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# Ctrl+Pdf

J o u r n a l o f C o n t e m p o r a r y A r t

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and 2nd Special Issue for  
*documenta 12* magazines  
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## Views from the Now/here<sup>1</sup>

### Now

From a busy and congested section of Cubao, Quezon City, Manila, self-taught curator Norma Liongoren has been presenting—for almost twenty years now—a series called *Walong Filipina* (Eight Filipinas), and has shown the works of close to a hundred women artists from the Philippines, from the time it was first held in March 1990 at a two-storey residential structure converted into a gallery. A year ago, Ctrl+P featured the 2006 edition of this series by reprinting Lisa Ito's exhibition notes. In this sixth Uploaded Issue, we celebrate our first year by retelling and collating—for the first time—the scattered fragments of the story of *Walong Filipina*, from its beginnings to the present. We find this reckoning by Ito a fitting way to mark a productive year of publishing from now/here, as *Walong Filipina* the series shares with Ctrl+P the publication certain defining qualities that characterize most women-initiated projects in these parts: their organic, makeshift and even “accidental” beginnings; and the two projects' vision of nurturing women artists in the case of *Walong Filipina* and emergent art criticism in the case of Ctrl+P.

This issue also presents, for the first time since Ctrl+P uploaded its first issue in April 2006, contributions from all three members of the editorial board—women who direct their curatorial, critical and creative energies towards initiatives that critique and challenge traditional art institutions and practices. Judy Freya Sibayan, the artist who instigated the founding of Ctrl+P by challenging me and my graduate students to write and publish works on contemporary art and artists, presents six case studies—Ctrl+P among them—from her body of work to concretize the ways by which artists can expand the frames and sites within which art can be produced, discussed and experienced.

Varsha Nair, the third editorial member sheds light on how *Womanifesto*, an important biannual event founded by Thai women artists in Bangkok took root and continues to grow even amidst a not-exactly-nurturing environment. In her account of her practice as a foreigner in Bangkok, who strives to see to it that *Womanifesto* “continues to distill amidst platforms with hazy foundations,” Nair describes herself as someone who “will be pronounced an ‘outsider,’ one that does not understand the local way of doing things, and dismissed even before I begin should the questions I raise make people uncomfortable.”

In a book review—another first for Ctrl+P—I center on two women “outsiders”: the poet Marjorie Evasco, who is not an art world “insider,” visual arts practitioner or gatekeeper, but who has, in my opinion provided us with one possible model for writing about art and artists; and her subject, the painter Hermogena Borja Lungay who works outside Manila, the epicenter of the Philippine art world.

This first anniversary issue also serves as the second of a two-part series devoted to the *documenta 12* magazines project. The first of the series, the fifth issue, focused on the theme *What is Bare Life?*; in this present volume, we contribute to the theme *What is to be Done?* framed within the question of “education” by revisiting the first Ctrl+P Uploaded Issue's focus on women and their contributions, particularly in bringing forth alternative modes of learning, writing about, curating, doing and disseminating art. But

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while the first issue featured young writers writing on women artists, this one presents women artists, curators and organizers who are telling their own stories through narratives of presentness, (re)presence and representation. As the women gathered here speak and write, they do so from now/here—a place, a point of view, a frame of reference and a state of now/hereness that implicates not just geography, but also emotional, spiritual, social and psychological dis/positions. Neither center nor periphery, neither exclusively here nor there, now/here is also a platform, a source of intervention that can possibly transform the “center” through difference, dialogue, and working together in communities that may be peripheral to, but still ultimately linked to the wider world.

## Here

In this issue, women demonstrate this now/here's potential for change through essays that appreciate the shifting nature of contemporary geographies. One cluster of essays speaks of movement and mobility that breaches national boundaries: Phaptawan Suwannakudt's relocation from Bangkok to Sydney; Varsha Nair's neither-here-nor-there status as a foreigner in Thailand; Yong Soon Min's hyphenated identity as an American born in Korea; and Judy Freya Sibayan's negotiations of the productive elsewhere of virtual and bodily spaces.

Another cluster of essays locates women in specific territories of nation, specifically Manila and its “other” art worlds, thus addressing, not only geographic, political and economic struggles, but also “alternative journeys towards different forms of emancipation,” to borrow from Sara Raza, whose essay “Travelling Light” is reprinted from *n.paradoxa*, one of the participants of *documenta 12 magazines* project. Hermogena Borja Lungay, who paints and works in the far-flung turtle-shaped island of Bohol in Central Philippines imparts to her work a sense of place and rootedness in the in-betweens of everyday history. Marjorie Evasco, poet and teacher, re-presents this rootedness through an engaging style and hybrid form of storytelling discussed in Flaudette May Datuin's review of Evasco's book on the Boholano painter.

Imelda Cajipe Endaya, who recently moved to New York from Manila, pioneered *Kasibulan*, the women artist's collective that—as we learn from Lisa Ito's account—grew alongside *Walong Filipina*, at a time of historical and political upheavals in the Philippines. Cajipe Endaya's essay—an excerpt from *Locus: Interventions in Art Practice*—demonstrates the importance of *Kasibulan* as a major turning point in Philippine feminist art history. By providing a community where women can come together and bond, *Kasibulan* consolidates the gains as well as wears like a badge-of-honor, the scars of women's struggle for repesence and representation in a male-dominated territory.

When women form coalitions, travel through different time zones and realities (virtual, hyper, actual) and journey across the globe, they do so with a keen awareness of the perils of such negotiations and the need for vigilant auto-critique and reflexivity. Such a state of perpetual inquiry and debate compels us to maintain a permanent outsider status, no matter which geographical location we come from or find ourselves in. As Nair insists, “to become *insiders*, in many ways means to become stereotypes, to conform and pander to what's expected, and in the process compromise the most vital tool of artistic enquiry—experimentation as a way of seeking and presenting.”

In her essay, Cajipe Endaya asks questions that disabuse us of the illusion of false harmony under which sisterhoods and solidarities labor by asking

how has *Kasibulan* fared in providing its members with opportunities for creativity, growth, and self sufficiency? It has provided wide opportunities of sisterhood support and exposure, yes. But on the level of aesthetic, the organization can be more determinate in self-critiquing in order to deepen its discourse on women's art practice. Jurying, curating, and excellence

remain to be such feared words among us, as though these ideas are antithesis of women empowerment and democracy. Inheriting Antonio Gramsci's Rx—that class, in our case, gender, should develop its own “organic intellectuals”—indeed women artists should synthesize their own actual experiences as women and those of their fellow women in order to formulate ways of truly attaining their aspirations.

Raza, in “Travelling Light,” on the other hand, maps out urgent concerns about the mobility and freedom of women, by discussing the works of four artists—Afghan Lida Abdul, and Iranians, Maria Kheirkhan, Shahram Entekhabi and Shirin Neshat—“who examine the themes of roaming and questions related to the construction of femininity and a feminist politics in representation...” These artists represent reality and the perceptions of realities through works that articulate the “possibilities and impossibilities of social, psychological and economic mobility for women that are partly fiction and partly fact.”

In other words, these artists and the women gathered in this volume are saying that to be mobile is to inhabit a “comfort zone of awkwardness,” as Suwannakudt puts it as she reflects on her life as a Thai artist in Sydney, her childhood memories as daughter of a renowned muralist and a former Buddhist nun, and her role in founding *Womanifesto*. Yong Soon Min, another dweller in the comfort zone of awkwardness, raises uncomfortable but vital questions, particularly on how “women of color” like her are received and re-presented as “native informants” and “Asian diasporics,” much of whose works are deemed “too political and autobiographical,” and more about “content,” and less about form, poetics, play and *jouissance*. Taking issue with the perpetual art-critical tendency to separate form from content, Min asks: “What is the relation of the work in a social context? What is the relation to audience and ethics?...How can we be strategic without being doctrinaire or overarching? How do we balance a self-reflexive awareness in the work, so that we are aware of the contingent nature of knowledge and subjectivity and don't claim an omnipotent voice but, at the same time also embody a confidence and agency so that we embrace the possibility to affect change through our work?”

Footnote:

1. With a tip of the hat to Griselda Pollock's essay “Views from ‘Elsewhere’: Extracts from a Semi-public Correspondence about the Visibility of Desire.” *12 Views of Manet's Bar*. ed. Bradford Collins. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996; and Patrick Flores' epigrammatic statement: “nowhere can only come to mean now and here,” in the proceedings of the 1999 Women Imaging Women Conference in Manila. Ford Foundation and Art Studies Foundation, 1999.

## Where

Where then, do we go from here? Or as Sibayan's essay title, appropriated from one of the *documenta 12 magazines* project theme, sums it up, “What is to be Done?” The women presented here do not have definitive and once-and-for-all answers. But they do present some of the ways by which we can address these questions, and they do so from a now/here- a “zone of awkwardness” where Suwannakudt feels artists can dwell. A lot has to be done, but it is from this zone where we are “able to feel, to hear, to make, and more important than talk, to continue to see. When things are getting too comfortable, it is the right time to move on.” As Ctrl+P looks forward to its second year, it is this issue's modest contribution to show how some women continue to move on.

# Merpeople in a Man's Land: The Comfort Zone of Awkwardness in Which We Dwell

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PHAPTAWAN SUWANNAKUDT

In my work *Akojorn* (No-Go Zone) I hung my used *Pahtung* on the over head-high washing line between two poles which was set up across the gallery space at Baan Duek (Concrete House, Bangkok) This was part of the exhibition *Tradisexion* which was co-organised by five Thai women writers and artists in 1995. It also marked the first event

in which women artists worked together on women's issues in Thailand and resulted in the subsequent exhibition *Womanifesto* in 1997. This has established itself as an ongoing international project held bi-annually in Thailand.

*Pahtung* means 'tube cloth' which is used as a lower garment by women in Thailand. Women wear them as skirts but in the past also used them as recyclable sanitary napkins. Women folded the garment up into a thick band, put it between their legs and bound both ends up with belt when they menstruated. The cloth also served as a sheet-cover to protect the bedspread when they menstruated at night. The garment would be washed and re-used until it had served out its life time. In a Thai household there is always a lower level washing line called the 'Pahtung' line for this purpose. It is socially taboo to put a *Pahtung* up higher than the waist line. For men it is bad luck to go under the *Pahtung* line with or without a hung piece of garment on it. I had no choice but to comply when my male cousin refused to use the bathroom unless I had already removed my *Pahtung* left on the bathroom rail. The title of my work *Akojorn* means No-Go Zone, which I did not mean as a warning, but as a brand name for this domestic device.

At Baan Duek I held my breath each time a member of the audience entered the gallery. The washing line was set up so that everyone had no choice but to go under it to enter the exhibition. *Akojorn* was my one and only work out of the area of my usual practice in Thai mural painting. My very private and intimate pieces of garment were exposed against social taboo in a public space. To me it was not only a statement but a work I made to challenge myself. I was about to move to Sydney in the following year. To put up the washing line in a gallery in Sydney would be irrelevant and would indeed look ridiculous. The awkward piece only made me feel uncomfortable but perhaps discomfort was what I was looking for. The piece, in a sense challenged the comfort zone I had been snuggling in for long enough.

My works in Thailand mainly involved large-scale mural projects in temples and other public spaces. Until then my life had revolved around the practice of Thai mural painting. My father, Paiboon, was a well known master of Thai mural painting who had then revived the dead art. When he passed away, I contradicted the tradition by becoming one of the first women to paint Thai temple murals. I had experienced challenges simply by being a young woman leading an all-men team and working in temples. The part that I took by breaking into the male domain and adopting the practice of mural painting also put me into the context of Thai contemporary art. At the peak of my Thai career, with fame, respect and the growing number of important patrons to my murals, I was leaving the country to begin a new chapter in my practice. *Akojorn* was the last work I showed in an exhibition before I left. It coincided with a large mural project in a temple at Phutthamonton Buddhist Centre about 25 kilometres from Bangkok, where the murals on the Life of the Buddha that I and teams under me completed covered twelve hundred square metres.

When I went to bid farewell to my boss at the SUPPORT Foundation where I had taught Thai painting for twelve years, she said I did not have to worry about working in foreign countries because the language of art was universal. She went on saying that I was lucky that my work belonged to one of the three occupations where one could work anywhere in the world. They were the doctor, the musician and the artist. I did not tell her that when I had gone to Paris in 1989 to look for galleries to show my works, I was first booted out of a gallery dealing in contemporary practice, then sent to an oriental art gallery, then to a naïve art gallery, then to an antique dealer and then back to the beginning again. I found there was nowhere in the structure of the Parisian art world where my work belonged. Having inherited a traditional practice through the family line, and also coming from outside the art academy in Thailand, has likewise distanced me from everyday art fashions despite my active involvement in Thai art circles.

The move to a new place and the start of my family life with children did not disrupt my creative activities. In contrast it has enhanced my studio productivity and my creativity. Thanks to the support from my husband I had much more freedom and focused more on my practice than I had in the past in Thailand. But, despite the success on the creative side, the echo from the audience has faded away completely. This, despite having had five solo-exhibitions in Australia. The move out of Thailand had removed my practice further away from the relevant context to which I was expected to belong.

The first year I arrived in Sydney I produced the *Nariphon* series which depicted the story of a girl among many other girls in Phayao (Northern Thailand) who was sold to a brothel by her own parents. The image of this girl I got to know from one of my temple projects in 1990 had stuck in my mind and was first realised in my work only when I moved to Sydney six years later. I sent the series to participate in the first *Womanifesto* in 1997. This was followed by two solo-exhibitions in prominent galleries in Bangkok and an international group exhibition at the National Gallery in Thailand. It proved that my work remained only in the faded memory of the Thai audience, now that my practice was not in Thai Buddhist temples. In Thailand I remain my father's daughter. It has not been proved otherwise before or after I moved, despite the fact that the number of years and number of murals I had worked on in Thailand already surpassed what my father had done in all his life.

In Sydney I continued working on Thai materials; both concrete and abstract. The work *My Mother was a Nun* was painted from memory on two narrow pieces of Thai fabric I put in my suitcase to take to Australia. The portrait was of my mother when she became a nun after the birth of her youngest daughter, which had followed her own mother's death. Several years later, when I myself reached the age of my mother the time she became a nun. I gave birth to my daughter in Sydney and worked on the series. In the work *Under the Lotus Shelter*, I painted portraits of my two children and a self-portrait of myself confronting demons. This retold a story of the Bodhisattva's life in a *Jataka* tale, (tales of the Buddha's lives before the incarnation in which he was enlightened) after an incident in Sydney suburb in which my bag was stolen off the pram which carried my baby boy. The scenes were ones I had repeatedly depicted in several

*Where there is No One..there is No Two*,  
2006. Acrylic on canvas, 100x120cm,



mural projects earlier in Thailand. The story had now turned into a personal one. Meanwhile Australian trees and flowers and more recently Australian houses started to appear in my painting. I anticipated I would paint figures, but my first approach to Australian subjects had led to the disappearance of human figures, as if there was something missing from my own words. The pictorial narration of Australia has been the telling of the story of the void. The connection to my new world was only my own echo. The Mermaid who, in order to connect to the human world, sacrificed her own voice to enter into the new one, bore a dilemma, which I confronted.

