

Prospects of Contemporary Philippine Art Overseas

Talk given to the docents of Singapore Art Museum,

Saturday, March 15, 2003 and April 23, 2003

(Asian Civilization Museum)

Thank you very much for inviting me today to give my impressions and overview of the development of contemporary Philippine art outside the Philippines. Truly, it is during these times that we try to get ourselves involve in the art and make an effort to know as many of the regional artists as well as the local ones. Art after all is the best in terms of investments as it is less risk, lasting and more enjoyable.

I will try to divide my talk into two parts: First, I would like to show you some of the slides of our artists and as much as I would like to show many artists, I am afraid I do not have their slides. I have been collecting slides of other artists and these are the ones I have that are available. Secondly, I would like to show you a few slides of an artist you are familiar with who has been living overseas for the last three decades.

INTRODUCTION

For me art is very personal and being brought up in the Philippines, living in the United States and Southeast Asian countries I have witnessed and interacted with many of the Philippine artists who are either visiting or working abroad. My views on the subject are probably very different from the audience as I categorized the artist in a way that maybe different from academics and art critics.

The Philippines has great diversity when it comes to art as we have many different groups with many different influences. I am proud to say that we are rich when it comes to art and that we, probably, have as many artists as we have islands in the Philippines. And by artists, I am only talking about visual artists.

- I. I would like to start with the annual auctions held ^{last} ~~here a~~ ^{year} ~~few months~~ where the leading auction house, Sothebys, featured our well known artists like Anita Magsaysay Ho (s1: Portrait of a girl), Ang Kiukok (s2: Two Figures #4), Vicente Manansala, Juan Luna, Botong Francisco,

Fernando Amorsolo (s3: Market place during the occupation), Juan Arellano (s4: Landscape) among others. These are what we call "Blue Chip" artists. There were also foreign artists who were either living or born in Manila like Locatelli and Antonio Blanco whose paintings were auctioned. Blanco lived in Bali until he died a few years ago. Although Blanco was born in the Philippines, he always claimed when he was alive that he was a Catalan painter. Many of these names are very well known, some have been collected in museums around the region, others have been around for so long they withstood the test of time. Many are dead and very few are actively painting like Anita Magasaysay Ho and Ang Kiukok. Some of their works are so scarce that they are sought after in the auction houses. Many collectors are looking for early works of these artists that is when the bidding goes very high. Two years ago, Anita Magsaysay Ho fetched the highest price for her painting for over \$600,000. Because of this, you can be assured that her paintings will always be a favorite in the auction houses.

Unfortunately, the auction houses main emphasis are of the very old or dead artists and foreign artists who happen to be living in our country during that time. There is not enough focus on contemporary artists but I guess this is still a good step in the right direction. I know that there will be another auction ^{in October} ~~next month~~ for Larasati here in Singapore and they will mainly emphasize Indonesian artists but there will be a handful of Filipino artists.

2. GENERALLY SPEAKING, HOWEVER, THE FILIPINO ARTISTS COME FROM DIFFERENT SCHOOL

There are the early avant garde painters in the likes of Arturo Luz (s5: Performance), Nena Saguil, Cesar Legaspi (s6: Mansanita), Mauro Malang Santos (s7: Untitled), Frederico Alcuaz (s8: Festive Motif) and Hernando Ocampo (s9: Dancing mutants), who belonged to the generation of the 40s. Arturo Luz was our national artist three years ago. In addition to his work as director of the Museum of Philippine Art and the Design Center in the Philippines a few years ago, Arturo Luz had one of the earliest galleries which,

unfortunately closed early this year, and one of the pioneers of abstract art.

one of the truly

In the early 80's I lived in Paris and that's when I met Nena Saguil. She was living in a very small studio and although her works were collected and bought by museums in France, she was not very well known in the Philippines. She lived frugally and I still remember her studio six flights up with no elevator and when you reached her place, the paintings, mostly paperworks, were stocked up and piled under the table, under the bed and closets full of paintings. She told me that one of her dreams was to have a big exhibit in the Philippines. Unfortunately, she did have the exhibit organized by her friends, but she passed away before the exhibit was held. Last October, her work at Sothebys, was sold for over \$60,000.

great and least known Filipino artist

There are the modernists-Lee Aguinaldo, Romulo Olazo (s10: Diaphanous B LXVII), Roberto Chabet, Ray Albano, Gus Albor (s11: Ether at play), Impy Pilapil, and Lao Lianben who venture into the total abstract and none objective art. All

except for Ray Albano ^{who died in the late 80's} are still very active in both the local and international exhibitions. Impy Pilapil, a sculptor, was one of the artists who came here for the Singapore Art Fair last year.

