may have previously un-nerved us. I always saw the exhibition as more for the Singaporeans first, rather than the international audience. The most quiet and sublime of works may in the end be the most effective and influential, more than shock. Sometimes shock does not leave a lasting impression, whereas wonder or that of curiosity begets a more sublime psychological insinuation. Recently, the triumph of civil action took place in Singapore. When a fundamentalist Christian sect managed to infiltrate a progressive women's group called AWARE, vigilant members of society took to action. The civil action that took place to change the governance of the group to one more plural and inclusive was a feat in the history of Singapore's civil liberties. There was enough critical mass gathered to lead to a change of leadership, but more importantly, those who participated (some 3000 people gathered in a state wherein five people need a permit to assemble) exemplified individual choices to become part of the discussion. While this may not be the effect of the exhibition, there is to my mind this connection of awe that this has happened. There are of course historical and social factors that galvanized and allowed for this event to occur, but are the subtle suggestions of mass action and insidious political action inherent in some of the work suggestive of possibilities? I would like to think that despite this most tenuous connecting thread, art somehow contributed to the Singaporean collective subconscious, no matter how miniscule. It was truly, to say the least, a wonder of an event.

Endnote

1. <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw02/020530hr.htm>

Lisa Yuskavage

GERRY COULTER

Lisa Yuskavage (47) is an American painter from Philadelphia who took her MFA at Yale in 1986. Since the early 1990s she has enjoyed increasing success in the art world: several solo shows in prestigious venues in recent years; her works reside in top collections (including MOMA, New York); and recently her paintings have topped the one million dollar mark at auction.¹ By any reasonable standard for "art world success" Yuskavage's star shines bright. I think her work is a success which is very much deserved as much for the discussions it has generated as for what is skillfully enacts on its canvases (oil on linen).

Like a number of the "old masters" she produces pictures at the rate of about five per year. Described as "technically ambitious (Lovelace, 2001)," her works brilliantly mock the male gaze (if it can get past the initial embarrassment) (see also Scott, 2006). Her oils are deeply thoughtful and very delicate paintings which have undergone meticulous preparation. Yuskavage scrupulously attempts to keep at bay the unintended



Lisa Yuskavage. *Day* (1994)

and this lends to her work something I am less fond of—their calculated quality. She makes many drawings as well as three dimensional models. She is deeply concerned with light and distance for which she uses both live models and photographs before she begins to draw.

This essay examines her art and how its thought provoking nature speaks so well to our time, and the way it raises provocative questions as: “If you had never seen her work before and I showed it to you saying it was painted by a man—would your response to it be different than if you looked at it knowing she were a woman?” What is said about the woman who paints (mainly) female nudes speaks volumes about the limitations (and possibilities) for women artists in our time.

Intersecting Interpretations

Reading art critics concerned with Yuskavage’s reminds me that I live in a very conservative period when even the discourse of the art world is often limited by conventional approaches to women, sex, and the body. One critic has written, for example, that such pictures embarrass him when he meets them in the gallery (Saltz, 2006).

I am even told by the Public Art Fund website that Yuskavage makes “extreme depictions of women” (Public Art Fund, 2007). But Yuskavage’s nudes are not really very radical at all for a place like New York. Images of nude or nearly nude women (usually made by men), surround me in art galleries, in magazine advertisements, in internet searches for everything from “flowers” to “tools,” pin-ups, and especially when I am in Europe, in street advertisements. However conservative the times may be we do live in a context which one leading theorist has described as “ambient pornography” (Baudrillard, 2005:25). This too is one of the ironies of our times.

When we examine her technique and process Yuskavage emerges as a rather conservative painter. Like Odd Nerdrum she can be read as a very traditional as opposed to “contemporary” artist. She has told interviewers that she remained sheltered very much from contemporary art during her younger days and that she is infatuated with the European nude (Lovelace, 2001). In technical terms what I think we have in Yuskavage is a woman artist who refuses to leave the European oil painting tradition and its female nude behind just as she avoids escapism. When we take a second look at her work we find a very challenging artist who gives us much to think about concerning the women she paints. In these conservative times perhaps many people are reluctant to do this. It has been a hallmark of previous conservative times that images of naked bodies are sequestered away from public view for private consumption. It is to this second level of escapism where Yuskavage’s art does its violence and the critics who are embarrassed to be in its presence in public make us aware of this, despite themselves.

One of Yuskavage’s detractors for a number of years has been *New York Sun* art critic David Cohen. Cohen says that Yuskavage fuses “the aesthetics of Hallmark cards and the knowing rhetoric of the graduate school seminar” (2003). Cohen cannot seem to get past the fact that Yuskavage is painting “breasts and buttocks” which for him remain “slick and silly” but to his credit, in my view, he does see something of Francis Bacon in her work. After suggesting who she may have slept with (do we still do that in art criticism concerning women or men?), Cohen then castigates Yuskavage’s technique which he says is “derived from mid-twentieth century ‘How To’ manuals” and is “full of hackneyed short cuts and splashy effects” (2003). Cohen also worries about the number of “fat women” in her paintings [some of Yuskavage’s women are pregnant] but he does think that she is coming to tone down her “misogyny”. What would women do without such men as Cohen to protect them? As for the Hallmark quip I really doubt Yuskavage will be asked to design a Christmas set for them any time soon!

Also among the early responses to her works was the thought that one might hang in the mansion of Playboy empire founder Hugh Hefner, due in large part to the position of the figures, lighting and color tonalities. Others have noted that her paintings remind

them of soft pornography but in way that nudes by Ingres do not. But when we look closer at images such as *Day* and *True Blonde, Draped*, we see that these are not the airbrushed and digitally collaged women of *Playboy*, other soft pornography magazines, or the advertising industry. Yuskavage's women look far more like actual women—imperfect breasts, hips and thighs that are neither exactly the same nor perfectly smooth. Far from the hyper-idealized Playboy nude, the woman in *Day* is not revealing herself as in some pin-up pose; she is doing one of the things our culture teaches women to do—to examine themselves for imperfections. Yuskavage has supplied this image with several imperfections as we see when we look at it longer. It isn't long before those thoughts of soft porn or a pin-up dissipate.

In various interviews and statements concerning her work Yuskavage has acknowledged Bernini and other masters of painting the figure as her inspirations. Responding to an interviewer who asked her about Bernini's influence Yuskavage replied: "I am really interested in the way things are weighted at the bottom. Bernini puts a helmet and rocks at the base to keep the work balanced. The difference is that, in a painting, you can take the weight out of the bottom and put it at the top. The 'weight' of color is another way of talking about color value, so when you use close value, as I do in these paintings, you reduce the weight of color." Yuskavage blends classical ideas with contemporary representations as well. In four of her earlier works she modeled them after soft porn images found in Penthouse magazine (the principle competitor of Playboy) (see Enright, 2007).

We also notice that the sitter in *True Blonde, Draped*, while positioned in a boudoir pose typical of the magazines, certainly isn't forcing a happy smile for the viewer. Yuskavage says she does not paint beauty but "the failure of beauty" (in Enright, 2007). It is quite possible that this painting represents a victim of a recent sexual attack (or at least someone living in a coercive sexualized arrangement). Her expression is one that makes us think long and hard about just what it is that she is thinking. I suppose there are some people who could be turned on by just about anything but I do not think it is imprudent to say that this painting does not work like pornography is supposed to work. I think a number of Yuskavage's more vehement critics are simply quite uncomfortable with the female nude. Yuskavage engages with this problem well and her work really doesn't seem to be about sex. The more we linger among her works the less "sexy" they become.

Indeed, in the case of *True Blonde, Draped*, the shadow falling over the right side of her face serves as an abstract element performing the role that abstract swirls of color played in the painting of Francis Bacon. Like Bacon, Yuskavage uses this unclear element to posit that we can never fully know the mind of a sitter or any other person fully. Bacon said this was the case even when the work is a self portrait (Coulter, 2007). In an earlier painting, *Big Blonde* (1997), Yuskavage paints a very Bacon-like abstract swirl (of hair) sweeping down across the woman's face. This makes the woman more enigmatic and highlights an underlying menacing quality to the world inhabited by the women in Yuskavage's art. Many of her women look as exhausted as any Degas ballerina or the fatigued women who occupy Lautrec's paintings (see also Lovelace, 2001). The color tonalities (the Romantic and Rococo sunsets of Etty and Fragonard come to mind), contribute to the sense of strangeness and mystery in her work. If you find the women in her paintings disturbing—as even some well established critics have—perhaps it is important to ask the same questions about the culture from which the painter, and presumably her subjects, come from. Color is the vehicle of an invitation to stop and look closely and deeply. There are many things to find disturbing about our society today from any woman's point of view (and there is nothing for shock value in a Yuskavage show that will not pale in comparison to the pages of many magazines at the local grocery store).

So let us do that—let's look again at *True Blonde, Draped*—look again at that face and body—is she 17 or 57? Is this an image of a woman

Yuskavage. *True Blonde, Draped* (1999)





Yuskavage. *Imprint* (2006)

at different ages shown to us simultaneously? Perhaps this is why Yuskavage has begun painting two figures in some of her recent works such as *Imprint* (2006). As Yuskavage suggested to an interviewer: “I would put out the possibility that there are not two figures. That there is one figure, one entity. It’s the idea of caring for oneself or struggling with oneself” (Scott, 2006). *Imprint* is my favorite Yuskavage painting—so poetic in its representation of the two ages of a woman—the forty-something clinging to her youth which looks ambivalently on the older woman she is to become.

The woman in *True Blonde* may appear, at first glance to be masturbating, but on second glance, she also appears rather introspective and her almost stereotypical (but as always in a Yuskavage), imperfect body is more like that of *Day*. Perhaps she is a magazine model—but one saddened by her occupation pondering other possibilities. Further, in most pornographic imagery she would appear in stockings and the black shadow line falling over her left thigh may indeed be Yuskavage’s way of entreating us to think about that. This might be a woman protecting her sexuality from the viewer, keeping one of her powers and her pleasures to herself. If this were an image in a pornographic magazine then it is quite likely that the woman’s sexual organs would be exposed and a much more explicit image of masturbation would be shown. In those images the woman typically looks into the camera with her air brushed misty eyes.

There is also the title “True Blonde” which plays upon the old witticism that the only way to know the true colour of a woman’s hair is to see her pubic area. In this case, we are prevented from seeing this area by the sitter herself. For all we know this may be an image of a woman coming to contemplate her own powers, desires, fantasies. Maybe Yuskavage’s art is about the women—not the viewer!

It seems that whatever her motivations and intentions, Lisa Yuskavage has managed to be understood as a sexist and a feminist at the same time, although the painter does not seem to identify her art with feminism: “There’s nothing more real than politics, and my work is not about what’s real,” she says (Scott, 2006). Eschewing politics for fiction, her work is likely to offend the orthodox feminist as it is the stereotypical “old white male conservative.” This, to my mind, is among the best things about Yuskavage’s work. Like many artists (be they writers, painters, photographers etc.), Yuskavage does not seek an empirical or a political resolution to the world in her art—but rather—a poetic one. Inviting multiple and complex readings, Yuskavage cultivates, intentionally or otherwise, uncertainty. The kind of pleasant uncertainty that stimulates debate and engagement with art. As Jean Baudrillard would understand the world is given to us as enigmatic and unintelligible—why cannot the task of thought (including poetry, fiction, painting) be to make the world even more enigmatic, more unintelligible? (2000:83; see also 1996:105; and 2001:155)

Conclusion

Perhaps in our Patriot Act, post-September 11, 2001 world, the critics (especially those located in New York), prefer their art on the lighter side. I have a feeling that if a pre-Raphaelite were to emerge in New York s/he would be highly celebrated at this time. Painters react to the times in which they live. Yuskavage has her way, the escapists have theirs. Robert Rauschenberg worried that every new thing he learned about art placed a certain limit on him. This is true of everything we learn no matter how useful or valuable it may be. Much of the negative critical response to Lisa Yuskavage’s art reminds me of another woman artist—Jenny Holtzer and one of her “Truisms”: “you are a victim of the rules you live by.”

One critic recently said (not supportively) that Yuskavage was a good example of the Andy Warhol quip: “Art is what you can get away with” (Naves, 2003). The same may also be said about art criticism. In any event Yuskavage does not seem to be paying much attention to the critics and in her interview with Enright she also cited Warhol when asked how she felt about the critics. She said she hoped they spelled her name correctly and otherwise does not worry about what the critics are saying—simply measure it in press column inches (Enright, 2007).



What an interesting thing it is to see the female nude in art history so deeply problematized by critics at the time when a highly skilled woman has emerged to paint them. Women have been far more likely to use performance, installation art, and photography to achieve what Yuskavage does in the historically contentious medium of oil paint. One thinks of Carolee Schneemann, Kiki Smith and Tina Barney who were also roundly dismissed in their early days (see Lovelace, 2001). Few women painters have worked with the nude as Yuskavage has done (Tamara Lempicka, Frida Kahlo, Dorothy Tanning, and Silvia Sleight). There are also very few women painters who have broached this area of traditional male desire in a way that allows them the power to reflect on the female nude from either her point of view or that of the women in the paintings. Her works compel me to ask: “what if the painter is actually asking me to think about what it means to look at women’s bodies as a public viewer in a public space—rather than alone with a magazine or a computer screen at home?” Yuskavage suggested in a recent interview with Robert Enright that this is at least part of what she is doing with her work: “consider that what we’re looking at is the exact opposite of what we think we’re seeing. We are looking in on something that is purely intimate, rather than at something occasioned by the presence of the viewer?” (in Enright, 2007). Issues of sexuality, reception and power are difficult to skirt when looking at Yuskavage’s works, and perhaps that is another reason why her work is so unsettling to some.

