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TO BE OR NOT TO BE “ALWAYS WRONG”: ESSAYS ON A TRICKY AREA

When an essay by Jude Adams was published in Artlink in March 1989, it generated a great deal of debate in Australia. Entitled “There is Always a Simple Solution and it’s Always Wrong,” the essay critiqued a community art project in an effort to disrupt the “ ‘critical silence’ that surrounds the reception of community art works,” and in the hope that “the community arts movement will engage in further self-examination and debate.”¹ But instead of critical dialogue, the responses she received, including “possibly libelous statements, incorrect charges, labeling and name calling” – proved that her “fears were well-founded and community arts may indeed see itself as a protected species and, unlike other visual media, not fitting vehicle for the critical function.”²

In this fourth issue, we lock horns with this “tricky area,” not only to interrupt the critical silence on a practice “more often trivialized as left over from a previous era, or seen as having little possibility as a source of active contribution to serious debate,” as Vivienne Binns puts it, in reaction to the reactions on the Adams’ essay. To be sure, this is not the first time that critical attention was devoted to the theme of “community and the arts” in the Philippines and I can cite the gathering of artists/community workers/organizers in *Locus: Interventions in art Practice* in 2002 as a most notable and recent example.

We contribute to these efforts by expanding and introducing other inflections to the term “community” through a range of curatorial, geographic and artistic “locuses” – from the Philippines’ premier state university in the nation’s capital, to the Cultural Center of the Philippines, to banana plantation workers in Southern Philippines, to cosmopolitan Singapore. It would be interesting to hear for instance, from Japanese Studies scholar Helen Yu-Rivera, and read her thoughtful reflections on Shimada Yoshiko’s *Bones in the Tansu* alongside that of Kristine Lim’s observations on how the University of the Philippines audience behaved and engaged with a work that aimed to gather secrets through and from a hybrid exhibition setting that is neither entirely ‘white cube,’ nor entirely accessible to a larger community other than the largely walk-in audience of a busy academic corridor-cum-gallery. Or learn about how the Korean artist Kyungah Ham went to far-flung Davao to confront a disturbing childhood memory on a Philippine export, the banana for her video installation in the 2006 Gwangju Biennale, and how scientist/community organizer Roger Teves helped her touch base with sites “plagued” by what he considers a weed – the Cavendish banana.

Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez pounds the sleek pavements of Legoland to view the humongous Singapore Art Biennale in its entirety, and writes a review that provides an interesting case study of how a largely ‘blue-chip’ cast of artists and curators attempted – successfully or not – to insinuate themselves into the fabric of this prosperous island’s utopian everyday life, from a shopping district, a riverbank, and a housing complex to a decommissioned military camp, to places of state power and worship.

And to round out this issue, we reprint Karen Flores’ curatorial notes on the country’s most prestigious recognition for emerging artists. Now 36 years old, the 13 Artists Award is going through a mid-life crisis, she admits, but it is also worth noting that this latest edition features a generation of artists who, like her are also “consider-

1. Artlink (Vol. 9 No. 1, March 1989.
2. Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice, Australian Perspectives. General Editor, Vivienne Binns. New South Wales: Pluto Press Australia, Ltd, 1991.

ably nourished and informed by their various engagements as art managers, educators, graphic designers, mass-communication media practitioners, and members of non-government organizations.” In others words, these are artists who defy the “hermit mindset,” but whose organizational concerns often deny them the “luxury” of contemplation, theoretical assessment and self-criticism that the Adams essay hoped to instigate. It is thus that we appeal to our readers to help us make this issue’s modest attempt to sustain debate and critical discourse on this risky topic more accessible to a wider “community” of readers across as many sites and sights as possible, not only to break the critical silence but to move on from simple solutions to complex questions that may or may not be “always wrong.”

Demystifying the Japanese Household: *Bones in the Tansu*

HELEN YU-RIVERA

Amidst the current rage over Japanese popular art and cultural products such as anime, manga and J-pop, Shimada Yoshiko’s works stand out as testament to the continuing role of the artist as iconoclast and social critic. Born and raised near Tachikawa, a former US air force base in Tokyo, Shimada was privy to the historical tensions that defined postwar US-Japan relations. The first decade of her childhood coincided with the growth of radicalism in Japanese society spawned in the 1960’s by the Anpo crisis sparked by the renewal of the US-Japan peace treaty. The then Kishi government was perceived as pro-American and demonstrators took to the streets to protest the growing involvement of the Japanese with U.S. military activities. Japanese artists joined popular sentiment reveling in a confrontational, anarchistic attitude towards society.

Belonging to the generation of Japanese artists in the post Showa (post 1989) era, Shimada’s works find affinity, in their biting historical and political critiques, with the works of Yanagi Yukinori and Nakahashi Katsushige. Art historians believe that the death of the Showa emperor in 1989 fomented this climate of subversion with Japanese artists challenging national myths and symbols. The death of the Showa emperor ended a significant era in Japanese history remembered by most non-Japanese as the most militant and aggressive period. Shimada believes however that the supposed public discourses around Japan’s national identity stimulated by the passing of the Showa emperor were nothing more than cultural nostalgia and that few Japanese really took a critical look at their historical roots. This atmosphere, coupled with Shimada’s defiant personality, contributed to the artist’s fearless deconstruction of Japanese national identity.

Shimada’s works aim to bring back personal and historical memories confronting sensitive questions of identity and culpability. Shimada’s works can be understood by situating them within the context of the Japanese household system or *Ie*. The *Ie* was institutionalized in Japan in 1898 stressing a patriarchal system based on conformity, group-orientedness, lineal and instrumental ties rather than conjugal and emotional attachment. This system is represented not only in the Japanese family but in Japanese polity as well and symbolized by the emperor as the patriarch of the nation. While this institution was broken down after Japan’s defeat in the last war, vestiges of this earlier system remain in contemporary Japan. It is this unbroken tradition that Shimada as a visual artist seeks to break down, challenging the patriarchal system latent in this national discourse.

Her recent project entitled *Bones in the Tansu* took a close look at the tensions within the family system. The exhibit has been shown in Tokyo and Seoul in 2005 and

had its first run in the Philippines last August 22-September 1, 2006 at the Gallery 1, Faculty Center, University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City. This exhibit was part of the Philippine leg of Shimada's research as an Asian Public Intellectual Intellectuals (API) senior fellow. She was hosted by the UP Department of Art Studies. After this leg, she was also scheduled to go to Thailand and Indonesia.

