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CURATING AS CONJUNCTURE:  
FILIPINO AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITIONS IN CALIFORNIA 1997-  
2010

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## Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own investigations. Sources are acknowledged by footnotes and a bibliography.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date 23 September 2017

## Dedication

Dedicated to

My dear friend, Dr. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, you left this world too soon

My grandparents, Ricardo C. Reyes, Sr., Priscilla Reyes, and Perceveranda Romero

My parents, Antonio and Roseana Reyes

My partner, Dr. Andrew J. Ardizzoia

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## ABSTRACT

The return of Philippine participation to the Venice Biennale after a 51-year absence marked an occasion to rethink Filipino American contemporary art, particularly its globalized dimensions and the contemporary art produced in diaspora. This rethink employs the notion of conjuncture as developed by Cultural Studies scholar, Lawrence Grossberg in his work *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Following Grossberg's notion of conjuncture as "constituted by, at, and as the articulation of multiple, overlapping, competing, reinforcing, etc., lines of force and transformation, destabilization and (re-) stabilization, with differing temporalities and spatialities, producing a potentially but never actually chaotic assemblage or articulations of contradictions and contestations," I propose that Filipino American contemporary art occupies two conjunctural formations, one rooted in the curatorial and the other in art history.

In Chapter 1, I examine curating as a conjuncture and articulate how the roles of the curator, the artist, and the audience overlap and compete within the exhibitionary space, and how moments of fragmentation lead to hybrid roles like artist-curator. The exhibitionary space is examined as a conjuncture where these roles (curator, artist, audience) encounter each other to create an ever-changing assemblage of articulations.

Art historical accounts of Filipino American contemporary art forms another conjuncture that I analyze in Chapter 2 to provide context for recent events such as the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. I proposed a different way to articulate Filipino and Filipino American art history based on historical events that occurred in the Philippines and the its relations with colonial conquerors, namely Spain and the United States. This timeline provides a new backdrop that enables a re-investigation of certain historical moment and figures, specifically the 1884 Madrid Exposition and the gold medal winner of that year, the painter, Juan Luna.

Interventions in exhibitions making are discussed in Chapter 3 as political strategies that break away from the traditional ways Filipino American contemporary art is seen and understood. Having established exhibitions as conjunctural formations, I discuss the interventions as the next steps, to critique and question the politics enacted in exhibition making and to participate in the political struggle to contest the marginalization and exclusion of Filipino American contemporary art in museums and galleries.

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## Prologue

From 1997-2007, I was engaged in a variety of projects ranging from making video art with an artist collaborative group, Barrionics, making art objects as a solo artist, organizing contemporary art exhibitions with community and commercial galleries, organizing historical exhibitions to create awareness of cultural regeneration campaigns, to dancing with a Filipino folkloric dance company. As an individual, it is easy to see these projects as part and parcel of my lifelong process and dedication to the arts, the Filipino community, and to the cultural life of the San Francisco Bay Area and Stockton communities in California.

I considered my work as a Marxist praxis based on the readings I have done of many post-colonial theorists and cultural critics. My art historical perspective was highly influenced by Howard Lay, who taught my undergraduate art history seminar with a heavily Marxist influenced art historical analysis, highlighting Communist art projects such as the Situationists International. Marxist ideas also permeated my Art Studio seminar, Education classes, Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies classes, and especially out in the field, on the picket line and at demonstrations, where Marxist thought seems to be the foundational and organizing principles of actions to which I was attracted.

Etienne Balibar expresses well my attraction to Marxism. "Having broken with a certain form of philosophy, Marx was not led by his theoretical activity towards a unified system but to an at least potential plurality of doctrines, which has left his readers and successors in something of a quandary. Similarly, it did not lead him to a uniform discourse, but to a permanent oscillation between 'falling short of' and 'going beyond' philosophy" (Balibar 1995, p. 4).

“Falling short of and going beyond” is the basis of my practice. I find myself breaking with a certain kind of artistic practice not towards a unified system but to a plurality of activities, navigating through various terrains from production, art history, criticism, and theory, often putting myself and my audience in a quandary. What am I? an artist, historian, critic, or theoretician? This identity crisis is where I fall short of a sustained and durational practice, but simultaneously, I go beyond the usual disciplinary artistic practice and approach the field of art with a panoramic vision and tackle singular issues regardless of its form with an understanding that each of these forms are networked and interrelated. My practice-based dissertation is rooted in this notion of “falling short and going beyond.”

In 1989, as an undergraduate, I started to read writers like Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Cornell West, Michel Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Homi K. Bhabha, John Yau, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Douglas Crimp, Audre Lorde, Richard Dyer, Elaine Kim, Ronald Takaki, Carol Becker, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Paulo Freire, and was - and still am - highly influenced by the art and writing of Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Trinh T. Minh-Ha. This collection of writers and artists are mentioned to illustrate the breadth of ideas that guided my thinking and continued to help me formulate a philosophical rationale to what I do, why I do it, and how I do it.

However, this kind of reading falls short and goes beyond, breaking from certain disciplines like art history, critical theory, and education, and going beyond to interdisciplinarity like cultural studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies. I refresh my thinking by addressing more current thinkers Rancière, Bourriaud, Lind, Tadiar, Rogoff – but the politics of the work remains the same, albeit packaged differently or scaled up immensely, and my practice continues to address the same political concerns in the arts the previous generations of thinkers have raised and continue to discuss.

Another influential philosophical thought I encountered as an undergraduate was that of Dr. Virgilio G. Enriquez, a Filipino psycho-linguist who wanted to revise clinical psychology protocols in the Philippines to include indigenous cultural values and means of communicating. In his work, Dr. Enriquez championed the notion of *kapwa*, which he defines as, “the unity of the ‘self’ and ‘others.’ The English word ‘others’ is used in opposition to the ‘self,’ and implies the recognition of the self as separate identity. In contrast, *kapwa* is a recognition of shared identity, an inner self shared with others” (Enriquez 1992, p. 45).

I saw the idea of the “shared inner self” as superseding the oppositional racial structure in the US. *Kapwa* promoted compassion, understanding, mutual respect through social interaction; this is an internal dynamic that affects external realities. Through *kapwa*, I recognized and embraced “otherness” and developed a resolve to be able to negotiate the US racialized structure and evolve from a nationalistic/separatist position to one of commonality and shared goals.

Armed with new ideas, I felt I had to bring a practical aspect to all these abstractions. I embraced Cornel West’s fourth strategy to be “a critical organic catalyst...a person who stays attuned to the best of what the mainstream has to offer – its paradigms, viewpoints, and methods - yet maintains a grounding in affirming and enabling subcultures of criticism...cultural workers who simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance” (Ferguson 1990, p. 33). To this day, I continue to aspire to be a “critical organic catalyst” and as such, this identity unifies the varied projects with which I am engaged.

Having developed an identity defined with a mission, I take on a variety of projects that I shape into acts of critique of racialized policies and practices, and

resistance of exclusion and oppression, while advocating for kapwa. I see my practice as having three strands; as an artist making artwork based on installation, video, and performance; as a curator organizing artists' works within the frame of an exhibition; and as a cultural regenerationist, preserving traditional expressions of culture through research, writing, teaching, art production, and politicization. These three strands exist only as organizing strategies and I do not see these strategies atomize or disintegrate the totality of my practice, or my identity as a critical organic catalyst.

I am employing these three strands to explore how similar projects can function as a body of work, and as a body of work examine the development, progression successes and failures of these action, and to focus analysis and critique based on reflections on completed projects. The knowledge gleaned from this small-scale analysis and critique are linked into a network that creates a broader and deeper analysis and critique of the critical organic catalyst, and the totality of the work as one major practice.

#### 1997-2007: My Conjunction

I began this exploration by recounting the ten years in question and created a chronology of events to begin unpacking my projects within the context of time and space. I begin this retrospection in 1997 because it is the year that I finished my MFA in New Genres from UCLA, and shifted from thinking of my work as student work to "professional" work. This is also the year when, in pursuit of a professional career, I first realized that my practice has multiple vectors.

Up to this point, I had been working on become a practicing artist, solely making a living on making art, with the understanding that it would be supplemented with odd jobs, mostly in education. Throughout graduate school at UCLA, I divided my time by

working in the studio making art, being employed an art-related part time jobs, as well as volunteering time to community organizations. This was how I understood it would be moving forward. I was resigned to this idea, and like many artists before me, thought I would be engaged in a constant negotiation on time spent between making art and making money.

In April 1997, I launched my Masters of Fine Arts Thesis Show at the UCLA Wight Art Gallery in Los Angeles. This was the compulsory exhibition for all MFA students in all media. I chose to show three pieces. The first piece, titled *Halo-halo*, was an installation of soda fountain glasses inscribed on one side with the word "FILIPINO," and on the reverse, a list of peoples who have migrated to the Philippine Islands and made it home. The list reads "Pre-historic man of African descent, Negritos (present day Aetas, Filipino pygmies), proto-Malays, "Indonesian A"- stone age, "Indonesian B"- late Neolithic, Malays I- bronze-copper culture, Malays II- proto-civilization, Malays III- Muslims, Orang Dampuans- Annamians (Central Vietnam), Arabs, Chinese, Hindus, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Mexicans, American- United States variety." The piece commemorated the centennial of Philippine independence, and I wanted to emphasize the ethnic-cultural mix that makes up the contemporary Filipino.

The title, *Halo-halo*, is borrowed from a dessert made up of layered sweetened beans and cooked fruit topped with ice and milk, traditionally served in a tall soda fountain glass to display the many layers. To eat this dessert, the eater begins by taking a long spoon and mixing the layers into one incorporated icy and sweet indulgence. Most of the ingredients maintain their shape, and with each spoonful, the eater scoops a variety of textures and flavors. The art piece conjures up this idea of halo-halo and equates it with a national identity that developed due to continual intermixing.

However, the glasses on the shelves are empty, requiring the viewer to fill them up with his or her own ideas of what makes up a Filipino.

My second piece was a video installation, in which images from a monitor sitting near a constructed pool of water suspended on a frame with wheels are reflected. This piece is about memory and remembering the journey of immigration, and reflecting upon who I am as a Filipino in America and the resources and sources of information that influenced my identity formation.

My third piece, *Salon Derrière, ca. 1933*, was an installation using photographs of pages of Filipino and Filipino American history books. These photographs were enlarged and hung on the walls of a broom closet in the gallery. Discarded old picture frames were hung from the ceiling floating above the photographs, framing sections of the images, or obstructing the view of the pages of history. The contents of the broom closet were kept intact, sharing the space with the installed photographs and frames. This installation positioned me not just as artist, but also a cultural critic addressing the visual materials that contribute to defining the Filipino American community. As such, artistic projects can address a theme like the Philippine Centennial and the history that surrounded that commemoration, and develop criticism through visual means.

By using historical visual sources, I am extrapolating the functions of these objects from primary sources for historical research to aesthetic material for artistic projects. The images, mostly from the publication by Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans*, functioned as primary sources that provided pictorial evidence of the contributions of Filipino/Americans to the US. This text became canonical and helped establish Filipino American Studies as a research field. My art installation took these images and used them in two ways: 1. As a direct reference to the publication and to Filipino American history; 2. to re-engage with them as aesthetic objects, to liberate



these images from the historic framing in which the publication has placed them. I am both bolstering their usage as historical material and as aesthetic objects to broaden the context in which these images are seen and understood.

A month later, I was asked to be part of a curatorial team to launch a centennial exhibition celebrating Philippine independence for the Fowler Museum at UCLA. Work for *Confrontations Crossings and Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998* began. I was involved with research and selection of photographs to be included in the exhibition. The curatorial committee originally thought to include 100 key photographs that visually narrated the last 100 years of US/Philippine relations. The scope of the exhibition was scaled down to 34 panels total, including text and didactic panels. However, an accompanying publication funded by the UCLA Southeast Asian Studies Center kept the original curatorial scope of 100 photographs selected for the exhibition.

Another vector to consider was my employment at the J. Paul Getty Museum. I started at the Getty as a Graduate Intern in the Education Department, conducting research in art pedagogy, museum education methods, artist involvement and community engagement in museums. I was hired the following year as a Gallery Educator. In addition to my regular schedule of giving tours and lectures on the collection, I also helped found the Getty Outreach program, working with agencies in Los Angeles to train teachers how to teach art, to bring Getty educators to the community, and to bring disadvantaged families to the Getty Museum. I found a way to include my activism – to open access to art and museums – in my employment situation. The synergy among these strands was totally energizing and fulfilling. I was determined to sustain this synergy throughout my career. I felt that I was expressing my totality, a

unified self, whose different projects coalesced in a fulfilling symbiosis. I was embodying *kapwa* and engaged with my identity as a “critical organic catalyst.”

I was fortunate to exhibit my work as part of important events the following year. I began the year with my first solo exhibition (*Disco Sale* held at Puro Arte Gallery and Performance Space in Los Angeles, CA, March 1998), and my first museum exhibition at the Bronx Museum (*1898*, Bronx Museum, New York City). I was also included in an artist-run exhibition held at the Farmer’s Daughter Motel in Los Angeles, the *Centennial Film and Video Festival* at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila, and *Destiny Manifesting* at the Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, California. I ended the year with travels to the Philippines and showed at the Third Space Gallery (*Rico Live! Performance and Lecture* at the Third Space Gallery in Quezon City, Philippines, August 1998) and consequently was included in the National Arts Festival held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. After my trip to the Philippines, I moved to San Francisco, CA where I continued my involvement in Philippine folkloric dance with Likha Philippine Ensemble.

In 2000, I was invited to organize an exhibition with the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance. Eager to use new technology and to address the intersection of Gay, Asian/American, and contemporary art, I launched *Post Gay/Ante Asian* as an online exhibition and art publication.

As a teen, one of the reasons I was attracted to “the arts” was due to my notion that visual art, theater, music, and poetry and literature provided safe places for “eccentric personalities,” a coded term used to refer to gays and lesbian, something that I learned from popular culture, and overheard from hushed conversations of family members.

Coming to terms with my sexuality and cultural identity, I yearned for spaces that accommodated and accepted this complicated intersection. I felt the Filipino community and its attachment to Catholicism projected a homophobic attitude, and the mainstream Gay community ignored the intersectional issues of sexuality, class, and race. The arts allowed me to affirm and express these identities, where I quickly developed a political stance as a Gay Asian American artist, and used this identity as the impetus for many of my art projects.

When I was asked to curate an exhibition for Gay Asian Pacific Alliance, I did not hesitate to take the opportunity to engage with the idea of Gay Asian/American contemporary art. I was thinking of the expressions of “Asian-ness” and “Queerness” as having temporal qualities, and that certain terms demarcated certain timeframes, and certain times in history used certain terms. As I wrote in the curatorial statement, “The words ‘post’ and ‘ante’ describe the dynamic of time. By using these temporal qualifiers, our names are questioned through the filter of time and history, memory and nostalgia. It also suggests that there was a before and there will be an after.” What were there terms to name the gay community before the term gay, and what is it now after Stonewall, the AIDS epidemic, and marriage equality? I asked the same question with the term Asian, what did we use before we were called Asians, and what name will we use in and after this anti-immigrant Trump era? With this exhibition, I focused on how expressions of “Gay and Asian” are unstable and that they need to be framed within the context of time to understand the development and the nuances of these markers of identity.

I continued my work in museum education at The Haggin Museum in Stockton, CA, which I left after one year to take the directorship and curator position for the Reynolds Gallery at the University of the Pacific. As director, I administered the art

enrichment program, oversaw the budget, staffing, and marketing. As curator, I increased the number of exhibitions from four per academic year to ten spanning the whole calendar year. This position validated my role as curator and allowed me to champion contemporary art in the Stockton-San Joaquin region. More importantly, this opportunity allowed me to focus my attention to exhibition making and how contemporary art interfaced and intersected with issues of race, class, and sexuality.

In 2002, my friend and long-time collaborator, Johanna Poethig, introduced me to Anne Perez, who had recently finished her MFA in Electronic composition at Mills College. Poethig, Perez, and I joked about putting together a folk electronic band at a dinner party, and soon after, we took this joke seriously and started a performance art collaboration, *Barrionics*. We showed our first video project, *Pobreng Alindahaw* at the Reynolds Gallery at Pacific. Following up with a second video, *Sarung Banggi*, shown at Togonon Gallery, San Francisco, following with a show at The Lab Gallery to premiere our third video and performance, *Ocho-ocho*. This artist collaboration is another iteration of how my artistic practice takes on the idea of forming a community around visual art projects. As an artist, I am concerned with the idea of community and how it forms and then how it expresses itself as such. Following the model of how social groups develop - from individuals, to families, to clans, to villages, to cities, to countries - I activate collaborations as the foundation upon which a community develops. In this instance, I am attempting to generate a community structured on collaborative labor and based on visual arts. *Barrionics* particularly recuperates marginalized performances such as tribal dances and rituals and re-energizes these works through contemporary art and technology.

I launched the Filipino Art History website in 2005, the content of which I wrote, along with the contributions of undergraduate students at the University of San

Francisco, who worked as research assistants. This project continues my art historical research of creating a compendium of Asian American artists that I began as an undergraduate. I extracted the Filipino American entries of the previous compendium to develop this project.

This website project was a brainchild of artist, Carlos Villa. He imagined a resource that provided access to the Filipino creative community, including literature, history, music, performing arts, and graphic design, and he thought that a website was the appropriate format for this resource. He invited me to take over the building of the website project and I stepped up to the challenge. I invited historians, artists, and web technicians to collaborate, reiterating my idea of building communities based on collaboration and kapwa.

In 2007, I started to concentrate on curatorial projects that focused on specific ideas about expanding the understanding of works of art made by Filipino American artists. I embarked on a study of Sigmund Freud's work on ego, id, and superego, the death drive and pleasure principle, and started to use psychoanalysis as a filter to analyze art and explore artistic practices. I revived my interest in kapwa with vigor and now developed new means of understanding artistic practice through psychoanalysis and kapwa.

As developed by Enriquez, the use of kapwa aimed to improve psychological diagnosis and treatment of Filipino patients, and to indigenize psychology by incorporating existing cultural practices within its treatment protocols and philosophy. Enriquez saw that psychology was a Western form of treatment that was alien and disorienting for Filipino patients. He proposed to employ local means of communicating and social relations to better diagnose his patients and offer treatment that is more

familiar to them. Indigenizing psychology was Enriquez's endeavor to decolonize psychology and develop *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology) (Enriquez 1992).

The use of psychoanalysis in tandem with Enriquez's proposal is an attempt at analysis that is embedded with cultural practice. If psychoanalysis aims to provide an analysis of one's thoughts and mental images, then its use with kapwa aims to provide an analysis that is embedded with Filipino cultural and value system. Analysis of artistic projects as realization of mental images becomes richer when filtered through a specific cultural value system.

I proposed three exhibitions employing psychoanalysis and kapwa as a decolonizing gesture, following Enriquez's example. As part of my practice-based doctoral program, I launched *Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Arts* at SOMArts Cultural Center in San Francisco, after which it travelled to Remy's on Temple Art Gallery in Los Angeles, where I reconfigured the exhibition to include local artists to indigenize the group show.

Using Freud's idea of the cartography of the psyche, *Overmapped* played with the idea of layering psychological maps to define new terrains of identity. Expanding on the thought of psychic mapping in *Overmapped*, I launched *From Hedonopolis, To Melancolony: The State of Contemporary Filipino Visual Arts* at the Thacher Gallery at the University of San Francisco. *Hedonopolis/Melancolony* were proposed as separate exhibitions but due to time constraints I combined the two exhibitions into one group show.

These two shows led to three invitations to curate group shows in San Francisco: *Bag'o/Neo: 21st Century Modernism* at Micaela Gallery, *EPIC: Visualizing Heroes Within* at SOMArts Gallery, and *Infix: The Grammar of Insertion* at the Artist Gallery of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. These exhibitions are included as part of my practice-

based dissertation and will be discussed further in later chapters. I see these exhibitions as spaces where some of my ideas about the Filipino artistic production are manifested and explored to tease out knowledge of nationalist identity and the social spaces created within a visual program.

I have recounted my artistic practice as a starting point in examining conjunctural formations. One's life is a combination of events, a conjuncture in its basic definition. But how these series of events are contextualized as social relations, albeit "fractured and conflictual along multiple axes," (Grossberg 2010, p. 41) and how political tactics are applied to these historical moments with intentions to intervene in our understanding of the past and alter the course in which these events are heading, form a conjuncture following the development and use of the concept by Althusser, Hall, and Grossberg. In the following writing, I particularly examine my work as a curator to contextualize Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions and to examine the ways in which curating is a process of intervention that alters how we understand Filipino American contemporary art and how it develops in the future.

## Introduction

After an absence of 51 years, the Philippines returned to the Venice Biennial in 2015 to participate in one of the oldest international art markets. Dr. Patrick D. Flores, curator of the Philippine Pavilion for the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial, has themed the exhibition, *Tie a String Around the World*, a quote taken from *Genghis Khan*, a 1950 film by Filipino filmmaker Manuel Conde. The Philippine National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCAA) and Department for Foreign Affairs (DFA) released a short statement that the exhibition at the Philippine pavilion "seeks to initiate discussion on the history of the sea and its relationship with the current world, claims to patrimony, and the struggle of

nation-states over vast and intensely contested nature. It locates the Philippines in the world through its deep ties to ancient cultures, its precocious modern art, and the critical responses of contemporary art to present predicaments" (NCAA/DFA 2014). According to Flores, this exhibition is a "poetic and political reflection on the history of world making, the links between geography and politics, and the notions of nation, territory and archipelago" (Neuendorf 2015).

Since I started my curatorial practice in 1997, I have been exploring Filipino world-making through exhibitions, and the return of the Philippines to the Venice Biennial with the aim of reflecting on "Filipino world making" supports my project and emphasizes the need to think about and analyze Filipino contemporary art and its place in the world. The complex colonial history of the Philippines necessitated an assembly of my own theoretical toolkit to help repair the damaged narrative that misrepresents, confound, or alienate artistic practices that address Filipino world making. This toolkit includes lived experiences, Filipino history and its diaspora, Filipino art history, critical theory, queer theory, contemporary art theory, aesthetics, post-colonial theory, neo-colonial theory, and de-colonizing practices. I did not settle on one theoretical method or position, rather, I use the tools in concert with each other to help unravel the knotted threads that make up Filipino and Filipino American contemporary art.

This method of using these theoretical tools in concert forms what is called in Cultural Studies as a conjuncture. I employ conjunctures to make a break from the sclerotic state and hagiographic disposition of diasporic Filipino contemporary art analysis. My goal is to integrate other dynamics into how these art historical events have been framed, and how these historical moments contextualize the works of art and the practice of contemporary artists. I looked to Cultural Studies and its methods of studying systems and their relations to each other. I wanted to be able to bring in the history of



colonization and other socio-cultural aspects into the mix, as well as globalization and economic factors that might have contributed to the development of certain artistic practices in the Philippines and throughout the Filipino diaspora.

The notion of conjunctures as developed by Althusser, Stuart Hall, and Lawrence Grossberg provide the context for my own development and use of the term.

Conjuncture in its basic definition is a series of events. In his book, *For Marx*, French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser added to this basic definition, stating that a conjuncture “denotes the exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination of the contradictions at any given moment to which political tactics must be applied” (Althusser 1969). The last phrase, “to which political tactics must be applied” is an important addition that both Hall and Grossberg emphasize in their writings about conjunctures. Stuart Hall bases the formation of the field of Cultural Studies on this notion of conjuncture, further elaborated to include the task of articulation.

For Hall, a conjuncture cannot be a chronological or historical given, it has to be formed by radically contextualizing which historical events are considered and the social relations these events have with each other. Grossberg’s contribution to the conversation is his denial of reductionism and his emphasis on multiplicity and complexity through active interdisciplinary dialogues with history, culture, economics, and politics.

In turn, my contribution to conjunctures consists not only of looking at historical events, but also including personal, lived experiences as foundational to and in parallel with these historical events--specifically, how the lives of artists influence the works of art they produce. Taken as a group, a set of artists’ lives can be seen as a conjunctural formation defined by a certain chronology, geography, and economy that engenders a particular political act to affect liberatory changes. In other words, the artist’s lifespan

determines the timeframe, where the artist worked sets the geographical boundaries, and the artist's class status informs his economic condition. The works of art created are political acts that contribute to the discussion of contemporary art and present new possibilities for understanding them.

This theoretical conjuncture that specifically addresses the colonial history of the Philippines is what I termed as "colonial thinking". I am making a decisive move to further develop "colonial discourse" as to not foreclose or limit what might emerge in the investigation, analysis, discussions, and expressions of the colonial solely as a way of thinking or producing knowledge. I am arguing that discussions of the colonial need to be processed through a set of theoretical filters and observe what develops, thence make an analysis from those observations. This is particularly important in the context of the Philippines and its long colonial history.

The lives, social structures, and cultural expressions of the Philippines were completely overhauled and affected by the colonization of the Spanish and Americans. From 1521-1898, the Spanish abused the people of the Philippines to extract material and labor resources, and coerced them to convert to Catholicism. The Americans acquired the Philippines along with Guam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba from the Spanish as war reparations after the Spanish-American War in 1898. The American presence in the Philippines further changed the nation with another period of colonial abuses to further extract material and labor resources, and to modernize and democratize the Philippine nation. These two colonial periods make up the Filipino colonial experience and continue to affect the notion of being Filipino today.

Post-colonial theory analyzes the literary and artistic production from previously-colonized nations as a way to assess post-colonial subject formation (Tadiar 2009; McRobbie 2005; San Juan 2002; Williams and Chrisman 1994; Singh and Schmidt 2000).

For this writing, post-colonial theory is not just about the state of being of formerly colonized nations, but includes and focuses on the modes of representations such as literary and artistic projects that continue to explore the effects of colonization on the Philippine imagination. Furthermore, I treat post-colonial theory as a conjunctural formation that brings together an historical event - national independence - with a continuing development, expression, and critique of that new nationalist culture.

The contemporary conjuncture of colonialism and culture is discussed in Neferti X. M. Tadiar's work, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historic Experience and the Making of Globalization*. In this work, she explores how the historic experience of colonization continues to affect how Filipinos represent themselves, particularly in poetry and video, aligning her work with traditional postcolonial analysis and critique rooted in representation. However, Tadiar also goes to great lengths to contextualize the production of representations through lived experience, particularly through the exportation of feminized labor. She argues that representation is a crucial step that allows the imagination to freely create and form other subjectivities that are otherwise confined by material context or life experience. It is from this notion that I analyze and critique certain works of art and the deployment of representation and its social relation. I question the need for mediation through literature or art and bring in the idea of embodiment and the direct action through the body as performance, specifically as intervention.

The complex colonial history of the Philippines provokes debate as to whether the nation has arrived at its post-colonial state or it remains in a colonial condition without the conquest and being mired in a neo-colonial haze. The conjuncture of colonialism and politics is expressed as neo-colonialism, following E. San Juan's work, *Towards Filipino Self-Determination: Beyond Transnational Globalism*. There, he

discussed the current US-Philippine relations as nothing but a re-iteration of past colonial relations, that it is a neo-colonial relation in that within the context of globalization the colonizer need not occupy the colony to control it. Further developing San Juan's thinking, I utilize neo-colonial thought to address a certain strand of art produced by diasporic Filipinos.

Decolonizing theory hopes to do reparative work with the goal of achieving equity and social justice. Certain decolonizing strategies have been rooted in the recovery of indigenous cultural traditions, like Katrin de Guia in her work in *Kapwa: The Self in the Other*, or Lenny Strobel with her Center for Babaylan Studies, while others have employed hybrid strategies of localizing or indigenizing foreign concepts like Dr. Virgilio Enriquez and his work with *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Philippine Psychology).

In her work, *The Decolonized Eye: Filipino American Art and Performance*, decolonial thinker Sarita Echavez See, anchors her thinking in Freudian psychoanalysis to unpack the colonial experience as it is expressed in the visual arts and performance. She deploys Freudian melancholia, "a complex that acts like an open wound" (See and Project Muse. 2009) to diagnose the Filipino colonial experience, and examines its symptoms as they appear as physical mutilation in the art and performance of Filipino artists. See suggests that the frequent use of the mutilated body in Manuel Ocampo's paintings and in Angel Shaw's video, *Nailed*, is a decolonizing act that materially shows what has been attempted to be erased or forgotten. She argues that Filipinos suffer from post-colonial melancholia. See explained, "By analogizing melancholic loss with physical injury, post/colonial melancholia offers a psychosomatic way to interpret these recurrent images of violence and, more generally, to theorize the positioning of a strangely anomalous entity like Filipino America" (See and Project Muse. 2009, p. 5). Extrapolating her thesis, I use de-colonizing strategies to analyze certain works of art

and specific exhibitions. I especially highlight the use of *kapwa*, the shared self, as a strategy of de-colonizing the self. Through *kapwa*, psycholinguist Dr. Virgilio Enriquez, indigenizes clinical psychological practices and centers them on local customs and cultural values. A recovery of indigenous practices appears in the arts through the incorporation of “native” and “exotic” materials but also through the framing of visual art through the notion of *kapwa*.

The term “colonial thinking” attempts to create a theoretical conjuncture that processes ideas through post-colonial, neo-colonial, and de-colonial theories as defined above and through the work of Tadiar, San Juan, and See. The constructs of post-colonial, neo-colonial, and decolonizing theories, in and of themselves, fall short of offering a comprehensive method from which the current situation in which Filipino contemporary art can be understood.

In this writing, I focus on these three modes of thinking that address Filipino arts in the context of globalization and discuss their insights and critique their oversight. These modes of thinking are all anchored in the historical experience of the colonial and its effects on varying aspects of life, but this research focuses the colonial effects on politics, culture, and curating. Deploying Lawrence Grossberg’s model for conjunctural formations, I use the colonial as a point at which politics, culture, and curating coalesce while continuing on their disciplinarian trajectories.

Colonial Thinking is an analysis and critique of how the historical lived experience of colonialism continues to be elaborated when encountering specific modes of inquiry such as politics, culture, and curating in varying studies and arriving at nuanced consideration of the development of this colonial experience. It is through and against these theoretical considerations that I frame the discussions of my interventions in exhibition making. I process my analysis through “colonial thinking” to glean from it

productive moments that move the conversation of Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions forward from the standard interpretation of Filipino art as nationalist projects, to the vexed modernity of Pastor-Roces that confounds the relations of art, power, and emancipation, to the conjunctural formation that networks Luna's practice to today's global art market.

I return to this theme of Filipino world making where showcasing Filipino artistic mastery and positioning the Philippines "as a nation of and a destination for contemporary art" (Neuendorf 2015) like an echo from the Philippines' past participation in the global art scene; like painters Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hildalgo winning gold and silver medals at the 1884 Madrid exposition all over again, the moment that linked together contemporary visual arts with Filipino subject formation.

It seems that Filipino participation in international art fairs and festivals since 1884 cannot escape the light of this triumphant historical moment when two Filipino painters showed masterful technique and critical narrative that elevated Filipino status in the eyes of a global audience. What is it about this moment that continues to entrap Filipino artists in international exhibitions within this line of thinking?

Is the fate of curating contemporary art exhibitions employing a theme that includes "Filipino" destined to rehearse this historic event over and over? How does one assert unique aesthetic positions without being essentialized as a national trait? On the other hand, how does one assert a nationalist position without foreclosing the content of contemporary art? In the next few chapters, I analyze a set of exhibitions that combined Filipino theme and contemporary art, looking at smaller scale international exhibitions like *At Home and Abroad* organized by the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, or *Bastards of Misrepresentation* organized by artist Manuel Ocampo shown at Freies Gallery in Berlin to address these questions. In conjunction with these

exhibitions, I interject my curatorial projects as small interventions to discuss other ways of thinking and talking about Filipino and Filipino American contemporary art.

In the following chapters, I discuss my practice as interventions in art history and exhibition making. I am coming in between standard notions of Filipino subjectivity and contemporary art and asking questions to open those ideological positions to expand and contribute to the dialogue of Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions.

My intervention in art history began with two painters, Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, who won medals in the 1884 Madrid Exposition. This historic moment catalyzed a series of events that fused together the ideas of Filipino artistic mastery with that of equality. Jose Rizal, then reformer and now Philippine National Hero, employed this event as a victory for the cause of Filipino equal rights under the Spanish crown, that Filipinos - both *insulares* and *Indios* - have equal or better artistic capabilities and therefore deserve to be given equal rights and privileges as *peninsulares*. Ensuing Filipino participation in international art exhibitions always stands in the shadow of this event. The Luna effect was reiterated during the centennial commemorative exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila in 1984, when the organizers of the exhibitions wrote in the catalog,

“The standard established by Luna and Hidalgo when they bested their people’s colonizers in competitive artistic creativity has posed upon their followers the almost obsessive challenge: to repeat their feat — to project Philippine greatness into the consciousness of other nations. Likewise because their triumphs were achieved amidst heated agitation for political reforms, and because their themes alluded to the very conditions that instigated the reform movement, Luna and Hidalgo have impressed upon succeeding artists that art is a potent vehicle for calling attention to national issues” (Pilar 1988)

More than a century later, Luna and Hidalgo winning gold and silver at the 1884 Madrid Exposition combined with Jose Rizal’s speech continues to link art and

nationalism to bring attention to Philippine national issues. The recent participation of the Philippines in the 56<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennials illustrate this point. My question then is, can Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions create other networks beyond art and nationalism and expand the field of analysis of the Luna/Hidalgo medals to allow Filipino artistic endeavors to develop varying lines of thought and narrative content? Can one avoid the aftertaste of nationalism when art addressing Filipino issues is consumed? Nationalism needs to be unpacked and explored in these narratives to see how it functions within an international context and a local context simultaneously.

Indeed, nationalism is most relevant within the discussion and context of international and local political formations. I begin with Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006) to define nationalism but venture into three developments that I find productive in the discussion of Filipino American contemporary art.

First, I deploy the idea of nation that Balibar developed through Fichte's notions of internal borders. This group forms around a means of communication through a common living language. This affinity group internalizes this language and bases membership on who can and cannot speak it. This creates an internal border that cannot be taken away or altered by external forces, such as landscape or geography (Balibar 1994).

This idea is helpful when thinking of diasporic communities settling and developing in new homelands. Having worked with Filipino American artists, I have found that the visual language of art making becomes this new way of communicating. Through the production of visual experiences regarding migration, colonization, racial/class/gender inequality, artists are able to communicate cross-generationally and transracially, and beyond class and gender. Contemporary art provides diasporic art



makers a platform on which they can present their lived experience and extrapolate this experience as instances within a larger, global dynamic. Art making communicates as both theory and practice: expressing lived experience as a greater idea that moves beyond the physical self, and enacting upon this lived experience to engage the systems at play with each artistic project.

Second, I follow E. San Juan's notion of "deferred nationalism." He argues that "the Filipino nation is an unfinished and continuing project, an unfinished work, constantly being reinvented but not under conditions of its own making. Becoming Filipinos is a process of decolonization and radical democratization of the social formation, a sequence of collective choices" (San Juan 2009, p. 56). The 300 years of Spanish colonization and the following 50 years of US occupation of the Philippines were the two major forces that made a lasting impact on the re/invention of the Philippines as a nation. It is from this history of colonization that Filipinos are constantly trying to negotiate and reconcile, to finally arrive at a state of decolonization and liberty.

Third, Marion Pastor-Roces discussed nationalism within the context of Luna's painting and Rizal's reception of this work in her essay, *Vexed Modernity*. She posited that Rizal was neither influenced by modern notions of nationalism, such as "'official nationalisms' that preserved aristocratic or dynastic privilege within modernity," nor "nationalism of creole America of the late 18th and early 19th centuries." Rather, Rizal was emoting his love of country based on "an evanescent shadow of the 18th century French Enlightenment idea of an *amour de la patrie*" (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). It is this point, the attachment to an "older Europe" that vexes the modernist project of nation-building, and debunks the mythology of nationalism that surrounds Luna's painting and Rizal's speech and its perpetuation in Filipino art historical writings.

How is a national identity, if it is based on imagined communities whose people internalize membership through language, that the development of a nation is deferred by colonial powers, and whose modernist universalizing project of state formation is vexed by “diversity and instability” within a group, expressed in visual art? And going one step further, how is this artistic expression analyzed? This writing offers a series of interventions that recontextualizes art history within Filipino artistic production, proposes new pathways of thinking by aggregating post-colonial, neo-colonial, and de-colonizing theories under the rubric of conjunctures and apply political tactics to exhibition making that reflects diversity and acknowledges instability of such an identity, a Filipino American identity.

The first intervening gesture I perform is to re-orient Filipino art history through an alternative periodization that paralleled Filipino and Filipino American history rather than following the Western chronology of historic events. In the *Worlds in Collision* website, I attempt to create an alternative art history that centers Filipino historic events within the narrative of Philippine history as opposed to fitting Filipino artistic development within the canon of western art history or general US History. This act stems from a desire to recontextualize Filipino art history within the lived historical experiences of Filipinos in the Philippines, and the Filipinos in diaspora, and looks at how artistic production within these communities were sparked by this history.

For the timeline, I developed six periods: Period 1- 1521-1889, *Worlds in Collision: A Lost Spaniard, Hooded Thugs, and Fun at Sea*; Period 2- 1890-1945, *The American Era: Sleight of Hand, Fair Games, and Side Shows*; Period 3- 1946-1965 *Waves Of Immigration: First Came My Grandfather Then My Father Then My Mother*; Period 4- 1966-80 *Time For Protest: We Are Sick Of Your Shit*; Period 5- 1981-1998, *Cultural*

Renaissance: Hindigenius, Puro Arte At Maporma Pa; Period 6- 1999-2006, The Filipino American Era: Making A Scene, Causing Attention, and Bringing It On.

My second act of intervention is to propose new pathway of thinking by aggregating post-, neo-, and de-colonizing acts as conjunctural formations. The idea of conjuncture is to call attention to the dialectics of colonial experience which privileges the contact between native and foreign, the relations between colony and empire, and the negotiation between colonial experience and decolonizing strategies. Conjunctural thinking sublates the colonial experience, negating the negation, to synthesize a complicated, pluralistic identity based on localized historical circumstances and on-going social relations.

The notion of conjuncture that I employ is built up from the works of many thinkers particularly, Althusser, Stuart Hall, and Lawrence Grossberg. My contribution to this thinking is applying conjunctural thinking to individual lives, artists' lives, as cellular blocks that form a larger conjuncture that encompasses historical events. In other words, the lives of artists are marked by events that coincide with and are part of larger historical events, and through their works of art, contribute to the way these historical events are understood. By looking at conjunctures from the cellular level, to the larger systemic level, I am asserting that the personal is part of the historical which is enacted within the political. Artists experiences are part of a historical moment and enacted through their works of art.

My interventions in exhibitions making begin and end this exploration. The exhibitions presented in this writing initiated ideas that generated further exploration through curatorial projects. The interconnected systems of nationalism, Philippine diaspora, and contemporary art need to be examined as a conjunctural formation to get to new ways of understanding the phenomenon of Filipino American contemporary art.

My work here is to present ideas of how I have been engaged in both theoretical work and engaged practice that explores these issues and attempts to provide some thoughts and answers.