The seventies were marked by political unrest and a growing anti-Establishment sentiment hence the beginning of Figurative Expressionism with artists like Ben Cabrera (s12: Delia) with his larawan series, Manuel Baldemor with his interpretation of his hometown landscape, Danilo Dalena'Alibangbang series, Onib Olmedo (s13: Song from the alley) street vendors, prostitutes and other denizens in his own stylistic way.

In the eighties, the social realist painters like Edgar Fernandez (s14: Unfinished painting of the present), Renato Habulan who hails from Tondo and whose series on Sisa, crazed mother of Rizal's Noli Me Tangere exposed his works to the art world. Jose Tence Ruiz was very active in the social realist movement in the 80s and continues to explore social and cultural issues using paintings, sculpture and

illustrations. Another award winning social realist was Antipas Delotavo. Elmer Borlongon (s15: Underpass) was a member of the Sanggawa, a collaborative group who did murals depicting the life on the streets, particularly the lives of the children. The painting called (s16: Water of Life) was one of my refugee paintings from the series called "Portraits of Cambodia". Dennis Gonzales (s17: Politico) was done in year 2000, oil on canvas. Elmer Roslin's (s18: Video Karera) was done in 1997. Elmer usually focuses on the youth but with massive figures and minimal surroundings to emphasize their isolation. This is the same with Vincent Paul Padilla's "small alley series" done in 2000.

The Philippines is also famous for religious art which is not surprising given our Catholic background like Norman Dreo's (s20: Ipinako sa krus). An ex-seminarian Norberto Roldan examines aspects of Filipino spirituality through his icons and religious paraphernalia related to his Catholic practices.

Alfredo Esquillo, Jr. (s21: Panatiko) explores the contradictions in reference to the Catholic faith.

Other artists known for their religious works are Leonilo Dolorican (s22: Crucificacion), Joy Mallari (s23: Chapel), Ray Contreras and Manuel Baldemor.

There are artists who deal with feminine issues and issues of identity like Agnes Arellano (s24: Three Buddha mothers). I remember Agnes' show in Manila where the waiters were all in tuxedo jackets pacing the museum with trays of mousse au chocolat which were all molded from Agnes breasts. Yasmin Sison (s25: Mrs. Lee's cake), Francesca Enriquez and Norma Belleza with her portrayal of the everyday life. Norma came from a family of painters. Her husband, Angelito Antonio was renowned for his paintings and their son Marcel Antonio held a very successful almost sold show here last year at the Jasmine Gallery. Julie Lluch (s26: Woman and Heart) is one of the most sought after sculptors these days. Karen Flores is from the younger generation of feminist artists. There are many feminist movements in the Philippines especially in the artworld and one that is consistent in terms of dealing with issues and exhibitions is

the group that meets at Norma Liongoren's gallery in Quezon City. One of the pride of the Philippines now is that there are many female painters as opposed to twenty years ago. Whenever I give workshops at the University of the Philippines, I am happy to see that there are more women studying Fine Art than men. Now, that is a change.

Then there are the conceptual, post modern and installation artists like Gerardo Tan (s28: Compressed/Decompressed), Sid Hildawa (s29: Osiris/Iris) and Ces Avancena (s30:Gypsy mood thermometer) who were all part of the ^{last year's} recent exhibit here called extra-small-EXTRA LARGE where they were able to challenge the idea of setting up an exhibition internationally at low costs and in a short period of time whether in the centers or the peripheries.

**3. THERE IS ALSO AN INCREASING NUMBER OF
FILIPINO ARTISTS PARTICIPATING IN THE
SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGIONAL FESTIVALS,
COMPETITIONS AND ART FAIRS**

The ASEAN art awards was created to support the development of ASEAN contemporary art and to increase the national and international exposure for ASEAN art and artists. Philip Morris Group of companies is the first organization to have provided a platform for the young artists of the region. Nona Garcia (s34: Double exposure) won the grand price in 1991 where she submitted a work that demonstrated a strong element of experimental art, combining painting and x-ray. Together with other artists known as Surrounded by Water, she was here last year for the show.