The exhibit consisted of a series of tansu or chests of drawers where secrets were kept. A euphemism for skeletons in the closet, the drawers contained some of the deepest and darkest secrets of family members. The chest of drawers was made in the Philippines by a local carpenter from Cavite, Southern Philippines specifically for this exhibit since transporting the tansu from Japan was too costly. It also gave the exhibit a local character as the chests of drawers displayed an old and rough look very much unlike the more polished tansu Shimada used for her Tokyo exhibit. As the drawers were pulled, the rough finish, which smelled like old furniture recently varnished revealed beautiful prints mostly in reddish and brownish hues. On top of these prints lay translucent acetates where the secrets were written. The secrets were collected from Shimada's exhibits in Tokyo and Seoul and touched on issues such as bulimia, incest, homosexuality and identity crisis (both personal and historical). At the end of the gallery hall, a booth with red curtain beckoned the spectator to sit inside and write their own secrets, and drop pieces of paper in a locked box. The identity of the writer was protected, the text rewritten by the artist so that not even a clue to the handwriting was visible. Shimada related that the secrets from Japan and Korea displayed the original handwriting since there was almost no possibility that they would be recognized here.

During this Philippine run, Shimada collected hundreds of papers containing secrets written mostly by UP students after the first day of exhibit and put them on display a few days later, exchanging some of the old secrets with these new ones.

On one level, Shimada's work confronted the rigidity of Japanese patriarchy, demystifying the stability of the Japanese family. The exhibit allowed the viewers to peek into the imperfections and tensions in familial relationships, be they conjugal, parental or sibling-related. One such secret for instance related:

I'd like my husband to die.
How wonderful it would be, just me and my three kids.
He is not a bad husband and I'm a bit sorry to feel this way,
But I don't care whenever he dies as long as he leaves money.
I don't intend to get remarried, but would like to have a younger guy.

According to Shimada, this secret was the most popular because many Japanese women empathized with what had been expressed validating the lack of emotional and conjugal ties in contemporary Japanese families. The artist also said that most of the secrets were written by women and that Japanese men who viewed her exhibit in Tokyo felt that they had no family secrets to share because their secrets were centered in the workplace, reaffirming the continuing demarcation of gender roles in contemporary Japanese society.

While the secrets revealed some of the most common problems confronting families, Shimada relates that the secrets were chosen based on how well they were written, the artist preferring those with multiple layers of meaning. *Bones in the Tansu* also finds affinity with the artist's earlier works where she consciously jogged the audiences' historical memories. She has dealt in her previous works with sensitive issues such as the emperor system, the militant role played by Japanese women during the last war and US-Japan relations during the postwar period. *Bones in the Tansu* may be a microcosmic look at the Japanese family but the secrets revealed historical memories that are difficult to shake off. A number of secrets collected from Tokyo and Seoul had references to the last war bearing marks of either nostalgia or guilt. In Japanese society where, by official sanction, the historical past is rarely recounted, this exhibit provided two very

important functions. It allowed the writer/s to express long repressed feelings regarding Japan's militant past and allowed viewers to understand the conflicts inherent in historical memories and that these memories are not fixed but are malleable. On another level therefore, the tansu, a common household fixture, may also be viewed as representing the macrocosmic Japanese society where historical memories are neatly tucked away in the recesses of each tiny drawer.

Shimada's work is commendable because while locating Japan as the central domain of her discourse, it reaches out to audiences of any nationality. Her work locates historical specificity outside the orientalist notions of Japan as exotica. Audiences in the Philippines viewed her work not only as representations of Japanese and Korean society but effectively empathized with the family secrets revealed in the drawers such as those referring to incest and homosexuality. Shimada revealed that the most common secrets in Japan, Korea and the Philippines were incest, homosexuality and mental anxiety, expressing surprise over the similarities between the three countries given their very different socio-historical environment.

On yet another level, *Bones in the Tansu* may be viewed within the context of the relationship between pleasure and images, scopophilia and exhibitionism. Her work acknowledged that pleasure could be derived from reciprocal relationships of looking. This interactive exhibit drew crowds of students in the University of the Philippines, curious to take a peek at the secrets contained inside the small drawers. In the course of the exhibit, viewers talked about the secrets they became privy to especially those that referred to the body and sexuality. At the same time, Shimada challenged the spectator to reveal their secrets, making public the realm of the private. By engaging the spectators to participate in this activity, the exhibit validated not only the pleasures of exhibitionism but allowed the viewers to experience what in psychodynamic theory is known as emotional catharsis. Conscious and unconscious conflicts are thereby set free in this process, allowing the spectator to release their tensions.

In 1994, art historian Alexandra Munroe wrote of the Heisei era (post 1989 to the present) that followed the passing of the Showa period and the place of socially and politically critical works of art:

...Heisei heralds an age of genuine democratic process. As the constraints of the "chrysanthemum taboo" loosen their hold over the Japanese people, the radical will of the opposition that has defined the avant-garde since the Taisho period consequently loses its object of defiance. If these events imply a certain victory, or at least vindication for the "postwar avant garde," they also indicate its passing (Munroe 1994, 348).

These observations may be considered premature in the light of contemporary developments in Japan. The rise of neo-nationalism for instance debunks Munroe's claim over the development of democratic processes in Japan. Japan's attempt to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy, espousing a more active military role and proposals for the removal of Article IX (non-military clause) of its constitution are symptomatic of this growing nationalistic fervor. Together with this is the continuing historical revisionist stance taken by the Japan Ministry of Education in its insistence on (re)writing a history that will not cast shame on the past. Politically critical artists like Shimada fear the growing apathy of the Japanese youth engendered by this historical amnesia. In this light, the role of artists like Shimada whose works are politically and historically situated have not lost their "object of defiance." And such defiance remains relevant and particularly urgent today, especially in the context of Japanese society's lack of critical historicism.

Work cited:
Munroe, Alexandra. 1994. *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against The Sky*.
New York: Harry N. Abrams.

KRISTINE LIM

Everyone has a secret. The kind of secret that sits in your chest, weighing heavily against your heart. Some secrets spill out easily to a confidant or a trusted confessor. But many secrets, harmless or not, stay with you, never to reveal itself.

Japanese artist Shimada Yoshiko's installation *Bones in the Tansu* allows people to be a part of someone's deepest, darkest secret. Shimada gathers secrets by way of a confessional booth, which is completely confidential, and translates it into a tangible work. She places the now-visual secret into a drawer for viewing. Each pull of the drawer reveals a secret more sordid than the next.

