



MUTABLE TRUTHS

Perspectives on Philippine Contemporary Art

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Foreword

The partnership between the La Trobe University (LTU) and the Ateneo de Manila University, now on its 17th year, is fortified by multi-faceted programs that are both academic and cultural. Since 2005 this partnership was given another dimension through an artist exchange program where the Visual Arts Centre of La Trobe University has served as host to one of the winners of the Ateneo Art Awards, a Philippine contemporary art prize given to artists below 36 years old. In 2007, the engagement between the two university's museums deepened with the commitment to host exhibitions curated by the other every two years. La Trobe University Museum of Art (LUMA) has brought three exhibitions of contemporary Australian art to the Ateneo Art Gallery and the AAG has organized two, the current project being the third. These programs have cultivated a partnership aimed at nurturing a fuller understanding of contemporary art practices in Australia and the Philippines. The idea to organize a reunion exhibition of the first ten Filipino artists (between 2005 to 2014) who have visited under this program came from Neil Fetting, former director of the La Trobe Art Institute. It was deemed timely too as it would coincide with the Castlemaine State Festival.

The exhibition, titled *Mutable Truths*, brings together some of the leading contemporary artists from the Philippines. Their respective practices are manifold, representing different genres, addressing local and global issues, and contributing to the vibrant art scene both in the mainstream and the peripheries. It is more than a reunion project though. *Mutable Truths* is our way of sharing the journeys past residency artists have pursued. They tackle facets of our realities, both communal and personal, as creatively articulated in painting, mixed media works and multi-media installations.

A project of this scale can only be viable with the support of our respective university officials – Prof. John Dewar, Vice Chancellor, La Trobe University, and Fr. Jose Ramon T Villarin, S.J., President, Ateneo de Manila University -- both cognizant of the significance of cultural exchange in the context of continued institutional dialogue and cooperation. We are also grateful to Dr. Vincent Alessi and Dr. Trevor Hogan for their guidance and to the curatorial team of the La Trobe University for making this project possible including former managing curator of LUMA, Michael Brennan, who worked with us in the planning stages. We also appreciate the support extended by Ambassador Amanda Gorely and the Australian Embassy in the Philippines. Her presence there since 2016 has energized the cultural relations between our two countries.

Finally, our utmost appreciation to Paul Northam, outgoing managing curator of the VAC, for his untiring assistance and support, not only for this project but for hosting our visiting artists in the past years and making La Trobe University in Bendigo their home and studio for a few memorable weeks.

We look forward to more years of partnership with La Trobe University.

Ma. Victoria T. Herrera
Director and Chief Curator
Ateneo Art Gallery

Yael A. Buencamino
Managing Curator
Ateneo Art Gallery



LA TROBE
ART
INSTITUTE





Human Study 5
Fiberglass, resin and
polyurethane paint
79x 46x 20 in
2017

Message

I am immensely proud to see the La Trobe University VAC and Ateneo de Manila University AAG partnership enter its 10th year.

What began as a vision to provide emerging Filipino artists, through the Ateneo Art Awards, the opportunity to expand their horizons and develop their practices through exposure to an international audience, materialized very quickly to an annual exhibition and residency program, and a biennial exchange of exhibitions between our two art museums through a serendipitous confluence of events tied to my personal and research ties with Australia.

It made perfect sense for me to initiate contact with La Trobe owing to its then newly established student and faculty exchange program and the opening of counterpart Philippines-Australia Studies Centres in our universities. How fortunate I was to have found colleagues at La Trobe who shared our desire to construct a bridge that would not only have a strong foundation built on mutual respect, but also one that would be traversed continuously and in both directions motivated by the enlivening discourse of visual art.

These journeys have left an indelible mark on both Filipino and Australian artists and academics, most of who have gone on to become leading lights in their fields; the roster of those who have crossed - or better yet broken down - borders a veritable who's who in the contemporary art scenes in both countries. In my opinion, there is no greater proof of the importance and enduring promise of the La Trobe VAC - Ateneo AAG partnership than this.

Please allow me to express my profound gratitude to those whose confidence in our pioneering work laid the groundwork for this year's milestone celebration: Rev. Bienvenido Nebres, SJ, former President of the Ateneo de Manila University, Dr. Antonette Angeles, former Vice President for Office of International Affairs, my good friends Drs. Trevor Hogan, Vince Alessi, and Neil Fetting, and Mr. Paul Northam. Managing Curator of La Trobe VAC in Bendigo.

Ramon E.S. (Richie) Lerma
Director and Chief Curator (2001-2015)
Ateneo Art Gallery

‘FROM LITTLE THINGS,...’: THE FIRST DECADE OF THE ATENEO - LA TROBE ART EXCHANGE

In 1991 Australian singer songwriters Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody penned the now often quoted and much-loved song *From little things big things grow*. The song recalls the actions of Aboriginal elder Vincent Lingiari who, with many other men, stopped working as stockmen in protest over the ownership of their traditional lands. While the song recounts a milestone period in Australian politics and the Aboriginal land rights movement, the sentiment of the lyrics are universal: great things can be achieved by small actions. If there was a song to sum up the relationship between Ateneo de Manila University and La Trobe University, it would be this Australian classic. For almost 15 years, from very humble beginning this relationship has given rise to a decade-long Art Exchange Partnership and countless academic events and outcomes, including symposia, public lectures, workshops, field trips, and themed journals.

The partnership formed after La Trobe University’s then Vice Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, asked the eminent academic and public intellectual, Professor Dennis Altman, to investigate universities in the Philippines. Professor Altman returned with a recommendation that La Trobe should begin discussions with the small but leading university, Ateneo de Manila University. Actively pursued by several academics, including Dr Trevor Hogan, small links were forged and the foundations laid to enable a number of actors to begin working together.