During my residency at the Bundanon program where I worked in a studio situated in the Australian bush, I attempted to use Thai forms to investigate the physical conflict I had in the process of making *The Elephant and the Bush*, 2003-2004. This was the first time I had used a grid with my outline drawing: this was to stop the gum trees from turning into the Thai





*One is All*. 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 40x90cm.

trees to which my free hand drawing always led. The physical conflict I went through calculating the isometric forms and perspective of the Australian house in my next work *An Elephant Journey*, was in fact shaped by the pace of learning about the new space I live in. The work however was read by one curator as a 'cross cultural' product, perhaps with an identity crisis, and her interpretation focused on what she called 'the wrongnes,' 'the mismatch,' and 'the wrong sense of perspective' in the representation. The language of Thai mural painting in the work was only the language of naivete in the empirical sense. The series was part of the exhibition *Abstractions* held in Canberra in 2003. A member of the audience approached me at the opening and said that my painting was most exquisite with details, but I had to tell him the stories because he had no idea what they were about. I wanted to say there was no story to tell in my work concerning Australian subject matter and that was the point, but he did not wait for the answer. Perhaps he did not want to know after all.

Shortly after I had arrived in Sydney, I took a driving lesson to familiarise myself with Australian traffic rules in order to get an Aus-

tralian driver's license. Before I went to the test my Australian driving instructor gave me a piece of ornament stone and said if I believed I could keep it to help me pass. She said further that sadly she had never had a chance to teach her mum. Her dad did not want her to, and indeed her dad did not want her mum to learn how to drive at all. I had learned how to drive in Thailand from my mum and obtained a Thai driver's license long before I moved to Australia. In Sydney I was pregnant with my daughter at the time when I went through and passed the test. It could be that my instructor, her mum, my mum or my baby girl, were all part of getting me through the test, but not the stone which I had never taken from my instructor. My husband said she might be from a migrant family. I wondered if my *Pahtung* and the piece of my instructor's stone could sit well together in my work. It could only represent the stories of women and migrants, a sub-class, the Merpeople from the Merland.

In Paris 1989, I was thrown like a ball rolling from one place to another place. In Sydney 2007, there may be too many categories available for me to fit in: feminist, feminine, Asian, South-East Asian, something Thai or a very Thai, Buddhist, a confused cross-cultural product in identity crisis, even an Asian Australian, and so on as far as the stream goes. In my more recent work I used my father's text from one of his short stories. My father often read out loud in the temple hall where he worked and in which I grew up. It dwells in me like my skin. To this sense I painted the text almost invisibly attached to a canvas surface, but intertwined with a sketch outline of an Australian suburb. It is this secret tune floating in the air waiting to find a place to inter-act with others. As for my voice in the new world or old, my former boss' statement about universal language proved nothing. Nonetheless I am most comfortable in this zone of awkwardness because it is where I am able to feel, to hear, to make, and more important than talk, to continue to see. When things are getting too comfortable, it is the right time to move on. I believe it can only be in the zone of awkwardness where an artist can dwell.

# Amidst Art Platforms with Dilute Foundations, Womanifesto Roots Down and Continues to Distill

VARSHA NAIR

## The “inter” aspect

I recently received an invitation from the Culture Office of the Italian Embassy for the opening of Bangkok International Art Festival taking place on February 23, 2007. This is the same event that I was initially invited to participate in almost a year ago, and the reason I, along with a number of artists in Thailand, are not presenting is simply because late last December, at short notice given by telephone, we were told that the festival was cancelled (we are yet to receive a letter from the organizing officials). Hence the notification that it was going ahead came as a big surprise. Later we were also informed that whilst the “international” part of the event will still go ahead as planned as venues were already booked and most of the foreign invited artists were almost ready with their work, assuming we are not, the “local” part will not due to lack of funding (read, lack of funding for the locals, the in-coming artists are being supported by the relevant Embassies and foreign cultural bodies such as British Council based in Thailand). There is local input however, and it comes in the form of including two Thai artists but, absurd as this may seem, since the curator of the foreign part had nothing to do with curating the local artists, a decision had been made to separate the press releases between the “Thai” and the “Inter” (the word *International* is abridged and part of the lingo here, such as Thai International, the national airline, is referred to as “Thai Inter”). Input for the fest will also come from non-artists, in the form of local manpower and use of knowledge/ local know how, but with no attempt being made to generate discussion about this first ever official Inter’ Art Festival of Bangkok, or to bring artists and audience together other than at an opening and a closing party; how the audience and community of artists here engage with the event remains to be seen.

Little is forthcoming from the organizers as way of explanation re the turn of events to the artists who were to participate, even less will be done to inform the audience in any real sense about what will be presented eventually. This is not an environment that encourages open debate and critical examination and added to that, just as the synonyms the dictionary offers for the word *inter*—“to bury” or “lay to rest,” the proceedings of this event, like some international flash-in-the-pan art events staged in the past, will start being interred even before the taste of wine and food served at the opening is fully savoured.

This lack of consideration of context in presenting large-scale art events is not new. I, an artist from a foreign land living here, frequently find myself coming face to face with such attempts to “bring together,” and the use of the words “global” or “international,” alluding to the universality of art and creativity. But they are mostly based on the narrow outlook of a few denizens of the art world, who each have their own agenda of fitting art and artists neatly in a box so as to be easily packaged and marketed.

After ten years of being active, both in terms of presenting my work and organizing art projects, I now find myself in a complex situation. I am somewhat considered a local, perceived as belonging and part of things here, but at the same time I am aware that I will immediately be pronounced an “outsider,” one that does not understand the local way of doing things, and dismissed even before I begin should the questions I raise make people uncomfortable. The thing is, as an artist I position myself as an *outsider* no matter which geographical location I come from or find myself in and, according to me, this is a position that artists must maintain. For to become *insiders*, in many ways means to become stereotypes, to conform and pander to what’s expected, and in the process compromise the most vital tool of artistic enquiry—experimentation as a way of seeking

and presenting. As artists, to be contrary in many instances is also essential and there is enough questionable fodder in the world at large and specifically in our immediate environments that needs addressing.

When I came to live in Bangkok eleven years ago I felt that I had *arrived* somewhere, as though I knew this place and the map of the labyrinth of Bangkok and its ways was pre-etched in my mind. This was significant in terms of settling down in the place and for my own art practice to thrive. The general buzz of life around me, the street vendors, mangoes growing on trees, the bird sounds etc were at once familiar, somewhat parallel to the day-to-day life in India that I had just left. But even as this made me feel at home it also heightened my sense of dislocation. I headed for the visual art department at Chulalongkorn University and asked if they would let me use their printmaking studio as a visiting artist, which they did. Almost immediately I found myself meeting and being included as part of the art community, and one thing led to another.

What I encountered in my early days was an inspiring hive of activity generated by artists who were busy creating the kind of environments and projects that they perceived as lacking. This included *Womanifesto*, an exhibition that was being planned by a group of Thai women artists. Soon enough independent spaces such as Project 304 and About Café/Studio opened. Artist Chitti Kasemkitvatana, who was the first curator at About Café/Studio founded AARA—about art related activities, and set up a regular event called Art Mart along with an exhibition program. One of his aims was to set up a meeting point for artists and the audience, and initiate cross-disciplinary exchange encouraging people to come and even barter their work at these gatherings. Suddenly young people from all walks of life—art, fashion, design, music had a space to let loose their creativity. The place was open all sorts of hours, and open to just about any idea that one might have. The vibrancy and creative energy was not only tangible, but was also pushed to the forefront utilizing the most direct artist created platforms. Today as much of this has got absorbed by a somewhat disconnected “art infrastructure” (that includes government-backed initiative, commercial galleries, large and small curated exhibitions at home and abroad) artists and their hothouses of creativity are being appropriated and drawn into some kind of a center that has not only failed to support individual initiative but has also started to take hold of the collective imagination.

### Setting a pace

Leaving the center aside *Womanifesto* began, continued, and slowly starting to gain recognition from artists from all over as an event to watch out for. Since 1996 to date it has set a pace, in many ways a constant one that has become part of my life. Interestingly after each event, there have been 5 so far, the ones who have been involved in organizing and realizing the events including me, put our exhausted hands in the air and say “that’s it, enough.” But within months this is forgotten and we find ourselves excitedly coming up with ideas and planning the next one. At the back of my mind I know that to give up would mean bringing an end to this form of significant collective practice that is purely artist initiated and managed, and a vital part of our lives.

Nitaya Ueareworakul, one of the founding artists of *Womanifesto* invited me as a participant initially then as co organizer for the first exhibition held in 1997. For this, two gallery spaces in Bangkok housed the exhibition and our homes became the places for informal gatherings and for visiting artists to stay. The seeds of this biannual event were sown when a group of Thai women—artists, writers, poets and activists, including Nitaya and Phaptawan Suwannakudt, came together in 1995 at an exhibition titled *Tradisexion*. Not wanting to be passive players in the art world, the aim was to break down, through their individual practices and through shared experiences, barriers and preconceived notions of what women’s art should be. Taking the initiative continues to be at the source of artists planning *Womanifesto* events that are not curated as such but where projects are conceptualized also as a result of encountering what other artists



are dealing with or wanting to deal with. Hence ever since it's inception *Womanifesto* projects have taken on different avatars.

Following the first exhibition, *Womanifesto II* (1999) took the form of an outdoor workshop and exhibition that incorporated a larger number of artists, consolidating its foundation and providing another rare opportunity for interaction. The prevailing feeling after this second event was not to involve a large group of participants for the next one. Having personally experienced the closeness and the crucial exchange that had taken place amongst the participating artists at the first gathering, I was keen on bringing a small group together and also decentralizing, moving away from the city that also represented the center in terms of art production and presentation, to see what could emerge by pitching a group of mainly city-based individuals in a rural surrounding for a period of time. The idea was loosely based on having an extended picnic that would provide the right environment to relax, meet and exchange ideas, as opposed to making and showcasing work.

With this in mind, *Womanifesto Workshop 2001* was designed as a ten-day community workshop in a remote setting of northeastern Thailand that was to be documented via video and a catalogue. At Boon Bandaan Farm near Kantharalak in Si Saket province, a group of 18 professionals consisting of artists, curators and art administrators, as well as 5 student volunteers studying cultural management, were invited to interact and exchange not only with each other but also with the community. Our main emphasis at this workshop was on exploring local materials, engaging with the community, sharing experiences, and a traditional way of life. The participants were also asked to focus on the position of women in this rural community, and the wealth of stored knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation and shared amongst men, women and children alike. The workshop successfully generated a lively exchange and many of the participants ended up working collaboratively with the artisans to explore processes and discuss ideas. Day-long children's workshops involving story-telling, drawing, exchanging knowledge about local plants, pottery, video making etc., were organized to also draw in the younger generation from villages around the farm. As Naomi Urabe, one of the organizers stated,

...while some of the work inspired by the Workshop may not be evident right away, it is hoped that the experience of living in Northeastern Thailand, even for only a short while, will help to inspire future projects and perhaps further collaborations. We hope that this first Workshop and exchange, not only among the artists but with the local community as well, will continue beyond the ten days that we spent on the Boon Bandaan Farm. Many of us did not know each other before the event and having the time to exchange our experiences and have dialogues, both formal and informal, was crucial to the whole Workshop process.<sup>1</sup>

Continuing to develop new spaces for representation, the fourth *Womanifesto* event, in 2003, was planned as an international publication offering pages of a print document as a medium to artists and non-artists, male and female. This project went out as an open call asking individuals from all walks of life to input on the theme *Procreation/Postcreation*. The material received was compiled and edited, and a publication in the form of a box was designed to contain each work on individual sheets of paper with its own specific layout. The project developed over a period of a year and it was completed and launched in November 2003. *Procreation/Postcreation* was about collecting, archiving and documenting material—personal stories, old and new beliefs, medical facts, taboos, recipes, poems and more—before some of this *knowledge* is forgotten and lost in time. Presenting thoughts, ideas and data from individuals and groups from across the globe, this project received an overwhelming response—90%



Front face of the postcard-invitation announcing the URL of *No Man's Land*: <http://www.womanifesto.com/en/events.asp>

of the participants were previously unknown to me. And over eighty-eight contributions are included in the box. The call for participation for the project and dissemination of the result was widely publicized via personal email lists and web postings; and most of the works were received via email from various parts of the globe. In the same year, a website to showcase our activities was also established.

Recently completed is a project titled *No Man's Land for Womanifesto 2006*. This web-based project explores attitudes towards nationalism and the territorially imagined line of the border—it's powers of inclusion and exclusion, and its ability to simultaneously promote both unity and conflict. The project began in 2005 when Katherine Olston (now living in

Sydney but then based in Chiang Mai) and I started to invite over 75 participants from diverse places and backgrounds to create pertinent works reflecting on the key concerns of the project. As Olston states in her essay,

Embracing the medium of the internet, the majority of administration of the project was done via email, and thus the project exists almost exclusively within the borderless scape of cyber space; another kind of no man's land. The participants may never meet each other, nor will there be a physical opening or launch of the project. *No Man's Land* has become its name in concept, it has become etherealised, existing no where except in cyber space. This is the primary space for presenting work, and it is widely accessible online from just about anywhere to anyone...<sup>2</sup>

As to the future, I am currently discussing with Nitaya Ueareeworakul and Phaptawan Suwannakudt the possibilities of establishing a biannual studio residency program to be located in North-eastern Thailand where the workshop was held in 2001 and where Nitaya now lives. The idea is to offer two residencies to a group of 4 to 6 individuals - during rice planting and harvesting seasons, respectively. The residency will be open not only for visual artists, but also for writers, musicians, art historians and curators, and each residency will be based on different thematic approaches.

### Open platforms

Finding myself lost in a maze of alleyways in the Iranian town of Yazd recently, amidst its distinctive architecture of tall mud walls, I sensed that rare feeling of having *arrived*. This feeling or sense of familiarity or belonging with/in a place one goes to for the first time, is hard to explain; there are the obvious connections one can make, such as sounds, smells etc, but often it is the place itself and the people that start to converse in a special way. It is this same sense of arrival I experienced when I first came here, like it was meant to be. I look upon this feeling as one that is distilled, distilled as in *derived from or encapsulating a wider experience or larger set of ideas*. Perhaps this comes from having lived in different places, not particularly rooted in any one.

I was invited to travel in Iran last December for *Karawane*,<sup>3</sup> an open-ended project organized by two architects who involved photographers, artists, architects and authors to journey together. This kind of a platform where people from different disciplines and backgrounds are invited to travel with no end result in terms of producing “work” defined is a rare one to come across today. Tapping into creativity and imagina-

For further information on Womanifesto please visit [www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)

1. From the essay, 'no work is good work', Published in art4d number 89, December 02/January 03, and SPAFA Journal, volume 12 Number 1, Jan – April 2002.

Full text available in the press section at [www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)

2. From Katherine Olston's essay, *No Man's Land*. Published in Ctrl+P 3rd issue and in the essays section at [www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)

3. *Karawane* was organized by X-CHANGE Culture-Science, a platform set up by two architects based in Vienna. <http://www.x-change.at/deutsch.htm>

tion to find subtle ways of exchanging knowledge that may lead to making a difference. is at the root of such projects. In this instance, the direct encounter and negotiation of this particular environment, one that is not easily accessible and one that most have preconceived notions about, became a way to educate, create awareness and open up a world of possibilities allowing for a more spontaneous exchange based directly on the complexities and realities of people and the place.

The premise of some Womanifesto projects, such as the 2001 picnic/workshop, procreation/postcreation publication, have followed a similar approach—that of creating a platform that is not about an end result but more about the process, also about encouraging experimentation, bringing people together and letting things develop.

In many ways Womanifesto represents a creative struggle that comes from within, from personal interaction with each other, our environment, and the thought and creative processes this generates. After years of jogging ahead much more still needs to be done to persist with presenting wider experiences and a larger set of ideas, and engendering the important critical information exchange.