Endnotes

1. The work, which sold for \$1,024,000 at Sotheby’s (New York) on May 10, 2006 is known as *Honeymoon* (1988). A list of Yuskavage’s solo and group shows as well as awards she has received may be viewed in her CV as posted by The David Zwirner Gallery: <http://www.davidzwirner.com/resources/37715/LY%20Bio%202007.pdf>
2. All the four images included in this essay are available on many websites as a result of a search on “Google Images” including the website of Lisa Yuskavage’s dealer, David Zwirner. <http://www.davidzwirner.com/>

References

- Jean Baudrillard (1996). *The Perfect Crime*. New York: Verso.
- Jean Baudrillard (2000). *The Vital Illusion*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jean Baudrillard (2001). *Impossible Exchange*. London: SAGE.
- Jean Baudrillard (2005). *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*. Edited by Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e)/ MIT Press.
- David Cohen (2003). “Gallery Going: Lisa Yuskavage” *New York Sun* (June 19): <http://www.artcritical.com/DavidCohen/SUN6.htm>
- Gerry Coulter (2007). “Overcoming the Epistemological Break: Francis Bacon and Jean Baudrillard and the Intersections of Art and Theory” *Euro Art Magazine*, Number 5, (Winter): <http://www.euroartmagazine.com/new/?issue=6&page=1&content=140>
- Gerry Coulter (2007a). “One Among Several – The Traditional Gaze Seduced. In *Kritikos: A Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text, and Image* (July, 2007): <http://intertheory.org/coulter2.htm>
- Robert Enright (2007). “The Overwhelmer: An Interview with Lisa Yuskavage.” *Border Crossings Magazine* (May): <http://bordercrossingsmag.com/issue103/article/15>
- Carey Lovelace (2001). “Lisa Yuskavage: Fleshed Out.” In *Art in America* (July): http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_7_89/ai_76332997
- Mario Naves (2003). “Hurry Up, Please, It’s Time: Banishing Fame’s 16th Minute”. *The New York Observer*, (June 8): <http://www.observer.com/node/47648>
- Public Art Fund (2007). “Public Art Fund Talks: Current Schedule: Lisa Yuskavage” (May 3): <http://www.publicartfund.org/pafweb/talks/talks-s07.htm>
- Jerry Saltz (2006). “Female Trouble” Lisa Yuskavage – New Work” *Village Voice*, (November 20): <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/saltz11-20-06.asp>
- Andrea K. Scott (2006). “Lisa Yuskavage: Flesh for Fantasy.” An interview in *Time Out New York*, Number 577 (October 19-25, 2006). This is also on web: <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/articles/art/3954/flesh-for-fantasy>

Flashing Emin: Critical Analysis of "Spectacular" Contemporary Arts

KUBILAY AKMAN

First Words

The conceptual gravity of "conceptual arts" is becoming much weaker every day as the artists involved in contemporary art movements are increasingly trapped by narcissistic tendencies and an extremely pronounced intrigue with domestic objects. Some examples are turning into a "big joke" without causing a big laugh. Where is art going? Or, perhaps a better question, where has art been? The answer is still ambiguous and many of the attempts to answer this question most probably would be swept aside by the actual happenings in the art world. In this article, my intention is quite far away from providing "substantial answers" to the issues and problems of the contemporary art world; however, this text is intended to contribute to the current theoretical and conceptual problems of art in the 2000s through some modest questions, with a particular focus on the *art works* of Tracey Emin. This was not a random gesture to emphasize "art works" with italics. Whether to call her and other contemporary artists' works "art" or not has been a crucial separation for the last decade. On the one hand, there is a chorus of art critics, writers, publishers, editors, curators, collectors, etc. chanting and greeting these works as outstanding masterpieces, without any critical process. On the other hand we find the most conventional and conservative critics blaming these contemporary tendencies with a preference for previous art styles and schools, and denying their being art in fact. I personally prefer to say: "Nice to meet you Achilles. I have no suspicion that you are Achilles. However, I am as sure as your name that you have that vulnerable *heel*. Although it is quite difficult to catch you there, still I will try to direct my arrows right there!" Yes, this is art. At least for the beginning we should accept that the works of Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and the others; are art. Actually works of all the significant conceptual artists aroused after the "aesthetical breaking point" of Marcel Duchamp could be considered as *art*. Here I will not get into a discussion around "What is art?". However I can clarify a little further my theoretical position in this issue:

1. Being or not being art cannot be determined by any collector, art dealer or by any art critic or scholar.
2. Art as a social process and a social production from the caves to the galleries of modern cities.
3. The current contemporary art is *art* in spite of all the reactionary critiques. Not because it is called art by spellbound followers, but it is art if only on account of the social, cultural and artistic structures that produce, reproduce and make it as art in a dynamic process.

What is the point in her scandalous art works? Essentially, her point, like many other contemporary artists, is based on her "flashing" objects of her personal life and happenings. This kind of "exhibitionism" aesthetically created and performed, is still a premium seductive factor for the art audience. Especially when there are the fading shades of "innocence," in the artistic expression, creation and production of art pieces, in spite of the dense coquettish style of the artist, the enthusiasm of the audience is growing. As Jean Baudrillard said, "There is no aphrodisiac like innocence." Tracey Emin makes this balance perfectly, and through her all exhibitionism in the artistic activities, she keeps a semblance of internal innocence intact somewhere, and this is always catching the attention of the art crowd. Hence, I would claim that the "innocent" stratagem is the real factor of attention, rather than all the flashing ceremonies.

In her career, she produced two symptomatic art works and she owes much of her success to these pieces. One is *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995), or *The Tent*. It was owned by Charles Saatchi and burned in the Momart warehouse fire (2004). In this work Emin put the names of everybody she had slept with. She says, “Some I’d had shag with in bed or against a wall some I had just slept with, like my grandma. I used to lie in her bed and hold her hand. We used to listen to the radio together and nod off to sleep. You don’t do that with someone you don’t love and don’t care about.”²² Here, you can see the addition of “innocence” too, if you can catch and “be caught.” This is the trick of Emin: always putting a little innocent sauce over the soup of lustfulness. This contrast is at the very core where “seduction” is bred.

The other symptomatic work is, *My Bed*, which was exhibited in Tate Gallery (1999). In this work, she turned her used and dirty bed into an installation, with used towels, cigarette packs, vodka bottles, condoms, panties with menstrual stains, slippers and other objects from everyday life. Although the previous work was more scandalous, this is much more striking with its high level of exhibitionism and emotional exploitation. Simon Wilson, the curator from the Tate said: “It came about after an episode when she was very ill and depressed. She spent a week in bed in a suicidal state, according to her. It is a meditation on spending a lot of time in bed. The bed is confrontational. There is an underlying innocence and honesty in her work and you are reminded of very fundamental issues.”²³ Here, our thesis about “innocence” is officially accepted. We can just emphasize the artificiality of this innocence, which is professionally produced and being marketed. as or instance, the crises of a middle-aged woman, the theme of suicide, of being left like used condoms, etc. For me it appears a little soapy and not artistically well-organized, although the giants of art world would not agree with us.

Contemporary Artists, or to be more exact, the most famous ones who have been involved in art capitalism more than the others, are a part of the “spectacle.” According Guy Debord, “the spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss”²⁴ This is like a new form of alienation and the spectacle is trapping human beings. In the spectacle, “what was represented as genuine life reveals itself simply as more *genuinely spectacular*²⁵ life.” So, the effects exhibited in the work of Tracey Emin are just elements of a “spectacular life.” This spectacular existence of her art is harming the innocence and revealing the tricks of the seduction. Fortunately or unfortunately, we (the audience) are not the biggest victims of the spectacle in the contemporary art scene. The real victims are always the artists themselves: They are reaching popularity, fame, and fortune. So, you can ask how are they “victims”? If we look deeper, we see what was lost is very important and is compromised with all these things: in the wheels of spectacle, they are losing the possibility to express their potential more substantially and to be “free artists” whose art works are more lasting than TV advertisements or any other temporary thing in popular culture. If the risk of this loss is acceptable for them, this critique has no ontological basis for their understanding.

For centuries, we have observed the indirect and sophisticated marks of artists’ individual lives. However, contemporary artists are rather impatient and directly put their lives into art form. The people you slept with, the condoms your partners used, the panties dirtied with your menstrual stains. Why should the audience be interested in these? However, the audience *is* interested in these. This is another matter. I would like to focus on the narcissistic dimensions of this process. Emin confesses her narcissism in the words written on the tent, “With myself, always myself, never forgetting.” This is like a hymn of narcissism in my opinion, rather than the words of loneliness.

Narcissus fell in love with himself and used to watch the reflection of his beauty in the water. In the contemporary/artistic version of narcissism the artist, broken up admiring and hating herself, is broadening her complicated feeling over the “self,” toward us. This is like dissolving in the water, rather than a simple reflection over it. In the classical/typical version of narcissistic order, the subject of admiration was located in the face

of the person. In the modern version, everything the person or her personality touches is provided as “admiration subjects.” The subjects cover everything she touches, as if she consecrates whatever is around her. This is like a new personality, a kind of “hyper-personality.” The new narcissistic person is not satisfied by her own admiration and desiring to be admired by the millions. You see this same mechanism with all pop-stars. In this worship of narcissism the sacrifice is “art” on the altar of spectacle.

Vulnerable Points

There are several vulnerable points in Tracey Emin’s work. Maybe one of the most stigmatic one is that, in spite of all the everyday image, carelessness, randomness or openness, her works are treated in the same way, as more conventional art pieces. We have seen that two times: first, in the fire of warehouse; second, in the intervention of two Chinese artists. However there is a virtue, of which we find plenty of samples in other contemporary artists, although missing a little with Emin: *temporary character of the work*. Many contemporary artists are creating their works that destroy themselves or turn into something else with the participation of other people. However, if it were not burned in the fire, *The Tent* would remain the same forever. Maybe an artistic instinct prevented her to do it second time and in this way it has become more meaningful. When we look at to the case of Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi, behind a humorous curtain we can realize a more sophisticated and political theme, which is like a divine punishment to the intentionally apolitical character of Emin’s art. After their “participation” the work (*My Bed*) was restored immediately, then nobody could say that: “this is a living art work and we consider this contribution as a new level of the concept.” Let us remember the motto: “With myself, always myself, never forgetting.” Apparently, a person who says this would not agree to collaborate with the others.

What was the “contribution” or “intervention” of the Chinese artists to Tracey Emin’s *Bed*? Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi jumped over the *My Bed* in the Tate Gallery, in 25 October 1999, this is the essence of their action, or with their own expression the art performance titled *Two Naked Men Jump into Tracey’s Bed*. The visitors were shocked during this action, and some of them even supposed that this is an official part of the event. The Chinese men intended to have some “critical sex” over the bed of Tracey Emin to complete the work, but they could not complete their performance entirely. Yuan Chai stated that Emin’s work was a strong one, although handicapped by being “institutionalized.” He said: “We want to push the idea further. Our action will make the public think about what is good art or bad art. We didn’t have time to do a proper performance. I thought I should touch the bed and smell the bed.” There were some words on his body such as “Communism,” “Freedom,” “Idealism,” and “Internationalism” written in Chinese and English. J. J. Xi said that Emin’s work was not interesting enough and they wanted to explore further, making it more significant and sensational. The words on his body were “Optimism,” “Idealism” and “Anarchism.” The gallery covered up this action and neither the gallery nor the artist made another attempt to charge the Chinese artists.

So, there were two more names in *Everyone T. Emin Slept With*. Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi, not at the same time, but at the same bed, took their place with a serious intention to practice on/with her bed. So, why not include their names as well in a possible reincarnation of *The Tent*? Neither the gallery nor the artist was willing to accept this participation. The reason was intuitively expressed by Yuan Chai: *institutionalization*. The institutionalization process, despite the opposite image, has continued as a vulnerable point. In fact, it would be fairer to change the title of the work to *Our Bed*, as it belonged to the Chinese artists as well. However, the more the narcissistic character spread through, the stronger she would react to any other dissolution in the water of her self-centered artistic production. Hence, the gallery just restored the installation, ignoring the new contribution.

Alexander Brener would call the action/performance of the Chinese artists probably as a kind of “anti-technological resistance.” According to Brener, anti-technologies are “striving for decomposition and unproductivity. Decomposition is an attempt to hinder the repressive order, which in hegemonic culture is perceived as the main source of productivity. The normative product in today’s understanding is repressive consensus in a certain packaging. Exactly this consensus must be subjected to the procedure of decomposition. Decomposition and disintegration are the weapons of a minority, calling into question the consensus of a moral majority.”⁷ Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi used these “weapons” as a part of this minority against the repressive “consensus.” The “decomposition” disintegrated the “certain packaging” of the spectacular art for a while, although their voice just faded in the fog of amnesia.