## Chapter 1: Curating as Conjuncture

Within the diversity of analytical methods Cultural Studies researchers employ, conjuncture and conjunctural analysis become apparent as productive grounds upon which to examine the dynamics that determine Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions. The topic at hand is an assemblage of ideas that touch upon the delineation of time (the contemporary), the demarcation of space (art exhibitions), and the attendant politics (Filipino American) that regulate such formation, therefore requiring a method of contextualizing that pays attention to the individual sets of ideas and the relations each set has with the other. Conjuncture emerges as a flexible tool of analysis that can handle the complexity of such accumulation and brings the promise of, as Cultural Studies theorist Lawrence Grossberg wrote, a “better way to tell a story.” Throughout this project, conjuncture is deployed as a way to lasso the ever expanding and constantly shifting elements of time and space, and slow the political engine that drives these expansions and shifts to allow for a moment of reflection and analysis. Conjunctures can be understood by its general definition as a combination of events, as well as the particular usage as elaborated by Grossberg in his work, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, as “an articulation, accumulation, and condensation of contradictions, a fusion of different currents or circumstances” (Grossberg 2010, p. 40). The notion of Filipino American contemporary art is such an accumulation and a fusion of different circumstances.

The act of curating creates a locus of contexts that continuously interact and form relations and networks through exhibitions that warrant analysis due to its currently expanded role as a means of producing knowledge. By juxtaposing the ideas of conjunctures with curating, I attempt to “tell a better story” of the curatorial process,

first through the analysis of its attendant parts – artistic practices, art object, exhibition space, the politics of art institutions – and second through an examination of the exhibition or art experience itself as a whole, an aggregation that forms its own presence and exerts its own gravity. Curating, as such, tells a good story, but the goal is to tell a better story by engaging it through the process of conjunctural analysis that radically articulates its parts as dynamic systems themselves, while also paying attention to the totality and the unity of systems activated within a specific curatorial gesture. Curating Filipino American contemporary art is a new way to tell the story of the Filipino people that needs further development. First, this story need to identify the artists, then describe the works of art and their meaning, in order to address larger issues such as race, immigration and diaspora, and world-making through group exhibitions.

Curating in itself is a richly dense conjunctural formation, developed over time through an accumulation of specific tasks. This accumulation in turn imposes its own agenda that continually shifts, evolves, and expands over time. Considering curating as a conjuncture demystifies it and reveals it as a collection of tasks that shapes the impetus for each curator and explains the varied priorities in exhibition-making. We now see that curating functions as a set of labors in relations with each other, and its unity, as labor-power, stands in relation with other aspects of the art market, such as collectors, museums, and government agencies. Curating as conjuncture show the dynamics of its constituent parts acting in tandem while it interacts and creates relations with other systems beyond itself; we recognize that curating is a set of relations creating another set of relations (exhibitions) that create another set of relations (art market) that create another set of relations (culture) and so forth. Conjunctural analysis in curating diagrams the mechanism involved in creating specific systems that can help pinpoint problematic areas that need further investigation. I attempt to address these problematic areas in

Curating Filipino American contemporary art by investigating the problems with Filipino art history, the role of the curator, and the process of exhibition making.

Curating is an electrifying current running through the network of the art field and has garnered much discussion in recent years about the aims of curating and the role of the curator, especially around the organizing of mega-exhibitions and biennials. The traditional aims of curating – to collect, care for, and display works of art – have been called into question by exhibition goers and critics, as curators continue to perform additional tasks that some see as an exciting expansion of the role, while others see it as a further exploitation of museum workers. The politics of exhibition making has implicated curating as the act where power is exercised and authority wielded, calling into question the lack of participation of women artists and artists of color. This project particularly questions the lack of participation from Filipino American artists.

My first step in addressing the question of Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions is to propose curating as a conjuncture, following Grossberg's development of the term. A conjuncture is employed to bring together different sets of ideas and overlap them, have them interact with each other, and analyze the relationships that result from the interaction.

This analysis of curating as conjuncture plays a crucial part when demanding a responsibility to develop new ways of understanding and thinking about Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions. Conjunctural analysis guides the viewers of Filipino American contemporary art through the vast archipelago of contexts that make up this category, from the recovery of indigenous artistic practices as a strategy of decolonizing contemporary art to the perpetuation of the avant-garde and modernist principles through participation in cosmopolitan mega-exhibitions.

Conjunctural analysis provides a topographical view and locates where these ideas are positioned and begins to address the interplay between these ideas and form relationships that help explain movement between ideas. What conjunctural analysis illustrates is a map full of islands of ideas and how they are positioned within that conjunctural formation, and some form groupings or archipelagos due to factors that provide a commonality, whether it is geographic, like the Philippines, or temporal like contemporary, or discipline-based like visual arts.

Labeling objects - as art, as contemporary, or as Filipino American - is a facile gesture that reduces both the object and the label to a flattened common notion. It acts as a veneer that has been attached to a corpus to articulate a surface-level meaning for easy consumption. So, in an art exhibition that is articulated as Filipino American contemporary art, everything in that gallery is flattened as being Filipino American and contemporary and consumed uncritically, without question. Asking questions needs too much thinking and takes too much time to answer. It does not fit within the 15 to 30 second<sup>1</sup> timeframe most museum or gallery visitors spend with each work of art.

The goal of this project is to intervene in this type of easy consumption by presenting a more nuanced and complex dynamic of engagement along with a more meaningful analysis, a conjunctural analysis, that unpacks the term Filipino American contemporary art exhibition, and looks at the social relations that this event engenders.

## Conjuncture

To fully grasp the context of curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions, a method of analysis needs to be employed to evaluate the distinct

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<sup>1</sup> When I was a museum educator at the J. Paul Getty in 1996-98, the education staff used an internal study conducted by Getty researchers observing museum visitors and timed how much each visitor spent looking at a work of art. The findings reveal that on average, a museum visitor only spent between 15-30 seconds in front of an art object.



elements that constitute the concept and their functions, the relations that emerge from the encounter, and then analyze the assemblage as a working whole. I employ a Cultural Studies methodology, specifically, Grossberg's notion of conjuncture to articulate ideas individually, and examine their coagulation into a system. He presents the idea of how a Cultural Studies approach to contemporary conjunctures allows for the juxtaposition of disparate thoughts and explores its various points of intersection and divergent tendencies within a certain political context.

"I believe that the project of cultural studies, which binds different people and work together, involves a commitment to a particular practice of intellectual-political work, and to the claim that such intellectual work matters both inside and outside the academy. Cultural Studies is a way of inhabiting the position of scholar, teacher, artist, and intellectual, one way (among many) of politicizing theory, and theorizing politics. The project of cultural studies is an effort to find an intellectual practice that is responsible to the changing context (changing geographical, historical, political, intellectual, and institutional conditions) in which it works. As such, it constructs for itself a more limited and modest claim to authority than one is used to from the academy; it refuses any and all dreams of universal, absolute, complete, and perfect truth, and at the same time, it refuses to give up the dream of truth to the burdens of relativism" (Grossberg 2010, p. 3).

As Grossberg wrote, Cultural Studies is first and foremost, a "commitment to a practice of intellectual-political work," and by starting an analysis of curating from this perspective, and using this methodology, the intellectual and political aspects of this study are embedded within the act of curating and as part of the idea of the curatorial. The act of curating can become a thorny enterprise of administrative tasks and technical minutia related to the mounting of an exhibition; for this reason, the political and intellectual aspects of this work easily can be lost when filling out contracts, negotiating delivery dates of artwork, etc. Through a commitment to Cultural Studies, I ensure that I am paying attention to the people who are brought together by the act of curating, and

insist that they and their work matters both inside and outside the academy, and that exhibition making is a viable political strategy that can affect change in people's everyday life.

As a practicing artist, independent curator, educator, and scholar, I am committed to Cultural Studies because it allowed me to inhabit these various positions in the process of 'politicizing theory and theorizing politics.' Inhabiting multiple personas liberates thinking from a narrow disciplinarian view, and complicates it through the layering of perspectives and overlapping agendas. My work and the tasks I perform might be defined and strictly delineated at certain times, but in the act of theorizing, these separate and related positions and actions may be gathered into an amalgam that reflects my unique perspective as a critical organic catalyst, to borrow Cornell West's term, or as a social formation, a practice that is networked and informs each identity compounds its effect. The political dimension of this work is reiterated by marrying politics with theory, emphasizing that theoretical work is inherently political, not in a dichotomous binary manner, but in a topographical manner where the political gives detail to the theorizing terrain making it much more complex and nuanced.

By shifting focus from the mainstream art markets and centers of production to postcolonial outposts, such as the Philippines, I can register how contemporary art is localized or indigenized and mark the difference in how contemporary art functions and how the notion of the contemporary interacts with temporal features of that locale, in addition to observing social relations that form to help in the dissemination, appreciation, and understanding of works of art from this region. The shift in geographic region provides a distinct context that is responsive and responsible for the political-economic-social conditions presently developing within this locale and how this condition is interacting with the rest of the world.

The study of curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions is a nuance within the larger dynamic of the art market and cannot claim itself universal. Although curating as an analytical process that examines the social relations of Filipino American art can provide a precedent with universal application, namely that curating within a smaller locale adds an energizing strategy that enacts upon the politics of everyday life, and giving significance to the truths of lived experiences.

Looking at conjunctions, Seeing action

Stuart Hall, one of the founders of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University deployed conjuncture as an analytical tool to examine overlapping, complex formations through radical contextualizations of racialized systems. Hall's conjuncture developed from his engagement with Marxist historical materialism, Gramscian theory of trajectory, and Althusserian theory of conjuncture and aleatory materialism.

Lawrence Grossberg first met Hall and learned about conjuncture at CCCS, and since that meeting, Grossberg has been committed to the development and use of conjunctures, and posits that the future of Cultural Studies lies in the deployment of radical contextualization and conjunctural analysis. In a reflection on Hall's work, Grossberg recalled one of the lessons he learned from Hall.

“One needs what he [Hall] called the discipline of the conjuncture—a commitment to study and understand the contradictory and complex realities that shape people's ordinary everyday lives. This was the responsibility of the intellectual: to begin as it were with the frequently expressed 'pessimism of the intellect,' based not simply on taken-for-granted assumptions and judgments (not merely decrying or naming the present) but on rigorously produced knowledge, because, he believed that with only 'optimism of the will,' one's efforts and strategies would not address the specific demands of the conjuncture and of people's hopes and aspirations, fears and angers. Instead, one would continue to lose the struggles, if not immediately, most certainly eventually. The project was,

quite simply, to help produce the knowledge and political vision that might contribute to what Raymond Williams called 'the long revolution' "(Grossberg, 2015, p. 6).

I believe in this work because it calls for a commitment to study the realities of people's everyday life and to produce knowledge and help form a political vision that would sustain purposeful action towards a continually progressive democratic society, the 'long revolution' that Williams wrote about in the 1960s. I am expanding this effort to include the field of visual arts, particularly curating, the curatorial, and racialized exhibition spaces, specifically Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions.

As Grossberg learned the lesson from Hall, I learned Hall's lesson through Grossberg who has helped articulate my commitment to ordinary experiences and how these experiences are visualized through art, and racialized through politics, as simultaneous processes that are intricately woven together. The conjuncture allows me to look at this complex encounter and articulate the relations that are formed between these elements as newly produced knowledge that can help focus a political agenda that liberates art, artists, and exhibitions from continual marginalization by institutions and the market.

Juha Koivisto and Mikko Lahtinen wrote a comprehensive entry ('Conjuncture – politico-historical') for the *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism* published in the journal, 'Historical Materialism,' that provided added insight to how Grossberg, through Althusser and Hall, developed his notion of the conjuncture. They start off with a definition from Althusser's glossary found in his writing, For Marx,

"The central concept of the Marxist science of politics (cf. Lenin's 'current moment'); It denotes the exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination (q.v.) of the contradictions at any given moment to which political tactics must be applied" (Althusser 1969, p. 250).

Then, Koivisto and Lahtinen traced the usage of the word conjuncture, starting with the Latin *coniungere* meaning to bind or to join, to its development and connotative variations arising from Diderot's *Encyclopedia* to include a notion of temporality, to the German *konjunktur* that relates the word with economic formation, or to the astrological as a celestial predictor of crisis (Koivisto and Lahtinen 2012).

Althusser believed that Italian Renaissance philosopher, Machiavelli, wrote what is considered the first documents to contemplate the theoretical aspects of conjuncture, in his renowned book, *The Prince*, re-considered to be an intervention in the conjuncture of Italian national unity (Koivisto and Lahtinen 2012). Althusser used Machiavelli's work to help him develop his concept of "aleatory materialism," a way to connect history and politics conjuncturally.

Koivisto and Lahtinen were critical of Althusser's method of conjunctural analysis as being too abstract and rooted in theory without addressing the material conditions that spurs the conjuncture, writing, "Marxist intellectuals seem to remain philosophers or theoreticians who 'spontaneously' reproduce the division between intellectual and material work typical of the capitalist class society" (Koivisto and Lahtinen 2012, p. 272), echoing E. San Juan's weariness about conjunctures as a tool for analysis, discussed at the end of the chapter.

Koivisto and Lahtinen is criticizing the glibness and dismissive characteristics of so-called Marxist philosophers and intellectuals who separate intellectual work from material work, rather than adhering to Marx's notion of praxis, theory and practice together. For them, a conjuncture considers within its formation the spectrum of work from the materiality of lived historical experience to the theoretical visioning of philosophical and analytical work.

In *Cultural Studies in the Future Sense*, the reader can see glimpses of Althusser's and Hall's ideas when Grossberg details his development of the conjuncture and its functions.

“Conjuncturalism is a description of change, articulation and contradiction; it describes a mobile multiplicity, the unity of which is always temporary and fractured. A conjuncture is constituted by, at, and as the articulation of multiple, overlapping, competing, reinforcing, etc. lines of force and transformation, destabilization and (re-) stabilization, with differing temporalities and spatialities, producing a potentially but never actually chaotic assemblage or articulations of contradictions and contestations. Thus, it is always a kind of totality, always temporary, complex, and fragile, that one takes hold of through analytic and political work. Contexts and conjunctures have complex relations. Potentially, any context may encompass more than one conjuncture, and both contexts and conjunctures have to be seen as multiple, overlapping, and embedded” (Grossberg 2010, 41).

I refer to this definition because Grossberg's detailed definition above aligns with my own perspective on how to unpack the totality of curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions to register the temporal and dynamic aspects of exhibitions, the need to fully communicate the parameters of the Filipino American category, and the antagonism that uneven development and fractured modernity provokes. The conjuncture also allows for movement from one geographical locale to another, considering both the postcolonial outpost and the cosmopolitan center, in addition to the nomadic diaspora that chases the global distribution of labor. The conjuncture is capable of handling multiple moving parts for analysis and politicization, but only for a short moment, until a new conjuncture is necessary and supersedes the existing one.

## Curating

As a practicing curator, I have often felt the disparate nature of the job and explained my role by listing a set of tasks, namely collecting, caretaking, and displaying. This was due partly to the job description that the institution in which I was employed had given me, but mostly, I recognized the job of curating as having evolved into its present state due to how certain institutions, mostly museums and galleries, utilized the worker to fill certain needs.

The dynamics of professionalization and institutionalization are tightly enmeshed and contribute greatly to how a task develops into a complex job function. Previously housed exclusively in museums or collecting agencies, curators had fairly defined and stable job descriptions. Currently, the role of the curator and the task of curating have become so ubiquitous that everything from “playlists, outfits, even hors d’oeuvres are now curated” (Balzer, p. 7).

In his book, Curatorism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else, Canadian writer and critic David Balzer looked at the current phenomenon of curating everything and called it curatorism, “the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being” (p. 8), and traced the development of the word *curate* as a verb, an act or something to perform, and consequently, also tracked the emergence of the performer, the *curator*. Balzer is one of many critics and writers who are thinking and writing about the explosion of curating and the issues that arise from its ubiquity.

I recognize that my own work participates in this discussion and my exploration of curating and how I have framed my introspection is affected by this trend. To avoid confusion, I often should add “gallery” or “museum” to curator to specify what exactly I am curating. My contribution to this conversation is simply to look at curating through

the conjuncture and see how curating is a convergence of many tasks framed within specific historical milieus. A conjuncture allows for a momentary pause for analysis, but at the same time frees its subject from a constricting definition.

By looking at curating as a conjuncture, I am practicing what Grossberg calls “radical contextualization” of curating’s constituent parts that shape the whole and how one understands the functions of these constituent elements within the complex of curating, and that slight shifts in contexts are registered as new conjunctural formations. Grossberg defines radical contextualization as “the identity, significance, and effects of any practice or event (including cultural practices and events) are defined only by the complex set of relations that surround, interpenetrate, and shape it, and make it what it is” (Grossberg 2010, p. 20).

The act of radical contextualization sets into motion the circumstances or the conditions in which a practice or event is precipitated. “Radical” is a key word in this term, that activates the energy in contextualization and harnesses it towards change. To further develop that idea of radicality in conjunctural formation, I employ Nicholas Bourriaud’s notion of the “radicant,” as a way of “setting one’s roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous context and formats, denying them the power to completely define one’s identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviors, exchanging rather than imposing” (Bourriaud 2009, p.22). For Bourriaud, radicality energizes the root, the origins, or the desire to return to the beginning, while the radicant is “caught between the need for a connection with its environment and the forces of uprooting, between globalization and singularity, between identity and opening to the other. It defines the subject as an object of negotiation” (Bourriaud, p. 51). By combining the strategies of conjuncture and radicant, I wish to develop a method of analysis that would address not just the conjunctural formation that contains



curating, but also curating itself as a conjunctural formation, a formation that is caught between opposing forces, whose terms need to be defined prior to engaging in negotiations.

Curating as a conjuncture is a temporary acculturation to the environment that cultivates the current notions of exhibitionary practices. The process of conjunctural analysis allows for a deeper examination of exhibitionary practices rather than staying on surface level observation.

Curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions is a rich and dense conjunctural formation due to its specificity in bringing together diasporic struggles of Filipino people, the temporal bracketing that the contemporary places on the art of a postcolonial people, and the brutal exhibitionary legacy of displaying Filipino cultures rooted in the 1904 St. Louis Worlds Expo. One must pass through curating as conjuncture, and understand its integral parts and how they interact. Thus, curating is analyzed as three conjunctures: of labor, of space, and of thinking.

Curating - Conjuncture of Labor

Curating in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reached a crisis<sup>2</sup> when it began to shift, expand or change altogether, moving away from the traditional tasks of collecting, caring, and displaying to include interpreting and producing knowledge about works of art and exhibitions. These changes were deeply felt when the origins of what we have come to know as the curator's traditional role began to conflict with the role which this figure currently is preoccupied: knowledge production through exhibitions.

From Lawrence Alloway's initial observations of the expanding role of the curator to Paul O'Neill's, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, the role of the curator and the development of the curator's job description have been traced and well-

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<sup>2</sup> Somewhat following a Marxist understanding of the term, as an overproduction, rather than the traditional usage as a predicament or disaster.

documented. O'Neill set the narrative of the curator's historical development and gave a historical account of how curating arrived at this moment. He stated that

“the figure of the curator has moved from being a caretaker of collections – a behind-the-scenes organizer and arbiter of taste – to an independently motivated practitioner with a more centralized position within the contemporary art world and its parallel commentaries” (O'Neill, p. 1-2).

His insightful historicization of curating practices since the 1960s to the present added value and context to how we understand the art curators' role.

The avant-garde position of the artist as genius has been usurped by the curator. The genius behind the exhibition is no longer the maker of the works of art, but rather, the maker of the exhibition itself. O'Neill rooted the emergence of curatorial discourse on subversive acts of exhibition and art making happening in the 1920s, as artists rejected the traditional forms and spaces of exhibitions as institutionalizing. Dadaists, Surrealists, and Situationists sought to redefine the role of art in society and broke down hierarchies that perpetuated bourgeois structures and systems. O'Neill wrote,

“Many artists of this period began to employ the exhibition as the vehicle through which to conduct a self-critical examination of art's separateness, by challenging the prestige and social status of art afforded by bourgeois culture” (O'Neill, p. 10).

Many avant-garde artists wanted to bring back the audience as active participants in the art making process, and set up exhibitions where the audience could manipulate and alter the objects, or participate in performances, and in the process relinquished curatorial control. O'Neill followed this development by looking at key exhibitions that exemplified how this idea of artist-curator was deployed within and outside of the museum.

While the artist curated his/her own work, a complementary dynamic developed; curators began to use exhibitions as the medium to create certain aesthetic

regimes, concepts and ideas, and transformed themselves to *curator-as-artist*, a term that O'Neill found to be persistent and widely used. Curator-artists proposed exhibitions based on themes rather than chronology, genres, or style, and not necessarily for a museum or institution. This marked the development of the curator as independent exhibition maker, increased the visibility of the curator and placed him/her at the center of the exhibition. This is the current situation in which we find curators and the discussion around curating and the curatorial. It is from this point that I use conjunctural analysis to accommodate the changes in curating, particularly looking at the changes in the tasks that define curating, firstly, as a conjuncture of labor.

The separate acts of caretaking, displaying, and collecting became consolidated into one person's job through the continual professionalization of the curator. Curating is defined by the conjuncture of these three separate tasks that has coalesced over time as one person's labor. However, in the consolidation of these tasks, they remain distinct because the spaces in which each task is performed remained discrete and separate from each other. The treasury or storage vault may house the prized objects where they are taken care of through maintenance and conservation. The space of collecting, assembling, or acquiring a collection happens in the marketplace, while the act of displaying may happen in a salon, hall, or gallery.

With the development of the curator's role, the spaces in which the curator worked also expanded, yet the tasks to be performed in each location remained strictly defined, revealing an interesting interrelation between space and the curator's function. I wanted to focus on curating as a conjuncture of labor by radically contextualizing the constituent parts of what makes curating a complete enterprise, namely the tasks of collecting, caretaking, and displaying.

By looking at the constituent tasks of curating - collecting, caretaking, and displaying - one can see how curating as a social function is a conjuncture of labor, and understanding it as such, it is given or expected that a conjuncture is always in flux, expanding or shrinking; thus, the practice of curating is an ever-changing job that will experience episodic crises reflecting market volatility and social upheaval. As a conjunctural formation, curating is seen to yield a certain kind of power in elevating the importance of certain objects and collections, in maintaining a movement between reification and demystification, and in perpetuating certain ideals and values through directed viewing and guided interpretation.

### *Collecting*

James Clifford began his essay, "On Collecting Art and Culture," with a poem about the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England whose collection of objects from other cultures was started by one man, Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, and his systematic and wholesale way of acquiring. Clifford connected the act of collecting with the act of recollecting, the recalling of memory and desire, rooting the "ideal self as owner: the individual surrounded by accumulated property and goods. The same ideas can hold true for collectivities making and remaking their cultural "selves" (Ferguson 1990).

These accumulated goods act as a material anchor that stabilizes the fluidity of cultural formation; it acts as evidence that supports the argument for the existence group formations. Furthermore, the act of collecting, a way to preserve "an authentic domain of identity...is tied up with nationalist politics, with restrictive law, and with contested encodings of the past and the future" (ibid). Collecting becomes a more powerful act when it serves to forge a certain identity, whether by an individual or group, and project a certain culture.

Clifford devised what he called, “The Art-Culture System: A Machine for Making Authenticity,” as a way of analyzing how objects are valued within collections. In his diagram, objects are deemed authentic or inauthentic as masterpieces of art or as artifacts of culture based on the object’s deemed merit. An example Clifford cited are tribal artifacts that move from ethnographic contexts to art galleries, or craft projects like Shaker chairs that become examples of high design. Clifford allowed for movement between the quadrants, traversing from art to culture, from inauthentic to authentic. For example, if an object is valued strictly for its aesthetic qualities, it is placed in the art area, and the level of value determined its authenticity. Those objects that sustain an authentic value became prized objects increasing their status as collectibles.

Based on Clifford’s notion, collecting is not a neutral activity but is tied to an ontological enterprise, a way of forging new identities, “a way of making and re-making [our] cultural selves,” whether individual or within a group. I stress this importance, especially when an individual precipitates a collecting activity, as a curator does when mounting a group exhibition, when its ontological foundation easily could be overlooked, since not every group show is a battle for identity or an expression of nationalism or group affinity, but it does foster a sense of camaraderie and affiliation that does not occur in solo shows. In addition, this ontological foundation not only begets identity, it also creates new social relations and possible new body of knowledge.

### *Caretaking*

The word “curator” first appeared in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, and by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the curator’s role crystallized to incorporate caretaking, displaying, and collecting as his or her role and function. This usage of the word continues to define

what a curator is today, and the tasks associated with “curating.” In Ways of Curating, Obrist made the same observation and remarked,

“Different kinds of caretaking have sprung from this root word over the centuries, but the work of the contemporary curator remains surprisingly close to the sense in *curare* of cultivating, growing, pruning, and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive” (Obrist and Razā, p. 25).

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what we arrive at is a return to a personalization and deprofessionalization (curating is no longer a unique function of the museum curator), singularized by the image of the *auteur* – “a concentration of functions within one individual who remains relatively singular and autonomous in relation to the institution” (Ferguson, p. 246). For sociologists Heinich and Pollak, this shift is “symptomatic of an evolution which conforms to a process antithetical to ordinarily privileged, sociological notion of what constitutes ‘professionalism’: an evolution from a professional position which is institutionally and collectively defined in terms of its *post* (for our purposes, the curator) to the progressive autonomization of *function* (the exhibition curator), itself capable of authorizing a more independent and personalized position which is that of the *auteur*” (Ferguson, p. 246).

### *Displaying*

The act of displaying non-public collections evolved slowly, starting with small sanctioned events like open houses where the public was allowed to view the palace or big houses of the aristocracy as a way to display status and power, “inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power...throughout society” (O'Neill, 1). From these small acts of display, the exhibitionary complex developed a standard regime of presenting power and status that directly involved a public audience.

Tony Bennett, an English sociologist working in Australia, used Michel Foucault's work on Discipline and Punishment to link the development of public display with that of surveillance. In his 1988 essay, "The Exhibitionary Complex," he posited that the most extreme sort of displaying power was located on the executioner's scaffold, where individual lives are taken as a form of a spectacle to control the masses. This type of public display became interiorized, as executions became less public, and as prisons became closed and secured environments "in the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries" (Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairne 1996, p. 83). The interiorization of the carceral system required a design that allowed the authorities to surveil the inmates in one panoramic view, resulting in the panopticon. The devious ingenuity behind this design is not that it made it possible for one person to watch numerous cells at once, but rather, that it made the inmates paranoid by not knowing when they are being watched, therefore, controlling their own behavior. Almost simultaneously, the great exhibitionary complexes were being built using the same ethos of surveillance, designed to maximize the surveillance of the visitors who came to view the spectacles that are housed within them. Bennett cites the 1851 Great Exhibition building, The Crystal Palace, a large glazed structure that allowed authorities and the public to peer in and watch the exhibition audience look at art or products of industry, as such a building that allowed for the viewers to be surveilled, and become part of the exhibition.

Displaying, as a task of curating, seems to have always been a political act that exercised control over the viewing audience. The displaying of selected art and artifact has served an agenda in the way it presented the work of art or artifact. Gallery spaces designed to be neutral, with their architectural features minimized and the walls sanitized in white paint, had their own agenda and exercised their own kind of power: extreme decontextualization or aestheticization. The works shown in these "white

cubes” are presented as autonomous objects that emit their own power to direct the viewer and guide the viewer’s thinking.

#### Exhibition - Conjuncture of Space

The exhibition space is both a physical area within a building that displays works of art: the physical space. It is also an abstracted, immaterial terrain bounded, perceived or defined limits: the conceptual space. By looking at the exhibition space as a conjunctural formation, one can analyze this space as a coalescence of multiple streams of activity, performed by the curator, the exhibitions designer, the gallery guard, and the preparator, among others. The exhibitions space is where these streams meet and result in a form of social interaction.

Specifically looking at the encounter of key players – the curator, the artist, and the audience – one can analyze how the exhibitionary space is created and how the work of art is transacted not just as a commodity but as a catalyst for knowledge production. The exhibition may be employed by the gallery or commercial space where the work of art acts primarily as a commodity to be sold, or it can be used by museums or public institutions as a site where the work of art is seen, interpreted, and appreciated in the service of producing new knowledge about the work itself or the narrative content embedded in the work that addresses issues at-large, whether purely aesthetic, or a much broader political agenda.

As a conjuncture, the exhibition space is understood to be in constant flux, and that the encounter among the curator, the artist, and the audience is contingent and highly contextualized by time, geography, media, and themes, to name a few elements that affect this encounter. This conjunctural formation articulates only a specific episode



in this encounter, meaning that the meeting between curator, artist, audience, and the active space is momentarily frozen to reflect upon and analyze this experience.

#### Curator

The figure of the curator holds a great deal of power in shaping how art objects are perceived and mediating the viewer's experience from the beginning of the process of organizing an exhibition. From selecting specific works by certain artists, and choosing where they go in a gallery, to how they are lit, to writing explanatory text panels, the curator guides the audience at every turn, narrowing its focus and inciting certain emotional responses. The curator contextualizes the works of art for the viewing public.

Within the context of mega-exhibitions and biennials, O'Neill presented the curator as the sole figure responsible for the event. This charge is either due to the underpinning institutional politics that privileges the curator or that the narrative of the biennial lacks an opposing account. Both expectations perpetuate the notion of the curator as "producer of exhibitions," with the curatorial statement acting as guiding principles that demarcates both an intellectual and social limits within the defined space of the exhibition (p. 60-1).

#### Artist

The image of the artist rising out of the dizzying display of art hung from floor to ceiling, emerging as genius, an idea perpetuated by the academies and salon system that peaked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, has all but vanished, has become mythology, a nostalgic aspiration for today's artists. Now, the role of the artist can be understood as a figure negotiating a globalized art world, contending with the critic – the bearer of expectations from both institution and public – hoping that his/her vision will triumph.

The curator excites the public with exhibitions and ultimately has the power to decree the fate of the artist, exclusion from mega-exhibitions lead to obscurity, and inclusion, to international stardom.

The curator straddles an intermediary position; he or she acts as an agent of the exhibitionary institutions, while at the same time takes on the visionary aspects of an auteur and advocates for the works of art and validates the artistic practice. With the emergence of curating as a vital act, the relationship between artist and curators is undergoing a continuing re-negotiation with both positions becoming contingent in the current exhibitionary system.

Maria Lind, curator and writer, reflected upon this condition when she presented at a conference at the Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art in 1997, and stated that she wanted to be a hybrid curator.

“The position that I want to take as curator is, in other words, a hybrid one. I am trying to combine the role of the provider – who creates possibilities for producing and exhibiting art on the artist’s own terms as much as possible – with that of the creator, or Harald Szeemanian auteur, who thinks and feels through, who digests historical and contemporary culture”(Lind, Wood, and Bismarck, p. 223).

Curators are re-making their roles and defining them contingent upon their relationship to artists and their works. This is not a one-sided equation; it should be balanced, so that when a change occurs in one part of the equation; a similar action needs to be taken on the other side. Thus, when a curator changes his/her role, the role of the artists also changes. Maintaining this balance allows for the even exchange of ideas and creates a collaborative field where neither curator nor artist dominates the other, and prevents exploitation and oppression. The inexact calculus of this exchange makes for a challenging equation, and the solution rests on the side where power lies, mostly in the institution and its agent, the curator.

Paul O'Neill registered the need for this balance when he looked at the overlapping functions of curators and artists. He "scrutiniz[ed] the convergence between curatorial and artistic practice...[he also took] account of the ways in which exhibition making is understood as a widened field, now including dialogical, pedagogical, and discursive approaches to exhibition coproduction" (O'Neill, p. 6).

I analyze and critique this widened field and scrutinize the many shifts and changes, as it begins to encroach upon postcolonial outposts. These shifts and changes must be traced and tracked to maintain an understanding of each role as it morphs during the process of encounter and negotiation.

A geographic shift away from the cosmopolitan centers of Europe marks a change in the curator's role. In his work, Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia, Patrick Flores locates his research in curating in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines and looks at how the curator's role develops and changes with political, economic, and social unrest, and "seeks to propose theoretical speculations on a range of contexts in which the 'curatorial' intervenes in creative practice" (Flores 2008, 177, p. 177). Flores also wrote of how the exploration of the curator's intervention in creative practices encounters the "problematics of the 'contemporary'" as it challenges a modernist telos of universality through "postness (as in post-modern, post-avant-garde, or post-colonial), a proliferation (as in multimodernism), or a critique (critical modernity)" (ibid.).

Flores considers the curator as a mutable agent highly affected by the context in which he/she functions, recognizing that the curator "sets off a conjuncture." He writes,

"If seen within a post-colonial history in Southeast Asia, the practice of the curator may be traced to a series of initiations into art and the museum, the reification of craft as object or community, the institutions of the nation state, the discourses of nation building and nationalism,

and the integration of spectacle into a global political economy. In the same vein, the role of the curator may also be diminished in the long haul because curatorial practice inevitably fosters conditions of critique of the power to discriminate and tests the limits of inclusion or inclusiveness” (p. 179).

Indeed, within the context of postcoloniality, the curator in Southeast Asia takes on the responsibilities of reification of craft, the building of institutions, and enlivening the conversations around nation building and nationalism, in addition to that of collecting, caretaking, and displaying. Flores adroitly navigates through the history of political unrest in Southeast Asia beginning in the 1970s to source the emergence of the curator:

“within intersecting contexts of social unrest arising from tensions between citizens and authoritarian regimes, largely a turning away from institutional habits and a moving toward a conception of an alternative creative sphere at the frictive fringes of law and freedom” (p. 180)

Already, the curator occupies a kind of space within Southeast Asia that is unlike its Western counterparts, whose emergence is rooted in avant-garde posturing to subvert the autonomy of the art object within bourgeois society. The curator in Southeast Asia emerges out of the need to project a democratizing objective, whether silencing the colonial echoes from the past or rejecting the repressive controls of a monarch or dictator in the present.

In the context of Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Thailand, Flores noted the enclosing of art in the political realm. The art in this geopolitical region is expected to function with a political agenda that supports the nation-state and bolsters its technological brief of ordering everyday life. Flores revealed that the curator in this region occupies a precarious situation in which he/she was responsible for the development of the structures for art and exhibition making as an agent of the state, but also expected to be its most vocal critic of institutionalized agendas and a champion for

the autonomy of art (Flores 2008). Flores cites the careers of Indonesian curator Jim Supangkat and Thai curator Apinan, who started out as artists critical of repressive governmental cultural policies who then were appointed to head regional biennials or ministries of culture.

Flores considered how the public sphere formed within the art world, specifically in relation to curating, “because curatorial practices create conditions of publicness, of visibility and exposure” (p. 189). Like Sheikh’s assertion of the localization of the public sphere, the geopolitical shift to Southeast Asia localizes the post-bourgeois formation of the public and tracks a familiar development of fragmentation, yet in its reconfiguration expresses a specific geographic and cultural flavor. Flores wrote that in the Thai context the curator becomes a mediator between the waning powers of the monarchy and the emergent voice of the forming public sphere; specifically, the curator negotiates notions of exoticism that do not threaten “norms of public exposition” while critiquing these images and avoiding maligning the public (179p. 190).

Flores expressed the tension of this mediation as being “trapped in a kind of superficiality” (ibid) and that the notion of "Thai-ness" is an empty signifier signifying nothing. This follows Sheikh’s assertion of the public as a notion, an empty signifier that needs to be filled, in this case, filled with Thai exoticism that placates public expectations while it negates it through the presentation of alternative images, “in each case we are dealing with a concept where the descriptive and the prescriptive elements cannot be separated chronologically or politically” (Sheikh 2007, p. 4).

Flores brought to light the notion that curating in Southeast Asia must keep in mind 1) the political history that demarcates the borders of the current nation state defining its geographical limit; 2) the modernist thrust that pushes toward the universal and its refusal by the contemporary that prefers fragmentation; and 3) that the curator

acts a double-agent of sorts who both builds cultural institutions in which to host the global art celebrities as a sign of modernization, but also to critique these institutions when they enclose future possibilities for art production and curation.

O'Neill marked changes to the curatorial role as beginning in the late 1960s, when curators attempted to "demystify" the artistic and exhibitionary processes to be more transparent and reveal how the artwork is made and how it is chosen for exhibition. Within this process of demystification, it was revealed that many players were part of the exhibitionary process and that many tasks overlapped among all these players, further complicating the issues of responsibility and accountability for exhibition making. The process of demystification was one of many attempts to resolve the problems of inequity in the art world by assigning responsibility and accountability for being inclusive and open to everyone involved in the exhibition making process, particularly to the curator who has control over the selection of the artists and their work.

The term "artist-curator," which was reserved for artists who made exhibitions, rooted in the Dadaist tradition started by Hugo Ball, soon expanded to include curators who were taking on exhibition making as an artistic practice, and any "practitioners using exhibition design, architectural structures, and curatorial strategies as a way of presenting themselves, alongside other artists, to create composite public outcomes" (O'Neill, p. 105). The expansion of the artist-curator role was "theorized neither as a threat to art (a curatorial takeover of artistic autonomy) nor as a celebration of the individuality of the curator (with curating as simply another artistic medium)...[and] can be seen as an attempt to move beyond the dominant roles within the normal division of the art world – a refusal that has contributed toward emergent forms of collective agency" (O'Neill, p. 110). The artist-curator amalgam catalyzes the

formation of collective agency by bridging the gap between artistic practice and the curatorial, a natural mediator who understands the production of the work of art and acknowledges his/her function within this conflated social relation.

#### Audience

Within the context of mega-exhibitions and biennials, the public is seen as “a unified and uncontested social constituency” (O’Neill, p. 61), a homogenous block void of context. O’Neill suggested that we consider “the public as being under construction [that] provides the exhibition with agency that can affect the social” (O’Neill, p. 61), rather than the pre-packaged set of exhibition consumers in collusion with the industrial art complex. Being “under construction,” the public and its role must be constructed in a way, articulated for the specific event in which it participates. The audience can only truly be defined retrospectively after participating.

Countering the idea of the unified or whole audience, O’Neill brought up yet another idea, that of the counterpublics, which emerged from the conversation about the formation of exhibition spaces within a contemporary context. O’Neill borrowed the idea of the counter-publics from curator and scholar Simon Sheikh ‘s article, *Public and Post-publics: The Production of the Social*. Sheikh wrote that the counterpublics is most productive if seen as a “fragmentation of the very idea of public space as one kind of place, as one specific location (even when it exists in a limited number of forms)” (Sheikh 2007, p. 4), and “instead, we have to think of the public sphere as fragmented, as consisting of a number of spaces and/or formations that sometimes connect, sometimes close-off, and that are in conflictual and contradictory relations to each other” (Sheikh 2004, p. 2). This idea of connecting fragments to contextualize their relations or oppositions affirms my gesture of looking at the exhibition as a conjuncture

of space. Just as the formation of a public emerges out of the fragments of sociality, the exhibition emerges out of the constituent spaces that curators, artists, and audiences occupy and animate.

Looking at exhibitions as a conjuncture reveals the architecture of space in which the curator, the artist, and the audience encounter each other. The curator as the organizer must provide opportunities to engage the public that goes beyond passive consumption. Ancillary events need to be included within the exhibitionary events that allow the public participation in asking questions to the artists or curators to help form a broader base of understanding the works of art on exhibition.

#### Curatorial - Conjuncture of Thinking

Continuing with the analysis of curating as a set of conjunctures, I am proposing another conjunctural formation that could help in the analysis of curating: the curatorial as conjuncture of thinking. Ideas, thoughts, reflections, imagination all play a crucial part in summoning the curatorial. These elements are like prayers, spells, and invocations at a séance to summon a specter, to migrate from the afterlife and re-engage the world of the living. The appearance or the haunting might take many forms, from poltergeists to possessions, but its presence is surely felt and revealed.

The issues surrounding exhibition making called on the curator and questioned his or her role and responsibilities. Alloway asked plainly, "Is a curator supposed to join the artist-dealer-collector group and thus make the museum a service for the expanded market or is he to figure out strategies of independence" (Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairne, 109, p. 109), namely by maintaining intellectual autonomy in the presentation and interpretation of works of art. In this formulation, the curator has taken on an expanded role, adding to the traditional role of collecting, caretaking, and displaying, the role of interpreting.