A key part of this was the establishment of The Philippines Australia Studies Centre (La Trobe) and the Philippines Australia Studies Network (Ateneo). Since 2000, these two organisations have been partners for increasing cultural and intellectual traffic between Australia and Philippines. This partnership has

established a vibrant student exchange agreement since 2007 that has encouraged student mobility at an undergraduate level between the two universities as well as the co-supervision of post-graduate students. Both partners have worked together to present academic activities, including five bilateral meetings in Manila (January, 2000; February, 2005; June, 2007; June, 2011, January 2016); two in Melbourne (April, 2001, July, 2009); and one each in Bangkok (June, 2007) and Perth and Mildura and Bendigo (July, 2009). In addition, in June, 2011 an Ateneo delegation attended the Festival of Ideas on Popular Print and Visual Cultures organized by the *Thesis Eleven* Centre for Cultural Sociology and hosted by La Trobe University in Melbourne and Bendigo.

Another key aspect of this long-standing relationship has been the Art Exchange Program, which celebrates a decade of activity with this exhibition *Mutable Truths*. La Trobe’s Melbourne campus is an expansive natural wonderland designed by Australian architect Roy Simpson and modelled on other large-scale green-field universities such as Stanford in the USA. Simpson’s original design placed all the academic buildings in a central cluster with all residential colleges and administrative buildings separated by an extensive moat system. This original plan and philosophy remains largely intact even after decades of expansion. Joining these “two sides” are a number of bridges and it is on one of these bridges that an informal meet and greet led to the establishment of the decade long visual arts partnership; a symbolic neutral meeting place between the academic and non-academic spheres of the University.

Mr Richie Lerma from Ateneo Art Gallery and Dr Vincent Alessi from LUMA, La Trobe University Museum of Art, along with Dr Trevor Hogan, were present at this bridge encounter. What was quickly established was the similarities between the two museum directors. Both had recently begun their tenures at their respective institutions; they were both of a similar age; and perhaps most importantly they both shared ambitious visions for their museums and a willingness to expand cultural traffic beyond their cities and countries. Over the proceeding months, joined by academic and artist Dr Neil Fetting, it was formally agreed to establish an Arts Exchange Program with a commitment to deliver at least one project a year. This would manifest in La Trobe University hosting a winner of the Ateneo Art Awards for a residency and exhibition in Bendigo and Mildura each year and an exhibition exchange between the universities every two years. Over the last decade, La Trobe has hosted more than ten Ateneo Art Award winners and six exhibition have been curated and presented between the two university museums.

The Ateneo Art Award residencies have enabled La Trobe to become the pre-eminent institution in Australia in presenting contemporary art from the Philippines. No other academic or art institution has consistently dedicated part of its annual program to works from this part of Asia. This partnership has been of mutual benefit: it has been an insight for Australian audiences and the Australian experience has been of great influence to the visiting artists. Ronald Ventura, the first resident in this exchange program, arrived making beautiful black-and-white drawings. Taken out to Mungo National Park it was the first time he had experienced the vastness of the desert, the enormous sky above Mildura and the intense heat and brightness of the Australian daylight. A year later this influence was seen in his work when black-and-white made way for spots of intense yellow. For artist Lyle Buencamino it was the pestering Australian flies that would surface on the face of his large-scale portraits and for Leeroy New the necessity of using materials found at a recycling station was to help forge a new approach to his art-making.

The exchange of large-scale curated exhibitions has likewise been of immense importance to the two institutions, artists and audiences. The first exhibition curated by La Trobe University Museum of Art, *My Country: Abstract Interpretations of the Australian Landscape*, was the first exhibition of Australian art presented in the Philippines. It not only celebrated La Trobe University's Art Collection, it was also the first time that Filipino audiences had the opportunity to see works by artists such as Fred Williams, Lawrence Dawes and Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula amongst others. In following exhibitions, audiences were able to engage with contemporary issues such as Australian identity and place and in 2016 with key issues of Australian Indigeneity with the provocative and beautifully curated exhibition *Octoroon* by Michael Brennan. For Australian audiences, they have had the opportunity to experience Filipino modernism, political works inspired by the events of the Marcos regime and the inventive, post-punk aesthetic of much of contemporary Filipino art.

One of the key aspirations of the Art Exchange Program, discussed initially by Richie Lerma and Vincent Alessi, was that it remain active and sustainable. One of the most pleasing elements is that after the departure of both of these actors from the stewardship of their respective institutions, the exchange of exhibitions and artists has continued and further developed. The foundations were built to be strong enough to support future projects and further extensions, irrespective of the people involved. Michael Brennan and Paul Northam at La Trobe University and Boots Herrera at Ateneo de Manila University, along with their respective teams, have kept the flame burning and this ten-year anniversary celebration exhibition, rightly celebrates their achievements.

The Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating espoused in the 1990s that Australia's future lay in Asia. He did not simply mean an economic future, he also believed that we needed to engage more broadly, including culturally with our neighbours in this part of the world – as co-equal partners. The La Trobe University/Ateneo de Manila University partnership

has this philosophy at its core. It is about mutual respect, understanding and a willingness to learn from each other, promote the work of each other and to share academic learning and cultural enrichment with each other. Through the many events and exchanges that have happened over the last fifteen years this has been achieved and from it little things have grown to be important bigger things. Our adventure together continues. Let's party and then begin afresh to take up the task of cultural exchange and mutual learning. Big things are growing still.

Dr Vincent Alessi

Senior Lecturer, Course Coordinator, Higher Degree by Research Coordinator, Visual Arts and Design Department of Creative Arts and English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce
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Dr Trevor Hogan

Director, Philippines Australia Studies Centre
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Mutable Truths: Perspectives in Philippine Contemporary Art

“... contemporary art has become ... thoroughly questioning in nature, extremely wide-ranging in its modes of asking and in the scope of its inquiries. At the same time ... can be more provisional as to its expectations about answers.”

(Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*)

Organizing a contemporary art exhibition with ten artists is a challenging and exciting undertaking. This one, let us say, took over ten years in the making with not just one curator, but a group of individuals who took part in an annual selection process. The ten participating artists were selected among the three winners between 2005 and 2014 of the Philippine contemporary art prize known as the Ateneo Art Awards (AAA). Conferred by the Ateneo Art Gallery, the program was conceived in 2004 by Ramon E. S. Lerma, then Director and Chief Curator, as a way of recognizing and encouraging innovative practices among emerging artists below 36 years of age. This was in keeping with the spirit of how the Ateneo Art Gallery, a university museum, was founded through the generous donation from artist and patron Fernando Zobel de Ayala that included his personal collection focusing on young Philippine postwar modernists.

The monetary prize AAA offers is quite modest. Nonetheless, it has gained repute as one of the most sought after award among young contemporary artists. It expanded its thrust

by providing winning artists an opportunity to take up a 4- to 6-week residency overseas, among them with the La Trobe University, a partner university of Ateneo De Manila University. Each year, residency partners are given the option to invite one among three winners to spend six weeks at the Visual Arts Centre (VAC) in the Bendigo Campus. Thus, selection of the ten featured artists in this exhibit underwent various layers – from the nomination phase, shortlisting and selection of winners by a jury that changes every year¹, and the invitation as decided by residency partners.

It is important to disclose this context to understand the seemingly disparate selection of artists. But then again, perhaps it is not. Rather, the line-up provides an overview of current practices and concerns in the Philippine art scene. Admittedly though, the selection is very biased towards Metro Manila, which continues to be the country's art center, especially with the recent growth of the art market and as a site of two major art fairs. But we hope to see an eventual change in the scope of the Awards as the infrastructure for the arts in

other cities around the archipelago are undergoing interesting transformations. Art spaces and regional art festivals, mostly artist initiatives, accord more avenues for artistic production and engagements outside the metropolitan center.

While it is often said that awards make an artist's career, the reverse can similarly apply. Now on its 14th year, the Ateneo Art Awards was originally intended by Lerma as “a list of critics' choices.” The program has since expanded to include artist residencies and recently a prize for art criticism with local and international publication partners.² AAA also gained stature by the subsequent success of its awardees, reinforcing the choices made by its jurors. Moreover, awards nor its winners do not exist in a vacuum. They constantly respond to the changing conditions that affect the art world and society. Terry Smith poses the question: “how do particular artistic practices relate to general social conditions?”³ He observes how “... contemporary art has become ... thoroughly questioning in nature, extremely wide-ranging in its modes of asking and in the scope of its inquiries.”⁴

From the onset, it was decided that artists will not be limited to work around a theme. The intent is for each artist to present his or her current concerns or directions taken since the residency and since winning the award. Thus, the title *Mutable Truths* which encapsulates their diverse practices. How do they live in the contemporary? in the now? or respond to multiple relationships?

While they all share the same nationality, they deal with different geographies and states of affairs that may be personal, local, regional, and global. Each artist has developed relationships with different realities – with fellow artists, institutions (e.g. art schools, museums, galleries, auction houses), modes of practice, forms, media, and personal and public undertakings. With the expansion of the art market in the past decade, they too have been navigating their ways within and without, as players and collaborators in the trade of art and even as critics and pundits of the system.

Imaging and Memory

Figurative painting continues to be a significant genre in the Philippines, an art form that traces its origins in the 19th century, back when art training was administered by the church and later by art academies founded by the Spanish crown. Filipino artists are renowned for their deft in handling the brush. But beyond this prowess, image making is used as a tool to explore societal issues and personal histories.

Ronald Ventura was the first artist among the Ateneo Art Awards winners to visit Australia in 2005, through a residency at The Cross Arts Projects in Sydney. At that time, the residency program with the La Trobe University was not yet in place but he had the opportunity to visit the Melbourne and Mildura campuses. In an interview, he noted that the trip to Australia was crucial to his development as an artist. Direct encounters with iconic artworks in museums, from the Renaissance to the contemporary, led him to “constantly analyze what is going on in the art scenes of different countries.” Working simultaneously as a fine arts teacher for nine years (from 1993 to 2001), Ventura straddled between his day job and studio to create works for art competitions and group and solo exhibitions. By this time, he started to shift from the aesthetics of social realism he was first known for to a style that is more introspective and hyperrealist using a monochromatic palette. He received recognition through awards and market validation which has led to invitations to international exhibitions and biennales. In 2011, his work titled *Greyhound* fetched a record -breaking price in auction for a Southeast Asian artist. Ventura has consistently engaged his practice in the craft of image making and continues to do so while employing a sundry of forms – paintings, drawings, print, mixed media works, sculptures and installation projects. In his *Human Study* series, he deals with the concept of mutation between humans and the animal kingdom, raising questions about the superiority of one over the other. Rendering an almost photographic image, Ventura melds human faces with animal features, carefully selecting specific elements to switch, to arrive at an ideal entity.

Similarly, Marina Cruz focuses on the human subject but implicitly through the object of clothing. Her works revolve around family and memory, an interest initiated by the discovery of materials from her family's archives composed of photographs, memorabilia and old clothes that belonged to her mother and aunt, her mother's twin sister. Cruz melds new technologies with traditional craft to produce large-scale images of little girls' dresses. These are photographed and digitally printed or carefully painted on canvas then delicately embroidered with biographical narratives. The creased clothing thus serves as the foundation, like a rocky terrain, for a life lived. Like glyph-based maps from precolonial Mexico, Cruz situates icons in thread to mark the journey of a relative – mother, aunt, and grandfather. In *Gregorio*, her grandfather's *barong* (a Filipino formal wear in delicately embroidered plant fiber) is printed larger than life. She works from the traditional embroidery, disturbs its symmetry with her own needlework, to represent aspects of his life as a husband, a devout Catholic, and a man afflicted with a heart ailment. *Goodbye* shows a camisole her mom and aunt used to wear as children. The garment is rendered all creased and stained and embroidered with references to the eventual separation of the siblings from each other.

