

## FILIPINA ARTIST IN THE FINE ARTS: DISRUPTED GENEALOGIES, EMERGING IDENTITIES\*

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### *Abstract*

*This paper represents my initial attempt to plot the artistic lineage of Filipina artists from the 19th century to the present. My account pays particular attention to the following turning points: the advent of modern art brought about by colonizers; the entry of women into the colonial art school; the pre-and post-years; the emergence of an organized feminist movement in the arts in the 70s to the 80s; and the continuing present. Throughout these events, women put forward new images of identity, thus presenting other modes of seeing and telling history.*

The first women artists of the Philippines, as in the rest of Southeast Asia, were the cloth weavers, basket weavers, and embroiderers of precolonial times. "Art" then was an integral part of daily life, and the artist was often anonymous, unlike the named artists of museum-related art. Although she often left her individual mark on her work, her personal aesthetics were subsumed to her community's meanings, values, and needs. Her art was largely produced by hand in homes and small villages, from materials she found around her.

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With the advent of colonization and the modern economy, women's art forms have been downgraded to "handicrafts" and exotic trinkets. Although still made by hand, they are now more impersonal and mass-produced for the tourist and global markets. More often than not, this change has harmed women and their communities.

The back-breaking, time-consuming but non-lucrative work contradicts scholars' and development experts' idealized view of handicrafts and women's supposedly important role in the traditional household as well as their creative prowess and virtuosity. The real beneficiaries of the women's labor are the traders in the tourist industry and the multinational companies. And when the women are incorporated into development programs, they are "saddled with yet a third burden – they [become] beneficiaries of women's projects or training programs, and [add] attendance at seminars on sewing, crafts, or nutrition and child care to their already filled days." (Van Esterik 1995).

### **Modernism and Modernity: Public/Private Dichotomy**

Women's handiwork has been dismissed as "low art" and "merely" communal, ephemeral, mechanical, organic, and non-intellectual ever since artists' identity and the art world's patterns of patronage shifted under colonialism. In the Philippines, the native craftsperson was transformed into a specialized "creator" trained in art. The shift in patronage involved a "movement of artifact" as "object of indigenous veneration to the Church and to some extent the State, and later to the market" (Flores 1997a) of the ruling elite during colonial and more recent times (under the regime of former President Ferdinand Marcos, for example, and the gallery system.)

In Bali, indigenous painting, which originally performed ritual functions, was assimilated into art academies as “fine” art and into the international art market as “tourist” art (Forge 1993). In Java, *seniman* (artist) and *pelukis* (painter) are relatively recent terms (Wright 1993). The Thai court and nobility and military government imported Italian art and artists in the 1890s, 1910s, and 1930s. In Vietnam, the French established in 1925 the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts de L’Indochine, now the Hanoi Fine Arts College. Later, the country formed a variety of “overseas attachments” – the North with the former Soviet Union and China, the South with the US and France, until reunification in 1975 (Clark 1993).

These developments gave birth to Southeast Asian modern art. Art gradually lost its association with artisanal production, religious or royal statuary, record keeping, decoration, storytelling, function, and folk art. Art came to be known as an object of contemplation in a specialized domain of the “fine arts,” such as museums and galleries. The centerpiece of this domain is the individual genius, an attribute traditionally associated with male artists. This sexual division relegates Woman (uppercase and singular – that is, the essential, unchanging Woman) to the domain of the private, the irrational, the intuitive, and the reproductive. The public sphere is the domain of the rational, the bureaucratic, the formal – a “naturally” male, and therefore superior, enclave. The reproductive spheres of home and family, the intimate interiors of the house and the mundane needs of the body are “regarded as intrinsically female space,” and “it is women rather than men whose job is to guard the moral and physical purity of households” (Bryson 1990). As a popular 17th-century verse puts it:

The husband must be on the street to practice his trade  
The wife must stay at home to be in the kitchen  
The diligent practice of street wisdom may in the man be praised  
But with the delicate wife, there should be quiet and steady ways  
So you, industrious husband, go to earn your living  
While you, O young wife, attend to your household (Bryson 1990,  
158)

The separation between public and private spheres became particularly acute during industrialization, when women's exclusion from the public sphere of art was further reinforced and legitimized. The few women who did gain recognition were considered exceptional, gifted with male talents, or bearers of feminine virtues that defined and affirmed the "essential" differences between men and women, and ultimately confirmed masculine dominance and superiority in the arts. The phrase "woman artist" is used not to distinguish an artist according to sex, but as "distinct and decidedly different from the great artist" (Parker and Pollock 1981).

### **Women as Image and Agent of History**

In Southeast Asia, women are doubly marginalized, excluded by virtue not only of their gender but of their race. As colonized subjects, they played a minor part in the colonial script. While the male native played the central roles, the female native – deprived of education and confined to the domestic sphere – was rendered invisible and excluded from the locus of action.

In the Philippines, only two women are known to have enrolled at the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura. Opened in 1815, it was the precursor of the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Fine Arts. UP was founded in 1908. From the Academia down to the present, the College is headed

by men. Few women studied at the university until the 1970s, and the ratio of male/female students improved in favor of women only recently. Yet few women later seriously pursued art.

During colonial times, there were no female counterparts for the well-known native painters (Juan Luna, Felix Resurrection Hidalgo, and Simon Flores) nor for the vanguards of pioneering art movements (Victorio Edades, Fernando Amorsolo, Fabian dela Rosa, Jorge Pineda, and Dominador Castañeda). From Lyd Arguilla, founder of the Philippine Art Gallery, to Purita Kalaw Ledesma, founding head of the Art Association of the Philippines, to Imelda Marcos, one-time patroness of the arts, women were merely adjuncts to male artists and were not creators themselves.

Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, founding president of Kasibulan and one of the Philippines' most established artists, notes that in mixed groups women are often assigned to secretarial, housekeeping, and administrative work. This was a reason, she said, that she and other women formed Kasibulan, a group of women artists, scholars, and writers, in 1988.

In the Philippines, "women often do not have time to pursue their careers because they are expected to be the main family care-provider. The inability of most women to make a living out of their art further discourages them from getting involved in producing art" (Labrador 1996, 80). Women have certainly been banished to the domestic sphere in Davao and Zamboanga (Philippines), Bali (Indonesia), and Hanoi (Vietnam). When I asked a group of social realists in Davao why they had no female members, one of them jokingly replied, "It would be nice to have women members, especially to do the cooking." Artists of the Baguio Arts Guild (Philippines) said their group had no woman members because women would rather go abroad to be domestic helpers.