Last Words

Unfortunately, Tracey Emin’s sensational style, both in her life and art works, is overshadowing the more interesting representatives of contemporary art scene and more particularly YBAs, such as Damien Hirst. As Sol Lewitt said, “the idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless.”⁸ When we look at numerous established or young contemporary artists, we see how the machine (idea) successfully works in the intuitive creation/production process. During my stay in the Balkans, as an art critic and scholar I had the chance to see the outstanding works of many artists, who are working devotedly despite all the difficulties. I can mention the names of Alem Korkut, Tanja Perisic, Saso Stanojkovic, Slavica Janeslieva among many others. Apparently Damien Hirst is more “conceptual” and “creative” than Tracey Emin with his elaborately thought and applied installations. I can mention also the names of Debora Warner and Ana Prvacki, both are promising female promising artists who prove that art can be successful and aesthetically/conceptually significant without flashing the artist himself/herself. And of course Marina Abramovic is the “master” of arts that touch the most intimate and individual points, while at the same time dealing with the most public and political issues, through a powerful artistic grammar, even exposing her body in the highest open and direct way, still thousands miles far away from exhibitionism. Tracey Emin is unfortunately lacking of these features.

Here the borders of our critical analysis have been limited with just two installations, as these were the most typical and stigmatic ones. Flashing the “personal” is an obsession for Emin constantly repeated through her works. This shallow exhibitionism is missing a strong conceptual or artistic basis, and prodding the audience through the “flashes,”—spectacle, innocence games and lascivious tricks of seduction. Art does not need to be “theoretical,” as Lewitt said. However an “idea” is processed as the essential mechanism at the heart of conceptual arts. For Emin, “desire” is filling the absence of an elaborate idea. It is possible to talk about the “desiring machines” in the Deleuzian meaning of the term, crossing her work.

If we close the circle where we started, when we speak sociologically, Emin is an *artist* and her work is *art*; although she has the Achilles’ Heel. The critique here targeted her “heel.” However the qualities that I refer to as “Achilles’ Heel” can be quite acceptable for others. We can have an endless theoretical discussion on this issue. As Goethe said, “theory is gray.”⁹ The point is that the green tree of life is also becoming gray more and more everyday. And finally, when art is also beginning to lose its colors and becoming gray, then the bells of caution are ringing. There are dark gray clouds floating over contemporary arts.

Notes:

1. “Emin Defends Her Art,” BBC Online, BBC News (August 13, 2001).
2. Barry Didcock, “The E spot,” *The Sunday Herald*, 30 April 2006
3. Nigel Reynolds, “Tate warns that soiled bed exhibit may offend,” *Telegraph*, 20 October 1999
4. Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/16>
5. Ibid, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/23>
6. Sam Wallace, “Tate protesters wreck artist’s unmade bed,” *Telegraph*, 25 October 1999.
7. Alexander Brener and Barbara Schurz, “Anti Technologies of Resistance”, *EuroArt Web Magazine*, issue: 1, Winter 2006
8. Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *ArtForum*, June 1967.
9. The full quote from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is like this: “Theory is gray, but the golden tree of life is green.”

THE ARTIST'S RESERVED RIGHTS TRANSFER AND SALE AGREEMENT

The accompanying 3 page Agreement form has been drafted by Bob Projansky, a New York lawyer, after my extensive discussions and correspondence with over 500 artists, dealers, lawyers, collectors, museum people, critics and other concerned people involved in the day-to-day workings of the international art world.

The Agreement has been designed to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists' lack of control over the use of their work and participation in its economics after they no longer own it.

The Agreement form has been written with special awareness of the current ordinary practices and economic realities of the art world, particularly its private, cash and informal nature, with careful regard for the interests and motives of all concerned.

It is expected to be the standard form for the transfer and sale of all contemporary art, and has been made as fair, simple and useful as possible. It can be used either as presented here or slightly altered to fit your specific situation.

If the following information does not answer all your questions consult your attorney.

1

Please click on this link to download the complete document *The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement*: www.ctrlp-artjournal.org/pdfs/siegelaub.pdf

The Philippine Modern: Conceiving a Collective Category

PATRICK D. FLORES

It was in 1981 when the artist Raymundo Albano, director of museums and non-theater operations at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), looked back at the ten years of what he called developmental art. There pervaded since 1971, the eve of the declaration of Martial Law by Ferdinand Marcos, to the beginning of the decade of the regime's decline, a "crisis in representation" and, Albano quoting the critic Armando Manalo, a "metaphysical unrest."¹ This was largely shaped by the search for a sense of origin of Philippine art that was reckoned to be lying beyond the pale of the "western tradition": a daunting prospect for a quest considering that the very inquiry into this identity may just prove to be the immanent critique of colonialism itself and, therefore, could never be viewed as external or extraneous to the conception of whatever may be nominated as "Philippine." Still, the anxiety festered, and in the frenzy of nation building in the sanguine season of the Cold War, this affliction could only be alluring, open to both pageantry and melodrama, overinvestment and underexplanation. After all, as high priest Arturo Luz would sternly disabuse: "There is yet no tradition in Filipino painting, only painters painting in a foreign manner or style or tradition."² This desire for the Filipino is the fear of repeating the foreign, a fear that defers the perfection of the impossible, the "not-yet" possible, Filipino.

Albano, perhaps in a strategically ludic mode, likened this form of artistic practice to other forms of developmentalist exercise, as in developmental communication harnessed for population control programs, or simply any other "fast-action" initiatives that could not be delayed, as in the building of roads or security complements yielding results "based on a total community response."³ The CCP thought of the period from 1971 to 1975 as the "exposure phase" in which "advanced art—experimental in nature—were deployed in the galleries. The use of sand, junk iron, non-art materials such as raw lumber, rocks...were common materials for the artists' development strategies. People were shocked, scared, delighted, pleased and satisfied even though their preconceived notions of art did not agree with what they encountered."⁴ This "curatorial stance" was provocative: it may have insinuated a level of democratic habit within a possible Kantian *sensus communis*, an engagement with strangeness and an encounter with disbelief, into an institution that was complicit in repressing the body politic in no uncertain terms. In all this, Albano was convinced that the atmosphere at the CCP "made one relatively aware of an environment suddenly turning visible."⁵ The Center, hence, was conceiving a world and its spellbound subjects, inventing an indispensable mythology of freedom and prefiguring the unknown in a regime that had claimed unerring destiny: *tadhana*, a fate written in the stars.

This exhibition excerpts Albano's foundational statement because it intimates an ontogenesis, a process of becoming, rendered urgent, with the alacrity of development, in the flash of exposure. This "suddenly turning visible" captures the energy of that instance and willful instantiation—and it may be a paradox that it presages a project that is about objects, a collection that has become sediment, the remains of erstwhile heady times. Nevertheless, these objects are in place: as they are brought out into the light of an exhibition marking a monolith's birth forty years ago, they will be endowed with the coherence of a collection, regardless of how they have been convened incoherently over time. This enables the public to revisit this estate so to speak, and from it carve out a terrain on which to initiate speculations.

Collecting History

There is no existing history of the art collection. This commemorative exhibition seeks to reconstruct how objects made their way into the institution as an initial survey of sightlines. We can point to specific sources:

First the building itself, which opened in 1969, that housed donations from such artists as Hernando R. Ocampo, who offered his design for the work *Genesis* that was transformed into a wondrous tapestry by Japanese weavers to serve as the iconic curtain of the Main Theater; Arturo Luz (*Black and White*) and Cesar Legaspi (*Triptych*) likewise donated murals, which adorn the Little Theater Lobby, alongside Eduardo Castrillo's metal totem *Pyramid Growth*. Other works, most probably commissions as well, that were built into the structure include Vicente Manansala's brass relief *Tribute to the Seven Arts* for the Main Theater entrance and Roberto Chabet's collage for the curtain of the Little Theater. A panel of Carlos Francisco's *Abuses of Spanish Authorities* for the New York World's Fair in 1964; Napoleon Abueva's *Ballet Dancer*; and Arturo Luz's gargantuan paper clip were later additions to the public art collection of the Center.⁶ By presidential fiat in 1966, the site of the building was decreed, and thereafter the Board of Trustees was named. The edifice, sitting on 21 hectares of reclaimed land from Manila Bay, is by itself part of the art collection in a manner of speaking. Designed by Leandro Locsin, it speaks of the style that was hailed then as innovative and its engineering, a public works feat for a Third World country in Southeast Asia: cantilevered construction in raw concrete with the use of crushed shells on site as aggregate and landscaping by Ildefonso P. Santos.

The commitment of the architect to the visual arts was earnest as indicated in the blueprint: a painting and sculpture hall with a section on contemporary art; a colonial art pavilion, split into two levels in which the San Jose church baroque altar donated by Antonio Bantug was to be ensconced; the Arturo de Santos collection of art, gold, and ceramics; the Potenciano Badillo collection of Muslim art; and a library for art and music. These pavilions would be surrounded by gardens, fountains, pools, and plazas so that visitors may be "surprised at every turn as new vistas unfold."⁷

Second, the initial acquisitions, largely undertaken by Roberto Chabet, who was appointed Curator as early as 1967, two years before the Center formally opened to the public. He purchased for the Center important pieces like Victorio Edades's *The Builders* and Napoleon Abueva's *Allegorical Harpoon*.⁸ It could be that some of these early pieces

were part of *Summer Exhibition 1970*, described as a "serendipitous collection of over 100 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and 'but-is-it-art?' objects that virtually span six decades of Philippine art history."⁹ It is reported that works like *The Builders*, Fernando Amorsolo's *Burning of Manila*, Ofelia Gelvezon's pinball series, and Brenda Fajardo's "classic-inspired etchings" were part of this ensemble; and indeed they are in the collection. To prepare Chabet for



Victorio Edades. *The Builders*.
Image courtesy of the Cultural Center
of the Philippines.

his duties, the CCP secured for him a generous grant from the John D. Rockefeller Fund so that he could observe museum procedures, administration, and related techniques in the United States, from 1967 to 1969. Chabet, who was trained as an architect at the University of Santo Tomas and was cited by Galo Ocampo¹⁰ as Chabet Rodriguez in an essay on Philippine art history as early as 1963, had no background as a curator or as an art historian and came into the scene with his modest reputation as an artist whom Arturo Luz deemed worthy to be exhibited in his eponymous gallery; he won First Prize at the Art Association of the Philippines annual competition in 1961. The registry of the collection lists Lee Aguinaldo's *Linear #24* (acrylic on wood) as one of the first to be bought before CCP's inauguration; and Leonard Aguinaldo's *E-Maginations* as one of the latest purchased in 2008.

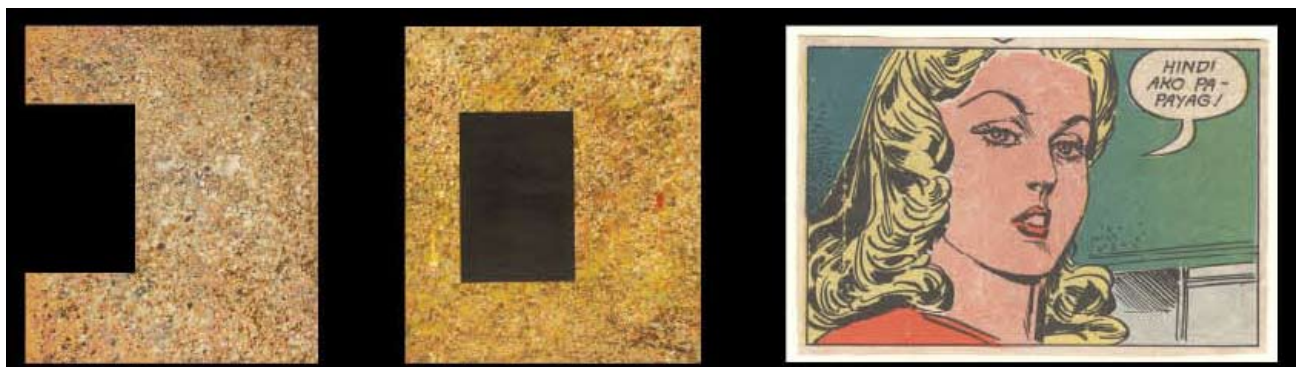


Left: Roberto Chabet. Untitled. 1976. 19 x 28 cm
 Middle: Roberto Chabet. Untitled. 1976. Printed matter on illustration board. 19 x 28 cm.
 Right: Roberto Chabet. Untitled. Inkwash on paper. 1965. 15.3 x 6.2 cm. Image courtesy of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Third, the collection put together by the Museum of Philippine Art (MOPA), which was initially called by Albano as the Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines (CAMP) was given its own building, the Elk's Club beside the United States Embassy and adjacent to the National Park. Albano, assumed office of the museum at the Center one fine day in 1970 when Chabet decided not to report for work. The latter rather cavalierly says in an interview that after his brief stint at the Center, Albano was "sort of taking over."¹¹ The heir apparent, who opened CAMP with the *Contemporary Art in the Philippines* exhibition, served with two of the period's liveliest minds, Marian Pastor Roces and Judy Freya Sibayan. Roces later worked at the Center in 1985 under Nonon Padilla after the death of Albano and was left minding the store when Marcos was deposed in 1986; Sibayan returned in 1987 as director of the museum at the Center, now renamed Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines as an homage to Albano.