Maria Lind examined the tasks that curators perform and acknowledged that curating has expanded to include many other tasks, from commissioning new works, community outreach, lecturing, to fundraising (Lind, Wood, and Bismarck, p. 63). From this expanded field, she summoned the curatorial, rooted in the “activities of the curator” yet used this field as a runway to take off into the dematerialized realm of thought and ideas, into “a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions” (ibid). Lind’s formulation of the curatorial, although it strives to “create fictions and push new ideas” is still an attempt to discipline this presence, by absorbing it into the modernist agenda of a universalizing telos.

Similar to Lind, Terry Smith wants to institutionalize the curatorial by engaging it within an “infrastructure” (Smith 2012, p. 250). The “Infrastructural” is yet another expansion, an outgrowth of the curatorial that has absorbed not only the expanded field of curating (the curatorial) but also the administrative, critical, artistic, and their interrelationships (p. 253). This newly expanded field of the “infrastructural” promises to give form to the abstracted notion of what a curator does, and Smith sees that this will invigorate the curator’s purpose to exhibit art’s work, allow the curator to be reflexive and develop his/her own discourse, archive the achievements including “keeping detailed records of every stage of his/her thinking and planning and to read statements of how he/she previsualized exhibitions, including how these ideas changed during the hang” (p. 255). This, Smith predicts, will make art public and enable “the art that is to come” (250p.256). This elaborates on the continuing desire to make the process of exhibition making more transparent and for the curators to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Perhaps another way of thinking about the curatorial is to contextualize it as a fragmentation based on Sheikh's essay. He considered the "proliferation of spaces to be considered public" as antagonistic to bourgeois created public space but also considered the proliferation stemming from the fragmentation of such spaces. This notion can be applied to the thinking around the manifestation of the curatorial. The increase in the tasks of the curator or the instances when the curatorial appears could be fragments, splintered from the grand task of exhibition making. These fragments, having been part of the whole, exhibit characteristics of the whole, yet have taken a different shape and have begun to function differently.

One can only experience a fragment of the curatorial, not its entirety. But this fragment can act autonomously from the whole and function like an independent unit, giving the participant the sense that one has undergone a total experience, when in fact, it's only a fragmentary episode. This episodic shard conflicts with the notion of the whole, creating a tension. The fragments are no longer of "a specific location," no longer uniform, and have become "oppositional and radical" (Sheikh 2007, p. 4).

In contrast, consider the curatorial as a hybridization rather than a fragmentation, and that the expansion of the curatorial catalyzes crossbreeding of functions that give rise to hybrid forms. Here, I bring back Lind who considered herself a cultural hybrid,

"As a Swede, I am part of this margin, bordering on the other" occupying a space outside of the center yet not quite in the periphery. Lind called this space "relative periphery" as a way to highlight those other centers of artistic production, albeit not part of the big economic machine, and also a way to speak about "an art practice in which local experiences and global outlooks can coexist and interact, often with a bias for the local" (p. 218).

Whether fragmentations or hybridization, what I would like to emphasize along with both Sheikh and Lind are the interrelations that develop among the fragments that

results in a hybrid formation. The formation of the hybrid artist-curator of the 1920s for example connected the labor of the artist with that of the curator through the shared social function of the work of art. The work of art is the product of the artist to engage with the public, as it is the material that curators use in exhibitions to build an audience. It is in the interrelations, the process in which ideas and thoughts are generated from which we can gain much knowledge rather than the static products, which can act like prescriptions and enclosed positions.

The appearance of the curatorial may look like an undisciplined way of thinking, not following a traditional line of questioning, coming to a conclusion. However, in its summoning, the curatorial addresses many potentialities of thinking. I consider two proposals that ‘jump the tracks’ of modernism and move towards alternative directions. By forming conjunctures, I am rejecting the historical periodization of that particular time frame as devised by art historians based on perceived similarities of stylistic elements, geographical location, or technical innovations. Instead, the conjunctural formation takes these into account as part of a larger interconnected system that continually inform other parts of that linked network.

For example, consider the term “abstract expressionism.” Standard knowledge of this term encloses this idea typically within the 1940s in New York City, albeit the term has been used before to describe works of art before the 1940s and/or made outside of New York City. A conjuncture formed around term “abstract expressionism” takes the typical notion of the term – 1940s, New York City – as one set of data that has many alternatives, parallels, and fragmentations, that are equally considered within through radical contextualization. Through this kind of conjunctural formation, I am filling in the details of the terrain, not as an expanded field but a landscape lush with unique features that open our minds to other potentialities of thinking.

First, examine Bourriaud's proposal for an "altermodern times," an alternative time space that embraces the "powers of decentering, of setting in motion, of unsticking, of de-incrustation" to construct a modernism "on a global scale, through cooperation among a multitude of cultural *semes*<sup>3</sup> and through ongoing translations of singularities" (Bourriaud 2009, p. 39). The altermodern world in its translation of singularities does not amount to a totalizing system but rather forms a network of islands, an "archipelago of local insurrections against the official representations of the world" (p. 186).

Second, explore Irit Rogoff's take on the curatorial as "The Expanded Field," what she calls "broader contemporary knowledge bases and practices" (Martinon 2013, p. 43), and follow her inquiry into an epistemological crisis, a position in which "one can no longer be content with taking positions within a given definition, but one has to make it stretch and twist inside and out to become significant again" (p. 44). The universalizing agenda of modernism created an obsolescence of specificity and detail that flattens complex forms and simplify complicated social relations.

To arrive at an epistemological crisis, Rogoff rejects multiplicity or any pluralistic model of curating that might have any attachments to "a very old Enlightenment conceit that cultural institutions are universalist and infinitely expandable" (ibid). This rejection is a sacrifice, a willingness to lose how we think now to make room for the potentialities that will arise tomorrow, echoing Sheikh's idea of the publics as a notion, of emptying our signifiers so that we can fill them with other content.

Bourriaud and Rogoff, both, also reject the "official representations of the world" by denying the universalizing drive of modernism through the "translation of

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<sup>3</sup> *Semes- defined as the smallest unit of understanding*

singularities” or by “stretching and twisting” given definitions, and allowing the network of ideas to interact and develop exits to escape such enclosures.

This chapter lays the groundwork for how to proceed with my inquiry of exploring possibilities for intervention when curating is analyzed as a conjuncture. I began with a discussion of the conjuncture as it was developed and used by Cultural Studies pioneers rooted in the work of Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser. Using Lawrence Grossberg’s work as a springboard to my own development of the conjuncture, I combine Grossberg’s idea of the conjuncture as radical contextualization with Bourriaud’s notions of the *radicant* – to set root while in motion – resulting in an analysis that grounds itself within the limits of the conjunctural formation. Once the constituent elements of one conjuncture shift and change, then a new conjuncture needs to be formed.

Within the last decade, curating has gained saliency outside of the art world and skyrocketed in popularity, that it has become ubiquitous and a bit banal. But nevertheless, despite its popularity or maybe because of it, curating has become more than ever, a defining act, a creative act, “another medium of artistic production” (O’Neill, p. 129). The rising significance of the curatorial act has sparked many conversations worldwide, and has been taken up by curators, art historians, cultural theorists, artists, among many others. This work contributes to this discussion and looks at the implication of the curatorial as a conjuncture to Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions.

Curating, in its many guises, is limited to the curating of art exhibitions in this work. I propose that curating is considered as three conjunctural formations: of labor, of space, and of thinking. The analysis of curating and its conjunctural formations unpack some of the notions that contribute to its understanding as a function of exhibition making and its place in the world of contemporary visual arts.

As a conjuncture of labor, curating is an amalgam of tasks that continues to expand along with market movements. The current expansion of the curator's role is partly due to the general expansion of the field of art but also to the growing business of mega-exhibitions that require an internationally renowned celebrity curator to author the exhibition.

The second conjuncture examines the exhibition as a space where the curator, the artist, and the audience interact, whether this space is a unified whole or a fragmented field. The social relations between the curator, artist, and audience is what defines the exhibitionary space, that remains in flux reflecting the changes in the relations between the curator, artist, and audience.

Curating as a conjuncture of thinking considers the curatorial and the intellectual exercises that it sparks to anchor the emergent notion within a way of thinking or disciplinary thinking. The curatorial was analyzed as an expansion, a fragmentation or hybridization, or as an undisciplined way of thinking to arrive at an altermodernity or an epistemological crisis.

The work of conjunctural analysis is a messy enterprise that does not have clear-cut resolutions, but offers a wide range of possibilities to follow. In its productive sense, a conjuncture is a treasure chest of contexts that serves as guiding principles for progressive political action.

Conjunctural formations to consider

The presentation of the conjuncture above studies a generalized and globalized art world centering on European and American cosmopolitan centers. What does a conjuncture that is rooted in a different geographic location look like? How does it change the conjunctures of curating? I want to take two geographic shifts and examine

how the conjuncture changes and what we can glean from marking this change. The first, still working within the globalized art world, shifts focus from Europe to Asia, particularly, the Philippines. A dialogue with the work of Filipino curator, Patrick Flores, helps hone in on the specifics of this geographic region. The second shift looks at a localized conjunctural formation in Filipino diasporic communities, mainly around San Francisco, California. Here, I bring in the work of Greg Sholette to help articulate how the Filipino American visual arts community exists outside of, around, and adjacent to the mainstream arts community as part of his notion of art's "dark matter," the unseen or unacknowledged activities of the art world that help bolster the hierarchy of the art market (Sholette 2011).

Conjuncture in the Filipino American art community

After analyzing the globalized art world as a conjunctural formation, I make a move to look at localized Filipino American art communities as a conjuncture. The shift from global to local requires its own conjunctural analysis to consider how local histories and politics alter the outlook of a globalized art world, and simultaneously create parallel developments that reflect global expectations, and intersecting trajectories that counter the homogenizing gestures of globalization.

Since the purchase of the Philippines along with Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Guam from Spain after the Spanish American War, the historical relationship of the United States with the Philippines has been foregrounded by the export of cheap labor. From that moment, Filipinos started to arrive in the United States, first as students, then as laborers working in canneries, farms, and menial service, increasing production and contributing to the economic growth of the West Coast. Small California agricultural towns like Stockton, Watsonville, or Delano would receive an influx of Filipino workers

who migrated up and down the West Coast following crop harvests. Stockton in the 1920s boasted the largest Filipino population outside of the Philippines and was considered a hub of the Filipino American community (Mabalon 2013; San Juan 2009; Bulosan 1946). It is from this historic beginning that I base my porous and contingent geographic boundary for this writing.

Despite the numbers of Filipinos in these communities and the economic impact they made, the racialized social structure of the United States prevented the assimilation of many people of color into the American cultural fabric. Enclaves and ghettos based on ethnicity and race – Chinatowns, Little Manilas, and Mexican Barrios – sprung up throughout West Coast cities that kept these communities segregated for decades.

The Filipino American art conjuncture is formed by the coalescence of American imperialism, racialized social relations, and the influx of Filipino migrants spurred a politics that strategized a movement from marginalization to mainstream, demanding equal rights and equal pay. The California Farm Labor Movement was started by a Filipino farm worker, Larry Itliong, in the 1930s demanding equal pay under the federal minimum wage laws (Mabalon 2013). The movement grew beyond the farm and affected every sector of industry and every segment of the population, and remained the underpinning politics of many communities of color. The student protests of 1969 in San Francisco State and UC Berkeley brought the struggle for equal rights to academia, demanding access to higher education and the expansion of the canon to include the contributions of people of color.

The Filipino American art community does not escape this political flow and contributes to its movement by demanding more access to exhibition spaces and inclusion in large-scale exhibitions. It's a cause for celebration when a Filipino American



artist is included in regional exhibitions like Bay Area Now, a triennial organized by the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, or a national exhibition like the Whitney Biennial in New York City, because it shows that there is room for Filipino art and artists in these exhibitions and that there are moments of illumination, albeit mere sparks, and that the demand for access and inclusion was momentarily heeded.

But what about all the other times? All the other artists who do not make it to these large regional or national or international art exhibitions? What do their continuing labor and practices do to the economy and culture of the local and how it affects the region and nation? Besides the superstructural dynamic of race relations, how else can we think about the work and labor of artists and the creative class? What I have found useful is to employ the idea of “creative dark matter” as proposed by artist/critic/scholar Greg Sholette.

Sholette borrowed the idea of dark matter from astrophysics, where it is defined as “an invisible mass...only perceived indirectly by observing the motions of visible, astronomical objects such as stars and galaxies” (Sholette 2011, p. 1). The “creative dark matter” of the art world consists of the invisible mass of art activities from preparators hanging art at galleries and museums, to hobbyist art makers spending money at art supply stores, or the “obscure mass of ‘failed’ artists,” all of whom exert a force upon the visible bodies that orbit within this shadowy field. For Sholette, “these underdeveloped ‘invisibles’ represent an essential pillar of the elite world,” where “the amateur and the failed artist represent a vast flat field upon which a privileged few stand out in relief” (Sholette 2011, p. 3).

Sholette’s articulation of the invisible force that buttresses the art stars attempted to invert this relationship and illuminate the invisible energy in the creative dark matter. He hoped that the value structure that perpetuates the marginalization and

exclusion of these “invisibles” are critiqued and questioned, “as a matter of politics and a rethinking of history” (p. 3). In addition, Sholette attempted to trace the movements of creative dark matter as it navigates around the “critical and economic structures of the art world by moving in-between its meshes.”

Furthermore, “dark matter’s missing cultural mass is both a metaphor for something vast, unnamable and essentially inert, as well as phantasmagoric proposition concerning what might be possible at this moment of epistemological crisis in the arts and the structural crisis in global capital” (Sholette 2011, p. 4).

Considering both dark matter and the economic repression it reveals, and racial oppression as elements in the conjunctural formation of Filipino American contemporary art, I propose that there is not one path to political action but must consider potential energy that can help move Filipino American contemporary art out of the shadows of a racialized social relations and away from the exploitation of globalized economic markets of late capitalism.

These overlapping elements make political strategizing complicated and unwieldy; even Sholette admitted that “what proves effective in the short term or locally remains untested on a larger scale” (Sholette 2011, p. 4). But perhaps, a sustained continual action that is short term and local will start to build enough momentum that it can scale up and affect the superstructures that enclose us. It is in this space, of the short term and the local, that I chose to intervene using the medium of exhibitions to address the politics of and to rethink the history of Filipino American contemporary art.

San Juan and his criticism of conjunctures

At the beginning of *Future Tense*, Grossberg addresses the shortcomings of his work as being narrowed by the geographical context of the North Atlantic and by the specificity to whom he addresses this particular work: to academics and intellectuals at established institutions (Grossberg 2010, 3). To counter this bias and register the criticism of contemporary conjunctures, I felt compelled to include *Racism and Cultural Studies* (2002), the work of E. San Juan, Jr., a Filipino writer and critical theorist whose work addresses the failings of certain forms of Cultural Studies, specifically in the way it handles the questions of race and postcolonial subjectivity, and insists on returning to a more orthodox Marxist political economic analysis. San Juan's intervention is an

“attempt to utilize historical-materialist principles in questioning orthodoxies and Establishment wisdom...hoping that fresh insights and uncompromising diagnosis on top of visionary proposals can be gleaned from this intervention” (San Juan 2002, 11).

San Juan lodged four main complaints against the “cunning of conjunctures” as a tool for analysis. First, he found the field of Cultural Studies so vast and panoramic that it encompassed a terrain too broad to study, and that Cultural Studies fashioned itself as a “superior form of bricolage” busying itself with a myriad of tasks from textual analysis and semiotics to psychoanalysis and survey research – “a carnivalesque bazaar for any handyman” (San Juan 2002, 215). However, it is exactly this sweeping gesture of conjunctural formation that attracts me. A conjuncture allows for an analysis of overlapping disparate contexts like curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions, without which there would be much that would be missed or deferred in the analysis. By forming a conjuncture, I am ensuring that all the elements involved in that specific topic are addressed and analyzed appropriately.

Secondly, the political aims promised in conjunctures become routinized and reduced to “discourse and knowledge-power.” San Juan argued that conjunctures are not rooted in material formation or lived conditions, and that it spends much of its activity dealing with representations as opposed to actual situations. I concede the idea that works of art are a type of representation. However, works of art do not undergo the same kind of analysis as text and even if a work of art is given a textual reading, it cannot rest on being read like text; this reading could be part of a wider analysis of the artwork but it cannot be reduced to a solely textual reading. I do agree with San Juan’s assertion that analysis must be rooted in material formations and lived conditions, but I make an additional assertion that conjunctural formations allow these material formations and lived conditions to be included in a theoretical analysis, otherwise the analysis will remain a formal or technical exercise. In forming a conjuncture, the researcher needs to articulate each element of the study, provide context of these elements, and analyze how these elements form relations, and apply political tactics to alter these relations to move it towards a progressive democratic direction.

Thirdly, San Juan asserts that political economy stands apart from cultural and ideological positions and warns against the “subsumption of relations of power to relations of discourse or cultural practices return[ing] to a one-sided culturalism that Hall originally wanted to move away from” (San Juan 2002, 216). I disagree with San Juan on this point. I think that the breadth of conjunctural formations prevent a return to one-sided analysis and refuse to rest on a single elaboration. Grossberg dedicated a whole chapter in *Future Tense* discussing this position in privileging this type of economic analysis, not to undermine its gravity and importance, but to ensure that the economic is always in concert with the cultural analysis. In addition, subsumption is mitigated within a conjuncture because the elements of analysis are examined at the

same level and treated together, as an amalgamation, a unified whole. If subsumption occurs, that dynamic is recognized, articulated, and analyzed, revealing the power relations that led to the subsumption in the first place.

Lastly, San Juan tackles the notion of articulation in forming conjunctures. Based on Hall's definition of articulation, "as a way to cohere together within a discourse," San Juan argued that articulation "seeks to disentangle the elements of any ideological complex from their class roots" (San Juan 2002, 217). From my perspective, a conjunctural formation accounts for both perspectives in that it coheres as Hall stated, but it also disentangles as San Juan asserts. I see conjunctural analysis as a series of small gestures, as in Hall's articulation, that identifies, focuses, and isolates an element to acknowledge that presence. San Juan desired to prevent and ensure that these articulated instances indeed are folded back into a larger analysis that accounts for its class roots and other aspects of its overdetermination.

This warning that San Juan announces rings loud and clear. I remind myself of this warning when I take detours into formal art analysis and technical discussions to guide me in my thinking and to prevent me from going astray from a Marxist materials view of art making and art history.

I also heed the warning of Koivisto and Lahtinen, that conjunctures are not a magic solution for all that ails the world. I see conjunctures as the opposite of a cure-all, in its specificity of forces coming together within a small window of time, conjunctures only work within that narrowly defined formation.

"In developing intervening [*eingreifend*] Marxist analyses, however, conjuncture cannot function as a new 'conceptual dictator', but only as one among the many Marxist concepts that can help to analyze the many determinations of concrete reality, and thus open new possibilities for political interventions. If this living connection to other conceptual tools is lost, one ends up

with a 'conjuncturalism' that dissolves everything into a conjuncture" (Koivisto and Lahtinen, p. 276).

I approach curating through Cultural Studies, specifically conjunctural analysis, to account for the complexity of the subject. Curating Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions is a tricky entanglement of politics, class, migration, history, and race whose relations with each other need to be traced carefully and to be articulated conscientiously to arrive at an expanded understanding of this formation.

## Chapter 2: Art History as Conjuncture

*When the excluded are made visible, when they demand visibility, it is always ultimately a matter of politics and a rethinking of history.*

*Greg Sholette, Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*

### Conjuncture

The art market's focus on economic and cosmopolitan centers renders much of the art making world invisible and insignificant. Adding racial marginalization, Filipino American contemporary art becomes more so invisible to the mainstream. Art market devaluation and racial marginalization contribute to the political systems that exclude these artists and their work from major exhibitions, therefore needing to re-examine Filipino contemporary art as a conjunctural formation.

The nationalist fervor that surrounds Juan Luna's work has made it seemingly sacred and untouchable to critique and analysis, creating what Pastor-Roces calls a "hagiographic disposition" that stunts art historical scholarship and rigorous analysis. The art historical frame that perpetuates a narrow interpretation, such as nationalism, that encloses the interpretation of such contemporary works of art also needs to be rethought to open up the possibilities of how Filipino American contemporary art can be contextualized beyond a nationalist project.

The elements that form this conjuncture need to be radically contextualized and articulated to recapture certain erasures that historical framing caused. The works of Filipino artist, Juan Luna, especially, need to be seriously re-evaluated, and the conventional interpretation of it as nationally representative art that continues as the sole context for contemporary works of art from the Philippines needs to be discarded. Even more, the exhibition of such art must no longer be treated as triumphant events of Filipino exceptionalism. The re-articulation of Juan Luna's work and conjunctural analysis

of that art historical moment in this project challenge these long held beliefs and attitudes in an attempt to release Luna's work from this narrowly historical grasp and open it up to various forms of analysis and critique that such significant works of art deserve.

I take up this task of rethinking Luna's work and create space for an in-depth art historical analysis that looks closely at the painting and its pictorial elements. The current art historical scholarship on Luna's work, particularly on his masterpiece, *Spoliarium*, lacks the depth of a rigorous analysis that takes into account the technical aspects of the painting and how these technical decisions bolster its narrative significance. To date, only two major publications are dedicated to Luna: *Juan Luna: The Filipino as Painter*, and an exhibition catalog commemorating Luna and Hidalgo at the 1884 Madrid exposition, both written and edited by Santiago Pilar. Pilar gathers an impressive collection of newspaper articles and letters from 19<sup>th</sup>-century critics and scholars that gives an impression of the contemporary reception of *Spoliarium*, but falls short of rendering a thorough art historical analysis and does not describe the painting's pictorial elements. This kind of technical scholarship is as important as the discussion on how *Spoliarium* changed the political course of Philippine nation. Pilar's work is useful as a springboard to contribute new art historical insight into Luna's work, because they allow a reconsideration of Pilar's sources. Encountering the limits of Pilar's approach has also allowed me to conduct my own research into Luna's source material and influences, particularly comparing his work with that of his teacher, Alejo Vera, at the Spanish Academy in Rome.

This research also included pouring over numerous articles on Luna, where I discovered Filipino Art Historian Marian Pastor-Roces' astute essay, "Hidalgo and Luna: Vexed Modernity," which called for a reassessment of how both Luna and Hidalgo's



work can be understood “because nationalism and heroism are dogma in the ideological infrastructure of the Philippine public sphere, that Hidalgo and Luna have not been fully yielded to analysis” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). The essay was inspired by a visit to Documenta 11, where, upon seeing the exhibit’s broad gesture of including many artists from Africa, Asia, and around the globe, Roces was reminded of “the necessary but false starts for innumerable demands for equality” and how the “erstwhile native can have an unsteady grasp of the relation of art, power, and emancipation” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). Indeed, this chapter echoes the call of Roces and follows her example to provide an analysis that expands the notion of Luna and Hidalgo’s work beyond the nationalistic trope, this time from a conjunctural analytic perspective.

This conjunctural analysis takes into consideration the abuses of the Spanish clerics and colonial administration that caused a racialized social formation from which the Filipino subject emerges. Luna is one such figure who negotiated his Filipino becoming through an artistic practice that provided visual content to this conjuncture. In addition, the toast – given by Jose Rizal that exemplified Luna’s painting, *Spoliarium*, as Filipino mastery of painting, and indelibly attached this work of art to a reform movement demanding equal rights – needs to be re-articulated along with the “relation of art, power, and emancipation.” Curating through conjuncture intervenes in conventional art historical developments by radically contextualizing historical events, offering a new analysis of the work, and making visible alternative art historical propositions.

#### Demanding visibility

The attendant politics of this conjuncture also need to be brought to light and made visible to map out avenues for political action and intervention. Sholette’s concept

of “creative dark matter” positions this conjuncture within the current dynamics of globalized late capitalism and focuses on action that can affect change within it, particularly within the Filipino diasporic communities in California. The conjunctural analysis that rethinks Filipino art history affects how the works of Filipino American contemporary artists are understood and interpreted, and creates new potential for inclusion in the broader discussion about art.

#### Art historical interventions

In the frontier of digital information, Filipino American art historical interventions are taking place, as new websites, blogs, and wiki entries on Filipino and Filipino American art history and artists are launched, multiplying the voices that speak this tradition and history. One such project was The *Worlds in Collision* website, conceived by artist, Carlos Villa, which I launched in 2005. This moment is an intervention within the continuous rethinking of Filipino art history in which I have been engaged for decades. Since then, other sites have appeared that address the topic from different perspectives and with various agendas that will spur on new interventions and refresh the Filipino artistic imagination.

#### Filipino American Art History timeline: forming new conjunctures

The *Worlds in Collision* website (<http://www.worldsincollision.org>) was a project conceived by San Francisco based artist, Carlos Villa. This project was a continuation of his anthology of the same title (*Worlds in Collision: Dialogues on Multicultural Art Issues*) that addressed race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in arts education. The website project also manifested Villa’s desire to centralize resources for artist biographies, art historical timelines, and samples of works of art. He wrote on the

welcome page, “We produced and compiled educational, historical and cultural information to nourish an organism called the Filipino American art history website. As we contribute to this organism it will not disappear or dissipate” (Reyes and Villa 2005).

My involvement began when I was invited to lead the project and structure the research activities that would include undergraduate students from the University of San Francisco who have taken Villa’s course on Filipino Arts. Expanding from Villa’s concept, I took an inclusive approach to involve student researchers, academics in Asian American Studies, History, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Music, along with a technical staff to build the website.

In Villa’s course, students were assigned to write a research paper on Filipino and Filipino American artists, and for three semesters have assembled a good collection of video interviews of artists, as well as an archive of research papers. This prefaced the activities of this project and acted as the springboard to the content development of the Worlds in Collision website.

#### Theoretical framework

As the main author of the Worlds in Collision website, I struggled with the articulation of the concept of Filipino American visual arts. Filipino American identity is highly fluid and sometimes contested as to its development, and coupled with the varied developments of the visual arts in the United States, Europe, and the Philippines, the question arises of how could a Filipino American art history be told. In addition, the perpetuation of certain canonical notions of Philippine art history inhibited the development of new scholarship, what Marian Pastor-Roces called a “hagiographic disposition of Philippine art history” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002).

A myriad of philosophies, theories, and strategies were available to me, and my preliminary task was to conduct an inventory of methods that could help with the development of this topic. Hegelian historicism came to mind as a method to tell this history. I also considered a Marxist historical materialist perspective. I knew that I did not want to wander into a revisionist writing of history, and also, wanted to retain a chronological telling of past events.

I wanted to ensure that the articulation of Filipino American art is as complete and whole as possible. However, by privileging one philosophy or strategy, I possibly could debilitate its holistic articulation. The methodology on which I settled is the interdisciplinary nature of Cultural Studies. Using conjunctures, I looked at Filipino American art as phenomena that contextualized the intersections of race, colonialism, social class, global economy, gender, sexuality, migration and diaspora. Due to the practical uses for this website, I also looked towards the works of Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Henri Giroux, and Carol Becker to ensure a solid pedagogical foundation.

I took creative license to craft an arc of history that joined together disparate artistic gestures with a nationalistic bent, and employed art historical periodization to frame certain historical moments. The methodology by far was not fixed in one camp, and it used one method or another, or in combination when addressing the different aspects of the website from artists' biographies, analysis of the works of art, or context to an artist's practice. The history of Filipino American art has never been told in this way and I wanted to develop a phenomenological study and a genealogy of this field to sketch out the where, when, and how, and then proceed to analysis and philosophizing.

The appearance of Filipino American contemporary art began when Filipino artists using Western techniques started to address Filipino identity within the context

of that production, as exemplified by Juan Luna's *Spoliarium*. "Therefore, the works presented here feature the cultural production of such a world in collision, the offspring of Western conquest and Filipino survival" (Reyes and Villa 2005).

To reach my goal of providing a holistic articulation of Filipino American visual arts, I had to move away from both Filipino American History and Western Art History to devise a chronology that is unique to this concept. Philosophically, I had to engage these two concepts in a dialectical process to synthesize a new and unified concept. In so doing, I used post-colonial theory, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy to craft a gesture for defining this specific art historical concept.

#### Research Activities

Having established the theoretical framework and how this project will be framed, I proceeded to the logistical aspects of conducting the research. First, I intersected two traditional fields of study: History of the Filipinos in America, and Western Art History. This intersection provided me with a precarious first step to begin the building up of Filipino American visual arts.

My first challenge was to encapsulate two historical chronologies: Filipino American history and Filipino American art history. Defining a gross chronology for each field was a daunting task that mostly provided boundaries of time. Each of these chronologies, also functioned with very different metrics. The periods of artistic development did not necessarily align with historic events, therefore, the framing of artistic development contextualized within historic events became challenging and problematic. The reverse act, framing historic events within artistic development did not make much sense, since the artist is framed within that time period, not the artist defining moments in history.

I took advantage of website interface to create a multidimensional timeline. Setting limits from 1521 when the Spanish first arrived in the Philippines to today, I created a workable timeframe from which to plot these moments of collision. Along a traditional timeline, artists were placed according to dates of birth and death and key times in his or her career to give a chronological context, but these plotted points do not necessarily correspond to traditional movements in Western Art History.

From the timeline, viewers can access artist biographies, examples of works of art, and a short description of the work. On the same screen, one can also see contemporaneous historical events that could be useful in providing context to the works of art and the artist's practice.

The actual research was conducted by myself and by a group of undergraduate students under my supervision, who used primary sources, art history texts, and conducted interviews with artists. Each researcher submitted 1-3 pages of information on the artists they researched, which I edited for consistency and accuracy. The involvement of students in this project was key in creating a resource that is not only holistic in content but also holistic in creation. As the targeted users of the website, the students' input on the design and presentation of information was invaluable.

#### Content

Using conjunctures as a structure, I created distinct and new historical periods that incorporated Filipino and Filipino American histories, with Western art history to provide a radical context from where the artist and their works can be understood. This framing created a very specific cultural and political context that challenged traditional notion of Filipino history and art history. I wanted to contribute new analysis and new

ways to understand conventional notions of art history, and to make visible the contributions of Filipino/Americans, especially in the visual arts.

In creating these conjunctures, I took an irreverent attitude in naming them based on my understanding of what happened in that specific chronological space, and to attract and provoke a reaction from the readers. This was also an attempt to prevent a sclerotic telling of history, and provide room for growth and expansion with new contributions to the field.

This art historical timeline starts in the year 1521, the year of when the European world collided with Southeast Asian, marking the arrival of the Spanish to the archipelago, now known as the Philippines. Section 1 is titled *1521-1889, Worlds in Collision: A Lost Spaniard, Hooded Thugs, and Fun at Sea*. This section forms the first conjuncture, bringing together the initial contact with Spain, the ensuing establishment of a Spanish colony with a strong religious impetus, and the development of trans-Pacific trading routes between New Spain (Mexico) and Las Islas Filipinas (the Philippines). As a conjuncture, the numerous events that adds up to a historical period can be examined, re-articulated, and re-contextualized to expose political, cultural, and economic factors that affected this period, expanding the conventional understand of this era.

An engraved map by Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay from 1734 exemplifies how the Indio have mastered the western idiom of etching and became a respected craftsman. This map also represented an early visual manifestation of the Philippines as a distinct place with delineated boundaries. Along with its geographic features, this map also includes eight miniatures that depict the people inhabiting the islands, from Sangleys and Chinese, to Mestizos, Mughals, Malabars, and Carmarin, linking identity with geography. As I wrote for the website, “The conceding forces of Western technicality with Filipino subjectivity created a new idiom of self-identity for the Filipino. From here

forward, the act of artistic production whether visual, musical, or kinesthetic becomes simultaneously an act of deference, national pride, and resistance. This complex dynamic is elemental in the development of ensuing Filipino artistic production in diaspora” (Reyes and Villa 2005).

The second section, *1890-1945, The American Era: Sleight of Hand, Fair Games, and Side Shows*, forms a conjuncture around the disintegrating Spanish empire, US market expansion, and the struggle for Philippine independence. The Spanish-American war began with demands for protecting American interests in Cuba and by 1898 war was declared by Spain and the US against each other. American economic interests saw an opportunity for expansion in the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico, and demanded that Spain secede these territories as part of the Treaty of Paris 1898 that ended the war.

This period began US involvement in the Philippines, first by interfering with the Philippine independence movement by underhandedly annexing the new nation under the Treaty of Paris with Spain, causing the Philippine-American war. Secondly, US involvement initiated the migration of Filipinos, which rapidly increased into an economic diaspora with 10 million Filipinos leaving the country for work worldwide (San Juan 2009, p. xiii). *Pensionados*, students on scholarship, left for US colleges and universities while thousand others were recruited as farm workers to work in giant agribusinesses in Hawaii and the west coast of the US. This period is crucial to the understanding of the diasporic Filipino because it began the “processes of racialization and cultural transformations that turned provincial immigrants into Filipina/o Americans” (Mabalon 2013, p. 6).

*1946-1965 Waves of Immigration: First Came My Grandfather Then My Father Then My Mother* is a conjuncture that focused on the period of American recognition of



Philippine independence after World War II to continuing gentle waves of migration. This period saw the *Manong* generation returning to the Philippines to find and marry women with whom they can start a family. The children of this generation became known as the Bridge generation who spans the gap between the first generation of Filipino immigrants to the US and the post-1965 brain drain immigrants a generation later (Mabalon 2013).

This period also saw the horrifying effects of the “red scare” and the rampant fear of communism and leftist radicalism, and contrasting with the enactment of civil rights legislation; these two events politicized communities of color to resist the post-war conservatism and paternalistic racism that defined the cultural norms.

Legislation might have changed the legal status of people of color but institutional practices were slow in changing. The fourth section of the timeline, *1966-80 Time for Protest: We Are Sick of Your Shit* revolves around the continuing resistance against racist practices, especially in higher education, and the increasing protests against the Vietnam War. Another protest that significantly affected the Filipino community was the protest to resist the eviction of elderly residents of the International Hotel in San Francisco, from 1968 to 1977.

Section five *1981-1998, Cultural Renaissance: Hindigenius, Puro Arte At Maporma Pa* examines the increasing cultural production of the Filipino community reflecting the increase in population, becoming the largest Asian immigrant group in California. The lack of political representation, the disproportionate high rates of HIV infection, teenage pregnancy, and dismal rates of college completion were alarming statistics that mobilized a new generation of Filipino American activists.

The last section on the website, *1999-2006, The Filipino American Era: Making A Scene, Causing Attention and Bringing It On*, examines not just the proliferation of

Filipino visual artists included in major regional, national, and international exhibitions, but also starts to see more Filipino American exhibitions being organized.

With this website, I am asserting a certain political position that reflects the realities of Filipino American artists. The inclusion of particular art pieces within a timeline only begins to reflect a group whose identity is not bound by time or style, but rather expressed and articulated through nostalgia, erasure, and synthesis.

This intervention in art history is a necessary task not only to expand the Western canon of art history with the inclusion of other art histories but more so to affect the constituent element that build up a global art history. The use of the Internet was a conscious decision to access a new tool for disseminating information and knowledge and create a network in which this body of work can grow organically. Since the launch of this websites, other websites and blogs have emerged that add to the Filipin@ art conversation and expand the narrative of art history. Curating through conjunctures can influence this growth “only if we reconceptualize the notion of the global and recalibrate the registers of the discipline of art history” (Flores 2017).

Forming an historical conjuncture

Spanish colonial abuses

After the Mexican war for independence in 1821, and other independence movements in Central and South America, the Spanish authorities were wearied of losing more colonies and wanted to assert more control and diminish the few positions criollos and mestizos held, which the Spanish believed sparked a hunger for control and independence. In the Philippines, this assertion of power was mostly felt when Spanish authorities took secular (not belonging to a religious order) Filipino parishes and reassigned them to a religious order, as was the case in March 9, 1849 when seven

curacies in the province of Cavite were taken away from secular Filipino priests and given to peninsular Recollects and Dominicans. (Agoncillo 1990, p. 123).

Between 1868-70, a liberal government introduced many reforms that criollos were awaiting, like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and eliminating flogging as punishment. These freedoms allowed many reformers to organize and spread their ideas. Three criollo priests, Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora, were part of a committee calling for reforms to create equal rights for criollos and mestizos, especially in the way priests were assigned parishes. They published a newsletter describing the unfair and unjust treatment of criollos and mestizos, and spreading their call for reforms.

Criollos and mestizo priests were not given high-ranking positions in the church. The religious orders - Jesuits, Dominicans, Recollects, and Augustinians - perpetuated the social hierarchy – devised by the Spanish colonial administration – and gave highest ranks to regular peninsular priests recently arriving from Spain instead of offering these positions to secular priests educated and ordained in the Philippines and unaffiliated with a religious order. More curacies were re-distributed from secular Filipino priests to peninsular Recollects in 1861 igniting fierce criticism that in 1870, the Archbishop of Manila wrote to the Spanish regent noting, “This policy is the cause of an ever growing enmity which is becoming more and more manifest between seculars and regulars, and which, sooner or later, may bring lamentable results to our beloved Spain” (Agoncillo 1990, p. 124).

By 1872, the government changed again and reverted to strict administration of the colonies. By decree of the new governor, Rafael de Izquierdo, additional taxes were levied on Filipino soldiers and indio workers. Receiving less pay, workers and soldiers at an arsenal in Cavite protested the higher taxes that led to a skirmish with peninsular soldiers. Spanish authorities saw this as symptomatic of a greater burgeoning rebellion

and anti-Spanish movement. Because of their newsletters, Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora were accused as agitators and were executed for sedition and treachery. Their deaths became a symbol of Spanish injustice and incited more fervent protests and louder calls for reform.

Racialized social formation

The historical development of racial categories in the Spanish realm provides needed context for Luna's intervention. Racial categorization in the Spanish colonial domain has its root in *limpieza de sangre* (Katzew 2004), purity of blood, a medieval Spanish notion used to enforce Catholic orthodoxy and expose heretical thought, further developed during the Spanish Inquisition to segregate those who were "tainted" by Jewish or Muslim blood. Individuals, families, and communities found to be "tainted" were discriminated against, had very few rights under the law, and were subjected to high tax rates or property seizures.

With the expansion of the Spanish kingdom due to conquest and colonization of the Americas and islands in the Pacific, and consequently the spread of Hispanic culture and customs, *limpieza de sangre* affected various policies enacted during colonial administration. The encomienda system is one such program influenced by *limpieza de sangre*, and imparted full rights and privileges to a pure-blooded Spaniards given the privilege to serve the crown as a conquistador or colonist. For the service of pacifying indigenous populations, the conquistador or colonist was granted a specific number of indigenes from which he can collect taxes and tributes in exchange for "civilizing" guidance, namely the conversion of *Indios* to Catholicism, and teaching the Spanish language and customs.

In the Spanish colonial context, three racial categories were predominantly used: Españoles, *Indios*, and Negros (Agoncillo 1990). Españoles were the Spaniards, *Indios* are

a monolithic category of indigenous peoples, and Negros are peoples from the African continent. This system of racial categorization was in wide use in the Philippines and developed into a hierarchical social structure with the Españoles on the top and the Negros on the bottom. The *Indios* occupied a space in between, since the Spaniards, when it was advantageous, recognized already existing hierarchies within certain indigenous cultures.

