

We close 2023 with an issue that brings together contributions from scholars of different research backgrounds working individually or collaboratively. The threads of discussions are interdisciplinary in method, weaving in arguments drawn from various fields such as history, literature, film, visual arts, and video games. By engaging with cultural texts which apply different frameworks, the studies in this issue are sites of convergence across disciplines, thus providing readers with new considerations and different dimensions of cultural materials, practices, and traditions.

Comics enthusiasts and scholars will appreciate the meticulous analysis of Filipino cultural icon Darna by Cherish Aileen Aguilar Brillon. In “Darna as Canonical Counter-Discourse on Power in the Superhero Genre,” Darna’s provenance is traced by looking at the icon’s cultural moorings, foreign influences, and transformations as a result of its migration from comics to film. Beginning with an exploration of Darna’s source of power—the stone she swallows in films—the study locates the heroine’s narrative within the Filipino belief system and folk culture. Local concepts such as *agimat* or *anting-anting* (amulets or talismans), *sapi* (spirit possession), and *loob* (pure heart) are critical in understanding the source of this power which is deeply rooted in a web of Filipino beliefs. But more than refuting the general impression that Darna’s figure is derivative of Marvel’s Wonder Woman and other western heroes, the study presents a culturally-grounded reading of a popular text which has continuously entertained comics readers and moviegoers.

Equally interesting in its analysis of an element in films and videos is “On Cam! Micronarrative-Based Typology of Cameos in Films and Video Games” by SF. Luthfie Arguby Purnomo, Lilik Untari, Shabrina An Adzhani, Yustin Sartika, SF. Lukfianka Sanjaya Purnama, Ikke Dewi Pratama, and Wildi Adila. Analyzing 30 films and 30 video games, this descriptive study foregrounds the function of cameos in films and games. By deploying the micronarrative theory, ergodic literature theory, theory of intrusive narrative, and the gestalt perspective on narrativity, the study looks at the Marvel Cinematic Universe and discusses the premises of and rationalization for a cameo’s appearance—Stan Lee in *Spider Man* and *Iron Man*, for example—its commercial and social value, and degree of intrusion in the film or game. Readers will find fascinating the detailed investigation of the effects of cameos on the macronarratives and how by knowing these, film and video makers will be able to anticipate the degree of intrusion and thus find ways of remediation.

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Pointing at how graffiti has been acknowledged as an object of study in academic discourse, Harvey James G. Castillo discusses the key currents in graffiti studies. Titled “In Praise and Defense of Graffiti: A Functional Review of Graffiti Literature” the study identifies the multiple trajectories of graffiti during the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern period and explains how graffiti/latrinalia could claim and reclaim spaces and provide insights on class, sex, and gender. Always transgressive to a certain extent, hence subject to censure, graffiti according to the works reviewed are perpetually under threat of erasure. In examining the major themes and theoretical approaches used in historicizing graffiti, Castillo’s study encourages Filipino scholars to explore this cultural form—considered art or otherwise—with the same academic rigor as other literary and cultural practices.

Also analyzing art in public places is Rose Pascual-Capulla and Feorillo Petronilo A. Demeterio III in their study “Ang mga Ideolohiyang Politikang na Nakapaloob sa mga Piling Obra ng Sining Saysay na Kabilang sa Pahanon ng Batas Militar Hanggang sa Kasalukuyan.” Four paintings depicting the Martial Law and post-Martial Law period are analyzed for their ideological stance. As part of Sining Saysay, a collaborative project between artists and historians from the University of the Philippines, the UP Alumni Association, and the Araneta Center, Inc., the four paintings end the twenty-three sequential panels covering different historical events in the Philippines; seven more cultural panels complete the thirty-panel exhibit at the Gateway Gallery, Gateway Mall, Cubao, Quezon City. Because Sining Saysay’s public art encourages people to locate themselves in the narrative of Philippine history, Pascual-Capulla and Demeterio III recognize the need to identify the underpinning ideology of each panel by analyzing the visual images and iconography in the artworks and assigning possible meanings to them. Four ideologies emerge from the juxtaposition of numerous images of Martial Law, human rights violations, activism, and democracy: dominant liberal libertarian, dominant radical libertarian, a dominant ideology that is somewhere between radical libertarian and liberal libertarian, and dominant liberal libertarian ideology.