Recalling the past in pop culture, Lyle Buencamino is known for large-scale paintings based on still shots of movies produced in the 1950s – what is often referred to as the Golden Age in Philippine cinema. His painterly style produces a surface texture that simulates projections in old movie houses or black and white images seen through picture tube television sets. In this exhibit, Buencamino is represented by works created in 2009, two years after he visited La Trobe. A distinct twist in this series is how the artist chose to capture in these vintage movie stills awkward moments, almost like “out-takes” from the director's point of view. *No Fighting in the Museum 1 & 2* are fight scenes, composed in a contrived manner, referring to the “staged” process of image making. Intended as an institutional critique, the works are Buencamino's reflections on propriety, that is, how people should behave as dictated by institutions like the museum.

Revisiting the Residency

Poklong Anading, Buen Calubayan, Martha Atienza, and Charles Buenconsejo choose to reference back to their artist residency, or the notion of it. Anading's Shared Residence is an iteration of the same project recently launched in the Ateneo Art Gallery. It examines the notion of public and private spaces and communal ownership – from the participating artists to its prospective borrowers (from among the university community). A sense of community and trust from the collaborators is crucial for the experiment to proceed. For the La Trobe edition, Anading invited Australian or Australia-based artists he had met through previous residencies or art projects. Those who have confirmed participation include, Maria Cruz, Lisa Andrew, Neil Fetting, David Griggs, Kiron Robinson, Juni Salvador, and Tony Twigg. Cruz, now based in Berlin and visits the Philippines every year, was instrumental to the AAA residency in Australia which was initially with The Cross Art Projects in Sydney. She also provided accommodations to Ventura before the formal residency partnership with the VAC began, while David Griggs hosted Anading the following year.

The lives these artworks will take in the next months are also integral to the development of the project. Borrowers are encouraged to document and share their personal spaces that these nomadic artworks will inhabit. Documentation will be compiled through digital media, tracing a work's movements online, thus creating another platform of sharing. *Shared Residence* underscores the aspect of contemporary art as a form of relational process through collaboration and engagement. Anading's practice is varied, ranging from photography, video, and installation works. Regardless of form, he engages the social bonds he has established and nurtured among communities as an integral component of his artmaking process.

In *Instructions on Viewing the Landscape*, Calubayan adopts a process-based approach grounded on the archive. This title refers to a series of works that began after his La Trobe

Residency in 2013. He acknowledges that the VAC residency provided him with “the necessary space and time to reflect and experiment on how to shift perspectives and to map different views.” Like most of his recent introspective projects, “landscape” is both the subject and a metaphor for a setting, for example, the art scene or his own artistic career. He arrived at a diagram that serves as guide on different “ways of seeing” as presented in his return show at the AAG in 2015 titled Bio-Works. Personal artefacts provide the content and form to plot the trajectory of his own life and, in the case of his 2013 award-winning exhibit titled *Fressie Capulong*, that of his mother.

For *Mutable Truths*, Calubayan creates a setting that maps out the 10-year history of the residency and the cultural partnership between La Trobe and Ateneo. Materials were compiled from the VAC and AAG archives such as catalogs for the Ateneo Art Awards, documentation of residents' VAC exhibitions, guest books, catalogs of return exhibitions organized after residencies, and memorabilia that relate to his own residency in Bendigo. These are then carefully laid out within an area simulating the studio space he once occupied. A deft painter, Calubayan's art practice is also informed by his years of experience working in museums (the University of Santo Tomas Museum and the National Museum) where activities related to cataloguing, archiving, and curating have currency.

Atienza and Buenconsejo, both working with multi-media, focus on their personal experiences during the residency. For raw materials, they literally culled through their archives of digital recordings compiled, much like how collages and montages are fabricated. For Atienza, the links between ports and water has been the subject of recent works, a theme which is rooted to her Dutch and Filipino family histories and ties up all four residencies she earned in 2012.⁵ Her residencies culminated with an ambitious project, an immersive environment titled *Endless Hours at Sea* first mounted in the Ateneo Art Gallery in 2014. The multi-media based installation required close collaboration with a physicist to allow visitors to experience

the sights and sounds while in a cargo vessel. It has since been re-installed twice at the Cultural Center of the Philippines and in the recently-concluded Singapore Biennale, acquiring a more technically savvy configuration.

For *Mutable Truths*, Atienza chose to eliminate anything visual and concentrated on the auditory elements for her installation work. Going back to the same digital recordings, she extracted the sounds of seas, ports, and cargo vessels. Instead of simply using speakers, Atienza experiments with a speaker driver attached to one side of a metal wall, thus creating another layer of vibrating sound. This sonic experiment will ultimately relate to a distinct place since what we experience is determined by the shape of the space and its acoustics.

Charles Buenconsejo, the most recent resident in the group, employs digital print and moving images how a weaver entwines the warp and weft. Ironically, his practice focuses on the deconstruction of images as he creates forms and patterns from spliced images. Buenconsejo titles his work *Charles Buenconsejo, Relative Nothing*, referring to himself in the third person and referencing his VAC exhibition in 2015. Triggered by a motion detector, the camera records curators, gallery staff, and visitors within a half day period. He manipulates the footages recorded during the opening day by zooming in and out as a way of recounting memorable experiences with the person captured within each frame. From a sociological stance, he frames recorded images as a metaphor of surveillance and as evidence of one's mundane existence. In this context, collected documentation is not merely about the residency but is also about how our consciousness remembers.