Philippine indigenous culture is varied in structure and organization but predominantly revolved around clusters of family units. The most organized political structure, the *barangay* (Agoncillo 1990), structured lowland villages, and consisted of many families numbering up to the thousands, with a datu or chieftain leading each barangay. The Spaniards took advantage of this structure when assigning encomiendas to certain Spanish individuals. It facilitated division of labor within the indio population with the datu and his family, known as *principalias*, receiving favors from the encomiendero and being released from hard labor and high rates of taxes and tribute. The datu became a middleman, a foreman supervising the labors of the peasantry. Each encomiendero demanded surplus material and labor to sell goods to pay royal taxes, fund the administration of the colonies, and make profits for themselves.

Conquistadors and their crew – charged with creating settlements and colonies – were mostly men. Those with higher positions had the means of bringing their families with them. In most situations, the colonists would have relations with indigenous women, or in the case in the Americas, also with enslaved women from Africa. This created generations of “mixed-blood” offspring, which challenged laws regarding marriage, inheritance, and tax rates.

By the late 17th century, this mixing of races had been codified through the Casta system, not only to enforce Spanish supremacy in a racialized social hierarchy but

also to determine the privileges and tax rates imposed upon certain persons. The Bourbon Reforms in Spain instated many policies to ensure that full-blooded Spaniards have control of every aspect of Spanish society, including churches and colonies.

“A quick inspection of the incomplete 1680 codification of colonial laws, the *Recopilación de las leyes de los reynos de Indias*, amply demonstrated that every aspect of the casta’s life was controlled, including the determination of paying tribute, occupational opportunities, and access to education and ecclesiastical posts” (Katzew 2004).

In her catalogue, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-century Mexico*, Itona Katzew discusses the conditions that possibly helped generate the genre of casta paintings, a particular type of painting that traces the development of racial categories through the depiction of interracial couplings. For example, a painting would show a Spanish male and an Indio female, with their mixed-race child, illustrating a Mestizo. She cites the Enlightenment thinkers’ drive to classification (which led to the exoticization of the peoples of the colonies) and the strengthening of administrative controls over the colonial subjects as contributing to the emergence of casta paintings. Written laws and recorded accounts from the period showed the growing importance of social hierarchy in the colonies. Katzew wrote,

“Throughout the colonial period, Spanish civil and ecclesiastic authorities emphasized racial differences as a way of exerting their control over the population. But the blurring of the boundaries that resulted from race mixing precluded a de facto categorization of the population, which greatly concerned colonial authorities. Anxiety over this loss of control permeated much of Mexico’s reality during the colonial period and may account in part for the emergence in that country of casta paintings” (Katzew, p. 39).

This anxiety over the loss of control was rampant in the Philippines too. The Viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) included the Philippines within its jurisdiction, thereby filtering most laws, biases, mores, and customs through New Spain and shipping them

across the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines. This system of classification was just as important and strictly enforced in the Philippines, where it developed its local nuances to account for populations like the Chinese, the Muslims, and the indigenous Aetas present in the Philippines.

As more of the native population converted to Christianity and adopted Spanish ways of dress and manners, they started to occupy higher positions in society. Not to be outranked, castas or mestizos also insisted on their birthrights, often aligning themselves with the most advantageous lineage and seeking positions of power and prestige. "Escape from darker phenotypes could also mean exemption from paying the heavy tribute exacted from Indians, Africans, and mulattos" (Katzew, p. 45).

#### Filipino Ontology

The divisive racial categorizations in the colonies eventually seeped back up to affect the top echelons of society. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Españoles class has cleaved itself into two distinct categories, the peninsulares and the insulares. The insulares in the Philippines took on the mantle of being Filipino, and at first, it was an exclusive category purely reserved for full-blooded Spaniards, but by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the category of Filipino began to open up and a more widespread usage of the term included mestizos and principalias.

In his catalogue raisonné of artist, Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, art historian Alfred Roces wrote about this period that deeply influences both Hidalgo and Luna.

"A confluence of factors and events precipitated the rise of the *Ilustrado* and the crystallization of a Filipino national identity. The principalia-mestizo class had acquired wealth, and education, and- with both of these- a strong self-awareness...The first to label themselves Filipinos, they celebrated in their newly discovered self-importance and their identity as Filipinos" (Roces and Resurreccion Hidalgo y Padilla 1995).

From a singular meaning, a Spaniard born in the Philippine colony, the term Filipino quickly expanded to promote the product, the aggregate, the accumulation of layering and mixing of cultures, races, and classes. Wealth, education, and self-awareness gave this accumulation of identities engine to develop and provided the term salience and its unique characteristics. It became a marker of regional pride, very much like how other Spaniards both identified as a citizen of Spain but also coming from provinces like Galicia, Catalonia, and Vizcaya.

Luna and Hidalgo identified with this newly expanded notion of Filipino and their work began to reflect aspects of this idea. Luna, especially, expressed his opinions through the negotiation of narrative content and the use allegory to infuse the formal academic painting style with Filipino content.

Filipino content finally appeared as a human body in his 1886 work, *España y Filipinas*. The painting shows two women wearing *traje de mestiza* climbing a staircase scattered with flowers going up to the heavens. This allegory depicts Spain as a woman with fair skin and broad shoulders, with her left arm pointing to the pink and blue expanse of the sky while her right arm rests on Filipinas' hip. The Philippines shown as a shorter brown skinned woman looking out into the heavens following España's pointing arm, seemingly eager to step forward to the beautiful unknown.

This painting was included in a 1938 publication *El legado de España a Filipinas* by Encarnacion Alzona with the addition of a caption that read, "España guiando a Filipinas por la senda del progreso" (Spain guiding the Philippines on the path to progress) (Alzona 1956), projecting more onto this painting than what Luna intended. Luna kept the scene ambiguous and mysterious. He does not show a horizon or any physical location as a destination, nor is there anything in the expansive sky that signify or symbolize progress. Ascending a staircase does not necessarily say climbing towards



progress; it's just not very clear. What rings loudly in this work is the embodiment of the Philippines as a separate entity from Spain. There is no indication that Filipinas is a daughter or ward of Spain, but shows a congenial relationship, an equal relationship, both occupying the same step on this stairway, España pointing to something that both characters have not reached, but could possibly attain together.

#### Propaganda Movement

The aftermath of the Gomez, Burgos, Zamora executions affected the Filipino *Ilustrados*, with many sentenced to exile, while others feared for their lives and chose self-exile in Europe where they continued to campaign for equality. Many Filipino *pensionados* (scholarship recipients) studied at universities and colleges in Madrid and Barcelona, and there, they returned escaping the accusations of sedition and the threat of execution.

Filipinos in Spain frequently published articles that described the inequalities and unfair treatment conducted by the friars in the Philippines to make the Spanish people aware of the abuses of the colonial administration and the religious orders. A small group of *pensionados* and exiled Filipinos organized, forming *La Solidaridad* in 1888 and began printing a newspaper of the same name in April of 1889, under the editorship of Graciano Lopez Jaena. The biweekly newspaper published articles, essays, speeches, and letters to spread the call for reform, and shared Filipino aspirations publicly, namely, 1. Representation in the Cortés (Spanish Parliament); 2. Abolition of censure; 3. An expressed and definite prohibition of the existing practices of exiling residents by purely administrative order and without a writ of execution from the courts of justice (Schumacher 1997).

In December of 1889, Marcelo del Pilar became the editor of *La Solidaridad* and expanded the goals of *Filipinos* to include: 1. the removal of the friars and the secularization of the parishes; 2. active participation in the affairs of the government; 3. freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly; 4. wider social and political freedom; 5. equality before the law; 6. assimilation; and 7. representation in the Cortés (Agoncillo 1990, p. 137). The demands of the Propaganda Movement were mostly assimilationist rather than liberatory. The Philippine revolutionary movement wanted to be free from Spanish rule. The fight for equality required a different set of tactics from those of liberty.

Juan Luna

For such an important figure in Philippine history, there exist a shortage of scholarship on Juan Luna and his contributions to art and history. A chronology of Luna's life with some biographical details was published in 1977, in a small pamphlet by historian Carlos E. da Silva, who was an acquaintance of Luna's son, Andres Luna de San Pedro. This lack, Pastor-Roces wrote, is due to the "hagiographic disposition of Philippine art history" (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002).

Juan Luna y Novicio was born on October 24, 1857, in Badoc, Ilocos Norte, Philippines (Da Silva 1977). In 1861, the Luna family moved to Manila to seek better fortunes. Luna's education started with his mother at home and progressed to attending the Jesuit school, Ateneo Municipal de Manila, from ages 8-12 years old, and continuing at the maritime academy, Escuela Nautica de Manila from ages 12-16 years. This afforded Luna an apprenticeship on a ship and travelled around Southeast Asia.

The drawings and sketches of his brother, Jose, inspired Luna and began to sketch in his free time, eventually taking private art lessons. In 1874, Luna enrolled at the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, at the time a fairly new institution granted by Queen

Isabella II to teach the *Indios* and Filipinos fine arts through an academic mode of instruction, which consisted mostly of copying works from master painters. Copies of paintings by Velazquez were sent to the Academia for students to copy. Luna excelled in reproducing the masterworks and was seen as a natural talent by one of his teachers. Mysteriously, Luna was expelled from the academy after two years but was encouraged by a junior Filipino faculty to continue his studies in Madrid at the Escuela de Pintura at the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Da Silva 1977). In 1877, Luna sailed with his brother, Manuel who was to enroll at the Real Conservatorio de Musica. Luna apprenticed with Alejo Vera y Estaca, one of the painting faculty at the Academia, who took Luna to Rome as a studio assistant to help fulfill outstanding commissions.

Luna encountered a novel, *Roma au Siecle d'Auguste*, by the French writer Charles Dezobry, whose account of ancient Rome seemed to spark his imagination. Luna also visited the ancient sites of Rome, including a tour of the Colosseum. The combination of the novel and the physical experience of the Colosseum crystallized a scene that Luna would develop as subject matter for a painting. His inspiration began to take form and develop details, growing into a massive painting he would title, *Spoliarium*, after a room under the arena where dead or dying gladiators are stripped of their battle armor and weapons and returned to their family members for last rites and burial (Harris 1874).

Luna started the *Spoliarium* in 1883 and exhibited it at the Palazzi dell'Exposizione in Rome in the spring of 1884 before shipping it to Madrid for the 1884 Exposition in the summer. The exhibition at the Palazzi was considered a preview of the Madrid exposition since many Spanish artists spent time in Rome to study or paint in that landscape. The *Spoliarium* created a buzz in Rome that grew to a sensation in Madrid. Luna won the first gold medal out of three but disappointingly was not awarded

the customary grand prize that came with the first gold medal, his race as the factor that denied him the grand prize. (Da Silva 1977).

Luna moved to Paris later that year to finish commissions and to fulfil new commissions his medal had attracted. By 1886, he married Paz Pardo de Tavera, a sister of one his friends. Luna and Paz had a son, Andres, in 1887 and a daughter, Maria, in 1889, who died from illness in 1892. Both grief-stricken, Luna and his wife began to fight constantly, causing Paz to take a long respite in the South of France where it was rumored that she had an affair with her doctor. Upon returning to Paris, Paz grew distant from Luna and the marriage continued to disintegrate. Luna heard the rumors of Paz's indiscretions, and became angry and violent towards her. Luna was alerted to a scheme to move Paz and their son, Andres, out of the house with the help of Paz's brothers and mother. Feeling angry and threatened, Luna found a gun and stormed to his house to find Paz and her mother packing, with one of Paz's brothers standing guard at the front door, who would not stand aside and let Luna pass, so Luna shot him. Paz and her mother locked themselves in a bedroom and pushed against the door. According to court documents, there was a loud and clamorous episode, Luna was shouting pleas to Paz through the locked door, while she and her mother were screaming for help on the balcony. Luna pleaded to enter the room and see her, but she refused. She and her mother blocked the door and would not let Luna enter, who had become desperate and fired the gun at the door lock, inadvertently injuring Paz and her mother on the other side. Doña Tavera died on the scene and Paz was taken to a hospital and later died from her injuries. He was tried in Parisian courts for murder but was later acquitted on the grounds that it was a crime of passion caused by his wife's alleged infidelity. He left Paris permanently with his son and moved back to Spain.

By May of 1894, Luna and his son moved back to the Philippines. At this time, revolutionary activities were heating up in the Manila area, and Juan and his brothers were often suspected of inciting rebellions. After a short visit to Japan in 1896, Luna was arrested along with his brothers, Antonio and Jose, and hundreds of other Filipino leaders suspected of participating in rebellions and revolutionary activities. Luna wrote to King Alfonso XII, who had commissioned a painting from Luna after he received his 1884 gold medal, and pleaded for his release. He was freed after spending eight months in prison due to a pardon from the king. He immediately left for Spain to see the king for pardons for his brothers.

Revolts and skirmishes with the peninsular militia escalated into a revolution beginning in 1896. By 1897, the Spanish and Filipino leaders of the revolution signed a truce, the Pact of Biak na Bato.

Meanwhile in the Caribbean, the United States intervened in Cuba and began a war against Spain in April 1898, ending with surrenders at Santiago de Cuba and in Manila Bay where the American navy showed immense military prowess with modern ships and weapons. By June, a declaration of independence was read in Cavite proclaiming Filipino liberation from Spanish rule. On August 1898, Luna was appointed to lead a diplomatic delegate in Paris to represent the new Philippine government. However, the governments of the United States and of Spain did not recognize Philippine independence, and continued to negotiate a peace treaty that negotiated the transition of power from Spain to the United States in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

This treaty between Spain and the US redirected Luna's target from Madrid to Washington D.C., where he traveled to lobby the US Government to recognize Philippine independence. Luna, after intense negotiations, was headed back to Manila when he

suffered a heart attack in Hong Kong. Two days later, Luna suffered a more severe heart attack and died on December 7, 1899.

#### Painting the Filipino

Luna's development as a painter is contextualized by the historic period in which he lived, and colored his political inclinations and impetus for art making. Anti-Filipino sentiment of the time perpetuated the notion that Filipinos were ungovernable and could not be civilized, and therefore could not be equal to the Spaniard. Meant to denigrate and keep the Filipino down, this kind of sentiment and notion became a driving force to excel, to out-manuever the oppressors, and to beat them at their own games.

The mantle of being Filipino was beneficial – giving Luna a reason to excel and to prove the colonial administrators wrong – and detrimental – as a source of discrimination and racism. The tension between the benefits and detriments of identifying as Filipino, affected Luna's artistic voice veering him toward strong advocacy for Filipino causes.

The tension between the Propaganda Movement and aesthetic movement within Luna's practice reveals another rupture in the neatly packaged image of Luna that has developed over time. This image, developed from the mythology created around the gold medal of 1884, projects a linear development of Luna as an artist whose perspective and voice were cultivated due to his association with activists of the Propaganda Movement, and that he took up the banner of the Propagandists and painted a work that echoed and supported the calls for reform.

## Spoliarium

The *Spoliarium* by Juan Luna is a massive oil on canvas painting measuring approximately four by seven meters, completed in 1883 during his stay in Rome. What Luna shows us are the few moments before the bodies arrive at the spoliarium; the effort of dragging lifeless bodies across the stone floor, leaving a bloody trail, witnessed by an agitated crowd waiting to mourn or taunt the defeated fighters.

The painting depicts a room below the fighting arena of the Colosseum, called

“the spoliarium where the dead and dying were dragged to be dispatched, then stripped for burial” (Bomgardner 1989). This foreboding darkness in the background is a room where the contemplation of life and the paying of respects to the dead or dying are hidden from view, made private. “The spoliarium is referred to as the *solitus locus ad iugulationem*<sup>4</sup>...hidden away from the crowd’s view” (Bomgardner 1989).

### *Technical description*

Luna shows a beautiful contrast of light, grounding the gaze on the brightest spot where a corpse of a fallen gladiator is being dragged with extreme effort by another gladiator into the darkness. “Gladiators were at first composed of captives and slaves, or of condemned malefactors” (Harris 1874).

The central body lies on the honed stone surface of the Colosseum floor, on his back with his right arm rising diagonally as it is pulled by another gladiator gripping his wrist. The blood stains on the floor mark the slow progress of movement, showing only several inches of smeared blood on the floor. To the left of the main corpse is another body twisted and mangled and wrapped in chains, its handler has his back to the viewer taking a deep lunge, a very labored step to move the body closer to the spoliarium.

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<sup>4</sup> Customary place for butchering

This scene is populated by figures in varying poses. Receding into the background, a fellow gladiator wearing a red tunic, points to the left, his arm stretched out and gestures ambiguously towards the left side of the painting, strangely pointing out a wall bathed in light, adjacent to an incredible scene in the shadows for our imagination to cast light upon.

But in the same shaft of light, a group of elderly men, a trio, closely observe the corpses being dragged pass them. One figure in a grey tunic seems to blend in with the background wall, with only his head and shoulders illuminated and the rest of his body in dappled shadows; Luna seems to paint this man to look like a Roman bust or herm. He looks straight out into the audience, addressing the viewers opposite him, forcing the viewers to be aware that we are being watched. The second figure wears a black robe and stands elegantly with a slight curved to his spine that develops with old age. His head, in contrast to his body, is brightly illuminated that it looks like it is floating in space. He crooks his neck towards the first man, preparing to share his thoughts.

The third man, wearing a white toga directs his gaze at the slave as he is pushed back by the slave's muscular arm. His body shirks back and the folds on his toga expresses this movement through Luna's use of deep contour lines and bright highlights.

The slave's raised arm reaches across the body of the man in white toga landing his grasp on this onlooker's left shoulder, creating a diagonal in line towards his upwardly tilted head, and his gaze directed up to the old man. The meeting of gazes activates the emotional tension in this encounter – a clash of classes, a slave pushing an older citizen aside. Luna reinforces this tension with the opposing body positions of the two characters. The old citizen looks downward with his body caving in and moving backwards. The slave is thrusting forward leading with his raised left arm, followed by his upward gaze reinforced by his open three-quarter pose.



In his other hand, the slave grips what looks like chains and rope, and the armor and weapons of the dead being dragged behind him, barely entering the picture. His pose caught in mid-step taking a forward lunge with his body turned towards the audience with his left arm raised up diagonally while his other arm drags behind continuing the diagonal line, directing the viewer's eye from the bottom left corner upwards towards the center of the piece. The exertion of his right arm is made evident by Luna's mastery in painting human figures dramatically. The dabs of dark and light paint congeal to create an image of a muscular arm in flexion, straining to hold on to the heavy load of which we can only get a glimpse.

To the left of the third slave, one can make out the motley crowd descending a staircase, halted by the procession of dragging corpses. Four faces, barely illuminated, peek out of the shadow and gaze towards the left: one woman excited, her body leaning in and her head turned in surprise. The woman behind her stretches her arms out and holds back the first woman, and she, too, surprisingly looks to the left, her face in half shadow caused by her veil, only her plump left cheek catches the light. Two men quietly look on barely showing the expressions on their faces.

The shaft of raking light coming from above directly lights the corpses of the gladiators, but in its dimming edges catch an interesting female figure wearing a green dress seated on the Colosseum floor with her back facing the viewer. She is busily attending to something in front of her that is concealed from the viewer.

Receding further into the background, a shadowy figure is seen to be tending to a fire in a hearth or oven. The flames peeking out of the oven seem to float above the seated woman. Luna has done everything he can technically to keep the viewer's eye on the lit animated sections of the painting, including diagonal lines that direct the eye to various faces and tableaux.

Most of the scene is hidden behind black shadows occasionally disturbed by a glint of metal or a flame from a fire. The cascading daylight illuminates the room just enough to reveal a small but powerful scene, but also a way to create depth, volume, and space. Light elements and saturated colors have a tendency to flatten the surface of the picture plane. The addition of the shadows and highlights create shapes and forms that our eyes and minds compose into a representational image.

If one examines the light effect on the main corpse, it is evident that the subligaculum he wears, painted with saturated red is mostly a flat inactive element. The same goes for the main corpse's torso, the best lit section of the body appears flattened, lacking contour lines or shading. Contrast this with the shadowy faces of the two old men whose facial features catch light and cast shadows, creating a kind of topography, dark valleys and bright peaks that give shape and detail to the faces of these men. The shadows also create a flatness, as in the robe of the second older onlooker; it is a lifeless black area that becomes incorporated with the shadows in the background creating a column of darkness, a black border that separates the main scene from the crowds to the left.

Luna uses the same dark border to separate the vignette on the right side of the painting. He uses dabs of white paint to create small bright reflections from a metallic surface that crawls from the central scene to the right, connecting with the woman's white garment.

As another contrast, Luna uses highlights as opposed to shadows to create volume and shapes. The woman's hair is shiny and forms a spherical contour that helps shape the head. The folds and wrinkles of the woman's green dress are crafted by carefully placed highlights. Looking closely, one sees abstracted shapes and tinted triangles that are placed sequentially, that come together to form her dress. The bright

swath of light becomes nuanced, differentiating the woman's milky skin from her snowy blouse. Luna is showing mastery in painting by showing a broad range of tints and shades from a limited palette of color. He does this again on the left side of the painting, showing a subtle nuance between the two men in white togas. The slave in the shorter tunic shines brightly, fully catching the light. The citizen recedes back into space with his darker shade of white, appearing as a linen color.

The dynamic compositional elements of the painting move the narrative from bottom left corner diagonally towards the background. An outstretched arm of a gladiator with his back turned to us, leads our eye towards to the left to an architectural feature from where the eye lands on a grouping of onlookers gazing to the left, beyond the scene of the painting.

Two thirds of the canvas have been composed using diagonals, an effective application of complimentary colors, and contrasting brightness and shadows. The remaining third on the right side of the painting seems static with a seated woman anchoring the scene in this section.

In the shadows, Luna paints another vignette, a hidden scene that requires real determination to decipher. The seated figure offers a visual delight in that it is painted with the same kind of dynamism using smaller diagonals that moves the eye upwards from her brightly painted foot, following the diagonal going up to her knee, turning to go up her thigh and torso, then another turn that leads us to her hair and the seemingly floating flame above her head.

From here, we register two figures in the shadow, one is near the fire, maintaining it, adding coal or firewood to keep it burning. Diagonally towards the upper right-hand corner, there is a cloaked, hooded figure with his arms crossed. Only one arm is visible, creating a white stripe across its chest as if holding an object to his or her

chest, a piece of armor or a trinket from a slain gladiator, cherished as a memento or loot.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century convention of painting human figures in as many different poses to show adroit skills in rendering bodies is evident in this work. At least ten different configurations that interact as inverse shapes or opposite action populate the picture. The central figure of the fallen gladiator is being stretched resulting in the curving outward of the chest from the tension exerted upon it. To the left, a second corpse is in a totally opposite position, crumpled mass of flesh, limp and lifeless, his back curving out with his arms resting on the ground. This lump of flesh is twisted around black strapping that seems to add to the bound feeling of this body, where the only tension or exertion is the black strap stretching from the body to the gladiator dragging it across the floor.

Luna composes the same inverse relation of action as seen with the two men dragging the corpses. The man dragging the central figure faces the viewer with both arms stretched out, holding onto the opposite end of a rope. His back is curved outward as he uses his legs to drive energy and move the body. The man to his left has his back to the audience with his arms going back, bent and strained, holding on tightly to black straps that entwine the corpse. Here, the outstretched leg contrasts with the bent leg of the previous figure.

To balance the painting, Luna painted a singular seated figure, disheveled woman, her blouse is falling from her body, exposing her right shoulder and upper back. Her position is seated with her legs bent and her torso twisted, creating a sense of tension. The fabric of her dress creates folds and creases that exaggerate her pose. On the opposite side of the painting, the figure in the short white tunic balances the seated figure but is shown as a moving figure with his body outstretched and open to the viewer. The contrasting positions of these bodies direct the action of the painting

towards the dark background, adding up to the overwrought moment when the slain gladiators are dragged from the arena and into the spoliarium. The number of bodies in various positions truly would have impressed judges and jury at the Madrid Exposition along with the very classical theme set in Ancient Rome.

Articulating the scene

The scene depicts fallen gladiators set in front of a spoliarium, a room dedicated to the transition from life to death, where old philosophers contemplate the sacrificed lives of the young, where slaves who desperately fought for their lives won death instead, and where audience members are engrossed with the spectacle of death. But in the periphery of the picture plane sits a female figure, a symbol of home and hearth keeping a vigil for the dying.

Just to the left of center, Luna show two figures bathed in cascading light. Slain gladiators being dragged across the floor towards the spoliarium. The central figure is stripped of his body armor exposing his torso, still wearing his leg armor glinting in the light. His right wrist is tied with rope and is pulled by a straining gladiator making the cadaver flex as if it were alive. The gladiator on the left, still wearing his helmet and armor, tied with rope like cattle going to the abattoir, his lifeless body refused to budge.

Gladiators were enslaved males from conquered lands sent to the coliseum to train and fight in bloody events. At the training schools, gladiators were motivated to fight well, in order to earn freedom by winning their combats. Those who did not fight in the arena were delegated to deal with the dead bodies as seen in Luna's painting.

The placement of struggle is at the center of this work. However, it is not the struggle of the defeated gladiators that the viewer is asked to contemplate, but the

struggle of the other gladiators who are dealing with this defeat and death, who has to prepare the body for burial, and who will someday be called to fight in the arena.

These two living gladiators are dealing with the aftermath of the defeat with one facing forward and the other facing back, a physical manifestation of how to psychologically deal with loss, face forward and move on, or face back and suffer melancholia. They animate the scene with their exertion and opposing movements.

Look intently and see that the central scene is surrounded by the color red, a color that punctuates spaces on the picture plane, a color that attracts the eye. The fallen bodies wear red subligacula, while the other gladiators wear long red tunics, forming a cluster of red in the middle of the painting. The red clothing of the gladiators signifies the blood that these men have shed in the arena. Symbolically, it also stands for freedom, albeit lost in death, and the continuing fight for it.

Out of the raking light and into the shadows, flanking this scene are two contrasting tableaux. The scene on the left shows an agitated crowd descending a staircase to view the disposal of the bodies. On the right, a shadowy vignette featuring a seated woman stoking a fire, with other individuals veiled by the darkness. Both scenes add to the narrative of this painting filling in with details.

The growing crowd on the left, coming down from the stadium above, shows who were in attendance at this event, and acts as witnesses to the death of these gladiators. At the landing of the staircase, a montage of reactions is featured by Luna through the various expressions each person wears.

The women who look surprised and awed avert their gaze not to the figures in front of them but to the left, out of the frame, anticipating another arrival. The men adjacent to them more stoic and stern, also look to the left enforcing this anticipation. A confrontation between a slave and a togate citizen adds action to this montage while

the older men to their right, look intently at the bodies being dragged in front of them. One leans over to the other as if to narrate the action passing by.

Luna added this crowd to remind the viewers that there was a huge spectacle in which these individuals participated, and that they witnessed the deaths of these men. They represent the larger crowd in the stadium above whose attention is diverted when faced with the tragic reality of blood sports.

On the other side of the painting, also in the periphery of the cascading light, a more sedate scene is partially revealed. The seated woman is reminiscent of Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth, typically depicted as a seated female figure keeping the fires of home and family alive. Vesta is also the keeper of the state whose temple fire was a symbol for the heart of the city.

The inclusion of this seated woman dressed in green, juxtaposed to the gladiators in red garments play with the basic color theory of complementary colors, but also add a narrative component that this scene complements that of the struggling gladiators handling the deaths of their fellow fighters. It is a warning sign that the fire that represents the heart of the city-state is underground where the fight for freedom is lost, near the room where death happens.

Spoliarium: an allegory

Many of Luna's companions in Barcelona and Madrid were other *Indios* who had gained status and been educated in Spain or in other cosmopolitan centers of Europe. In Barcelona, Luna was in the company of writers/journalists Jaena-Lopez and Rizal, as well as other Filipinos who shared the same passion and dedication to fight for Filipino equality. Luna shared this view with many of his compatriots, and in drafting the theme and composition of his magnum opus, *Spoliarium*, these elements of propaganda were allegorized as a Roman scene.

By employing allegorical tactics, does Luna then disassociate himself from representing reality and place his work within the symbolic? Is Luna employing multiple layers of representation to offer subtle entryways to understanding the critique of colonial and clerical abuses and the resultant calls for reform?

The scene of dragging the bodies of defeated gladiators into the spoliarium is not a depiction of any particular historical moment. The inspiration for this work was a synthesis attributed to Luna's visit to the Colosseum, his reading of DeZorby's fictional travelogue of a Gaul in ancient Rome (Flores 2011, p. 3), and his apprenticeship in Rome under his professor, Alejo Vera, who was passionate for Pompeian excavations and Roman themes. Luna manifested in paint an imagined scene that addressed imperial abuses in its colonial outposts.

Luna was reminded of Spain's history as an ancient Roman colony - under which it suffered and resisted cruelties - through Vera's work, whose 1881 gold-medal winning painting, *Numancia* (Prado Museum Foundation), was displayed with Luna's *Death of Cleopatra*, which earned a silver at the same contest. *Numancia* depicts the city in Hispania under siege from Roman soldiers whose residents decided to burn the city and commit mass suicide rather than be enslaved. The theme of heroic sacrifice that won the gold medal veered Luna away from pretty, imagined, Roman genre scenes like his painting, *Damas Romanas*, and prompted him to address empire and colonialism in *Spoliarium*, with the ambition of winning the gold medal.

The *Spoliarium* is an allegorical scene, a symbolic representation of Spain's own history under Roman colonization. Luna reminded the Spanish audience of their history as colonial subjects, and wanted the Spaniards to see themselves as dying gladiators in order to understand the oppressive regime in the Philippines and the suffering of the Filipino people. Rather than accuse the Spanish viewers of colonial abuses, he appealed



to their empathetic humanity, and evoked the suffering of their people. As Flores wrote, “Allegory permits a transposition of a tale impossible to narrate and offers a moral resolution to a predicament too intricate to reveal with directness” (Flores 2011).

Indeed, the Filipino predicament was too intricate to reveal with directness and needed a subtler form of articulation. The use of allegory followed acceptable conventions that appealed to the aristocracy and the conservative factions of Spanish society, who supported such exhibitions and commissioned artists.

Jose Rizal and the winning moment

On June 15, 1884, at a banquet held at the Restaurante Ingles in Madrid, Luna and Hidalgo were celebrated for their triumphs. Jose Rizal and Graciano Lopez-Jaena toasted the winners and declared their medals a victory for the Filipino people (Pilar 1988). The coalescence of the medal win and the desire for reforms developed a conjuncture<sup>5</sup> to which Rizal applied tactically a political agenda for equality. The deployment of a conjunctural analysis to this episode in history allows for a re-articulation of the events and re-contextualization of the moment to better understand the political tactics employed by Rizal and how these tactics set a precedence for the function of art in protest. Pastor-Roces recognized that “José Rizal is the ur-interpreter. He set the manner and thematics for the politicization of the work of Hidalgo and Luna in his brindis” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002).

From the starting moment, Rizal provided context as to why they are gathered and articulated his political goals. He set the scene as “full of empathic good feeling” and “currents of brotherhood,” and flattered his audience, the “men of hearts,” who stood

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<sup>5</sup> Using Lawrence Grossberg’s definition of conjuncture as “a description of social formation fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes, and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” Grossberg, Lawrence. 2010. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Durham NC: Duke University Press,.

in the “heights where noble emotions dwell” waiting to welcome Luna and Hidalgo’s arrival, and to join them in “one single thought, one single aspiration: the glory of genius, and the splendor of the country” (Guerrero 1963). Rizal did not hesitate to incorporate Luna and Hidalgo’s winning moment, their works, and their artistic practices as part of the reformist agenda.

Rizal marked this moment as the end of “patriarchal era in Filipinas” and the perpetuation of the “eternal laws of continual evolution, of transformation, of periodicity, of progress.” He saw this moment as indicative of the advancements Filipinos have achieved, and that the momentum of progress cannot be stopped. Rizal saw the next stage of Spanish progress as providing equal rights to Filipinos and representation in government.

The medals of the two artists attested to the equality that Filipinos have achieved in creative and artistic endeavors, that the Filipino was a productive contributor to Spanish society and needed no longer be a ward of the imperial court, colonial administration, and the abusive clerics, and that the call for equal rights needed to be adopted, so that the Philippines and Spain “may form one sole nation in spirit, in their duties, their perspectives, their privileges.” At this moment, Rizal and the reformist were not yet advocating for autonomy or independence, but called for reforms in the way the Philippines was governed to bring equality and end the abuses and corruption of colonial and clerical administrators.

Rizal elevated painting as a declarative act that exposed “humanity subjected under severe tests” and visualized “fanaticism and injustice” in his speech. Rizal emphasized the powerful statement that Luna’s work expressed through the varied use of light, the punctuation of color, the movement of line that makes this painting an active scene. He further emphasized this action by attributing sounds, like the noise of

the crowd, or the clanking of armor, bringing the sense of hearing to this visual wonder. He said that the sounds that this painting induces are as natural as thunder and waterfalls, and that the talents of Luna's brushstrokes came from the same natural phenomena. Rizal's agenda for reform enclosed his interpretation of this work and instead, put it in the service of his politics.

The painting is no longer an autonomous object but now functions as a tool for political engagement. Rizal emphasized this point when he stated, "If they lack the pen, if the printing press does not second them, then palette and brush not only will give pleasure to the eyes — they will also be eloquent orators" (Guerrero 1963). Rizal equated works of art with other forms of expression like writing as a means to disseminate propaganda and work towards a political goal.

Due to this speech, the *Spoliarium* has become a symbol of Filipino mastery, of exceeding expectations, and the proof that Filipinos are entitled to equal treatment and rights under the Spanish crown because Filipinos were capable of superseding the Spaniard's skill level and was able to beat him at his own game.

Rizal made his case to the young Filipinos in Madrid. He closed his toast by imploring the audience to action:

"I ask you then to drink a toast to our painters, Luna and Hidalgo, exclusive and legitimate glories of two peoples! A toast for those who have helped them on the arduous paths of art! A toast for the youth of the Philippines, sacred hope of my country, that they may follow such excellent examples, and may Mother Spain, solicitous and ever mindful of the good of her provinces, soon put in effect the reforms that she has longed planned; the furrow has been ploughed and the soil is not barren" (Guerrero 1963).

"Rizal was extravagant, however florid the Spanish of the day," remarked Pastor-Roces, and that this extravagance is carried forward and reflected on the writings on Philippine art and history as quotes, fragments, and extracts circulated reducing the

brindis to two ideas: “that Rizal ably articulated the *ilustrado* political passions of the late 19th century; and that it marked the moment Rizal himself became a central figure in the reformist expatriate community from *las islas Filipinas*” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002).

These two ideas continue to circulate and created a cultural mythology around Luna’s and Rizal’s nationalist beginnings, and that these ideas continue to “promote the illusion of a nationalism that was uniformly understood, desired and fought for” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). It is precisely this illusion of nationalism and its perpetuation that stymies a broader understanding of Filipino American contemporary art both in the Philippines and throughout the Filipino diasporic communities, especially in the United States. It is particularly curious as to why this illusion of nationalism continues to be conjured by curators of international art exhibitions like the Venice Biennale, and the many other biennials and art fairs happening throughout the world.

#### Historical Experience

When *the Spoliarium* was started, the propaganda movement had not yet organized. The call for reforms was just some loud grumblings from a small band of *Indios* and mestizos in Spain. But this small group reflected a consistent and strong resistance to the mistreatments of *Indios* and mestizos, intensified after the Cavite Rebellion of 1872, and further punctuated by the executions of Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora. The central figures painted in the *Spoliarium* may be read as an allusion to the 1872 Cavite rebellion contributing to the propaganda campaign of Filipino students and exiled *Ilustrados* living in Madrid or Barcelona.

Luna’s act of painting this imaginary scene sparked in the viewers a world of possibilities, and afforded those who were affected by the painting an alternative

agency to fight colonial abuses. Rizal's speech given at the *Restaurante Ingles* was one of the first acts to recognize the new space that this painting created, a space in which indio struggles can be recognized within the Spanish government. I am marking Luna's work both as a symbolic representation of domination, but also as a "historical experience" that created an alternative agency in the making of Filipino history.

Neferti X. M. Tadiar's book, *Things Fall Away*, discussed historical experience and brought to light issues related to symbolic representation. She made a clear distinction between the mode of postcolonial representation and lived historical experience, stating that "historical experience is thus both the imaginary, affective, sociosubjective activity that impels and shapes prevailing relations of production in a particular sociohistorical formation and the hermeneutic perspective that recognizes alternative agencies in the making of history, which such activity affords" (Tadiar 2009, p. 15). In other words, Tadiar is saying that lived experience sparks imaginative possibilities, or affects the way we think and relate to making our own history. This activity then influences how others understand the lived experience and reflect the experience in written form. The written word that reflects these sparks of possibilities or recognizes the nuanced effects becomes the validation or rationale for reshaping or reforming current historical formations.

This spark triggered an onslaught of activity, from Rizal writing his novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, to the founding of the alternative newspaper, *La Solidaridad*, as the tool to promote the need for political reforms in the Philippine colony. As Tadiar writes, "From this renewed standpoint of dispossessed historical experience we are thus led to envision forms of political action and alternative features that are at once immanent in and yet seemingly outside of the dominant imaginations of existing social movements" (Tadiar 2009, p. 16). Indeed, Luna's *Spoliarium* continued to circulate after the Madrid

Exposition of 1884, winning awards in other art contests, generating new sparks of envisioning new political forms in many other places.

*Spoliarium* was not seen in the Philippines until the 1950's when Spain gifted the painting to the Philippine government, yet its symbolic effects influenced the development of colonial critique and calls for reforms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Spain, we saw that this painting sparked a vision for Jose Rizal to write *Noli Me Tangere*, which in turn, sparked other visions of reform, and nurtured a burgeoning independence movement to become more viable.

#### *Equaliberty* in *Spoliarium*

Rizal's speech marks the *Spoliarium* as a symbol of equality, despite its ambiguous narrative, and this mark has persisted to today, still influencing how works of art made by Filipinos presented at international exhibitions are understood. The catalogue essay for the Luna and Hidalgo Centennial Exhibition, states that artists have a "fundamental responsibility to assist in nation-building" and that the images and symbols artists create become talismans that rally people together, like the eagles of the Roman army or the Ark of the Covenant that led Moses out of Egypt" (Pilar 1988).

What constitutes a citizen is a contested arena where distinctions such as race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, skin color, become lines of separation that justify the declassification of a group from citizen to other. The social hierarchy that existed in the Spanish realm, exacerbated in the colonies, is challenged when *Indios* and Filipinos claim the same entitlement to the rights of the Spanish citizens, as in Rizal's call is for equality, to open the state to include *Indios* and Filipinos as citizens of the realm with equal rights and privileges.

A slippage that occurs in the *Spoliarium* is the discussion between equality and liberty. In Etienne Balibar's book, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, he wrote that within a state system, equality and liberty take on very distinct characteristics, as "freedom represents a status, a personality, and equality is a function and a right of this status" (Balibar 1994, p. 46). Balibar questions when or where equality and freedom get conflated as synonyms as opposed to maintaining their individual characteristics. He made a distinction between equality and freedom to ascertain the politics that revolve around these two terms.

Examining the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man, Balibar stated that the French revolutionaries were "fighting against two adversaries and two principles at once: absolutism, which appears as the negation of freedom ("the royal will is law"), and privileges, which appear as the negation of equality ("might makes right")" (Balibar 1994, p. 46). He claimed that the French revolution and the consequent writing of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen conflated equality and freedom and made them synonyms and interchangeable. Balibar devised a portmanteau, *equaliberty*, to describe how each of those terms has been inscribed within the other and that liberty and equality function together not separately.

For Balibar, liberty or freedom is a universal right of wo/man, endowed to wo/man through his/her natural being. Equality on the other hand is a social construct based on the politics of citizenship, those who are validated members given rights and privileges. The separation of these ideas "introduces an indefinite oscillation, induces a structural equivocation between two obviously antinomial forms of 'politics': an insurrectional politics and a constitutional politics. Or if one prefers, a politics of permanent, uninterrupted revolution, and a politics of the state as institutional order" (Balibar, p. 47).