What is most interesting about the exhibit is not the secrets tucked away in drawers but the behavior of the people who see them. I spent two afternoons watching over the exhibit and had the chance to observe the people who view it. At times, people on their way somewhere slow down and read the wall notes and Shimada's bio. If there's no one currently looking in the drawers, they hesitate, as if they didn't know they could open the drawers, and just leave. But if there is someone opening drawers freely, people are more inclined to do the same, as if they had been given permission to do so. It's almost as if they don't want to be caught doing something wrong, unless of course someone is doing it already.

But is looking at someone's secrets wrong, even if it is in a public setting? Since many of the secrets Shimada transforms into work are sexual in nature the viewers become, in a way, voyeurs. Voyeurism takes place at a distance from the subject observed. And what greater distance is there but the distance of anonymity?

There is a German term "schadenfreude" which is loosely defined as "pleasure taken in someone else's misfortune". I noticed most of the viewers didn't open just one drawer; they had to open all of them, indeed seemingly taking "pleasure" in reading other people's misfortunes. Our society today revels in the misfortunes of others. Our TV screens are filled with scandalous sights, offered up to us as entertainment. The likes of the Jerry Springer Show exist purely on schadenfreude. Soap operas, too. Why else would they have all those brain tumors and amnesiacs?

Jean Jacques Rousseau believed in the concept that man is basically good (a "noble savage") but through the development of society and civilization, which he thought of as artificial and corruptive, man turns his positive self-love into pride. This pride in man leads him to find shame in himself and fear others, and subsequently find enjoyment in the pain or weakness of others. It seems his philosophy stems from the

oldest story in the Bible. Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge and what did that get them? Banishment and misery and sin. The couple kept their indiscretion from God out of shame. The first ever secret was the original sin.

There may be some merit in what Rousseau proposed, but in his "Discourse on the Arts and Sciences" he argued that the arts were not human needs and therefore not beneficial to mankind. Art is merely a garment man puts on for the benefit of keeping up appearances among other men.

I'm sure Rousseau got a lot of flack for his opinions in the 18th century and if Rousseau were still alive there may be many people who would debate him on this as well. But one just has to show him Shimada's cabinets and he'll instantly see the benefits of this voyeuristic exercise.

Shimada Yoshiko, *Bones in the Tansu*, 2006, installation, Faculty Center Galeria 1, University of the Philippines. Photo credit: Robin Daniel Rivera



The exhibit goers may not necessarily get off on the secrets or even enjoy what they see, but they do participate in the process of revelation. The same people who view the exhibit are the same people who enter that cloth-draped booth. And they enter it with a certain amount of trepidation. I've seen people hover around the booth for a time until they gather up the courage to enter. And writing the secret down on a piece of paper also requires some strength. Seeing what you keep inside with your own eyes makes the secret more real. Finally, putting the tightly folded secret into the ballot box is the last hurdle. They could have stopped at any one of these steps, keeping the secret with them, but they didn't. At the end of the week, Shimada collected more than two hundred secrets. Which just goes to show you that UP students have a lot to get off their chests.

It's anybody's guess how people feel after writing down their secrets, but there must be some feeling of relief. There are a couple of popular websites devoted to the confession of secrets- all done anonymously of course. Secretsbooth.com is a venue for people to air out anything they want to. Most of the secrets are of a harmless variety. Postsecret.blogspot.com is another site for secrets. What is interesting about it is that people have to send their secret by way of an illustrated postcard. It's actually very similar to Shimada's work, only in a more techno-savvy way.

In the end though, the secrets are still secrets. They don't undergo any transformation other than from a guilty conscience into a physical form. Since no names are mentioned, no one is "outed". The secret is still in the consciences of the people who made them.

The ones who are changed are the people who participate in the installation, whether they just view the drawers or they actually contribute a secret. The secrets they see in the drawers are in their hearts now, alongside the secrets they already own.

On (Banana) Cue

ROGELIO RACHMAN TEVES

Dilemma

I am among the few would-be weed scientists from the University of the Philippines at Los Baños, Laguna. I should know because the course, Weed Science, has not been offered anymore after our time. Yup I suppose that is something to be proud of. That I should know as much basic information about weeds after going through college as the other guys in the Western hemisphere? That is also something anyone should be proud of. An agronomist specializing in weed control like me is also supposed to always look out after the safety and growth of the main crop and get rid of weeds: plants that grow where they are not wanted. Right? Wrong! Well not always...

This I came to realize now, as I pondered on the recent visit of the Korean artist, Ms. Kyungah Ham. She was very enthusiastic and full of energy. But, having imbibed the overall food security situation in Mindanao (Southern Philippines), having lived and worked here for almost five years, I came to realize that doing my job of getting rid of weeds is not as easy as it may seem, or at least the way I would treat weeds before I graduated from college in the early 80's.

To begin with, there is this nagging question, and a conviction that the plantation we were introducing the nice lady from Korea and her friend "Bruce" Lee is in reality, growing one of the biggest weed of them all. Believe me: Cavendish banana variety is big, it occupies more than 30,000 hectares of prime agricultural land in the region of Southern Mindanao and it fits the exact description of an agronomist's enemy: it is a plant growing out of place, in a wide plain best suited for other more important, edible,

staple crops like rice and corn. It literally competes for important resources like water, soils, fertility, air, wind, and sun! I thought, if only Ms. Ham knew that Mindanao is importing 28% of its rice requirements from other countries, including the US of A, one of the main markets of our bananas, second only to Japan...Now how do I tell her and her friends abroad about it? And not dampen their enthusiasm?

The Delicacy Explanation

Unlike our tropical delicacies, this Cavendish banana tastes bland, is oversized and does not smell as nice as her cousins binangay, saba, bongulan, and lacatan. While exotic is a term we Pinoys (slang for “Filipinos”) usually reserve to refer to new and wonderful things, it does not give much sense to assign it to this Cavendish, even if it is as foreign as anything on this part of the globe. This is because almost no Filipino enjoys it very much, and most of its export ‘rejects’ are fed almost exclusively to animals, including poultry and pigs. In contrast, in pineapple plantations in Bukidnon, reject pineapples are collected and resold for domestic, human consumption.

But, back to reality: Since we explained the purpose of the filming activity, people readily welcomed the idea of their hosting the visit of the camera-toting duo. In fact, even at such a very short notice schedules were set, people were briefed and everyone cooperated to make their trip also as memorable and successful as possible.