Living in the Now

The works of Mark Salvatus, Kawayan de Guia, and Leeroy New may seem disparate in form yet they employ similar approaches to their practice. They are very much connected with their respective communities and their works informed by current events and social concerns.

The woes and challenges of city living have always been strong in Salvatus' cross-disciplinary practice. He co-founded Pilipinas Street Plan, a group that brought art to the public through street art and graffiti. In 2012, Salvatus and his wife, Japanese curator Mayumi Hirano, co-founded 98B, an artist collaborative which eventually found base in Escolta, the heart of the old business and finance district in Manila. It has since provided a venue for artists to discuss and incubate ideas and engage with collaborative projects. Equally important are the connections made among business owners and residents of a district rich in architectural heritage but threatened by urban development.

The street and the city continue to be sources of inspiration and fascination for Salvatus –the incompetent institutions entrusted with its care, its old majestic structures alongside high rise dwellings, and the marginalized inhabitants. In this exhibit, Salvatus reworks a 2015 video installation titled *Gates*, inspired by Dan Brown's *Inferno* wherein he depicted Manila as the gates of hell. The La Trobe installation fulfills his original plan to project the image of a gate in its actual size, blocking the entrance of the exhibition space. Playing the video of the gates opening and closing in a loop, visitors are confronted by issues concerning urbanism, boundaries, security, and public-private relationship.

Kawayan de Guia lives in Baguio City located in the Cordillera mountains of Northern Luzon, a city developed as a vacation destination during the American colonial period. He comes from a family of artists and grew up among a community that promoted local artists and nurtured pride for the indigenous. The Baguio Arts Guild, co-founded by his father filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik, with Santiago Bose, Roberto Villanueva, and BenCab organized art festivals that gathered local and international artists and curators. This context informs De Guia's own practice and his recent community-based collaborative projects such as the *Halsema AXS Art Project* (2012). For five days, approximately 30 artists travelled 120 kilometers along the Halsema highway in an old bus to engage with each other and local artisans to create site-specific and

ephemeral works. The project was a commentary on the rapid environmental degradation as well as on the impact of commercialism and art trade. Regardless of form, De Guia's works and projects are responses to current social issues often bestowed with wit and humor and taking on configurations that reference Philippine history and pop culture.

His work *Lifetime Substance Control* is very current, responding to the aggressive crackdown on drug users by the present administration under President Rodrigo Duterte. Recent killings brought about by the drug war led De Guia to an existential mode, questioning one's "existence and extinction." The multi-paneled configuration of drawn, painted, and actual objects is evocative of the artist's workspace. It started as anatomical drawing exercises when he was working on the horses (formed out of discarded film reels) for the Aichi Triennial in Nagoya in 2016. As a pattern was formed, objects scattered around his studio "started to enter the work". Perhaps as a way of taking stock, he composes painted and actual objects, arranged in neatly-defined compartments, bestowing each with a sense of significance, at least to his life. Interestingly, amidst the tableaux of still life and boxed objects, a black cat sits on a dog's skull staring at you the viewer. It is not necessarily ominous and forbidding as his studio and home are animated by feline pets. De Guia plans to extend this triptych to a 12-panel piece, implying a continued journey of introspection.

Leeroy New's artistic practice finds strength in the public sphere, evident in the communal processes employed and the interactive nature of most of his works. He acknowledges how his residency in 2009 significantly expanded his creative process by realizing the possibility of non-traditional and industrial materials such as cable ties and flexible tubes. *Balete*, his return show at the AAG in 2010, marked the fusion of his early ventures in sculpture and installation as a student and the future directions for outdoor and public art projects. He has since taken a multi-platform practice, linking the spheres of sculpture, production design, theater, film,

and fashion design. New describes his site-specific works as "sculptural interventions" or appropriations of mutated forms grounded on local mythology and history. He fashions worlds and its inhabitants that are imagined but are nonetheless suggestive of current conditions and personalities. Thus, his creations were equally powerful in the context of the many collaborations with performers in experimental theater productions and in protest street rallies.

For the La Trobe Art Institute and the Castlemaine State Museum (a project commissioned for the Castlemaine State Festival), New revisits early works that depict cavernous spaces. Titled *Grotto* and *La Puerta del Laberinto*, respectively, New returns to the recycling centers for materials, responding to the resources offered by the specific place and environment. Eight years later, he is now more adept with using industrial materials to arrive at a mystical and mythological realm. *Grotto* relates to the quandary residents of Metro Manila face each day – city traffic! After discovering a large supply of car parts from recycling plants around Bendigo, New decides to focus on the general urban scenery. He creates a grotto or a cave with red tail lights and hubcaps to re-contextualize a chamber for meditation into the motionless space in a traffic jam. In his words: "The sea of red lights is a signal for stillness." A local commuter may also associate the chamber as the inside a vehicle where one is forced to meditate just to survive the daily commute of a least three to four hours.

New also subscribes to the animistic belief of spirits inhabiting nature, where caves and balete trees serve as dwellings for spirits and as places of refuge. *La Puerta del Laberinto*, on the other hand, projects an eerie mood but his playful forms and use of materials create an inviting space. Both projects encourage physical interaction as New's prescription to revive closer ties with nature.

The practice of these ten artists are clearly influenced by the different contexts and environments they chose to develop and sustain relationships with. Collectively, their diversity, inventiveness, and criticality provide a glimpse into the currents in the Philippine art scene.

The partnership between La Trobe University and the Ateneo de Manila University clearly has provided platforms for a vibrant cultural dialogue. Apart from the mainstream avenues of large-scale exhibitions and biennales, exhibition exchanges and artist residencies also create meaningful relationships and expand collaborations to communities within and outside the universities. Returns are multiple from both institutional and personal levels, and its forms continuously shifting and changing, as diverse as contemporary art practice.

