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## Lost in Transliteration

**Lost in Transliteration**  
A special guest edited/curated  
issue by Kóan Jeff Baysa

Featured are works by Martin  
Puryear, Lawrence Weiner, Emilio  
Chapela Perez, Michael Arcega,  
Kay Rosen, Pouran Jinchi,  
Annabel Daou, and Manuel  
Ocampo.

**About the Guest Editor/Curator,  
Artists featured,  
and Editorial Board**  
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**Editorial Board**  
Flaudette May V. Datuin  
Varsha Nair  
Judy Freya Sibayan

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Martin Puryear, *Some Lines for Jim Beckwourth* (1978)

Figures of speech, puns, and idioms enrich, but are intrinsic to a language; they mutate or disappear when transferred to other languages. Martin Puryear's piece above, in his current show at the MOMA in New York, and the concurrent Lawrence Weiner exhibition at the Whitney Museum, "As Far as the Eye Can See," are visible reminders of the lyricism and power of the word even in allusion and abstraction, but also of its pitfalls and contextual parameters. Puryear calls these parallel lines of dried twisted rawhide with tufted cow hair "drawn out scribblings" that demonstrates the contrasting perceptions of information when viewed up close as opposed from a distance. From James Gregory's text accompanying Weiner's exhibition, "The achievement of Weiner's practice is not simply his use of language, but the consequent effect of his work . . . (it) offers the visitor a full experience while allowing for every experience to be different."



Lawrence Weiner Installation Shot,  
Whitney Museum Exhibition 2007

Translation involves mapping changes in language while preserving meaning. In contradistinction to transcription, which maps the aural properties of a language to the correlate script of another, transliteration is the transcribing of text written in one writing system into another. And from the linguistic perspective, it is the inter-mapping between systems of writing, word for word. Transliteration attempts to be exact, so that unknown transliterated words can be interpolated. Examples of mixed transliterated and transcribed systems include Chinglish and Spanglish.

The language is  
the communication  
of the guarantee  
that is used by  
the system  
between a taller  
animal and one  
more a computer,  
but that one is  
not the  
communication  
that is not  
limited.

Door taal de  
mededeling aan  
waarborg zijn  
zal die door het  
systeem tussen  
hoger door dier  
wordt gebruikt  
en één is meer  
computer, maar  
die één geen  
mededeling zal  
zijn die niet

Emilio Chapela Perez *lenguaje*

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The most illustrative example of transliteration is the common online exercise of computerized translating through successive languages. Mexico City artist Emilio Chapela Perez's piece, *lenguaje*, is an example of a standard English definition of the word "language" processed through successive non-English translations, then back into English, but ends in a mutated nonsensical sequence of words.