This feat would not have been made possible without the kind cooperation of our NGO friend, Ms. Gin Aloro of the Philippine Network of Rural Development Institutes (PhilNet), one of the more known groups operating in Region XI (Southern Mindanao) and beyond. With all of Ms. Aloro’s full directorship approval, this network kindly granted our request for a field visit last 20 to 22 of July 2006 to their “areas,” which include two Cavendish banana plantations in Tagum, a banana filled City just around 80km north of Davao, one of the major cities of Mindanao. The first one visited was an Agrarian Reform Beneficiary (ARB)-owned plantation and the second and last area visited is a small community of independent growers of bananas.

Before this visit to the ARB areas, Ms. Ham also went to the Cavendish banana plantation being managed by Dole, a multi-national company engaged in buying and exporting bananas to other countries. Hence, while DOLE plantation gave Ms. Ham a road show demonstrating the order and wealth of the company, PhilNET exposed them to the reality of many plantation workers and small holders and the poor and deprived but dignified and humble condition of most rural folks. As expected, Ms. Ham found the view of the lives of the two different workers a picture in contrast. We tried to explain everything to her in our own way, as we guided her on a tour of contrasting landscapes, people, technologies, issues, and funny and not so funny stories. We struggled to explain development paradigms and offer examples, not to mention doing translating works, as well.

Audition, Action, Transmission

We NGO workers were all glad to know that at the least we got attention from, of all people, two Korean citizens (in this country’s popular culture, Koreans are associated with “Jewel in the Palace,” a Korean soap opera) and film makers at that, who were quite pleasant to their hosts. The interviewees generously gave their time off to be interviewed, almost whenever and wherever they were asked to be present. I think it was because of two things: they saw the genuine interest of the visitors and their concern for getting their part of their story in full, and on film, was very exciting.

To me the rural folks who hosted the community visitors, who told them about their problems, their hopes and desires did so spontaneously and extemporaneously, according to no instructions from either the UASSN, the United Agri-Cultural Systems and Services Network of which I belong, or from PhilNet or the cooperative management themselves. We consider this as an important cue for people who will be viewing

Ms. Ham's work, to have no doubt about our seriousness in getting the true picture out: of the mono-culture and dismal living conditions of people inside banana plantations.

Personally, I think that ARBs having devoted most of their lives to sweat and labor in order to nurture the Cavendish, (which as I have mentioned, I can consider as a giant weed) apparently had nothing to show to their visitors but their true lives, in their humble homes and work places and with all smiles in front of the camera. They know and were able to explain to the film makers, that, aside from the problems and issues in the commercial farms, they are very lucky to have a job working in the plantations. And, some are even luckier since they also own the land, being among the only few hundred Agrarian Reform Beneficiary cooperatives in the region who have been awarded lands through the government's snail-paced agrarian reform program.

Recitation: The Actual Events and Commentaries

While the visitors were busy in the field, interviewing people and filming daily activities we at Davao City made arrangements and re-arrangements of the itinerary for succeeding remaining days of their stay. There were even plans made for viewing aerial spraying in a nearby banana plantation, in collaboration with groups such as the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Makalaya and Interface Development Initiatives. But, sad to say, these did not materialize due to time, logistics and security concerns. And besides, the spraying plane schedule was also very unpredictable.

But, we somehow managed to bring them to a quiet restaurant on stilts, a cheap place but with a very strategic and panoramic view of the pier at Panabo City where they saw the bananas being loaded in huge cargo ships bound for Japan, U.S.A., China, Korea and other countries. It was quite a memorable place and a fitting occasion to say goodbye to our bananas. Complete with videoke music and seaside breeze in the background.

In an interview (conducted later the next morning by the film crew of two) I tried hard to explain, besides answering simple, human-interest questions of lovely Ms. Ham e.g. my childhood story related to banana, the dilemma facing me as an agriculturalist and as a weed scientist: whether I should promote or not promote the crop (Cavendish banana). I said that on a macro-level, bananas are fine for foreigners, particularly Koreans who love it, but, to me they are like weeds considering that people do not benefit from growing it as much as the multinational companies like Dole, and that it is growing and even expanding in areas formerly devoted to rice and corn, two of our most important staples that are becoming scarce in these parts of Mindanao. I had to tell her, people who are hungry matter, too.

Until now I am wondering if have made my point clear. I thought, ah, this (film) art and agro-technical and cultural things apparently do not mix very well. They are so hard to delineate, to capture, and to show on film in an artistic and at the same time agro-technically sound manner. As I said, I still do not know, am confused, torn between supporting or not supporting the growing and exporting of bananas, those "weeds".

On the one hand, it gives ARBs something to be happy about, to have a source of income, but, on the other hand, it is competing with rice, the more important staple crop. I had to tell them these concerns during the interview, and I think I did it on film right there and then not later. The bottomline: we can no longer tolerate this "monkey business" of multinational giants. That was what's important to me: to tell the truth. If it is part of an artwork, then it is well worth the effort. If it is also understood, then, by George, I think we are in business!

KYUNGAH HAM

I remember that the price of one banana was four thousand Won (four dollars) and that was about 20 years ago when I was a child. The prices have risen by 20 times today, so one can imagine how costly it was back then.

It won't be understandable by today's standards, but back then, many Korean fathers' number one gift for their family on the way from their business trip from Japan was a bunch of bananas. It was the bananas that were chosen as a common gift when visiting patients at a hospital. Even at a time when the Korean government waged a "milk drinking campaign," it was the banana milk that ranked number one in people's wish list, followed by chocolate and strawberry milks. As such, bananas were a golden fruit not only to children but also to grown-ups. I wonder how these bananas were afforded to feed monkeys (as Roger Teves says they do in the Philippines).

When I was at the age of around 20, my family happened to visit a banana green house run by a friend of my father in Jeju Island, the famous sub-tropical Island in the southern part of Korea. I had heard that farmers in Jeju Island used to enjoy the most profitable years for a while when they reaped huge profits from a greenhouse farming technique to produce the premium fruit, bananas. However what I first saw there was the depressed and numb face of my father's friend who was crouching in the corner of the big greenhouse, holding his shoulders, lots of banana bunches here and there, and the big leaves that were either rotten or dried out on the greenhouse floor. My father's friend didn't seem to quickly recognize and talk to us although the two friends haven't seen each other for a long time.