The original CAMP was headed by Albano who was relieved from the post the same year it opened. Arturo Luz took over as museum director and was responsible in renaming it Museum of Philippine Art; the museum operated through the Center but was curatorially independent of it. In its effort to organize an exhibition on Philippine modern art, the MOPA solicited works from selected artists to form a collection envisioned to be on permanent display on the second floor of a high-ceilinged California mission-revival building. Luz vetted the artists and appealed to their generosity, though reserved the right to refuse, with no apologies. The gaps in this narrative of modernism were filled by the bequest of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, the founding President of the Art Association of the Philippines, established in 1948, and luminary of Philippine art in the first half of the twentieth century. The MOPA presented important retrospectives of ground-breaking modernists, many of whom had been or were inevitably proclaimed National Artists by Imelda. In this space, Luz codified his scenographic signature of white-cube sleekness, brooking no awkward angle and placing pieces in order: the first one on view is the most important and impressive and that the arrangement defines the space, or better still, the interior design. He asked critics Leonidas Benesa and Cid Reyes to prepare the literature for exhibitions; and in order to sustain itself, the MOPA sold works, with a thirty percent commission on the sale.¹² This collection proved pivotal because it succeeded the Ateneo Art Gallery as a key node in the hoard of modern art in the Philippines. The Kalaw-Ledesma collection was inevitably withdrawn when the MOPA trove reverted to the CCP in the post-Marcos dispensation.

Left: Ray Albano. *Happy Birthday Suite #4*. 1981. Acrylic on chipboard on wood. 121.9 x 106.7 cm.
 Middle: Ray Albano. *Happy Birthday Suite # 1*. 1986.
 Right: Ray Albano. Untitled. Comic magazine strip. 30.1 x 21.5 cm Oil on canvas. 84.5 x 181 cm. Image courtesy of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.



The MOPA was dedicated to Philippine modern art in contradistinction to another Imelda brainchild, the Metropolitan Museum of Manila or the MET that was decidedly international in its projection, having opened in 1977 with loans from the Brooklyn Museum and other galleries or collections in the United States,¹³ most notably Armand Hammer's. Like MOPA, which commenced with a Federico Aguilar Alcuaz event under Luz's directorship, the MET was directed by Arturo Luz. Through the years, it hosted the exhibitions of Paul Klee and Joseph Beuys, Byzantine icons, Yugoslav naïf paintings, the Vatican Collection, among countless others. The MET after Marcos, in some version of the developmentalist model, pursued an "art for all" vision, and interestingly this meant overturning the Luz museography. According to Felice Sta. Maria, MET President from 1986 to 1993: "For Philippine museums, adherence to the Western museum paradigm led to an isolationist image, incomprehensible texts, and ineffective programs—a total museological dysfunction...It dampened the *raison d'être* of museums as cultural and educational institutions for the general public."¹⁴ It may seem then that post-Marcos likewise meant post-Luz.

Fourth, the somewhat unpredictable and unsystematic admission of gifts, contributions, and art left behind by artists, a practice that was practically dependent on the social networks of Imelda Marcos and Raymundo Albano, who did not have the budget to buy. There had been purchases after the Marcos period, governed by no clear-cut acquisition guidelines. This could be attributed to an anti-CCP outlook that infected the CCP, that is, an aversion to curatorial engineering. Reigning in a scenario soaked in people-power euphoria were the tedious and ultimately reactionary concepts of decolonization and indigenization, informed by the populist nationalism of a coalition of anti-dictatorship forces. The plurality that was unleashed by the fall of the house of Marcos found its expression in *Piglas: Art at the Crossroads*, the come-one, come-all exhibition at the Center in 1986 that, as it is in all days of deliverance, let the barbarians at the gate, anybody who thought of himself or herself as artist, crash the fold of culture's grand catacomb. Marian Pastor Roces interjects: "It was extremely difficult to keep the exhibit free from the emotional issues surrounding the CCP itself. It was impossible to screen out works which did not seem to have anything to do with art at the crossroads. It was, to say the least, impossible to 'curate.'"¹⁵ This could only be indicative of the semblance of strict curatorial control in the previous years and the irresistible urge to negate it when the party was finally over.

In light of these developments at the CCP, one way of piecing together the sources of the collection would be to match exhibitions at the CCP and the existence of objects in these exhibitions with the registry. For instance, Lani Maestro's work in the collection might have come from her exhibition at the CCP Museum Hallway in 1981 based on the visual documentation. Cid Reyes also confides that Arturo Luz bought some of his works at his *Chroma* exhibition at the Hyatt in 1973 on behalf of Imelda; and one of these, the tondo *Volta Redonda I*, is in the collection. And we take note of a Betsy Westendorp de Brias exhibition of *Marcosiana* in 1975; a portrait of Ferdinand Marcos is in the storage. To summarize, the collection at the Center was assembled under the broad rubrics of commission, purchase, and gift. A curious note: In 1976, in time for the International Monetary Fund-World Bank Meeting, an exhibition of reproductions of modern masters (Picasso, Bacon, Magritte, Klee) was held at the CCP to shore up a proposal for a collection of international contemporary art at the Center.

Ethic of Collecting

It may be useful to tentatively assume that the logic of collecting at the Center was contingent on a level of connoisseurship represented by the taste of Imelda Marcos and the coterie around her: Leandro Locsin, Arturo Luz, and Roberto Chabet. At the outset, a particular type of internationalist abstraction of a late modern pedigree would frame this disposition, although Imelda also favored nativist inclinations in the works of, let us say, Carlos Francisco of Angono, Rizal. Locsin's design of the building, a cross between brutalist minimalism and nativist quotation of the *bahay kubo* (nipa hut) morphology, set the tone, inflected by the exacting predilections of Luz and, later, Chabet. They

represented a kind of modernism that may be described as highly discriminating, maybe even elitist and indifferent to the Filipino penchant for ebullient decoration. And so to a certain extent, there could be a line drawn between the patronage of a dictatorship in the arts and a patronizing attitude among a segment of the intelligentsia towards a people who, it might have thought, needed a new cycle of modernist civilization, one that was not folkloric and pastoral. This was an approach foiled, however, by the “fiesta” ambience of Raymundo Albano’s CCP as well as of its satellites like Patio Kamalig and Third Level Gallery at Shoe Mart Cubao, which accommodated an array of hits and misses, from Fluxus to Mabini art, Russian socialist realism to Picasso.

Another trajectory of collecting could have been, as earlier mentioned, the comradeship of the art unit’s longest-serving curator (1970-1985), Raymundo Albano. A preliminary look at the records of the collection reveals that a significant number of works are by artists with close artistic ties to Albano, including Rodolfo Samonte (who guest-curated *Gridworks* in 1975) and Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi. Albano was sui generis, an artist of ample affinities (painting, printmaking, performance, photography, installation), curator of myriad persuasions, and a prolific poet and writer who was able to articulate the philosophical underpinnings of his imaginings. Among his projects at the Center were the journal *Philippine Art Supplement* (1981); representation of Philippine art abroad (Paris, Fukuoka, ASEAN); art for the regions (Baguio, Los Baños, Cebu); the *CCP Annual* (1976); and outreach through the Community Involvement Program and regular art workshops centering on pattern and grid system and alternative materials. The liaison between experimentation and sorties into the gallery system prompted the artist Alan Rivera to quip that “conceptual art can be blue-chipped.”¹⁶

The shift from Albano to Chabet bears some elaboration. Albano’s bent was antithetical to Chabet’s insouciance, which was in turn akin to Luz’s sense of entitlement: they saw no need to explain the power to make art and produce its value, let alone lay the predicate of its alleged interrogation. For an artist like Chabet who sought to unravel the mystification of art through the mechanism of language, this streak of genius bordered on bogus high formalism. His ideas gained adherents beyond the Center because he taught at the University of the Philippines: the rarefied precincts of Diliman unfortunately bred acolytes who to this day deign very little tolerance for art that does not go their way. Chabet, who was prone to tearing things to pieces like Manuel Duldulao’s book in CCP and a hand-out in MOPA, was the central intelligence of the Thirteen Artists Award (1970), which raised the consciousness for artists who demonstrated a “recentness that hopes to endure.”¹⁷ He waxed optimistic on its commencement: “They are a new generation of artists that promise to dominate Philippine art... Their works show recentness, a turning away from past, familiar modes of artmaking... (made) credible by a keen awareness of artistic problems, an articulate command of means to pursue innovative solutions... a confident commitment to ideas... Their influence is being felt in the works of other young artists... They have accelerated the motion initiated by our earlier modernists... they constantly restructure, restrengthen and renew artmaking and art thinking that lend viability to Philippine art.” Above all, they have ambition: “In this exhibition we have in evidence a certain expansiveness of scale and largeness of concept that are intimations in which the promise each artist has shown in recent years is finding fulfillment.”¹⁸ These are lofty words, but the recipients through time could no longer be exclusively tied to Chabet’s discernment. Also, Albano’s *CCP Annual* in hindsight may have been more generative: “The essential irony of the annual is that all the works are test-markers for things to expect in the future. The works are highly contemporary, which means that they are risk-takers, transitory. They have not been validated yet, so to speak, and they may look like diversions or ends to a series. But it is this risk taking that artist’s works become useful in questioning and provoking certain attitudes. There are no perfected works here (there may be some masterpieces) but, eventually, we will realize that many prove to be sparks of innovative ideas, pivotal points.”¹⁹ The relationship between the Thirteen Artists award exhibitions and the *CCP Annual* merits further study.

Finally, the practice of collecting art at the Center was preceded by a more institutional method of collection evidenced by the spaces devoted to the ethnographic and

archaeological collections of the landowner-interior designer Arturo de Santos and the dealer-couturier Potenciano Badillo, principally consisting of trade ware, ceramics, and Maranao and Maguindanao artifacts. It is said that Imelda promised the two collectors a building to house their holdings; and in fact piles had been driven in an area close to the Folk Arts Theater for this purpose. But plans fell through. After the Marcoses were forced out of the palace in 1986, Marian Pastor Roces, curator of the newly formed Museo ng Kalinangang Pilipino, returned the pieces to their owners. We mark this moment of collecting at the Center because its presence may help us understand more clearly the invented distinction between “fine art” and “ethnology,” on the one hand, and how these two genus of objects could come together under the aegis of museumification as heritage or antiquity or commodity, on the other. These are aspects of modernity that are imperative, because tressorial, and moreover part of wealth that is Filipiniana. We must remember that when the Marcoses left the Philippines, the revolutionary government of Corazon Aquino confiscated part of the Marcos art collection, ranging from Raphael to Zurbaran. Christie’s auctioned off some of these pieces on behalf of the Presidential Commission on Good Government in 1991, with the proceeds of the sale funding the country’s Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. Earlier, the auction house peddled furniture, silver, and decorative accessories from the family’s town house and apartment in New York City. The catalogue reports that a number of Impressionist and modern works were still being tracked down, including Monet’s *La pluie* and *L’église a la Seine*; Renoir’s *Jeune fille au bord de l’eau*; and Picasso’s *Reclining Woman and Head of a Woman*. In other words, collecting at the Center was paved by a deep provenance of collecting in the Philippines by both the old rich and arrivistes, from Felipe Hidalgo to Luis Araneta to Leandro Locsin.

The Modern as Collectible

With the collection in place, a little more than a thousand odd pieces in total, this exhibition charts the coordinates across which objects make sense as things within a contrived scheme, a curatorial intervention in our own time: the new, the now, the next—terms referring to modernity and its critical inheritance. This is a first foray and therefore fraught with inconsistencies and plagued by theoretical problems. But before such, typologies at this point are de rigueur. We cast a taxonomic web to catch a better vantage of the collection:

1. Art history: The collection may be viewed art historically as representing types of Philippine modernism but not necessarily in linear mode:

- a) Incipient: from the Triumvirate to Thirteen Moderns
- b) Neorealist and Philippine Art Gallery cohort: from School of Paris to non-objective to David Cortez Medalla
- c) Abstract: geometric and gestural, with Arturo Luz represented with the most number of works
- d) Avant-garde/Conceptualist, with one flank moving towards greater self-referentiality, and the other towards greater plurality, including Roberto Chabet’s 12-piece steel installation *Hurdling* and Santiago Bose’s door pieces
- e) Neofigurative, with printmaking as dominant medium and access of women artists to the scene and the canon; and Benedicto Cabrera’s *Larawan* series as watershed
- f) Expressionist, including the large works of Jaime de Guzman
- g) Social Realist, which has minimal representation

2. Will to form (Aesthetic Urge)

- a) Play: experimental, ephemeral, anti-art, anti-museum
- b) Essence: abstraction, action painting, formalism, language games
- c) Culture: local color, identity, motif
- d) History: colonial critique, narrative

3. Logic of practice

- a) Performative, including the painterly: dematerialization
- b) Reprographic: multiple circulation
- c) Expressive and expressionist: classicism, sense of beauty, anxiety, abjection
- d) Picturesque and kitsch: idealization of everyday life, commodification of idyll and folk resilience

NEW: Bago ang Lahat

First, the modern is ordained, the new is positioned at the outset, with Edades's *The Builders* as a contentious locus classicus and myth.²⁰ Around it are ciphers of an earlier academism or conservatism embodied by such exemplars as Fernando Amorsolo and Guillermo Tolentino, and a relatively unacknowledged liminal figure in the emergent modernist enterprise, Diosdado Lorenzo. Implicated in this incipient system of the historiography of modernism is the temper of Leandro Locsin and Arturo Luz in the context of geometric abstraction and internationalist architecture. The so-called Triumvirate of Victorio Edades, Carlos Francisco, and Galo Ocampo plays out here, as well as its furtherance in the much-profiled but ultimately apocryphal Thirteen Moderns. Beyond the Ash Can school of American realism and post-Impressionism of Edades lies the domain of neorealism, a Filipino neologism in modern art vocabulary of which cubism was the dominant aesthetic. The neorealist style, which was honed through exhibitions at the Philippine Art Gallery, had broad sympathies, extending to the art brut experiments of David Cortez Medalla. A treasure in the collection is a suite of the latter's drawings of Fernando Zobel lecturing on art history at the Ateneo de Manila University in the fifties; along with Leonidas Benesa and Emmanuel Torres, both of whom became Philippine modern art's leading critics, and Tessie Ojeda, who married Luz, Medalla was a student of Zobel who was at once painter, patron, and polemicist on Filipino culture.²¹ Needless to say, the collection counts several Zobel as its cherished possessions. Concomitantly, the belief in the international, with Zobel as a foreign element in the vicinity, was overriding, a testament to Philippine cosmopolitan culture. This much Luz intuited: "I have a feeling, my work included, that most of our paintings and sculptures are a reflection of something happening worldwide, and for want of a better word, this trend is now being identified as 'international.' In fact we always refer to it as being an international phenomenon, and in the process, this trend obliterates national characteristics, and transcends geographical boundaries."²² Zobel may have been the vector of the international in the nation, while Medalla referenced a post-national Philippine art outside the nation.