Michael Arcega *Loping Honoring* 2007

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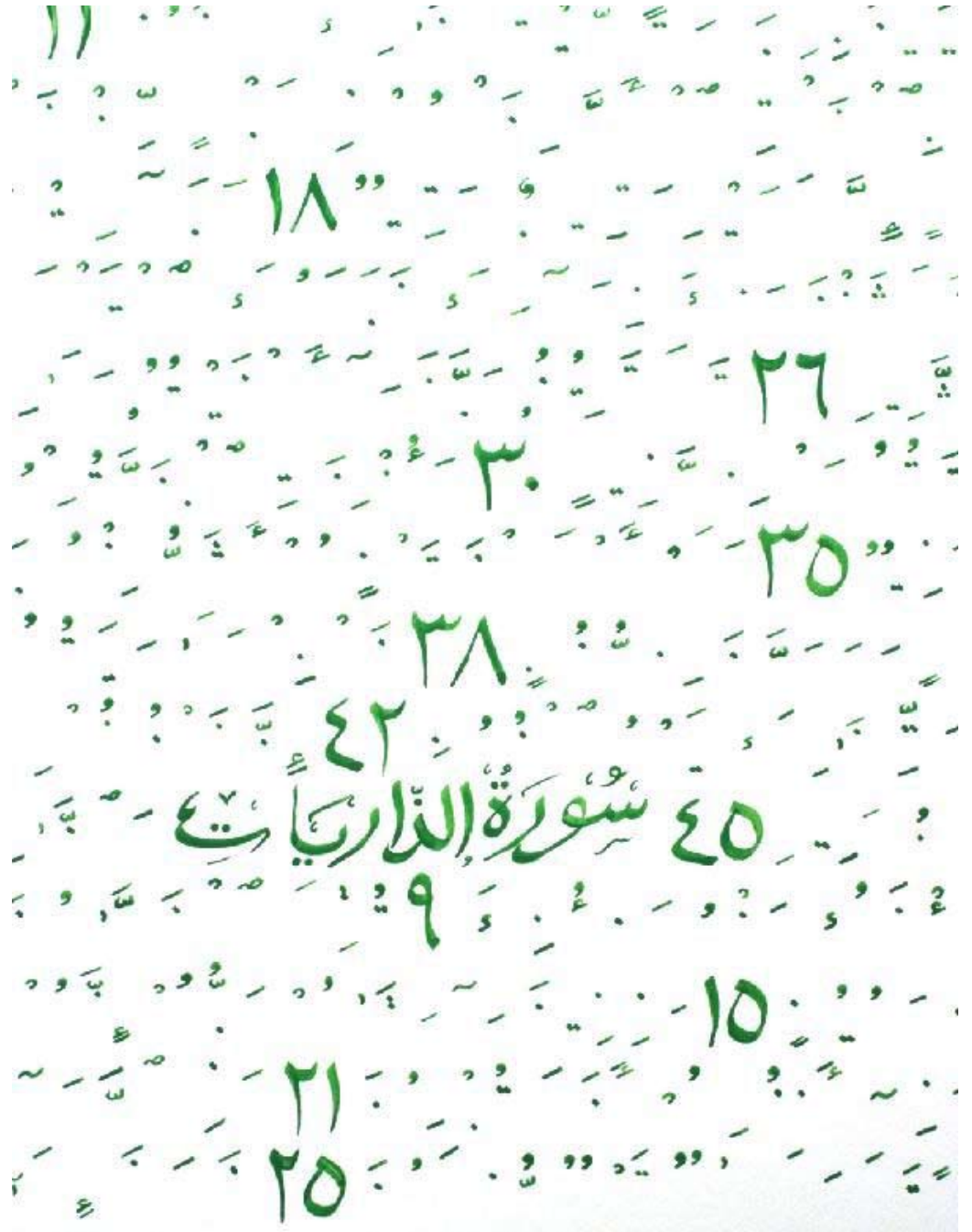
San Francisco-based artist Michael Arcega has also used spell checking applications to exemplify the perils of translation programs. An example is his corrected rendition of the United States Constitution, run through spell check. The text of the following piece, *Loping Honoring* (2007) was generated by spell checking the national anthem of the Philippines, Lupang Hinirang, in MS Word v.11.3 It was then applied to the harmony of Lupang Hinirang and sung in an operatic voice by Erin Neff.

It's time Tim spoke. Inside he cries. It's raining. He lies about the room. It couldn't be concluded, he confessed. But it was all over between them. Behind him. Everywhere he went he remembered in spite of himself. He missed her so, he thought. The note had instructed, "Repeat after me, 'the deluge.'" He considered drowning. His sorrows came to mind.

"It's time," Tim spoke. "Inside," he cries, "It's raining!" He lies about the room. It couldn't be, concluded he, confessed. But it was all over—between them, behind him, everywhere. He went, he remembered, in spite of himself. He missed her, so he thought. The note had instructed, "Repeat, After me, the deluge.'" He considered. Drowning his sorrows came to mind.