It was then when bananas started to be imported from the Philippines, a huge blow to banana farmers in Jeju Island ending up in failures in farming due to plummeting banana prices amid such a fierce competition with the imported produce. The profits reaped were so low that the farmers couldn't even afford to give wages to banana pickers. Not only that, those on bank loans for banana business expansion faced bigger debts in many cases.

Unfortunately, that tragic image in the greenhouse remained in my childhood memory as a beautiful landscape - an image that very vividly lingered for more than 20 years. In addition, my questions about the overall structure resulting in such an ironic situation served as a motif for me to produce *Honey Banana*, My contribution to the 2006 Gwangju Biennale.



Videostill and detail from *Honey Banana*, 2006, video installation for the 2006 Gwangju Biennale by Kyungah Ham. Photo courtesy the artist.

Jeju Island

It was not an easy task for me to search for those involved in the irony in my memory 20 years ago. After the lean years, domestically produced bananas started to disappear from Korea because all the bananas abundant in stores, supermarkets and street vendors were the imports from the Philippines.

My antennas on even the word bananas started to work anytime and anywhere with all my utmost effort and I ended up visiting the Jeju Citrus Grower's Agricultural Cooperative. There I happened to be aware of "a secret project on farming organically produced bananas in a greenhouse" from an executive. After days of nagging and per-



Videostill, *Honey Banana*, 2006, video installation for the 2006 Gwangju Biennale by Kyungah Ham. Photo courtesy the artist.

suaision, I, at last, succeeded in seeing the greenhouse. The bananas shipped from there were expected to be sold one month later than September when my project, “Honey Banana” is to be on display. That was why about a week before the opening of the Gwangju Biennale, I even received a strong threat call against my will from the Seoul headquarters of the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation, saying, “This should never be disclosed.” Even when I visited the greenhouse, it was located in an extremely secretive and distant place inside Mount Halla on zigzag routes for confidential reasons. I could tell how much they were concerned about the security and confidentiality. Eventually I pledged that I would just use the image and not say a word about what I saw and thankfully got away with it.

The most memorable incidence was my interview of several farmers who experienced poor crops. Their first responses were, “Why do you want me to talk about it” or “There is not much to share,” showing a strong refusal to share their story. However after repeated persuasions, I ended up setting some time with them and recorded them with my camera. At first, they were reluctant to talk, and they responded to my challenging questions to them about their past with a gloomy face. And yet, as time went by, they started to open their mouth and unraveled their story. There was the story of an unwanted divorce due to failures in banana farming. Another man had a brother who abandoned his family without paying off debts and fled into exile in Japan. Others gloomily shared their story about their neighbors who, due to severe heartbreak, had ruined their lives through alcohol and gambling.

As such, Jeju farmers had already experienced bankruptcy due to price competitions with the imported products against their will. Amidst farmers’ ever-severe protests against the possible Korea-US Free Trade Agreement following the Korea-Chile FTA, they seemed to have given up on their hope, pessimistically saying, “We don’t think the government would protect us. That’s the way it is. It is the reality, so they would just end up doing what suits their needs, right?”

The Philippines

At last I went to Mindanao Island located in the southern part of the Philippines, the birthplace of bananas consumed by all Koreans. The banana farms were extraordinarily humongous that went on and on as if there is no end to it even by car. At dusk, the marching of blue plastic bags wrapping the banana bunches was like a ghost festival that only night insects would know of. There were banana bunches resembling meat loaves in the packing plants. As the symbol of life and tears of the Philippine farmers, they seemed to have some kind of spirit, so I felt the marching at night was like a ghost parade.

Thanks to the cooperation of the Korean Embassy in the Philippines, I learned about the huge size of Dole, the multinational company, and about banana harvesting processes and the status of other multinational companies within the Philippines. Meanwhile one of my acquaintances there introduced me to NGOs. From their passionate cooperation, I could relate myself to the opposite pictures as well: the multinational companies’ unreasonable and ironic behavior, and the environmental and human rights issues of the Philippine farmers who had to suffer the status quo.

My request to take photos of the ports where bananas were shipped in for various reasons was rejected. However I could take a distant shot at a small bar located near the ports that I visited with Roger Teves, a representative of an NGO via unknown routes. I had to be extremely cautious because Dole was overly sensitive about my movements and documents for my work.

Bananas in the Philippines I saw were the source of life and painful tears of the Philippine farmers. There is grievous outcry about the hometown that they lost and the degraded natural environment resulting from a liberalism that is fully equipped with massive capital. Roger's simple poem sums it all up:

It's a fruit that has lots of stories
It is green from our country,
It arrives yellow in yours,
It is a bitter fruit for us, but it is sweeter in your country.
What happened to our local bananas?
Our local bananas you'll find them in the wilds,
where government cannot reach them
where the foreigners cannot capture them,
where the people are fed with these bananas.

The Singapore Art Biennale: Keeping Faith

EILEEN LEGASPI-RAMIREZ

The very first Singapore Art Biennale (SAB), which ran 4 September to 12 November 2006, was not exactly born at the most auspicious of moments. After all, over the past five years or so, biennale-bashing seems to have reached fever pitch. Mounting grand art spectacles have routinely been met with cynicism and a general critical frothing at the mouth at the way curatorial threads have been recycled and flimsy national re-presentations always seem to fall short in these extravagantly marketed events. But then again, unlike us measly souls who hanker for comparably pittance grants from the wily collector and/or National Commission for Culture and the Arts, the Singapore government had S\$10M (as per press estimates) to burn and flaunt those dollars they did.

Simply themed "Belief," the first SAB, as most tentative, first-off ventures normally do, got off to an expectedly ambitious if fumbling start. Of course the big names (Barbara Kruger, Yayoi Kusama, et. al.) got the requisite ho-humming which blue chip appearances are wont to do when events that are primarily expected to publicly regale with the art of the moment hedge by bringing in the tried and the tested. And then there were the de rigueur organizational problems that are the bane of art blockbusters from Athens to Yokohama. SAB pulled in 95 artists from 38 countries and this brought in, the again expected wrangling of how adequately broad or not this all was in light of the larger artworld. Living up to their efficiency expert track record, the Singaporeans technically seemed to have most things going for them though – there seemed to be nary a wayward projector, and visitor services like freebie buses operated like clockwork. For the visitor however, SAB still proved particularly physically daunting to negotiate with its spread of 19 venues that included the Singapore river bank, a disused military camp, City Hall, the Singapore Art Museum, a major shopping strip, the National Library, various places of worship, and a public housing complex. Unless you were an absolutely dogged biennale goer (and those apparently come few and far between no matter where these events take place), you would've had to reckon with an arguable lack of signage that often played peek-a-boo with visitors even within obviously Biennale exhibition sites. And so as this Biennale came to a close on the second weekend of November, one wonders how many people actually got to such "far out" spaces such as the HDB flats and the river bank which weren't on the free SAB bus routes and were not played up as must-sees, and what the return factor was for people who visited shrines and temples

that were only open for viewing at specific times and days (note that Singapore continues to be regarded as a transit point where visitors fly in and out sans the luxury of slack time).