Moreover, this section integrates the transition from abstraction to what may be provisionally called neofiguration from which an emergent social realism, the style that undermined the argument of Marcos development partly through Marxist thought, derived parts of its grammar. Here the works of Solomon Saprid, Ang Kiukok, Danilo Dalena, and Benedicto Cabrera are remarkable in relation to, for instance, the abstract expressionist pieces of Jose Joya, who with Napoleon Abueva, represented the country at the Venice Biennale in 1964. The alternation between deformation/abjection and nostalgia/melancholy condenses in this kind of expressionism of folksy and urban grit and post-abstract graphic art. It frustrates the heroism of the painterly stroke, the disinterest of the perspicacious line, and the kitsch of late neorealism's penchant for vendors, shanties, and New Society propaganda.

The search for a level of Filipino identity bedeviled Philippine art in the seventies. After 1986, with the restoration of so-called democratic space and its attendant ethos, a template was contemplated to nuance this issue, proceeding from the revived CAMP helmed by Nonon Padilla who drew up a ten-year program of three phases: the dialectical, questioning aesthetics, identity, issues and orientation; the analysis of the visual arts as a reflection of Philippine culture; and the definition of Philippine culture as expressed in contemporary visual arts. *The Sensuous Eye* (1987) evolved out of the need for this introspection, as well as for trying to address gaps in curatorship in the Philippines, which according to Judy Freya Sibayan "has not reached a level of systems." Thus, the intent of the exhibition was both analytic and curatorial: to "re-think how Filipino artists create and

why they create the way they do,” on the one hand, and to advance the central aesthetic thesis that “ours is an art of objectifying visual pleasure,”²³ on the other. The walls were painted peach, alluding to the “physicalization of pleasure”: the exhibitionary and the artistic merge. The critic Cid Reyes was able to propose categories of analysis for this particular pursuit of a Filipino aesthetic in painting: frontality of image; fragmentation: openness of forms; décor: enhancements of the picture plane; horror vacui: appropriation of space; ‘focal point’: leading the eye to pasture; recession: shallow space; and color: radiation of energy.”²⁴

This was the second and may have been the last serious attempt of the CCP to strive for discursive density in relation to its collection. The first one was done in 1980 with the exhibition curated by the critic and printmaker Rodolfo Paras Perez titled *Five Directions*; it attempted to map out “for meditation the various permutations, perplexities, the five identifiable tendencies, the ambitions deemed characteristic of Philippine art”²⁵: non-objectivist, macro-visionist, magic realist, Laguna lake shore, conceptualist. Curiously missing was the social realist aesthetic that had already potently posited its agenda since 1971, finding its impetus with the founding of Kaisahan in 1976. Surely, the omission was obvious: the MOPA might not have wanted to present art that tried to disclose an abject social condition, a far cry from Imelda’s idealized City of Man, for which the government was responsible. This policing was, therefore, political, something that might have also permeated the choices for the Thirteen Artists. As social realist Renato Habulan would reflect on his belated conferment in 1990 along with confreres Pablo Baens Santos, Edgar Talusan Fernandez, Antipas Delotavo, and Neil Doloricon: “Our selection was a vindication of work that was deserving but could not be displayed because of the dissenting political implication they held during the Marcos era. We may have even deserved nomination in the 1970s, but this could not happen under the (Marcos)administration.”²⁶ This umbrage is not as simple as it looks, because on the other hand, the modernist canon makers in New York like Museum of Modern Art’s Alfred Barr during the Cold War would juxtapose the freedom of abstract expressionism with the fascism of socialist realism.

Marian Pastor Roces reviewed *Five Directions* and thought it iterative and recursive: it “moves into itself and around and over again, in a steady, non-corrective, immutable, static, state.”²⁷ While viewed as curatorially faulty, this exhibition, along with *The Sensuous Eye*, constitutes the only consolidated effort of the Center to assess its collection, coextensively and implicitly with its exhibitions, in relation to both aesthetics and art history. From this stock taking, we could infer artistic leanings in terms of themes, forms, and ideas, on the one hand, and a deeper structure of an aesthetic sensibility that is constantly eluded by its grail that is the Filipino, on the other.

NOW: Simula Pa Lamang

The turn away from neorealism towards the contemporary may have been heralded by Raymundo Albano at the Center, who insisted on working on the now, its labor as the advent of an alternative universe that was present—and that was only the beginning. Albano widened the parameters of art and invested the modern not only with the notion of the new, but the urgency of the now, its being essential in development that must seize the day, demanding quick action and being forward looking, the better perhaps to slay the feudal time of oligarchy that Marcos so despised, assiduously tried to dismantle, and replaced with technocrats and cronies of a developing nation state.

It is in this segment of the exhibition that the documentation of the projects at the Center becomes extremely helpful. Albano diligently annotated them, dutifully wrote curatorial briefs, and kept photographs in tidy volumes that serve as our map to the labyrinths of the spaces and the laboratories that they had become in the seventies and eighties. We may designate this juncture as the carnival world and adventure time of Albano, one of the most solvent periods in Philippine art history, rivaled only by the hectic routine at the Philippine Art Gallery and the steady production of protest art during the Marcos administration.

NEXT: Abangan ang Susunod

Roberto Chabet was the fountainhead of the visual arts at the CCP at its inception, cobbling together a fortress of state-controlled culture for the masses with a motley crew of Martial Law architects, high-society personalities, and academics—from Juan Ponce Enrile to Antonio Madrigal to Fr. Horacio de la Costa. But Chabet's presence as curator was short-lived. His lasting legacy, however, is the Thirteen Artists Award that he imagined as signaling art on the threshold. He was proud of the first laureates, though had reservations about the second, which he thought were mostly "mediocre." According to him: "In the second Thirteen Artists show... I had to include things which I didn't know about. I was surprised to find them included in the show. Somebody had disorganized the show!"²⁸

This is vintage Chabet, who has only contempt for artists who try too hard to do work that looks like art, calling them "the acrylic embroiderers" and the "San Andres sitting circle," comprising the new Mabini artists, and are "nincompoops."²⁹ To distinguish himself from these wastrels in his estimation, he casts himself as "experimental," the adjective he uses to describe what he had been doing; and as critical, taking on the task of a critic who questions the "nature of art."³⁰ In this modality of valorizing the mind over the hand, he would advocate, for instance, the use of the "professional craftsman" to execute the artist's design: "It's the only way to do it."³¹ This is the avant-garde capital that Chabet arrogated unto himself, arbitrarily of course.

Chabet would disclose in an interview years later that the CCP was "not doing its function properly." When queried what this function was, he retorted: "I really don't know. Maybe that's another reason why I resigned. I don't know and I don't care."³² This may be symptomatic of the rift between Chabet and the enviable lush afterlife of conceptual art after his departure from the CCP; it also betrays the hauteur, conceit, and his inability to make himself accountable to the modernist obligations of reflexivity.

This exhibition recalls the gains of the Thirteen Artists recognition not only through the collection, but also through the work of the recipients of the award, specifically the installations of Reginald Yuson and Poklong Anading that reference, for the former, a Japanese garden of bullet shells, and, for the latter, debris of the city's road painted in the colors of rags. Both projects are at once gritty and melancholic, testifying to the poetics of ruination resting on a building resting on land resting on water. This should be able to glimpse a future that is the heritage of this coveted honor, for good or for ill.

Inchoate Notes

This exhibition of the visual arts collection of the Cultural Center of the Philippines occasions a probe of the history of its becoming, the very nature of the collecting impulse, and inexorably, of the construction of the collective. A couple of conclusions could be put on the table.

First are the intricate relationships among institutions that circulated art that deserved and was desired to be collected as property, as well as index of progress, refinement, radical expression, experiment, and patrimony. Here specific codes of quality were ratified through sheer confirmation of taste in acquisition, exhibition making, workshops, cohort formation, and award giving (Thirteen Artists in 1970 and National Artist in 1972). In this situation, the CCP as the state's premier bureaucracy for modern art was involved in generating symbolic capital for objects that were not merely regarded as species of art history or the history of art, which implied some kind of progression from a perceived indigenous origin to a telos of sophistication, but as goods of the market and artifacts of a museum that meet certain standards and cannot be easily reduced as instruments of the economies in which they are entangled. This confluence would be facilitated by the personage and prerogative of Arturo Luz, who at one time directed three art institutions—the Design Center Philippines (1973), the Museum of Philippine Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila – and owned the Luz Gallery, heir of the Philippine Art Gallery and Manila's most respected art gallery at that time; according to Raymundo Albano, the latter was the only platform for the unsaleable conceptualist art³³ and, in fact was contracted to program and manage MOPA's exhibitions. It may not be too imprudent to aver then that many of the artists exhibited at the MOPA were also

in the roster of the Luz Gallery. In other words, there seemed to be a singular circuit through which a distinct mode of modernism found its relay: this was for all intents and purposes on the watch of Luz, who was widely respected for his mandarin sensibility and fastidiousness as artist, curator, and administrator. We note this tyranny of taste: “Actually, my principal reason was simply to provide art with the setting and importance it deserves. Bad painting deserves obscurity, but painting that deserves to be shown must



Left: Arturo Luz. *For Xavier Gonzales*, 1978. Painted burlap on wood, 102.9 x 221.6 cm
 Middle: Arturo Luz, *Untitled*. 2007. Metal
 Right: Arturo Luz. *Nightglow*. 1960. Oil on canvas. 84.5 x 181 cm.
 Image courtesy of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

be shown well. Surprisingly, virtually all other galleries in Manila ignore this obvious truth... More obvious though less popular is my notion that galleries have to be dictatorial in matters of taste and quality... The point is that galleries have certain functions and responsibilities other than to make profit... Above all, it (the gallery) should mold taste and exercise a certain degree of critical judgment.”³⁴ This acuity in hindsight made the Gallery a veritable bellwether of the first Thirteen Artists awardees in 1970: in 1968, the *20 Artists* exhibition was practically the mirror-image of the latter.

Moreover, Luz proved to be a vital element in the art world because of his links to a very influential circle of standard-setters and opinion-makers in the sixties and the seventies. We may trace the lineage of this elite to Fernando Zobel whose role as artist, benefactor, and intellectual shaped hegemonic formations in the art world. His bequest to the Ateneo was the nucleus of the Ateneo Art Gallery, the first institution of modern art in the Philippines that partly enhanced the auspice of Luz by way of exhibitions of his art, including the ten-year retrospective that Ateneo professor and critic Emmanuel Torres curated in 1966, the same year Luz received the Republic Heritage Award. Torres likewise wrote a book on his drawings and at one time conceptualized an exhibition of Philippine art, running the length from the nineteenth century master Juan Luna to Luz. This clique also included the pianist and theater artist Leandro Locsin, chief architect of Imelda and the Ayalas, and later Roberto Chabet, who exhibited his early Malang-like works at the Luz Gallery. More importantly, they thought highly of each other. When asked who among the local painters of his time he esteemed most, Zobel would point to Luz if he “had to name a single person...his clarity, the profound honesty of his work, the elegance of his restraint, have to do with everything I admire.”³⁵ Luz for his part is indebted to Chabet for the evolution of his collages. The crucial coordinates would be Luz, Locsin, and Chabet. Locsin and Luz may have been kindred spirits. A story has gone around that one time when the two were asked to select ten objects, they had similar choices. They were attuned to the same wavelength in terms of their regard for space, intellect, and class affectation. Albano, who came from Ilocos Norte and was not reared in privilege, did not belong to this orbit.

All told, as Alfredo Roces would put it: “Luz had the gallery, Locsin had the building and clientele and Zobel had the theories and even the patronage.”³⁶ In this regard, Tessie Luz relates that “there was a small group of collectors who revolved around Zobel and Lindy Locsin.”³⁷ Furthermore, Zobel had a hand in the founding of the Ayala Museum in 1961, on the heels of the establishment of the Ateneo Art Gallery, the Luz Gallery, and the Lopez Memorial Museum the previous year; it opened to the public in 1967. In 1974, it moved to Makati in a building designed by Locsin. The Ayalas nurtured the country’s oldest business house and was its pioneer monopolist.³⁸ Zobel’s cousin Jaime Zobel de Ayala, the industrialist and tycoon whose family practically owns the financial district Makati and the country’s gated enclaves, was CCP’s first Executive Director and President. These connections are very telling. The history of Ayala as a firm and proto-conglomerate and how Jaime would try to elide class in the production of culture through the CCP are equally compelling: “The Center, they say, is only for the affluent.