Returning to the idea and claims that Philippine National Hero Jose Rizal practiced Filipino folk fencing, Andrea Rollo’s “Reflections on José Rizal, *Arnis*, and the Nature of ‘Historical Knowledge’” examines Rizal’s novels, memoirs, letters to his family members, friends, and fellow reformists, and oral accounts and biographies about him in order to engage with arguments repudiating the hero’s achievement as a martial artist. Complementing the meticulous appreciation of evidence confirming Rizal’s practice of Filipino martial arts is the fine attention to terms used to refer to *arnis de mano* in the documents analyzed, the context given to oral accounts about Rizal’s life, and the extensive examples provided in the study to lay the groundwork for its arguments. Ultimately, the study explains the possible reasons behind the

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disputes surrounding Rizal being an *arnisador* and reflects on the politics informing what is accepted as historical knowledge.

Two articles in this issue are significant contributions to scholarship on art, literature, and culture in the Visayas. In a way supplementing each other, the two studies deepen our knowledge of the Panayanon universe and how it continues to inform contemporary practices and material culture.

Maria Christine M. Muyco and Katrina Francesca M. Nazareno's "Visual Depictions and Ponderings: Sinday-Muro and Other Beings of Panay Cosmology" is an elaboration of Panay cosmology which unravels as they discuss and comment on each other's works. Nazareno's is an 8x4 foot pen-and-ink mural depicting the structure of the Panayanon universe and its cosmic beings, particularly Sinday-Muro, while Muyco's is an extensive field research on the Panay Bukidnon, the indigenous people in the highlands of Panay. The latter's work anchors Nazareno's rendering of Panay Bukidnon's *sugidanon* or epic chant.

Two voices alternatively explain the mural: the artist's description of her choice of color, shade, texture, and images depicting the epic's characters, clothes, jewelry, weapons, and abilities, and the ethnographer's explanation of how these images reflect the fluid relationships among the different cosmic layers. Highlighting Sinday-Muro's role as a mediator in Panay cosmology, the discussion then foregrounds the concept of *husay*, a method of resolving issues and conflicts. Muyco's description of the process of mediation shows the importance of this practice among the Panay Bukidnon of today, evident in the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples' (NCIP) acknowledgment of the negotiations process of indigenous peoples.

Also exploring the nuances of another Panayanon concept is John Ray A. Hontanar's "Decolonizing *Kaagian*: Babaylanism in *Agi* Poetry." Disentangling the different aspects of *gahum* or the Panayanon term for power and using it as a framework in reading gay poetry by Hiligaynon poets, John Iremil Teodoro and Leonard Francis Alcoran, the study establishes the need to recognize *agi* as an expression of homosexuality in Panay, Central Philippines. Because the specificity of *kaagian* or the performance of indigenous homosexuality requires a lens grounded in Panayanon culture, Hontanar locates the poems analyzed in the tradition of *babaylanism* or the practice of shamans (healers) in Panay. It is in the poetry of Teodoro and Alcoran that *gahum* is manifested in the babaylanic voice and images of the babaylan as a shaman, culture bearer, and political leader. And it is in their poetry that gender constructions, Catholicism, capitalism, and neo-colonialism are challenged. Hontanar's study complements that of Muyco and Nazareno by calling attention to the endurance of Panayanon mythos and tradition.

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This issue closes with Honey Alerta's review of Chuckberry Pascual's *Bayan ng mga Bangkay* (2022), a collection of queer horror tales with folklore elements unfolding against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, authoritarian rule, drug war violence, and Philippine folktales. In reading closely the stories and the various dimensions of horror experienced by gay men, Alerta points out how Philippine folklore is successfully interwoven in the narratives to highlight the *bakla* identity. Alerta's review-analysis of the collection shows how Pascual's horror stories are attuned to Philippine history and culture and paves the way for the possible incorporation of queer identity in the realm of Philippine folklore.

This issue encourages readers to think more deeply about material and non-material culture and how they perpetually inform each other. As the articles attest to, an object/subject of study acquires new significance when the analysis are historically, culturally, and contextually specific. As important as the critical insights emerging from the studies is the healthy skepticism they demonstrate towards knowledge production. It is with optimism that this issue will engender more studies and conversations, even arguments, among scholars who are cognizant of the need to consider the social formation in which cultural practices and products exist.



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