Although uttered in jest, the comments manifest the public/private sexual division in the arts. Because of their multiple burdens as mothers, wives, and daughters, and because they often do not make money as artists, more women than men choose to become art teachers, art critics, gallery owners, and museum curators. Despite the power inherent in these positions, most of them, including women artists, are unaware of the unbalanced sexual division of labor in the arts. They unwittingly assume the supporting role to the male stars of the art establishment.

### **Images of Women by Men: Mind/Body, Nature/Culture**

Women continue to be marginalized even in the midst of frenzied interest in Southeast Asian art. In the 1993 ASEAN Conference on Indigenous Art Materials for instance, the Filipino women who attended sought to bring gender issues into the discussions. The predominantly male delegation, relates Cajipe Endaya, “conveniently dismissed the subject as personal and therefore non-issues. Undaunted, the women artists proceeded to formally propose an ASEAN Conference of women during the subsequent committee meeting,” she recounts in her keynote at the 1999 Women Imaging Women Exhibit-Conference in Manila. “The policy makers were of course not ready for that. It was typical to receive such responses as ‘Why not have a Conference for Men?’ It seems the same difficulties are barring us women in Southeast Asia until today (1999).”

In the 1999 Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia, “the representation of women’s art in (the) exhibition still remains at one third of the total figures,” wrote Australian artist Pat Hoffie during the Conference plenary session. “(T)he forum of women’s art,” she

mused, "seems marginalized on the peripheries – as a kind of tea-room chat show that was, nevertheless, bursting at the seams," in reference perhaps to the forum of women curators, which was not part of the main program, and relegated to a lunch hour.

Cajipe-Endaya (1998) reports that in the 1992 Biennale of Sydney, only 39 of the 107 artists from 35 countries were women. Only two Southeast Asian countries were included: Thailand, with three male artists; and the Philippines, which she represented.

In the 1996 Second Asia Pacific Triennial of Art organized by the Queensland Art Gallery, the ratio was one female for every three male artists, with an equal number of male and female curators – a great improvement over the first triennial held in 1993, when there were no women artists from Indonesia, Singapore, China, Papua New Guinea, or Vietnam. One out of six artists from Malaysia was female, three out of nine from the Philippines, one out of seven from Thailand, two out of two from Hong Kong, two out of seven from Japan, one out of seven from Korea, three out of seven from New Zealand, and six out of nine from Australia.

The 1995 "Asian Modernism" exhibit of 50 artists from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand organized by the Japan Foundation featured two token contemporary women artists, both from the Philippines. In the 1997 "Glimpses into the Future" exhibit at the Museum of contemporary Art in Tokyo, and Hiroshima, five out of 16 artists were women.

The "KIAS" exhibit in the United States (1990-1992) had only four women out of 60 participants. The "Modern Art" exhibition in Amsterdam (1993) did not include a single woman among 22 participants. The nine Indonesian participants in the Asia-Pacific Triennial (1993-1994) were all men (Bianpoen and Jaarsma 1994).

Women's invisibility has thus become natural and deeply ingrained in modern art-historical scholarship; it persists even after colonialism, and even amidst currently fashionable buzzwords like postfeminism, postcolonialism, and post-modernism. And since duality – women exiled to the private sphere, men elevated to the public sphere – is central to modern art-historical narratives, women will “naturally” have no place in art history as it is being written.

Women's one major role in art history is that of image, model, and muse in the male artists' work. Women are painted or sculpted as earth goddess or earth mother, mother nature and motherland, priestess, nymph, vestal virgin, witch – not persons with their own identity, voice, history, needs, and aspirations. Philippine National Artist Fernando Amorsolo's classic nudes and nubile rural maidens are seemingly untouched by the hardships of agrarian life, forever youthful and innocent. They exhibit Western classical norms of femininity – regular features, nymphlike grace and slenderness, serenity, demureness, fragility. The women are dutiful wives and daughters, the men active and dynamic, casting a dominant and acquisitive gaze upon women: “Men act and women appear” (Berger 1977). Women turn themselves into an object, particularly an object of vision – a sight.

In National Artist Carlos Francisco's *Mariang Makiling*, the woman is a delectable goddess who personifies Nature, a territory to be nurtured, conquered, and protected by male power and control. The universal and transhistorical Mother image is also a favorite subject, such as *Madonna in the Slums* by National Artist Vicente Manansala, which is a seemingly radical – but heavily orientalized – departure from the European Madonna. But it still casts the mother and child in a passive light, unable to break away from their decorative and exotic wretchedness.



Ethnicity and gender are also appropriated in the name of national essence in the works of the 13 Moderns, the pioneering group assembled after World War II by Victorio Edades, the father of Philippine modern art. In their works, identity is presented as an eternal and unchanging “primitive” or “ethnic” attribute. It is often associated with the chthonic (pertaining to deities, spirits, and other beings dwelling under the earth) and the female “savage” (for example, *Two Igorot Women* and *Bontoc Folk* by Edades); or with the peasantry or rural folk, evident in Manansala’s *Nipa Hut* and *Tuba Drinkers*, the early works by Cesar Legaspi (*The Guitarist*, *Frugal Meal*, *Playing the Guitar*, and *Mother and Child*), Francisco (*Sungkaan*), and Anita Magsaysay-Ho (*Winnowing Rice*), the lone female member of the 13 Moderns.

Evident in these depictions are the mind/body, nature/culture dichotomies, where women are associated with body and nature, and men with culture and the mind. As creatures of nature and biology, women are considered irrational, emotional, intuitive, frail, and uncontrollable – attributes that are destabilizing to men’s rationality and sense of control. To maintain society’s equilibrium, women and their bodies have to be “processed” and tamed by the refinements of culture, the rationality of science and civilization, and the artifice of art and history.

At a more obvious level, this reworking is apparent in the artworks’ representation of women as passive objects of the male gaze, of women’s bodies as inert, chthonic, physical. At a more subtle level, it can be seen in how the intimate spaces of the feminine sphere are refashioned and set in opposition to the public masculine sphere of greatness, honor, and achievement.

European works such as Willem Kalf’s *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* and Cezanne’s *Still Life with Apples* deny “low-

plane reality, identified with feminine and domestic space” (Bryson 1990). Kalf portrays the table “in such a way that between the great spaces of the outer world and the reconstituted interior there is no detectable break, and an image appears of a unitary world ruled by one sex only, and presided over by a single masculine gaze” (Bryson 1990). Cezanne’s *Still Life . . .*, on the other hand, pits art against domestic space, where pitchers, glasses, and napkins lose their reference to domesticity, and are instead deployed to suit the demands of aesthetic composition and theatricality.