## What's in a Cup?

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YONG SOON MIN

What educational dividend or political purpose can be derived from frosting a cake (it was actually icing 5 Bundt cakes to be exact)?<sup>1</sup> I'll let this rhetorical question dangle a bit, as do these cakes presently in the gallery, stacked one above the other, tucked inside the thick woven strands of a garish, blood-orange colored macramé hanger, while I attempt to develop my ideas. In my artistic practice that is inclusive of curatorial projects like the one that prompted the cake icing, I often experience the unexpected, or encounter works, even that of my own, that I don't readily grasp, which provoke curiosity and questions.

This work triggered one of those quixotic questions: how does a work attain political meaning? And if by "political," I mean the negotiation of and about power and influence in relation to social interactions and governments, why is this important and what does it have to do with art? No art work is inherently "political," or somehow imbued with political meaning in and of itself. Rather, it is the context or the relationship of the work and the social settings as well as its reception by an audience that confers upon it a political significance. And political meanings are not fixed; a work that has political meaning for one person or one community may not for another. Political import also evolves such that a work may gain, lose or change political significance over time.

In the current context in which we might imagine Walter Benjamin's angel of history being completely engulfed by the monstrous heap of injustice and trauma that's topped-off by an invasion and war in Iraq waged in my country's name by a government that's also in denial about the irreversible destruction of the environment, the sense of urgent action is more pressing than ever. Where does play and poetics fit in this grave context? The proverbial question about the role of art begs to be raised again and again. Is art merely a palliative, a diversion, even a distraction? Are we blithely playing parlor games while the titanic (read: the world) is on the verge of sinking? Given this state of affairs, what matters most? What is at stake? How do we best address the burning issues of the day?

Oddly enough, at this juncture in my train of thought, I am reminded of a lecture I attended as a college student in which the artist Robert Irwin used the empty paper cup he had been drinking out of as a synecdoche for art history and referred to the cup itself as "form" and the Coke he had consumed as "content." At various moments in the

history of art, the cup is being filled to capacity and then, when full, emptied of content and then when empty, filled again. And the cycle is repeated, in perpetuity. The consideration of a form/content relationship seems academic at best especially in light of the preceding paragraph but this nexus in relation to issues of identity and the politics of representation bears scrutiny.

Most observers would say that art that was labeled multicultural was content-heavy. This was in part the intent of the artists. Back in the late 70s/early 80s when artists of color and women artists were beginning to gain exposure in the art world as a result of their active agitation, it seemed important to emphasize content over form—to make sure that the message of who we were and what our issues were, up front and center—an insurance against being overlooked. For instance, stories of immigrant experience were finally visible in the inner sanctum of a pristine gallery space, considered by many to be the last bastion of racism. Furthermore, instead of the paternalistic tones of a white male presentation of official histories, these new stories were being told or represented by the immigrants themselves. Same was the case with stories about racism, sexism or homophobia and other aspects of identity that had no previous place in mainstream galleries or museums. The art world had not been receptive to representations or critical discourse on difference and identity before artists such as Mierle Ukeles Laderman insisted that cleaning the entrance of a gallery was art, in order to question the devalued



Yong Soon Min and Allan de Souza, *Tress/Pass*, 1999

and hidden nature of women's labor; or African American artist Fred Wilson's series of installation that "mined" various museum collections to reveal its often hidden, underlying racist assumptions and narratives; or Lynne Yamamoto's installations that evoked the bittersweet legacy of her grandmother's toils as an early settler of Hawaii. Like other marginalized artists, my response to the lack of validation of my hybrid identity as a Korean American in the galleries, museums or in the art history texts, was to assert the autobiographic backbone of my work. However, while these personal-is-political works took no prisoners in terms of content, in actuality, I expanded my repertoire of materials, processes and format, continuing in my view, to make work that forged new formal territories.



Most of the press coverage of my work and that of other artists put in the multicultural camp was disappointing and sobering. As a rule, it appeared that most reviewers resorted to pigeon-holing the work and to regurgitating the press release information. In politically correct or simplistic responses, all the attention to the “what,” the “how” of the work got lost or overlooked. A well-known example of the problem was the classification of Maxine Hong Kingston’s first novel, “Woman Warrior” as autobiography, instead of fiction, its proper category. Kingston objected to the autobiography classification on the grounds that it undermined the author’s craft and artistry. The politics of representation in this period of managerial multiculturalism relegated the artists to a role akin to that of the “native informant” of traditional anthropology. Typically, the native informant (artist) was singled out by the anthropologist (curators, critics, art historian) from the ranks of the natives as the one with the best abilities to serve as the liaison between the natives and the anthropologist—based on qualities and characteristics such as cooperativeness, amenability and story-telling abilities. As native informants, our stories were expected to be edifying above all—to inform and raise the awareness of the willfully ignorant public about our various cultures and ethnicities. This is why marginalized artists are so much more visible in the educational department of a museum than its curatorial departments—examples of tokenism and window-dressing.

A double standard prevailed during the brief multicultural heyday: non-marginalized artists could work in any range of styles and modes and attention was not spared to analyze every stroke in a Brice Marden painting or the neon buzz of a Bruce Nauman installation. The labeling of artwork and artist as political or as ethnic or identity based seemed to blind reviewers to the other qualities of the work. It would appear that the shortsighted affliction that many white Americans suffered in which all Asians look alike, was analogous to most reviewers’ response to art work who saw only content and ethnicity in a work by an artist of color and not the distinctions of formal considerations.

Perhaps a silver lining to be found in the ensuing backlash against multiculturalism in the 90s is the perception that a greater diversity of works exists among a younger generation of artists of color and female artists who are no longer perceived to be straight-jacketed by identity politics. This popular perception perpetuated by the mainstream observers as well as those from within the multicultural ranks (viz., “Freestyle” exhibition at the Studio Museum of Harlem, dubbed “post-Black” by its curator and “One Way or Another” at the Asia Society, also considered to be of the “post-ethnicity” persuasion)<sup>2</sup> is in my view overly convenient and facile, predicated on the overemphasis and overdetermination of autobiographical content in the work by the previous generation.

The heightened emphasis on style and form in current reception of works by artists of color, a tipping of balance in favor of form and style over content, can be seen as a sign of the whitewashing or sidestepping of the socio-political critiques that are actually evident in many of these new works.<sup>3</sup> While an argument can be made that certain shifts have occurred in the 90s in terms of certain generational differences and conceptual distinctions to be had in the shift in conceptual framework from the “third world” to the “post-colonial” or from “Asian American” to “Asian diasporic” or from the “multi-cultural” to

Yong Soon Min & Allan de Souza,  
*Will \*\*\*\* for Peace/ Montreal, 2003.*



the “global,” the weaker claim is that the modes and approaches of artwork has somehow radically “opened-up.” This latter assessment masks the fact that diversity of formal concerns that was evident in art produced by artists of color was overlooked during the multicultural heyday. Much of the reception of art work from the multicultural period was essentialized and conveniently historicized in like manner. This is a rich terrain to be more closely examined, hopefully by a new generation of art historians.

Recalling again Irwin’s cup and Coke story, he purposefully separated the two for emphasis in the beginning but acknowledged by the end their inseparable relationship: form is content and vice versa. For instance, painting was considered tainted as the traditional preserve of male privilege which explains why so many early Feminist artists, myself included, gave up painting during the 70s and find themselves in an on-going search for form. Form/Content conjunction may also explain why installations became such a popular mode since the 80s, as it seems to offer the most porous and permissive form of visual language and experience. To deny the dialectic relationship between form and content does disservice to the complex operations and understanding of art works. As noted by feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, “Only very recently has Western art been distilled—or reduced—to an essence of pure form, in which any tincture of social comment is considered a taint.” Much of the work deemed to be too political and autobiographical in the 80s by artists of color embodied as much poetics, play and jouissance—the ineffable elixir of the French post-structuralists (in the sense of truth=beauty), as any today.

With content/form dyad at the forefront of my considerations, the curatorial premise of “Exquisite Crisis and Encounters” attempted to place subject matter and process on an explicit equal footing by inviting exhibition participants to consider a historical legacy by employing a Surrealist inspired game which integrates chance as a generative factor in the production of the work. This strategic attempt to explore a mechanism for mixing the known and unknown resulted in unexpected forms and perspectives such as the Bundt cake composition. Might the pairing of macramé and Bundt cake (the name that is derived from the German word ‘Bund’ which means the gathering of people) suggest the banality of populist aspirations of the middle class that are constantly thwarted and often pitted in opposition to the interests of the underclass, the inner city Blacks and Latinos as well as the Korean merchants that constituted the epicenter of the LA Riots?

Questions of meaning are then inseparable from questions of form and content: what is the relation of the work in a social context? What is its relation to audiences and ethics? Given that there are as many different audiences for art as there are many different communities within communities, how do we determine the site of struggle of an artwork without overdetermining it? How penetrating are the strategies in our artwork and where is our work sited to exert the greatest impact? How can we be strategic without being doctrinaire or overarching? How do we balance a self-reflexive awareness in the work, so that we are aware of the contingent nature of knowledge and subjectivity and don’t claim an omnipotent voice but, at the same time also embody a confidence and agency so that we embrace the possibility to affect change through our work? How do we address traumas of history and the present day without irrevocably fixing the histories and subjectivities in similarly oppressive operations? These kinds of questions defy pat responses or easy answers. Like the dangling Bundt cakes in macramé which confounds easy assimilation in considering the LA Riots, this is perhaps why art as a site of struggle is so simultaneously challenging and engaging and always, a contested territory.

1. A work by Kim Yasuda in the exhibition, “Exquisite Crisis and Encounters,” at the Asian/Pacific/American Institute gallery of New York University, New York City. For this exhibition, I invited artists to utilize the exquisite corpse process to consider the legacy and the vestiges of the Los Angeles Riots of 1992.

2. Freestyle was curated by Thelma Golden in 2001; “One Way or Another” by team consisting of Melissa Chiu, Karin Higa and Susette Min in 2006.

3. In this overheated art market epitomized by the seven art fairs all held during the same winter week in New York City, there is tremendous pressure on young artists to be apolitical or “political-light” in order to have an art career.



Making a journey in today's volatile climate can sometimes turn out to be a complicated and laborious affair especially if one insists on travelling light, unaccompanied and on a one-way-ticket. The act of carefree roaming and visually consuming one's surroundings is no longer considered as just a pleasurable pastime. Due to current world events, it is an act that is now under serious threat due to a noticeable upgrading of surveillance. In these times, possessing a clearly mapped out route or carrying excess baggage, in any form, whether it is physical, emotional, imaginary is considered a far more agreeable state of being than travelling light. Living a rhizomatic or nomadic existence, without any visible roots or route, is perceived to be far too problematic for those who regulate, monitor and enforce security on behalf of governmental bodies whose aim is to decipher, categorise and control populations. Travelling light may simplify the bureaucracy within the regulatory framework of air travel in which we frequently choose to move today but does it also challenge the status quo in these standardised formations of power, whose sole purpose is to survey and regulate?

Questions about mobility and its constraints, particularly in the domain of urban space, is readily identifiable within the work of some contemporary international practitioners concerned with feminist strategies. Citing the epic and karmic events of recent tragic history as motives for the current fraught circumstances that impede and delay journeys, artists are being forced to reassess and explore the notion of the local urban space or rather, a more accurate term, the globalised city. The globalised city suggests a city or urban space that is both a by-product of globalisation and the patriarchal power games that are performed in the West and executed in the developing world. In particular, this idea of the city has been a substantial and recognisable influence amongst artists who originate from environments of questionable stability (in terms of homeland security) and where portability, both literal and metaphoric, is highly restricted for a variety of reasons not least war, religion, and poverty resulting from aggressive forms of capitalism. In this context, the mobility of women, especially, the freedom of women to make their own journeys takes on a special role.

The artists discussed here, Afghan Lida Abdul, and Iranians, Maria Kheirkhah, Shahram Entekhabi and Shirin Neshat, all deploy these notions within their artworks. From their diverse positions as visual-cultural critics, these artists are seen to pursue often highly acclaimed journeys in their works which comment on both real and imaginary urban realities. The visual journeys that these artists carry out imply a unique approach to the poetics of immediacy within the discourse of feminist practices, both actual and assumed, principally defying stereotyped notions of mild and subdued "*feminine*" or "*feminised*" approaches concerning gender and ethnicity. In this article, the performative works of Abdul and Kheirkhah, for example, in which both artists use their own bodies to map out instances of trauma, memory and spatial navigation. Both artists are seen to perform a form of intellectual remembrance in light of their dislocation from their homeland. Abdul also responds to the after-effects of war and (male) political games in her works. Entekhabi, a male Iranian artist, refers to an entirely all female domain of three generations of Iranian women in his narrative structure which focuses on suspicion, Islam and terror. His work reverses typical power dynamics within the masculine and patriarchal structures of Islam, challenging the presumption that these are only issues affecting men. In this way, he could be seen to trouble notions of what constitutes a "*feminine*" subject and even could be said to articulate a feminist approach, perhaps possibly even both. In contrast, Neshat's re-appropriation of modern life in Islam and her visual reworking of Iranian writer Shahrnush Parsipur's novel *Women*

*Without Men* (1989) which had been banned in Iran due to its frank content, re-examines the position of women in urban Islamic structures as subjects whose actions are both revered and profane in equal quantities.

The practice of Afghan-American performance artist, Lida Abdul has largely been defined by her personal experiences, which greatly affected her own mobility. Following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the war that followed Abdul fled Kabul and as a refugee travelled from Central Asia to Europe and then to the USA, settling in Los Angeles where she has been based now for almost two decades. The disasters that have fallen upon her country—the Russian invasion, the infiltration of the Taliban regime and the American “War on Terror”—all inspired Abdul to transfer her experiences of an involuntary (forced) portability into creating highly emotional performances concerning the status of the home and “homelessness”.

In 2003, Abdul created her *Nomadic House Series*, performances recorded in photographs and video, in which she travels with a wooden toy house through various deprived urban neighbourhoods in Los Angeles. Within these performances, one sees the artist dragging the house across the pavements and roads, sometimes walking at other times running resulting in the house colliding with the corner of wall and smashing to pieces. Her actions mirror the actuality of a broken and fractured home as well as anyone’s ability to possess the concept of the home as a pocket sized portable reality. Her choice of location for these performances was an important and premeditated decision transporting her childhood home from the debris of war torn Kabul, where millions of American dollars have been spent to maintain an unjust war, to the neglected and poverty stricken innercity areas of Los Angeles largely inhabited by black and Latino Americans, the victims of another war: capitalism. The coupling together of two socially and globally disparate urban environments is a commentary on both familiar and unfamiliar territories. At the same time by placing herself within another unstable environment, she created a sense of vulnerability concerning the issue of safety as one affecting the ability of all women to perform freely within the urban space.

In 2004 Abdul returned to Kabul after almost two decades of separation to create new works that commented on the destruction of the city. Once again the concept of the home was a principle issue for the artist, but in this instance the idea of home was expanded to include the architecture of the city as a whole, particularly its devastation. By creating a more plural notion of the “home” Abdul could be said to free the space from any conception of it as a stereotypical feminine domain and instead reappropriate its meaning to reflect a more unilateral concept about the countless individuals who experience uprootedness, either real or metaphoric. In Kabul the artist produced a new series of works entitled *Painting the Ruins of Kabul* (2004) in which she was engaged in the act of painting white all visible remains of the recent “War on Terror”, ranging from abandoned army vehicles to the debris of homes, schools and mosques. The act of painting functioned as an act of sanitising the space, freeing it from the constraints of the various ideologies that imposed their power upon the city and at the same time she marked that which was left unmarked or abandoned as a form of silent witness.