Ma. Victoria T. Herrera March 2017

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¹The panel of jurors include 7 members, two of which are ex-officio, namely the AAG Director and a representative from the Fine Arts Department. The remaining jurors change every year to represent the following: (1) a juror not based in the Philippines (curator, artist, or museum director), (2) a practicing curator, (3) an academic or art critic, (4) a senior artist who is represented in the collection, and (5) past AAA winners beyond the age limit of 36 years old.

²In 2014, the Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation and Ateneo Art Gallery launched an art criticism writing prize to encourage more art writers and to bring art criticism into the public sphere beyond classrooms and academic journals.. Winners were given a regular column in the national daily, *The Philippine Star*, and recently in the bi-monthly publication *ArtAsiaPacific Magazine*.

³Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, p. 2.

⁴Ibid, p. 8.

⁵That year (2012), Martha Atienza was invited by all residency partners. Apart from La Trobe University, she did her residencies with Artesan Studio in Singapore, Liverpool Hope University, and Art Omi New York.



Ronald Ventura

Artist Profile

Ronald Ventura (b. 1973) has expanded the narratives of the Filipino folklore through the interweaving of history, mythology, nature and pop culture. Going beyond the canvas, he has been experimenting with a variety of media from installation to sculpture to object-making, mixed media to photography. His most recent solo exhibitions are *RONALD VENTURA SHADOW FOREST: Encounters and Explorations* at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila in 2017, *Project: Finding Home* held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei in 2016, and *Behind the Clouds* held at The Drawing Room in Makati in 2016. Ventura lives and works in Manila.

2005 - The Cross Arts Project Residency, Sydney

Ronald Ventura has consistently engaged his practice in the craft of image making and continues to do so while employing a sundry of forms – paintings, drawings, print, mixed media works and sculptures. In his *Human Study* series, he deals with the concept of mutation between humans and the animal kingdom, raising questions about the superiority of one over the other. Rendering a hyperrealist image, Ventura melds human faces with animal features, carefully selecting specific elements to switch, thus fashioning an ideal entity.

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Black Star Series 8

Fiberglass, resin charcoal, polyurethane, paint
39 x 39 x 52 in
2016

Human Study 10

Acrylic and graphite on canvas on stainless steel
14.25 x 9.5 in
2017

[Opposite Page](#)

Human Study 1

Graphite and acrylic on canvas
48 x 72 in
2017

Human Study 4

Graphite and acrylic on canvas
48 x 72 in
2017

Human Study 5

Fiberglass, resin and polyurethane paint
79 x 46 x 20 in
2017





Poklong Anading

Artist Profile

Poklong Anading's (b.1975) practice utilizes a wide range of media from video, installation, photography and object-making. Taking a more process-oriented and conceptual approach, his continuing inquiry takes off from issues on self-reflexivity, both of himself and others, and site-specificity, in continuing discussion about society, time and territory. He recently partook in the Philippine Pavilion of the 15th International Architectural Exhibition in this year's Venice Biennale, and had solo exhibitions in Japan (Taro Nasu) and Jeddah (Athr Gallery), as well as group shows in Shanghai (Minsheng Art Museum) and Hong Kong (Para Site). Anading lives and works in Manila.

Shared Residence

With the participation of Lisa Andrew, Maria Cruz, Neil Fetting, David Griggs, Kiron Robinson, Juni Salvador, and Tony Twigg
2017

2006 – The Cross Arts Project Residency, Sydney

Poklong Anading's *Shared Residence* interrogates the underlying processes, frameworks and practices in exhibition making, specifically focused on the terms 'to share' and 'to reside.' The activity of lending and borrowing explores the dispersion of information – be it physical or digital—as the times shift into contemporary iterations. It explores the formation of meaning as things enter and leave spaces, particularly in the connections it creates and removes. Meanings that surround objects, whether a book or an artwork, transitions as it is 'shared' from a public space, such as a gallery, library or museum, to the private space of the borrower. This movement also sheds light to the kind of viewership and exchanges created, as well as the delineation between what is public and what is personal in today's world.

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km 0
video installation
35:10 mins
2016

[Opposite Page](#)

Maria Cruz
Tubero
Oil paint on MDF board
9 x 12 in
2015

Kiron Robinson
Young women floating down
Archival Pigment Inkjet print on
Baryta paper
31 x 42 cm
2015

Lisa Andrew
Wall pillow (synthetic surfaces)
Dye sublimation on polyester
neoprene, poly fibre stuffing
54 x 77 x 2 cm
2017

David Griggs
Gay Skull Cowboy
Oil on canvas
51 x 40.5 cm
2016

Tony Twigg
Poklong 4 wish bones
Enamel paint on timber construction
44.5 x 44.5 cm/ 89 x 21.5 cm
2017

Juni Salvador
Neither Here Nor There
Ready mades / Ceramic plate
and wood stand
85 x 75 cm
2017

Neil Fetting
You know, I'm one of a kind
Mixed media
38.5 x 53.5 cm
2007

Poklong Anading
every water is an island
Video projection
Variable size
2013 – present





Lyle Buencamino

Artist Profile

Lyle Buencamino's (b. 1978) works are often about the influence of images on personal history and self-image, and the failings of memory. Often printed in impasto, the objects become about pointing and levity. A recipient of the Ateneo Art Awards in 2007, he has since had two solo exhibitions: *All the Symptoms But Not the Disease* at Ateneo Art Gallery (2008) and *Death of the Last Romantic* at Finale Art File (2013); and numerous groups shows in Manila, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Buencamino lives and works in Singapore.