It is not committed because it does not take a class stand. It does not identify itself with the masses and is not led by the ideology of the present struggle. True, the Center does not and cannot adopt this kind of orientation. It does not divide the people into classes. But it is committed. Its commitment is to art and art alone. It shall not be subservient to any ideological belief.”³⁹

Finally, the developmentalist bent that guided the policies and programs of the Center, as previously indicated, may have conspired to craft a cosmopolitan aesthetic that principally dwelled on design. This is validated by a strong investment in design that encompassed both the primitive and the avant-garde as could be discerned, again, in the initiatives of Luz at the Design Center Philippines where he developed buri and hand-made paper as local materials within an interior-design context; his burlap series provides the nexus to art. Therefore, the intersection between fine art, interior design, architecture, tourism, convention city building (hotels, theaters, coliseums), and other Marcos ambitions brought together practitioners who built edifices and decorated them with art, furniture, and antiques. The apartments Locsin designed in Makati and how



Left: David Cortez Medalla. *Parables of Friendship*. 1984. Oil on canvas. 50.8 x 76.2 cm.

Middle: J. Elizalde Navarro. 1981. *Homage to Carlos V. Francisco*. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 86 x 160 cm.

Right: Hernando R. Ocampo. *Homage to Diego Silang*. 1976. Oil on canvas. 84.5 x 181 cm.

Image courtesy of the Cultural Center of the Philippines

their interiors were done may be exemplary. But more than this, as David Cortez Medalla confided in an interview, it was the shift of the art scene from Manila, which was bohemia to the culturati of a fabled era, to Makati that decisively altered the kind of modernism that was to take root.⁴⁰ The Luz Gallery in Herran moved to Makati in a Locsin building along EDSA in 1966; and Luz secured commissions for public art in the area. We are of the mind that this transfer, which according to Medalla (represented in *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969; *Documenta* in 1972; Venice in 1980) deprived modernism of its social texture and made it pretentiously cerebral, aborted a potentially robust avant-garde that was nipped in the bud by the high modernism of Luz and Chabet. It was only during Albano’s tenure at the CCP that this orientation was meaningfully reversed, but only to the degree that it tried to simulate an artificial condition of “happening” minus political happenstance.

This developmentalist framework could be key to the unevenness of the collection, a sign of the kind of the fulcrum on which a native/national, truly neo-ethnic Filipino teetered. It is a balance that may have also informed the expressions of artists active at the Center: the avant-garde ethnomusicology of Lucrecia Kasilag and Jose Maceda (whose *Ugnayan* broadcast sound across Manila through the radio on new year’s day in 1974) and the modernist theater of Rolando Tinio who translated with irresistible rigor Euro-American canonical pieces into cogent Filipino. Ballet and folkloric dance companies; piano concerts in basketball courts; philharmonic orchestras and art workshops for children, opera troupes and local playwrighting were developmentalist endeavors that reached out to the vast masses of Filipinos. Tinio had the perfect formulation for this program: “The classics of the world are like natural resources; we mine them and manufacture from them products for local consumption, first and foremost.”⁴¹ But Albano was able to explicate this rationale not so much for development as for the process of developing something unknown: “For an establishment to accept and promote such unrecognizable visual propositions was rather controversial, and yet it was the only workable plan possible. Exhibiting more established works would be duplicating the commercial galleries. A permanent collection is not possible to have because the CCP has no building and accompanying budget yet. A bias for interdisciplinary tendency stems from the fact that the Cultural Center promotes the ‘seven arts’ together.”⁴²

Second, Marian Pastor Roces advances the astute insight that the CCP visual art collection may be viewed as spinning off discretely from the art and exhibitions of the seventies at the Center.⁴³ This stems from the fact that the experiments then were basically anti-object, keen on dematerialization, basking in ephemera. And so, it may be argued that this acumen was an immanent critique of the necessity of a collection at that time and the way in which the collection festers in the current climate when first-world amenities are unavailable to arrest the entropy of things and to contain the attrition of the collection, tasks that are well-nigh impossible in an unindustrialized economy presided over mostly by rent-seeking elites. Roces, who conjures the image of the collection as tumor, speculates that this may have been an unc cosmopolitan manner of sustaining the cosmopolitan ethos of collecting. And she has a very interesting case to make because of two things: one is an antecedent modality of collecting through the endeavors of Luz in his gallery, which sold antiques apart from marketing fine art in the same space, as well as in MOPA, and second, the Filipiniana collection at the Center. This “ethnographic” strain in Luz, who extensively traveled and whose abstraction was inspired by temple and cloth in Asia, would nuance the De Santos and Badillo collection at the Center, supposedly curated as objets d’art by Locsin, whose family in 2008 loaned to Ayala Museum its exceptional reserve of gold and donated to the National Museum Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo’s *The Assassination of Governor Bustamante and His Son* in 2006. In Fernando Zobel’s book *Philippine Religious Imagery*, he states that Luz “owns the finest existing collection of statuettes in the popular style” and that Locsin and his wife Cecilia of the wealthy Yulo clan “have a small but very select collection consisting of carefully chosen examples of every style.”⁴⁴ The Locsins, who have held the country’s most important private collection, were also interested in archaeology, having written the important book *Oriental Ceramics Discovered in the Philippines* (1967), a culmination of their excavations in Sta. Ana in Manila. This confirms that the Locsin-Ayala-Luz—and, of course, Marcos—loop perseveres.

But this anti-object mentality in the conceptualist model may have in the same unnerving vein taken a different twist in the Marcos matrix, with things aleatory and embryonic mutating into things spiritual, the inverse of the material or the materialist; the scientific; or the rational. Emblematic is Jaime Zobel de Ayala’s statement: “The Center is deeply relevant to our times because a recourse to the spirit and things spiritual is very much warranted in a time of material crisis.”⁴⁵ And surely, this appeal to the ineffable may have been Imelda’s access to art, the best way for her to kindle kinship with artists. As gifted essayist and speechwriter Kerima Polotan Tuvera puts it: “Though she had never written or painted, and what singing she had done had been on small stages, she understood the artistic alchemy, and if she did not burn deeply with the fever that raged in all artists, she nursed a touch of that sweet delirium, and many saw in her a kindred soul.” Thus, Imelda, whose penchant for adornment and decoration – indeed, beautification -- imbued her festivalist imaginary, was, therefore, attracted to art, a fascination that required no exegesis. This rambling rumination is fabulist: “I like the modern. I like the abstract. I like them because they get me thinking. You know, sometimes I do not understand them. I like things I do not understand because they make me curious. I do not claim to be a technician or a scientist in the arts. But, as I always say, when I like something, I like it even though I have no reason for it. Just like friends. There are friends you like but you don’t know the reason. There are paintings you like but you don’t know the reason.”⁴⁶ It is this reverie that coddled the dreams of Imelda of the Platonic ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful. When Imelda, a woman of appreciable beauty and charisma, spoke of these virtues, it looked and sounded exceedingly credible.

Finally, and this is the other path through which the “collecting” at the Center may have been paved: the conceptualist posture to question the basis of artness, or its objecthood within the spectrum of institutional critique, only that in this setting the institution itself of authoritarian rule was spared. Still, the instinct to appropriate material culture of everyday life and behold it on the plinths of the museum at the Center furthered the conceptualist mindset to restore the integrity of the object before it is devoured by the modernism of art or the mercantilism of the market, to dematerialize it conceptually in a paradoxically sensory and intersubjective, even immersive, atmosphere.

Endnotes

1. Albano, Raymundo. 1981. “Developmental Art in the Philippines.” *Philippine Art Supplement*. Vol 2 Number 4, p. 15.
2. Luz, Arturo. “Filipino Painting.” n. d.
3. Albano 1981, p. 15.
4. Albano 1981, p. 15.
5. Albano 1981, p. 15.
6. An account points to other donations like a mural from Fernando Zobel and a curtain from Federico Aguilar Alcuaz, both of which seem not to exist; mentioned as well are the collections of Antonio Bantug and Arsenio Escudero. See De la Torre, Visitacion. 1984. *Cultural Center of the Philippines: Crystal Years*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, p. 19.
7. Locsin, Leandro. 1969. “Physical Aspects of the Center.” Inaugural Program. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines.
8. Reyes, Cid. 1989. *Conversations on Philippine Art*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, p. 126.
9. De la Torre 1984, pp. 132-133.
10. Ocampo, Galo. 1963. *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the Philippines: From 1928 to 1962*. Manila: National Museum, p. 32.
11. Reyes 1989, p. 126.
12. Interview with Purissima Benitez-Johannot, curatorial staff at MOPA, December 2008.
13. For thorough discussion of the MET, see Paulino, Roberto. 2005. “The Metropolitan Museum of Manila.” *Pananaw* 5. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, pp. 30-47.
14. Paulino 2005, p. 37.
15. Pastor Roces, Marian. 1986. *Piglas: Art at the Crossroads*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, p. 5.
16. Rivera, A. F. Alfon. 1981. “Art at the Third Level.” *Philippine Art Supplement*. Vol 2 Number 1, p. 16.
17. *1988 Thirteen Artists Brochure*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, n. p.
18. *1988 Thirteen Artists Brochure*, n.p.
19. Tence Ruiz, Jose. 2000. “Atras/Avant: Lessons from a Continuing Reinvention of the Thirteen Artists.” *Pananaw* 4. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, p. 56.

While some artists celebrated conceptualism, others were suspicious. Alfredo Roces would forward the opinion that “conceptual art is essentially an intellectual medium, a mental process” and he could not see it thriving in an “anti-intellectual” locale.⁴⁷ This may be supplemented by the lament of Chabet and Albano about Filipino critics; Albano, for instance, thinks that Emmanuel Torres’s tenor is too poetic. Marian Pastor Roces agrees, alerting us to a language that is florid, cardiac, verging on “swardspeak,” or gay lingo. Then she continues: “But you see, nobody likes critics; our entire sociological profile denies the very notion of pointing a judgmental finger at another.”⁴⁸ How could have conceptualism flourished then without a flourishing art criticism? Was this vacuum filled by the artist-curators like Chabet and Albano as an extension of their conceptualist practice?

Such incommensurability is intrinsic in conceptualism itself, and this exhibition affords us the opportunity to look at its appropriation in Philippine art. Several publications and exhibitions have tried to discuss conceptualism in its philosophical and global registers under cognate terms like post-object art, art-as-idea, theoretical art, and so on.⁴⁹ The line of flight of this reconsideration begins with the autonomy of the aesthetic as productive of the alienation and fragmentation obtaining in a modern society, or a society that is undergoing modernization. Part of the conceptualist venture was to undermine the sensuous particularity on which the universal aesthetic rests as a critique of modernism, but paradoxically through the recovery of the sensory that has been institutionalized as art, fetishized as commodity. This enterprise runs into thickets of internal contradictions, indeed ineluctably resulting in a failed negation: art’s formalism proves to be inescapable no matter how it tries to conflate itself with everyday life and non-art, and expectantly to disappear into the energy of the common. Artists might have taken Adorno’s fantasy too seriously: “To make things of which we do not know what they are.”⁵⁰

Chabet belabored this in vain because he was confined to the Center and his own cult thereafter, which instrumentalized art as regulation of, precisely, everyday life; CCP’s outreach later with Albano at the helm may have colonized it as well in another modality of discrimination or being discriminating. This aporia might mean that their postmodernity was a continuity of modernism, and in some respects not even a critical nor a postcolonial one. This revisit is extremely indispensable in light of contemporary art’s complicity in it and the fact that its binary critique of art history is long over, having been absorbed into its domain as a genus, settling into, alas, a collection. There are many ways to spin this problematic, and the exhibition nudges us to introspect on a multitude of hints: if Philippine modernity at all reached a level of aesthetic autonomy; if Filipino conceptual artists were persistent amateurs who failed to philosophize and therefore were not up to conceptualism’s metalinguistic demands, except perhaps for Hernando R. Ocampo, whom Albano thinks is conceptualism’s forerunner, Albano himself, David Cortez Medalla, Judy Freya Sibayan, Marian Pastor Roces by way of her idiosyncratic writing, and perhaps Lani Maestro; if conceptualism in these parts was compromised because it failed to become activist and effected institutional critique; and other more painful possibilities.

In 1867, Matthew Arnold declared that “Culture suggests the idea of the State.” David Lloyd and Paul Thomas thread through this thought by saying that: “Both are given the role of furnishing sites of reconciliation for a civil and political society that is seen to be riven by conflict and contradiction. Both are seen as the sites in which the highest expressions of human being and human freedom are realized. Both are seen as hedges against the political anarchy of rapidly transforming societies.”⁵¹ This exhibition complicates this idea, as the ethical formation of a polity (nation state, democracy, revolution) emerges from the critique of the coloniality of culture (identity, development, subjectivity).

The collection at the Center, therefore, may be subjected at this seminal stage of reconceiving it as property, as object, and as intellection. And it is most thrilling to just let it crawl out of the woodwork as a burdened corpus of things and deeds by privileged persons—be they the proletariat of a starving art world or potentates of an aggrandizing culture. In the Filipino culture of bereavement, this is our protracted padasal or prayer for repose to augur the babang luksa, the end of mourning and grief after forty years of trying to achieve fitting parting from relics.