This particular body of work was later expanded in 2005 for networks, like the video *White House* (2005) that Abdul created especially for the 51st Venice Biennale, where she represented Afghanistan. Abdul’s *White House* chronicles a journey through the destruction of the city left by both war and men, which can be thought of as inseparable and representative elements of power formations not only in Afghan society, but globally. The title of the piece also echoes and comments on another power house, the actual White House, where world-affecting decisions about the future and policy of developing countries such as Afghanistan are made. Within this piece, Abdul paints a Maria Kheirkhah In Love with a Red Wall (2003) colour photographs ruined house that exists at the bottom of a hill, another possible parallel with its US counterpart, situated ironically on another hill, Capitol Hill. Within the performance Abdul after finishing

painting the house diverts her attention to a lone young Afghan man, who has his back turned to the lens of the camera, and proceeds by also painting him white. This deconstructive act is not only a political commentary on the clinical aspect of wiping out, literally bleaching, or washing the city of Kabul, it is also a reversal of the celebrated actions in paint of Western modern male artists Yves Klein or Jackson Pollock. In Abdul's case, her parodic actions expose the white and masculine vernacular in modern art history, as her canvas here is the city of Kabul. By painting the body of the man, she not only reappropriates the standardised masculine practice(s) of painting but also highlights the Western or "white" world's performance of "bleaching" the Eastern realm and imposing its ideology upon the Afghan people. Therefore, it is possible that by painting the space Abdul is also seen to double the negative charge in the work and at the same time signal a potential rebirth of this physical and emotional space.

Iranian Maria Kheirkhah's highly conceptual performances also reflect upon ideas concerning home, sanctuary and space which straddle both the West and the East. Many of Kheirkhah's performance pieces are inspired by a reciprocal desire to comprehend existence as one moves from one sphere to another utilising both the public and private domain of the UK and her native Iran, opening up a two way dialogue between cultures.

In her performance *In Love With A Red Wall* (2003), recorded as photographs, Kheirkhah creates a complex scene in which both the private and public realms are seen to coincide together in an absurd and critical socio-politically context. The artist is attired in the compulsory black veil imposed after the 1979 Iranian Revolution as a mandatory uniform for women in the public sphere. However, here one can witness the paradox of such dress situated within the confines of the home or private space, where such clothing is not compulsory. Coupled with this inconsistency, as the title suggests, she is seen to be musing over a red wall within a tightly enclosed space and either occupied with the act of reading to the wall or attempting to embrace it. Whatever the action, one thing which remains undoubtedly clear is the sense of a total and non-reciprocal exchange between the artist and the red wall. Her actions suggest multiple readings about one sided and unequal relationships, but particularly how women act out relationships, which are both idealised and imaginary.

*In Love With a Red Wall* also suggests how social values are internalised by being practiced and performed within the public space in a totalitarian regime and how resistance to these can only be performed within the domestic, private space:- a condition that affects both genders and transcends religions and national borders. The wall may well masquerade as a sign of passion but it equally represents the colour of danger and as a physical object obstructs, hinders or acts as a marker which inhibits anyone from escaping the constraints of spaces marked private and/or public. Both claustrophobia and agoraphobia are referenced in the work as, the tightly enclosed red wall suggests the suffocation and restriction which might trigger the former neurosis, but, the artist's clothes and actions allude to the possibility of the latter as a possible state of mind. The implication of these two conditions can also be seen as triggered by the current climate of mass fear and paranoia generated by governmental bodies as a means of controlling the public and spreading an ideological xenophobia.

In contrast, Kheirkhah's video *Souvenir* (2003) demonstrates the sequence of a journey of memory, homeland and transplant. In this video Kheirkhah travels to the ancient city of Yazd Iran, and visits many sites on route to savour a sense of what she defines as "home". The artist walks in solitude amongst the serene landscapes of rugged mountains and deserts of the region. There is profound and complete sense of emancipation within this work, particularly a freedom from the constraints of a dense urban environment. Kheirkhah collects air in clear plastic bags, which she then seals and marks in Persian with the date and location. Interestingly, this action suggests another form of containment, albeit, quite different from that of *In Love With a Red Wall*, as this time it is

the artist who controls and marks the situation, creating these portable objects. Collecting the air serves as a metaphor for holding onto memories, the memory of this location, which she is then able to transport back to another home. The video ends back in the UK with Kheirkhah placing the bag over her mouth and inhaling the trapped air from Iran.

The difficult notion of transplanting one reality to another is also suggested by *Souvenir* as there is perhaps a fifty percent probability that a substitute can function as a real lived experience, or carry with it a sense of home. There is always already the possibility of rejection—or in this case deflation—as reality sets in. As the title aptly proposes the performance makes apparent the reality of a literal souvenir as only a temporary reminder or source of comfort. Nevertheless, Kheirkhah's video performance highlights the nuances of such a transitional object, a necessary "respiratory" system in order to survive one journey to the next.

Entekhabi, a male Iranian artist, whose practice has been defined by an interest in how Middle Eastern cultures in Western society are marked puts forward a unique perspective in his latest work on any fixed ideas concerning femininity and masculinity. The artist has previously created a body of work using his own body to enact various performances, both video and photographic, disguising himself in a variety of different migrant stereotypes ranging from exile to Islamic fundamentalist or militant figure. These performances, through their humour and irony, toy with stereotyped ideas about ethnic migrants and their perceived masculinity which parallel those of migrant women in the West as either docile or rebellious or sacred or profane. However, in recent video works, Entekhabi has been seen to divert his attention in light of the current climate to reflect upon the "feminine" domain in a post 9/11 climate and this is evident within his most recent experimental film work *Mimra* (2005).

*Mimra* features three generations of Iranian women, whose relationship and identities are never disclosed, neither is the location, which could be any Middle Eastern urban town ranging from Tel Aviv, Amman or even Cairo. The main scenes take place in three rooms of a hotel. In one room, a young girl is sleeping and is woken by an unknown phone call which causes her to run from the room. In another room, a woman is painting her nails a dark shade but the scene is cropped to show just her hands, which are contrasted by the stark white colour of the bed linen. In the third room, an elderly woman is preparing to perform her Islamic prayers placing her prayer mat and prayer beads in front of her. Each scene is dimly lit with a blue tone increasing a feeling of tension. One expects some form of confrontation. The film, however, defies any narrative structure and instead employs a non-linear technique which highlights this sense of noncompletion. The film concludes with the elderly lady walking out of the hotel with a package, past a security machine which is activated, towards a bus stop sign posted 'Mimra' where she leaves the unknown package and walks away.

*Mimra* is an overt commentary on the ideas of suspicion and terror, where the presence of terrorist insurgents is creating a state of emergency not just in the West but within the Middle East itself. In this climate everyone is a suspect, but in this realm of terror, the perpetrators are assumed to be largely men. Entekhabi reverses this notion by creating a scenario that is entirely feminine and in doing so challenges stereotypes concerning masculinity and Islam. At the same time, the film could be read as a feminist form of resistance against ideas concerning the role, limited mobility and exchange of women in patriarchal Islamic states. There is a resemblance between *Mimra* and Gillo Pontecorvo's classic film *Battle of Algiers* (1965) in which female protagonists play a crucial role in the Algerian Revolution against the French colonisers. However, Entekhabi's film is neither a set nor a definitive revolutionary account and the women do not reject their Islamic attire to perform so-called acts of resistance as they do in Pontecorvo's film. Entekhabi's portrayal is completely fictional and far more conceptual than Pontecorvo who paints a portrait that depicts an actual historical moment. Nevertheless, the fascinating aspect of Entekhabi's film is that it could also be an incident

of life imitating art as the recent bombings in the Hyatt hotel in Jordan in November 2005, carried out by supporters of al-Qaeda, were executed by a middle aged couple, one of whom was a woman who represented the least likely protagonist to carry out such atrocities. Her fate was not that of a martyred suicide bomber as the bomb failed to detonate but as the perpetrator and co-conspirator of these events, exposed in a public display on Jordanian TV. Entekhabi toys with deception and identity questions but succeeds in undermining some fixed ideas concerning femininity and Islam that are rooted in its gendered constructions.

Neshat's latest film work *Zarin* (2005) aims to present a modern perspective on femininity and the Middle East. Neshat was inspired by the Iranian novelist Parsipur, whose novel *Women Without Men*, although entirely fictional, paints a candid portrait of the lives of some tortured Iranian women. Parsipur's women go to great lengths to achieve a sense of satisfaction and emancipation in a society where women suffer from the "doubling" of patriarchy enforced by both religion and the state. Neshat's film draws on the characterisation in Parsipur's novel and *Zarin* centres on the life of a prostitute of the same name and is set in a brothel in an urban setting in Morocco, which nevertheless masquerades as an Iranian city.

*Zarin* is a departure from Neshat's usual style and subject matter, which has always kept within the boundaries of the norm and values of the society, namely Iran, which she depicted. Furthermore, Neshat's female protagonists were earlier either presented as martyrs, in her *Women of Allah* (1993-1997) photographic series or as mystical figures that borrowed from Persian poetry and fable, in for example, her *Logic of the Birds* (2002). In *Zarin* the themes of prostitution and poverty within a society of human trade are expressed much more explicitly resulting in a highly intense film.

Within *Zarin*, Neshat's use of the public space of a city as both networked and dislocated creates a virtual labyrinth for urban encounters as a space where bodies are bartered, threatened and yet still find sanctuary. The urban setting functions as an interesting network of social, economic and cultural spaces particularly in the contrasts between the narrow streets and the wide open courtyards and avenues. In particular, the brothel district and neighbouring scenes bear an uncanny resemblance to the real neighbourhood of Shahreno in Tehran Iran, which was the infamous red light district in the early 1970s famously depicted within the photographs of the late Iranian photographer and war journalist Kaveh Golestan. The brothel scenes are also framed in imitation of a colonial setting where Western dress codes and photographs of American/Hollywood idols such as Elvis Presley decorate the walls of the interior spaces. In particular, the colonial atmosphere sets the tone for this life under siege and full of false pretences from the very start of the film, highlighting Neshat's obvious intentions to tease out ideas concerning Morocco's real colonial past under French rule. It is within the space of the brothel, that *Zarin* who at first appears immune to her surroundings actively decides to reject her involuntary complacency as she starts to perceive only distortion within her male clients' faces. This recognition forms the catalyst to *Zarin*'s subsequent journey from the public space of trade to the private spaces of interior homes, courtyards and finally to the public bath where she furiously and violently performs cleansing rituals in order to free herself. At every public junction she sees a man's face deformed and is unable to distinguish between her previous clients and complete strangers.

Neshat's journey of emancipation for her protagonist demands that her audiences enter the painful and disturbing journey into *Zarin*'s body and psyche. In turn, this journey further reads as a metaphor for the raw and exploited psyche of the city body, which like *Zarin* is represented as equally tortured. Consequently, the film examines a particular discourse about feminine strategies of resistance against patriarchal power in light of spiritual awakening, which is seen to be a re-appropriation of ideas concerning religious oppressiveness hinted at in Neshat's previous works. In *Zarin*, Neshat successfully makes the personal highly political and makes a feminist statement by link-

ing the body of a woman to the public domain of the city and the representation of both on the cinematic screen. The themes that she portrays are still taboo in the Middle East and although entirely based on fiction they do possess some strong resemblances with reality.

In the work of these four artists, the representation of reality and perception of different realities are based on the possibilities and impossibilities of social, psychological and economic mobility for women that are partly fiction and part fact. These artists examine the themes of roaming and questions related to the construction of femininity and a feminist politics in representation which address the geographic struggles affecting the region but provide alternative journeys towards different forms of emancipation.

## Kasibulan and the Parallels Between the Personal and the Collective

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IMELDA CAJIPE-ENDAYA

A harassed woman, her patriarch-husband cold and unfeeling, a bored dog – this terracotta tableaux called *Philippine Gothic* Julie Lluch was modeling was a narrative of the gender politics then informing her life. *Bintana ni Ninay*, a woman peering by a sawali window, wind blowing grandmother's torn laces, mother's old crochet, and my curtains, was a reflection of my own isolation as a woman and those before me who had struggled for self-transformation. Mystical albeit sensuous intertwining of foliage and a woman's torso functioned as Anna Fer's visual diary as she confronted her feeling of aloneness amidst caring for home and children. The *baraha* or tarot was Brenda Fajardo's way of ordering her views of woman's role in society, revolution, and history, as she went about her tasks as a teacher. Ida Bugayong was tooling and stitching hide, canvas, and ethnic weaves onto bags, shoes, and belts, even as she questioned her role as artist and provider for a dozen craft workers in her *Garahe* (garage) shop.

Civil society refers to the social framework of everyday life. State ideally refers to a disinterested and humane political framework that regulates and provides direction to human affairs. Isolation, rooted in woman's reproductive biology and social mandate of care-giving—whether in nursing our offspring as in the cases of Julie, Anna, and myself, or in caring for dying parents as in the cases of Ida and Brenda—is our circumstance. In our own art, we are steeped in the situation of woman as a subjugated being apropos husband or father.

Yet fired up by the myth of nation and vision of identity and liberation, our matter-of-fact experiences and day-to-day struggles thrust the course of self-knowledge as pre-requisite to becoming initiators in the historical process. The state's neutral and selfless position ruling over human affairs is a delusion, as the state itself is very much a result of conflicts of social life, not mediating but imposing domination of one class over the rest of society, or of one political power over another, or of male over female. The post-Marcos era witnessed the rise of many forms of popular initiatives then called cause-oriented groups, challenging the supremacy not only of the state but also of political parties.

Recognizing the inequities and insufficiency of both state and most organizations in addressing the woman question, we came together as *Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan* (Women in Art and Emerging Consciousness) or *Kasibulan*, a collective commitment to art practice and exchange that would contribute to our own transformation as women, as Filipinos, and as artists. We lined up our goals: to

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## Filipina: Migranteng Manggagawa

**KASIBULAN**  
*Laban sa Sinigang Bayang Sibol na Kamalayan*



provide members with opportunities for creativity, growth, and self-sufficiency; to promote women's arts and crafts; to expand the social, economic, political, and cultural consciousness of women artists and Filipino women in general through the arts; to consciously work for the development of distinct women's expressions in language, symbols, imagery, values, and beliefs; to nurture and sustain sisterhood among its members; and to link its members with the larger community of artists and women's groups here and abroad.

In my work, I was often criticized for being "straight in your face," especially when my works point out root causes existing within the social and political structure. In *Kasibulan's* first five years, we emphasized projects in partnership with NGOs that criticized the conditions in women's work, health,

and overseas labor migration. In its seventh year, members objected that *Kasibulan* was much too outward-looking, leaving behind the inner development of its individual members. We were told that socio-political orientation was becoming a dictate of a few leaders rather than an initiative of its larger membership. What right or effectiveness could middle-class women artists speak for what she was not—DH, Japayuki, or Japina (Domestic Helper, Filipina entertainer in Japan, children of Japanese and Filipina entertainers in Japan)?

Were we confusing art with social work? Did we actually help solve problems of those we purported to benefit with our outreach? Baidy Mendoza (founding member and past president) disagreed about focusing on negativity. She asked, "In so doing, were we not encouraging victimization rather than achieving self-redemption?" Flaudette May Datuin, referring to my work *Hulagpos* cautioned that *Inang Bayan* (Mother Country), so popularly used by male and female artists of the anti-Marcos nationalist movement, was entrapping woman in myth and traditional mold. Yes, the woman in feudal bondage should imaginatively free herself, use fresh modes of resistance, and play more productive roles.