In the nude, on the other hand, the body is the center of the universe, but it has to be re-formed if it is to transcend the uncomfortable overtones associated with being “naked,” that is, to be without clothes, to be huddled and defenseless. Thus “the nude is not the subject of art, but a form of art” – a “balanced, prosperous and confident body” again elevated to its ideal form and a higher plane of artistic existence (Clark 1972).

In both still life and the nude, women’s bodies and the spaces they inhabit are imagined and re-shaped in art that exalts personal achievement and individual greatness. The anonymous life of the table, the intimate interiors of the house, and the creaturely life of the body are consigned to low-plane or mundane reality – an opposition that extends to the construction of gender and the division of the sexes: “And for as long as painting’s mode of vision would be constructed by men, the space in which women were obliged to lead their lives would be taken from them and imagined through the values of the ‘greater’ existence through which they were excluded” (Bryson 1990). And in order for women to be admitted into this privileged circle of greatness and genius, they have to “master” the masters’ style, and be unwitting participants in their continued subordination.

### **The First Women Artists in the Fine Arts**

At the advent of modern art, with its stress on originality and greatness in the public sphere, the presence of the first Southeast Asian women artists in the fine arts was obscured – not because no women artists were “qualified” to “make it” into the mainstream, but because they had become invisible as producers and practitioners of art.

The earliest women artists in Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines were “discovered” only recently, and little is known of them. In the Philippines, their arrival coincided with the establishment of the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura by the Spaniards in the 19th century, and in Vietnam with the founding of the Ecole Superieure des Beaux Arts d’Indochine by the French in 1925. The Academia’s first female student was Pelagia Mendoza y Gotianquin, who won an award for a bust of Columbus during the celebration of the quattrocentennial of the “discovery” of America (Flores 1996, 9). In Vietnam, Le Thi Luu entered the Ecole in 1927, the first woman to do so (Dang Thi Khue 1996).

In Indonesia, the first recognized woman fine artist is painter Emiria Sunassa, about whom little is known except that she was from the island of Ternate in the Moluccas (Bianpoen and Jaarsma 1994). It is Kartika Affandi (now Koberl), however, who was the “leading radical figure of the first generation of modern women artists in Indonesia” (Wright 1999). Sunassa did not appear to have an ongoing career as an artist. Only one painting by her is known and that was painted from a well-known photo taken by Walter Spies of a *kecak* dance performance in Bali (Wright, *ibid.*).

The Seniwati Art Gallery for Women represents two of the most senior women fine artists in Bali - Ni Made Suciarmi (b. 1932) and Dewa Biang Raka (b. 1937) – who continue

to paint in a pre-modern Balinese style. Ni Made Suciarmis is one of the few artists still skilled in Wayang (or Kamasan) painting, whose themes are drawn mainly from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics. She learned the style at the age of six while helping her uncle, a workman on a Dutch project to renovate the Palace of Justice of Klungklung. She learned even more about myths and legends when she became a dancer as a teenager. She continued painting after marrying and having children. Dewa Biang, together with her late husband (also a famous painter), was encouraged by Rudolph Bonnet, who helped develop what is now known as Balinese art. She has taught at the Seniwati Gallery of Women's Art school for talented girls since 1993 (Wright 1996).

Western influence on Thai art first appeared in the works of Khrua in Khong, a monk and the most celebrated painter in the court of King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1868). Like succeeding vanguards of major Thai art movements, he had no known female counterpart. The first students at the School of Fine Arts, which was founded in 1933 (later renamed the University of Fine Arts and now known as Silpakorn University), were all men, including the painter Fua Hariphitak and sculptors Pimarn Mulpramook and Sitthidet Sanghiran.

English-language publications mention no pre-20th-century women modern artists. Misiem Yipintsoi, "one of the few female painters recognized," emerged at a later period of modernism and nationalism (Poshyananda 1992). She won three gold medals in painting from 1949 to 1951. She was also the only woman, besides M.C. Pilailekha Diskul, ever invited to judge at the National Exhibition of Art, "which in those days was the only recognisable art contest in the Thai art scene" (Poshyananda 1993). A recent exhibition catalogue (*Asian Modernism in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand*) mentions her as an impressionist landscape painter

and as having “played an important part in the development of Thai modern art since the post war years to 1958” (Rodboon 1995). But neither her works nor those of any other Thai women were represented in that exhibition.

### **First- and Second-wave Filipinas**

Filipina artists were better represented than their Thai counterparts during the early years of modern art. Aside from Mendoza y Gotanquin, Paz Paterno was another important artist in the 19th century and the first Filipina to paint a landscape. Her meticulous attention to detail seems to have grown out of the feminine art of embroidery. She was also courageous, a “concededly frail woman” who submitted “herself to the rigorous discipline of her art, was able to break through the barriers of convention and . . . make herself felt in the male-dominated world of art” (Alice Coseteng in Flores 1996).

Carmen Zaragoza y Rojas (1867-1943) was from a family of artists – uncle Felix Rojas was an architect; uncle Felipe, a landscapist. Her *Dos Inteligencias* won a prize at the 1892 Columbus celebrations and, in 1895, she was awarded a copper medal for her two landscapes at the Exposicion Regional de Filipinos. Many Filipinas participated in the exposition, including Concha and Adele Paterno (Paz Paterno’s stepsisters), Concepcion de Montilla, Patricia Reyes, Ana Garcia Plana, Josefa Majo, Concepcion Ortiz, Olimpia Teran de Abella, Rafaella Calanta, and Fermina David (Flores 1996).

The “second wave” emerged only in the 1940s and 1950s, the period of early Philippine modernism, when Victorio Edades challenged the conservative school of “sweetness and light” and formed the 13 Moderns. Anita Magsaysay-Ho was the lone female member. Educated at the University of the

Philippines (UP) School of Fine Arts, The Cranbrook Academy in Michigan and the New York Institute, she is said to be the first Filipina artist to study art abroad.

Other noted women artists of this generation is the late Paris-based painter Nena Saguil, one of the last revered expatriate painters, and the only non-objective abstract painter of her generation, Saguil successfully entered a territory dominated by men, but at the same time chose to inhabit a world of her own beyond a conventional nuclear-family lifestyle and away from her country. Based in Paris until her death in 1994, she worked largely in the neorealist abstract mode of her older contemporaries, Vicente Manansala and H.R. But her other works show that she had other concerns as well. Two works from the 1950s, for example, “show the artist’s range of figurative repertoire as she portrays an enlarged hymen and a woman cleaning a toilet bowl splattered with human waste” (Flores 1996).