Rizal's declarations in his brindis betrayed his bias and belief in equality as he spoke of "one sole nation," politicizing the moment and calling for action from the state to grant equality, and from the Filipinos to demand it. Rizal showed his preference for a "politics of the state as institutional order." Rizal's nationalism is what Pastor-Roces wrote about as "official nationalism" (borrowed from Benedict Anderson and Hugh Seton-Watson) "that preserved aristocratic or dynastic privilege" (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). She contends that Rizal's call for equality is not a true negation of privilege as defined by Balibar, but rather a mere extension of privilege to the *Ilustrados*, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Filipino bourgeoisie.

I take this notion of equality a step further and apply it to late capitalistic national formations as seen in international exhibitions, and that curators, like Flores is still functioning within and under this system. Instead of calling for equality within one nation, the call is for equality within the global circuit, of equality for the citizens of the global cosmopolitan art community. It is still as Pastor-Roces contended, not a true negation of privilege but a limited extension of it.



## Chapter 3: Interventions in Exhibition Making

I began curating exhibitions to provide space for makers, viewers, critics, and thinkers to come together, to explore new ways of understanding Filipino American contemporary art. Within this broad field, I specifically wanted to address how conjunctures are formed through the notion of praxis and how this conjuncture then helps in defining strategies of intervention in exhibition making. As a curator, I engage with theory and practice, which allows me to think and act conjuncturally. I participate both in the thinking realm by conducting research and proposing new ideas, and in the production realm by making art. This praxis extends to my curating activities both thinking about and making exhibitions.

My intervention started with addressing the sclerotic nature of mainstream Filipino art history in the previous chapter, and insisted on the fluidity of notions such as “Filipino” and “contemporary art” as part of the analysis and to create new ways of thinking about Filipino American contemporary art. As part of this intervention, I discussed exhibitions I curated between 2007-2010 and contrasted them with other Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions, specifically examining *Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art*, (1996); *At Home and Abroad*, (1998); and *Pioneers of Philippine Art: Luna, Amorsolo, Zobel* (2006).

This series of exhibitionary events combined as a set forms a conjuncture that shapes the corpus of my analysis. Within this conjuncture, these exhibitions also act as markers of my development as a curator, absorbing and contemplating ideas that emerged through these exhibitions, but also being pushed to action by my dissatisfaction with the lack of new ideas or the recuperation of established yet unquestioned notions in Filipino American contemporary art. By using these exhibitions

as a spring board to my curatorial work, I hope to impress upon the reader that my curatorial work is an expression of interventionist praxis.

Praxis

I use the term praxis as it allows for the interplay between theoretical work and practical recreation. Both as an artist and a curator, I constantly negotiate contemplation with production and vice versa, and within this negotiation, the term praxis emerges following its development traced through Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, and Etienne Balibar.

Praxis is a Greek word for practice that was used by the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, in delineating the three forms of human activity: *theoria*, *poiesis*, and *praxis*. Further development of these terms expounded on the specific kind of knowledge each generated; theoretical or contemplative truth, *poiesis* or material production, and *praxis* or knowledge that leads to actions, transforming oneself in search of perfection (Balibar 1995).

In his *Theses on Feuerbach* found in *The German Ideology*, Marx addressed these separate systems of gaining knowledge. In Thesis II, Marx wrote, “the question whether objective truth is an attribute of human thought – is not a theoretical but a *practical* question” and in Thesis IX, the most famous of all aphorisms, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world differently, the point is to *change* it” (Marx, Engels, and Pascal 1947, 197, pp. 197-199). These two aphorisms illustrate the tension between the classical idea that separated *poiesis* from *praxis* with which Marx struggled. In Thesis II, Marx attributed the search for objective truth as a practice, and by Thesis IX, he called for action in addition to contemplation.

French critical theorist Etienne Balibar pointed out the conflation of poiesis with praxis, equating production with practice, stating that “Marx removed one of philosophy’s most ancient taboos: the radical distinction between praxis and poiesis” (1995, p. 40). With the conflation of the two, Marx pointed to his belief that the production of one’s material condition is a transformative act, and that it does not need another step to make one’s material condition into a transformative act; praxis is already a part of and subsumed within poiesis.

Balibar further develops the blurring of this distinction,

There is never any effective freedom which is not also a material transformation, which is not registered historically in **exteriority**. But nor is there any work which is not a transformation of self, as though human beings could change their conditions of existence while maintaining an invariant ‘**essence**’(1995, p. 41).

Achieving any sort of freedom is a result of a material transformation, and any material transformation begins with transforming the self through thought or action, and vice versa. This dynamic that Balibar explained, in which thinking changes one’s material condition, and conversely, one’s material condition changes how one thinks, uncannily describes my work both as a curator and as an artist.

Within an exhibition setting, my curatorial intention is to create pathways to certain ways of thinking about each art object, about a certain grouping of artworks, about an artist’s current body of work, or about the whole show in its entirety. The introduction of a set of ideas through a curatorial statement applied to works of art create a rendezvous, a reactive environment where the encounter between the articulated curatorial frame and the work of art begin a series of negotiations that move both frame and object onto different contextual planes or conjunctures.

The new ideas presented by the curator guide the viewers to think of the material within a prescribed theoretical position, while the work of art, as material,

displays its physical attributes that lead to a different set of ideas. It is in the arena of ideas where the curator's thoughts encounter the content within the work of art, and begin a dialogue that eventually implicate the viewer's thinking and fold them into the conversation. The curatorial statement, the work of art, and the audience's thinking triangulate a plane of understanding, to follow the mathematical theorem, three points make a plane. Going through the exhibition, the viewer as a moving point, create for him/herself a new plane of understanding with every new idea that he/she brings into the conversation, developing a series of planes of understanding unique to that individual.

What I have described above is an application of praxis that Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* developed based on dialogical relations. For Freire, the dialogue is a human phenomenon based on the instrument of the word and its constituent elements: reflection and action. "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (Freire 1970, p. 68)

In the scenario I have described above, I have substituted word with image, the verbal with visual. The utterance that make up words have been replaced by marks, gestures, pixels, by the facture that make up the image. In this shift from word to image, what I kept intact is the dynamic of the dialogue, a meaningful encounter where the artist shows his or her own truth through visual means, and where the curator has created space in which to have this encounter with the viewer who enters this space. "At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses or perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know"(Freire 1970, p. 71).

Each player – the curator, the artist, the audience – comes to the exhibition space and performs a prescribed role or set of tasks. In other words, each player comes into the encounter speaking his or her word or showing his or her image. The encounter starts a dialogue, “in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussant” (Freire 1970, p. 70)). It is in the space of the encounter that these roles begin to transform in the attempt to understand the work together, and within this context of mutual understanding, the performers are liberated from their roles, and the art is liberated from its frame. It is in the encounter where the line that separates theory and practice is dissolved, and where the distinction between curator, artist, and audience begin to dematerialize.

To reach this ideal liberatory space, I exercised a series of technical processes. I approach each work of art with a blank curatorial frame and ask myself questions about the work in front of me, first and foremost, to calibrate my coordinates to ascertain a position vis à vis these works. By asking questions first, I begin the dialogue with the work of art. In this process of presenting ideas about the work of art, I become more aware of the ideas that are contained within it, and these new discoveries then affect my thinking and alter my original thought.

Often, viewing the work of art in front of me begins to change how I have formulated a curatorial theme, and as a set of objects, each work’s proximity to another work of art begins to inform each other, and inform the curatorial statement. On certain occasions, I have detailed how these mere juxtapositions transform my curatorial ideas around the exhibition, allowing for the expansion of the dialogue, for “true dialogue

cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking...thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than static entity” (Freire 1970, p. 73).

I also strategically focused attention to specific details of the work to ensure the viewers capture my curatorial ideas and contemplate them, especially if these ideas elicit a different perspective of lived, everyday life as experienced by the viewer. As a problem-posing curator, I begin with asking myself how these works of art change my ideas and in the process of, change the way I organize an exhibition. Secondly, through the exhibition, I ask the audience how the exhibition change their perception of the artist and the work of art, and how does it affect their lives. Once this dialogue starts, thinking and acting begin to blur into one, “the point at which it becomes actual and lives historically (that is socially and no longer just in the brains of individuals), when it ceases to be arbitrary and becomes necessary – rational – real” (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith 1971, p. 369).

I continue with Antonio Gramsci’s development of the term praxis, as he brings this term into the arena of politics and energizes the activist part of my curatorial equation to engender political consciousness. I often work towards what Gramsci called the *progressive self-consciousness*. He wrote,

Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political ‘hegemonies’ and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one (Gramsci, Hoare, and Nowell-Smith 1971, p. 333).

My work as a curator is highly invested in developing a politically conscious audience, an audience that is open, to echo Gramsci, to “work out at a higher level of one’s own conception of reality,” that is to say that the audience member who is there

and is willing to participate in a dialogue with the work of art and to experience the exhibition. This is the main responsibility of the audience, to come to an exhibition with the willingness to look and experience with an open mind. Gramsci had asked more from the audience and had wanted the audience to arrive conscious of his or her own participation in particular hegemonic forces and to acknowledge the activation of these forces when entering the exhibition space and encountering the work of art.

It is at this moment when reflection of one's position is enacted upon to contribute to the dialogue between oneself, the work of art, and the exhibition, that the audience member lays the foundation of his/her own conjuncture, and moves towards the praxis of engaging with works of art. That is to say, when an audience member acknowledges his or her social position and the events, both personal and historic, that contributes to that position, the dialogue that occurs between the work of art and him/herself, between the exhibition and audience, forms a conjunctural space. The coming together of personal history, historic events, and the exhibition space create a conjuncture from which one can start to see how to activate political consciousness towards a "progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one."

The audience member is but one part of the equation; the curator, the artist, the gallerist, among others who contribute to creating an art experience, must undergo such self-reflection when entering the space to contribute to this dialogue. When I ask myself questions in front of the works of art as I have described above, I am working out what privileges I enact and hegemonies I support and bring these to consciousness to arrive at a critical understanding, a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play within a designated space.

To ensure that the exhibitions I curate achieve this result, I return to Freire, and borrow his pedagogy to privilege the instructive aspect of curatorial work. He was also influenced by the Marxist notion of praxis via Gramsci and described praxis as “human activity [that] consists of action and reflection” (Freire 1970, p. 106). He took praxis a step further towards revolutionary acts, and offered that “revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (Freire 1970, p. 107). Not only do we reflect and act, but now we are asked to direct this gesture towards structures, institutions, and organizations that we wish to change – to be more inclusive of women and artists of color, to acknowledge emergent practices engendered by social, economic, and political conditions, or to provide a democratic space in which artistic projects can be experienced.

Indeed, as a curator, it is my hope that I am reflecting and acting upon the structures I wish to change through the exhibition making process. I want to intervene in exhibition making to transform the exhibition space into an open, democratic, and liberatory space in which viewers, artists, and curator are engaged in active dialogue, creating new knowledge and learning together. As part of the process of learning together, I strategically enact upon Freire’s liberatory pedagogy to expand the exhibition space to accommodate a learning experience to nurture personal growth.

Some art critics, like Denise Frimer, saw the intentional learning aspects of artistic projects as “educational” and examined how this “educational turn” seeped into curating and exhibition making. The “educational turn” in curating, this gesture of adding an educational experience in exhibition making has been a subject of criticism and is suspected of over reaching beyond the prescribed curatorial responsibility. Art writer and educator, Denise Frimer traces the historical development of pedagogical



strategies employed within exhibition making, particularly education's growing role in the international exhibition, Documenta (Frimer 2010).

In the late 1990s, Frimer saw a proliferation of exhibitions that employed pedagogical strategies that many art thinkers, like Irit Rogoff and Paul O'Neill, believed that the direction of curatorial practice has taken an "educational turn" (Rogoff 2008). Frimer claimed that this turn began in the early 1970s when a conjuncture formed after massive student protests demanding curricular change and greater access to education, a time when "alternative solutions were being sought within the larger global economies and academies" (Frimer 2010, p. 2). Along with the publication of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Harald Szeemann curating Documenta 5 in 1972, in which he anchored his curatorial statement on the notion of "individual mythologies" and centered the exhibition around Joseph Beuys' work, whose lifelong project was to challenge standardized education in favor of an emancipatory pedagogy through performance art, Frimer saw the convergence of these events as beginning a dialogue and moving towards structural transformation, and that "these methods pioneered the means to opening borders between schools, museums and political spaces" (Frimer 2010, p.4).

For Irit Rogoff, the educational turn, whether it was an actual or perceived turn, was a moment to evaluate the deployment of pedagogical strategies in the expanding field of curatorial practice. She questioned whether this "turn" shifted the way we experienced works of art. Do art exhibitions bolstered by an underlying pedagogical structure add an interpretive model, a way of questioning art through a pedagogical system of thinking (Rogoff 2008)? Rogoff, weary that this "turn" might become a style and lose its liberalizing aspects, looked to Michel Foucault's "parrhesia"—free, blatant public speech—as perhaps a better model through which to understand some kind of

“educational turn” in art as a “counterpoint to the professionalization, technocratization, and privatization of academies” (Rogoff 2008).

Due to the structural shifts in universities and education in general, there was an increasing trepidation to align exhibition making with an educational turn. Unlike Freire’s dialogue that sparks an intellectual transformation, a way of learning together, the structural changes in education affirms the one-sided banking method that Freire resisted, and turns education into an outcome-driven alienating institution. This idea of education was being instituted on a grand scale and there was fear that it might seep into art education and stifle artistic development.

More poignantly, Clare Doherty, in her 2004 article, “Art of Encounter,” was highly critical of the educational turn, or what she calls “new institutionalism,” observing it as a cooptation of creative and liberating practices by institutions, mainly museums and commercial galleries. The incorporation of dialogic processes, open-endedness, and questioning strategies have become suspect as it was deployed to buttress the institutions of art as a necessary locus for visual experiences, and that these organic encounters between work of art and audience is now a controlled, highly rehearsed encounter, practiced through the borrowed social interaction from daily life. Doherty believed that audiences now have been conditioned to act in certain ways when engaging with exhibitions that solicit participation; they are invited to “role play” being the open-minded visitor, and undergo the highly mediated artist-conceived visual experience. As Doherty stated,

The gap between the rhetoric of engagement and the actual experience of the work may make for impotent participation rather than dynamic experience. This is because the visitor's behavior is already coded by the gallery's associated exhibition programme which demands a much more passive series of encounters. The danger is

that exhibitions such as these may operate as novelty participatory experiences, rather than on their own terms” (Doherty 2004, p. 6).

I appreciate both of Rogoff’s and Doherty’s positions in the “educational turn” in the visual arts. Their critiques support the expanding notion of the exhibition space as a learning space, and favors the increased participation of the audience. Rogoff expressed her concern, “I would not wish to give up the notion of ‘conversation,’ which to my mind has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade” (Rogoff 2008, p. 10), and instead focused on the turn itself. Why is the visual world making a turn, shifting focus, wanting to move in a different direction? This drive is to find new ways of having a conversation, not just a new format but a new way of saying and hearing what is important, and that “the “turn” we are talking about must result not only in new formats, but also in another way of recognizing when and why something important is being said” (Rogoff 2008, p. 10).

My work as a curator takes on the task that Rogoff have listed above, and it bears repeating: 1. to find new ways of having conversations, and 2. to recognize when and why something important is being said. The interventions in exhibition making that I started grew out of these tasks and continued that work in making exhibition spaces both contemplative and active spaces – spaces of praxis.

Exhibition spaces that activate praxis are productive spaces that spur on various levels of transformation, a way of changing oneself based on the visual stimulus experienced in that space. My work is to cultivate an environment in which viewers can raise their consciousness level through the understanding of the works of art on view, to transform the experience of seeing an exhibition from the banking method into a dialogical encounter, and to revolutionize the structures that host exhibitions to be agents of liberation.

Intervention

Another aspect of my practice engages with the idea of intervention. The idea of intervention, rooted in military tactics, and developed by interwar artists like Hugo Ball, mobilizes praxis as strategic engagement with the hopes of transforming longer historical processes, or traditions and customs (Williams 2004).

My training as a visual artist exposed me to conceptual performance and socio-political art practice. I gravitate towards artists who have used art to engender a political position; from Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii*, a history painting depicting duty and patriotism as a critique of government corruption; or Juan Luna's *Spoliarium*, which is seen as an allegory for colonial and clerical abuses in the Philippines. I summon these historical works of art as means of creating various circuits of history, linkages with the past that continue to influence the present and anchor future projects. When it comes to my own practice, I recall these works of art as glimpses into how a political praxis have been deployed, and borrow the tactics employed in these historical works of art as motivation to prepare my own intervention in art.

I consider my own creative endeavors as following a tradition of artistic practice that aims to raise political awareness through aesthetic means. Conceptual performance is an ideal vehicle rooted in both the deployment of concept and performance, of idea and action – a type of praxis. Working within this mode, I needed two elements, an idea and an action, from which I could elaborate how the idea is transformed into action, and how the action supports the idea.

This dialectical relationship is always my point of departure, following the works of art by my mentors, Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Yvonne Rainer, Allan Kaprow, Mary Kelly, Joan Jonas. These mentors showed me specific instances of how conceptual

performance can be deployed: the way Mary Kelly's performances occupy a position of criticality; Allan Kaprow's gestural performance pieces intervene in the status quo; the Guerilla Girls media campaign shown on billboards and magazine advertisement to expose the disparity in exhibiting the works of women artists in major museums and galleries. These works of art influenced me deeply, and I began to develop conceptual art that centralizes Filipino subjectivity while offering critiques of U.S. racial politics, or investigates the nuances of queer Filipino community, or explores immigrant or diasporic perspectives.

My current practices as an artist and curator are also rooted in political performances, such as Hugo Ball's anarchic action at Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916. Reacting to the atrocities and chaos wrought by World War I, Hugo Ball's performance expressed the fragmentation of society through the disintegration of language in "bruitism" or noise poetry. Ball, by establishing a center from which new forms of art can emerge, intervened in formalist experiments of Cubism and Constructivist art to bring the chaos of war into the rituals of everyday life with the intentions of creating new art that acts as a "key that will open all mysteries" (Williams 2004, p. 195).

While my practice as a whole was rooted in performance and inflected with subversive acts, the exhibition projects that I organized were deeply engaged and in conversation with political art action, like the Situationist International (active in France from 1957-1972), the Independent Group (active in London 1952-55), and activist/artist projects like the Guerrilla Girls (currently active in New York) or Guillermo Gomez-Peña (currently based in San Francisco, California). Whether I am working on an art piece or curating an exhibition, I want to engage my work with theory like the Situationists did, or break down elitist structures in the art world like the Independent Group, or just be

bold and active in redefining certain categories of identity, much like Gomez-Peña's work often does.

The Situationist International was a group of artists and philosophers who wanted to resuscitate the political and cultural critique that Surrealism had begun a generation before, and had "created a comprehensive strategy of resistance to the sterility and alienation of modern life" (Williams 2004, p. 237). I was particularly influenced by Guy Debord, a leading member and chief philosopher of the Situationist International, whose work around the critique of capitalism and commercial image production, specifically the emergence of the "society of the spectacle," that argues that capitalist alienation has caused everyday life to be based on representations, and transacted daily exchanges of images as reified commodity form, and that these transactions maintained social order.

To combat this condition, the Situationists opted for smaller-scale, anarchical acts that intervened and subverted the maintenance of order to catalyze a larger revolutionary action through two types of activities, the *dérive*, and the *détournement*. The *dérive* was seen as a tactical maneuver to break up the experience of geometric space that the order of city streets dictated upon its inhabitants, and relied on wanderings and improvised walking and roaming, while the *détournement* relied on "the subversive appropriation and transformation of pre-existent objects or disruptions of events" (Williams 2004, p. 238). Art objects or events are appropriated and subverted to counteract the social conditioning promoted using those objects or events, like using an advertisement campaign manipulated and altered to reveal its corporation's exploitative and unethical practices. A great example of Situationist *détournement* takes a billboard advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes and alters the original text of "Marlboro" to say, "It's a bore."

I align my artistic practice and curatorial projects with the political potential and the subversive nature of *détournement*. A conjuncture provides me the parameters of pre-existing conditions that are assembled as a set to analyze the initial acts of interventions. *Détournement* is a further development of this intervention defining how this intervention takes shape and how it is implemented. A conjuncture only provides the conditions for any action can take place; how this action is set into motion is aligned with and influenced by the notion of *détournement*.

Particularly, as a curator, I rely on the tactics of appropriation and disruption of events to attempt in making exhibitions an engaging space for viewers and artists alike. I am attracted to *détournement* because I see it as praxis, a collaboration of theory and practice as I have explained above. A process that is both directed by ideas or theories, and supported by certain politics through intervening acts is what drives my work. This act is contingent upon the theme of the exhibition and what I am disrupting at the time. Typically, I include performances during receptions that interrupt the reception or opening events and transform the exhibition space at least for one evening into something more dynamic or unexpected for that space.

A *détournement* also allows me to appropriate and transform pre-existent art historical notions that disrupts the reification and perpetuation of ideas that might have become static or stifling. In making exhibitions, I am very cognizant of my position in the arc of art history and try to create a moment that somehow causes a detour in that trajectory, opening the possibilities for thinking and performing, just like how I appropriated and transformed Juan Luna as a way to tangle the long thread of art historical writings that perpetuate him as a nation builder and that subsumes contemporary art as a function of nation building. I used Juan Luna's artistic practice and political work to form a conjuncture in which I activated a *détournement* to disrupt the

established thinking around Luna and offer new analysis and ways of understanding this contributions to contemporary art and to nation building.

The kind of work that I have been doing for the past decade has been defined and called many things. More recently, David Morris and Paul O'Neill in their introductory essay in *Exhibition as Social Intervention* gathered these new terms "including 'conversational art' (Homi K. Bhabha), 'dialogical aesthetics' (Grant Kester), 'new genre public art' (Suzanne Lacy), 'new situationism' (Claire Bishop) and 'collective creativity' (WHW)" (Decter and Draxler 2014, p. 9) to describe this kind of intervening and processual work under a rubric of social intervention.

As mainstream art outlets and museums have become increasingly engaged in social interventionist works of art, many of these institutions have attempted to define what this kind of work is or does. These definitions helped provide their audience a frame from which to view these types of action to validate these acts as works of art, and as such, belong in museums and galleries.

However, social intervention as a category is broad and vague and can take many forms, doing a more of a disservice in providing a weak definition that it is in helping the audience understand what it does and how it is an artistic practice. Again, considering the ad campaign of the Guerrilla Girls to expose the low numbers of women in museum exhibitions, the audience might see the billboard or the publication advertisements as the work of art itself. Rather, that is only one element in the totality of the work. The women dressing up as gorillas, purchasing advertising space, designing the ads, and criticizing the system that exclude women are what constitutes social intervention art for the Guerrilla Girls. Other artists might have a totally different way of producing a visual product and disseminating it to the public, that would still be considered an intervention of certain social systems.



The Tate Modern website provided an example of how an institution is handling social interventions and gave it a glib definition as “art designed specifically to interact with an existing structure or situation, be it another artwork, the audience, an institution or in the public domain” (Tate.org, 2015). Although I find this definition to be bland and innocuous, and completely stripped of its gravitas, and disappointingly disempowering of these acts, I occasionally use this type of shorthand to facilitate in framing the kind of actions with which I enact or engage; I use it as a quick reference. I see the totality of my practice as intervening into myriad and disparate systems to reveal the politics at play or at least getting a step closer to understanding the mechanisms of these systems.

My curatorial interventions maintain the same spirit of critique and intend to disrupt the lack of exhibition opportunities for Filipino American artists, to address the visual arts through a critique of colonial thinking, and to expand the historical context upon which Filipino American contemporary art is understood. From this constellation of political concerns comes the idea and the act that will become the work of art or exhibition.

#### Reasons for intervention

In the late 1980-90s, exhibitions of Filipino American contemporary art were rare and were seen only sporadically in major galleries or museums. Even museums like the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, whose collection area included the Philippines, rarely mounted shows on Philippine objects. As a Filipino American artist, I was cognizant of the fact that I am lumped in with Asian Americans due to geographical proximity and for political expediency. When Asian American umbrella organizations do not reflect or represent the Filipino community, I see this as a rejection of the

community and a further marginalization from an already ghettoized or balkanized practice that needs constant critique and consistent action to dismantle.

Restricted by its focus, anthropological museums relied on historical material to narrowly define culture, and rarely showed contemporary art in their galleries. On the other hand, museums of art notoriously neglected the works of art made by artists of color. These two factors made it almost impossible to see any type of Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions in museums. On certain occasions, I have questioned exhibition makers and organizers as to why Filipino American contemporary art was so rare to see, and the response was that Filipino as an area of research is highly specialized, there were not many Filipino artists, or that the Filipino community is a “sleeping giant,” numerous in numbers but not actively participating in the community-at-large.

To see Filipino American contemporary art, one must search intently into small commercial galleries who may represent a few Filipino American artists, or at alternative art spaces with a mission to engage with ethnic communities living nearby, or in university or college galleries whose student body might include a small population of Filipinos.

As an art student at UC Berkeley from 1989-93, living in the San Francisco Bay Area, I got the impression from galleries and museums was that Filipinos were not important to include in exhibitions. From then on, I have made it a point to intervene into the programming of galleries and museums and offer to organize exhibitions of Filipino American contemporary art to make Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions less rare and be an active contributor to the aesthetic landscape, intention of spreading throughout California and the West Coast.

Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art, 1996

The centennial of Philippine Independence in 1998 became an occasion for many institutions and exhibition makers to address Filipino themes. Museums large and small, community centers within Filipino neighborhoods, and galleries at colleges and universities, made this centennial commemoration a rare moment to celebrate the contributions of the Filipino community or explore the relations between United States and the Philippines. This was an exciting time when many Filipino artists exhibited their work, and many Filipino studies scholars were invited to give talks on various Philippine related topics.

A group of faculty members and graduate students in the art department of the University of California at Irvine took the opportunity to launch a serious look at Filipino identity politics through visual arts. *Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art* started out as a small-scale Filipino art exhibition by two UC Irvine graduate students, Cirilo Domine and Vincent Golveo, in 1995, and quickly expanded to a larger international exhibition. A curatorial committee was formed that included faculty members Yong Soon Min and Catherine Lord, and gallery staff, Pamela Bailey (Baerwaldt 1997) in addition to Domine and Golveo.

The title of the exhibition quoted Filipino American poet and essayist, Luis Francia's essay of the same title which was later included in an anthology of his writings in 1998. In his essay, Francia recalled his childhood growing up in the Philippines and what it was like living in post-colonial Philippines and wrestling with the vestiges of American occupation through institutions like the educational system. He makes a poetic argument that his childhood and subsequent immigration to the United States, and the Philippines as a nation had parallel "overdevelopment" both becoming

transcultural hybrids. He wrote, “a child grown stodgy and suddenly very old, content only in its memories of overdevelopment” (Baerwaldt 1997, p. 28).

The breadth of this exhibition was ambitious and laudable, assembling Filipino artist from the Philippines, Canada, and throughout the U.S. The curatorial committee was not interested in the celebration of Filipino artists or national independence, but rather “in the effects of cultural dislocation and reinvention on the production of contemporary art” (Baerwaldt et al., 1997, p. 11). This directed focus on contemporary art and how identities, such as Filipino, affect, alter, and/or reinvent the idea of contemporary art, an important development that influenced my thinking about exhibitions of Filipino American contemporary art.

My previous experience with Filipino cultural presentation was framed within a celebratory practice, extrapolated from village festivals and religious holidays; *Memories of Overdevelopment* presented itself as being rooted in another idea, in critical theory, and pioneered the discussion on transnational and globalized art production. *Memories* pushed me away from the tokenizing practice of only celebrating ethnic and racial difference during designated months, like February for Black History month or October for Filipino History month (only recognized by Filipino college students or members of the Filipino American National Historic Society), and gave me permission to be critical of the lack of Filipino exhibitions but also critical of the depth and breadth of conversations we are having about Filipino topics.

In addition to the exhibition, a symposium titled, *Filipino?* was organized to invite theorists, creative writers, participating artists, and other cultural workers to address the major themes of the exhibition within the context of the

idea of a global reunion, a gathering that could consider both material circumstance and necessary fiction, a gathering that could register history, borders,

memory, invention, and loss...evoking a process of ongoing exchange, of migration and return, of loss and re-appropriation, of dislocation and resistance. We wanted to make visible both art produced in the context of overseas communities established by immigrants, guest workers, refugees, and exiles, and art produced in the Philippines – art produced out of a process of exchange, out of a two-way conversation, continuing and continuous, between overseas communities and their homelands (Baerwaldt 1997, p. 11).

I was involved with this exhibition as an invited artist representing the DIWA Arts Collective based in San Francisco, showing several elements from our site-specific installation, *Bayanihan Transition*, a project from the Art in the Urban Landscape series in San Francisco 1993 to 1996. By the time I joined in 1993, DIWA Arts Collective had whittled itself down to a small group of five visual artists working in varied media with very diverse practices. I first saw the collaborative work of DIWA Arts at the San Francisco Art Institute where they installed a piece for an exhibition titled *Voices of Citizenry: Artists and Communities in Collaboration*, from August 26 – September 25, 1993.

My membership in DIWA Arts offered me a platform to address Filipino issues like immigration and Diaspora, American imperialism in the Philippines, Filipino exclusion from art galleries and museums, and using visual arts to fight against the narrow conception of Filipinos based on stereotypes and racism; it also allowed me to collaborate with other Filipino American artists who wanted to address these issues using aesthetic and visual means, and to create a supportive community of cultural practitioners.

Diwa received a grant from the Gerbode Foundation as part of Art in the Urban Landscape series and worked on several site-specific installations throughout San

Francisco. The list of artist members reflected the strength and diversity of the Filipino community in the Bay Area. They included Rene de Guzman, Leo Bersamina, Agelio Tagle, Ileana Lee, Terry Acebo-Davis, Johanna Poethig, Maria Medua, Jennifer Wofford, Reanne Estrada, Eliza Barrios, Romel Padilla, and me, Rico J. Reyes. At the end of the Gerbode project, most of the members left the collective with only Bersamina, Estrada, Poethig, Acebo-Davis, and me staying on to create an installation at the Bronx Museum for an exhibition called *1898*, the year the US acquired the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Guam at the 1898 Treaty of Paris to end the Spanish American War. The group has not reconvened since then.

Another aspect of *Memories* that was highly influential in my career was the self-determination of the artists to organize exhibitions for themselves, and showed me what an artist-run exhibition can accomplish, namely, questioning the authority of the curator and challenging the power structure of exhibition spaces. The exhibition committee members were all artist/academics who did not wait for curators and museums, but organized themselves and invited others to participate in this gathering. This exhibition helped to counteract the notions that there were neither many Filipino artists, nor an audience for Filipino exhibitions. More importantly, the exhibition broke the dichotomy of artist and curator, and exemplified the role of artist-curator and how to navigate the fluidity of that role.

At Home and Abroad, 1998

The exhibition *At Home & Abroad: 20 Contemporary Filipino Artists*, organized by the Asian Art Museum in 1998 was a rare occurrence and showed new potential of how an anthropological museum can employ contemporary art to discuss culture that is part of our everyday lives. The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is a unique museum established to show works of art from Asia but rarely deviated from the Chinese and

Japanese objects in the collection. Not until 1985, with the establishment of the department of Southeast Asian art, did the concept of Asia at the Asian Art Museum begin to include cultures outside of China and Japan, and feature objects that were made within the last century.

The guest curators of the exhibition included Corazon Alvina, from the National Gallery of the Philippines, Jeff Baysa, Independent Curator based in New York and Honolulu, and Dana Friis-Hansen, Senior Curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, Texas. The project was shaped by the collaboration with the Philippine Centennial Foundation/USA, and acted as the Asian Art Museum's commemoration of the centennial of Philippine Independence from Spain.

Instead of looking to the past and showing objects based on the Philippine Revolution, the guest curators opted to "survey and celebrate the talent and innovation of artists who are shaping Philippine/Filipino art now" and to address "the complexities of contemporary Filipino identity as it exist worldwide" (Friis-Hansen, et al. 1998, p. 15). Showing Filipino artists from various parts of the Philippines, not just Manila, and from various cosmopolitan centers, *At Home and Abroad* could address the issue of Filipino identity from a globalized perspective and tackle the expanse of the Filipino diaspora.

The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco began as an anthropological or cultural history museum exhibiting artifacts and historical ephemera, and did not prioritize the works of Asian/Asian American artists influenced by western modes of artistic production. It perpetuated an antiquated idea that art from a specific group of people bore essential stylistic features that defined them. For example, Chinese art always related to a dynasty and was strictly defined by the stylistic conventions of a certain period; exhibitions were narrowly defined and carefully selected, but always showed stereotypical images and objects like Tang dynasty horses, Qing dynasty porcelain, or

the development of academic scroll paintings. Contemporaneous artistic developments were considered as anomalies that did not meet stylistic conventions, therefore invalidating it rather than admiring it for its innovation and experimentation.

The focus of the collection at the Asian Art Museum was also narrowly defined by the major gift of Chicago entrepreneur Avery Brundage, who established the museum collection in 1959. As a member of the International Olympic Committee, Brundage traveled frequently to other countries. It was in London in 1936 that he first saw Chinese art and was enamored with the objects he encountered. He became a collector after his visits to Shanghai and Hong Kong in 1939. He also visited Japan on that trip was equally impressed with Japanese art added this category to his collecting focus. The remainder of his collection, numbering 7,700 objects out of the 17,000-total collection of the museum, was donated to the Asian Art Museum after his death in 1975.

Pioneers of Philippine Art: Luna, Amorsolo, Zobel, 2006

In 2006, when the Asian Art Museum launched a new exhibition, *Pioneers of Philippine Art: Luna, Amorsolo, Zobel*, the curators of the exhibition asked the question “what is Philippine art?” As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, the artists Luna, Amorsolo, and Zobel benefited from formal art education both in the Philippines and in Spain, and received high praise for their mastery of European painting techniques that appealed to Spanish aristocratic tastes. However, in conversations with my fellow Filipino artists, these works were always suspect when discussions veered to national representations and whether these works can truly represent Filipino national identity. It is harder to question national origins of woven textiles or ornately carved figures from tribal artists following a long tradition. However, when *Indios* take on the colonial master’s idiom, like oil painting on canvas, somehow, in an anthropological sense, these pictures no longer have the same authenticity to speak of culture or identity. The



civilizing narrative thread of colonialism always frame cultural developments as a gift to the primitive indigenous population. Artistic forms, like painting, were considered “borrowed” or “imposed upon” the native population and did not develop on its own merit.

From an artistic sense, I do not believe that these works of art showing mastery in European style paintings are less valid as expressions of Filipino identity but present an alternative to indigenous image making. It shows the adaptability of Filipino subjectivity to various means of expressing this identity. Luna, Amorsolo, and Zobel are pioneers in a different sense; they pioneered the way in which Filipino identity can be expressed through various artistic means, in this case, European-style painting.

As part of the opening events for the exhibition, I was invited to moderate a panel discussion on the paintings of Luna, Amorsolo, and Zobel and how they contribute to Philippine artistic development, as well as how each artist negotiated the Western idiom of oil painting and subsequently, whose works contributed in defining Philippine national identity. Panelist Florina Capistrano-Baker, Director of the Ayala Museum in Makati, Philippines, asked the question, *Is this Asian Art?* and presented her thoughts on the artistic development of the Philippines during the colonial and post-colonial eras. New York University professor Edward J. Sullivan discussed Juan Luna’s work in his presentation, *Lost in Translation? Juan Luna between Manila and Madrid*, and lastly, art historian Pearlie Rose Baluyut presented *On Crimes of Passion and Fiction: 'La Bête Humaine' by Emile Zola and Juan Luna*. This panel addressed the ways that Luna, Amorsolo, and Zobel complicates and opens up the rigid traditional way of categorizing works of art based on geographic region or timeframe, something that I strive for in my own practice of exhibition making.

Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergence 1998

In the same celebratory spirit, in the spring of 1997, I was invited to be a part of a curatorial team to mount an exhibition at the Fowler Museum at UCLA (an anthropology and cultural history museum) to commemorate the centennial of Philippine Independence from Spain. At the time, I had only been organizing my own exhibitions as an artist, and had not organized an exhibition of others' art or historical objects. I have always been interested in the idea of Filipino American contemporary art, and at the Fowler, whose collection consists of textiles, basketry, and pottery from many ancient and tribal cultures, I wanted to mediate in the standard exhibition practice and include Filipino American contemporary art, to insist that culture is alive and evolving and not frozen in the period historical objects were produced.

The Fowler Museum dedicated most of 1998 to Philippine culture, showcasing their stunning collection of Philippine textiles, followed by a smaller exhibition of Philippine basketry, while in the colonnade of the courtyard they showed a 34-panel exhibition of photography by their invited guest curators: art historian Pearlie Baluyut, Asian American scholar Enrique de la Cruz, and me. As a committee, we proposed to show 100 photographs that marked 100 years of US-Philippine relations to supplement the textile and basketry exhibitions. *Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States 1898-1998* presented the historical relations of the Philippines and the United States as an entanglement, an encounter that is often negotiated, and questioned where power lies, whether in the grip of domination or the fist of resistance. Our proposal explored the subject of US-Philippine relations, as a "reconfiguration of the empirical frame" (de la Cruz, Baluyut, and Reyes 1998, p. 5), and that the US policies towards the Philippines is presented as an imperialist and colonizing project.

These photographs were assembled into thematic groupings, 1). “Spectacle and Surveillance” looked at the myriad ways American colonial administrators tried to present the Filipino people -- anthropologically, historically, or scientifically, which required an objectification and a “disciplining of Filipino bodies at the turn of the century”(de la Cruz, Baluyut, and Reyes 1998, p. 7). 2). In the section “Diasporas, Struggles, and Survival, we examined the exchange of bodies; native Filipinos going to the US, and Americans going to the Philippines. This migration began as a trickle with a few Filipino students arriving at various universities in the U.S. and a handful of American missionaries (Thomasites) arriving in the Philippines to provide basic education. The numbers quickly escalated as American troops were deployed to squelch the continuing independence movement that began more than a decade before. Meanwhile, a full-scale display of Filipino life, complete with 3,000 live bodies, opened at the 1904 World’s Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri, which heightened the exoticization of Filipinos, and created a spectacle out of non-American cultures. 3). The following section, “Resistance and Collaboration,” looked at how major confrontations —the Spanish-American War, Philippine-American War, World War I, and World War II — caused shifts in political allegiances and in narrative trajectories. 4). Post-colonial, post-war, post-independence and their aftermath were visually explored with the promise of gaining some understanding of the “Closures, Fractures, and Parallels” that continue between the Philippines and the United States.

Photography is considered as a modern invention, an industrialization of drawing or painting, and not thought of as a medium for the arts of ancient or tribal cultures. The focus on photography and its uses as a tool in various anthropological projects showed how the apparatus was instrumental in providing visual evidence for this type of research.

On page 24 of the accompanying publication, two photographs of the same boy from the Bontoc tribe in the northern highlands of the Philippines were taken by Dean Conant Worcester, an American zoologist who served in the American colonial administration and later became a businessman with interests in coconut agriculture, an industry he helped established as Secretary of the Interior for the Insular Government of the Philippine Islands. The pairing of the photos were published in Worcester's book, *The Philippines Past and Present* (1913), which was highly criticized by Maximo Kalaw in his book, *The Case for the Filipinos*, (1916), as perpetuating the exoticization of the Filipino people, and the exaggeration of the benefits of American colonial government.