Truth is, it remains much too easy to lapse into biennale dissing mode these days when it's not at all hard to find some upturned nose partnered with the witty biennale slur that these events come across as mere contemporary art Cliffs Notes or heady fast-food culture trips meant to tease but never to nourish. With now over 60 such events happening globally, these blockbusters seem to repeatedly irk the culturati for plucking art out of contexts and serving them up sans any reading handles. Then again, for the battle-weary art organizers which we three Pinoys (the author, Patrick Flores and Joselina Cruz. "Pinoys" is slang for "Filipinos") doing SAB were, at least one pertinent question hanging in the air was: could we have pulled this off at home if we had wanted to?

Given that that would be a no-brainer (translated as: in our dreams), one can just as easily argue that the serious student shouldn't be looking to such events for hardcore art education. Yet in the case of SAB, the parallel event, *Telah Terbit* (Out Now): Southeast Asian Contemporary Art Practices During the 1970s played out at the Singapore Art Museum could easily have been construed as clearly didactic foil with its patent art historical grounding serving as lucid counterpoint to SAB's overtly thematic flair. Nonetheless, SAB had plenty of things going for it particularly venue-wise, with Artistic Director Fumio Nanjo's strategic choice of siting the art in obvious power centers—civil, spiritual, commerce, et. al. Even without the art as yet installed, this move undoubtedly infused SAB with some discursive pedigree – bringing its viewers to confront spatial engagements between art and power – e.g. in the National Museum and Library, City Hall courtrooms, temples, mosques, churches, and at the former Tanglin military camp (which is reminiscent of Camp John Hay replete with its fancy cafes).

Truth to tell, some works were quite clunkily insinuated in these 'non-art' spaces, an illustrative example would be Jaime Plensa's Bedrock-like projection base fronting the Maghain Aboth Synagogue, the stone base kept behind steel road barriers to (I suppose) keep pedestrians and vehicles from running into it when the projection wasn't so plain to see. And then there were Jennifer Wen Ma's otherwise visually engaging videos of morphing forms of alms that were routinely set aside when regular synagogue/mosque/church activities would get underway.

In what appears to be a schizophrenic stance, SAB seems to have gone out of its way to place art where people cannot avoid it (e.g. Kusama's polka dots wrapped around Orchard Road's trees, Takafumi Hara's boarding up of the City Hall façade with shock pink texts on communally-held beliefs, etc.) and yet on another level, simultaneously seeking to temper its engagement strategy with Nanjo's classic pronouncement of: "we do not intend to provoke but to dialogue." In line with this, a mid-stream SAB casualty was the original carpet that Xu Bing had produced for the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple which was subsequently relocated to an obscure site at the National Museum since worshippers refused to step on what they regarded were sacred texts. Perhaps SAB indeed may not have primarily intended to play up to the already 'converted' art groupies but rather more facilely locate work where publics would be confronted with art whether they wanted to or not. Whether this gambit ultimately pays off in terms of audience development remains an open question.

Nonetheless, to this writer, what perhaps could be viewed as SAB's more pointed missed opportunity was its obvious non-commitment to aggressively staging critically charged work. Nanjo had hinted at this early enough in a March 2006 press conference when he'd been quoted as saying: "political art in Southeast Asia is passé." And so it seemed quite deliberate that the way too subtle meshing of form and content was a curatorial tact at SAB. So much so that potentially powerful pieces such as Muhanned Cader's *Loudspeaker* (touted as an aesthetic critique of freedom of expression)

and Jason Wee's audio narrative referring back to Operation Spectrum and its resonance with communist witch hunts in the late '80s came across as merely one of many things to look at but not to get too worked up about.

So the irony seems to be that this attempt "to dialogue" could easily be construed as an attempt to mask brewing points of dissonance which indeed exist even in the famously multicultural, multiracial, and multi-faith territory of Singapore. Not discounting alternate readings, this seemed to be the case as well for a supposedly potentially problematic work like Brian Gothong Tan's cheeky video installation, *We Live in a Dangerous World* which had been bandied about as courting censorship. Not having had the benefit of this information going into the viewing of the work, Tan's aesthetic of gloss and kitsch appeared to me as diffused and flat despite the obvious attempt to engage people encountering faces of Asian leaders juxtaposed against texts and objects situated in a locus of state control. (Tan's work was sited in a rather sanitized room inside Tanglin camp, the British army's former barracks. After the 1930s, its buildings housed various important military offices, which are now decommissioned.)

To be fair, or perhaps despite itself, SAB does not so wholesaledly push the "different faiths/race/class/culture-peaceful coexistence narrative" to the hilt. There were genuine surprises such as Donna Ong's eerie secret, interiors installations which lent a twistedly disruptive air to the whole enterprise of allowing art to invade the sacred chambers of dispensers of Singaporean justice (in City Hall); same thing goes for the virtual book burning that took place whenever Eugenio Ampudia's *Cold Fire* video projection was screening amidst books in actual use by people mingling in the National Library. And yet, for all these multisensory amplification, all these seem to be presented as coming or happening elsewhere and at some other time, something unimaginable in Singapore's present-day managed "utopia."

Still other cases in point: recently smarting from anti-death sentence campaigns which dismally failed to gain any degree of mitigated justice for alleged Nigerian drug offenders, Singapore brandished its unapologetically unflinching "belief" in its chosen regime of justice by siting Bigert and Bergström's *The Last Supper* video in one of SAB's privileged spaces – that is, its National Museum, no less. This piece not so subtly touched on the perfunctorily humane rituals extended to individuals condemned to die without even the benefit of digesting their final repast. Also, and perhaps despite curatorial chinks, another work which seems to have resoundly cut through the static was Amal Kenawy's *The Purple Artificial Forest*, a haunting loop of animated ink drawings that resonated against Tanglin's camp imagined history and complicities.

