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# Ctrl+Pdf

## CONTENTS

**From 'Red House'  
to Dream House:**

**Alma Quinto's  
House of Comfort**  
*Patricia Marion Lopez*  
P2

**From the 'Home of the  
Brave': Terry Berkowitz**

**Bravely Swims  
Against the Current**  
*Maniel Grace O'yek*  
P5

**Dancing on Water:**

**Rowena Seloterio's  
Water Dance**  
*Ryan Roberto*  
P7

**A Multitude of Muses  
(reprinted with  
permission)**

*Lisa C. Ito*  
P9

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For easy lay-outing, printing and downloading, this journal is entirely text-based. Images are available upon request, or in artists' websites provided in the essays, whenever applicable.

We also wish to encourage you to write your comments and/or your own essays and send them to [ctrl\\_p.artjournal@yahoo.com](mailto:ctrl_p.artjournal@yahoo.com). You may wish to do a quick report on an art conference you recently attended or critique an exhibition, or inform us about a show you curated or contributed to, or share us an essay about a particular theme or artist. All you have to do is email us, and once the board approves it, and if there are at least three essays ready to see "print," another Ctrl+P issue comes out. Your essay should range from 1,000 to 2,000 words and should deal with contemporary art and artists

This process makes the "printing" very fluid, and need not be pegged at coming out weekly, quarterly, monthly, bi-annually and we need not wait for a long time for a number of essays to make up an issue. Issues and essays are then labeled through a tracking system that may look something like: "Uploaded Issue No. 2 Articles 5 to 10, 2006." This way, we not only ensure the development and growth in number of writers/contributors; more importantly, Ctrl+P provides a testing ground for a whole new culture/praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art criticism in the Philippines.

As a digital journal of accessible art writing, Ctrl+P offers itself as a publication that responds to the dearth of critical Philippine art publications focused on contemporary art and artists. What often passes for art writing in television, newspapers and magazines nowadays are actually self-aggrandizing press releases, mediagenic and marketable "cultural" and "lifestyle" reports and easily digestible but shallow "sound bites." On the other hand the few serious art publications on contemporary art are often delayed, appear sporadically, and crippled by the high cost of printing, eventually die natural deaths, with very little possibility for resurrection.

The creators of this publication feel that art criticism should be a productive endeavor which challenges artists to produce formalistically, critically and theoretically astute works. Without serious and sensitive critics, there can be no mature artists and without critical dialogue, there can be no responsive and responsible audiences deserving their artistry.

Ctrl+P demonstrates the fact that there are indeed young writers with young ideas who are trained in the academe to write responsibly; it is just that there are only a few, if at all, outlets for their writing. But while the writers of this publication are largely academe-based, we also take care not to write in an esoteric “artspeak” jargon which only a few can understand. On the other hand, we also do not want to water down our criticism and sacrifice rigor for comprehensibility. By writing in Ctrl+P, we wish to achieve a balance between these two equally elitist tendencies (artspeak and writing reductively so we can be understood), knowing fully well that this negotiation is one fraught with peril.

But as we walk this perilous tightrope, we also focus on the promise and premise of this negotiation. And it is one we saw when Ctrl+P was hatched one day in March 2006 upon the instigation of Filipina artist and curator Judy Freya Sibayan during her artist’s talk before a graduate class at the University of the Philippines. Supervised by Flaudette May V. Datuin, the class was called Art Studies 298- Special Problems: Contemporary Arts of Asia, one of the elective courses offered that semester (2nd semester, 2005-2006) primarily for Art Studies graduate students working for their Masters degrees in Art History and Art Theory and Criticism.

Before talking about her work, Sibayan prefaced the discussion by urging us to write on contemporary art, and that, if we DO write, we need not do so within traditional discursive frames, publication circuits and technological channels. As we saw in her art projects, including Scapular Gallery Nomad, Museum of Mental Objects (MoMO), and the exhibitions which she curated largely through the internet, we realized that yes, there ARE indeed other ways and spaces for “doing” art and writing and disseminating responsible art criticism.