The Nokia Arts Awards Asia Pacific started in the year 2000 where Filipino artist Rodel Garcia won the first price of US\$8,000 cash, educational grant of US\$15,000, a mobile phone and a five week training program at Parsons in New York and eight week program at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki, Finland.

The Singapore art fair held last October, which is on its third year, witnessed several Philippine galleries participating like

Galeria Duemila, Finale, the Drawing Room and in addition several Filipino artists being represented by non-Filipino galleries. One of the Filipino favorites is Kiko Escora (s35: Show off). The general feeling was that the Filipino artists in the fair did very well and I was in the Philippines last October and learned that more galleries will participate next year.

There are also a number of art festivals in the provinces like the Baguio arts festival organized by BenCab and the rest of the Baguio artists, the Bandung and Yogyakarta festivals.

4. THERE HAS BEEN A TREMENDOUS GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF GALLERIES, CURATORS AND ART DEALERS IN THE COUNTRY AND OTHER COUNTRIES REPRESENTING PHILIPPINE ART.

Gallery owners and dealers have played a very active and aggressive role in promoting their artist. In San Francisco, there is an art dealer who deals with Philippine masterpieces and is very active in the auction houses. In the California area, there are a number of galleries representing Filipino artists living in the Bay area. The University of California

galleries have been known to show regularly Philippine contemporary artists who are visiting or living in the area.

During the past two years while residing in Singapore, I have seen Ippreciation Gallery, the Sculpture Square, Art Seasons Gallery, Atelier Frank, Sunjin Gallery among others showcasing Philippine artists. Sculpture Square, headed by Tay Swee Lin, has continuously looked for artists in the Philippines to exhibit and also to be artists in residence. At the end of their residency, they put up an exhibit of their

works. Nestor Vinluan, an abstract painter & former Dean of UP Fine Arts, was supposed to come here as artist in res for Sculpture Sq but b/c of SARS - he cancelled & postponed his residency for next year

During the last five years, there has been an increasing number of artworks in public places in Singapore. The galleries and dealers are mainly responsible for putting these artworks in public space as well as in hotels and office buildings. Ramon Orlina's glass sculpture (s36: Glass installation) at the Singapore Art Museum and my mural of (s37: Celebration and Joy) at Singapore Expo are examples that has increased the public's awareness of art. The month of November 2002 until January of this year, I had a ceiling

installation called “”Sky is the limit” at the Cultural Hall atrium of the Esplanade. (s38: the Sky is falling, the sky is falling) is one of the twenty two large trapunto paintings on view during those months.

5. THE ART MUSEUMS IN MOST OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES HAVE PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN PROMOTING LOCAL ARTISTS.

The Singapore Art Museum has been a pacesetter in buying artist works from the Philippines (s39: Marcos and his cronies) was bought by Singapore in the year 2000. The Fukuoka Museum has continuously invited Filipino artist to participate in their Bienale at the same time purchasing works of participants. Roberto Feleo had a one man exhibit where his works seem to reflect the Filipino history of bitter struggle for the sovereignty from Spain, Japan and the United States.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manila has played a very important role in co-sponsoring Philippine exhibits like the

traveling show called "At Home and Abroad: 21 Contemporary Filipino Artists" which was exhibited at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. As a result, these museums plus the UC California museums have become important venue for our artists.

Other government support groups like the National Council on the Arts, foundations and art centers play important tasks of giving financial support to the artists. These efforts, however, still fall short of what is being done in the West. I would like to see a similar National Endowment for the Arts, Guggenheim fellowships and other art patronages in this region. It would be nice in the Philippines if we could even have, perhaps, a Lopez, Ayala or a Go Kong Wei fellowships.

6. THERE IS AN INCREASING AMOUNT OF INFORMATION BEING MADE AVAILABLE ABOUT FILIPINO ARTISTS.

Initially, most of the books and articles about Filipino artists were written either as dissertations by local Phds, foreigners who came to the Philippines to do their dissertation on Philippine art, or published coffee table books.