Baidy, Lia Tayag, Myrna Arceo, Charito Bitanga, Cecil de Leon, all avid terracotta practitioners, willed *Kasibulan's* departure from its critical stance and high-profile advocacy. Their concern was to steer a direction of joy and celebration in women's art. Soon most every one of us was fashioning sculpture, jewelry, cups, dishes, and mobiles from clay. Anonymous and childlike verve pervaded its ventures in *luad* (clay) and papier mache. Soon the Princesa Urduja, Maria Makiling, Marcela Marcelo, Marcela Agoncillo, heroines of legend and revelation took shape as charming dolls that injected fun and familiarity into the national centennial celebrations.

Like these moves, the *Bai Art in Craft* exhibit in 2000 was a step toward the interchangeable function of art and craft, as these both meant technical skill, spontaneity, play, consciousness of design, and practical use. Baidy underscores craft's role in shaping us to become true artists instead of art celebrities.

Contradictions will continue to battle within an artist's inner being. Art is my life, my vocation, my meditation, my profession, and my social service. The burdens of such aesthetic attitude become bearable as I take great pleasure in sensually delighting

over the sights, color, and texture of everyday things, magnifying simple situations, even moments of domestic drudgery into imagined social history. Fetish for experimental, accidental nuances waiting for a “voila” is a reality for any true artist of whatever persuasion. Often, work that spontaneously springs from the subconscious, as one’s spirituality blooms in isolation, is the most successful. My craft is my meditation—a process of centering myself and clarifying the disorder in and around me.

The upside of depicting victimization and root causes is in its provoking a sense of urgency to solve issues. Its downside is that these could be viewed with acquiescence and resignation. My criticism has evolved, as I realize we must celebrate rather than flagellate.

The upside of depicting joy and celebration is that these affirm positive qualities. Its downside is that it could become escapist and illusory. The upside of isolation is that it helps an artist focus and deepen her craft and outlook. Its downside is that one could lose context and dialogue with audience. Thus we see the need to balance one with

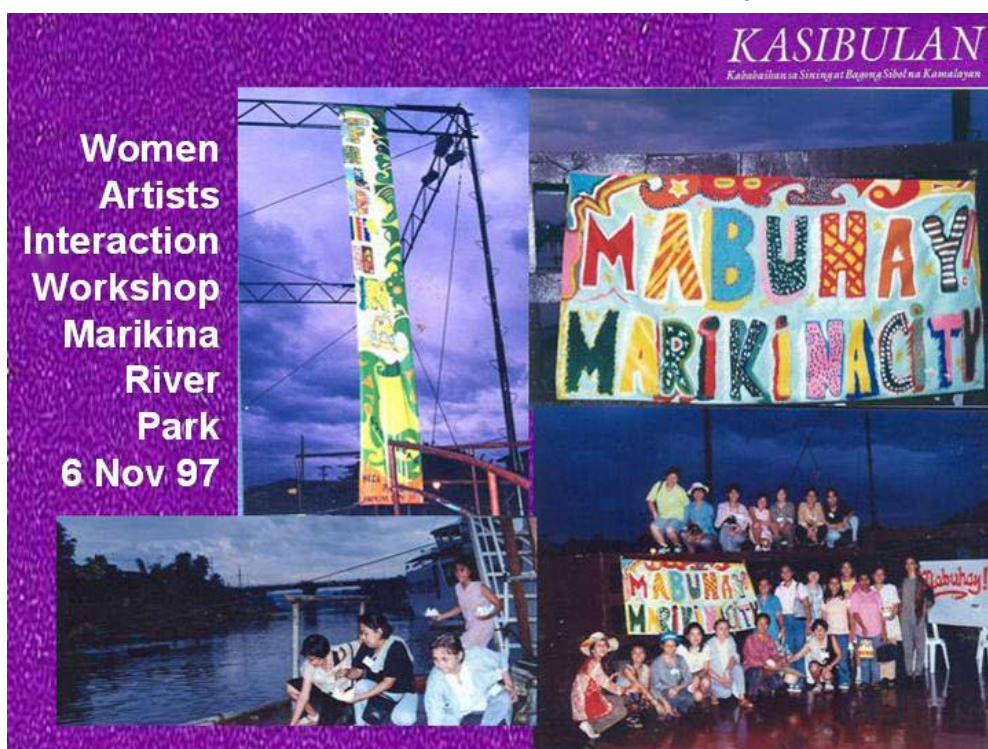
the other.

In her aloneness, Paz Abad Santos deliriously stitches and knots abaca fibers onto burlap with coconut shells, seeds, and painting. To break her seclusion, she welcomed *Kasibulan* to nest in her home. Her hand-fashioned roof garden of vines, ponds, and hammocks was the monthly setting for us to recreate ourselves and strengthen our ties. Soon, anecdotes, great fun, and laughter substituted the serious fora and artists’ talks we used to have. I thought *Kasibulan* was fast becoming an amity sorority. Though looking back today, Lia defends this period as an effective medicine to *Kasibulan*’s organizational woes. Once Brenda and I chuckled that the group was turning into a “sewing circle.”

In no time, we awakened to the fact that we found ourselves stitching, embroidering, and patching images of ourselves and mementoes of our lives onto rags, shawls, dusters, curtains, and sheets into the collective exhibit *Tahi-Tagning Talambuhay* of 1997. Like the *kambay* cloth of the *babaylan* (the ancient priestess), Fe Mangahas likened our piecing together of tapestries to empowering acts of undoing patriarchal myths.

In no time, Paz and Alma Quinto were literally establishing a trend of stitching and sewing art with Marge, Maria, Aster, Tala, Tita, and the rest. Many remain reluctant about accepting an ideological feminist structure. Yet developing distinct women’s expressions in language, symbols, and imagery within the context of rediscovering indigenous spiritual values proved to be a unifying vision. The confluence of clay, fiber, and textile was inevitable.

Pottery as a function of women’s nourishing role and weaving as a function of her duty to clothe and protect her family have made clay and textile the domain of women, being in their private spaces, while men’s physical prowess hurled them to the public sphere of economic and political conquest. Even if in truth, many women today do half or most of a family’s earning, the woman continues to carry the double



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Artists  
Interaction  
Workshop  
Marikina  
River  
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burden of prioritizing her home-keeping role, thus is the shaping of her worldview and her art, says Thelma Kintanar.<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin's thought that "man's power is active, progressive, defensive, speculative; Woman's intellect is not for invention or creation, but sweet ordering and praise" has long been rejected. And the special characterization of women's art being biologically determined or as an extension of her domesticity has been dismissed as western, 19th century, and bourgeois.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the artists of *Kasibulan*, unaffected by such articulations, seize materials and images of their own confinement only to use them critically and creatively to their advantage.

Alma Quinto reclaims the bed from male hegemony as she sews the babaylan's mattress. According to her, "Ang aking likhang sining ay tungkol sa pagsanib ng itinuturing na hiwalay—ang katawan at kaluluwa—at binigyan ko ito ng bagong kahulugan ayon sa aking karanasan bilang babae." (My art work is about the unity, instead of separateness of the soul and the body, and I gave this unity new meaning through women's experience).

Nadi Xavier, on painting about the clutter of clothes and sheets in her house, says: "Ang mga karanasan sa buhay ng babae ay para bang mga damit na nagkasabitsabit, nagkabuhul-buhol at nagkadikit-dikit. Habang pinagpipilitan niyang makaluwag sa pagkakabuhol ay lalo naman siyang napapahigpit sa pagkatali. Napapalala ito ng kanyang hangaring makawala at maging malaya." (A woman's life is like tangled pieces of cloth. The harder one tugs and pulls to undo the tangles, the more they become more tightly knotted, tangled, melded together. The tugging and pulling only serves to intensify the desire to break free).

Rhoda Recto, who intensively worked and researched on indigo dyes on textiles, adds: "Ang paghanda ng tela para sa pagkulang ay gaya ng paghihirap ng isang tao. Ang paghanda ng pangkulang na 'nila' ay parang paraan ng pagpapalinis-sarili. Habang ipinakukulo ito ay patuloy na inihahalo at mas mamamasdan ang pag-ikot ng alimpuyo." (When we go through trials and self-cleansing, it is like going through the trials that cloth undergoes in a spiraling whirlpool of dyeing and boiling.)

"Alimpuyo", the spiral, is *Kasibulan's* force, spirit, and symbol. It is about the cycle of birthing and dying, about stirring the soup in the pot, turning the threads at loom's edge, about swirling magentas with white and blue to make a lavender, whisking the white with the yolk, the moon appearing and disappearing from sight, of the planet revolving on its axis around the sun. *Kasibulan* as an organization is also a spiral, working in circles and clusters instead of hierarchies. It is a continuing *pagsibol* (emergence).

Outsiders comment that after 13 years, *Kasibulan* has gained mileage and popularity, yet no one remembers a singularly strong collective art piece. Perhaps they are waiting for a dominant visual style that would make public impact. But the impact of *Kasibulan* is precisely in its being a non-exclusive organization open to all women in art across disciplines who are willing to work for its vision and goals. Women painting flowers, still life, the feminine, graceful, delicate and decorative, and doing printmaking—these images and crafts which correspond so well to the role of abnegation and devotion—are accepted as members. The danger of retrogressing into women's stereotyped values and of her art sliding back into new versions of cute parlor paintings is real. Yet the true feminists among us constantly and patiently keep us awake in gender consciousness-raising.

How has *Kasibulan* fared in providing its members with opportunities for creativity, growth, and self sufficiency? It has provided wide opportunities of sisterhood support and exposure, yes. But on the level of aesthetic, the organization can be more determinate in self-critiquing in order to deepen its discourse on women's art practice. Jurying, curating, and excellence remain to be such feared words among us, as though these ideas are antithesis of women empowerment and democracy. Inheriting Antonio Gramsci's Rx—that class, in our case, gender, should develop its own "organic intellectuals"—indeed women artists should synthesize their own actual experiences as women



and those of their fellow women in order to formulate ways of truly attaining their aspirations.

As Sandra Torrijos passed the torch to Edda Amonoy, Lorna Israel appraised the organization of learning to value and quantify Kasibulan's work in terms of the time, resources, and money that individual members voluntarily put in. While we have come together for empowerment, such omission backfires on us as the woman/mother/housewife's unrecognized and unpaid labor. Kasibulan's roster of members is an inventory of talent and resources and it could very well develop a professional group to further empower its individual members and the organization in economic and social spheres. The collective, like the person, is body and soul in one. Side by side, teen or 70, single, married, separated, grandmother, mother, daughter, sister, straight, or lesbian, we link hands for acceptance and equality. Kasibulan's meaning and impact have been in the emergence and visibility of more and more women artists and their work. Across diversity of outlook, approaches, and chosen media, Kasibulan artists work to express the transforming and transformative worldview of Filipino women in the spirit of openness, freedom, and solidarity to attain their fullest human potential. The dynamic pursuit of feminist values and experimentation in feminist (or femaleist? womanist?) art is a continuing challenge.

Endotes:

1. Kintanar, Thelma & Ventura, Sylvia M. (1999). *Self Portraits: Twelve Filipina Artists Speak*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
2. Parker, Roszika and Pollock, Griselda. (1981). *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.; Pantheon Books.

## Birthing Women Artists: Norma Liongoren and the Walong Filipina Exhibition

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LISA ITO

For 17 years, the annual *Walong Filipina* (Eight Filipinas) exhibition of the Liongoren Gallery has collectively shown the works of close to a hundred women artists from the Philippines. Exhibiting the works of eight selected artists annually throughout different venues, the show pays "tribute to the creative contributions of women, who often have to juggle the multiple roles of wife, mother, and artist."<sup>1</sup>

Norma Liongoren, gallery owner and curator, asserts that the *Walong Filipina* show has literally and figuratively gone a long way since it was first held in March 1990 at the Cubao-based art space, a two-storey residential structure converted into a gallery.

"At the time, it was unheard of [in the Philippines].<sup>2</sup> Now there are more women artists. In a way, *inaabangan ito ng mga tao* (people look forward to it)," she says of the curatorial gamble. Nearly two decades later, the annual *Walong Filipina* exhibitions continue to gain acceptance in its attempts to reflect, interrogate, and recreate social realities from the perspective of Philippine women artists.

### Periods of feminist interventions

*Walong Filipina* can arguably trace its ideological roots from the socio-political turmoil of the Martial Law and post-EDSA Philippines, which was characterized by the upsurge of women's organized and communal interventions in society. The early years of this era saw the births of collective feminist formations, such as *Makibaka* (organized in 1972) and Gabriela, the largest umbrella organization of Filipino women's groups in 1984. The 1980s to 1990s were marked by more interventions in the spheres of cultural politics, such as the founding of Women Writers in Media Now, Concerned Artists of the Philippines Womens Desk, and the women artists group *Kasibulan* (Kababaihan sa Sining at Bagong Sibol na Kamalayan). The contextual conditions of the times led to more women going out, getting involved, and getting together, whether in politics, media, or the arts.

The direct precursor of the *Walong Filipina* was a five-woman exhibition sponsored by the Liongoren Gallery shortly after the EDSA 1 popular uprising.<sup>3</sup> By that time, Liongoren Gallery was operating in its 5th year as a commercial and artistic space. Sculptor Julie Lluch came up with the idea of holding an all-woman exhibit, prompting Liongoren to put up a show in March 1986.

This exhibit featured works from who Liongoren considered as “women artists of the hour”: Lluch, the late Philippine Association of Printmakers founder Adiel Arevalo, book designer Edwina Koch-Arroyo, printmaker-ceramic artist Nelfa Querubin and sculptor-painter Virginia Ty-Navarro.

The show was a milestone of sorts for the gallery, as all-women exhibitions were generally unheard of in Manila during this period, Liongoren says in retrospect. There was only a sprinkling of active women artists in a predominantly-male art scene, in spite of the fact that it was women who initiated the founding and setting up of institutions recognized as pivotal to the emergence and development of Philippine modern and contemporary art: Lyd Arguilla of the Philippine Art Gallery, Purita Kalaw Ledesma of the Art Association of the Philippines, and even former First Lady Imelda Marcos who “[endowed] ‘culture and the arts’ with both capital and infrastructure.”<sup>4</sup>

Before, male artists were used to having women as organizers [of art events], but seemed not as open once the latter’s qualities as artists were emphasized, Liongoren opines. Such shows, she added, initially caused others to raise their brows in skepticism but eventually became more accepted in time. The idea and practice of an all-women show persisted.

The Liongoren Gallery’s *Walong Filipina* exhibition officially began in 1990, a few years after *Kasibulan* was organized by Imelda Cajipe-Endaya and others. For this debut show, Liongoren gathered eight women artists: Ida Bugayong, Cajipe-Endaya, Brenda Fajardo, Lydia Ingle, Veronica Lim-Yuyitung, Lluch, Nelfa Querubin and Arlene Villaver. The gallery, not surprisingly, was also a venue for some of *Kasibulan*’s meetings later on, Liongoren recalls.

The title *Walong Filipina* was arrived at out of sheer coincidence and symbolic significance. “Why eight (8)? While I was listing down all the artists I wanted to feature, I stopped at the number 8. Later on, I rationalized [the choice] by noting that the number 8 has a closed form, forming an infinite loop. I wanted to emphasize that women were infinitely endowed with talent,” Liongoren says.

This time, the public proved to be more receptive to the concept. “I tried to hold a *Walong Filipina* show every year after that. I’d feature a senior artist and a young woman artist, or *bunso* (literally translated from Tagalog as youngest child) who is new in the art scene,” she says. Villaver was the 1990 show’s *bunso*.

Liongoren realized the potentials and the power of the show, and decided to pursue it as an annual art event. “Artists are encouraged by the mere fact that you highlight their characters as women. They try to put their best foot forward,” she says.