And thus was Ctrl+P conceived, and you now have before you a low-cost, downloadable and printable publication – one that takes advantage of the digital medium’s fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. Essays No. 1, 2, 3 and 4 for this first Uploaded Issue contribute – albeit belatedly – to the celebration of Women’s Month last March. But rather than being an exercise in tokenism and of continuous ‘gripping’ about how difficult it is to be a woman and a woman artist, the essays privilege empowerment over hopelessness, coming and being (at) home over homelessness, and agency over helplessness

The essays for this issue were written by the students of the Art Studies 298 class as part of their requirements and features essays on Filipina artists Alma Quinto and Rowena Seloterio and New York based artist Terry Berkowitz. These artists are working on exhibits to be held in Manila in the coming months. Quinto and Berkowitz are preparing for upcoming group show on art, trauma and healing and Seloterio is working on her solo show to be held this July at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. We are also reprinting, with the author’s kind permission, Lisa Ito’s exhibition notes for the latest edition of the *Walong Filipina* (Eight Filipinas) series, Liongoren Art Gallery’s contribution to Women’s Month.

This is just a start and we hope to widen the pool of writers in subsequent issues. Again, for contributions and feedback, please email us at [ctrl\\_p.artjournal@yahoo.com](mailto:ctrl_p.artjournal@yahoo.com)

## **FROM ‘RED HOUSE’ TO DREAM HOUSE: ALMA QUINTO’S HOUSE OF COMFORT**

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**PATRICIA MARION LOPEZ**

“If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.”

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The work of Alma Quinto, feminist artist, activist and art educator attests to the range of directions contemporary art is taking in response to the challenges posed by feminist and postcolonial discourse. Her recent art projects, *Ayayam*, which was exhibited at the 2005 Yokohama International Triennial of Contemporary Art and *Soft Dreams and Bed Stories*, which was included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Havana Biennale in Cuba in 2003 and later on exhibited with 25 other works in the Henie Onstad Kunstenter in Norway before it was shown at the University of Santo Tomas Museum of Arts and Sciences in the Philippines in 2004, represent her belief that art is indeed a powerful resource for women's empowerment. Her most recent art project, *House of Comfort*, the centerpiece of an upcoming exhibit *trauma, interrupted* to be held in Manila in 2007, is a continuation of this trajectory.

The *House of Comfort* is a collaborative art project that will involve women and children survivors of sexual abuse and various women artists from the Philippines, Japan, Indonesia and Thailand. The house is a collapsible, modular, easy-to-install structure wherein each element- the roof, walls, windows, doors, and rooms, will represent a woman's life both as survivor and dreamer. The house will measure approximately 5.75 meters by 7 meters with a height of 9 feet and will be made mostly of textiles and foam. The house will consist of a sala, a dining room, a comfort room, a healing room, and perhaps a kitchen, complete with furniture and toys.

It is called a House of Comfort primarily because, with foam (soft sculptures), fabrics and discarded clothes, each woman survivor participant creates a tapestry of her life story (visual autobiography) depicting her past and current struggles and her dream for her future. This is actually a continuation of my *Ayayam* project, which invited the audience to share their experiences of trauma and love and their dreams through the message cards. The only difference with this current project is that the artists have more prolonged interaction and immersion in the communities and together with the women survivors will "construct" a "house" that will serve as a space to exchange stories, discuss issues, meditate or reflect, play and rest.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing from the Filipino concept of *bayanihan*, a collective process of building houses still being practiced in the rural areas, Quinto views the construction of the *House of Comfort* as a major production that will involve the cooperation of many people. However, her idea of production departs from the hierarchical character of typical art productions (whether in film, theater or architecture) which assumes that the artist should be the sole authority in terms of conceptualization and execution. As in her previous projects, Quinto welcomes the possibility of change and flexibility in the course of the project's realization as long as it suits the needs and vision of its collaborators allowing for a more dynamic, multi-vocal art process. However, like the "quilting mistress," hers is responsibility for ensuring "quality control" and artistic rigor. As Quinto comments, "as artists we should respect and never shortchange our audience by giving them good and well-crafted works. Also, as artists, we should always strive to create works with passion and excellence."

The idea behind the project was inspired by one of Quinto's many trips to marginalized and traumatized communities. One such trip was to Mapaniqui, Pampanga where she interacted with the *Malaya Lolas* (Free Grandmothers), a group of women whose loved ones – the men and boys of their village – were massacred during the Japanese occupation in 1944. She also visited the now rundown and believed-to-be-haunted *Bahay na Pula* (Red House), a tricycle ride away from where the lolas live, and where many of the women – young girls barely into puberty at that time - were brought by the soldiers to be raped.