The picture on the left taken in 1904 shows the boy dressed in his native clothing – the bahag – a woven cloth wrapped and tied around the torso, and wearing a small woven hat. The picture on the right taken in 1913 shows the same boy, nine years later dressed in a white linen suit with a starched collar and tie, a straw hat in hand, and shod with leather shoes. The juxtaposition of these images helped conjure a narrative of the exotic far off land at the edge of the Pacific Ocean whose inhabitants needed the tutelage of American missionaries or the coercion of the American military to become proper American citizens. Before American intervention, the picture shows the boy in his natural setting, and after, shows the boy in Western garb. Even the detail of the background changes from the wide open wild natural landscape to an ordered garden with a manicured tree, set off by a brick edging aside a paved path. This type of before and after photograph helped garner support from the American public for the continued occupation of the Philippines and its civilizing mission at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The timing of the centennial of Philippine independence from Spain gave many institutions a reason to present Filipino-themed exhibitions and relieved the pressure

building up from the historical lack of or the rarity of Philippine themed exhibitions, especially following a decade of conversations and criticism around identity politics and the deficiency of diversity in American museums and cultural spaces.

## Intervention 1

Overmapped, 2007

Almost a decade later, little has changed to be more inclusive of Filipino American contemporary art. Since the boom during the centennial of Philippine independence commemorations, one or two small Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions were organized, and only a handful of Filipino artists, such as Michael Arceaga, Stephanie Syjuco, Lordy Rodriguez, Gina Osterloh, and Carlos Villa were featured by commercial and alternative spaces. In San Francisco, two Filipina-owned commercial galleries, Galerie Michaela and Togonon Gallery, were instrumental in keeping the momentum going of exhibiting Filipino American contemporary artists.

Again, with a mission to address the lack of Filipino American contemporary art exhibition opportunities, I accepted an invitation to curate an exhibition for the SoMA Cultural Center. I proposed a series of three exhibitions looking at kapwa and psychoanalysis in contemporary art. *Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Arts* was the first in a series of three. The exhibition was made possible through the collaboration between SOMArts Cultural Center and the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center, and whose combined resources were able to fund the exhibit.

SOMA (South of Market Street) in San Francisco, was a neighborhood disrupted by on-going displacement due to redevelopment in the 1960-80s. SOMArts Cultural Center was founded to give artists support and space to make and exhibit art. At the time of the exhibition in 2007, SOMA had a large community of recent Filipino and Latino immigrants, beside a developing artist and designer enclave. I was invited by the administrators of SOMArts to organize a Filipino show to engage with the growing Filipino community in the district.

Around the same time, I was noticing a great deal of academic work being produced around the Filipino cultural concept of *kapwa*, as developed by Virgilio Enriquez, based on the Filipino cultural value of shared inner-self, and the de-colonizing scholarship influenced by Frantz Fanon's work, which employed Lacanian psychoanalysis. I was not exactly sure whether it was an actual surge in production or I had noticed it more due to my interest in the topic. In 1992, I had studied with Dr. Virgilio Enriquez, considered the father of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology), who employed *kapwa* in his work, and developed it as a major component of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (SP). Enriquez was a psycho-linguist whose research into language helped establish a protocol for psychological practices based on native cultural values as opposed to importing protocols from Western clinical psychological practices. (Enriquez 1992).

I wanted to further explore the themes of *kapwa*, psychoanalysis, and de-colonizing theory in the visual arts through a series of exhibitions that would develop sequentially and continually, over time, with an exhibition opening as another one is closing, creating an impression of a seamless event. I wanted to explore the Freudian notion of consciousness, the pleasure principle, and the death drive as aspects of psychoanalysis and how each of these aspects interplay with *kapwa* and decolonizing theory.

Freud's conception of consciousness is one of three levels of awareness, where the mind can rationally express desires, memory, and emotions. The pleasure principle and the death drive are two energies that propel a course of action or of thinking that mitigate pain and loss, and the attempt to erase contradictions to nothingness. These two drives influence consciousness to take action.

My approach to curating Filipino American contemporary art is to expand the conversations around art making to include an exploration of internal struggles, especially the struggles embedded within the experiences of colonization and migration. I wanted to see how artists are expressing this struggle and resolution through their visual projects. My reading of kapwa and decolonization led me to Freudian psychoanalysis and began to explore the links between the two sets of ideas.

After reading Sigmund Freud's, *The Ego and The Id*, I developed three concepts: *Overmapped*, *Hedonopolis*, and *Melancolony* as the three exhibition themes I would further elaborate. When the invitation from SOMArts Cultural Center was made, I quickly proposed the three exhibitions as a series. Only one was accepted and I proceeded with *Overmapped* while working with other galleries to find space to launch the other two proposals.

The first exhibition addressed the idea of inner struggle and how it emerges and how it is expressed. To guide me through this exploration, I needed to create a mapping system that begins with the awareness of the contradictions, moving to struggling with conflict, to finding resolution. The first step was to map out Filipino consciousness following Freud's example of his map of the "Pept.-Cs." (perception-consciousness) system (Freud and Strachey 1961). Instead of following Freud's method of "word presentation" to tap into the subconscious, I substituted words with images through works of art to tap into the Filipino subconscious. As a nation, the Philippines spoke 102 different languages and made using words a cumbersome method. I felt that images became a more reliable resource for tapping into Filipino subconsciousness.

Freud used a visual sketch to diagram his idea of the psyche, pictured as an iceberg divided into three different regions, the consciousness surfacing above the water line. I am following Freud's example here, and using visual and pictorial works to



help diagram my ideas about kapwa. I took it a step further by using works of art that others have made and organized them as an exhibition.

According to Freud, “these word-presentations are residues of memories; they were at one time perceptions, and like all mnemonic residues they can become conscious again” (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 12). Later, on page 18 of *The Ego and the Id*, Freud provides a sketch of the *Pept.-Cs.* system illustrating the relationship of the ego to the id, the repressed, preconsciousness, and the “cap of hearing” where external information enters. Freud stated that the ego is part of the id, modified by the perceptual system through external input or stimulus. I saw this diagrammatic sketch as a cartographic expression of the way Freud was exploring the mind or subjectivity. I used the sketch as an example to build upon a cartographic representation of what I imagined as Filipino subjectivity.

The Filipino’s perceptual system does not function differently from any other human’s; the Filipino mind functions exactly as everyone’s does. The major difference would be in the way the ego is modified by the perceptual system through the stimuli of colonization, migration, racism, and class struggle. These stimuli are experienced by the Filipino people on varying levels as evidenced by historical narratives, but how each individual ego is modified is where my interest lie.

Beginning with Freud’s diagram of the perceptual-consciousness system, I inscribed upon this system the experience of colonization, of migration, of racism, of marginalization, of exclusion, of neglect, all entering the id. Some experiences might be sent to the region where they are repressed and isolated, others might not be conceived fully and sent to the region of pre-consciousness, where experiences we don’t understand or don’t know how to feel about rest until they are summoned by *image-presentations* and are fully integrated into and as experience.

While other experiences are actively interacting with the ego, being consumed, integrated, and modifying the ego. I imagine these stimuli as a series of transparent diagrams that are overlaid on top of Freud's sketch, each transparency adding a new layer of information, marking topographical details, drawing contours that show how the ego is being shaped, altering the cartographic act from a simple mapping exercise into "overmapping," a term I used to explain how the perceptual-consciousness system becomes stimulated and overstimulated through the layering of traumatic experiences like colonization, migration, and racism. Some regions of the ego become saturated with experiences that it begins to create muddy and unclear peaks and valleys. The overstimulated areas negotiate the bombardment by expanding its reach and entering the repressed zone, making some of the stimuli unconscious, but Freud clarified, "it is still true that all that is repressed is *Ucs.*, but not all that is *Ucs.* is repressed. A part of the ego too – and heaven knows how important a part – may be *Ucs.* undoubtedly is *Ucs.*" (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 9). There is a part of the ego that renders certain stimuli as unconscious, and in the act of creative expression or in the process of making art, these ego-based unconsciousness surfaces to consciousness as artistic projects.

With the theoretical concept for the exhibition laid out, the selection of the work of art relied on how the artist self-identified, as Filipino or Filipino American to be part of the show. Given the premise of ego formation based on external stimuli particularly colonization, migration, racism, and class struggle, self-identified Filipino and Filipino American artists through this identification confessed an internal struggle with these stimuli, and through their work, may be expressing this struggle openly or in the process of finding resolution.

This is where I began to employ the notion of conjuncture as a way to create parameters, to focus my attention. The Filipino diaspora as a global phenomenon is vast.

However, Filipino diaspora as a critical position and a subject for art making is a much smaller field. The conjuncture was formed by considering two events that occurred in each of the artists' lives: the first was becoming aware and self-identifying as a transnational migrant, or acknowledging that they are part of the large global Filipino diaspora, and second was becoming an artist and using the visual as means to explore one's identity.

Forming this conjuncture helped me with the selection of the artists, although the exhibition was still large and presented work from 30 artists. I spoke to each artist about the concept of the exhibition and asked for 2-3 pieces to exhibit. This conjuncture is now articulated as an exhibition of the works they produced within the context of diaspora to discuss Filipino consciousness and kapwa. The conjuncture I employed allowed me to show a good number of artists and their projects, fulfilling my mission to intervene in the rarity of or lack of opportunity for Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions.

The events in artists' lives (awareness of their diasporic subjectivity, becoming artists, and making work to articulate Filipino identity) are made more relevant through the application of conjunctures as a tool for curating. By equating the lived experiences of artists with historical events, I arrived at the analysis of the artworks armed with two levels of articulated recontextualization. Forming a conjunctural formation allowed me to navigate between historical events and personal events, and focused my attention on how certain artistic practices have addressed the notion of Filipino contemporary art. The exhibition of Filipino contemporary art has become a vehicle for both exploring this idea, and also an engagement with the lives of the artists that sparks the creation of works of art. With conjunctures providing an armature for the discussion of Filipino contemporary art, the addition of the Filipino cultural value of kapwa and Western

psychoanalysis provides more entry points into the motivations of artists, and the cultural context in which their practices are located.

The selection of works of art from individual artists was limited to those the artists preselected as fitting the theme of the exhibition. From this smaller group, I specifically chose works that strongly addressed my ideas. For *Overmapped*, I was looking at work that employed layering, overlapping, or work that functioned similarly to an index or a directory, regardless of actual layering of images such as in a collage or as can be accomplished with paint. Some were an overlapping of ideas or concepts that manifested in the work of art. An index or directory does not appear as a layering of text or signs but orders information numerically or alphabetically, and points to where those ideas can be found. The works of art selected for *Overmapped* functioned as such, that it pointed to ideas of Filipino contemporary art in various ways.

There are works of art that exemplified my notion of overmapped and showed a layering of images or text, like the works of art by Terry Acebo-Davis. Her untitled pieces were made of layers of transparent plastic printed with anatomical images, scenes from Filipino American history, personal affects, and portraits, among others.



*Terry Acebo Davis  
Untitled I and II  
2007  
plastic sheet, b/w  
transparencies, bamboo rod*

The layering of images in her two pieces echoed the sketch that Freud provided of the perceptual system and how stimuli entered and affected the ego. Here, the form that emerged references a crucified person, arms and hand stretched out to side with

the feet bound together, like Jesus on the cross, with other anatomical images, like a pelvis, a leg, and a human heart providing a rough map of a physical body. Other images that are revealed are the hands of a priest, fishing equipment, an image of a man in a boat, pebbles, a map of California, a pair of women's eyes, a famous Dorothea Lange photograph of Filipino migrant workers picking lettuce, along with text interspersed, "to live out loud" printed large and clearly legible, while others are small and hard to read. Acebo-Davis is showing not a resolution but an ongoing process of negotiating stimuli, and how they might affect the physical body, or how the body then carries this load, the beginning of embodiment, "It is as if we were thus supplied with a proof of what we have just asserted of the conscious ego: that it is first and foremost a body-ego" (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 21).

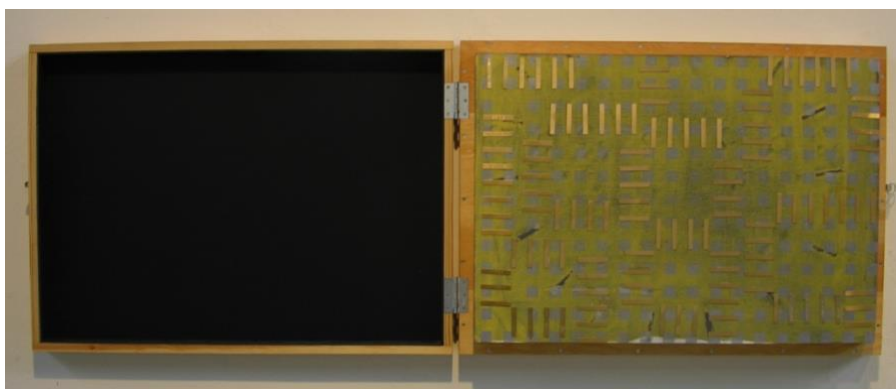
At the basic level, Mel Veracruz's large collages function like Acebo-Davis' work. They present a layering of images, this time opaque images that hide parts of pictures buried underneath, overlapping and forming a central image; in this work, it is the image of Mickey Mouse, sandwiched between the words "inosente" printed on the top and "ignorante" on the bottom. At closer look, layers of layers of malnourished babies and children create the background on which Mickey's image rest; newspaper clippings of dying or dead babies and children ravaged and deformed by war or starved due to poverty make up the ground upon which Mickey, the symbol of The Walt Disney Company stands. Yet, an image of the perfect American family with big smiles waving to the viewer is placed among dead babies, a flash of an ideal that does not exist in many places in the world, but sets the standard for normal family life.



Mel Veracruz  
*Inosente/Ignorante (I)*  
*Bone (r)*  
 2007  
 Acrylic on canvas, magazine and newspaper clippings

Vera Cruz's piece showed an overmapping of the "word-presentations" of *inosente* (innocent) or *ignorante* (ignorant) that implicates the Disney brand with infanticide and world-wide neglect of children in poverty. Vera Cruz questions whether the Disney Company chooses to remain ignorant of the plight of children in poverty or war by peddling innocence through fairy tales and fantasies, imaged through the perfect suburban white American family.

A diptych by Carlos Villa follows suit with the cartographic theme of exhibition. On one side of the piece, a matte black panel, empty, a void juxtaposed a golden grid marked like streets on a map with etched golden signs that give directions to places like "Frisco to Sacramento" or "L.A. from Baguio," while other signs mark emotional states, like "Upstairs with desire" or "intrigue" or "madness." In this work, Villa has provided a map of his memory and how movement and migration have informed how his recollection is arranged or stored in his consciousness.



Carlos Villa  
*Kearny Street Game Boy*  
 2000  
 acrylic on wood,  
 engraved metal plaques

On the one hand, Villa showed the void of repression: a black field that reveals nothing but emptiness. The map, seemingly organized like a modern metropolis on a grid with a logical pattern is soon confused when the street markers offer glimpses of travel to and from places, intersections are marked by emotions or one word description like “Always.” Villa’s piece can be understood as a representation of the paradox of memory. Memory is either repressed and blacked out, or the way experience is stored in our consciousness, it does not follow any system of logic: chronological, spatial, or visual or otherwise. Yet memory presents itself as an ordered system.

The cartographic exercise that was undertaken in this exhibition attempted to show the various overlapping psychological maps, with each layer drafted because of stimuli modifying the ego. Each work of art is a map of some sort that gives a general boundary and an impression of space, a site of internal struggle, rather than of place.

I would like to emphasize this distinction as a pattern that arose by electing to have artists select which of their works would be included in the exhibit. Filipino American contemporary artists in this exhibition chose not to talk about place—geographic location – but rather about space – an amorphous landscape imagined by memory, imaged by experience. However, the works of art still function as maps; they provide markers within the terrain of a stimulated ego, a specific laying out of experiences brought to consciousness through the work of art, and that their experience growing up Filipino is embedded within this terrain; the work of art acts as coordinate points that help navigate the viewer within the space of Filipino contemporary art.

The SoMa Cultural Center is a converted industrial property providing cavernous spaces for exhibiting works of art. The viewer entered the main gallery and was greeted by a title wall with one short essay (Appendix 2) functioning as the sole didactic interpretive source for the exhibition. The title and one text panel elaborating on the

idea of Overmapped was sufficient to focus the viewer on the notion of cartography and a mapping exercise employed in the exhibition. The totality of the exhibition functioned as one large map that showed the breadth of artistic projects created by the Filipino American artists, while each work of art functioned as points of interests on this map, showing a specific point of engagement with Filipino identity politics.

Once the viewer moved on from the title and text wall he/she entered a massive open plan gallery with sculptural objects occupying the center of the room and the walls occupied by paintings, wall objects, photography, ceramic, found-object collages, and conceptual text pieces. The viewer was left to meander through the open space to explore without a prescribed path, to create their own mental maps of how these works of art expressed their “Filipino-ness”.

The primary curatorial goal of Overmapped was to assemble a number of Filipino American artists making work in various ways, bringing together 25 artists and 60 works of art. The secondary goal was to engage the viewer in a conversation about the expression of Filipino identity in art. Touristic images of the Philippines often employ palm trees, rice paddies, or Nipa huts and have become stereotypical if not synonymous with the Philippines. These pictorial elements need not be the marker that point to an artist’s Filipino identity. I wanted to break away from those tropes and open the way Filipino art is seen, in order to highlight the fact that an expression of one’s ethnic identity is not encapsulated within a touristic or stereotypical image.

Overmapped provided a new perspective in curating Filipino American art that did not rely on facile notions of the Filipino diaspora, but challenged the artists and viewers to expand their ideas of what Filipino art can be. This exhibition also succeeded in setting the platform for the continued discussion of kapwa and psychoanalysis within the ensuing exhibitions: Hedonopolis and Melancolony.



## Intervention 2

To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony 2007

Following Freud's development of the psyche, I move this exploration to the instincts or drives that activate the id and the ego. "The id and the ego roughly line up with two separate sets of instincts – the id correlates to the instinct of pleasure – which Freud also calls Eros, the Greek word for love...The ego correlates to the instinct to protect oneself, the instinct of self-preservation" (Thurschwell 2009, p. 82).

In *Overmapped*, I presented the psyche as a landscape that needed to be mapped out and how the experiences of colonization, migration, etc. create different layers of maps that are overlaid one on top of the other. For this next exhibition, I zoomed into specific regions – the ego and the id – and look at them from a topographical perspective. The topography of the psyche gives us more details, contours, elevation, depth in the landscape, in addition to revealing patterns of movement between regions that show how one region relates to the other. "Freud's topographies perform the service of helping us understand the way these areas of the psyche work together and relate to each other" (Thurschwell 2009, p. 81).

Understanding the mind as a topographical map, the artists and the viewers of these works of art can occupy the same terrain, a terrain that has been developed by either the drive of self-preservation or erotic desires.

I further took the idea of cartography of the psyche and plotted two destinations, Hedonopolis and Melancolony. Based on the pleasure principle, Hedonopolis is a cosmopolitan center on the psychic terrain where one can erase trauma through pleasure. Melancolony is anchored by the death drive and the aching

desire to never forget trauma, and to live in continual melancholy for the loss of the colony and one's colonial subjectivity.

### *Hedonopolis*

The pleasure principle as described by Freud acts as a protocol for dealing with "unpleasure." He states that pleasure affects the psyche less than that of unpleasure, external stimuli that act as change agents, moving towards "a heightening of the energetic cathexis" (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 15). Cathexis is the need to discharge or expel exterior stimuli, and return to a state when the external stimuli have been released or have been contained. Every external stimulus that enters the *Pcpt.-Cs.* Model through the cap of hearing passes through the ego and then negotiates with the id whether that stimulus is pleasurable or not. If the stimulus is deemed unpleasure, the ego along with the id guides to discharge and release the stimulus from the body or internalized and hidden as repression, "the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle" (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 19).

The terrain on which Hedonopolis was founded was an oasis in the middle of a vast desert. It is often mistaken for a mirage and bypassed by those driven by self-preservation. Those who seek pleasure and need to fulfill their erotic desires know exactly how to get to this urbanized, built-up, metropolis, reeking of decadence, and moving at a blinding pace. Here, the id is unbounded and drives all stimuli towards pleasure, even succeeding to repress or deny colonial oppression from centuries past for the pleasures of the present.

### *Melancolony*

When the one experiences a great unpleasure, like death of a loved one, the ego begins to mitigate this loss through the pleasure principle, by releasing or repressing the loss. However, the ego may overcompensate for this heavy loss, and instead of releasing it and moving towards acceptance, represses it by substituting the loss object with a fantasy of the object, “an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego – that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification” (Freud and Strachey 1961, p. 23).

Unlike mourning, the natural process of dealing with loss, melancholia results from a glitch in this process, when the mourner feels that a part of him/herself that was attached to the dead loved one had also died. Thus, “melancholics identify with the lost object, and may even appear to become that other person by taking on their traits...Melancholics feel responsible for the death of the object; they feel they have psychically murdered the other person. Taking on the other’s trait is a way of repairing this loss in fantasy by bringing the other back to life” (Thurschwell 2009, p. 90-1).

The landscape of Melancolony is like a swampy delta with its frequent flooding that washes away major structures and features in the terrain. Loss is constantly present in this hidden jungle, shaded by giant trees. Melancolony is also an archipelago surrounded by the slow ebb and tide of murky waters, where the ego, in its drive for self-preservation, is clinging to an object that has been lost due to the consequence of colonial abuse; a melancholia for the lost indigenous knowledge and forgotten tribal traditions prevents further development on this terrain.

### *The exhibition*

My original intention was to have two exhibitions, one focusing on Hedonopolis and the other on Melancolony. However, due to time constraints and scheduling

conflicts, I took advantage of the opportunity given to me when I was invited to curate a show at the Thacher Gallery at the University of San Francisco and fused these two themes together as one exhibition.

For these two proposals, I wanted to further develop the mapping metaphor I initiated with *Overmapped* by shifting the vantage point from a cartographic to topographic perspective, allowing me more nuanced textures of the landscape, to experience terrain, to see the views from the peaks of mountains to the floors of valleys, going beyond the bounded mass with abstracted and imaginary coordinates of the simple map.

In packaging *Hedonopolis* and *Melancolony* together into one curatorial theme, I created a relationship between the two as an exchange. For the exhibition title, I added the words “To” and “From,” to demarcate destinations of departure and arrival. I wanted to impress upon the viewers that the Filipino artistic community moves between these two terrains.

*To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony: Current Topography of Filipino Visual Arts* opened on September 6, 2007, showing the works of Terry Acebo-Davis, Yason Banal, Genara Banzon, Leo Bersamina, Emily Caisip, Crisanta de Guzman, Cirilo Domine, Reanne Estrada, John Yoyogi Fortes, Vince Golveo, Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza, Johanna Poethig, Charles Valoroso, Carlos Villa, and Jennifer Wofford. The selection of the artists began from the pool of artists who participated in *Overmapped* to create a consistent element, or control group, in exploring the psychoanalytic dimensions of art production, and these artists have proven their dedication to the Filipino community, another aspect I wanted to keep consistent. I selected the artists based on the depth of my knowledge both of their bodies of work and their public personas as artists, and the comfort I have with these artists to embark on a psychoanalytical exercise.

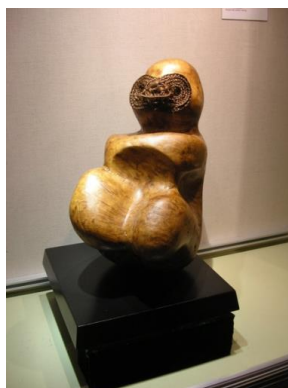
The curatorial structure continues to employ a conjunctural formation that was set up with *Overmapped*. The events of the artists' lives create a conjuncture that helps analyze their projects and works of art. A group of artists in an exhibition expands this conjunctural formation to a larger time frame and geographical context, adding specific details to the historical period in which each of the artists participated. For example, the 1965 Immigration act abolished quotas from countries of origin, focusing instead on family reunification and incentivizing the immigration of skilled labor, or in 1972, the declaration of martial law in the Philippines prompted an increase in Filipino immigration to the United States, two historical events that are part of the lives of many of the artists included in *Hedonopolis* and *Melancolony*, and so became markers for the conjunctural formation that helps define the conjuncture formation of the exhibition.

To create *Hedonopolis* and *Melancolony*, I maintained the same curatorial process as I used when conceptualizing *Overmapped*, inviting Filipino American artists to preselect several works of art. From this small group, I selected one or two to be part of the exhibition. I consider this type of selection a curatorial collaboration, and demonstrates that the artist and curator have a shared understanding of the exhibition's goal.

One curatorial decision I exercised in *Hedonopolis/Melancolony* was to limit the number of participating artists. *Overmapped*, was an open call to Filipino American artists. Email invitations, word of mouth recommendations, and a small ad in a local art publication attempted to reach the broadest possible participants to create an inclusive group exhibition. From the artists who participated in *Overmapped*, I invited certain artists to continue on to the next exhibition due to the smaller venue and the combining of two exhibitions.

The concept of Hedonopolis is rooted in the Freudian pleasure principle, a way to alleviate psychic trauma and pain. Therefore, I selected works of art that expressed a sense of erasure, similarly to how the pleasure principle acts upon a trauma, by forgetting or repressing. In contrast, Melancolony developed from the Freudian notion of melancholia, a loss that is incomprehensible and unidentifiable. The featured artworks negotiate loss and recovery, and rely upon the use of materials indigenous to the Philippines or creative processes associated with Philippine folk crafts.

Crisanta de Guzman's life coincided with the historical events mentioned above, allowing her to study in the UK and then immigrate to the United States. She was recommended to me by San Francisco-based Filipina gallerist Julina Togonon. As with other recommendations, I looked at de Guzman's work, read her biography, and examined in her art how she might have struggled with her racial/ethnic identity. In her work, I saw elements of both erasure and recovery. First, de Guzman used abstraction to mystify form and shape. This mystification is a gesture of erasure, taking away what is recognizable and a possible source of trauma, and replacing it with a visually soothing amorphous figure. Second, her use of folk craft materials or native forms are references to an indigenous past, a desire to recover and identify what has been lost, a clear symptom of her melancholic state.



*Crisanta de Guzman  
End of Purity (l)  
Mother Substitute (r)  
2005  
wood, wax candles, fabric, synthetic hair*

She presented two sculptures of carved wood, one with a plaited-hair-knot, called *Mother Substitute*, and the second carved object placed on a pillow in an altar-like platform, titled *End of Purity*. De Guzman's work seemed so anachronistic; carving burly oak into abstract or amorphous shapes that reference objects in nature. *Mother Substitute* is a gorgeous bulbous abstracted figure of an infant with smooth rounded surfaces. In this work, there is a strong reference to the Bulol figure, a squatting person carved from wood, used as granary guardians and house idols, ubiquitous in the Cordillera region in the northern highlands of the Philippines. *Mother Substitute* and the Bulol share materiality and technique, as well as purpose, to convey protection to the home and family.

De Guzman added a plaited-hair knot in a form of a large baby's pacifier stuck on its face. Hair memento was popular during the Victorian era to remember a loved one who was traveling for an extended period or had died. The juxtaposition of these two elements suggest the result of a kind of erasure, forgetting the trauma of migration in the present and looking back to a simpler time. Abstraction here functions as a de-forming act, undoing the details of the trauma and leaving smooth sensuous surfaces and shapes as the residue from a modified ego. The modification of the ego leaves traces of the trauma, as a faded image.

Reanne Estrada's series, *Lacunae*, drawings on jigsaw puzzle pieces, visually expressed this residue quite eloquently. At first glance, the work looks like an abstracted map, a cityscape in fragments made up of broken lines and planes of color. A closer look revealed that the ground on which these marks were made are jigsaw puzzle pieces, and that the whole image is a puzzle that has been put together. Here's where the contradiction begins. In the proper ordering of the puzzle pieces, linking it with its

correct adjacent pieces, what we see is a unified whole, a solved puzzle, everything put in its proper place.



*Reanne Estrada, Lacunae I-III (series), 2006, acrylic on cardboard, jigsaw puzzle pieces*

However, the image that we see is a jumble of colors and lines that do not make an integrated whole, a contrast to the solved puzzle, a fragmented abstract view. Perhaps unsolving the puzzle and not following the logic of interlocking pieces may resolve the image. Like the result of the pleasure principle, what appears to be a physically unified whole is only the residue of a repressed ego, and the tension and chaos of unpleasure remains unseen, only projecting a fragmented, partial, or hollow image that marks that body.



*Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza  
Meat (I)  
2003  
Colored pencil on board*

A sculpture/3D drawing of a T-bone steak in the shape of the United States hanging on the wall of the gallery was an odd delight. Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza's contribution to Hedonopolis appealed to the viewer's carnal desires for flesh. The libido, the desiring machine, was activated and all competing desires were drawn and



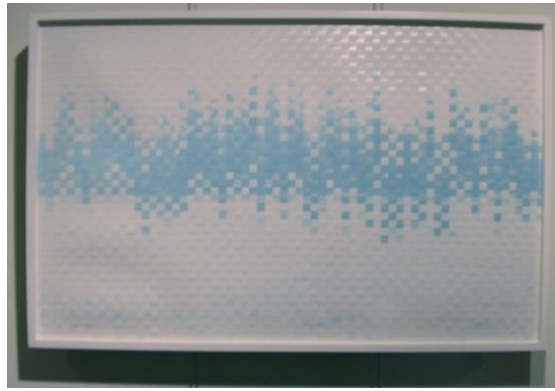
projected into one object, *Meat*, 2003. This piece is hilariously luscious and simply created from paper and colored pencil. The economy of materials and an adept hand in rendering the streaks of fat interlaced with bloody strands of muscle produce a fantastically realistic piece of meat. The decision to make it in the shape of the 48 contiguous United States opens wonderful pathways leading the viewers to myriad interconnected ideas about one's desire and how that desire is manifested. Taking the object at face value, a T-bone steak in the shape of the lower 48, one can talk about the relationship of meat with the United States: Americans as the biggest producers of meat or the biggest consumers of meat, the US as a choice cut of beef. What if we pepper this piece with a history of colonial abuse and racial oppression, and view this piece from a Filipino perspective? Now, this piece of American meat is a visual metaphor for the American dream, the lure of the land of plenty, but on the other hand it could be a hedonistic desire to devour America, the source of ongoing colonial oppression. With or without the added layer of colonial thinking, a piece of flesh incites libidinal desires to consume.

On the other hand, colonial thinking is embedded in *Melancolony* and manifests itself as nostalgia for the motherland. References of tropical landscapes, Filipino heroes, or traditional crafts emerge as a pattern of production in the works chosen for *Melancolony*. As much as *Melancolony* is rooted in a melancholia for the motherland left behind, pillaged and plundered, longing for the days before European contact and regenerating tribal cultures and morays, *Melancolony* also includes a melancholia for the colonial powers, ousted in the name of liberty and freedom. But in the chaos of freedom, colonial order and hierarchy is still desired as seen in the corruption of oligarchs in Philippine government. These corrupt officials suffer a deep melancholia, a sorrow that cannot be mourned but doomed to be repeated in a perverted cycle of loss.

They perpetuate the colonial system based on privileges to continue to reap personal benefits. Amidst the crisis of the late globalized capitalism, post-colonial migrants have no means to recover what is lost and return to tribal life, a life cycle in collaboration with nature's rhythms.

Leo Bersamina's submissions to the exhibition are intricately woven mats made from photographs. In his first piece, the woven image that emerged is of a nipa hut, a typical type of dwelling on stilts made of woven branches and thatched nipa fronds found in the lowlands of the Philippines, which has become a symbol of the idealized Filipino rural life. The warp and weft are both strips of photographs that have been woven together to arrive at this image of the nipa hut or bahay kubo textured and altered by the technique used. The total image is both distorted and made clear by the weaving. What is distorted are the two source images reduced to strips and woven together, creating a new picture. This piece speaks to the way trauma is repressed and moved to the unconscious in Freud's writing. The two source images are reminders of the trauma, which are reduced to strips of images, then reworked to create a new image from those strips.

Bersamina's second piece, *Sitting* (2004), is more abstracted and divided into two color fields, an off-white upper half and a sky-blue bottom half. In this piece, the warp and weft are made of wider strips of photographs and creates a more uniform image. The artist added loops in the weaving to draw attention to a faint latent image of teens on surfboards waiting for a wave. In Melancolony, memories become constant companions and govern the present, stuck in the past, reliving a moment continually.



*Leo Bersamina*  
*Sitting*  
*2007*  
*color prints*

Jennifer Wofford's ink and acrylic drawings on paper, titled, *Point of Departure*, used the archetype of a Filipina nurse and created scenes from the nurse's life, illustrating gorgeous details detached from its context. Viewers are only shown an instant, and together with other instances, may put together a speculative narrative or biography of this nurse, the best one can do amidst these drawings. Melancholia represses details that add pain caused by the trauma. What we remember are bits of details that illustrates the past as something pleasant or at least, less traumatic.



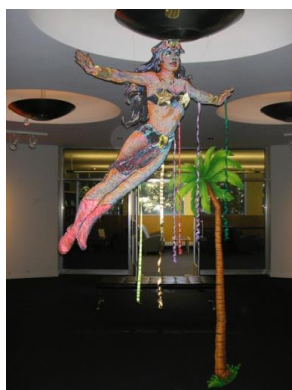
*Jenifer Wofford, Point of Departure, 2005, ink and gouache on paper*

For this exhibition, Wofford presented four drawings that amount to a strange narrative set on a tropical island with a volcano. The protagonist is nearby contemplating the puffs of smoke and steam released from the opening on top. In one frame the viewer is presented with a green landscape with a mace, an amorphous blob with spikes on it, embedded in the ground. It's ambiguous whether it is penetrating the

surface or the ground is swallowing this object, which could be an idealized durian fruit grown widely in Central Philippines, act as a marker of being Filipino in this series.

Another image of a cocoon like object, wrapped in white tape or gauze laid on the foreground, along with the durian like object, lends a fantastical or mysterious air to the ensemble. Each pictorial element acts as both a riddle and an answer, as soon as one gets an idea of how this narrative is unfolding, a new element diverts attention away from one way of thinking and questions the viewer's position within the narrative.

In her installation, a comic superhero of the Philippines, Darna, is employed by artist Genara Banzon. A cardboard cutout of the superhero is suspended in the middle of the gallery along with a palm tree cutout creating a scene with Darna mid-flight over a tropical location. The cutout is embellished by the artist with added shades of color and decoration of ribbons creating a festive mood, like decorations for a child's Darna-themed birthday party. Darna, for the Philippines, just like Superman in the US, provided an image of goodness and justice to fight evil. She has become a symbol of hope during nation building after World War II. The Philippines became an independent nation again in 1946, and by 1950 Darna appeared as a Filipino comic book hero to save the Filipinos from evil doers.



*Genara Banzon  
Darna  
2007  
acrylic on cardboard,  
ribbons, found objects*

Banzon's use of Darna succinctly expressed the feelings of loss for the Philippine nation. Darna's appearances in popular culture coincided with political events that

longed for a more prosperous and happier time. Nation building was halted in 1972, when President Marcos declared martial law and essentially made the Philippines an arm of the US military defending the young nation from communist insurgents, at that time, Darna appeared on the big screen. A few years later, Darna appeared again in a television serial, marking the loss of the nation when it became a source of cheap migrant labor for the globalized capitalist markets. At each of these moments of loss, Darna appears, manifested by the people who are in dire need of hope. In this cycle of loss and hope, Darna becomes a mark of *Melancolony*, a national symbol that is conjured to interrupt mourning's path to acceptance, instead repeatedly turns to the moment of loss, like the angel of history with its back turned to the future witnessing "men make their own history" (Marx 1948) or fixating on a singular act that prevents real progress.

I saw in certain works of art a type of contradictory affirmation of melancholia, an articulated residue of loss and longing. Woven photographs trying to piece together a memory; or drawing the details of a life, someone else's life, whose life stories are absorbed and abstracted, that it blurred the distinction between memory and imagination; or a superhero conjured to help escape from the realities of lived experience, these works of art testify that loss has occurred, and that these pieces somehow express this loss while also trying to find a remedy and abate the feelings of pain caused by the loss of family, of country, or of freedom.

In these works of art, so much care is taken for indigenous practices that has been left behind, as leftovers, or cast-asides. In the Filipino American psyche, the pleasure principle has repressed the horrors of colonial and immigration experiences and focused on deriving immense pleasure from what is left after the erasure: the residue, the detritus.

Unlike the massive cavernous space at SoM Arts Cultural Center, the Thacher Gallery at the University of San Francisco is a long narrow T-shaped corridor with a circular atrium in the middle. The space limited the number of artists and the size of the works of art to be included in Hedonopolis/Melancolony exhibition. The combining of two exhibitions into one further limited the number of participants and works of art. The gallery offered a natural separation of ideas with one wing addressing Hedonopolis, the other, Melancolony.

Upon entering the space, the viewer has to make a decision whether to go left or right. To the left, Melancolony presented work including Bersamina's distorted Nipa hut photograph, Wofford's drawings of a volcano, and Valoroso's photo-realistic painting of a mid-century muscle car parked in a suburban neighborhood. These works build upon the notion of loss showing works that refer to stereotypical touristic images of the Philippines or an imagined history that attempts to re-discover traditions eradicated by colonialism.

To the right, Hedonopolis overflowed with visual delights such as Mendoza's Steak, Estrada's Lacunae series, and Banal's dark mysterious photographs of figures. This group of artworks appeal to the viewer's sense of pleasure and delight to distract from the trauma and pain of a colonial past. I purposefully separated the ideas into each own wing to emphasize the visual impact of each of the groups as a whole, that memory and longing were dominant in Melancolony, while abstraction and erasure were key pictorial elements in Hedonopolis.

These exhibitions fulfilled my curatorial expectation, which was to address Filipino identity in contemporary art. As a whole, Overmapped, Hedonopolis, and Melancolony offered different ways to address Filipino contemporary art that did not rely on stereotypical or touristic images that oversimplifies the notion of what Filipino

art is and what it can be. Filipino art is as varied, dynamic, and nuanced as any of its non-Filipino counterparts. Filipino contemporary art is engaged in creative manipulation of material, inventive compositional strategies, and a serious engagement with current political issues while also expressing its cultural foundations as Filipino art. Overall, the exhibitions exemplified my thesis of curating as conjuncture: the coming together of disparate issues –kapwa, Freudian psychoanalysis, and contemporary art – that informed each other to provide a better understanding of each issue but also to tell a better story of the conjuncture of Filipino American contemporary art.

### Intervention 3

Infix: The Grammar of Insertion, 2010

After my exploration of psychoanalysis and kapwa, I turned to language and how the structure of language can be employed to explore the dynamics of acculturation, specifically, how Filipino cultural mores brought by immigrants were changing the cultural landscape of cosmopolitan centers, particularly in California. I continued to look at artists lives to help define the chronological period from which the conjuncture was formed.

The use of language – how it is structured to interpret, to theorize, or to think about visual art – was seen as a linguistic turn by art writers like Bruce Ferguson (Greenberg et al., 1996). Proponents of the linguistic turn supposed that art can be read like a text and that what we see are mere representations of meaning, they are signs that point us, direct us towards meaning. From Ferdinand de Saussure’s work in linguistics, to Roland Barthes’ semiotics, to Bruce Ferguson’s essay, *Exhibition Rhetorics*, the use of language or language’s structure has been an influential development in how to think about art and exhibitions.

My project, *Infix*, takes on the linguistic turn and earnestly and whole-heartedly plays with the concept, and further develops a linguistic idea that might be useful to thinking about Filipino American contemporary art exhibitions. Specifically, using the function of insertion, I attempted to insert within the art world an update on Bay Area art production.