Kay Rosen *Ob, Eau* 1989/1998

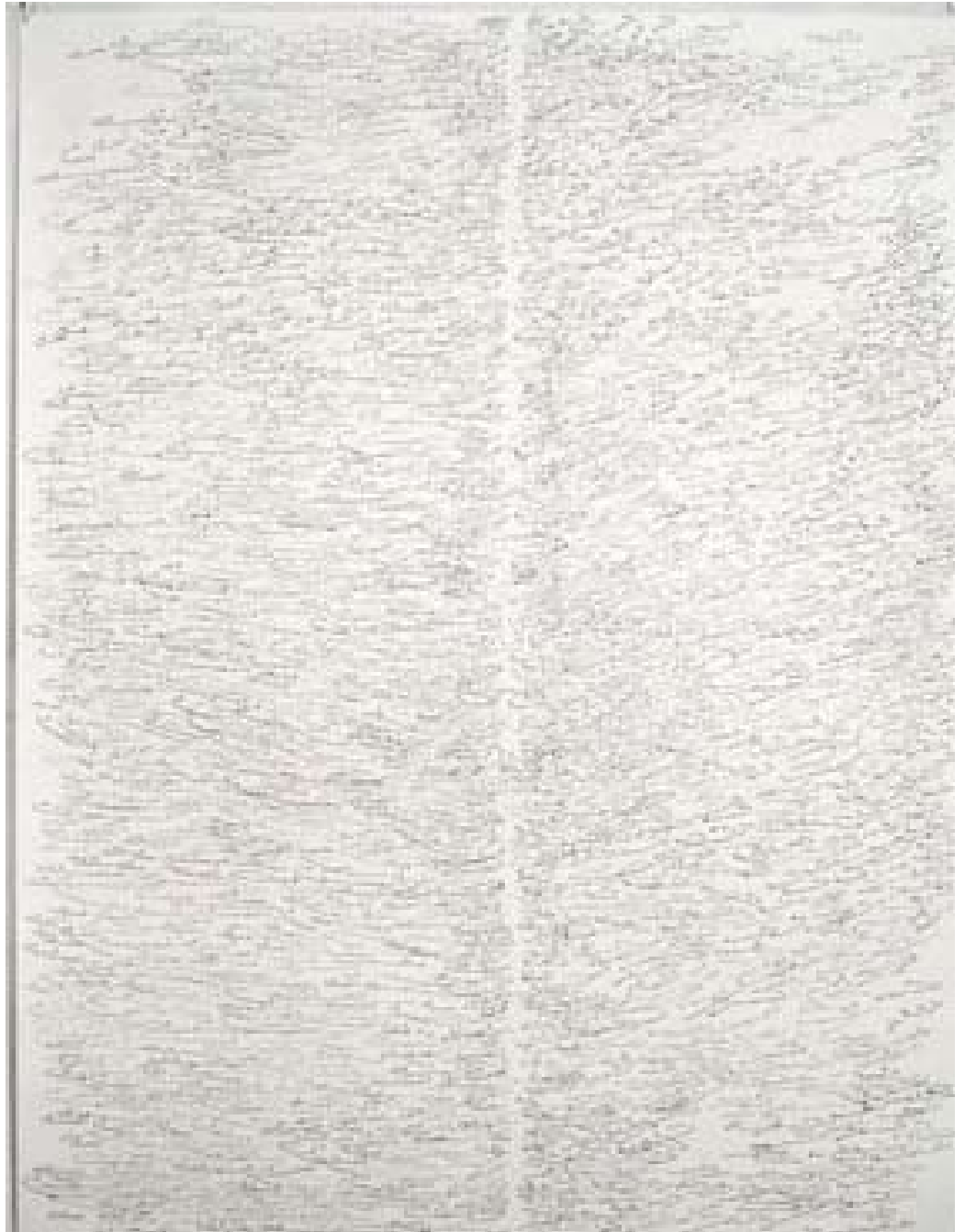
Kay Rosen's work underscores the strategies and importance of punctuation that change the context and meaning of the following word-equivalent twinned texts.



Pouran Jinchi, *Tajvid* (2007),  
ink on paper, 144 x 53 in

Looking at text markings in a different culture is Pouran Jinchi, an Iranian-American artist living in New York. She trained in calligraphy in childhood, but after completing her studies in civil engineering, she turned to painting, influenced by the abstract expressionists. Her works involve the subtraction of text from identified and identifiable sections that retains context. She states, “In Farsi and Arabic, the punctuation markings are hardly used any more. The Koran is the perfect example of retaining and emphasizing the diacritical markings like the, *tasheed*, *saken*, and *hamzeh*. People who are familiar with the Koran, even from different cultures, like African and Chinese Muslims, can recognize the Koran in my paintings even when the text is removed because of these markings. They are like mathematical notations. To me, mathematical equations looked like art, like vocalizations. Visually they look the same to me.”