Norma Belleza, who obtained her fine arts degree from the University of Santo Tomas (UST), is one of the first women artists to pursue her art consistently and to produce a considerable body of work. Virginia Ty-Navarro, who was married to the late National artist Jerry Elizalde Navarro, studied fine arts at UST when Edades was director and Carlos “Botong” Francisco, another modern vanguard, an art teacher. Other notable women fine arts students in at the time were Celia Diaz-Laurel of UP and Rosario Bitanga of UST.

Also part of this wave are Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, Virginia Flor-Agbayani, Lydia Villanueva-Arguilla, and Araceli Limcaco-Dans. Ledesma, Agbayani, and Dans were the first women students at the UP School of Fine Arts (formerly the Academia de Dibujo y Pintura, and today the UP College of Fine Arts), which was directed by Fernando Amorsolo and Guillermo Tolentino, vanguards of the conservative school

against whom Edades and the early moderns rebelled. Like their male classmates, the women trained in portraiture, still life, and landscape.

Of this group, only Limcaco-Dans was to pursue art making almost exclusively, along with being a wife and mother. As a student, she was already a skilled portrait painter, with a keen sense of form. She put herself through school by selling her portraits of her classmates, all the while caring for her mother and sisters. Trained in the Amorsolo School, she is largely known for her *calado* series, which refers to needlework technique, meticulously done by hand, before the advent of embroidery machines. However, she since moved on to nude painting and surreal still life, where her delicate *calados* are hung on clothesline or wrapped around the rung of a ladder, which she says, indirectly evoke the tension she feels “about the country”—a meaning which she says may not be readily apparent at first reading (Kintanar and Ventura 1999).

In the interview with Kintanar and Ventura, Araceli-Dans states: “Why does everything have to be on a table? Why always fruits and flowers? Why not rags, objects inside old cartons? So I did my *Sampayan* series, where I hung *calados* on the clothesline. Nobody else did that before.” On the *calado* she painted wrapped around the rung of a ladder, she says: “The ladder is rotten, it’s eaten up by the termites. One of the steps is detached. You cannot go up or you’ll fall down. It has a lot of tension. It’s probably me. That’s an aspect of me, my personality. I worry about the country, so I put some of tension in the picture. But unless you ask me for the meaning, you may not see it (Kintanar and Ventura 1999).

Limcaco-Dans’ contemporaries held administrative positions. The technically proficient Agbayani worked on her art during her term as director of the Philippine High School for the Arts. Ledesma founded Art Association of the Philip-

pines (AAP) and Arguilla the Philippine Art Gallery (PAG)—two important institutions that propelled the Edades-led modernist rebellion forward. From the PAG sprang the first all-woman group in literature and the arts in the Philippines, consisting of Arguilla, Estrella Alfon, Flora Lansang, and Trinidad Tarrosa Subido.

The “third wave” of women artists emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, largely by way of printmaking workshops conducted by Manuel Rodriguez, Sr. They include Adiel Arevalo, Brenda Fajardo, Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi, Evelyn Collantes, Petite Peredo-Cataguas, Ileana Lee, Flora Mauleon, and Rhoda Recto, among others. Fajardo, Cajipe-Endaya, and the Paris-based Gelvezon-Tequi are still active and making their mark in the art world.

### **Shifting Spaces, Negotiated Identities**

The emergence of these women also coincided with the rise of a wave of women artists who redefined their identity and the terrain of the struggle for women’s empowerment, either as individuals or as part of a group. It was also during this period when important women’s groups were founded. Among them are Kasibulan, an organization of women in the arts and art-related fields, and Kalayaan, a women’s political group (Flores 1996). Both founded in the late 1980s, the groups continue to critique a wide range of social ills and to join the broader struggle for political and social change.

Makibaka, established shortly before President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972, was an underground revolutionary group. Women’s groups of various political persuasions later emerged, from the militant coalition Gabriela to the women’s desk of the government’s Cultural Center of the Philippines. Out of the debates on theory and practice,



feminist perspectives grew and took shape. Although many women artists steered clear of the debates, a significant number worked from a distinct feminist consciousness, the most articulate of whom were and continue to be nurtured by Kasibulan.

Kasibulan, which made it possible for women to launch empowering strategies, was initiated in 1987 by a maker of handcrafted leather bags (Ida Bugayong), a sculptor (Julie Lluch), and three painters (Fajardo, Cajipe-Endaya, and Anna Fer). They were later joined by Baidy Mendoza, "a terracotta artist who is very vocal about her notion of her craft (which she sells at non-art prices) as a form of individual expression, thus fusing 'art' and 'craft' as one and the same thing" (Cajipe-Endaya 1999).

The founding of Kasibulan enabled the women to take advantage of the democratic space cleared by the dismantling of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, and the "subsequent reconstruction of democratic institutions," reveals founding president Cajipe-Endaya. The triumph at Epifanio de los Santos Avenue or EDSA, the site of a massive "people power" protest rally that eventually led to Marcos' flight to exile, she continues, "allowed us space and time to focus on our situation as women. We noted that the images of women we made ourselves were always in relation to, if not in service of others, as sister, as daughter, as wife, as mother. As we shared each other's life and works, we were spurred to continuously search for distinct womanly symbols . . . The sisterly bond cultivated among the women artists of that time is alive and well today" (Cajipe-Endaya 1999).

But the sisterly bond and visibility for women artists were not Kasibulan's only concern. Its members questioned the very parameters of art and artistry as defined by the mainstream by redefining and challenging the stereotypes about

artists and their roles. Instead of confining themselves to their studios and the academe, they broke through the boundaries that enclosed them as women and as artists, and advocated women's rights, not only for artists, but also for other professionals, workers, and members of cultural communities. Kasibulan's exhibits and forums not only revealed women's potential for excellence but also brought together professional city artists and nameless village weavers in shattering the primacy of "fine art" over "folk" or "indigenous" art. Exhibits such as "Filipina Migranteng Mangggagawa" (Filipina Migrant Workers) "pushed women artists into the arena of advocacy and exacted from them the commitment to analyze the current diaspora of Philippine women labor across the global ethnoscape" (Flores 1996).

Kasibulan linked up with women of the southern Luzon artisan town of Paete, Laguna, in the northern Philippines, by introducing alternative means of casting papier-mache or taka. Since wood is scarce, Kasibulan's terracotta sculptors made casts in plaster and clay; and since most of the town's products cater to tourists and overseas markets, the artists created alternative images. Instead of reindeer and Santa Claus, for example, they shaped the taka in the image of heroines from Philippine history, legends, and myths. They learned the conventions, aesthetics, and requirements of taka-making by observing the women at work and by assimilating their "folk" ways of painting and imaging. The project not only requires the women of Kasibulan and Paete to work closely together, but also offers them modest financial reward.