### **Celebrating Diversities and Affinities**

*Walong Filipina* has held 15 shows to date since that first exhibit back in 1990. The gallery has generally sustained the annual all-women’s show, except for a brief respite from 1996 to 1997 when the series was suspended for operational reasons<sup>5</sup> and 2002, when Liongoren was preoccupied with organizing a separate art exhibit commemorating the EDSA 1 popular revolt.<sup>6</sup>

Since its debut in 1990, *Walong Filipina* has taken on an organic and dynamic character of its own, a state of flux and exploration. From its first show at the Liongoren Gallery along New York St. in Cubao, *Walong Filipina* has sojourned through various other locations throughout the Philippines as a travelling exhibition: ranging from commercial to academic spaces, from government to Catholic Church offices, galleries and

museums.<sup>7</sup> Liongoren Gallery also operated a second branch at the commercial shopping center Megamall from October 1992 to 1996, adding to the list of venues. At times, the exhibit would be staged as simultaneous shows, or held in tandem with workshops or discussions.

Equally varied were the artistic media encompassed by the shows. Saying that she does not want art to “be pegged to the usual paintings,” Liongoren has consciously attempted to display the diversity of media, modes and materials that Filipina artists have worked with. At the start, the exhibitions featured mostly traditional paintings and sculptures, but quickly widened its range to include non-traditional media such as installation and performance art, fiber art, clay art, advertising and graphic design, craft, cuisine, fashion, dance, music, theater, film, poetry, literature,<sup>8</sup> and even ceramics, miniatures and floral arrangements.

Rather than feature a single artists’ group or a pre-defined *barkada* (clique, coterie or group of friends, when loosely translated from Tagalog), Walong Filipina generally assembles a loose set of individual women artists converging through incidental or defined thematic affinities, which are defined in the subtitles given to each Walong Filipina show. The women in Walong Filipina are conceptually-unified through commonly-shared territories, identities and roles, or advocacies.

At least two *Walong Filipina* shows have grouped artists on the basis of shared geographies: *Mga Anak ni Urduja* (Urduja’s Children, 1999), a travelling exhibit featuring women artists who trace their roots to Pangasinan province,<sup>9</sup> and *Parangal Kay Tandang Sora* (Tribute to Tandang Sora, 2003), featuring works by Filipina artists who have lived, grown up, settled, or are based in Quezon City.<sup>10</sup> Although the concept may have first originated from a curatorial assertion of regional affiliation (Liongoren hails from Dagupan, Pangasinan and is commercially based in Quezon City), the shows have been reframed as a tribute to the two heroines of Philippine pre-colonial mythology and historical armed resistance to Spanish colonization, respectively.

However, shared geographies among women artists may not always be literal. In *Parangal Kay Tandang Sora*, the common location (Quezon City) is merely a transit point for women artists of vastly-differentiated interests and leanings. These may also pertain to shared arenas of interest or inclinations, such as the time when Liongoren chose to feature visual and written works by writer-artists, during the first Walong Filipina show held at Megamall (a major shopping center along EDSA) in 1993.<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, other *Walong Filipina* shows chose to celebrate professional diversity: the 2006 selection, for instance, featured a selection of visual artists who were practitioners from various fields: dance, music, advertising, photography and film.<sup>12</sup> Curatorial selection of participating artists is mostly done by Liongoren, in consultation with other women artists. As the shows went on, Liongoren occasionally “recycled” several artists, although always in the context of a new exhibiting group. Another unintentional aspect of the Walong Filipina series was its featuring of mother and daughter artists, albeit in separate shows: Julie Lluch and Krista, Aba and Sari Lluch-Dalena, Cristina and Maria Taniguchi, for instance.



Participating artists in *Walong Filipina* 2001: *Sa Ngalan ng Kalikasan II* are mostly Kasibulan members.



## Thematics and transits

Many of *Walong Filipina's* offerings and themes have been premised on shared advocacies and conceptual interrogations: patriotism and nationalism in contemporary practice, ecological and environmental struggles, questions of authorship and gender, and the delineation of personal and collective identities, for instance.

The ecological thematic was first explored in the sixth *Walong Filipina* show in 1995, which featured applications of clay and fiber art by women artists, who created works from volcanic ash, pina cloth, twigs, earthenware, *tinalak* (tie-dyed textiles) and other indigenous materials. A few years earlier in 1991, Mt. Pinatubo in Central Luzon erupted, leaving in its wake a massive amount of debris that people from various professions have sought to utilize as an alternative material, *Walong Filipina's* artists included.

The use of native materials and concern for the environment has been a recurrent theme of many *Walong Filipina* shows afterwards, particularly in the 2000, and 2001 exhibitions. This may be partially attributed to society's responses to increasing environmental issues and to the strategic timing of the exhibitions: March 8 (International Women's Day) and Women's Month comes right before April 22, when Earth Day is observed worldwide and in the Philippines by environmental groups.

A more direct articulation of environmental awareness and advocacy was evident in the 2000 and 2001 shows, entitled *Sa Ngalan ng Kalikasan I at II* (In the Name of Nature I and II), respectively. The first exhibit revolved around the philosophical theme of nature as a site of rebirth, regeneration and destruction. The second show, composed mostly of *Kasibulan* members, revolved around the theme of nature and nurturing. Incidentally, many natural disasters and tragedies occurred during this period when *Walong Filipina* chose to take on the environment as a priority cause: the Payatas landfill landslide tragedy in 1999, landslides and flash floods due to strong rains, and the furor over the Visiting Forces Agreement and toxic wastes left in US naval bases in Subic and Clark.

Back-to-back exhibition featuring Imelda Cajipe Endaya's conversational collage with Juan Luna and responses by Agnes Arellano, Ida Bugayong, Araceli Dans, Brenda Fajardo, Anna Fer, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Julie Lluch and Alma Quinto.



1. Exhibition notes, *Walong Filipina* 1995.

2. Post-EDSA refers to the highway, Epifanio delos Santos Avenue, where a series of “people power” mass actions took place. EDSA 1, which toppled the Marcos dictatorship took place on February 1986, after the then homecoming Senator Benigno Aquino was assassinated on the Manila International Airport tarmac; EDSA 2 took place in January 2000, and led to the overthrow of then President Joseph Estrada, who is currently on trial for his alleged unexplained wealth and other anomalies.

3. Defeo, Ruben. “Art Conversation in Exhibit.” *Philippine Star*, 11 April 2005.

4. Flores, Patrick. “Birthing Women Artists.” *Sulyap*.

5. Closure of the Liongoren Gallery’s branch in SM Megamall, Ortigas Complex, Mandaluyong City

6. *Reimagining People Power II* commemorating the second decade of Piglas exhibition staged in 1986. Both were held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

7. These locations included the Manila Pavilion along U.N. Avenue, Manila (1994), GSIS Museo ng Sining, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City and the Australian Center, Pasong Tamo (1998), the Chancery of the Archdiocese of Lingayen in Dagupan City (1999), the Quezon City Hall (2003), Pasig City Museum and Corridor Gallery of the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Fine Arts (2004), Gateway Mall in Cubao (2005), and Galerie Y (2006) at SM Megamall in Mandaluyong City.

8. Defeo.

9. Painter Remy Boquiren, book and product designer Ida Bugayong, art photographer Tita Lim, painter and product designer Wendy Maramba, clay artist and art teacher Baidy Mendoza, installation artist and art teacher Alma Quinto, folk artist Cora Tomas, and broadcast media personality Luchi Cruz-Valdez

10. Sculptress and film-maker Krista Gabriela Dalena, painter Anna Mari Goy, installation artist, writer, and cartoonist Lyra Garcellano, painter Jemina Reyes, multi-media artist Sandra Torrijos, painter and art teacher Arlene Villaver, miniaturist Aleli Vengua, and painter Chit Navarro-Hontiveros

11. Poet Tita Lacambra-Ayala, Mindanao-based writer Joan Edades, anthropological researcher Anna Fer, fictionist and editor Chit Balmaceda-Gutierrez, Mindanao-based poet Lydia Ingle, art critic and author Jeannie Javelosa, Lulie Lluich (also a scriptwriter), and the late Maningning Miclat.

Another thematic arena explored by *Walong Filipina* was the process of imagining self and nation. The 2004 travelling exhibit with the subtitle *Ang Paglalahad ng Walong Filipina* (Revelations by Eight Filipinas), showcased two works from each of the eight featured artists,<sup>13</sup> representing who they were and what they wanted to be. The show, writes art critic Alice Guillermo, “[hints] at revelatory self-referential narratives” and “a reckoning with what constitutes one’s deepest self or how one defines oneself as a woman and as a human being.”<sup>14</sup>

But the artists of *Walong Filipina* were not always women, exclusively. In 1998, the year of the Centennial of the 1898 Philippine Revolution, the gallery commissioned eight male artists to pay tribute to eight Filipina revolutionaries<sup>15</sup> during the period of dissent against Spanish colonial rule. The eight participating Filipino artists were allowed to choose and portray from the book *Women in the Philippine Revolution* (edited by Rafaelita Hilario Soriano) eight *Katipuneras* (women members of the Katipunan, the lead revolutionary organization founded and led by Andres Bonifacio) who would represent the first eight provinces that revolted against the Spanish rule over the Philippine islands.

Liongoren Gallery also celebrated the Centennial of the Philippine Feminist Movement in 2005 through a back-to-back solo exhibition of Imelda Cajipe-Endaya’s works entitled *Conversations on Juan Luna and the Walong Filipina* exhibit. Norma Liongoren infused a collaborative element to the two exhibitions by framing the *Walong Filipina* show as a response to or “conversation” with Cajipe-Endaya’s collages, which were composed of old silk-screened images of Juan Luna’s *Spolarium* representing each of the eight featured artists<sup>16</sup> in turn. This process of reaction, appropriation and dialogue unifies the lives and works of the nine women artists, threading them together and subverting traditional notions of authorship.

For this year, the *Walong Filipina* 2007 show straddles traditional dividing distinctions between classes and crafts, by including in one exhibition the works of women artists and artisans alike. Subtitled *Daragang Magayon* (‘Beautiful Maiden,’ in the Bicol<sup>17</sup> dialect), the exhibit features works from Bicol-based women artists: three “fine arts” artists—Lina Llaguno Ciani, Tosha Albor and Raquel Almonte and four crafts-women: handloom weavers Socorro Napa and Benita Tucay and craftswomen and typhoon *Reming* (International codename: Durian) survivors Mercoria Basas, Eustaquia Barce and Marissa Mendoza.

Also interesting is Liongoren’s appropriation of the term *bunso*, to signify the “new” or “youngest” artist of each batch. *Bunso* as a local term of endearment does not exclusively refer to familial or blood relations but connotes informal cultural and social formations as well. The term’s usage implies the creation of a community: not a competitive and strictly hierarchical one, but a cooperative and communal gathering of sisters.

Lastly, most of the shows function as tributes to historical figures or individual women artists, such as the 2005 show, which paid homage to Paz Paterno, the first Filipina painter to be given historical recognition and to the late contemporary artist Pacita Abad, known for her tapestries. The 1993 show was dedicated to the late Dolores Feria, who was Liongoren’s professor in Western Thought (as the subject was then called) at the University of the Philippines. Liongoren later on found out that Feria painted in addition to writing and teaching. In at least one case, *Walong Filipina* is dedicated to women as a whole sector: *Sa Ngalan ng Kalikasan II*, was a tribute to all women who collectively engaged in the EDSA 2 popular uprising, which overthrew the administration of Joseph Estrada, now on trial for alleged anomalies, including unexplained wealth resulting from illegal gambling (*jueteng*) kickbacks. This year’s *Walong Filipina* is a tribute to the survivors of Typhoon Reming, where part of the show’s proceeds will go to a fund for art-based rehabilitation work led by the House of Comfort Art Network, Inc. (ARTHOC).

12. Singer-songwriter and painter Cynthia Alexander, dancer, writer and painter Ligaya Amilbangsa, theater director and installation artist Isabel Aquilizan, graphic designer and multimedia artist Hannah Liongoren, photographer and Silver Lens creative director Isa Lorenzo, art teacher and gallery owner Lea Padilla, researcher and documentary photographer Ma. Cristina Saulo, and gallery owner and painter Rollie Yusi. For details of this exhibition, please see Lisa Ito's essay, Ctrl+P issue 1: [www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp/issue1.pdf](http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp/issue1.pdf)

13. Printmaker and art educator Ambie Abano, installation artist and Kasibulan President Edda Amonoy, art writer Lisa Ito, painter and poet Gigi Javier-Alfonso, gallery coordinator and visual artist Kitty Taniguchi, sculptor Portia Mercado, painter and professor Yasmin Almonte, and gallery curator Dinggot Conde-Prieto

14. Guillermo, Alice. "8 Filipinas: Narratives of Self," *Today*, April 11 2004.

15. Jose Tence Ruiz (representing Praxedes Fajardo from Pampanga), Jeho Bitancor (for Agueda Kahabagan from Laguna), Pablo Baens Santos (for Gregoria de Jesus representing Manila), Norman Dreco (for Salome Siaopoco from Nueva Ecija), Emmanuel Garibay for (Segunda Fuentes from Rizal), Dansoy Coquilla (for Lorenza Agoncillo from Batangas), Lazaro Soriano (for Trinidad Tecson from Bulacan), and Leonilo Doloricon (for Gregorio Montoya in Cavite).

16. Agnes Arellano, Ida Bugayong, Araceli Dans, Brenda Fajardo, Anna Fer, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Julie Lluch, and Alma Quinto

17. A peninsular region in Southern Luzon, forming one of the Philippines' 16 provinces.

18. The third super-typhoon to hit the Philippines in 2006, leaving hundreds of casualties in its wake in the Bicol region.

19. For instance, Liongoren, who is a founding member of the NGO, House of Comfort Art Network or ARTHOC, is currently part of a trio of women who are collaborating on the *Malaya Ka Ba?* (Are you Free) Quilt and House of Comfort - works in progress, which are taking her and other ARTHOC founders, Alma Quinto and Flaudette May V. Datuin to several communities all over the Philippines, particularly survivors of traumatic experiences related to human rights violations and disasters, among others. For more information, please log on to [www.trauma-interrupted.org/arthoc](http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/arthoc).

This practice of parangal or paying tribute also sets the *Walong Filipina* exhibits apart from other shows, as it indicates a continuity of purpose: the word connotes both gratitude and a bestowment of honor towards the subject, and, more importantly, allegiance to a shared cause.

### A 'Midwife of Ideas'

The story of *Walong Filipina*, moreover, is a testimony to Norma Liongoren's unique though low-profile sojourn as a self-taught curator. In the Philippines, the role of curator remains a largely loose one which is often shared by artists, critics, writers, teachers, and even gallery owners out of contingency.

Liongoren's story of how she came to be is best appreciated in the context of the informal character of curatorship in the Philippine setting and in relation to her other gendered roles. As curator of the *Walong Filipina* show, Liongoren engages in a multitude of tasks: conceptualizing, mobilizing and motivating, contacting the artists, meeting deadlines, scouting for venues, negotiating, socializing, inviting, entertaining guests, communicating, educating, networking, promoting, delegating tasks, cooking, overseeing administrative work, supervising the set-up, even finding appropriate clothes and standing in for absent artists during photo shoots. In between these, she attends to her other duties as gallery proprietor, art dealer, wife, and mother.

"I'm an organizer, people-oriented by nature. Along the way, there are people who gravitate towards you," she says, "I get involved in their lives. I try to get them all together in a meeting, try to mobilize them, get them to contribute. They get excited." This degree of influence enables her to engage in a dialogue with others, to be a "midwife of ideas" as Liongoren terms it.