I was approached by Maria Medua, currently the director of the Artist Gallery of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, to curate an exhibition at her venue. This is a commercial gallery run by SFMOMA to generate operating funds. The focus of the Artist Gallery is to promote artists from the nine counties that surround the San Francisco Bay, giving me a chance to extend my focus to a larger pool of Bay Area artists, expanding from the community of Filipino American artists with whom I have worked previously. This exhibition also gave me the opportunity to explore how Bay Area artists have brought attention to this region as a place for contemporary art.

The San Francisco Bay Area is a small region that made a global cultural impact in the late 1950s to early 1970s with the Beat and Hippie movements, the AIDS crisis of 1980s, and with the explosion of Internet start-up companies in the 1990s — the dot com boom and crash. The development of contemporary art around these cultural phenomena spans the spectrum from reacting against popular trends and current events, moving art to a more abstracted space, to embracing the zeitgeist and becoming a marker of that moment. The development of the Funk Art Movement is a great example of this phenomenon because it shows how the rebellious nature of the Beat movement carried over to art production leading to a rejection of abstract expressionism and a return to figuration (Jones, Bishop, and San Francisco Museum of Art. 1989). Unlike the Impressionists, another group of rejectionists and rebels, who exhibited together, painted together, shared ideas, and learned from each other,



creating a “school” of thought outside the accepted norms, the Funk Artists were not as organized and the similarities in their work was due to the general conditions of the time happening in the Bay Area. The gatherings were more informal and based on socializing rather than collaborating.

I wanted to remind the readers of this history to help contextualize how I thought of organizing this exhibition at the SFMOMA Artist Gallery. I wanted to locate the Bay Area and the artists working in the Bay Area within the panorama of global art production. Coincidentally, the San Francisco Art Fair, held at the same location in a separate building, brings galleries and art spaces from around the globe to show and sell art, impressing the notion that San Francisco participates in the global art market.

Within this conjunctural formation, I also assembled the following ideas: linguistics, Bay Area art scene, Hegelian sublation, and Filipino infixing to further articulate how this conjuncture might be activated to question the politics around inclusion. The conjuncture frames a set of historical events along with personal events in artists’ lives as a way to articulate “different modalities of contextuality” (Grossberg 2010, p. 46). Within this conjuncture, analysis is guided by certain theoretical positions that help produce moments of understanding in order to affect change on the social, cultural, and political level. Since “conjuncturalism is a description of change, articulation, and contradiction,” I wanted to introduce Hegelian sublation as way to describe this change, but also to help analyze any changes that emerges due to the conjuncture formed.

Hegel’s notion of sublation or *aufheben* describes the relations between thesis and antithesis and their confrontation that leads to synthesis. Hegel used the German word *aufheben* to play with the internal contradictions in its meaning – to cancel, to lift up – and to illustrate that ideas are not obliterated but raised to a different level. The

thesis and antithesis continue to exist in synthesis, but raised to a new level of understanding. This is the dynamic in which my interest lies; I want to activate the *aufhebung* in my curatorial work, not to privilege the thesis or its antithesis, but to explore the synthesis and its elevation to new ideas.

In my study of Filipino languages, I learned of and was fascinated by a linguistic phenomenon called an infix, commonly used in Filipino languages. My initial idea explored how a phenomenon like an infix, which does not occur in standard English grammar, change the way one expresses or creates art. An infix is an affix that is inserted within the root as opposed to before the root like a prefix, or after, like a suffix. In Tagalog, one of the main languages of the Philippines, an infix is used to change the tense of the verb from the infinitive to past tense with the insertion of the infix, <um>. For example, the word to eat is *kain* (kah-ihn), and the past tense, *kumain* (kuh-ma-ihn). Here, the insertion of the infix changes the tense of the verb from present to simple past tense. A verb can employ multiple infixes, or a combination of suffixes, prefixes, and infixes to create various subtleties in tenses from present tense to future to progressive tense, i.e. *kain* (to eat) to *kakain* (will eat) to *kumakain* (eating).

I found this linguistic phenomenon quite intriguing, and imagined how to employ this non-European language structure, and further engaging with the linguistic turn in visual arts using Tagalog, as an organizing principle for an exhibition. I thought of a few ways in which the infix can help affect an exhibition from exhibition design to art history, art theory, to global art scene.

The infix can change the internal structure of a word in many ways; this was how I would employ the infix in this exhibition. I wanted to insert an artwork that didn't seem to belong and see how that changes the exhibition. Perhaps, by including the work of an artist who did not live in the Bay area or work that did not quite meet the curatorial

theme. I wanted to place this exhibition within the larger Bay Area scene and see how this exhibition changes how locals and travelers alike change the way the Bay Area art scene is perceived. I wanted to insert the Bay Area art scene within the global art market and see how this locality ex/changes the conversations around globalism.

The series of insertions, of course, has varying degrees of penetration and effect on any of the systems in which it is deployed. My focus was not on the result or overall effect; rather, I wanted to assert that the act of inserting one's self, or creative project, or locale within bigger systems, and insisting upon an engagement from within begins a process of change. Like Hegel's *aufheben*, the synthetic result is elevated to a different level of thinking, inserting Bay Area art within the context of globalized art field, that interaction creates a new idea that elevates the notion of Bay Area art.

The exhibition, *Infix: The Grammar of Insertion* is an exploration of the linguistic phenomena of the infix, and how

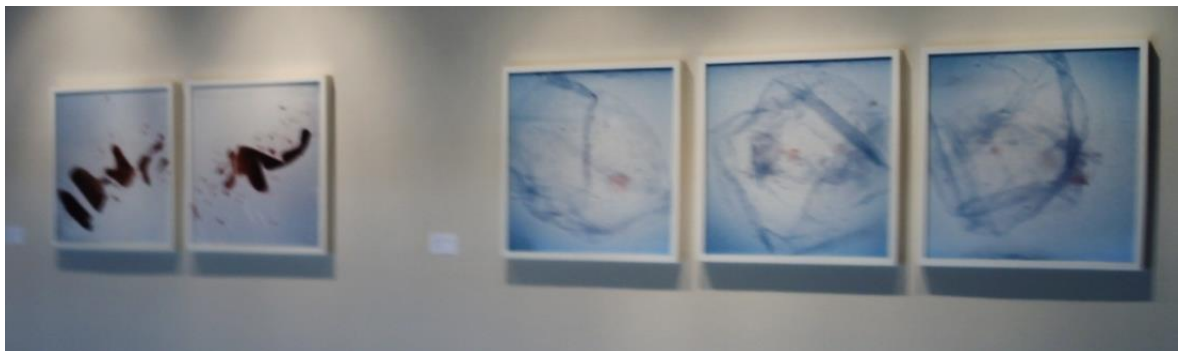
“the concept of the infix creates a parallel between the linguistic function of an infix –in changing the tense, subject/object relationship of a word– with the function of the art object or practice being inserted in the panorama of the global art scene –in asserting its contemporaneity, shifting the subject/object relationship of the work of art, and pondering the function and processes of artists. Just as infixes are inserted into a word –to change its meaning by shifting its tense, subjectivity, or objectivity– these artworks inserted within the notion of Bay Area art and this exhibition inserted within the production of visual art knowledge changes how we ‘read’ these art objects and the way these ‘readings’ create an understanding about them” (Appendix 4).

The first step in this practice of infixing was my insertion, as an interlocutor, into the artistic practices of the artists in the exhibition. The initial assertion I made was the selection of the artists participating in the exhibition. The parameters of the selection were based on geography and limited to those artists who worked within the nine counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay. The second parameter, although more of a

suggestion, was to choose artists who were already registered with the Artist Gallery, and who had not recently shown new work.

Due to time constraints and the challenge of distance (I was living in London at the time and was not able to visit the gallery's archives to select artists from this group), I selected artists based on the first given parameter. My previous position as Director and Curator of the Reynolds Gallery had put me in contact with many artists in the Bay Area, and at that time was still following the development of many artists' careers. In addition to the parameters set by the gallery, I also had an agenda to make my selection reflect the diversity (racial and ethnic, gender, sexual orientation) of the given region, as well as to show artists from different points in their careers, whether emerging or established artists. Each decision, to include diversity, or reflect a broad span of careers was based on the notion of insertion; of inserting these works, these artists into the mainstream narrative of contemporary art.

Lisa R. Gould's photography was stuck in my mind and I craved to see it. As a curator, I reveled in Gould's handling of photography and the way she can create an image that was technically stunning but also poetically arresting. Her series on food packaging and restaurant detritus attempted to undo the sterilization of food handling, bringing to the forefront the messy business of food from acquiring, preparing, to consuming.



*Lisa R. Gould, Consumption, 2005, color prints*

I selected a series of beautifully lit photographs taken at close range of the subject, making it slightly undecipherable, abstracting the image into layers of light that created volume and space. Some images looked like fantastical landscapes taken from an aerial perspective, deceitfully showing drops of water as lakes and ponds in this landscape. Within a moment, the viewer recognized the object of the photograph; bloody and wet butcher paper, plastic bags that held meat, and surfaces where the meat had been prepared or cleaned for consumption. The carcass or the cut of meat has been omitted to allow the viewer to imagine if that was last night's dinner.



*Lisa R. Gould  
Constellation  
2004  
color prints*

Another series, a group of photo tondi resembled a solar system whose planets and their moons were in close orbit of each other. The images seemed to be the same class of planets, or different views of the same planet at different moments of its rotation. A dark blue background made the white objects pop; cloud-like they float into each other forming masses and clusters. The mesmerizing images piqued curiosity but with dulled urgency, and the moment of recognition came much later. Each image is a photograph of a pot of water in which eggs are poached. Bits of egg white separate during the cooking process and form small floating pieces; the constant motion of the poaching liquid move these bits to take on form while maintaining its lightness and buoyancy.

At the time these pictures were made, Gould was working at a restaurant and experienced the daily preparation of meals, from receiving the raw ingredients to the aftermath of the cooking process. Her photographic works took on these mundane tasks and abstracts them in a way to create something beautiful from something banal and to reveal the detritus and waste that comes with consumption. This work supports my thesis on insertion as it reflects her own insertion as an artist within the restaurant world - as she inserts a photographic process within the process of food preparation.

E. G. Crichton's color photographs used a similar process of capturing images as Gould used. Crichton's series of photographs, *Matter Out of Place*, took household cleaning products and chemicals and mixed them on a clear glass plate and then scanned at a high resolution. The mixture of various household cleaners created a chemical reaction that generated gorgeous pictures of other-worldly landscapes or scenes from outer space.



*E. G. Crichton  
Matter Out of Place  
2005  
household chemicals, cleaning  
products on glass plate*

In a piece titled, "Comet, Pinesol, Betadine", the chemical reaction created a yellow nebula formation edged with a red cloud from the betadine, and a black hole accented by clumps of white powder. It is uncanny how these three chemicals reacted to create images that mimicked views of outer space. Bubbles from the chemical reaction added an interesting texture that looked like a field of asteroids floating in the mass of yellow liquid.

Like Gould's close-up of poaching liquid, Crichton's close-up of these household items zoomed in for a more arresting look and a deeper understanding of our quotidian existence, tapping into other-worldly pictorial resources. The all-too-familiar household products become something unrecognizable at a microscopic level, and the interactions that it generated created an unexpected universe of minerals, gas, and liquid.

This work focuses on the domestic realm and the myriad of products invented to keep this designated space clean. The patriarchal and economic division of labor has designated the domestic space as women's space and the labor of keeping house as women's work. The housewife and her realm are enclosed and separated from the dirty, masculine world. Crichton addressed the idea of cleanliness as women's work, and pushes the notion of the domestic setting as an alternative world by rendering these household products unrecognizable. It is in the mis-recognition of these products that prompts a critique of these designated spaces based on gender, and questions the task of keeping house as women's work.

As a child, growing up in rural North Carolina, Willie Little saw family members use farm tools and garden implements daily. Over time, these tools rusted and became worn, developing new textures with each use. This phenomenon of rusting and wearing smooth that occurred with tools became a metaphor for image making and storytelling that Little employs in his work.



*Willie Little  
Oxidation  
2005  
paint, rust, household  
chemicals on board*

Willie Little's work, like Crichton's, relied on chemical reactions to create his pictorial surfaces. Little's oxidation paintings stemmed from the exploration of rusting, the process of oxidation of iron, as a way to mark time. Metal tools containing iron exposed to the elements over time create a rusty patina. Little used patina to represent the development of stories that build up with the use of these tools. The rusty surfaces of his paintings are embedded with the idea of passing time and the development of personal history. He reworks the surface adding pigment and paint to create a vibrant abstraction that draws in the viewer.



*Willie Little  
In Mixed Company  
2000  
wood, crushed stone, cockleburs*

Accompanying these oxidation paintings are walking sticks encrusted with cockleburs, stones, wrapped in fabric. Little treated the surface of these 6-foot tall sticks similarly to his oxidation paintings. He juxtaposed smooth worn surfaces with highly textured, built-up elements to create a stunning and precious piece. These walking sticks



are part of a larger installation called, *In Mixed Company*, a recalling of the hushed stories told under breath when women are in the presence of men, when blacks are in the presence of whites, and when queers are in the presence of heterosexuals. For Little, the fence became a border that kept like company together, and the crossing across this border created mixed company. The embellished walking sticks encouraged walking over borders, real or imagined.

Three sets of photographic works and sculptures show the creative range of Renee Billingslea. Her work, like Little's, follow a narrative line and is expressed in various forms. Billingslea tackled the subject of race and racial violence in her work, particularly looking at lynching from 1880-1961. She used postcards made from photographs of lynching episodes as her source material first, to give voice to the victims and second, to try to understand the mob mentality that spurred violent action and the socializing aspect of viewing a lynching.



*Renee Billingslea  
Fabric of Race  
2000  
photo transfer on  
fabric, papier maché,  
ribbon*

One of the postcards Billingslea used depicted a charred body hanging from a tree with a mob viewing the body, showing the hats that they wore. From testimony and eye-witness accounts, Billingslea laboriously takes strips of paper printed with quotes from these accounts such as “we packed a picnic” or “Mama took me out of school to watch,” and lacquered them in layers to build up these delicate hats made from the words of lynching spectators. Another set of objects, neckties printed through the

Vandyke photographic process, depicts the spectators themselves in their Sunday clothes as they watched the violent event.

The last set of objects were three books altered and transformed into boxes. Three different book-boxes held specific items inside; one had wax crayons in dark skin tone colors, another had color pencils in the same dark skin tone ranges, and the third, contained tags with lynching victims' names written on them. This last set of object addressed how racial prejudice is perpetuated, partially through history books, and partially through socialization and parenting.

Billingslea explicitly addressed race in her work and confronts both victims and perpetrators through the various image-based objects that she created. Little addressed race in a more “hushed” manner, under breath or from the “other side of the fence.” The photographs of Lewis Watts addressed racial injustice through photographs of erasure and neglect. Watts depicted scenes from Harlem and New Orleans and how African American neighborhoods are displaced by gentrification or by neglect after a catastrophic natural disaster.



*Lewis Watts  
Harlem series  
2000 ongoing  
silver gelatin prints*

In one photograph, Watts captured rays of sun beaming down through the five skylights above creating squares of light on the concrete floor of a flood-damaged school room in New Orleans. The debris has been cleaned up but the room remained neglected and in disrepair. Another photograph depicted a building with a side wall bearing the

marks of the adjacent building that is no longer existing, razed to the ground, and now surrounded by a chain link fence. This scene was a common sight in Harlem as it was undergoing a fast and vigorous re-development program that caused displacement and the reconfiguration of the landscape.

The third photograph Lewis showed is a still-life in all aspects of the phrase. Layers of object are piled on top of the ground and buried under chain link fencing panels. On top of the fencing material laid a dress, dirty and torn, but its luxurious detailing of beading and sequins are visible and still sparkle among the detritus. The scene is a still life in sense that these are objects that represented a life lived, and still-life in a poetic sense that there is no movement, capturing the quiet of neglect and the silence of displacement.

Watts is inserting this story of displacement and neglect amongst the success story of Harlem's redevelopment and revitalization. His photographs remind the viewers of the loss of culturally significant sites and the years of neglect that this Manhattan neighborhood has endured has been easily forgotten in the glare of shiny new buildings and purpose-built plazas.



*Barrionics  
In Search of Kwan...  
2010  
Installation with video,  
acrylic paintings on  
canvas, electric sound  
components*

Recovery and insertion is what the artist collective, Barrionics, attempted to do with their performance-video-installation projects. For the Artist Gallery at SFMOMA,

the collective occupied a storage closet and installed “In Search of Kwan...,” a single-channel music video piece surrounded by paintings.

“In Search of Kwan...” confronts Hegelian sublation at the moment after negation but before synthesis. Hegelian sublation is the process that takes a thesis, negates it with its antithesis, and the outcome is the synthesis. The Filipino word “kwan” is a filler word used when an object, person, or event has no name or is in between misrecognition and recognition.

By searching for *kwan*, this undefined moment, Barrionics hopes to bring light to this ongoing process of synthesis and that there are other stopping points during in this process other than thesis, antithesis, and that the glitches that happen in between can be fertile ground for redefining moment of identification. Barrionics is inserting a moment in this thinking process to delay or intervene in the synthesis. Like an infix, this undefined moment changes the tense of a verb or adds a different emphasis to the word in which it was inserted.

The notion of infixing as an exhibition strategy is supported by way the works of art are placed within the space. I worked with the Exhibitions Designer Renée Cossio to help place and install the show. The designer’s intimate knowledge of the flow of the space and the possibilities of hanging and installing made the curatorial thread of the exhibition more evident and seamless, like an infix being placed in the middle of a word. Crichton’s mysterious glossy photographs attracted walkers-by to enter the space. Viewers continued onto a contrasting work, Watt’s black and white photographs of economically declining and once-thriving African-American neighborhoods. Just a few steps further into the space, Little’s Walking Sticks fantastically suspended from the ceiling emerged like a grove of exotic trees. His oxidation paintings seen beyond the Walking Sticks create an alluring and colorful background. Although these two bodies of

work are visual contrasts, the sticks ornate and encrusted with material while the oxidation paintings are nuanced experiments on color, they share a similar consideration of surface treatment. The sticks on end of the spectrum as an additive form of decoration, while the oxidation painting is a reductive chemical decomposition of mineral.

As the viewer turns, the fantastically floating sticks fade into the background as images of lynching appear in Billingslea's work. Reneé Billingslea uses photographs of lynchings in her work transferred onto various garments like hats, ties, and shirts, the clothing that is seen worn by the spectators in these "lynching parties." Billingslea metaphorically disrobes the spectators, taking their hats, ties, and shirts as material witnesses to these heinous acts of violence. First, the viewer sees the hats arranged in various heights that emulate the different heights of the spectators. The ties are framed and help guide the viewer up the staircase. At the top of the stairs, the viewer is back to a mysterious universe of other-worldly photographs by Gould. The deliberate juxtaposition of the works of art underscored my curatorial intentions; my hope was that viewers felt inserted into and part of this world that I created.

The viewers' feedback was complimentary and the exhibition was well-received. There were a few memorable comments from visitors who questioned whether my curatorial agenda was too ambitious and that in the end it didn't do too much. I remind the viewer that the curatorial gesture was infixing, and that infixes only change one root word, but this one change affects the whole sentence.

## Conclusion

This work is rooted in the desire to tell a better story about Filipino American contemporary art. In the process of telling this story I saw a few obstacles, including a

lack of an appropriate theoretical approach that considers lived experiences, politics, history, and exhibition making, and the shortage of rigorous art historical scholarship on Filipino art that prevented the narrative from flowing effortlessly. The initial desire was superseded by the immediate need to address these obstacles, to take a detour to intervene in Filipino art history and exhibition making, and rethink Filipino contemporary art through the role of the curator who uses the Cultural Studies method of forming conjunctures.

The first obstacle was the way Filipino art history was framed and discussed vis a vis contemporary art and exhibition making. Filipino contemporary art analysis, as Marian Pastor-Roces has written, has become “sclerotic” since the practice of art history, especially when it comes to important national figures like Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, has taken on a “hagiographic disposition” that prevents new research, analysis, and criticism of their contributions to Filipino art. Pastor-Roces believed that “Filipinos have harnessed Luna and Hidalgo, in ways and for reasons that bear examination” (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002). Luna and Hidalgo’s contributions were immense in the fields of Filipino art, art history, and national identity, and the role of new research, analysis, and criticism is not to make their work less important but to expand it and give it more complexity and nuance and to chart other possibilities that their work might have engendered and how it continues to be influential today. In short, figures like Juan Luna and his works need an update and a recontextualization within contemporary art history and exhibition making as I have done earlier in this writing.

This updated art historical work provide a much richer context in which to understand Filipino contemporary art as Filipino artists increase their participation in international mega-exhibitions like the Venice Biennale. Just as Pastor-Roces thinks that the modernity that encloses Luna and Hidalgo needs to be reassessed, curator Nicholas

Bourriaud feels that the modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is unable to explain or guide the art of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of its universalizing ethos that flattens out the complex terrain of globalized art. His idea of “altermodernity” is based on the *radicant* and denies the standardization of globalized economies through contextualizing practice within the time and place of its production. In other words, understanding who, where, how, and why art is made anchors it as it is distributed and transacted globally.

Whether through the lens of “vexed modernity” or “altermodernity”, a continued examination of art production that takes place away from cosmopolitan centers and the barriers that prevent these works to participate in the global art agora and the racialization that deems these works as other, all need to be examined, re-contextualized, and re-articulated. As curator, the connection that I make from Luna to contemporary art using conjunctural analysis attempts to do just that.

The current role of the curator becomes pivotal as someone who is attentive to both art history and exhibition making. The responsibility falls onto the curator to engage art historical traditions and to bring them to new light, to develop new knowledge through exhibitions that expand and complicate standard art historical notions. I find Bourriaud’s work instructive as he grapples with the unwieldy task of negotiating the myriad dynamics that affect artistic practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is due to this condition that art can no longer be confined within the provinces of art history and that disciplinarian avenues need to be seen as having multiple intersections encountering other disciplines or systems of knowledge production that influence and affect it. I use the Cultural Studies methodology of forming conjunctures as a way to accommodate the scale of this engagement. With the use of the conjuncture, the curator is able to expand the reach of his/her analysis beyond art history and incorporate radical contextualization as part of exhibition making.

However, the role of the curator also needs to be thought of as a conjuncture, one of labor. By showing the complex development of the labor of a curator, I recognize that this work is ever changing and currently, expanding in various ways, blurring previous borders between market, scholarship, and connoisseurship. The curator is expected to address various fields within the scope of exhibition making, and as with any expansion, cracks and fissures are sure to occur.

My intervention in art history started by problematizing the current field and rethinking the place of Philippine art within that history. I proposed an alternative periodization using a website, *worldsincollision.org*, to make a break from the standard Western art historical timeline and propose a new way of understanding Philippine art history. The traditional western periodization of art historical movements does not consider the time needed to cross geographic distances for ideas to be exchanged and settle in far colonial outposts like the Philippines. For example, Western art historical accounts marked Cubism emerging around 1907 with Picasso's painting, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. This stylistic development didn't reach the Philippines until the 1930s (Agoncillo 1990). There is a 20-year gap between the emergence of European Cubism and Filipino Cubism that needs to be acknowledged to understand the space and time in which Filipino artistic developments emerge. The transfer and exchange of ideas are also not as easy and direct. Other influences, including Indigenous forms, Indonesian, Malay, and Chinese, impose varying sets of pressure depending on the regions and are part of the mix in the Philippines that are represented along with Western cultural traditions.

The Worlds in Collision website attempted to create art historical periodization based on artistic production and colonial influences as opposed to chronological time. Historical events punctuate each of these periods, and the works of art and the artistic



practices within these set periods bring nuance and complexity. The periods are therefore defined by works of art, historical events, and existing political conditions.

In order to expand the discussion of Filipino contemporary art, the art historical timeline needs to be rethought to arrive to a working concept of what is contemporary. By mis-aligning Filipino art history against Western art history, the overlap and point of exchange needs to be articulated or radically contextualized to make sense of how this art historical conjuncture is formed. Indeed, these acts of periodization are specific art historical gestures that are constitutive of forming conjunctures. The whole website project was meant to create a massive conjuncture that takes into account the entirety of Filipino art history in order to accentuate the moments of fracture and fragmentation where political pressure and tactics can be applied.

Within this new Filipino art history timeline, the life and work of Juan Luna is explored as a conjuncture. Luna's life provides the parameters of this conjuncture punctuated by the historic events of 1884, when he won the gold medal at the Madrid Exposition; Jose Rizal's speech praising Luna's accomplishment and connecting the win to Filipino national identity; and Luna's ensuing work as a diplomat representing the new Philippine nation. This conjuncture established by Luna's life allows later scholars and critics various paths to scholarship that keep this work fresh and relevant to contemporary Filipino artistic production. The most common political frame in which Luna's work is understood is his role in nation building recounted by historian, Santiago Pilar. It is this enframing that Pastor-Roces reacts against and calls for a "re-think" of Luna's legacy. Pastor-Roces tackled this conjuncture and questioned the established role of Luna as a nation builder, not to minimize his role as national hero but to return to his work, his paintings, to uncover other narratives that might be hidden in them and to expand how we see his artistic practice that might provide insight into contemporary

Filipino artistic production within the globalized art market. Her analysis presented the framing of Luna's life by Rizal not as an expression of Enlightenment thinking but rather as part of a vexed modernism that is rooted in "18<sup>th</sup> century French idea of amour de la patrie" (Pastor-Roces, et al. 2002).

The second obstacle I attempted to overcome is the relationship of this art history with the contemporary moment. I follow Pastor-Roces' footsteps and examine this conjuncture based on Luna's life as a way to contextualize and analyze Filipino participation in global mega-exhibitions. How the history of art in the Philippines was narrated has always perplexed me, particularly how it attempts to catch up with Western art history. The *Wolds in Collision* website was my first project that proposed to de-center art history from the European and American art movements, and instead locate it within the timeline of Philippine history itself. This project revealed other challenges namely that Philippine history since 1521 has been contextualized and written from a foreign perspective under the colonization of Spain, then the United States. The layering of Filipino art history on top of Philippine history proved to be problematic as it posed questions of subjectivity and agency. Philippine history and art history was subjected to suit the colonizing powers to justify conquest, forced labor, and clerical abuses under the guise of Christian conversion.

This writing re-visits the problematic of layering art history over history by adding the component of lived experiences and analyzing this gesture through conjunctural analysis. The method of analysis has permitted me to examine each layer, suture them together and analyze them as a whole. The resulting whole will be malleable as long as its constituent parts are re-contextualized and re-articulated. Art history is one of the major disciplines that inform curatorial labor. This source of information needs to be deep in scholarship and rich in analysis to sustain the work. To keep this source viable, it

needs to maintain its analytic malleability and theoretical dexterity to navigate through the competing attentions of artists, audience, and collectors when crafting exhibition proposals. More importantly, by employing conjunctural formation and analysis, curators can cultivate historic events like the 1884 gold medal win by Luna to be productive in today's global art market.

Etienne Balibar's notion of "equaliberty" proves useful to define the political dynamics that have defined Luna's work, particularly his master work, *Spoliarium*. The conflation of equality with liberty as *equaliberty* describes the after effects of *Spoliarium* as a call for both equality as citizens of the Spanish government and liberty from the colonial abuses of the friars and colonial administrators. Through conjunctural analysis, I can extrapolate the notion of equaliberty to the Philippine pavilion at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. When curator Patrick Flores themed the Philippine contribution within the context of world-making, he has conjured hopes for equality in status in the global art market while trying to achieve liberty from the notion of the Philippines as peripheral to cosmopolitan centers.

The third obstacle I wanted to breakdown is the role of the curator and labor of curating. Curating is the appropriate political action to the conjuncture of Filipino American art history. Having established an alternative Filipino American art historical narrative through the Worlds in Collision website, I launched exhibitions as a way to dialogue with this history and to continue to make it richer and more complex. Previous exhibitions on Filipino American contemporary art were instrumental in helping me define how I want exhibitions to function for the Filipino community and for the art viewing public. For the Filipino community, I wanted to have a deeper conversation about art and community, going beyond the celebratory, on the one hand, and the feeling of dissatisfaction with tokenized presence in ethnic cultural festivals, on the

other. For the art viewing public at-large, I wanted to ensure that Filipino American artworks are viewed as aesthetic objects and not only as cultural artifacts.

An art exhibition is a conjunctural formation based on the lived experiences of the artists in the exhibitions. The works of art become articulated visual moments in which these lives intersect and share space. An exhibition, therefore, becomes an articulated space that explores the social relations among the artists in the exhibitions, but also the social relations between the artists and the audience, and with the curator and the audience.

Within this conjuncture, I strive to reach an artistic praxis that combines the theoretical and practical aspects of curating. Curating is no longer a practical task of mounting an exhibition, it has expanded to include interpretation, research, and the creation of new knowledge. Each exhibition that I propose undergoes a rigorous negotiation between theory and practice to ensure that I have done my research and propose new ideas, but also that the show is presented well.

Curating as a conjuncture always requires an extra step of applying political tactics, and in my exhibitions, that tactic is intervention – in art history, in racialized social relations, in curatorial labor, in artistic practices. The combination of historical events with lived experiences form conjunctures that have their own energy and flow, and move at their own speed. My work is nothing but an intervening moment that pauses the flow for an instant with the hope that it can somehow redirect some of this current toward an examination of Filipino contemporary art. The Situationists set a great example of how to intervene in art exhibitions through their use of *détournement*, and I expanded upon that notion and started to use art exhibitions as interventions.

The exhibitions *Overmapped* and *Hedonopolis/Melancolony* were attempts to intervene in the conversation about decolonizing theory and how a decolonized self is

expressed. Starting with the self, I questioned how the decolonizing process begins psychoanalytically by combining Freudian psychoanalytic methods with the Filipino cultural value of *kapwa* as used by Filipino psycho-linguist Dr. Virgilio Enriquez. The exhibitions became a 3-part mapping project that surveyed the terrain of Filipino American contemporary art filtered through a decolonizing lens. Another aspect of decolonizing theory is based on the use of language, and how puns and double-entendres are used to subvert meaning or hide intentions. With *Infix*, I questioned how the use of decolonizing strategies in language affect the perceived linguistic turn in the visual arts. If the structure of language is being used to “read” art, then a decolonizing strategy can be deployed to restructure and subvert these organizing principles.

I used the Filipino linguistic phenomenon of infixing as a way to insert the Bay Area art scene within the larger field of art production and market. The San Francisco Bay Area has contributed and continues to contribute to the globalized art scene through a number of artists such as Clyfford Still, Richard Diebenkorn, Barry McGee, and Amy Franceschini. The globalized art scene, however, flattens out the terrain and circulates the same artists in every cosmopolitan center. The question that I have wrestled with, and which my curatorial practice has tried to answer is: how does one insert a local perspective into the global art scene without losing its nuances? By emulating the functions of an infix - inserting a fragment into the middle of a word to change tense or subject/object relationship – I wanted to explore how the insertion of a local scene in the conversation of the larger global art field can affect it. For the artists involved, infixing seemed to have worked in their favor, as they have continued to show in national and international venues after the exhibition closed.

The work of rethinking Filipino American contemporary art can be done in many ways. What I have presented here is a means of implicating the curator as a key agent in

contributing to this work. With the use of conjunctures, curators can cast a much more inclusive net that expands the conversation about Filipino contemporary art, artistic practices, and the attendant politics in the art market. The use of conjunctures allows for a deeper dive into the dynamics of artistic practices, and intervenes in the current politics at play.

Indeed, what is at stake with this work is to provide a toolkit that can repair the damaged narrative of an art history with a hagiographic disposition, the short circuits in curating when the labor is not understood or the role ill-defined, and the bad patch up job of politics that chases expediency over reflection and action. The history of art, the lived experiences of artists, curating as labor, exhibitions as interventions all need to be re-examined so that they play a bigger role within this story, so that the story is better told, and so that it becomes a better story to tell.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Worlds in Collision website: Filipino American Art Historical Timeline

#### The Worlds in Collision website

(<http://www.usfca.edu/classes/worldsincollision/mtimeline.html>) is a project that was conceived by San Francisco based artist, Carlos Villa. This project is a continuation of his anthology of the same title (*Worlds in Collision: Dialogues on Multicultural Art Issues*) that addresses race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in arts education. The website project is also Villa's desire to centralize resources for artist biographies, art historical timelines, and samples of works of art. He writes on his welcome page, "We produced and compiled educational, historical and cultural information to nourish an organism called the FILIPINO AMERICAN ART HISTORY WEBSITE. As we contribute to this organism it will not disappear or dissipate." (Villa)

My involvement began when I was invited to help structure the research activities that would include undergraduate students from the University of San Francisco who have taken Villa's course on Filipino Arts. From the conception of this project, an inclusive approach has been utilized to involve student researchers, academics in Asian American Studies, History, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Music, along with a technical staff to build the website.

In Villa's course, Filipino American Arts, students were assigned to write a research paper on Filipino and Filipino American artists, and for three terms have assembled a good collection of video interviews of artists, as well as an archive of research papers. This prefaced the activities of this project and acted as the springboard to the content development of the Worlds in Collision website.

## Theoretical framework

As the main author of the Worlds in Collision Website, I struggled with the articulation of the concept of Filipino American visual arts. Filipino American identity is highly fluid and sometimes contested as to its origins and its development, and coupled with the varied developments of the visual arts in the United States, Europe, and the Philippines, the question arises of how could a Filipino American visual arts (FAva) be told. In addition, the perpetuation of the academic canon inhibits the development of new scholarship. If indeed, that the scholars in this field are able to conduct research, are they able to negotiate and survive the restrictions of the academy?

A myriad of philosophies, theories, and strategies were available to me, and my preliminary task is to conduct an inventory of methods that could help with the development of this topic. Hegelian historicism came to mind as a method to tell this history. Continuing in this vein, I also considered a Marxist historical materialist perspective. I knew that I did not want to wander into a post-modernist revisionist history, yet I wanted to inflect this history with traditional chronological telling of past events. Given my personal agenda, the task at hand was going to be difficult and could be the beginning of a life's work.

I wanted to ensure that the articulation of FAva is as complete and whole as possible. However, by privileging one philosophy or strategy, I can debilitate a holistic articulation of FAva. The methodology on which I settled is the interdisciplinary nature of Cultural Studies. Using the concept of intersections, I am looking at Filipino American visual arts as phenomenon that intersects issues of race, colonialism, social class, global economy, gender, sexuality, migration and diaspora, and post-colonialism. Due to the practical uses for this website, I also looked towards Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, Henri Giroux, and Carol Becker to ensure a solid pedagogical foundation.



I took creative license to craft an arc of history that joins together disparate artistic gestures under a nationalistic banner, but also uses canonical art historical episodes to frame certain historical moments. The methodology by far is not fixed in one camp, and it uses one method or another, or in combination when addressing the different aspects of the website from artists biographies, analysis of the works of art, or context to an artist's practice.

The history of Filipino American Visual Arts has never been told in this way and I wanted to develop a phenomenological study and a genealogy of this field to sketch out the where, when, and how, and then proceed to analysis and philosophizing. Due to the time constraints I was given, I limited the scope of my research and created criteria to help guide me as I underwent research activities. My one criterion is that Filipino American visual arts are produced within the sphere of influence from a Western culture. The appearance of FAva begins when Filipino artists using Western techniques starts to address Filipino identity within the context of that production. Juan Luna's *Spoliarium*, a painting that allegorizes the status of the Filipino under Spanish colonization exemplifies this notion. "Therefore, the works presented here feature the cultural production of such a world in collision, the offspring of Western conquest and Filipino survival." (Reyes)

To reach my goal of providing a holistic articulation of Filipino American visual arts, I had to move away from both Filipino American History and Art History to devise a chronology that is unique to this concept. Philosophically, I had to engage these two concepts in a dialectical process to synthesize a new and unified concept. In so doing, I used post-colonial theory, psychoanalysis, and pedagogy to craft a gesture for defining this specific art historical concept.

## Research Activities

Having established the theoretical framework and how this project will be framed, I proceeded to the logistical aspects of conducting the research. First, I intersected two traditional fields of study: History of the Filipinos in America, and Western Art History. This intersection provided me with a precarious first step to begin the building up of Filipino American visual arts.

My first challenge was to encapsulate two historical chronologies: Filipino American history and Filipino American art history. Defining a gross chronology for each field was a daunting task that merely provides boundaries of time and very little else. Each of these chronologies, also function with very different metrics. The periods of artistic development do not necessarily align with historic events, therefore, the framing of artistic development within historic events become challenging and problematic. The reverse act, framing historic events within artistic development did not make much sense.

I took advantage of website interface to create a multidimensional timeline. Setting limits from 1521, when the Spanish first arrived in the Philippines, to today, I created a workable timeframe from which to plot these moments of collision. Along a traditional timeline, artists were placed according to dates of birth and death and key times in his or her career to give a chronological context, but clearly, these plotted points do not necessarily correspond to traditional movements in Western Art History.

From the timeline, viewers can access artist biographies, examples of works of art, and a short description of the work. On the same screen, one can also see contemporaneous historical events that could be useful in providing context to the works of art and the artist's practice.

The actual research was conducted by myself and by a group of undergraduate students, under my supervision, who used primary sources, art history texts, and conducted artist interviews. Each researcher then submitted 1-3 pages of information on the artists they conducted research. I edited each of the submission for content and accuracy. The involvement of students in this project was key in creating a resource that is not only holistic in content but also holistic in creation. As the targeted users of the website, the students' input on the design and presentation of information was invaluable.

#### Content

This website presents a story of a cataclysmic encounter between the Filipinos and Europeans. This moment, September 21, 1521, situates the people involved in an encounter continually in conflict. Already fluid societal constructs of economics, religion, politics, and aesthetics, become increasingly unstable as it is negotiated through time, space, and bodies, marking each moment of concession as the generative spark of invention. Therefore, the works presented here feature the cultural production of such a world in collision, the offspring of Western conquest and Filipino survival.

#### *Section 1- 1521-1889, Worlds in Collision: A Lost Spaniard, Hooded Thugs, and Fun at Sea*

The first section of the website groups together the consequences of a "lost Spaniard", Magellan, "hooded thugs", the Christian clergy, and "fun at sea", the generations of trade among Europe, Asia and the Americas. This first era of collision radicalizes Western understanding of the commodification of the exotic. Goods from Asia are now more readily available to the masses of Europe due to newly revealed oversea trade routes. The Spaniards set up trading posts in existing commercial centers developed by the Malays, Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesians. Differing tastes in art objects led Europeans to treat indigenous art as mere curiosities and refashioned them

once they arrived in European cities. It was the raw but trainable, natural talents of the natives that was the real commodity to be exploited and currently continues to be exploited. The *Indios'* (non-Spaniard) artistic education became a top priority to help civilize and Christianize the population. Indigenous artists rapidly mastered retablos, altarpieces, and devotional sculptures to appease the conquering clergy but also started to use these idioms to reflect and express their own identity.

In this section, we see the products of the first wave of Filipino artists working in a Western idiom or with Western subject matter who were applauded for their mastery and skill. Nicolas de la Cruz Bagay was one of the first Filipino artists to be shown outside of the Philippines. Simon Flores was one of the first Filipinos to win a medal (silver medal) at the Centennial World's Fair in Philadelphia in 1876. The conceding forces of Western technicality with Filipino subjectivity created a new idiom of self-identity for the Filipino. From here forward, the act of artistic production whether visual, musical, or kinesthetic becomes simultaneously an act of deference, national pride, and resistance. This complex dynamic is elemental in the development of ensuing Filipino artistic production in diaspora.