By cooperating with each other, women artists create alternative local art practices and ways of disseminating their art. Projects funded by the state's cultural arm, National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), for example,

enable women to produce art that, ironically, challenges and transforms the foundations of the state's cultural and tourist industries, "break[s] down the walls of the canons and curricula of the establishment, and build[s] new structures of literacy and pedagogy" (Flores 1997b).

The women demolish the traditional stereotype of the apolitical artist by "finding new ways of doing and making art, and articulating its political message across diverse constituencies in academe, government, the private sector and media" (Flores 1997b). Fajardo, for example, trains future generations of artists; as former chair of the University of the Philippines (UP) Department of Art Studies, she introduced curricular and pedagogical reforms; as vice-head of the NCCA Committee on the Visual Arts, she spearheaded outreach programs in rural areas; and as its curator, she made the mausoleum-like UP Vargas Museum more accessible to the public.

In her hometown, the central Philippine city of Bacolod, Fajardo helps improve living conditions in Hanao-Hanao, a community of farmers and plantation workers, by promoting textile weaving (which revitalizes the dying art of making *patadyong*, a plaid cloth); fan making (which started as a way of enabling people to pay their debts); paper making; basket weaving; pottery (a craft tradition in nearby areas); and the documenting of folk dances, songs, and games (a way of retrieving forgotten forms of folk culture).

More than just a nostalgic revival of dormant art forms, these activities are changing the political, economic, and cultural life of Hanao-Hanao. They begin to break down the hierarchical and feudal relationship between landowner and tenant. They give the people the confidence to make their own decisions. They allow them to rely less on loans from the landowner. They keep the people busy, putting a stop to their endless gossip and coffee-drinking sessions.

Fajardo founded Baglan (meaning a person chosen by the spirits as a bridge between the spirit and earthly world), a group which helps the community install sanitation systems, electricity, and water sources; set up child care and parenting projects; promote herbal medicine, nutrition, and primary health care; and plant vegetable gardens.

Fajardo's itinerary as artist, educator, and community organizer began not in the academe, but was shaped by several streams that at times diverged and converged. Her bachelor's degree is in agriculture from UP; her master's degree is in art education from the University of Wisconsin; and her doctoral degree is in Philippine Studies, also from UP. As a child, her main interest was dance and body movement (her mother, Libertad Villanueva, was a folk-dance scholar). Her fascination with line and "the beautiful works of art" she saw in Wisconsin brought her to the visual arts, particularly printmaking. She attended Manuel Rodriguez, Sr.'s workshop, launching a successful career, first as a printmaker and graphic artist working in intaglio, drawing, and relief print; and later as a painter whose works, particularly those that depict tarot cards, portray events from history and women's images in highly original ways.

Yet Fajardo's art is young, as she started her career in the late 1980s after taking a 15-year detour into theater. While working with the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), a national theater movement heavily influenced by the anti-formalist aesthetics of the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, she designed sets, costumes, and posters, and directed, acted and taught. By the time she returned to painting and drawing, while staying on with PETA, she had matured politically, emotionally, and artistically.

The intersection of a personal crisis and her theater experience was a major turning point in her life, when her artistic

and spiritual paths crossed. "I believe in reincarnation and karma," she says, "and I believe I have a mission. Were it not for the crisis with my boyfriend, I would have gotten married, had children, and I would not have been able to accomplish my mission. I also realized that it wasn't the man who was important – it was the idea that I was supposed to be married and have a child." (Interview 1997) She has since transcended these pre-given roles and followed another path. Today, as a single woman, she may be free of the burdens of child rearing, but she also has multiple roles and considerable responsibilities, all of which demand a balancing skill that, if we go by her anthroposophical beliefs, needs several lifetimes to develop.

### **"Somebody Has Got To Do It"**

Working closely with Fajardo on several projects is Cajipe-Endaya, an organizer, writer, and advocate of Filipino women's rights here and abroad. She founded the NCCA-funded Pananaw, the first Philippine art journal of its kind. She held important positions and continues to be active in the NCCA Visual Arts Committee.

Her activism started in the late 1960s, when she was a fine arts student at UP. A self-described moderate at the height of militant and revolutionary activism, her growing discontent with the Marcos regime pushed her into student politics. "It was not my ambition to be a student leader or Fine Arts College Council president," she says. But faced with so many curricular and pedagogical issues and a studentry in disarray, she felt that "somebody has got to do it." And even now she feels that "when something has got to be done, then it has to be done." (Interview 1997)

After graduation, she taught some courses and pursued graduate studies in art history and criticism at UP, and worked as a researcher and writer for various art and culture publications of the National Library. The central point of her life, however, was raising her three children, which for her “had a certain kind of isolation.” Now that her children are grown, she has more time for her art even if her family continues to be her most important concern. As a homemaker she confronts several problems everyday, but, she confides on the whole “life has been kind to me. This is why I feel I have a moral responsibility to give something back to the larger world out there.” (Interview 1997)

One of Cajipe-Endaya’s constant companions in the printmaking workshop was Ofelia Gelvezon-Tequi, who was then a humanities teacher at UP. A UP fine arts and English literature graduate, Gelvezon-Tequi was known as an artist even as a student. Today she is acclaimed as one of the foremost exponents of printmaking in the Philippines, praised not only for her artistic consistency and robust iconography but also for the exacting nature of her prints. Now married and settled in Paris, Gelvezon-Tequi regularly returns to Manila to exhibit.

Another product of the Rodriguez printmaking workshops is Ivi Avellana-Cosio, a founder of the Philippine Association of Printmakers (PAP) in 1968. Inspired by the patterns of the Mangyan, T’boli, and Yakan cultural communities, she is also fascinated by pre-Hispanic history; her works have a recurrent motif – the *alibata*, a precolonial writing system that continues to be used by the Tigbanua in Palawan and the Hanonoo in Mindoro.

Other artists of note in this generation include Agnes Arellano and Julie Lluch, two of the few women sculptors in

the Philippines. Arellano works in cold cast marble and plaster, among others, and Lluch in clay.

After studying psychology at UP, Arellano “went into psychedelics. I got hooked on downers, then I got married to Joey Smith (a 1970s rock icon). Then, my father (a well-known architect) offered to take me to Europe.” (Interview 1997) She lived in Paris for three years and a half, after which she took a perfectly conventional job doing evaluation and monitoring research at the Development Academy of the Philippines. Then she decided to study sculpture at UP, where she obtained her second degree in 1979.