Even while trying to reckon with my own uneasy feeling that SAB's apparently intended dilution of art's ability to disturb wasn't a total kowtowing, let me wrap up by professing a personal assertion of belief: that is, as an art educator, I still subscribe to the notion that in the end, no art spectacle ever comes across as a complete failure if only because new audiences are indeed initiated to contemporary art which would otherwise not even be in their imaginative realm. The danger comes when such intermittent engagements are construed as infallible pictures of the present and not seen as the tentative, processual exercises that they most certainly are.

Images of the Singapore Art Biennale can be viewed at: *Universes in Universe - Worlds of Art* <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/singapore/eng/2006/tour/index.htm>

Thirteen Goes Thirty-six

KAREN OCAMPO-FLORES

It should be a celebratory year. The Thirteen Artists Award is thirty-six years old in 2006, and we continue to be hopeful that the event stirs pride, elation, and the kind of provocation that propels us into visions of innovative artmaking in the future. Then too, the award is now in the throes of mid-life. Could it be that the critical points, the

conflicts and ruptures that so marked its inception and growth in the past three decades have now fomented into crises? Welcome, indeed, to the middle of the road.

The perennial complaints have been aired, in unofficial and anonymous ways, as usual. The objectivity of the jurors' selection was questioned; given that majority of the names in the final roster belong to or are represented by a single clique of commercial and alternative, yet highly empowered, art spaces.

I am wont, however, to turn the page to more glaring, and recurrent oversights, such as the absence of deserving and exceptional artists practicing outside Metro Manila. But I have managed to review the materials submitted, and have seen that in the first place, no nominations had arrived from the regions save for one or two artists who have already won in high-profile corporate competitions. Truly, our judges could only work with what was given. We will have to accept the lapse as our collective responsibility.

The backlog cited by Patrick Flores in his essay for the 2000 Thirteen Artists roster, is just as recurrent. Jeho Bitancor and Daniel Coquilla now receive their due six years after being honorably mentioned as similarly deserving in the catalogue. Lyra Abueg Garcellano, Lena Cobangbang, Mariano Ching, Luisito Cordero, Jayson Oliveria, Gary-Ross Pastrana, and Yasmin Sison are artists who first came to our rapt attention through events organized by the Surrounded by Water group beginning in 1998. They receive the award four years after this accomplished collective closed the doors on its last exhibit space in Cubao.

This curious running after the fact goes against the grain of what Thirteen Artists is supposed to uphold, which are qualities of 'recentness' and 'responsiveness to contemporary realities.' On that note, Poklong Anading may be one of those saved from such a dilemma, even if his startling multi-media pieces first gained notice at the now-defunct spaces of big sky mind and 18th Avenue Artists' Compound. His copious output of art activities places him squarely as present, even potentially ubiquitous, given that the variations possible in each of his projects easily outnumber the tangibles presented. Not surprisingly, he receives double recognition this year after garnering top prize in the Ateneo Art Awards.

Yet discussing the elusiveness of present and presence thus only creates annoying divisions and reinforces fetishistic notions about 'freshness.' The launching points from a timeline drawn from the mid-90s do vary, but each of the present thirteen winners are commonly predisposed to sustained and constantly inventive praxis, which is considerably nourished and informed by their various engagements as art managers, educators, graphic designers, mass-communication media practitioners, and members of non-government organizations. These are interests and occupations they pursue not on the side, but side-by-side with the creation of art projects. They also belong to a generation of visual artists who have a firmer grasp of their place within their communities and have comfortably kindled symbiotic ties with other art disciplines. These have all been happening with or without the presence of the Thirteen Artists and other awards. As such, we may be witnessing the reconfiguring of forces in areas where the art market and cultural institutions traditionally set the agenda.

From what I see, what will truly spell trouble for Thirteen Artists in the future is a growing crisis of confidence. For one, recentness does not always spell relevance; so what exactly are we convinced of when we commit to preserve this recentness? An award is basically an honor granted for merit or worth. And worth is based on a certain set of values. F. Landa Jocano's anthropological study on the Filipino value system chooses the word *pamantayan* as the equivalent of value. Thus, alignment, or conformity to a line. It is a paradox then to have an award to reward provocation and transformation. Rebels fight for their beliefs. They don't wait for trophies.

Contradictions abound. Now I'm also beginning to wonder about the CCP's ambivalence about the award it has sheltered and nurtured for so long. At 36, Thirteen

Artists must be in need of a glamorous corporate makeover; or else should it be preparing for a more ceremonial and respectable identity now that it has officially stepped into mid-life? As the curator assigned to this endeavor, I have been beleaguered by numerous entreaties to ‘drum up’ this event. I couldn’t help seeing the symptoms of crisis here, even if I do know that people only mean well when they wish to see the award becoming more ‘popular.’ I won’t argue against the prospect of greater gain, of increased sustainability for culture and arts; but we are in danger of losing ourselves to spectacle if we don’t make clear among ourselves what this award should be about.

I need not take up here the history of Thirteen Artist’s invention and several reinventions. Its story is no different from the backgrounds of most awards. They are all creations for some purpose dictated by entities in power. Only winners have the privilege of conferring more winnings, whether to cleanse a collective conscience or to propel an agenda. Likewise, an award can be remade into anything. Will it help accelerate developments in art practice; is it a source of support or does it merely decorate?

Thirteen Artists was established among peers to encourage and push artists towards the advancement of ideas and the taking of risks. The recentness it espouses is about constant renewal; hence, we should not literally assume that it’s about the young and the new. It is also a mechanism for collegial validation, but as collegial efforts tend to proceed, it is difficult to come to agreement as to what constitutes fresh visual language and which artistic problems are being solved by the artists we’re betting on.

Despite these musings, I am not really equipped to state what’s looming for Thirteen Artists in the years to come. I can only walk you through its mecca, the CCP main gallery; site of all its exhibits since 1970 and still the same venue where our thirteen honorees have put up works that hopefully bespeaks the concerns and inquiries of today.



Left: Jayson Oliveria. *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2006. Installation of artist’s works with found objects.
 Right: Lyra Abueg Garcellano *No Let Up*, 2006. Stencil on paper and carpet with plaster-cast bullets.
 Photo credits: Karen Ocampo-Flores and Atchet San Jose

The exhibit will be the location of collaborations, reunions and reunifications. Strangely, Thirteen Artists has stuck to recognizing individual merit and bodies of work, yet indirectly its past and present choices mirrors the collective achievements of the groups and collaborations that certain honorees have been or are associated with. Certainly, many of the works will interact whether unconsciously or by choice, especially with seven members of *Surrounded by Water* present. Alice and Lucinda will also comprise the fourteenth artistic entity. Three past awardees will have peripheral but no less important roles as curator, exhibition designer, and trophy designer.