2007 VAC-La Trobe Residency

Lyle Buencamino is known for his large-scale paintings based on still shots of movies produced by the now defunct LVN Productions in the 1950s – what is often referred to as the Golden Age in Philippine cinema. The series *No Fighting in the Museum* began as a reflection on propriety and behavior in institutions and other similar public spaces. As his work often involve a search for his identity as a painter and artist of his time, Lyle Buencamino took a particular interest in this tongue-in-cheek read that forwards a domestication of his own thinking. It poses a direct reading of the work, laying great trust in humor as its foundation.

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Speculations on Potato and Tomato (detail)
Oil on canvas
2006

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No Fighting in the Museum 1
Oil on canvas
72 x 96 in
2009
Collection of Michelangelo and Lourdes Samson

No Fighting in the Museum 2
Oil on canvas
72 x 96 in
2009
Collection of Michelangelo and Lourdes Samson





Marina Cruz

Artist Profile

Through realistic painterly representation, **Marina Cruz (b. 1982)** delves into the intricate map of memory and nostalgia. Taking mostly from her family history, she makes tangible the depth of reminiscence and the life that objects carry as it persists through time. In 2012, Cruz won the Culture Center of the Philippines' Thirteen Artists Award. Her latest solo exhibitions include *Loose Threads* at 1335 Mabini (2015) in Manila, *Wear and Tear* at Mind Set Art Center in Taipei (2015), and *Unearthed Landscapes* at West Gallery in Quezon City (2015). She lives and works in Bulacan, Philippines.

Profile photo by MM Yu.

2008 VAC-La Trobe Residency

For years, Marina Cruz has tirelessly archived her family's history through the preservation their personal affects in her works. Glimpses into their narrative are made manifest with every carefully laid out piece of clothing that is painted or printed on canvas. Embroidered allegories about her relatives' lives turn into badges for their triumphs, devotions and frustrations. The piece *Gregorio* is a tribute to the artist's late grandfather, represented by the formal shirt or 'barong' that he used to wear. Symbolisms of his life animate the surface, with the heart denoting his being a devout catholic, his illness, the enlargement of the heart, and his kindness. *Goodbye* on the otherhand looks into her mother and her twin, as she utlizes the camisole that they used to wear together as children. Sewn in are imagery that speak of the sisters' eventual separation.

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Just balls...atoms, planets and a hole

Oil on canvas
40 x 60 in
2015

[Opposite Page](#)

Gregorio

Embroidery on printed canvas using UV ink
70 x 60 in
2009

Goodbye

Oil and embroidery on canvas
12 x 9 in
2017





Leeroy New

Artist Profile

Leeroy New's (b. 1986) versatility comes in being able to venture across the disciplines of the fine arts, film, theater, design, photography, styling and fashion with the use of his own distinct vocabulary. He is known to create otherworldly costumes, installations and objects with the use found synthetic material and discarded industrial parts. Born in General Santos City, his latest exhibition *Partake Harder* was held at Mo Space in 2016. New received the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2012. He was shortlisted for the 2016 Ateneo Art Awards for his exhibition *<3U-lolz* held at the Bencab Museum.

2009 VAC-La Trobe Residency

Leeroy New's artistic practice finds strength in the public sphere, evident in the communal processes employed and the interactive nature of most of his works. He acknowledges how his 2009 residency in Bendigo significantly expanded his creative process by realizing the possibility of non-traditional and industrial materials such as cable ties and flexible tubes. He fashions worlds and its inhabitants that are imagined but are nonetheless suggestive of current conditions and personalities.

Grotto relates to the quandary residents of Metro Manila face each day – city traffic! After discovering a large supply of car parts from recycling plants around Bendigo, New decides to focus on the general urban scenery. He creates a grotto or a cave with red tail lights and hubcaps to re-contextualize a chamber for meditation into the motionless space in a traffic jam. In his words: "The sea of red lights is a signal for stillness." A local commuter may also associate the chamber as the inside a vehicle where one is forced to meditate just to survive the daily commute of a least three to four hours.

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Balete

Found and recycled materials, zip ties
2009

Polyp

Metal frame, assorted industrial hoses, cable ties, wooden platform and plastic mesh
Variable dimensions
2015

[Opposite Page](#)

Grotto

Site-specific installation, wire, epoxy, cable ties, found objects from Bendigo and Castlemaine
Variable dimensions
2017





Kawayan De Guia

Artist Profile

Kawayan de Guia (b. 1979) is a Baguio-based artist who presents commentary on socio-political and cultural issues with the use of collage, painting, installation and object-making. Although deeply grounded on his interest in the narratives of his heritage, he weaves together disparate imagery and materials that result in contemporary works that stay faithful to the weight of its history or spirituality. De Guia has had numerous solo shows in various spaces in the Philippines, Australia, China, Japan and Germany. He received the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2009. In 2013, he was part of the curatorial team of the Singapore Biennale.

Profile photo by MM Yu.

2011 VAC-La Trobe Residency

In participation to the ongoing struggle against the current government's war on drugs, of which he has been a personal witness to, Kawayan de Guia pronounces his frustrations and existential wanderings in the form of this 3-panelled mixed media work. What began as a continuation of his anatomical drawing exercise while working on the horses for the Aichi Triennale in Nagoya last year has turned into a methodical consolidation and deconstruction of the various objects and patterns around his studio. Symbolisms and imagery of the artist's and the nation's past and present circumstances merge, revealing the scent of lingering death and the invasion of fear in the everyday.

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Dear hunter (detail)

Mixed media
182 x 213 x 12 in
2014

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Lifetime Substance Control

Mixed media
64 x 132 x 4 in (triptych)
2017





Mark Salvatus

Artist Profile

Mark Salvatus (b. 1980) confronts and intervenes with the saturation of urbanization through his performative, interactive and ephemeral projects. Here, he explores the political in the everyday, finding a universally present association among societies around the world. He recently received the Asia Center Fellowship in Kyoto and Osaka from the Japan Foundation in 2016, the IASPIS grant in Sweden in 2014 and the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2012. He is also co-founder and Artistic Director to independent space and platform 98B COLLABoratory. Salvatus works and lives between Manila and Osaka.