Annabel Daou, *Too Close to the Bone*, 2005  
pencil on paper, 50 x 38 inches



Annabel Daou works with Arabic text with a different approach. She states, “I was thinking about how close and how far apart at the same time, the expressions “god is good” and “god is great” are. I found that when you research “god is great” you tend to get the transliteration “allah hu akbar” which is the muslim phrase. so i transliterated (phonetic spelling) “god is good” into Arabic. Then thinking about one trying to approach the other, i would write one phrase and indicate it’s trajectory to the other. so the English “god” or “god is good” is transliterated into Arabic letters and the arrow draws it to “allah” or “allah hu akbar” which is the Arabic transliterated into English letters.



Manuel Ocampo *Para eso habeis nacido*.  
1994

Words are strung together and transformed by context, punctuation and delivery by social individuals variably shaped by geoculturopolitical forces. As in Manuel Ocampo's works, texts in other languages remain as abstractions unless one possesses the translational tools, but even then, as these examples demonstrate, there are flaws and pitfalls used to creative advantage in these contemporary works.



### About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art

Ctrl+P was founded in 2006 by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin 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 is currently part of *documenta 12* magazines project, a journal of 97 journals from all over the world (<http://magazines.documenta.de/frontend/>)

### About the Guest Editor/Curator

**Kóan Jeff Baysa** is a curator, writer, critic, physician, and Whitney Independent Study Program Curatorial alumnus. The Pacific editor for *d'Art International* magazine, he is contributing writer for the online publications *Flavorpill* and *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*, and a member of AICA, the association of international art critics. In addition to organising numerous art events in the U.S. he has curated shows for the London Biennale, the United Nations, Whitney Museum, and has organised art events in Paris, Cork, London, Beijing, Bandung, Hong Kong, Manila, and Yokohama. The Senior Curator for the CoCo Institute Foundation, he is on the boards of The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School University, Art Omi International Artist Colony, and The Center for Photography at Woodstock. He is the Head of the New York Curatorial Office and the Director-Curator of International Projects for MOCA China, an art foundation that supports MOCA Beijing and a network of five proposed contemporary museums throughout China. He was the critic-in residence for the 2006 Art Omi International Artists Colony in Ghent, New York. Dr. Baysa divides his time between New York and Los Angeles, and has a private consultative clinical practice in lower Manhattan. He recently received a Ford Foundation grant to lecture at Hanoi University of Culture in Vietnam and to conduct a survey of contemporary art in both north and south Vietnam.

### About the Artists Featured

Click on the names to download bios.

**Michael Arcega**

**Annabel Daou**

**Pouran Jinch**

**Manuel Ocampo**

**Emilio Chapela Perez**

**Martin Puryear**

**Kay Rosen**

**Lawrence Weiner**

### About Ctrl+P's Editorial Board Members

**Flaudette May V. Datuin** is Associate Professor of the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines. She is the author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). She curated *Women Imaging Women* held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) featuring the women artists from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines; *balaybay@kasibulan* to celebrate the 15th anniversary of KASIBULAN, a group of Filipina artists in the visual arts, *trauma interrupted*, an international and interdisciplinary exhibition both held also at the CCP. Datuin is co-founding editor of *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art*.

**Varsha Nair's** selected exhibitions include *Saturday live* at Tate Modern London, 2006; *Sub-Contingent, The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006. She performed at the National Review of Live Art at the Tramway in Glasgow in 2006; and at the 2004 *New Territories; In-between places, meeting point*, Si-am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005 (solo-show);

*Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, 2004. Nair is also co-curator of *No Man's Land*, a web project for Womanifesto 2006. Her writings have been published in art and architecture journals such as *n.paradoxa*, *Art AsiaPacific* and *art4d* (Thailand). Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India.

**Judy Freya Sibayan** is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. She performed *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, which she wore daily for five years and is curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects*. Although Sibayan's major body of work is an institutional critique of art, she has exhibited and performed in venues such as The Tramway, Glasgow, Vienna Secession, Hayward Gallery, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, The Photographers' Gallery, and the Mori Art Museum. She participated in the 1986 3rd Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh and the 2002 Gwangju Biennale. She was lead-curator of *xsXL Expanding Art*, Sculpture Square, Singapore, 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon*, 2005. She is co-founding editor of *Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art* and currently teaches as Assistant Professor at De La Salle University-Manila.