One of her artistic turning points happened while she was in Spain “sorting out my love-life” – her family home burned down and her parents died in the fire. One of her works depicts two skeletons in the act of making love, locked in an embrace that recalls the way her parents were found after the fire, “their innards still intact . . . lying one on top of the other.” From the ashes Arellano built – along with husband Michael Adams – Pinaglabanan Galleries, which was a haven for highly experimental shows during the 1980s. It was both a “memorial to the dead and a statement not to stop at death, for one must think of the living” (in Bunoan 1997). In her life and art, the theme of creation-after-destruction is a major thread.

Lluch is one of the few openly feminist artists and writers in the country as well as one of the most prolific and articulate. She is also a founder and core member of Kasibulan, Kalayaan, and the Philippine Women Artists Collective. As a teacher of philosophy and English at a women’s college, she organized a student art laboratory.

A largely self-taught artist, her undergraduate degree is in philosophy, from UP. As a girl, she loved ballet and music; in college she also developed a passion for theater. She came to

know the visual arts through her marriage to a famous painter, Danilo Dalena. But she did not practice art seriously until after she gave birth to her third child, “when I hovered on the brink of a breakdown,” she writes. “The doctors put me heavily on depressants and I walked around the house like a zombie unable to care for my baby.” She continues, “As many times as I was rushed to the emergency room because I was dying, so many times the nurses told me it was all in my mind which was going, going. Fiercely, I held on to the last weak strands that held together my sundered selves . . .”

It was during “this dark night,” she writes, “when I hit upon this wild idea that I could somehow save myself - through art . . . because I have known even as a child that unless I was being a creator, I wasn’t fully alive.” That was when she “dropped everything – the psychiatric and hypnotic sessions and my trances and a floundering teaching job at a girls’ convent school and announced to my surprised husband that I was going to be what I really wanted to be – an artist” (Lluch 1997).

Now she follows the path of spirituality, which, she insists, has revitalized rather than impoverished her creativity: “My art didn’t perish, I only stopped being a ‘mere’ artist. Lluch writes that her present preoccupations are “too intense even for art, but knowing a peace that ‘passes human understanding.’” It is in this way, too, that she ceases not only to be a “mere” artist but also a “mere” feminist.

### **The Conceptual Stream**

Cajipe-Endaya, Lluch, Fajardo, and the early Gelvezon-Tequi belong to an important aesthetic stream of the 1970s: social realism and its aesthetics of protest. Another stream of women artists – Yoly Laudico, Genara Banzon, and Lani Mae-



stro – belongs to an opposing and equally important paradigm of that era: the “conceptual” tradition, with its uncompromising aesthetics of experimentation.

Although no longer producing art, Laudico is a pioneer. She was part of Shop 6, a short-lived group (May 1974–February 1975) that staged some of the country’s most significant exhibitions. At one exhibit, she gathered discards of self-photograph machines, grouped the discards according to the discernible outfits of the subjects – “those with spaghetti straps, those wearing black” – and pasted them onto six panels of plywood. Once, she poured oil on a huge piece of cut glass. One installation consisted of twigs soaked in crude oil, thrown onto fishnet-covered walls. Of one of her works she says, “I just saw the paint move and that movement generated in me an element of surprise, an element of satisfaction, an element of pleasure. I want something that I cannot predict” (Flores 1998).

Unlike her male colleagues, who once described Shop 6 gatherings as “another good reason for drinking,” she took the group’s goals seriously: “The process of thinking is clearly manifested. The thought, the idea, the abstract motion is seen. There’s a thought behind my work; it’s not just an impulse to paint a pretty picture” (*ibid.*).

The principles of Shop 6 live on, thanks largely to Roberto Chabet, the acknowledged leader of the conceptual movement, the first museum curator of the Cultural Center of the Philippines and an influential teacher at UP. Among his outstanding former students are Lani Maestro, now based in Canada, and Francesca Enriquez. Their younger colleagues include Katya Guerrero, Ma. Angelica Bunoan, and Aileen Familara.

Maestro’s artistic practice started in 1977, when she graduated from the UP College of Fine Arts. Like many others of her generation, her early works were social realist,

perhaps a logical consequence of her involvement in the underground anti-Marcos movement. Another strand in her artistic life, however, was the important influence of Chabet and his particular brand of modernism. These strands are woven into Maestro's respect for traditional Asian art and indigenous crafts. Her themes are belonging, exile, home/land, identity, and difference. Maestro also writes and edits art journals, books, and catalogues. She teaches part-time and is co-founder of Galerie Burning and Burning Books in Montreal (Labrador 1996). She visits the Philippines regularly.

Other women artists similarly walk different paths and chart their own direction, not only in their art but also in other fields. Among them are Kasibulan member Paz Abad Santos, who works in burlap assemblage; Jakarta-based Pacita Abad, who works in trapunto; Impy Pilapil, who does murals and sculptural works in glass; Jeannie Javelosa, also an art writer and art administrator; Susan Fetalvero-Roces, also an important member of Art Association of the Philippines and Kasibulan; Virginia Dandan and Araceli Dans-Lee, daughter of Araceli Limcaco-Dans, also teachers at the UP College of Fine Arts who hold important positions in the university. Women artists who concentrate on terracotta and pottery are Nelfa Querubin, Tessy Pettyjohn, Anne de Guzman, Kay de Lange, Baidy Mendoza, and Lanelle Abueva-Fernando. Veronica Lim-Yuyitung and Phyllis Zaballero continue to excel in painting. Jean Marie Syjuco also deserves mention for her notable experimental works in the 1980s and her performances in the early 1990s.

### **New Wave**

Today, a new wave of women artists is "emerging" in the sense that they are chronologically and/or professionally

younger than their more established colleagues, and started their artistic careers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet they have chalked up an impressive track record as professional artists, each in her own way. Among them are Yasmin Almonte, Francesca Enriquez, Karen Flores, and Cristina Taniguichi.

Almonte had her first group show in 1988. At her first solo in 1992, the buyers snapped up her works. She completed her master's degree at the University of Northern Iowa and taught part-time at the UP College of Fine Arts.

Her life is punctuated by what she describes as "turbulence." Born out of wedlock at a time when such unions were unthinkable, she was a solitary child, spending her time looking out the window, play acting, and telling herself stories. "It became a creative world," she says, "maybe because when you're alone and lonely, you've got to find a way of reaching out outside yourself." (Interview 1997)

After finding "escape" in a marriage that later failed, Almonte further isolated herself. A single parent with little work experience, she toyed with the idea of studying dress-making to support her children but realized early on that her talent lay in painting and drawing. She enrolled at the UP College of Fine Arts, completing her studies with the support of mentors and friends, among them the late Jose Joya, former dean of the college and a leading practitioner of abstract art at the time.