20. Reyes 1989, p 96.
21. See Zobel de Ayala, Fernando. 1963. *Philippine Religious Imagery*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University. Reyes 1989, p. 62.
22. Sibayan, Judy Freya. 1987. “Preface.” *The Sensuous Eye*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, n. p.
23. Reyes, Cid. 1987. “The Sensuous Eye: A Survey of Philippine Art Focusing on the Filipino Artists’ Vision of Beauty.” *The Sensuous Eye*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, n. p.
24. Pastor Roces, Marian. 1980. “Five Directions in a Steady State.” *Philippine Art Supplement*. November - December, p. 8.
25. Tence Ruiz 2000, p. 59.
26. Pastor Roces 1980, p. 9.
27. Reyes 1989, p. 126.
28. Reyes 1989, p. 124.
29. Reyes 1989, p. 124.
30. Reyes 1989, p. 125.
31. Reyes 1989, p. 126.
32. Reyes 1989, p. 163.
33. Paulino 2005, p. 35.
34. Reyes 1989, p. 54.
35. Reyes 1989, p. 98.
36. Reyes 1989, p. 184.
37. See Baluyut, Pearlie Rose. 2005. “The Ayala Museum: A Site of Culture, Capital, and Displaced Colonial Desire.” *Pananaw 5*. Manila: National Commission for Culture and the Arts, pp. 6-17.
38. De la Torre 1984, 51,
39. Interview with David Cortez Medalla by author, May 2006, Madrid, Spain.
40. De la Torre 1984, p. 90.
41. Albano 1981, p. 15.
42. Interview with Marian Pastor Roces by author, December 2008.
43. Zobel de Ayala 1963, pp. 35-36.
44. Zobel de Ayala, Jaime. May 31, 1970. “A Closer Look at the CCP: Asia’s Mecca of the Arts.” No publication details.
45. Pastor Roces, Marian. 1987. “Beauty or Wis: A Philippine Dilemma.” *The Sensuous Eye*. Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, n. p.
46. Reyes 1989, p. 101.
47. Pastor Roces 1987, n. p.
48. For this essay, the author consulted: Newman, Michael and Jon Bird. 1989. *Rewriting Conceptual Art*. London: Reaktion Books; Bernstein, J. M. 2006. *Against Voluptuous Bodies: Late Modernism and the Meaning of Painting*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s-1980s. New York: Queens Museum of Art.
49. Bernstein 2006, p. 1.
50. Lloyd, David and Paul Thomas. 1998. *Culture and the State*. New York: Routledge, p. 1.

The author wishes to thank Purissima Benitez-Johannot, Marian Pastor Roces, and Judy Freya Sibayan for their generous insights.

Prized Possessions: The Promise of the Contemporary in Philippine Art Competitions

JAY GIOVANNI BAUTISTA

It was in a painting competition that we had our first international recognition. At the Exposicion Nacional de Bellas Artes, there were earlier accounts that a Filipino student named Alfonso Calderon placed in 1866. What is certain is that a student Juan Novicio Luna won the silver medal at the same Madrid Art Exposition of 1881 for the seminal work, *Death of Cleopatra*, which he painted while on an excursion in Rome. Held every three years at the Salon in Madrid, the 26-year old Luna would even win the first gold medal for the masterpiece *Spoliarium* three years later. It will also be the same occasion that another Filipino named Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo will win the silver medal for his *Virgenes Cristianas Expuestas al Papulacho* which is now part of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Painting Collection.

It has always been the young and uninitiated that the lure for recognition seems strongest. Founder Purita Kalaw-Ledesma told author Cid Reyes in an interview that not only did the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) become a formally organized art association; it also provided the venue for competition that has become the perennial rite of passage when Filipino artists were starting out. “The beauty of [AAP] competitions, [is that] students usually defeated their professors. This happened many times and that’s why we discovered many raw and emerging talents. [Juvenal] Sanso for example won first prize defeating his professors. I will not mention names, but time has proved that the judges were right about Sanso.” Kalaw-Ledesma recalls.

AAP’s first offering in 1948 saw Carlos “Botong” Francisco winning first prize with *Kaingin* showing farmers tilling their fields. So playful was the 35 year-old future maestro as he was so engrossed with playing basketball in Angono that he would even fail to attend the awarding ceremonies scheduled at the National Museum (then at Herran) with an impatient President Elpidio Quirino and other guests waiting for him in vain.

Through generations after, the AAP Art Competition saw the likes of National Artists Jose Joya and Arturo Luz, Fernando Zobel, Federico Alcuaz, and Roberto Chabet Rodriguez winning the coveted plum. Getting temporary access to the few public exhibition venues in the metropolis was more than enough to the then struggling painter in them.

Art contests became more pertinent then since the exhibitions attracted collectors and gallery owners alike. Only a handful of exhibition venues and art dealers existed in the 1960s. To name a few spaces were the Philippine Art Gallery showroom along Arquiza street in Malate, Gallery 7 in Makati Merchandising Mart Bldg., and the new Luz Gallery that moved to E. Delos Santos Avenue.

Among other initiatives to showcase Philippine art then, came from artists and art lovers themselves. Bencab opened Gallery Indigo, and F. Sionil Jose shared artworks with his book space at the Solidaridad Galleries located a block from it in 1967. The other galleries that followed suit would eventually become the venue for winners of art contests. These were Palette at Greenhills arcade, Capitol in Quezon City, Arts and Ends at the Savoy Hyatt Hotel, Gaerie Bleu at Rustan’s in Makati, and Gallery One at the PCIB building in San Juan, Rizal.

With the inauguration of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 1969, the Philippine art scene was altered to conform to the dictates of the “new society.” As we all know First Lady Imelda Marcos would be influential in calling the shots in the visual arts as she took care of the few artists she favored (they know who they are) to the detriment of the equally deserving painters but who did not have collectors.

Don't Touch the Wet Paint, To Each His Own

In a country where the arts get so little of the attention it needs to survive, let alone thrive, the encouragement given by an art contest is much sought after and close to wanting. Next to the AAP, the oldest art contest is the Shell National Student Art Competition (NSAC) which has vowed to continue their creative tradition on its 42nd anniversary this year.

The NSAC has long been bestowing certain immortality to artists at the onset of their creative vocation. And even in its latter years, an artist would join competitions like NSAC not for the prize but prestige.

“Art competitions have come a long way from the time I used to join them. I remember participating in the Shell student art competition in 1962 and the cash award was 250 pesos. The current crop of visual artists is privileged to have supportive entities to encourage them to develop and produce outstanding works of art.” National Artist Benedicto Cabrera was once quoted in an art book.

In 1984, Metropolitan Bank & Trust Company captured the call of the epoch and created the Metrobank Young Painters Annual (MYPA). Open to all Filipinos not more than 35 years old and who have not had a solo exhibition, the YPA is an open painting competition with “sign of the times” as an unwritten yet guiding theme to this day. Three years ago it was renamed Metrobank Art & Design Excellence (MADE) to accommodate other categories like Architecture, Interior Design, and Achievement in Sculpture.

More than the cash prize it provides as incentive and a selling show during the awards night, the YPA has helped launched the careers of Roberto Feleo, Gabriel Barredo, Dennis Gonzales, Elmer Roslin, Maria Taniguchi, Leslie de Chavez, Norman Dreoo, Alwin Reamillo and most of the members of the Salingpusa—Mark Justiniani, Elmer Borlongan, Ferdinand Montemayor, Anthony Palomo, Tony Leño, and Karen Flores.

Four years after, in 1988, the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company in partnership with the Directory Philippines Corporation would launch a unique and innovative scheme to promote Filipino values through the PLDT-DPC Telephone Directory Cover Visual Art Competition. Past winners like Gerri Dueñas, Alfredo Esquillo Jr, and Jaypee Samson saw their works being awarded and selected as cover in the PLDT-DPC directory.

Esquillo, who was 28 years old then when he won almost every art award there is, is a three-time winner of PLDT-DPC Telephone Directory Cover Visual Art Competition, the 1993 Metrobank Young Painters Annual Grand Prize winner, and two-time Philip Morris Asean Art winner. He still sees these art contests as relevant today, however only at a certain phase in one's artistic career.

“For the student, significant *yung may approval ng new ground or experiment mo* by the judges who are also critics in the art community. The only challenge is after the art contests, *paano mo susundan?*” said Esquillo, now 36 years old, emphasized in an interview.

Other awards would come in as a corporation or government office saw these fit in their marketing strategies and overall company advocacies. There's the Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards in 1997, ArtPetron National Student Competition in 2001, and the GSIS National Painting Competition in 2004. This year adding to the list there's the LRT (Light Rail Transit) Art Competition, *Pagalingang Pinoy* by the city government of Makati and the Figurative Art Competition sponsored by the Big and Small Gallery and Philippine Drawing Society where at stake is a house and lot and cash prize for the lucky painting.

As these art competitions were born, there were those who died a natural death. Some of them were Dow Jones Art Contest for People with Disability, the Nokia Digital Art Competition, *Letras Y Figuras* by Instituto Cervantes and the Remy Martin Public Art Competition, whose approved winning studies have already been executed as large works on the walls along Roxas Boulevard fronting Rizal Park. In fact, some of these murals are currently in critical condition and up for restoration, a sad reflection of the short-term planning some corporations that sponsor them have.

The choice of judges in art competitions remains to be a factor. It is they who will decide, debate and dignify the winning art work. How do they say one work is better than the other? Each judge will definitely have his or her own preconceived biases and cultural notions.

You cannot deny that a winner of a major art competition earns a certain pedigree of instant marketability. Even an exhibition slot would oftentimes depend on how many art awards an artist has won.

“Some artists have luck in competitions, however others who won, I don’t know where they are now?” inquires Emmanuel Garibay, who also won the AAP Grand Prize for his work *Santwaryo* in 1993 and the NCCA Diwa ng Sining in 1994.

“Depending on what you mean by relevance, as in all things, there is the good and bad side of it” Garibay explains further. “There is a conscious contextual reflection of what is going on in the country. Then there is the repeating of styles. Who ever won that year will definitely be imitated next year. In the end, it’s the artist’s persistence and passion that sustain him in the years to come.”

With a few variations submitted by a small circle of painters who win art contests year after year, other participants bewail what they think are repetitive works. A situation like this puts oneself in a tight corner and Garibay’s comment has also been validated by other artists who have won these art prizes.

Elmer Borlongan’s *Tampuhan* (roughly: “Lovers’ Quarrel) comes to mind. Although it placed second only in the MYPA in 1992, the winning work inspired more entries imitating his social realist style in the following years. This domino-effect even created a resurgence of social realism (as espoused by his *Salingpusa* group) that started with artists-activists during Martial Law in the 1970s.

Another artist who has set a trend was Neil Manalo meticulously filling up the canvas with images in an altar-like triptych form as part of his graphic handle for the winning cover of the PLDT DPC directory. Again this kind of aesthetics would eventually dictate upon future submissions of “worshiping” students. Meanwhile the “longest” idol in Shell Student Art Competition is Ronald Ventura whose painstaking depiction of the human anatomy has become a standard emulated long after the applause faded and the trophy has been handed to him. Maybe Ventura brought back the excitement since before his winning, Shell had been criticized for just hanging on to its long years of experience, that boredom had seeped in and nothing new had come out of its winners.

Fresh Paint All the Time

With the earliest paintings dating back to when religious orders built their churches and painted their walls with religious images to magnify their faith, Philippine painting, as an adopted western art form, is as old as colonialism itself.

In the last 30 years however there seems to be a deliberate effort in art contests to rediscover and appropriate pre-colonial images, motifs, and western belief systems as means of sourcing one’s identity in the midst of a rapidly changing milieu.

The irony of art contests is that students try to unlearn whatever formal art practice they imbibed in their respective fine arts schools in every new entry they submit. Some of them did not only earn the accolade but are changing the overall landscape of painting and thus issuing an indirect refutation to what an American art critic called the “end of painting” ten years ago. Mark Andy Garcia’s *Attack of the Righteous* (MADE, 2007) is another case in point. His work depicts his sordid experience of working in the Middle East where in the most unlikely place, he even became a born again Christian. Done in quick, unequal with often tempered brushstrokes, the last thing you would think is that it is religious. With this work, he created an unusually hardcore piece deep in faith and morality.

John Paul Antido’s *El Viaje de Familia* (ArtPetron, 2005) uses mapping as a graphic handle to literally convey the distance and the exodus of the Filipino family in the ongoing diaspora of Filipinos to the different parts of the world.

In the long tradition of art contests, every participating student artist knows that there exists some kind of aesthetics or strategy when joining a particular visual art competition. A fetish for the new and original in approach, as far as the artistic process, is a must for a work to be noticed among the many others. Together with that is the creative use in materials and add to that the work must reflect Philippine contemporary life and issues as these are what are to be expected. As keenly observed, there seems to be a gray area as far as representational style is concerned. Lately there are no delineating lines whether your work is abstract or representational, biographical or political.

Consider Vince Darwin Jumalon's *Sisikapin Kong Maging Isang Tunay na* (I Will Strive to be a true, Philip Morris Asean Art Competition, 2005). The mosaic-like image of a woman filled with emotion was created using Japanese-anime stickers as a visual material. Or the recent Philip Morris Philippine Art Awards where Marina Cruz's Embroidered *Landscape of My Mothers' Life: A Biography* featured an infant's dress worn by the artist's mother, this being carefully stitched over and thus serving as a backdrop or a printed over canvas.

There is little intervention in terms of painting in these two works which are essentially "painting" without, or with minimal use of paints. No one really knows what holds in contemporary Philippine art as seen in these past winners. The canvas has never been this wide open to possibilities indeed.

The Paint that Lasts a Lifetime

Each annual art competition rethinks conventions of the paint medium, thus, renewing faith and hope in its prospect of coming out with what is a fresh and captive representation of our present urban life. Do the contest rules of different art contests force them to question, if not rebel against conventions of painting? Recent winners vary greatly not just in terms of style or materials but also in terms of concerns, themes, and agenda. New spaces of promise in terms of iconography and iconology have emerged.