Thirty years ago, being a "midwife of ideas" was the farthest thing that Liongoren, a trained-but-no-longer practicing nurse and field worker immersed in population research, had in mind. Events, however, steered her towards the visual arts, leading her to engage in it full-time. Liongoren founded the gallery in March 1981 after marrying the renowned abstractionist Alfredo Liongoren. Her foray into art dealership, she says, was an unexpected consequence of being a painter's wife, as she would often deliver her husband's works to clients and would be asked by his fellow painters if she could bring their works along. Although Liongoren nursed a fervent interest in the arts "as a spectator", it was her family and professional background (business, medical services, and work with non-government organizations) which unwittingly prepared her for the tasks of selling works of art.

Liongoren eventually took on the role of curating most of the gallery's exhibitions, conceptualizing her own shows in the process, the longest-running of which are the *Walong Filipina* exhibitions. "[The shows] go with my current involvements. It's me. It emanates from my advocacies and concerns,"<sup>19</sup> she says. This is perhaps the reason why *Walong Filipina's* themes are reflective of personal passions and advocacies which Liongoren has carefully cultivated through the years: feminism and gender studies, patriotism, social justice, and environmental struggles.

She, however, remains self-effacing when it comes to her role and process as a curator. "I'm not a trained curator, I just learn along the way," she says, describing her process as *oido* (Spanish for "by the ear," as in having an ear for music, or moving as one goes along) and going by instinct.

But what accurate instinct it is. Whether Liongoren eventually acknowledges it or not, *Walong Filipina* has, for the past seventeen years under her care, proved to be a formidable contributor to the pursuit of the feminist discourse in Philippine contemporary art. For birthing more than a hundred women artists in the last twenty years, Liongoren has proved herself as one of the more capable midwives on this side of the artistic archipelago.

# What is to be Done: Six Case Studies

JUDY FREYA SIBAYAN

In 2000, I contributed a work to the travelling exhibition *Text and Subtext: Contemporary Asian Women Artists*,<sup>1</sup> a work consisting of a stack of postcards on a pedestal. In these postcards, I announced a five-year long performance art entitled *Into the He(art) of the Commodities: An Allegory*. I wrote:

Judy Freya Sibayan will appropriate images—reproductions of works of master artists. Some will be reproduced through xerography as found. Some will be used exactly as found. These readymade images will be framed and traded as mere commodities in non-art gallery and non-museum spaces. She traces/cites her lineage thus: Grosz and Heartfield, Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Broodthaers, Haacke, Lawler, Asher, Levine. Into the He(art) of the Commodities begins June 14, 2000 and ends June, 14 2005. This performance may end earlier or may go on beyond five years depending on the success of these works as commodities.

I also provided the bibliographical citation of the list of names which I referred to as my lineage: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” *Artforum*, 1982 September, pp. 43-56. In September 2005, *Artforum* published Andrea Fraser’s essay “From the Critique of Institution to an Institution of Critique.” Plotting the emergence and use of the term “institutional critique,” she cites this same text by Buchloh as the one where she “probably first encountered that list of names coupled with the term ‘institution.’”<sup>2</sup> And where she quotes Buchloh as having described

“Buren’s and Asher’s analysis of the historical place and function of aesthetic constructs within institutions, or Haacke’s and Broodthaers’ operations revealing the material conditions of those institutions as ideological.” The essay continues with references to “institutionalized language,” “institutional frameworks,” “institutional exhibition topics,” and describes one of the “essential features of Modernism” as the “impulse to criticize itself from within, to question its institutionalization.” But the term “institutional critique” never appears.<sup>3</sup>

Having cited the list of names which according to Fraser, are the “people often considered as the ‘founders’ of ‘institutional critique’”<sup>4</sup> as my lineage in producing *Into the He(art) of the Commodities*, I obviously considered my work within the art praxis termed “institutional critique.” Fraser observes that the term has “emerged as a shorthand for ‘the critique of institutions...’ and that today this “catchphrase has been even further reduced by restrictive interpretations of its constituent parts: ‘institution’ and ‘critique’...‘art’ and ‘artist’ generally figure as antagonistically opposed to an ‘institution’ that incorporates, co-opts, commodifies, and otherwise misappropriates once radical—and institutionalized—practices.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, lamenting<sup>6</sup> the “basic misconception of what institutional critique is, at least in the light of the practices that have come to define it,”<sup>7</sup> and re-examining the history and aims of the practice, Fraser points to a contradiction: “...the idea that institutional critique opposes art to institution, or supposes that radical artistic practices can or ever did exist outside the institution of art before being ‘institutionalized’ by museums,

is contradicted at every term by the writings and work of Asher, Broodthaers, Buren and Haacke...the critique of the apparatus that distributes, presents and collects art has been inseparable from a critique of artistic practice itself.”<sup>8</sup> She reiterates that indeed,

Institutional critique has *always* been institutionalized. It could only have emerged from *within* and, like all art, can only function *within* the institution art. The insistence of institutional critique on the inescapability of institutional determination may, in fact, be what distinguishes it most precisely from other legacies of the historical avant-garde. It may be unique among those legacies in its recognition of the failure of the avant-garde movements and the consequences of that failure; that is, not the destruction of the institution of art, but its explosion beyond the traditional boundaries of specifically artistic objects and aesthetic criteria...<sup>9</sup>

Having been once an artist and a curator who produced art primarily in and for contemporary art museums and galleries<sup>10</sup> and who, precisely because of this work at the very center of the art system, went deep into crisis over the criticality of art, a decade ago I began a series of works that addressed head on the problematics of “a system that engendered art that is institutionally delimited and dependent; a system that ideologically pre-coded, heavily determined, thus conscripted art to be instrumental in the production of symbolic capital.”<sup>11</sup> But Fraser has since laid bare the realities of institutional critique and reminds us that

Every time we speak of the “institution” as other than “us,” we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. We avoid responsibility for, or action against, the everyday complicities, compromises, and censorship—above all self-censorship—which are driven by our own self-interests in the field and the benefits we derive from it. It’s not a question of inside or outside or the number or scale of various organized sites for the production, presentation and distribution of art. It’s not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It’s a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward and what kinds of rewards we aspire to. Because the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals, these are the questions institutional critique demands we ask, above all, of ourselves. Finally, it is this self-questioning that—more than a thematic like the “institution” no matter how broadly conceived—that defines institutional critique as a practice.<sup>12</sup>

Six works I have produced the last decade are presented here as case studies viewed within the historical frame of institutional critique cited above.

1

**Scapular Gallery Nomad. (Performance begun in 1994; aborted after a month; resumed in 1997; performed daily for five years and concluded in 2002)**

Conceived and performed as a move away from the monolithic Center, *Scapular Gallery Nomad* was a piece of clothing I wore and performed daily as an art gallery for five years. Thirty-two exhibitions by thirty-three artists were exhibited and performed. I took on multiple roles as curator, gallery architect and builder, press relations officer, archivist, writer and publisher. Works of Winged Women was its publishing arm. Rhizomatic in its movement, the performance claimed and activated every space I inhabited as site for the production, circulation and reception of art.

**Museum of Mental Objects. (Performance begun in 2002; the museum continues to collect and exhibit artworks that are not visible)**

Birthered as a logical conclusion to *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO) collapses the body of the artist<sup>13</sup> and the art space into one. More importantly, addressing the problem of art in constant threat of disintegrating into mere commodities, *MoMO* is one exploratory answer to the inquiry of how to deplete an art object of its commodifiable condition. This museum collects and exhibits no visible objects to be commodified.

The artist now being the museum itself, *MoMO* can open its doors anywhere and everywhere at anytime. The artist is also its curator. As its curatorial procedure, *MoMO* invites artists to whisper artworks to the museum. These works are never to be represented or documented in any other shape or form. Thus these works are kept as mere memories by the museum. The museum can be invited to recite the names of the artists and their artworks. During such a performance/exhibition, there must not be any audio or video recordings made, no photographs taken. The audience is requested to do the same. The works must remain as memories for anyone who hears them performed.

3

**Into the He(art) of the Commodities. (Performance begun in 2000 and concluded in 2005; the work was announced through postcards)**

This work operated within the recent tradition of artists appropriating images created by other artists and in offering them as their own creations, they aimed to deconstruct representation and its modernist problematics. Works of Sherrie Levine for example

made it clear that piracy, with its overtones of infringement and lack of authorization was the point. Her appropriations were not to be perceived as some mousy homage. Nor was she putting herself in a cult-kook exercise in self abnegation. By literally taking pictures she did, and then showing them as hers, she wanted it understood that she was flatly questioning—no, flatly undermining—those most hallowed principles of art in the modern era: originality, intention, expression.<sup>14</sup>

1. *Text and Subtext* premiered at the Earl Lu Gallery in Singapore and traveled to Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney; The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm; Sternersensemuseet, Oslo, Norway; Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen; X-Ray Art Center, Beijing, Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

2. Andrea Fraser, "Critique of Institution to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum*, September 2005, XLIV, No. 1, 279.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, 280.

6. Fraser writes: "I find myself enmeshed in the contradictions and complicities, ambitions and ambivalence that institutional critique is often accused of, caught between the self-flattering possibility that I was the first person to put the term in print and the critically shameful prospect of having played a role in the reduction of certain radical practices to a pithy catchphrase, packaged for co-optation." Fraser, 279.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid, 280.

Levine however "insisted that hers was an aesthetic practice that implied no particular quarrel with the economic determinations of cultural production"<sup>15</sup> Levine: "I never thought I wasn't making art and I never thought of the art I was making as not a commodity."<sup>16</sup> She affirms simply that art making *is* commodity making. Thus, to phrase my own project vis-a-vis hers: I made no art objects for I offered no objects that were made visible, comprehensible, and thus commodifiable within and by the art system. What I did offer was *the gesture of owning up to the fact that art making is commodity making but unlike Levine, I did so without the pretext of the art system.*

4

**Sacred Sites in Secular Spaces: Installation/Performance. (Begun in 2001 and still ongoing; performance is done upon request; a variation, Sacred Rites in Secular Spaces is oftentimes performed as an invocation for opening or concluding art events)**

Designating myself as shrine maker, I perform the installation of shrines for those who wish to have a site for quiet moments of communion with whatever they consider divine forces guiding and gifting them their lives. These shrines are made from objects considered significant in these people's lives. The sites may be ephemeral, installed only for the duration of the event or made more permanent and used as altars in houses, offices, and even in gardens. These installations are not attributed to me. I do not own these shrines. For the more permanent sites, the requesting party owns them. After





600 Images in London at the Great Eastern Hotel, June 2005.  
Photo by Sara Haq

600 Images in Bangkok at Gallery F Stop, Tamarind Café, June 2005.  
Photo by Varsha Nair



9. Ibid. 282.

“From 1969 on, a conception of the ‘institution of art’ begins to emerge that includes not just the museum, nor even only the sites of production, distribution and reception of art but the entire field of art as a social universe. In the works of artists associated with institutional critique, it came to encompass all the sites in which art is shown from museums and galleries to corporate offices and collectors’ homes, and even public space when art is installed there. It also includes the sites of the production of art, studio as

my performance of the initial rites, the owners get to reconfigure them as they please, adding or removing objects, moving things around. Other people too are invited to use the shrines. I have never informed those who want a shrine installed I am making art; that I am doing an art installation or that I am doing a performance art. It is perhaps my most ambitious work yet in terms of problematizing this question of whence is the art institution.

For the work *Sacred Rites in Secular Spaces*, I formulate and perform prayers as invocations to mark the opening or closing of art events. Everyone present is invited to participate in performing the prayer. In a recent performance of this work in London,<sup>13</sup> the directors of the hosting institutions were very cautious about the performance of a prayer with the audience participating. One of them made the point that British audiences “On the whole...tend to shy away from participatory activities and as a primarily secular society the invitation to take part in a ‘prayer’ may meet with a rather lower key response than the one” I was usually used to.

5

**600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon. (An exhibition of 600 photographs by 60 artists and co-curated entirely through the Net by 6 people living in 6 different cities)**

One exhibition was replicated 6 times and exhibited simultaneously in 6 cities in 6 informal venues. I conceived and developed this project as lead-curator in 2005. With the current boom of blockbuster exhibitions such as international biennales, trien-

nials and thematic travelling exhibitions held in many cities that are often in urgent need of economic revival, social and cultural capital are made instrumental in attracting economic capital. This has required that economic capital itself be infused into these international expositions; rightfully so considering the massive infrastructure required to house and install these expositions and the gargantuan task and cost of insuring and transporting hundreds of artists and art works into these places and spaces and back again to the source. Inevitably, only institutions and organizations which are part of the formal apparatus of global capital have the power to produce such events/ expositions. And on the matter of geographies of globalization resulting from these transnational engagements, an imaginary of centers and peripheries, international/global and local, are constructed locating and fixing points of emanation, reception and circulation of ideas and meanings. In the

process, a hierarchy of power reinforcing the dominance of these leading institutions is continuously being established and maintained.

Saskia Sassen notes that “Globalization and digital networking have contributed to produce a new spatiality for politics, for art, for cultural workers. In doing so they are contributing to the production of countergeographies of globalization.”<sup>17</sup> 600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/ London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon takes advantage of the internet as a dematerialized and democratic space allowing for 1) great speed of access amongst a vast number of actors who “inhabit multiple localities but intensely engaged digitally;”<sup>18</sup> 2) borderless crossings; 3) freedom from the tyranny of real space and real objects; 4) digital information to be rhizomatically transmitted, trafficked, circulated and networked to all parts of the world; 5) the not-so-powerful, not-so-dominant, and not-so-well-endowed agencies and even individuals to be able to take part in the crucial project of production and circulation of meanings and ideas in this era of globalization.

## **Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art. (Founded in 2006; survived its first year and still ongoing)**

I co-founded *Ctrl+P* with 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*. Its editorial board members multi-task as publishers, editors, proofreaders and all try to promote it whenever given the opportunity. I also act as art director, layout artist, and production staff.

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 participating in the *documenta 12 magazines* project with two issues as its contribution to a series of debates on three themes. The last issue was on the question "What is bare life"? This current issue is our contribution to the debate on "What is to be done?" framed within the question of art and education.

### **We are the institution**

Because *Scapular Gallery Nomad* and the *Museum of Mental Objects*, are alternative practices to the traditional gallery and museum praxes, they *are* institutions no matter that they are parodies of traditional art institutions. *600 Images* was a project offering a more "humane" scale and realizable mode of exposition alternative to the institutions of biennales and triennales. *Ctrl+P* is unabashedly "a journal of contemporary art" digitally formatted to engage globally no matter its condition as a small-scale, zero-funded backyard enterprise. *Sacred Rites in Secular Spaces* proposes that some sacredness be given back to the institution of art in the face of powerful commodifying forces. *And Into the He(art) of the Commodities* like *MoMO*, problematizes art institutions rendering art as the commodity fetish par excellence.

Indeed there is no outside. We are all part and parcel of the art institution. So that we need to repeat here "what institutional critique demands we ask, above all, of ourselves:" What kind of institution are we? What kind of values are we institutionalizing? What forms of practice do we reward? What kinds of rewards do we aspire to? When *MoMO* was invited to discourse on its praxis at a conference entitled *Museum Practices in the Twenty-First Century: A Cultural Exchange with the Museum of Modern Art*,<sup>19</sup> it/I took the attitude that as an institution with a mandate to contribute to the critical project of oppositional meaning-making within sites of cultural production in this era of hegemonic power, *MoMO* is as significant as *MoMA*.