Quinto's years of experience as an art teacher with the Marikina-based NGO CRIBS (Create Responsive Infants by Sharing, Inc.) enabled her to draw parallels between the stories of trauma of the lolas and her young students. Both lolas and girls suffered abuse at a tender age and had experienced several kinds of traumatic displacements within their lifetime. Displacement, in the case of the lolas,

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Alma's project concept.

does not just refer to the experience of being physically dragged from one's home, witnessing the destruction of a structure that one used to inhabit and the bombing of one's village, or in the case of the girls of CRIBS, the repeated transfer from one house to the next, not having a place to call one's own, having been separated from one's family. Displacement in the lolas and girls also refers to the feeling of what Quinto calls *homelessness within oneself*. As a result of their abuse, both groups of survivors experienced estrangement from their own bodies, from their families and from their communities due to the stigma of being raped. In addition, for many of the girls, the home itself was the place of trauma as many of them were victims of incest, physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their own family members, or at least people they *know* and perhaps more often not, loved and trusted.

Quinto envisions the *House of Comfort* as a dream house that would run counter to the hard realities of the women survivors, which finds its most painful metaphor in the surviving, termite-ridden structure of the *Bahay na Pula*. By creating a space made completely from soft materials representing the different dreams of the survivors, she hopes to create an environment that would give the viewers and collaborators a sense of coming home to a place of comfort and renewal.

Central to the project is the view of art making as an empowering process – one that requires time, patience and respect and one that takes as its creative metaphor and strategy the process of needlework and quilt-making. The *House of Comfort* adds on to this arduous, lifelong process and continues to build on the girls' creative skills and techniques which they acquired through the many art sessions which Quinto has been conducting under the auspices of CRIBS' New Beginnings program for the past ten years – but this time with a big difference.

In her earlier projects, starting with *Sew and Tell* at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 2001, right up to *Ayayam* in 2005, Quinto created her artworks based on the girls' case histories, with the girls contributing their pieces by painting, sewing, and improvising on Quinto's foam templates, like the numerous "flying breasts" - naughtily called *pakpak pekpek*, a play on the Tagalog version of "wings" (*pakpak*) and slang for vagina (*pekpek*) – of her installations. This time around for the *House of Comfort*, the girls are more actively creating their own pieces: they are the ones visualizing their own stories and creating their artworks. "This is more empowering," says Quinto, "because (they are now expressing) their own voice and their own representation."

This shift in the creative process has become apparent when Quinto held a series of art workshops this March with the children of CRIBS ranging from ages 7 to 17. In the first session, Quinto motivated the girls to recall the homes where they used to live before they came to CRIBS. Though they were not asked to retell their traumatic experiences, the drawings were very telling as they showed the difficult journeys the girls had to go through- transferring from one home to the next without having a place that they could confidently claim as their own. This was followed by workshops wherein Quinto asked the girls to visualize through collages and paintings what they wanted to be when they grew up and what they wanted their dream house to look like.

The works in the first session in turn functioned as the studies for the tapestries which they started making last March 29, with the help of the *trauma, interrupted* team composed of student volunteers and coordinators-teachers from the University of the Philippines. Slowly, through the laborious process of cutting, pinning and sewing together different pieces of cloth, several colorful tapestries each representing a young girl's dream for her future have started to emerge.

These tapestries compose the frame of the *House of Comfort* which is also starting to take shape with the collaboration of other artists. A visiting artist from Indonesia, Nerfita "Popi" Primadewi will contribute to making the walls by reproducing photographic print-outs-on-textile. The print-outs will depict images of the Malaya Lolos with whom she has been interacting during her several trips to Mapaniqui. These images focus on the lolas' strengths instead of weaknesses – strengths that they draw from their own personal emotional and psychic resources, as well as from family, friends and community.

This initial process of building the *House of Comfort* reveals that the pace of constructing the dream house cannot be rushed and is subject to the capabilities and readiness of its primary collaborators - children who have yet to complete their long and perhaps lifelong journeys towards healing. By

focusing on the present realities and dreams of the women and children, the home that these children will build hopes to move away from too much dwelling on a traumatic past and on the repeated retelling and re-experiencing of trauma. This House tells us that the children are moving on, from “homelessness” to being (at) home with their bodies, their selves.