Art competitions may still have their purpose as they are held in bigger exhibition halls with longer duration. There is a history of art that is well documented in the yearly catalogues, and winning artists are guided at least until their first formative shows. In a way, they consequently promote the culture of excellence and artistic promise for these young painters. The question that remains is: what have the previous winners done as a plow back to their community or to society to be worthy of these prizes?

Esquillo perfectly sums it up, "You have to remember that it is only one work per art contest. You are good only until such time you will have a body of work to be proud of. Age will dictate if you are ripe for these competitions. There comes a time (when), you have to give chance to other younger ones to shine."

With the scarcity of blockbuster exhibits, painting competitions have provided the alternative excitement in showcasing their winners. Even in big galleries there is much to consider in conceptualizing and planning of shows for their calendar year. In fact the general sentiment is not the art spaces in the malls but the "continuous mall culture" of our museums and galleries.

How Philippine art can become relevant to the times given this situation remains to be seen. In the meantime, there has always been the steady flow of grand prize winners in the yearly art competitions. It would be unwise to say that all these winning works merely reflect the general state of Philippine visual arts. With the dearth of Philippine art books written, could the history of Philippine art be told in patched-like quilts of all winning works of art contests through the years?

One good thing that has come out of this is that there seems to be a following for winners of art competitions particularly since serious collectors are getting younger (in their 30s and 40s) compared to 40 years ago when art buying was confined to friends of the artists.

Until a more professional system has been set up for the benefit of the young would-be-contemporary-Filipino artist, there will always be a long line of those submitting in the next art contest. In the end, art as an investment should enrich one's life or fill up a blank canvas.

Interviews

Robert Besana, 13 July 2008
Alfredo Esquillo Jr, 13 July 2008
Emmanuel Garibay, 11 July 2008
Kirby Roxas, 11 July 2008

References

Duldulao, Manuel D. *Contemporary Philippine Art: From the Fifties to the Seventies*. Vera-Reyes, 1971.

Ramirez, Eileen L. "Crossbred and ?migré: Visual Arts in a Flux" National Commission for Culture and the Arts, undated essay.

Reyes, Cid. *Conversations in Philippine Art*. Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1989.

An earlier version of this essay came out in the catalogue for the Inaugural Exhibition of Britania Art Projects in 2008.

RENEE ALPHONSO

Transformation as a process implicates change; a metamorphosis that may or may not require any change in circumstance. This is the premise that surrounds the Thirteen Artists' Awards exhibition, entitled *Brave New Works* and curated by former awardee Wire Tuazon (2003).

The awards first arose as a curatorial project of the Center's first curator, conceptual artist Roberto Chabet. Over the years the project then developed into an exhibition and awards, featuring progressive, young artists whose works embody the engagement of Philippine art in its present day context.

The exhibit is transformative in three ways. First, on a more obvious level, is the context of physical space. Divisions within the gallery are quite literally nonexistent, as the artworks seem to seamlessly bleed into one another. Upon closer inspection, elements from certain works, like the tiny plastic mice from Buen Calubayan's work, and MM Yu's photographs of the exhibit's installation process, integrate themselves into other works, making the installations interact with each other as well as their audience. Thus formed from this interaction is an alternative reality, in which physical space is not simply a setting but also an element contributing to the exhibit's poignancy—whether for better or worse. Mr Tuazon regrets in his curatorial statement that the exhibition did not have enough spatial freedom, as the institution did not welcome works that were to integrate other spaces outside the main gallery.

Second, the exhibit invites us to rethink and ultimately transform our perception of what art is, and what it means in the Filipino context today. Each artist tackles themes such

as family and home, religion, culture and national identity in their work. Their methods are meticulous but by no means timid; and each installation resonates with a distinct personal voice, skilled in technique and pulsating with the sentiments of a generation of artists. It is by these methods that the artists engage viewers to participate in this challenge of reinvention. Christina Dy's "obsessive" drawing, as she terms it, creates an atmosphere upon entrance that draws out attention and allows us to re-examine and re-think where it is we stand, physically and on a more metaphysical level. Winner Jumalon's witty and skilled reconstruction of his family's Zambales home tackles themes of displacement, nostalgia, and disturbance. Kawayan

De Guia's rather interesting take on a Jukebox expresses the sentiments of a community and culture, refined into elements that come together into an awe-inspiring image.

Perhaps most importantly, however, is how this exhibition is transformative in terms of the possibilities it presents for Philippine art. These works are works that incite bravery—bravery to actively participate in the discourse that contributes to the progression and development of art. Circumstances may not have changed completely, nor have spatial boundaries been completely traversed, but the work presented here may be the beginning of a true metamorphosis. By challenging current boundaries through the engagement of method, context, space, perception and interpretation, the exhibit invites us to take a risk, and step into a brave new world.



Subject/Object. Installation by MM Yu. 2009 *13 Artists* exhibition. Cultural Center of the Philippines. Photo credits: MM Yu.

About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art

Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Flaudette May V. Datuin and Judy Freya Sibayan as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Contributors write gratis for *Ctrl+P*. Circulated as a PDF file via the Net, it is a downloadable and printable publication that takes advantage of the digital medium's fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. *Ctrl+P* provides a testing ground for a whole new culture and praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art writing and criticism in the Philippines. It took part in the *documenta 12 magazines* project, a journal of 97 journals from all over the world. (<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/>)

About Ctrl+P's Contributors

Kubilay Akman is a sociologist, academician, art critic and editor from Turkey. He studied sociology at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (Istanbul, Turkey) and completed his PhD dissertation in 2006 at the same university. Akman has been in Southeast Asia several times to participate in academic events and projects, including ASEAN Inter-University Conference in Manila, Philippines (2008). His academic interests are sociology of arts, sociology of literature, cultural studies, social theory and philosophy. ● **Renée Alfonso** is a graduate of Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan, and currently a Master's student in Exhibition Design at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, DC. She has previously worked at the Lopez Museum in Pasig, Philippines. ● **Jay Giovanni Bautista** presently works as a Project Development Officer of Studio 5 Designs/Publishing. He studied for an MA in Art History at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He has been involved with the following publications: *Malacañan Palace: The Official Illustrated History*, *Tanaw: The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Painting Collection*, and *Brushstrokes From the Heart: The First Five Years of ArtPetron* and is currently working on a coffee table book on Carlos "Botong" V. Francisco. ● **Gerry Coulter** is a Full Professor of Sociology (Art, Film, and Theory) at Bishop's University, Canada. Recent peer review publications include: 'Jean Baudrillard and the Definitive Ambivalence of Gaming,' *SAGE Journal: Games and Culture* (Volume 2, Number 4, December, 2007:358-365) and at: <http://www.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/2/4/358>; 'The Poetry of Reversibility and the Other in The English Patient,' *Widescreen Journal*. (Volume 1, Number 1, April 2008): <http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/view/15/14>; 'Baudrillard and Holderlin and the Poetic Resolution of the World', *Nebula*, (Volume 5, Number 4, December 2008:145-164) and at: www.nobleworld.biz/Coulter.pdf. He also writes a quarterly column for Euro Art (On-line) Magazine (<http://www.euroartmagazine.com>). Dr. Coulter's teaching has been recognized on numerous occasions most recently by Bishop's University's highest award for teaching the William and Nancy Turner Prize. He is the Founding and Managing Editor of the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* (On the Internet): (www.ubishops.ca/ baudrillardstudies). ● **Joselina Cruz** is an independent curator based in Manila, Philippines. She was curator for the *Singapore Biennale 2008* and one of the networking curators for the *Jakarta Biennale 2009*. She received her MA in Curating Contemporary Art, Royal College of Art (RCA), London and has worked as Curator for the Lopez Memorial Museum in Manila, and as Assistant Curator for the Singapore Art Museum. She was curator for *You are not a Tourist*, Curating Lab, Singapore, co-curator for the exhibition, *All the Best: The Deutsche Bank Collection and Zaha Hadid*, and the Tapies retrospective both at the Singapore Art Museum. She has curated numerous exhibitions, writes essays, reviews, criticism and art commentary. ● **Gina Fairley**, a former arts manager in America and Australia, is a freelance arts writer widely published across Asia and Australia. She is Regional Contributing Editor for *Asian Art News* (Hong Kong) and splits her time between Sydney and Southeast Asia. She runs the Sydney window space SLOT with artist Tony Twigg. ● **Patrick D. Flores** is Professor at Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines and Curator of the Vargas Museum. He is also Adjunct Curator of the National Art Gallery of the Philippines and Singapore. His recent book *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* was published by the National University of Singapore Museum. ● **Irene S. Leung** received a doctorate in art history from the University of Michigan and a master in International Affairs at The New School. Irene has worked in a gallery, auction house, non-profit institutions, and academia in the United States and Asia. A native of Hong Kong, she is working as an arts development consultant in Malaysia this year. ● **Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez** is a faculty member of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines and curatorial consultant at the Lopez Memorial Museum. She has managed international projects and symposia including *Locus: Critiquing Critical Art* and serves as managing editor of Panapanw, Philippine Journal of Visual Arts. Her essays have appeared in *Transit: A Quarterly of Art Discussion*, *Fine Art Forum*, *Forum on Contemporary Art and Society*, *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal*, *RealTime+Onscreen*, *ArtIT* in Japan and Asia-Pacific, *Visual Arts Magazine*, Indonesia, *Metropolis M*, *C-Arts*, and the *Sunday Inquirer*. She is a 2009 US Endowment for the Arts International Visual Arts Journalism fellow. ● **Eliza Tan** is a writer and curator from Singapore, currently based in London. Further to completing her art history degree at the Courtauld Institute of Art, she presently curates 7.9 Cubic Metres at the Stanley Picker Gallery, a 12 month evolving program of exhibitions and a platform for emerging British talent as well as international artists. A regular contributor to *Ctrl+P*, Eliza has worked on various projects with the National Arts Council, Singapore, The Solomon R. Guggenheim in New York, Art Forum Berlin and European Art Projects.

Flaudette May V. Datuin, associate professor at the Department of Art Studies, UP Diliman, is co-founding editor of *Ctrl+P*; co-founder and current chair of the House of Comfort Art Network or ARTHOC, a non-profit organization that conducts art workshops for the underprivileged and the afflicted. A 2008 Visiting Fellow (with grant) in the Research School of Humanities at the Australian National University (2008), Datuin is also recipient of the Asian Scholarship Foundation (ASF) and Asian Public Intellectual (API) fellowships, which enabled her to conduct research on contemporary women artists of China and Korea (2002-2003) and Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Japan (2004-2005). Author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, (2002), she also curates and organizes international and local exhibits and publishes here and abroad. Datuin currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on Art Theory and Aesthetics, Art History, Philippine Art and Society, and Art and Society, Asian contemporary art and aesthetics and gender issues in the arts. She obtained her MA and PhD in Philippines Studies from the University of the Philippines.

Varsha Nair lives in Bangkok, Thailand. Her selected shows include *Still Moving Image*, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, 2008; *A Proper Place*, Ryllega Gallery, Hanoi, 2007; *Art as Environment: Cultural Actions on Tropic of Cancer 007*, Taiwan; *Exquisite Crisis & Encounters*, NYU, New York, 2007; *Subjected Culture-Interruptions and resistances on femaleness*, venues in Argentina 2007-2008; *Sub-Contingent: The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006; *In-between places, meeting point*, Si-am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005; *Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, UK, 2004, *With(in)*, Art In General, New York, 2002; *Home/Dom*, Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, 2002; Free Parking, Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2002. She performed at *On the Move*, Hong Kong, 2008; Khoj Live Performance Festival, Delhi, 2008; *Saturday Live*, Tate Modern London, 2006; *National Review of Live Art*, 2006 and 2004; *National Review of Live Art Midland*, Perth, Australia, 2005. Since 1997, Nair has also curated and organized *Womanifesto* (www.womanifesto.com) and other art related activities, and has been invited as speaker at various international symposia. She was the Bangkok curator of *600 Images/60 artists/6 curators/6 cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon*, an exhibition that was simultaneously exhibited in all 6 cities in 2005. Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India.

Judy Freya Sibayan, co-founding editor of *Ctrl+P*, has an MFA from Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. She is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, (www.asa.de/magazine/iss4/17sibayan.htm) a gallery she wore daily for five years (1997-2002), and is currently co-curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a performance art proposing that the artist's body be the museum itself (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/judy/writing1.pdf>). Although Sibayan's major body of work is an institutional critique of art, she has also exhibited and performed in museums, galleries and performance venues such as Latitude 53, Edmonton, Canada; PEER Gallery Space, London; Privatladen in Berlin; The Tramway, Glasgow; the Vienna Secession; the Hayward Gallery, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, The Farm in San Francisco; Sternersenmuseet; The Photographers' Gallery, London; ArtSpace Sydney; The Kiasma Contemporary Art Center, The Mori Art Museum, The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Fukuoka Art Museum; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Hong Kong Art Centre; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Manila; and at the capcMusée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. She has participated in two international art biennales, the 1986 *3rd Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* and the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale*. Also an independent curator, she curated *The Community Archives: Documenting Artists Collectively, Openly* held at Latitude 53 (Edmonton, Alberta Canada). She also conceived and was lead-curator of *xsXL Expanding Art* held at Sculpture Square, Singapore in 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon* in 2005. The latter two projects investigated the possibilities of developing large scale international exhibitions mounted with very modest resources. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Communication, De La Salle University (www.dlsu.edu.ph).