As I have written in an earlier text, the refusal or resistance to be instrumental in the maintenance of the status quo presupposes that we give ourselves the choice as to how we "relate to existing power relationships"<sup>20</sup> and to believe "that power relationships are themselves not fixed but mutate as struggles are won or lost."<sup>21</sup> And in order to attain this kind of autonomy, we must not wait for the art system to take care of us. Self-initiated projects aspire for fiscal independence, critical self-representation (the production of self-discourse), and the sincere acceptance that getting the work done is in itself the reward. And since we are the institution, we are always implicated in any critique we do. Thus our work must be rigorously auto-critical.

And finally to use Fraser's words, "with each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, to redefine art or reintegrate it in everyday life, to reach 'everyday' people and work in the real world,"<sup>22</sup> we can hope to "expand [the] frame and bring more of the world into it"<sup>23</sup> and in the process expand the site where we are able to produce art and engage with the world.

well as office, and the sites of the production of art discourse; art magazines, catalogues, art columns, in the popular press, symposia and lectures. And it also includes the sites of the production of the producers of art and art discourse: studio-art, art history, and now curatorial studies programs. And finally as Rosler put it in the title of her seminal 1979 essay, it also includes all the 'lookers, buyers, dealers and makers' themselves." Fraser, 281.

10. From 1974 to 1980, I exhibited mostly at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) galleries. In 1976, I worked as a curatorial assistant at the CCP Museum and in 1987 was appointed director of its contemporary art museum.  
11. Judy Freya Sibayan. "Curating Upon My Body." Published in *Pananaw* Special documenta 12 magazines Issue, 2007. Victor Burgin quotes Bourdieu on symbolic capital: "Symbolic capital is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, mis-recognized, hence legitimate, a credit which under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees economic profits." Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1986), 190.  
12. Fraser, 283.

13. *MoMO* is actually a museum of two people. Matt Price, a writer and an independent curator based in London and Birmingham UK is the other founding curator. *MoMO* was recently performed in London and for the first time, the two "galleries" so to speak came together to collect and exhibit ten works from ten London artists. ([www.trauma-interrupted.org/judy/writing2.pdf](http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/judy/writing2.pdf))  
14. Gerald Marzorati. "Art in the (re)making." In *Artnews*. May 1986, 91.  
15. Abigail Solomon-Godeau. "Living with contradictions: critical practices in the age of supply-side aesthetics." In *The Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1999, 230.  
16. *Ibid.*, 231.

17. Saskia Sassen. "Countergeography of Globalization," <http://absoluteone.ljudmila.org/globalisation.php>  
18. *Ibid.*  
19. This event was jointly organized by the International Program of the Museum of Modern Art and the Hong Kong Arts Centre. It took place in Hong Kong from November 14 to 18, 2002.  
20. Eric Louw Eric Louw, *The Media and Cultural Production*, (London: SAGE Publication, 2001), 31.  
21. *Ibid.*  
22. Fraser, 282.  
23. *Ibid.*

Marjorie Evasco, *Ani: The Life and Art of Hermogena Borja Lungay, Boholano Painter*, Espana, Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2006.

### **Blossoms of Wisdom from a Turtle-Shaped Island**

**By Flaudette May V. Datuin**

Marjorie Evasco's book on the life and art of a Boholano<sup>1</sup> painter is neither glossy nor glamorous. Modestly designed by Leo Abaya, it is not a flashy coffeetable—the standard format preferred by publications on the visual arts in these parts. It has no “selling point”—its subject, Hermogena “Nene” Borja Lungay is not a household name, especially in star-struck Manila. But this book is an engaging read on many levels. At the level of biography, it is about a woman who works quietly and steadily as a painter and as a central figure in the flowering of the arts in a turtle-shaped island Evasco and Lungay call “home.” At the level of writing and feeling about art, the book disrupts neat categories—biography, art writing, art criticism, history, art history—and presents instead a hybrid form that is part biography, part art history, part diary, part poetry.

Writing in an accessible, non-“artspeak” style that neither simplifies nor romanticizes, Evasco—a renowned poet and fictionist who teaches at the De La Salle University, Manila—presents Hermogena Borja Lungay, not as a success story or female counterpart to male geniuses, but as a living person, whose life story can “inspire us to deepen our connection with the living places of our imagination, as she has remained strongly rooted in hers.” It is this sense of rootedness that imparts to the writing of biography—in response to the art historian Lucy Lippard's challenge—a way of turning “more people on to where they are, where they came from, where they're going, to help people see their places with new eyes.” In turn, this sense of locality and place disturbs beachheads and breaches boundaries; it offers a locus away from, but at the same time, still intimately linked to the wider world of “Manila” and beyond. In Lungay's case, this locus is her home-island of Bohol, to which she is “committed to the lifelong practice of her art. She is of Bohol, in spirit and soul. This keen sense of place is not mere context for her art; it is the heart-source from which her visual imagination draws its living waters.”

Drawing from the devices and language of cinema, Evasco gives flesh to this sense of place by dividing her narrative into five “frames” revolving around five paintings she describes at length. In Frame One for example, Evasco tells the story of Hermogena's birth in the town of Tagbilaran, “on a solar eclipse at 2:00 pm of September 2, 1929.” Before that empirical data however, she describes a painting entitled *Hain na ang Pagatpatan?* (1998), (Where Have All the Mangroves Gone?). This painting begins to take on a life of its own, as the writer unreels her story, homing in on a close-up of the painting she minutely describes, and then moves on to the painter's training (UP in the 40s and 50s), style (Impressionist, influenced by National Artist Fernando Amorsolo), her creative process, and her feelings of despair about a vanishing shore. And then the writer pans out to the context: Bohol as a major tourist destination and a strong agro-industrial province in the Visayas, and the need to protect its natural environment. The painting does not passively reflect this reality, however; instead it is positioned between the gaps of high purpose and actual situation, bringing the “viewer to a place in her consciousness where the beauty of the represented world confronts, interrogates, and exposes, in the true realist's sense of the word, the hard truth.” In the succeeding section, Evasco moves further on beyond the painting's frame—towards a panoramic view of Bohol and its history, geography, and its life ways, which she dramatizes through the birth, childhood and adulthood of Nene Lungay.

Footnote:

1. Rough translation: “of or from Bohol,” a turtle-shaped island in the Visayas, Central Philippines, one of the country's three major islands, the other two being Luzon in the North (where Manila, the capital is located) and Mindanao in the South.





*Hain na ang Pagatpatan?*, 1998.  
Oil on canvas. 76.5 x 89 cm.

Evasco proceeds in a similar vein in the succeeding frames, pairing off her detailed account of the artist's student life with the work *Gubat* or Forest (1953); her return to her home town of Tagbilaran, her battle with cancer, and her struggle to practice art in a non-existent art world with the painting *Babayi: Inahan, Anak, Asawa* or Woman: Mother, Daughter, Wife (2000); and her resurgence as professional artist with a painting of a *Waling-Waling* (1993), a flower which takes its time to bloom, but blooms with stunning beauty after years of mindful tending. In Frame Five, the writer returns to a panoramic retelling of present-day Tagbilaran, detailing the artist's sig-

nificant contributions as teacher, artist and organizer. *Hara sa Kinampay* (1987), the first of a series of five paintings on the *kinampay*, a root crop or yam known to be sacred to Boholanos, and is known to grow only in the island, provides the visual expression and central metaphor for this chapter. The *kinampay*, which enabled seafaring Boholanos to travel great distances for trade, bears witness to the strength of Nene Lungay, who journeyed through trials as a woman, as a student, mother, and artist.

A strong presence in Bohol today, Lungay is role model to new generations of Boholano artists. In her workshops, she not only teaches technique on how to paint well, but also how to live well. In one telling incident that took place in a gathering of Visayan artists, she sent a strong message: artists must learn how to strike a balance "between the need to survive in the world and the desire to serve one's art." When a male artist admonished young participants that "they shouldn't get stuck with painting flowers and fruits," the kind which collectors prefer, she countered: "Do not forget how to paint your flowers and fruits. These will help you survive in the world. But take care to paint each one very well."

To paint very well, to continuously hone one's craft but at the same time, taking care not to style oneself as a "starving artist," a romantic notion Lungay does not subscribe to—this is an important lesson Lungay shares by example. After all, this creative woman is a survivor, who "experienced the pain of having snagged in the shallows of routine on one hand, and on the other, the pleasure of having summoned her inner capacities to break through given boundaries and make of her life a radical or root source of wisdom for others."

Like that of the late-blooming waling waling, Lungay's wisdom blooms in the pages of this modest volume- one which Evasco frames and re-presents with an intensity and lucidity that challenges the reader to listen, to feel along with the work, as much as to see and grasp its meaning. To write well, to paint well, and to live well—this is this book's gem; this is the book's "selling point."

### About Ctrl+P's Contributors:

**Phaptawan Suwannakudt** graduated from Silpakorn University, Thailand with a degree in English and German and completed her MVA degree at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney. She has worked extensively on several full-scale temple schemes and hotel decoration projects in Thailand during 1980s to 1990s. Phaptawan has been active in the organization of women's art exhibitions in Bangkok. She exhibited her work in Sydney, Bangkok and Melbourne and participated in many group exhibitions internationally including 1998, Women imaging women: home, body, memory, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila. 2000 El Poder de Narrar, Espai d'art Contemporani de Castelló, Valenciana, Spain, 2003 Abstractions, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra, 2005 Open Letter, Gallery 4A, Sydney traveling to five Asian countries supported by Asia Links Australia. The awards Phaptawan has received including 2001 Australia Council Studio Grant for new work by an established artist, 2003 Bundanon Trust, residential Studio Grant and 2005 Gunnery Studio residency, NSW Ministry for the Arts. Phaptawan lives and works in Sydney. ● **Yong Soon Min** is an artist and independent curator. She has lectured and exhibited widely since the late 1970s. Current curatorial projects include: "transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix" (exhibition about the intersection of contemporary popular culture and the traumas of history of Vietnam and Korea) "Humor Us" (about Asian Americans and humor); "Exquisite Crisis and Encounters" at NYU (about the LA Riots). In 2002, Min curated "THERE: Sites of Korean Diaspora," about the Korean diaspora, held in Gwangju, South Korea as part of the 4th Gwangju Biennale. She is Professor at University of California, Irvine. During her sabbatical leave, she holds a Visiting Artist/Scholar position with the Asian/Pacific/American Institute of New York University. Min has served on the Board of Directors of Asian American Arts Alliance; Artists Space; Women's Caucus for the Arts; College Art Association; and the Korean American Museum. ● **Sara Raza** is a writer and independent curator of 20th and 21st century visual practice based in London and Berlin. She is editor for West and Central Asia for *Asia Art Pacific*. ● **Imelda Cajipe-Endaya** Imelda Cajipe Endaya gained recognition in the Asia-Pacific contemporary art world for the distinct womanly visual language and statements in her art, as well as cultural leadership in women's advocacy. Her installations were exhibited at the 9th Biennial of Sydney, Queensland Art Gallery's First Asia Pacific Triennial, the Asia Society's Traditions/Tensions in New York. Her paintings are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, and the Singapore Art Museum among others. She was co-founder and first president of *Kasibulan*, a women artists' collective in the Philippines. She also initiated the *Pananaw Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*, of which she was first editor. Currently living in New York, she continues to do work on the Philippine diaspora and other women's concerns. Her recent group exhibits include those at the Silent Space and Ceres galleries in New York and George Segal Gallery in New Jersey. She was panelist at Arts in Orange, New York State Council for the Arts in 2005-2006 ● **Lisa Ito** finished her Bachelor of Fine Arts (major in Art History) from the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts in Diliman and formerly served as the Associate Editor of the Philippine Collegian, the university student paper. Her writings on art have appeared in *Asian Art News*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Philippine Star*, *Philippine Graphic*, *Art Manila Quarterly*, *Art Manila Newspaper*, *Art Paper* and *www.bulatlat.com*, among others. In addition to art writing and art production, she serves as a full-time staffwriter for the environmental alliance Kalikasan-People Network for the Environment (Kalikasan-PNE). Ito is based in Quezon City, Manila.

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

**Flaudette May V. Datuin** is Associate Professor, Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines (UP). A co-founder of Ctrl+p, she is also author of *Home Body Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present* (University of the Philippines Press, 2002). The book is based on her dissertation for the PhD in Philippines Studies (UP, 2001-2002). Datuin is 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). She is currently curating an international exhibition called *trauma, interrupted* to be held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in June 2007 (*www.trauma-interrupted.org*). Datuin currently teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the contemporary arts of Asia, art criticism, art theory and aesthetics, and gender issues in the arts.

**Varsha Nair** lives in Bangkok, Thailand. Her selected shows include *Exquisite Crisis & Encounters*, New York, 2007 ([www.apa.nyu.edu](http://www.apa.nyu.edu)); *Subjected Culture-Interruptions and Resistances on Femeness*, venues in Argentina till 2008 (<http://www.planoazul.com/default.php?idnoticias=1390>); *Sub-Contingent: The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006; *EMAP - media in 'f'*, 5th EFWHA Media Art Presentation, Seoul, Korea, 2005; *In-between places*, Si-Am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005; *Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, 2004; *From My Fingers-Living in the Age of Technology*, Kaohsiung Museum of Art, Taiwan, 2003; *With(in)*, Art In General, New York, 2002; *Home/Dom*, Collegium Artisticum, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina, 2002; *Free Parking*, Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2002 ([www.thingsmatter.com/project.php?proj=0234&mediaID=13](http://www.thingsmatter.com/project.php?proj=0234&mediaID=13)) She performed at *Saturday Live*, Tate Modern London, 2006; and at *National Review of Live Art*, at Tramway in Glasgow, 2006, at the Arches in Glasgow, 2004 ([www.newterritories.co.uk](http://www.newterritories.co.uk)), and at *National Review of Live Art* Midland, at the Railway Workshops in Perth, 2005 ([www.swan.wa.gov.au/nrla/](http://www.swan.wa.gov.au/nrla/)) Nair has co-organized/co-curated various art events and projects; she was also instrumental in setting up the *Womanifesto* website in 2003 ([www.womanifesto.com](http://www.womanifesto.com)). The last three projects for Womanifesto: *Womanifesto Workshop 2001*, *Procreation/Postcreation 2003* and the recently completed net-art project *No Man's Land*, were conceptualized by her. She was the Bangkok curator for *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. She was invitee speaker at the conference *Public Art In(ter)vention*, Chiang Mai, 2005; *Women's Art Networks: Varsha Nair and Wu Mali in Conversation*, Taipei Artist Village, Taipei, 2004; Presentation for EMAP, 5th Media Art Presentation held in conjunction with 9th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, held at EFWHA University, Seoul, Korea, 2005; *Art and Public Spaces* by SEAMEO-SPAFA Regional Centre for Archeology and Fine Arts, Bangkok, 2002; *Asia Now: Women Artists' Perspectives*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2001; Exhibition symposium *Women Breaking Boundaries*, Hillside Forum, Tokyo, 2001; co.operation, a conference on feminist art practice and theory, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 2000. Her writings have been published in art and architecture journals such as *n.paradoxa*, *Art AsiaPacific*, and *art4d*. Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India.

**Judy Freya Sibayan** 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. In 2006, the City of Manila where she lives and works awarded her the *Patnubay ng Sining at Kalinagnan sa Bagong Pamamaraan Award*. She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, a gallery she wore daily for five years (1997-2002), and is currently co-curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a work 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 PEER Gallery Space, London; The Tramway, Glasgow; the Vienna Secession; the Hayward Gallery, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, The Farm in San Francisco; Sternersensemuseet, The Photographers' Gallery, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 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; 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 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. Both 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](http://www.dlsu.edu.ph)) where she has taught for twenty years.