## **FROM THE ‘HOME OF THE BRAVE’: TERRY BERKOWITZ BRAVELY SWIMS AGAINST THE CURRENT**

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**MANIEL O’YEK**

Terry Berkowitz’s video “Winter” shows an American flag atop a skyscraper besieged by a raging blizzard. In the background, we hear an out-of-sync rendition – probably by a child or several children – of “God Bless America” as the snow storm mercilessly accelerates. To the uninitiated Filipino audience encountering her work for the first time, the piece may be interpreted as a harmless and even humorous patriotic tribute to the world’s most powerful nation. But Berkowitz, who was then speaking before a packed lecture hall of University of the Philippines students, quickly points out that “there is nothing patriotic about that work. This video is saying that the United States is actually going to freeze, it’s doing a meltdown, it’s doing a superfreeze. What the US is doing in the world is unsustainable, our economy is falling apart, our government is acting unilaterally, even without the permission of a majority of the US people.”

In the Land of the Free, Home of the Brave, Berkowitz felt the brunt of anti-Semitic racism from a very young age, having grown in a predominantly non-Jewish community. And later on, after finishing graduate school, the feeling of being dehumanized by racism in all its myriad forms and contexts became more intense and concrete. As she was coming to terms with the city as milieu, she became aware of how its spaces not only encroach on one’s personal space, but also participates in ‘othering’ the voiceless and the marginal. Her sense of outrage and indignation deepened as she became involved with student protests against the Vietnam War, to which she lost many friends.

Unlike other activists who eventually become co-opted by the system, activism for Berkowitz is not just a phase she went through as a young adult. Starting out as a painting and sculpture student at the School of Visual Arts of New York, then on to graduate school at the Art Institute of Chicago, Berkowitz moved on to produce multimedia installations, photography, video, sound and found objects. She studied under renowned personalities in art- the feminist writer Lucy Lippard, Robert Ryman, and the art historian Whitney Halstead, her advisor, and the one who exerted a particularly strong influence on her. “He let me run. He said, ‘do whatever you need to do, just come see me every once in a while and present me with something.’ ” This formal studies background also provided the impetus for her works’ thematic concerns.

In a body of work which spans 30 years, Berkowitz dealt with a number of issues, all of them social and political, ranging from domestic violence (“Eye of the Needle”, a collaboration with Blerti Murataj, shown in *Cárcel de Amor*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain, 2005); rape (‘Backseat’, Sculpture Center, New York, 1994); migration and displacement (Chant for the Unsettled, 1996, *Transition/Dislocation: Images of Upheaval*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Ohio); and terrorism (“T/ERROR” shown in “Beyond Glory/Re-presenting Terrorism”, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, 1992).

Because of her works’ orientation, Berkowitz admits that she often does not get invited to take part in projects that take a rosy view of the world or refuse to approach the world critically. She exhibits mainly in alternative spaces and university galleries or museums. In 1992 however, she had her solo show at a very mainstream venue – the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, where she presented “A Rock and a Hard Place,” which featured several interviews from trips she made to Gaza and the West Bank in 1989 and 1991. This video was installed amidst an environment she recreated for

the museum, composed of live grass, barrels and rocks which signify how land and its connectedness to home and being home is being disrupted by war. The work also aims to give a face to the Palestinian people during a time when they were virtually non-existent, particularly in the US media. “In the US, the only way the Palestinians were seen was as ‘terrorists’. They weren’t seen as individuals or as people at all and so this piece was really meant to allow them to give voice to who they were in an environment where they haven’t had that opportunity.”

In 1997, she staged and performed an event – originally entitled “La Misma Tierra” (The Same Land) – which she initially conceived as involving an exchange of sand between Spain and Morocco across the Strait of Gibraltar through the use of *pateras*, the fishing boats being utilized to bring contraband goods and illegal immigrants to Spain. One *patera* was set to come from Morocco and another from Spain. This project aimed to dramatize the plight of those who were fleeing to make a better life for themselves and also symbolizes the undeniable connectedness and continuous exchange of culture happening between the two countries. However, the Moroccan government never responded and the Spanish government would only allow the exchange if the boat coming from Morocco would pass through customs, an idea she found ridiculous. As a result, she resorted to Plan B: the boats would just exchange sand in the middle of the Strait. But only the *patera* from the Spanish side was able to sail and sat waiting for the other boat that never came. The project was renamed “Medio Estrecho” (Half the Strait). Though the work encountered administrative difficulties that required certain adjustments to the project’s realization, the very process of making the exchange happen underscored and challenged the apathy of the Moroccan government with regards to a problem that happens very close its shores (For more details and images of this work, please visit [www.harvestworks.org](http://www.harvestworks.org)).