The next turning point came when she pursued graduate studies in Iowa, where she met her second husband and "soul mate." Leaving home was an epiphany – it made her more aware of her link to other women in the broader social structure. While Almonte does not consider herself a feminist, she is aware of the conditions of other women and the differences and disadvantages emanating from class, racial, and ethnic origins.

Enriquez, on the other hand, disavows any political intent and content in her art and in her life. She describes herself as an “overprotected” homebody who paints what is “familiar - the house.” Her works are predominantly “interior,” both in subject matter and attitude. Prone to solitude, she seldom left her parents’ rambling house, where she worked before leaving to explore her options abroad.

As one of the few artists who make a living solely through their art, Enriquez admits that she does not feel discriminated against because she is a woman. She earns her keep by sending her “saleable” works to her agent in the Philippines. She has exhibited and participated in cultural exchanges in Manila, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Hong Kong. She received the prestigious Thirteen Artists Award, bestowed by the Cultural Center of the Philippines upon promising young artists, and the UNESCO-Aschberg Bursaries for Artists, which funded her graduate studies at the Norwich School of Art and Design in England.

While Almonte and Enriquez are politically ambivalent, Karen Flores is consciously feminist and can be considered her generation’s heir to the tradition started by Fajardo and Cajipe-Endaya. She started exhibiting in 1988, mostly as part of Sanggawa and Salingpusa – groups known for collective and individual works imbued with strong social realist themes. Flores contributes to the groups’ advocacy and commissioned projects of mainly large-scale paintings and murals. Either as part of Sanggawa or on her own, she represented her country at cultural events in Tokyo, Sydney, Perth, and Copenhagen. She also worked as a writer and artist for various publications.

While Almonte, Enriquez, and Flores are Manila residents who formally trained at the UP College of Fine Arts, Taniguchi is based in the central Philippine university town of

Dumaguete. A largely self-taught artist, she obtained her bachelor's degree in communication and her master's degree in English literature from Silliman University. Married to a Japanese, she runs an establishment that is a gallery, restaurant, and pension house, and doubles as a nerve center for artists from Dumaguete, Cebu, and Bacolod. Since her first exhibition in 1989, she has exhibited often in Manila, Dumaguete, Cebu, and Bacolod.

Bunoan of the UP College of Fine Arts is emerging as a conceptual artist and feminist art historian. Her undergraduate thesis, "Breaking Apollonians: Filipina Artists from 1975 to the Present," documents the works of 12 Filipina artists, which she exhibited for her graduation project in 1997. The thesis and the exhibit brought together works that represent a wide range of media, processes, temperaments, thematic concerns, and levels of feminist consciousness.

Despite its theoretical and methodological gaps, the exhibit showed a curatorial and critical competence and aesthetic cohesiveness not found in past and even the more recent all-women exhibits in the Philippines. It "is a pitch for staging single-gender shows as an aggressive strategy for furthering the feminist agenda – an agenda which is not at all as down pat as its antagonists or protagonists assume it to be" (Legaspi-Ramirez 1998).

Bunoan's interest in women's art is a result of her involvement with human rights groups before she entered the university. She shifted to fine arts when she found out that community development as it was taught was "too heavy on theory but too little about actually helping people." (Interview 1997) She then studied industrial design but could not see herself working in a demanding corporate environment. She later studied art history, since she wanted to teach, then took a second degree in painting. Unlike most artists, who

believe that creativity is theory-less, Bunoan thinks that “theory and studio work complement each other” and that they should not be separated.

She decided to work on women artists for her thesis because “nobody writes about the subject.” Bunoan deserves credit for venturing into a young field littered with theoretical landmines. Her brave attempt sends a signal not only to those bound by outdated paradigms but also to those deeply engrossed in feminist praxis but unable to seriously challenge its orthodoxies.

Also promising is Sandra Torrijos, who opened Sands Gallery in 1998, a venue for young (chronologically or professionally) women artists “who have potential but need some time to develop.” The gallery, says Torrijos, seeks “to encourage, support, and promote young women artists by way of discussions concerning art (theories, materials, and techniques), their artistic practices and concepts, and by organizing art workshops and exhibitions.” The gallery is a support group for women who wish “to pursue their art seriously,” develop their aesthetic sensibility and somehow juggle their household and workplace responsibilities. She started the gallery for many reasons: “Because women have a different way of working and imaging themselves and society. Therefore they can create a different kind of aesthetic sensibility and enrich the Philippine art story. Because sometimes when a woman gets married, her art takes a second or third priority in her life. Sometimes the husband is unsupportive of her work and she thus loses the passion to create. Support from the husband does not only come by way of verbal approval but in terms of actual physical support like shared responsibilities in household management, stretching canvasses, caring for the children, etc. Isn’t it abnormal that there are more male than female artists ‘making it’ in the art scene?”

Something must be wrong." (from a letter she sent to the author, 1998)

Terracotta artist Rosalia Tayag is leading Kasibulan through a phase that reflects a shift in its priorities. While the pioneers were mostly concerned with correcting the absence of women in the art world, the younger artists, she says, are more preoccupied with their own economic and aesthetic concerns and need a support system that will get them through hard times.

Other younger women worthy of mention are painters Joy Mallari, Pardo de Leon, Yasmin Sison, Riza Manalo, Karissa Villa and terracotta artist Cecil de Leon. They use various media and styles and have diverse thematic concerns. Their approaches run from autobiographical to third-person accounts, realized through media ranging from the traditional (painting, sculpture) to the cutting-edge (installation). Some of them directly confront gender and women's issues, while others sidestep them altogether by working on formalist concerns. Some image women as victims, while others portray them as strong and subversive. Most are unclassifiable, representing a spectrum of expressions rather than neat dichotomies.

### **Working Away from the Center**

While the younger women mentioned, except for Taniguchi, are based in Manila or abroad and are graduates of art institutions, another set of mostly self-taught women is steadily and quietly working outside Manila. On the southern island of Mindanao, some women successfully perform their multiple roles as educators, homemakers, artists, and civic leaders, contributing significantly to the development of a strong artistic infrastructure in their cities. They in-

clude Carlota de Pio of Ateneo de Davao University, Sandra Jamiro of Ateneo de Zamboanga, Brenda Barba of Davao's Philippine Women's University, and Rachel Holazo, the first curator of the Davao Zonta Museum and Gallery.