In recent years this has changed with the advent of magazines like Asian Art News and Art in Asia Pacific and more recently the development of art critics. Art professors and writers like Ana Labrador, Alice Guillermo, Emmanuel Torres, Cid Reyes, Krip Yuson, Jenny Jauelosa, Patrick Flores and Rod Paras Perez are frequent contributors to these magazines, guest writers for exhibitions and in addition to writing weekly reviews of recent shows in our local newspapers. This has also changed due to museum curators who have pushed to publish larger and more detailed catalogues about museum exhibitions. An example of this was the exhibit held here three years ago called FAITH: A survey of contemporary Filipino art curated by Valentine Willy. This traveling exhibit moved to Penang and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Some of the artists represented here were Ofelia Gelvezon Tegue (s40: Homage to

Lorenzetti) based in Paris and was instrumental in the 70s in promoting art of fine print in the Philippines. Daniel Coquilla's (s41: Fried Tsik, Oranges and Balut); His paintings viewed from the top are maze like in composition. Luisito Cordero's (s42: Attack fo the killer Pancit Canton) was a member of the Ilustrado ng Kabataan, and active in the children's book illustrations. Jerson Samson (s43: Homes) presents a cross section of Philippine society situated in intimate settings as well as public spaces.

More importantly, many artists have taken the initiatives to provide more information about themselves and their works through brochures and books. With the advent of internet many Philippine artists now have their own websites to provide information to the world about their art. Most of my overseas exhibitions are organized by email and transported by DHL. All of these positive trends will only accelerate the future knowledge and appreciation of Philippine art.

7. THE PROFILE OF COLLECTORS OF PHILIPPINE ART HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY.

In the past much of Philippine art was bought by expats looking for a low cost cultural reminder of their stay in the country. They tended to prefer barebreasted women and traditional rural scenes. Nude women always sell whether it is in Mabini where local handicrafts are sold or Sothebys. More importantly, Philippine art was supported by a small number of local patrons who tended to be nationalistic.

In recent years the collector profile had changed tremendously with increasing wealth of upper middle class Filipino professionals greater appreciation of art in general and promotion of their respective artists. Many Filipinos living overseas are actively purchasing works of Filipino artists and this is happening in New York, Washington, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Jakarta and Singapore. Many of these Filipinos living abroad have achieved a level of financial success in their fields and become avid collectors and supporters of Filipino art. These collectors will grow in the future and a good example are the number of Filipinos

who showed up at the recent opening of the Singapore Art Fair.

Jun Villalon, owner of the Drawing Room, was very pleased during the Singapore Art Fair opening night with the sales. He confided to me that he could finally sleep that night, thanks to the support of the Singapore Philippine community.

8. SOME FILIPINO ARTISTS ARE NOT ONLY TURNING TO THEIR CULTURAL ROOTS FOR INSPIRATION BUT ARE ALSO INCREASINGLY USING LOCAL AND INDIGENEOUS MATERIALS LIKE LEAVES, SHELLS, TWIGS, HOMESPUN, BARK AND ANIMAL HAIR FOR THEIR ARTWORK.

There were many reasons to resort to this medium. The escalating cost of art materials which were imported was an issue. During the Marcos era, there was a growing nationalistic sentiment which gave a lot of artists a new reason to find a new medium. Installation art was one way of

rejecting the traditional form of art. With installation came the materials which artists use: leaves, twigs, barks, shells, fabric, etcetera. Artists like Junyee, Roberto Villanueva and Jerusalino Araos (s44: Buntis (Pregnant) were known for their works in Asia for their use of indigenous materials. They have continued to pursue their art this way putting the Philippine in the map through representations in the biennales and foreign exhibitions.

9. A MAJOR PROBLEM IN THE PHILIPPINES IS THAT THE FUNDING AND TRAINING FOR THE PROTECTION OF PHILIPPINE ART IN BOTH PHYSICAL AND INTELLECTUAL SENSE IS NOT AVAILABLE.

In the physical sense, many of our museums, unlike the Western museums, do not have the capability or finance including insurance to take care of documentation, preservation and conservation of valuable pieces including insurance. I have been in the back rooms of many museums in the Philippines where paintings carefully done by noted artists are piled up on top of each other, paperworks are

getting mildewed, flooding in the storage rooms and a general impression that many of these valuable works are not being properly care for.

In the intellectual property sense, another growing problem is that much of the Philippine art is being copied or modified by unscrupulous forgers.

A typical example of this is when on two separate occasions, two five star hotels in Indonesia stole my artwork, copied them 300 times so that each room will have a copy and not bothering to look for me and ask my permission. To add insult to injury, I found out that the forger is a Philippine art consultant who lives in Los Angeles.