We can see from these examples that Berkowitz takes her cue from seemingly mundane matters – sand, the backseat of a car, a needle and thread, and lately, for a project still in its early stages of conception, from the patterns of soles of a hundred sneakers, with which she plans to confront the issue of petroleum and other perennial sources of conflict between a struggling “East” and an affluent, powerful “West.” It is also evident that for Berkowitz to realize her work, she has to do a great deal of spade and legwork to get a clear grasp of issues. And unlike the solitary painter in his/her studio, she has to muster an enormous amount of time, energy and logistics, especially since her projects involve interacting with many communities, many of which are in foreign cultures. And while she knows exactly what she wants to happen for a particular project, she also continuously questions herself, her purpose, her method, her material, as she negotiates all the many perils of cross-cultural and interpersonal interactions. Overlaying all these is her aim to create art works that effect positive changes in people’s lives.

“Backseat,” her work on rape for instance, affected the survivors (and herself as well) in a difficult and cathartic way. For most of the women in this video, it was the first time they talked an incident that shattered their lives and adversely affected their social relationships. The work made evident that shame, stigma and suffering are societal, rather than interiorized and individualized, emotional states. And it enabled people who have never been forced to experience it to understand what “rape” really means to the victims, and thereby respond more sensitively and productively, taking care not to subject the survivors to a ‘second victimization.’ According to Berkowitz, even 15 years later, the work has had resonances and that there are times when women come up to her and tell her how glad they were to have seen this work.

Last March, Berkowitz was in the Philippines to interact with the *Malaya Lolas* (Free Grandmothers) of Mapaniqui, Pampanga, a community of women who suffered mass rape and massacre during the Japanese occupation. This project continues her engagement with rape and displacement evident in such works as “Backseat” and “La Misma Tierra.” But since the Malaya Lolas went through and are still going through a collective form of suffering, Berkowitz is now confronting a set of totally different dynamics of gendered shame. However, with the help of such organizations as the Asian Center for Women’s Human Rights (ASCENT), which has been working on the case since the early 90s and whom she consults very closely, she remains resolute in her conviction that it is possible for an artist

to cross cultural straits, oftentimes swimming against the “grain” and flow of powerful currents, but ultimately hitting land, with all its hazards and potential for positive change.

## **DANCING ON WATER: ROWENA SELOTERIO’S WATER DANCE**

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**RYAN P. ROBERTO**

*Water sprung from the ground through the stream...struggling through the rocks that wall its way. The water seems beaten as it gushes through the rocks. Left and right it crushes undirected, it rushes...*

Rowena Seloterio- Wee Wee as she is fondly called - grew up in Tagbilaran City, Bohol, a province in the Visayas, Central Philippines. She recalls that Tagbilaran City was once obscure from national scene and used to be a quiet city with few houses, few people and few cars. During the early 70's, industrial progress was turtle-paced in the province and there were no commercial building higher than three floors. Very few visitors came to the province as there was only one vessel that ferries passengers from Cebu, the metropolitan hub of the Visayan islands. This once silent city enriched her with beautiful childhood memories. She remembers how she used to play “low-tech” games involving *tsinelas* (slippers) *lata* (cans) and *shiato* (a sticks-and-cans game) with her friends in the middle of the street without fear of getting hit by cars; caught grasshoppers and dragonflies and stole chicos and tambis and bayabas (guava) from the trees of an affluent residence near their house and how she used to climb kalachuchi trees to gather flowers for flores de mayo during summertime.

Though she had happy memories as a child she is also honest to share another side to her growing up years. Those were the days when rearing and disciplining children were largely based on physical punishment, like having to kneel on salt and being scolded in public:

“All of us siblings grew up with the belt. What is most painful is that I always tried to be a good girl, yet even the slightest mistake wasn’t spared from harsh scolding or severe beatings”.

*The water sips through the ground wishing not to flow. But the heaven cried and the rain drops. Paper boat floats over the water that now flows ...*

Seloterio went to Cebu to pursue a Certificate in Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines (UP) after her first year as a commerce student in a local college in Bohol. It was during her first year in UP when she got the idea of drawing pen and ink abstractions. In a course on “subject materials” under Mr Carmelo Tamayo, one of the plates required them to draw different kinds of line - straight lines, curved lines, broken, zigzag. Using this technique she joined the Joya Arts Competition, named and established in honor of National Artist Jose Joya, one of those who helped pioneer the College of Fine Arts, UP Cebu. She filled up the whole space of a cartolina size paper with modified pen and ink strokes. Because of its intricate and unique style the judges declared it first prize for the non-objective category.