Poet Tita Lacambra-Ayala or Tala is at the helm of various publications, notably the *Roadmap Series*, a helpful introduction to the artists, writers, and poets of Davao City. Lydia Ingle is a pianist, "farmer," and biographer, whose book *Edades: Kites and Visions*, won the Cultural Center of the Philippines Literary Prize in 1979. Margarita Marfori is a faculty member at UP Mindanao, as well as a poet, short-story writer, and part-time manager of her family's hotel business. Priscilla Tionko runs her family's weaving factory in a community outside Davao City, employing the women there while also applying her creative energies to the design of Maguindanao-inspired textiles.

Emebertha Nazareth and Phebe Simbajon-Prena are the key figures of the SocSarGen (which stands for a wide area including South Cotabato, Sarangani, and General Santos City) Arts Council. Simbajon-Prena also owns a flower shop, which doubles as a meeting place for artists. Lea Padilla of Iligan City heads the Likha Visual Arts Training Center and is known for her paintings depicting daily Muslim life. Lyra Tiblani is one of the few Muslim women artists in the country. Homemakers Rorie Aradanas, Daisy Jamasali, and Lorna Fernandez-Jumalon continue to add to their considerable body of work.

Most of them work in oil and watercolor, except for Tala and Fernandez-Jumalon, who experiment with objects found in their immediate surroundings. Although most of their works are informed by the idiom of the early moderns – particularly discernible in Ingle's Gauguin-inspired canvasses – it is difficult to identify common threads in their works and



lives. Ingle appears to have had the most cosmopolitan upbringing. She traveled and lived in Europe for most of her life and studied art in Madrid, Paris, and London. In Paris, she met Nena Saguil, one of the first Filipina artists to live abroad, and the Austrian painter Fritz Hundertwasser. In England, she was an *au pair* for an exceptional English family: George S. Fraser was a poet and critic of note, and "his wife was a rare combination of intelligence, sweetness, and efficiency." There she also met her husband, her next-door neighbor while she was sharing a flat with a stage actress she met at one of the Fraser gatherings.

Although her marriage "overflowed with love," it was also filled with "alcohol and pain," she writes. She found solace in music, which she loved since she was a child. When the pain became unbearable, she divorced her husband and returned to Davao with her three children in 1975, when "the whole nation was in the grip of martial law." Isolated in an "unexpectedly alien environment," she redefined herself and her existence. She "felt the need to paint again," using mostly improvised materials such as rough cloth instead of canvas, household paint, and coconut husks for brushes. Ingle continues to paint, but her work on her farm occupies much of her time. She is an active advocate of arts and culture activities and organizations. (from her Artist's talk, 1998)

Also working away from the center are Irma Lacorte, Cristina Quisumbing Ramilo, Maita Beltran and photographers Bing Concepcion and Tita Lim, some of the few lesbian artists in Southeast Asian and the Philippines who have openly declared themselves through solo and joint exhibitions. These women's assertion of identity through a marginalized theme and subject matter compels us to grapple with lesbian art as an art-historical and critical category, as

well as to come to terms with identity in art, the politics of representation and the ideology of form.

Little is known about lesbian artists largely because they are marginalized and, consequently, invisible in both feminist and mainstream cultures, making it doubly difficult for them to declare themselves as lesbian artists. And even if they do come out, would they want to be known primarily as lesbians? Heterosexual women artists, for instance, resist being called “women artists,” and want to be called “artists,” period. Is it the same with lesbian artists? Do they want to be known as artists who just happen to be lesbians? Or as lesbians who just happen to be artists? How do they grapple with the distinct possibility of being treated as novelties who will get noticed precisely because of their gender identity and not because of their art?

By openly declaring their politics and identities as lesbians, these women imply that they have chosen – as a strategic and political maneuver – to be identified primarily through their sexual orientation. In which case, the question is, is there such a thing as lesbian subject matter? Style? Theme? Visual strategy? Are they unique and universal to lesbians? Does sexual orientation affect their art?

Then there are questions that have to do with lesbian art's relationship to the mainstream. If lesbians happen to tackle lesbian subject matter, particularly lesbian sexuality in their art (as Lacorte does), how do they represent themselves in a way that cannot be co-opted by the dominant heterosexual culture? Lesbian sex, for example, is used in pornography for men as well as in the so-called high art of Courbet. How do artists challenge the images and remap the very paradigms that make lesbians invisible at best and objects of erotica at worst?

The questions are serious ones but remain unanswered for now. However, as she proclaims her own choice through her own voice, Lacorte reminds us that the questions must be tackled. Studies on and exhibits of lesbian artists should be encouraged, even at the risk of tokenism and even at the risk of construing their voices in terms of stable essence instead of unstable landscapes. For, paradoxically, it is the only way we can drive home the point that there are differences, not only between men and women, but also between women, between gays and lesbians, and even between lesbians.

Homosexuality must then be extricated from its critical closet by openly challenging the way it has remained under the shadow of heterosexuality and "women's issues." This project is of course contingent on gay and lesbian artists' body of works and professional track records – criteria which have yet to be satisfactorily addressed given the small number of openly gay and lesbian artists in the Philippines. This limitation aside, the feminist critic could also observe the works of gay and lesbian artists outside the Philippines and take note of how these artists assert their confident and overt sexuality and on how their works manifest the predominant concerns of today's contemporary artworld: issues of the body, the limits of pornography, the failure of technological promise and the deconstruction of social power structures (Kleeblatt 1955, 29).

The above account shows that Filipino women become artists in vastly different ways and through widely varied routes. A privileged background is surely an advantage, although more so for the first generation. Others became artists through formal training, but some went on to become professionals without it. There seems to be no direct connection between medium and strategy, educational training

and geographical base. While some Manila-based women have ventured into the seemingly esoteric media of performance and installation, most women artists favor oil, watercolor and other traditional media, remaining conservative in terms of technique, style and philosophy.

This account also shows that because little is known of women artists, especially women of the 19th century, their story is so gap-ridden and impossible to emplot through the usual unilinear art-historical templates. To do so would not only simplify their complex lives; but would also coopt the dissident edge of their Other histories. By no means complete and by all means still ongoing, this account hopes to capture – in a very preliminary way – those voices that present us with Other modes of seeing, Other modes of telling. By putting forward new images of identity, these women are presenting an/Other history, one that is not anchored on a parade of styles, forms and masterpieces, but on testimonies of struggle and continuing negotiations. As we reclaim our voices, we also claim responsibility for our actions, thus finally breaking free and moving on.

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