10. UNFORTUNATELY FOR SOME OF OUR WELL KNOWN ARTISTS, THERE IS A DANGER OF COMPLACENCY AS ONCE THEY BECOME WELL KNOWN FOR A CERTAIN STYLE, THEIR DEALERS ASKED THEM TO PRODUCE SIMILAR WORK OVER

AND OVER AGAIN. MANY ARE SEDUCED BY THE SALES WHICH IN THE END STIFLES THEIR CREATIVITY AND WILL NEVER GROW FROM THAT COMPLACENCY.

- II. MY FINAL COMMENT THAT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IS THAT PHILIPPINE ART IS NOW MAKING ITS MARK IN THE WESTERN WORLD (AUSTRALIA, EUROPE AND THE USA).**

To many in the Western world, any art that is not from North America or Europe must be folk art and there is a lack of appreciation. I remember when a New York curator came to my studio and we started discussing Asian contemporary art and how she should start making exhibitions for them. She did not know what I was talking about. She wanted to know if these artists were doing folk art. I managed to tell her that it is very important for her to look for these artists. Otherwise she will be losing her job in the future.

Now this ignorance of contemporary Filipino artists is beginning to change for a number of reasons. Many of the Filipino artists living in international capitals like New York, San Francisco, London, Paris, Berlin have begun to make their mark on the local art scene. In addition to Nena Saguil whom I mentioned earlier, there is Alfonso Ossorio who lived in East Hampton in New York in the 70s. Alfonso Ossorio came from the sugar family of Negros in the Philippines. He studied at Harvard and was known for his fantastic house and garden in East Hampton. You have to pay \$50 to visit his garden which was decked with his sculpture all painted in red white and blue. When you enter his house, you do not know where the carpet ends and his paintings begin. He was fun of using found objects and would go around the flea markets and buy by the truck load of things which he assembled on his canvas. He painted during the period of Jackson Pollack, deKooning and Rauschenberg. I remember going to his place in the Hamptons and it was like a huge Ossorio museum. Although his paintings hung next to his friend Jackson Pollock at the Museum of Museum of Modern Art in New York, he never had a major exhibition in the

Philippines, even though he told me that his greatest wish was to have a major show in the Philippines yet he is collected by almost all major art museums in America. If you ever happened to be in his hometown Negros, he did a wonderful mural in one of the churches in Negros Occidental.

In recent years, a number of younger Filipino artists have followed the path to the Western countries including the enfant terrible Manuel Ocampo who was a favorite of curators and art dealers in the nineties and is currently living in California. Manuel is an art professor at UC Berkeley. David Medalla in London, Gaston Damag and Ofelia Gelvezon Tegui in Paris and Lina Liani in Italy to mention a few.

Paul Pfeiffer, a video artist who lives in New York, has participated in the Venice and Whitney Bienale and has been awarded the Bucksbaum Award in New York two years ago which gave him US\$350,000 and open him to a lot of offers for exhibitions. Lani Maestro who is based in Canada, a multi-media artist, won the Grand Prize in the Havana Bienale in Cuba in 1987 when I participated in the Bienale.

Now that I had given you a tour of the Philippine contemporary art, I would like to share with you a few slides of an artist you are familiar with.

S46: Mural in Bangladesh

S47: Surma Bridge in Sylhet

S48: Moslem Wedding

S49: Sa Kaeo

S50: Two Orphans

S51: Alone

S52: Watching and waiting

S53: Kaunga

S54: Dancing Women

S55: Weeping woman: a domestic violence

S56: The Hagen Man

S57: Puerto Galera

S58: My fear of night diving

S59: Ligpo Island

S60: Shallow garden of Apo Reef

S61: Flight to Freedom

S62: If my friends could see me now

S63: How Mali lost her accent

S64: I thought the streets were paved with gold

S65: Santanu, Dewi Gangga and Bisma

S66: Pandu Dewanata

S67: Gareng dalam dua gaya

S68: Srikandhi

S69: Over Sanaa and far away

S70: A door of many colors

S71: Yemen was a dream

S72: Standing in the doorway trying to say goodbye

S73: Turn me loose

S74: Jaisalmer colors

S75: Constellations

S76: As you like it

S77: Dancing in the dark

S78: Hey sugar

S79: Roomful of blues

S80: Basel art fair

Thank you!