Seloterio went on to obtain more recognition for her works. On her 2nd year she won 3rd place under the realistic category in the Joya competition. And for year 1991-1992, she was chosen to represent UP Cebu for the PLDT-GTE telephone directory cover after her work was noticed in a visual art national competition, though she did not make it to the lists of finalists.

She also recalls some of her fearful but interesting encounters with her teachers:

“In Mr Roque's class during my sophomore year, our plate was white on white on a 20"x48" surface. I came to class with with 20x24" plywood, and my teacher scolded me for not following

instructions. As we were to pass the plate the following meeting, he told me to comply with the required size. Wanting to make a mark, and more to make *inis* (irritate) my teacher I submitted the 20x24". My friend was nervous for me. I was trembling as I explained that that the title of my plate is "solving the problem". My problem was: how could I make my 20x24" acceptable to him. So I showed him the collaged back side and reasoned it would be the same as working fully with the required size. Surprisingly *nakalusot ako*. (I passed scrutiny)"

In this experience she said that she realized that art is not just about exploring different media; it is also a test of one's sensibility. In another incident, their class was required to make 4ft x 8ft paintings for the finals.

"My work was stick figures done in acrytint, like a drawing of a five year old kid, with angels above raining fruits to the earth. There were staple wires flying through the heavens. When a classmate asked me why, I replied 'who knows? Maybe staplers exist in heaven.' My teacher did not like my work and ordered me to make another painting but I stubbornly refused because I liked that work so much. For that he flunked me."

Notwithstanding these skirmishes with professors – some won and others lost- she experienced in UP a taste of freedom, particularly from parental control and that of her other elders. Geographically far from her family, she got closer to her self.

"When I went to college at UP I started coming out and run a new stream. This time my waters were chasing outbound. I was free. Hanging out with friends over drinking sprees was a spiced activity, well at least hadn't gotten into drugs and sex. I almost did but I said no. Thank God!"

*Tormenting ripples appear over the water as it disturbingly rushes through the rocky stream again...*

Seloterio was not able to finish her studies. In 1996, she suffered extreme depression and was diagnosed with Schizophrenia. But she continued to make art. When she was ill she used to draw on the walls of their house and even on the walls of their store - drawings do not make sense to her now.

"Once in my relapse I painted a figurative work with ladder climbing towards huge eyes outside that waited in heaven."

Unfortunately these works were burned because her family thought they were making her crazy.

*Silent water flows through the stream...quiet waters runs slowly over the pebbled floor...*

Upon her recovery in year 2000, she resumed working with small drawings and attempted to do figurative and social realist paintings but abandoned them, perhaps because social realism cannot adequately capture her very personal, reflective and inward-looking emotional state.

"I like the idea of having the subconscious guide me. Mostly i have no cognition of what I'm about to do. *Basta gawa lang ng linya, gawa lang ng kahit ano*. (Just trace a line, and do what I can do) As my work progressed, it's then that I related it to something that is happening in me. It's more like an introspection thing."

Seloterio reveals that she likes working with pen and ink because she doesn't have to worry about color schemes. The fine strokes require an attentive mind and a controlled hand and a great deal of patience. She is now working with her "waterdance" drawings: water that dances on paper through



repetition of lines and points. Finding a healing element in water, she feels it also captures the flow of her struggle to reconcile with her inner self.

She found her inspiration from the scribbles of her youngest brother when he was still learning to draw—circles and bicycles, eyes, faces, fishes, elements which she rearranged in a repetitive pattern to achieve a symphonic and harmonious effect. She refers to these works as “stylized doodles”, which she starts by plotting the paper with fine pencil on which she draws using ink pen.

She got her idea of water dance when she was on board a ship:

“I was standing at the railing looking down and the reflection of the rope on the water caught my attention. It was an enormous rope from the ship whose other end was tied unto a certain edge of the pier to keep the ship in place. I was fascinated with how the ropes’ reflection danced in the water. “

This can be found in the bold-lined images of spinal columns running through her drawings, around which are intricate points and lines flowing and moving smoothly on the paper. The compositions are neither stiff nor predictable but rather free and outbound. She uses elemental symbols like fishes, turtles, starflowers, urchins, to represent different personalities, and embellished with a mat-like maze and coral designs. With her drawings are psalms that support the visual image, and textually re-enforce the expression of her emotions.