There will be crossovers, incursions and investigations through multi-disciplinary and multimedia processes, while at the same time propensities for pushing the limits of materials and their textures are explored. High and low technologies will be

The Thirteen Artists Award exhibition was held at the Bulwagang Juan Luna (Main Gallery), Cultural Center of the Philippines. September 28 to October 31, 2006

interestingly combined. And there would still be resistance and responsiveness to glaring social inequities through visual idioms gleaned from traditional art materials and found objects.

These are the tendencies that will come into play, but are not necessarily the operative themes. Nor should it all translate into an easy amalgam. We would welcome the sort of critical tensions that should leave us a little more shaken and instructed, as stated by Jose Tence Ruiz who, interestingly, also emphasized the importance of confronting crisis in his note as one of the jurors in 2003 selection.

I say now that the confrontations have been well-established. Long have we been called to connect. Artists find themselves more as mediators in a world fraught with detachment, dislocation and disenfranchisement. In the middle of the road, the struggle is in honing the potency of our mediations.

About Ctrl+P Journal of Contemporary Art (<http://www.trauma-interrupted.org/ctrlp>)

Ctrl+P was recently founded by Judy Freya Sibayan and Flaudette May V. Datuin as a response to the dearth of critical art publications in the Philippines. It is produced in Manila and published on the Web with zero funding. Circulated as a PDF file via email, it is a downloadable and printable publication that takes advantage of the digital medium's fluidity, immediacy, ease and accessibility. *Ctrl+P* provides a testing ground for a whole new culture/praxis of publishing that addresses very specifically the difficulties of publishing art criticism in the Philippines.

About Ctrl+P's Contributors

Karen Ocampo Flores is a Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Awardee in 2000. She graduated from the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts in 1988, and was a member of collaborative groups Salingpusa and Sanggawa. She also served in the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) Committee on Visual Arts from 2001 to 2004 where she worked as National Capital Region (NCR, a.k.a. Metro Manila) coordinator for *Sungduan3: Making the Local*. Flores is currently directing the artists' initiative for human rights advocacy called *Tutok Karapatan (tutoK)* which is presenting exhibits and events in various venues including the Cultural Center of the Philippines until April 2007.

Kyungah Ham was born in 1966, Seoul, Korea, where she is currently based. She graduated from Seoul National University in fine art and got her MFA from school of Visual Arts, New York. She creates insightful media installations mainly searching for personal traces in public domain, crisscrossing different cultures. She has participated in many international exhibitions such as Yokohama Triennale 2001, Tirana Biennale 2001, Swiss National Expo'02, Gwangju Biennale 2002, 2006 Text & Subtext (traveling exhibitions in 8 countries), Image of Asia 2003, DMZ_2005 International Art Project and many more. She is recipient of a Freeman Foundation, Couvent des Recollet international artist residency grant, Paris, France; AIT (Art Initiative Tokyo) international artist grant in 2004. She currently teaches at the Seoul National University.

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serves in varying capacities: as a researcher, writer, community organizer, and manager/project coordinator as well as an independent project evaluator and consultant. He is currently titular head of the United Agri-Cultural Systems and Services Network, a loose organization of different technical and cultural workers committed to assisting small holders in developing self-reliance and sustainable development projects. This commitment has become the main thrust of the UASSN rural development assistance that has been welcomed and sought after by groups of various political and religious persuasions.

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About Ctrl+P's Editorial Board Members

Flaudette May V. Datuin is associate professor at the Department of Art Studies, University of the Philippines. She recently founded an NGO – the House Of Comfort Art Network (nick-named ARTHOC), and is now currently traveling to several parts of the Philippines to conduct art workshops that explore the link between trauma, art and healing with artist Alma Quinto. These workshops will culminate in an international exhibit and conference in June 2007 called trauma-interrupted, with Manila as locus of engagement and negotiation – one that is fraught with danger, including the possibility of being very wrong, but consequently be more informed and more equipped with the afflictions of experience and reflection.

Varsha Nair lives in Bangkok, Thailand. Her selected shows include *Saturday live at Tate Modern London, 2006*; *Sub-Contingent, The Indian Subcontinent in Contemporary Art*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy, 2006. She performed at the National Review of Live Art at the Tramway in Glasgow, UK, 2006 and at the 2004 www.newterritories.co.uk; *In-between places, meeting point*, Si-am Art Space, Bangkok, 2005 (solo exhibition); *Video as Urban Condition*, Austrian Culture Forum, London, UK, 2004 www.video-as.org <<http://www.video-as.org>>. Nair is also organiser and co-curator of *No Man's Land*, a web project for Womanifesto 2006 (www.womanifesto.com). Her writings have been published in art and architecture journals such as *n.paradoxa* (UK), *Art AsiaPacific* and *art4d* (Thailand). Born in Kampala, Uganda, Nair has a BFA from Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India.

Judy Freya Sibayan has a Master of Fine Arts from the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design. She is the recipient of the Cultural Center of the Philippines 1976 Thirteen Artists Award and is former director of the erstwhile Contemporary Art Museum of the Philippines. She performed and curated *Scapular Gallery Nomad*, a gallery she wore daily for five years and is currently curator and the *Museum of Mental Objects* (MoMO), a work proposing that her body be the museum itself. Although Sibayan's major body of work is an institutional critique of art, she has also exhibited and performed in major venues, i.e. The Tramway, Glasgow, Vienna Secession, Hayward Gallery, PS 1, The Photographers' Gallery, Kiasma Contemporary Art Center, Mori Art Museum, capcMusée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux. She has participated in two biennales, the 1986 3rd *Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh* and the 2002 *Gwangju Biennale*. Also an independent curator, she conceived and was lead-curator of *xsXL Expanding Art* held at Sculpture Square, Singapore in 2002 and *600 Images/60 Artists/6 Curators/6 Cities: Bangkok/Berlin/London/Los Angeles/Manila/Saigon* (curated entirely through the internet and held in all 6 cities in 2005). Both projects investigated the possibilities of developing large scale international exhibitions mounted with very modest resources. She currently teaches as an Assistant Professor of the Department of Communication, De La Salle University.