*Section 2- 1890-1945, The American Era: Sleight of Hand, Fair Games, and Side Shows*

Step right up folks to the second era of Worlds in Collision. The Spanish-American War in 1898 was a great collision of geo-political interests. The United States fought Spain for control of Spanish territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific under the banner of Manifest Destiny. After the war, the Treaty of Paris in 1898 recognized Cuba's independence, and ceded the islands of Puerto Rico, Guam, and other Spanish territories in the South Pacific. The Spanish government, which did not recognize Philippine Independence, with a sleight of hand, included the Philippines in the Treaty.

The Filipinos asserted their independence and the Philippine-American War followed. The US firmly planted its imperial footing on the islands after the bloody war and the Filipinos eventually welcomed the democratizing Yanks and the following do-gooders, the Thomasites, a group of educators who volunteered to help civilize their “little brown brothers.” By 1904, Filipinos were in the mind of Americans as the St. Louis World’s Fair exhibited more than 3,000 live Filipinos. The Philippine Pavilion housed people representing almost every province and sub-ethnic group in the Philippines and became one of the biggest and most popular pavilions at the Fair.

The continuing development of technology and industrialization, along with the sideshow of modernization that the Americans brought to the Philippines, catalyzed the paradigm shift from the religious outpost of the Spaniards to the poor, orphaned ward of the Americans. Current Philippine-US relations still enact this drama as especially seen in the complicit acts of the current administration with the policies on the War on Terror. It is also in this period, “from 1906-1934, when more than 100,000 Filipinos, mostly single men (though about ten percent were women), migrate to Hawaii and the West Coast to work in the agricultural fields, in the service sector, indelibly changing the face of the labor force in Hawaii, California, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska.”(Prof. Dawn Mabalon).

This period sees the first wave of visual artists working in the United States. The earliest arrivals came as students under the auspices of the American government or corporations. In 1927, Dr. Robert Vallangca came to study with renowned artists Diego Rivera and Maynard Dixon. In the same era, Alfonso Ossorio came to study Fine Arts at Harvard. After the 1934 Tyding-McDuffy Act, immigration from the Philippines waned and most Filipinos came to work in the agriculture and service sectors. These men, now known as Manongs, persisted and many gave life to a new generation of Americans.

Artists, Leo Valledor and Carlos Villa were born at this time and whose artwork broke many barriers in traditional American artistic production. It is with their pioneering spirit and the persistence of their vision that marks the Filipino presence in American art history.

*Section 3- 1946-1965 Waves of Immigration: First Came My Grandfather Then My Father Then My Mother*

This period saw the major waves of immigration from the Philippines. Due to the Luce-Cellar Act of 1946, immigration strictures were eased and allowed 100 Filipinos annually to come to the US. Filipino Americans who enlisted in the US military were able to come back and bring back with them war brides and the hope to start families. However, the incentives given by the Americans to Filipinos to enlist and fight dematerialized after the war and hundreds who fought for the US were unjustly denied citizenship and other benefits of veterans.

The children of these hopeful soldiers became the Bridge generation, spanning the gap between immigrants and American-born, between cultural preservation and assimilation, and between modernism and post-colonial. Artist like Johanna Poethig, Terri Acebo-Davis, Lucille Tenazas, and Catherine Wagner continues the work of the previous generation skillfully mastering techniques but at the same time pushing forward a more politicized and culturally informed imagery. Ethnic pride and nationalism became the mode to desegregate, to integrate, and to elevate ethnic communities' affirmative action.

*Section 4- 1966-80 Time for Protest: We Are Sick of Your Shit*

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a hopeful glimmer in the shadow of oppression. However, when changes were slow in coming, more radical measures were called upon

to catalyze action. The worlds of peaceful protest and violent vigilance collided as institutional policies continue to enact racist bias. In 1967, the United Farm Workers was established after the merger of AWOC and the National Farm Workers Association. Universities and colleges were particular sites of contention, as admissions quotas limited access to education and the preservation of the canon limited the course of inquiry sparking the Third World College strikes starting in SF State in 1968 and continuing to spread to UC Berkeley in 1969. Along with protest, a surge of creative energy propelled the creation of groundbreaking work like the journal *Liwanag*, and launched the careers of a number of Filipino American writers, visual artists, and performers. Not since the 1890's that struggle and resistance were so pronounced in the creative expression of Filipino artists.

*Section 5- 1981-1998, Cultural Renaissance: Hindi Genius, Puro Arte At Maporma Pa*

The stage built by the previous generation opened play on words, images and identities. The combination of poignant protests and the high of hedonism concocted a cultural construct of creation, critique, and collaboration. Indigenous forms of art and craft were incorporated in endless manner giving way to catty taglish (Tagalog-English) critique of "hindi genius," a play on the word "indigenous", but meaning that the uses of indigenous elements were not smart or meaningful. A counter movement arose out of the pastiche to present an idiom of art pure in form and homage to indigenous Filipino artistic practices, a facility with modernist language, and the innovation contemporary identity. The performance art group, M.O.B. (mail order brides) exemplifies this movement through their photographic and video tableaux, enacting feminist, punk, queer, transnational and post-colonial identities. This also met with catty critique, playing off of pure art or puro arte and employing its double entendre, alternately

meaning “all-façade.” Regardless of the reception of the works done by artist in this period, Filipino artistic production reached a stage of maturity, arriving fully formed and ready to engage.

*Section 6- 1999-2006, The Filipino American Era: Making A Scene, Causing Attention and Bringing It On*

Contemporary Filipino artistic production is experiencing a period in the spotlight. With the last Bay Area Now exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts including five Filipino identified artists/art groups, mainstream institutions are now paying respect to these artists and their work. Also, with the creation of the USF Yuchengco Philippine Studies Center, Bindlestiff Theater, Bayanihan Community Center, Togonon Gallery, Gallery Micaela, Philippine subject matter is gaining legitimacy, establishing critical presence and continuing critically acclaimed cultural productions.

*Critique and Analysis*

The creation of a Filipino American visual arts website provided me with a challenging intellectual project. The structures of history, art history, art analysis, cultural impact, philosophy of art and history resonated during this project along with intervening methods of cultural studies, ethnic studies, gender and sexualities studies, and post-colonial studies. A thorough analysis of this method needs to be scrutinized to see if the pedagogical goals were achieved. However, I am revisiting this project to question the theoretical framework that acts as the armature supporting the field of Filipino American visual arts.

There are still numerous tasks to be completed to satisfy my own intellectual curiosity. Among these are: a continuation of assembling Filipino and Filipino American visual artists, an analysis of the works of these artists, a continued writing of these artists’ biographies, and the collection of images of the art works. The greatest question



remains: How does one write the art history of a diasporic people? Many follow up questions arise at the asking. How closely does one connect the diasporic works with the traditions of the home country? How are the artworks of diasporic people seen within the canon of the host?

#### Conclusion

With this website, I am asserting a certain political position that reflects the realities of Filipino American artists. The inclusion of particular art pieces within a timeline begins to reflect a group whose identity is not bound by time or style, but rather expressed and articulated through nostalgia, erasure, and synthesis. The members of this panel can hopefully ask probing questions to problematize certain gestures while providing constructive criticism that continue to encourage this and other like projects.

[Worlds in Collision website](#)

[Worldsincollision.org](http://Worldsincollision.org)



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## 1521-1889 | Worlds In Collision

The first section of the website groups together the consequences of a "lost Spaniard", Magellan, "hooded thugs", the Christian clergy, and "fun at sea", the generations of trade among Europe, Asia and the Americas. This first era of collision radicalizes Western understanding of the commodification of the exotic. Goods from Asia are now more readily available to the masses of Europe due to newly revealed oversea trade routes. The Spaniards set up trading posts in existing commercial centers developed by the Malays, Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesians. Differing tastes in art objects led Europeans to treat Indigenous art as mere curiosities and refashioned them once they arrived in European cities. It was the raw but trainable, natural talents of the natives that was the real commodity to be exploited. The Indios' (non-Spaniard) artistic education became a top priority to help civilize and Christianize the population. Indigenous artists rapidly mastered retablos, altarpieces, and devotional sculptures to appease the conquering clergy but also started to use these idioms to reflect and express their own identity.

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Biography  
Artist Stats


## Juan Luna .1857



Juan Luna was a man known for his many talents and professions, but most acknowledged for his expertise in painting.

"Luna produced most of his work in the Romantic and early Impressionist styles. Nurtured in the academic classical canons then prevalent all over the western world, Luna followed the conventional steps in attaining professional success, such as obtaining prizes with colossal Graeco-Roman canvases in the grand Classico- Romantic manner at prestigious salons in Europe" ([www.geringerart.com](http://www.geringerart.com)).

In 1881, Luna took 2nd prize at the National Exposition of Fine Arts in Madrid, Spain for his canvas *Death of Cleopatra*. *The Spoliatum*, one of



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## 1890-1945 | The American Era

**Sleight of Hand, Fair Games, and Side Shows** - Step right up folks to the second era of Worlds In Collision. The Spanish-American War in 1898 was a great collision of geo-political interests. The United States fought Spain for control of Spanish territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific under the banner of *Manifest Destiny*. After the war, the Treaty of Paris in 1898 recognized Cuba's independence, and ceded the islands of Puerto Rico, Guam, and other Spanish territories in the South Pacific. The Spanish government, which did not recognize Philippine Independence, with a *sleight of hand*, included the Philippines in the Treaty. The Filipinos asserted their independence and the Philippine-American War followed. The US firmly planted its imperial footing on the islands after the bloody war and the Filipinos eventually welcomed the democratizing Yanks and the following do-gooders, the *Thomasites*, a group of educators who volunteered to help civilize their "little brown brothers." By 1904, Filipinos were in the mind of Americans as the St. Louis Worlds Fair exhibited more than 3,000 live Filipinos. The Philippine Pavilion housed people representing almost every province and sub-ethnic group in the Philippines and became one of the biggest and most popular pavilions at the Fair.

The continuing development of technology and industrialization, along with the sideshow of modernization that the Americans brought to the Philippines, catalyzed the paradigm shift from the religious outpost of the Spaniards to the poor, orphaned ward of the Americans. It is also in this period, "from 1906-1934, when more than 100,000 Filipinos, mostly single men (though about ten percent were women), migrate to Hawaii and the West Coast to work in the agricultural fields, in the service sector, indelibly changing the face of the labor force in Hawaii, California, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska." (Prof. Dawn Mabalon)

This period sees the first wave of Filipino visual artists working in the United States. The earliest arrivals came as students under the auspices of the American government or American corporations. In 1927, Dr. Robert Vallanca came to California to study with renowned artists Diego Rivera and Maynard Dixon. In the same era, Alfonso Ossorio came to study Fine Arts at Harvard in Massachusetts. After the 1934 Tyding-McDuffy Act, American-sponsored immigration from the Philippines waned and those who came were recruited to work in the agriculture and service sectors.

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## Carlos Villa .1936

Biography  
Artist Stats  
Statement



Carlos Villa graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute (formerly California School of Fine Arts) in 1961 and earned an M.F.A. in painting at Mills College in 1963. While living in New York in the 1960s, He exhibited minimalist aluminum sculpture before beginning to draw and paint with the airbrush. Villa returned to San Francisco in 1969 and began a new series of abstract works based on his interest in ritualistic art from Polynesia, New Guinea, and Africa and the Philippines. He experimented with a syncretic vocabulary of forms inspired by being an American born- Filipino American in America.

He has exhibited his work internationally, most notable the Whitney Annual 1972 (now Biennial) and Havana Biennial. He has also had exhibitions



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WORLD'S IN COLLISION

## 1946-65 | Waves Of Immigration

**First Came My Grandfather Then My Father Then My Mother** - This period saw the gentle lapping of waves of immigration from the Philippines. Due to the Luce-Cellar Act of 1946, immigration strictures were eased and allowed 100 Filipinos annually to come to the US. Filipino Americans who enlisted in the US military were able to come back and bring back with them Filipina war brides accompanied with the hope to start families. However, the incentives given by the Americans to Filipinos to enlist and fight during World War II, dematerialized after the war and hundreds who fought for the US were unjustly denied citizenship and other benefits of veterans.

The children of these hopeful soldiers became the Bridge generation, spanning the gap between immigrants and American-born, between cultural preservation and assimilation, and between modernism and post-colonial. Artist like Johanna Poethig, Terri Acebo-Davis, Lucille Tenazas, and Catherine Wagner continues the work of the previous generation skillfully mastering techniques but at the same time pushing forward a more politicized and culturally informed imagery. Ethnic pride and nationalism became the mode to desegregate, to integrate, and to elevate ethnic communities' affirmative action.

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Biography  
Detailed Bio  
Artist Stats

WORLD'S IN COLLISION


## Terry Acebo Davis .1953

To view a series of conceptual works by artist Terry Acebo Davis is to experience an assimilation of memories as sacred relics of her past and ideas yet to be realized. Whether in mixed-media assemblages or prints, Acebo Davis concentrates on the highly personal, which critics claim have universal meaning for her viewers. Through this content, which is spurred by her Filipino American ethnicity; she seeks answers to an Eastern Western duality that takes its form through complex works that candidly chronicle layers of time.

Image: Pollock - Triumph of Death, Terry Acebo Davis


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## 1966-1980 | Time For Protest

**We Are Sick Of Your Shit** - The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a hopeful glimmer in the shadow of oppression. However, when changes were slow in coming, more radical measures were called upon to catalyze action. The worlds of peaceful protest and vicious vigilance collided as institutional policies continue to enact racist bias. In 1967, the United Farm Workers Union was established after the merger of AWOC (Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee) and the National Farm Workers Association involving the Filipino community in a national coalition to fight labor injustices. Universities and colleges were particular sites of contention, as admissions quotas limited access to education and the preservation of the canon limited the course of inquiry sparking the Third World College strikes starting in SF State in 1968 and continuing to spread to UC Berkeley in 1969. Along with protest, a surge of creative energy propelled the creation of groundbreaking work like the literary journal, *Liwanag*, and launched the careers of a number of Filipino American writers, visual artists, and performers. Not since the 1890's that struggle and resistance were so pronounced in the creative expression of Filipino artists.




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Biography  
Artist Stats

## Michael Arcega .1973



Michael Arcega is an interdisciplinary artist working primarily in sculpture and installations. His art, though visual, revolves largely around language. He mines history for residue from cultural clashes such as accents, Spam, Jesus nightlights, and cocoa crispies. Michael received his BFA in Interdisciplinary Studies at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1998. His work has been shown in San Francisco, Oakland, Marin, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Lisbon. He was awarded a residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts for the fall of 2005. Michael is represented by Heather Marx Gallery in San Francisco.

Image: "Divide and Concur," 2004 Installation View




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WORLD'S IN COLLISION

## 1981-1998 | Cultural Renaissance

**Hindigenius, Puro Arte At Naporma Pa** - The previous generation of artists created a space that made it possible to transform words, images and identities. The combination of poignant protests and the high of hedonism concocted a cultural construct of creation, critique, and collaboration. Indigenous forms of art and craft were incorporated in endless manner giving way to catty *taglish* (Tagalog-English) critique of "hindi genius," a play on the word "indigenous", but meaning that the uses of indigenous elements were not smart or meaningful. A counter movement arose out of the pastiche to present an idiom of art pure in form and homage to indigenous Filipino artistic practices, a facility with modernist language, and the innovation contemporary identity. The performance art group, M.O.B. (Mail Order Brides) exemplifies this movement through their photographic and video tableaux, enacting feminist, punk, queer, transnational and post-colonial identities. This also met with catty critique, playing off of pure art or *puro arte* and employing its double entendre, alternately meaning *all façade*. Regardless of the reception of the works done by artists in this period, Filipino artistic production reached a stage of maturity, arriving fully formed and ready to engage.




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Biography  
Detailed Bio  
Artist Stats


WORLD'S IN COLLISION

## Mail Order Brides .1994



Eliza "Neneng" Barrios  
Reanne "Immaculata" Estrada  
Jenifer "Baby" Wofford

The Brides have shown nationally, creating public art projects for the San Francisco Arts Commission's Market Street Art in Transit posters and the McColl Center Mobile Art Project, as well as performance works for the exhibition Museum Pieces at the de Young Museum and for Oakland's Lunar New Year Parade. M.O.B. has also had solo exhibitions at the Triton Museum of Art in San Jose and Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery and The Luggage Store in San Francisco. The group's film/video works have screened at the San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, the International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, the



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## 1999-Present | The Filipino American Era

**Making A Scene, Causing Attention And Bringing It On** - Contemporary Filipino artistic production is experiencing a period in the spotlight. With the Bay Area Now 2005 exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts including five Filipino identified artists/art groups, mainstream institutions are now paying respect to these artists and their work. Also, with the creation of the USF Yuchengco Philippine Studies Center, Bindlestiff Theater, Bayanihan Community Center, Togonon Gallery, Galerie Micaela, Philippine subject matter is gaining legitimacy, establishing critical presence and continuing critically acclaimed cultural productions. This is not isolated to the San Francisco Bay Area but is happening simultaneously in other parts of the US. New York, Seattle, Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Diego are among the leading cities to exhibit and promote Filipino cultural production. We are in a dynamic era that expands the conversation and include Filipino artistic expression. This website hopes to facilitate and perpetuate this conversation.


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2001-  
9/11 backlash includes the laying off of thousands of Filipinos from jobs as


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Synopsis  
Essay

## BAE Exhibition .2001



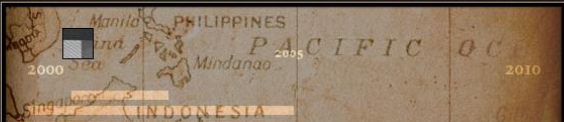
**Date & Location**  
March 2001, The Luggage Store Gallery, San Francisco, CA

**Co-Curators**  
Sarah Baltazar and Arel Gonzales

**Artists**  
Jenifer Wofford, Terry Acebo Davis, Rico Reyes, Christine Wilcox

Image: Jenifer Wofford

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## Appendix 2 – Overmapped, Curatorial Statement

Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Arts

**Curated by: Rico J. Reyes**

**SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco, California, 2007**

**Remy's at Temple Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 2007**

**Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Arts** is an exhibition looking at the vital and vibrant visual arts community with ties to the Philippines. The artists presented in this exhibition are Filipino, Filipino American, American Filipino, scholars of Philippine Studies or Pinoyphiles. This exhibition is an informal and incomplete survey and by no means an exhaustive study. However, the growth and development of the Filipino visual arts community needs to be marked; there is a need to pause, to look, and take stock of what is happening with young artists coming out of school, with established artists and their career trajectories, with hobbyists who find themselves deep in serious art making, along with many others. This moment is as good as any!

The artists included in this exhibition represent the various points on the arc of Filipino: American visual art production. The points are defined by both artists and the academia and institutions. There exist the myriad points addressing gender and sexuality, the points of race, ethnicity, or otherness, the points of material and formalism, the points of conceptual and avant-garde, the points of the established and the up-and-coming, etc. There are many points on the arc and one artist may occupy many points simultaneously, or a point might be occupied by more than one artist. The



artists included in this exhibition are Melba Abela, Terry Acebo-Davis, Matias Aguilar, Yason Banal, Genara Banzon, The Barrionics, Eliza Barrios, Elaine Benisano, Leo Bersamina, Emily Caisip, Danilo Cuevas, Ariel Erestingcol, Robert Gutierrez, England Hidalgo, Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza, Allyn Nobles, Marcius Noceda, Johanna Poethig, Carlo Ricafort, Angela Silva, Alberto Vajrabukka, Charles Valoroso, Carlos Villa, Mel Vera Cruz, and Jenifer Wofford.

The title of this show is the product of intellectual synergy and confusion. The word “overmapped” is derived from the interplay of ‘overlap’ and ‘mapped’. The concept behind the exhibition is to layer on top of the topographical map of the psyche, as developed by Sigmund Freud, with an imaginary topographic sketch of the colonized mind of Filipinos. This overlapping of maps creates a new terrain that shifts with migration and memory, desire and resistance, embodiment and dismemberment, love and hate. These maps are continuously being drawn and re-drawn to charter a course to unknown coordinates. Thus, the act of organizing an exhibition under the theme of “Filipino” becomes a cartographic exercise, redrawing the boundaries of the community and repainting the lines of visual art, in an attempt to speculate a heading and to propose a new course.

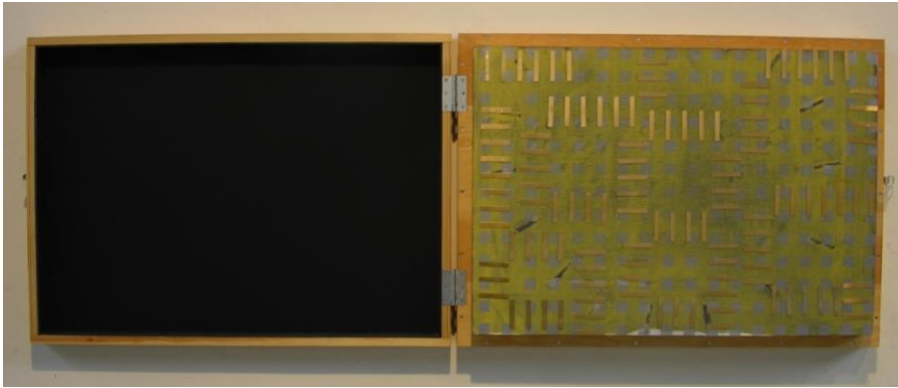
Coincidentally, the term “overmapped” is also used in computer programming language. An “overmapped error” describes a situation when 1). two or more data directories exist in a hard-drive and each script in the directory competes and confuses the logic of a given set of memory, or 2). the memory chip is overloaded with a data file that is too big for it.<sup>6</sup> Either phenomenon describes the condition of Filipino artists. From which “directory” does one process information, or is one’s colonized experience

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<sup>6</sup> <http://digital.ni.com/public.nsf/allkb/060BA89FE3A0119E48256E850048FFFE>

too much to handle within a mainstream framework? The psyche of the Filipino artist is like that of the computer chip overloaded with cultural data from two conflicting sources, always alerting its viewer of a process being OVERMAPPED.

Images: [Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Art](#)



Carlos Villa  
Kearny Street Gameboy



Terry Acebo Davis



Charles Valoroso



Charles Valoroso



Allyn Nobles

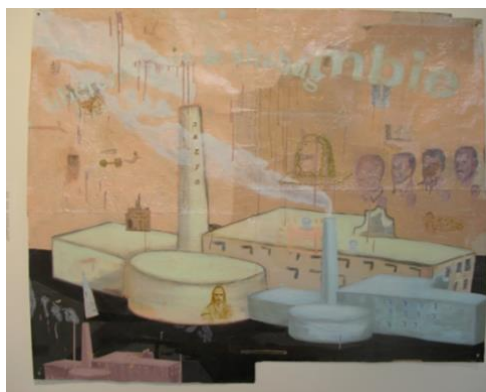




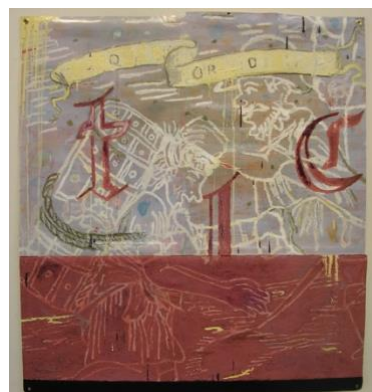
Marcus Noceda



England Hidalgo



Carlo Ricafort

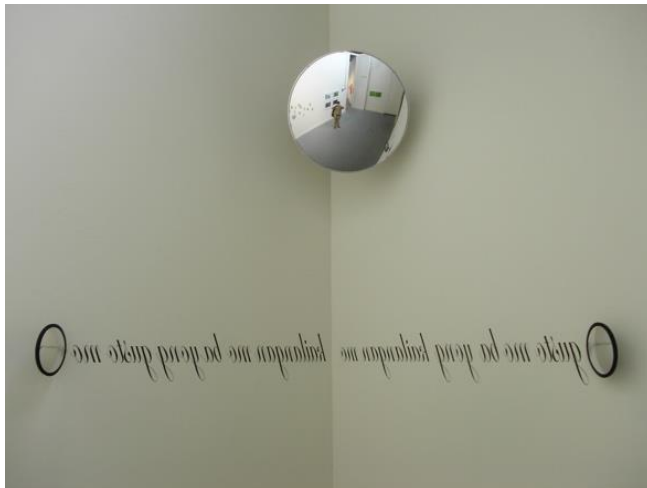




Carlo Ricafort



Genara Banzon



Eliza Barrios



Mel Vera Cruz



Yason Banal



Alberto Vajrabukka





Danilo Cuevas



Ariel Erestingcol



Johanna Poethig



Robert Gutierrez



Emily Caisip



Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza

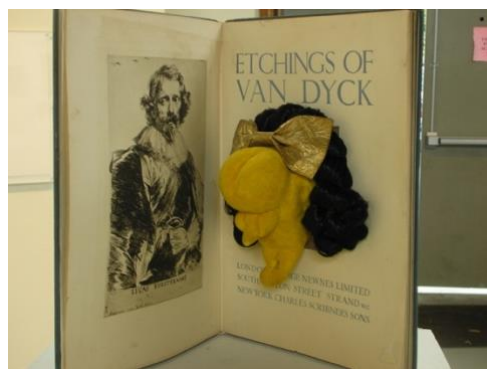
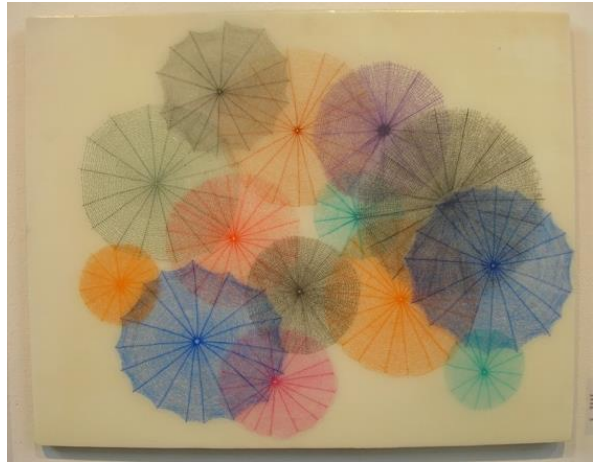




Leo Bersamina



Leo Bersamina





Melba Abela



## Appendix 3 – Hedonopolis/Melancolony, Curatorial Statement

To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony: Current Topography of Filipino Visual Arts

**Curated by Rico J. Reyes**

**Thacher Art Gallery, University of San Francisco, 2008**

In the spring of 2007, SOMArts Cultural Center Main Gallery, under the curation of Rico J. Reyes, assembled a group of artists engaged in the theme of Filipino American and showed their work in an exhibition titled, Overmapped: A Cartography of Filipino American Visual Arts. This exhibition acted as an informal survey of mostly Bay Area artists with inclusions from New York, Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles. Twenty-five artists presented two to three pieces to mark different points on the arc of Filipino American visual arts. The underlying conceptual foundation of the exhibition was derived from Sigmund Freud's mapping of the mind. Freud drew a map to illustrate his concept that the mind has three major regions: ego, id, superego, each region having unique characteristics. This exhibition draws a map to show that Filipino American artistic production is varied and prolific.

The exhibition Overmapped is further developed by layering the theme of "Filipino American" over Freud's mapping of the mind to arrive at the concept of the Filipino American mind. The concept of Filipino American differs for each artist, and for each artist the dynamic of layering expresses peculiar ideas and thoughts or feelings and emotions marking a location on the newly drawn map of the Filipino American mind. Each artwork in this exhibition acts as a point of expression defined by coordinates along the x-axis, psychoanalysis and y-axis, Filipino American identity. The result of this

exhibition is like a map dotted with pushpins marking a spot where one has identified or visited.

About the Exhibition

To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony: Current Topography of Filipino Visual Arts

looks at the vast terrain of Filipino American visual art production. The viewer is no longer presented with points on a map to determine location but rather, the points are grouped to define regions or systems. If *Overmapped* is a cartographic exercise, *To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony* is a topographic one. A “topographical or structural division of the mind [is] based on something more than function, a division into portions to which it was possible to attribute a number of differentiating characteristics and methods of operating” (Freud, p. xxx).

The topography of current Filipino American art production begins to form itself as the character of each point is noted and compared with its neighbors. For this exhibition, the points on the conceptual map represent artworks, and when these works of art are grouped together, their relationship to each other informs the other and its surroundings, while the aggregate begins to define a new system of thought. *To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony* is a new system of thought arising from the amalgamation of psychoanalysis, colonization, migration, artistic production, and survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This exhibition explores two topographic systems developing within this map, one called Hedonopolis and the other called Melancolony.

The twin systems of Hedonopolis and Melancolony provide both refuge and exposure to surveyors taking measure of a landscape continuously shifting. The elements that help define the boundaries of the system: psychoanalysis, colonization, migration, artistic production, economics, religion, labor, and survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, are also the elements that keep these two systems dynamic and indefinable.

To gain an understanding of these two systems, one must reflect on moments in time and space when the shifting landscape is momentarily frozen just long enough to gaze out into the panorama and embed visual delights in memory. In this frozen moment, the viewer sees Melancolony, a land of nostalgia, memory, and longing and/or Hedonopolis, a virtual city of erasure, innovation, and pleasure.

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Images: To Hedonopolis, From Melancolony: Current Topography of Filipino Visual Arts



Terry Acebo Davis





Cirilo Domine



Johanna Poethig



Maryrose Cobarrubias Mendoza





Genara Banzon



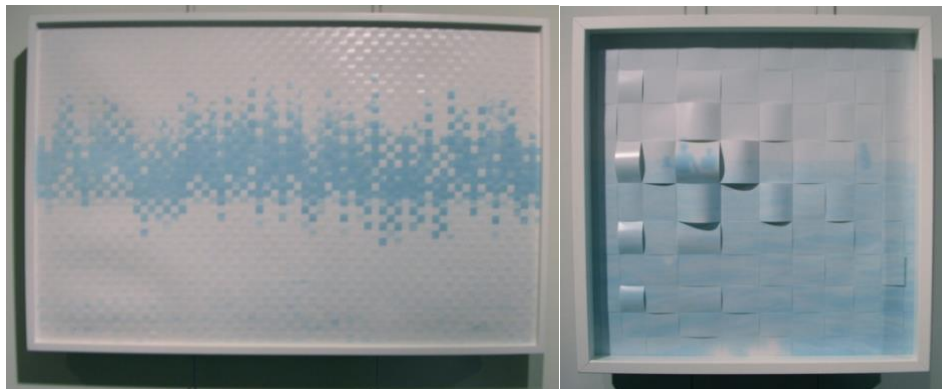
Jenifer Wofford



Carlos Villa  
("My Uncles" series)  
Unfinished door painted black, framed, vinyl letters and tape  
85.5" x 37.5" x 7.25" (1996)



John Yoyogi Fortes



Leo Bersamina



Leo Bersamina





Charles Valoroso



Reanne Estrada



Yason Banal



Crisanta de Guzman



Emily Caisip

## Appendix 4 – Infix, Curatorial Statement

Infix: The Grammar of Insertion

**Curated by Rico J. Reyes**

SFMOMA Artist Gallery @ Fort Mason, San Francisco, California, 2010

So much of how the visual art is discussed or understood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present has been based on the theorization about the function of language.

Theorists like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida among others have been instrumental in presenting language as a means to analyze visuality. This trope has been called the “linguistic turn” of the visual arts and has compared looking at art as a process of reading, where the work of art remains the central object to be ‘read’ like text.

The works of these theorists inform the development of this exhibition and borrow linguistic elements in framing the works of art exhibited and how this exhibition may be understood. Revolving around the linguistic concept of the infix, this exhibition looks at the works and processes of six Bay Area artists as infixes inserted within the global language of visual art and asks how these works of art and modes of production are affecting the way we talk and think about art.

This exhibition features the works of artists Renée Billingslea, E.G. Crichton, Lisa R. Gould, Willie Little, Lewis Watts, and the artist collaboration, BARRIONICS (Lily Anne Perez, Johanna Poethig, and Rico Reyes). Including photography, installation, sculpture, prints, video, and performance, Infix assembles some of the Bay Area’s most dynamic artists working in these media and engaging in themes such as identity and gender,

perception and humor, place and specter, packaging and the grotesque, residue and culture.

What is an infix?

An infix is an affix that is inserted in the middle of a word. Unlike a prefix added at the beginning of a word or a suffix added at the end of a word, an infix is inserted in the middle of the word changing the structure of the root word consequently changing its function, whether it is a shift in tense, in subject/object relationship, or in meaning. A common occurrence in Tagalog and Filipino languages, this linguistic phenomenon is rare in English and in Romance languages.

The deployment of the concept of the infix creates a parallel between the linguistic function of an infix –in changing the tense, subject/object relationship of a word– with the function of the art object or practice being inserted in the panorama of the global art scene –in asserting its contemporaneity, shifting the subject/object relationship of the work of art, and pondering the function and processes of artists. Just as infixes are inserted into a word –to change its meaning by shifting its tense, subjectivity, or objectivity– these artworks inserted within the notion of Bay Area art and this exhibition inserted within the production of visual art knowledge changes how we ‘read’ these art objects and the way these ‘readings’ create an understanding about them.

The way we speak of works of art or artistic practices have been set by previous exhibitions and art writings. The precedents create a ripple affecting the future articulations of works of art and art exhibitions setting notions bounded by the limits of these writings. One strategy in changing this mode of articulation is to change the structure of the language, dismantling archaic vocabulary and deconstructing grand

narratives. Using the phenomenon of the infix in a language where it does not naturally occur destabilizes the language opening up fissures for analysis.

Bay Area art has a way of inserting itself within the language of contemporary art, expanding the current vocabulary. If the Bay Area art scene acts like an infix, inserting itself within the word, then New York and London acts like a prefix, seeing itself before the word, and unlike Los Angeles, Chicago or Berlin, a suffix, an addition after the word. Each locale contributing differently to the language dependent upon the works of art that it presents.

#### Exhibition as Infix

This exhibition challenges the beholders to spend time to think about how the visual arts in the San Francisco Bay Area are articulated and asks the question, how critics and art writers in the past have framed the works of art made in the Bay Area, and how the Bay Area art scene have been contextualized within the larger art field? Mostly defined by its historical contributions to Abstract Expressionism, figurative painting, ceramics, and photography, or its occasional breakthrough from the underground scene, Bay Area art is confined within these two notions. From examining three critical texts, Thomas Albright's, *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1980*, Johnstone and Holzman's, *Epicenter: San Francisco Bay Area Art Now*, and Sidra Stich's, *art-SITES San Francisco*, it is inferred that the grand narratives that describe the San Francisco Bay Area art is hinged by the intersection of its sporadic contributions to past art movements, and to its perceived eccentric underground scene, thereby creating a set language, or a limited notion, that affects the continual development and articulation of Bay Area art.

Infix tries to break open this foreclosed articulation of the Bay Area art scene by focusing on media that by and large have taken a second position to painting's

popularity and importance and by breaking with traditional ideas of the avant-garde or the currency of the new and hip. The focus on sculpture, photography, and video/performance gives painting a respite from center stage to allow the exploration of other material and momentarily redirects the attention paid to Clifford Still, Richard Diebenkorn, and Barry McGee and to the Bay Area's love affair with painting. The formal aspects of sculpture, photography, and video/performance are placed within a context of a continued exploration of the nature of these materials and its relationship with issues of identity, gender and sexuality, and history. The juxtaposition of varied objects within an exhibition creates a new constellation of interpretation as each body of work informs the other. For example, the works of Renée Billingslea and Willie Little have little formal similarities, but shown together the materiality of their work becomes more pronounced as the narrative structure of their works are exposed through the handling of similar content such as African American identity. The material nuances of bedazzled walking sticks and papier maché hats now share a common quality of bearing narratives.

Other Bay Area exhibitions periodically challenge the limitations that have been set by the grand narratives of Bay Area art. The 2008 SECA Art Award Exhibition presented four Bay Area artists who were working in diverse media of digital art, social intervention, and installation, or the 2008 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Bay Area Now 5 Exhibition including exhibitions as a source of artistic production. However, these exhibitions reinforce the art world's obsession with the now and hip, privileging relatively young, emerging artists, thereby setting forth the idea that vital works of art are located in the province of youth and immaturity. Infix breaks this position by showing a multi-generational group of artists invested in a durational study of a subject and a continuous exploration and innovation of material.

## Artwork as Infix

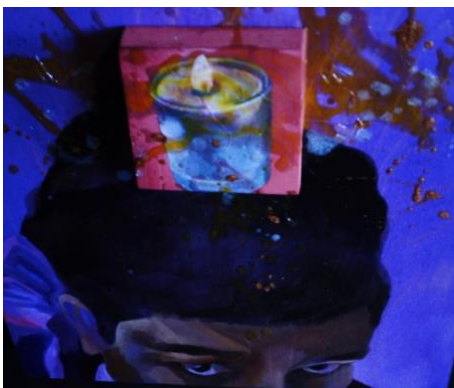
The works of art presented in this exhibition acts as infixes within the language of Bay Area art. Renée Billingslea's work continues to address the artist's relationship to issues of race. Working from archival images of lynching, Billingslea turns her attention to the lynch mob and questions the mentality of these spectators and those who witness them. The photographs of Lewis Watts reveal his work with archival photographs in the way he shows the landscape: as an archive of cultural imprints. Whether it is the gentrification of Harlem, or the destruction of New Orleans, Watts registers these disappearances and recovers them in the facades of buildings or in the faces of its inhabitants. The collaboration, Barrionics, redefines the archive by sourcing data from everyday experience. In this project, acting as sound archeologists, Barrionics undergoes a journey to excavate from different landscapes the sounds of the past.

Wood-carved walking sticks are tools of sojourning that have been imprinted in Willie Little's imagination. His walking stick series uses this form but they are adorned with cockleburs, beads, glass, and glitter transforming a tool for storytelling into a storyteller. Indeed, stories may be extracted from various objects like walking sticks to household chemicals. E.G. Crichton places samples of household chemicals onto a glass plate and digitally scans them. The results are views of fantastical worlds from the cosmic to the microscopic, a solution to mundane domesticity. The household is repackaged in Lisa R. Gould's photographs as she documents the detritus of daily domestic consumption. Emerging from her observations of consumption and consumerism, Gould captures the instances before consumption, the moments before they disappear; either discarded as refuse or consumed as commodity.

The use of the notion of the infix, opens up the standard way in which language is conjugated to fit the temporal and contextual frame in which it is placed, however, the works of art and how it is exhibited never reaches the closed reading that happens with reading text. The insertion of the infix opens the reading rather than closes the reading of the viewer by getting to the root of the matter. The infix changes the structure of the word and offers new meaning. The artists presented in this exhibition eloquently speak the language of art and successfully articulate specific perspectives that continue to expand the conversation about visual art and challenge our notions of the work of art and debunks the mythology of an artistic life.

### Images: Infix: The Grammar of Insertion

#### Barrionics

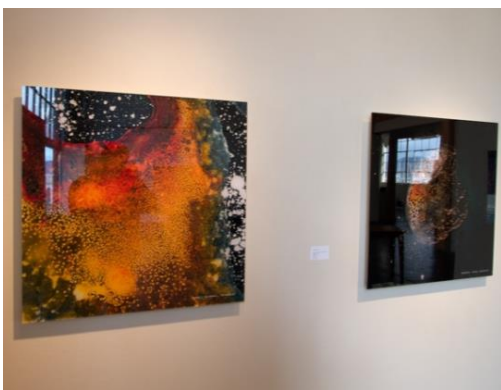




Renee Billingslea



E. G. Crichton





Lisa R. Gould



Willie Little



Lewis Watts



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