*The water beams to life...in celebration and sweet anticipation as it moves along the stream gently...*

Seloterio will exhibit 32 pieces of her pen-and-ink suite of drawings called *Waterdance*. The show will open on July 20, 2006, the eve of her birthday, and will run till August 20, 2006 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines fourth floor hallway. After *Waterdance*, Seloterio plans to work on bigger canvasses with more gestural and painterly strokes and with more vibrant colors, as she jubilantly celebrates life by dancing on water.

*Gentle water runs through...the sun shines high...the water dances reflecting its light...*

## **A MULTITUDE OF MUSES**

**(REPRINT)**

**LISA C. ITO**

Whom the Muses endow, they endow bountifully. In this year’s *Walong Filipina* exhibition, the Liongoren Gallery features women artists who have been precisely, bountifully endowed with a multitude of talents spanning the range of arts, and who have chosen to carve their own paths apart from that delineated by the traditional and the predictable.

This year’s *Walong Filipina* exhibition pays homage to a wide range of arts and cultural disciplines. It, for instance, is notable in the sense that it has given space to photography, installation, and graphic art by Filipina cultural workers, as well as focus on women artists who have chosen to depict national minorities and their respective cultures as their subjects. The show has also provided space to women cultural workers who, while already recognized in other fields of the arts, continue to practice their vocations alongside their personal art-production.

Traditional genre such as portraits and landscapes also populate the *Walong Filipina* show, although not wholly in the predictable sense of the word. The woman artists in this show who utilize traditional artistic media and techniques nonetheless produce fresh images through their choice and depiction of their respective subject matter.

In her *Taal Series*, for instance, nurse and gallery owner Rollie Yusi utilizes her mastery of watercolour techniques to depict delicate vistas of the popular tourist destination. *Taal On A Clear Day*, for instance, is modelled through overlapping washes that delineate sky from sea; nuances of pigment evoke the whiff of breeze wafting through coconut leaves, the calm lapping of wind upon lake, islands unfolding through the haze. Works lightly tinged with rose and purple evoke the transition between dawn, dusk, or the calm before a storm. Yusi's enchanting 'lakescapes', so to speak, defamiliarize and make distant a site that has continually been occupying the State's glossy and tourism-oriented ad spiels.

Multi-awarded singer-songwriter Cynthia Alexander alludes to personal narratives in her paintings through the poetic continuity of images. *Coming Back*, presumably a self-portrait of the artist, discreetly depicts in the background the figure of a woman with an umbrella, back turned to the viewer. In another painting entitled *Takipsilim*, this same woman is intriguingly depicted as a central image, walking away into a distant and moonlit landscape. Alexander's use of blue and yellow pigments to exclusively delineate light from shadow in the works also convey a tone of mystery in the stories hidden beneath the literal images of the works.

This year's *Walong Filipina* also features Filipina women artists from the South, and their continuing desire to popularize and document images of traditional ethnic culture. Ligaya Amilbansa, while foremost known as a groundbreaking scholar and practitioner of the *pangalay* (a traditional popular festival dance of the Sulu archipelago), displays in this show her lifelong love for the dance. Such a cultural advocacy is overtly reflected in her paintings, such as the self-portrait entitled *Pangalay Rising* (oil on canvas, 2004). In this work, the artist depicts the self throughout the stages of performing the sinuous rhythmic movements of the dance, donning the *janggay* (extended metal finger nail) while positioned beside a *gabbang* (Tausug bamboo xylophone, decorated with exquisite wood carvings).

Amilbansa's lifelong efforts to depict and document the living cultural traditions of the Tausug tribes in Southern Philippines are likewise seen in works such as *Seaside* (2004), a quaint portrait of a pottery vendor cradling her baby in their hut spanning the sea. This work on pastel depicts a traditional and nearly-universal theme in art history (mother and child) in the context of local Tausug society.

The resolve to depict woman from national minorities throughout the Philippines and the living indigenous traditions is likewise invigorated in the works of art teacher and gallery owner Lea Padilla and documentary photographer and researcher Ma. Cristina Saulo.

If Amilbansa's channels her advocacies through scholarly studies and active pedagogical efforts, Padilla's practice as a Mindanao-based cultural practitioner is channelled through her proprietorship of the Linya Gallery in Iligan City and her personal works.

Padilla similarly locates near-universal scenes in the local context, producing images that depict familiar human routines and motions (the act of genuflecting before a meal, or creating communal music, for instance) amidst the initially unfamiliar array of local ornamental motifs. Padilla's works point to a vibrant and intense familiarity with the patterns of the local. In her *Pagana Maranao Series* (acrylic on canvas, 2006), the artist juxtaposes solid and strung hues and flat backgrounds with intricate and painstakingly-rendered details of Southern Philippine decorative motifs, seen in the *ukkil* embellishments all throughout the textiles, accessories, tableware, and musical instruments that populate the spaces of her works.

Also present in this year's *Walong Filipina* show are notable Filipina photographers and their works. Ma. Cristina Saulo depicts the woman of the Philippines' national minorities through a different approach: the straightforward gaze of the mechanically-captured image. Saulo is one of the few Filipina cultural workers who have braved forays into documentary photography and local research into the selected national minorities of the Philippines and the South East Asian region, a rarity of sorts nowadays.

Saulo's photographs of the Filipino Amerasians in the Central Luzon region and the Batak tribe of Palawan in the Southern Tagalog region, and the Mlabri and Hmong tribes in Thailand are intimate portraits of a people pushed to the margins by colonial incursions. Despite the appalling degree of material and social disenfranchisement that Philippine national minorities are subjected to, Saulo manages to capture portraits of a people that do not evoke pity, but quiet dignity. There is an elegant

ease, even a poignant beauty, in the way Saulo's images capture the stark bareness of her subject's lives, such as in the work *Batak Girl* (Sepia toned silver gelatine print, 2000) or *Fisherfolks' Daughter* (Selenium toned silver gelatine print, 2003). Other works such as *Tagbanua Woman* (sepia toned silver gelatine print, 2002) evoke the graceful weight of passing time.

On the other hand, photographer and Silver Lens Creative Director Isa Lorenzo chooses to capture images of still objects and scapes, using their formal qualities to transform familiar household scenes into unknown territories. *February* (lambda duratrans on lightbox) captures a fog-shrouded landscape from an unknown location, presumably taken at that time of the year. Lorenzo also infuses poetic allusions through the texts of her works' titles, seen in the photograph of a silver ball suspended on a ceiling entitled *Kissing, Eyes Closed*, or that of what seems to be a clear plastic cap suspended on a wall entitled *In Sickness and In Health*. The deliberate disjunction between the text and the image projected points to the need to see beyond the literal beauty of the image and uncover an entire narrative of contexts beneath.

Interestingly, Lorenzo's works are positioned in the most inconspicuous corners of the gallery, in places where one least expects to find a 'work of art'. This deliberate curatorial choice also conveys the message that art, whether it be through painting or photography, persists even in the margins of one's world. Lorenzo also makes effective use of the lightbox as a component of her photography display, using the medium to illuminate her images.

Other artistic genres represented in *Walong Filipina* include installation and functional art in the works of Isabel Aquilizan and Hannah Liongoren.

Aquilizan, an installation artist and theatre director who has usually worked in tandem with artist-husband Alfredo Aquilizan on various inter-disciplinary, collaborative and communal art projects, presents her individual works this time around. Aquilizan makes use of used blankets, seemingly mundane items that nevertheless comprise the various important rituals and phases of our lives, from womb to tomb, from the sacral to the carnal.

As an object signifying social relations and structures, these threadbare and patchwork-riddled blankets convey the spartan yet strong lives that millions of Filipinas live as a consequence of prevailing social realities. The blankets symbolize a tapestry of lives, worn and weary through the years, yet still held together through common threads and painstaking initiatives to heal and repair whatever rips or tears there are. '*Alagang Perla*', for instance, may symbolically attest to how impoverished women nationwide are striving to care for their kin and children even with the barest essentials, such as the cheap pink detergent sold in bars all over the country. This is a reminder that gently settles upon the viewer just as the floral fragrance emanating from the installation wafts subtly throughout the gallery space.

Contemporary graphic art and functional pieces, meanwhile, converge in Hannah Liongoren's series of handmade notebook covers on canvas. Liongoren hails from an emerging generation of Filipina graphic artists and illustrators from the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts. Her works combine contemporary graphic technology, popular culture, and biographical vignettes, seen in the elements of works such as *Lola Ada*, *Cut*, and *Fudgee*.

All in all, the multitude of Muses paid homage to in this year's *Walong Filipina* spans an entire range of art disciplines, subjects, and inclinations. As such, the deities of the arts, wherever they may be, must indeed be pleased.