Profile photo by Maurice Boyer.

2010 VAC-La Trobe Residency

Particularly positioned at the entrance of the exhibition, *Gates* examines the dialectics of welcoming and unwelcoming. As the exhibition introduces Filipino artists to the audiences of La Trobe, and as inspired by Dan Brown's novel *Inferno* which refers to Manila as the 'gates of hell', its varying forms, all of which typical to city, feign an opening and an entry way, only to be closed off at the next transition. This never-ending loop explore the nuanced layers of security, public-private relationships, urbanism, power and boundaries in the public sphere.

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Claws

Tables, books, catnip, rope
Dimensions Variable
Installation view: Sonsbeek International 2016, Arnhem, Netherlands
2016

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Gates

Video installation (HDV, color, silent, loop)
As per actual projection size
2015





Martha Atienza

Artist Profile

Dutch-Filipina artist **Martha Atienza (b. 1981)** creates multi-sensory and immersive installations, grounded on both societal concerns and personal history. With the use of experimental filmmaking paired with audio-visual stimulation and objects, she looks into the deeper relations of man with nature and its community, particularly focused in her hometowns in Rotterdam, Netherlands and Bantayan Islands, Cebu. Last October, Atienza was part of the Singapore Biennale where she was nominated for the 11th Benesse Art Prize. She was also recently awarded with the 2016 Gasworks Residency in London, the 2016 Ateneo Art Awards, and the 2015 Cultural Center of the Philippines' Thirteen Artists Award in Manila.

2012 VAC-La Trobe Residency

Martha Atienza isolates another facet of her months long travels at sea, done during her her residencies at New York Art OMI, Hope Liverpool, Artesan Singapore and La Trobe University Australia, with *RESOLUTION A.468 (XII)*. Her obsession with maritime runs deep with her family's history, her grandfather being a lighthouse keeper, her father being a sea captain, her mother having worked for Holland America Line, a shipping company, and her brothers currently working for the shipping industry. Recorded sounds and vibrations of ports and cargo vessels generate an immersive installation, allowing viewers to somehow step into and traverse the same path that she has taken in her journey.

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Gilubong ang Akon Pusod sa Dagat (My Navel is Buried in the Sea)

3-screen video installation

31 min. 48sec.

2011

[Opposite Page](#)

RESOLUTION A.468 (XII)

Sound installation, 196 x 60 cm aluminium sheets with Dayton Exciters

17 min loop

2017





Buen Calubayan

Artist Profile

Buen Calubayan (b. 1980) traverses the various levels of self-reflexivity through a scrutiny of the linkages, contradictions and landscapes it exists in. Through this biographical lens, he questions the position of his personal present as both an artist and Filipino within its historical, social and cultural past. His paintings, sculptures, archives and conceptual installations are left as evidences to the rooted investigations he enacts. Calubayan held his latest solos *Hidalgo: Towards a History from Within* at Blanc Gallery in 2016 and *Biowork* at the Ateneo Art Gallery in 2015; and was part of group exhibition *WASAKI: Filipino Art Today* at Arndt Berlin also in 2015. He received the Cultural Center of the Philippines Thirteen Artists Award in 2009.

2013 VAC-La Trobe Residency

Buen Calubayan creates another version of *Instructions on Viewing the Landscape* as he continues the contemplation of his positioning in the grand narrative of art history in the Philippines. Through the creation of diagrams, as well as putting on display archival materials, photos, books and notes relating to his experiences, he is able to methodically activate objects as well as viewers to participate in the mechanisms of framing history, time and space. Specifically for this piece, he extends the practice beyond the self by incorporating the entire experience of exchanges and exhibition making through the collection of materials that span before and after his own residency at VAC - La Trobe University. Calubayan takes off from his own standpoint and negotiates not only with the objects and space at hand, but also the past, present and future that it carries with it.



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Hidalgo: Towards a History from Within

Installation view: Oil paintings appropriated from F. R. Hidalgo's works; Documentations, notes, timeline and diagrams. Blanc Gallery, Quezon City. 2016

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Instructions on Viewing the Landscape

Site-specific installation
Variable dimensions
2017



Charles Buenconsejo

Artist Profile

Charles Buenconsejo (b. 1984) continues his ongoing investigation of the digital visual culture through his videos, installations and photographs. His unique catalogs of constructed and deconstructed forms from his everyday life epitomize the personal and social functions of the image, which tiptoes between the creativity of man and the illusory algorithm of the surface. He won the Ateneo Art Awards twice, in 2013 and 2014. His recent solo exhibitions include *Name, Kind, Application, Date Last Opened, Date Added, Date Modified, Date Created, Size, Tags* at Artinformal in Mandaluyong (2016), and *Relative Nothing* at Ateneo Art Gallery in Quezon City and at La Trobe University- Visual Arts Center at Bendigo, Australia (2015).

2014 VAC - La Trobe Residency

With the use of his collection of video footages from the opening day of his solo exhibition at the Visual Arts Center of La Trobe University, Charles Buenconsejo visually depicts the manner by which our consciousness retrospects and introspects. Depending on the movement in the space, strategically installed motion detection cameras continuously record how the room is utilized, automatically turning off and leaving black spaces on the grid when it is empty. Audiences then partake in an ongoing loop wherein there is a blurring of the subject's and the object's positions in such surveillance. This parallelism that Buenconsejo creates between man's warped sense of remembering and the straightforward characteristic of a camera's recording acknowledges our engagements with the digital age.

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Being and Time
Latex print on fabric
300 x 59 in
2016

[Opposite Page](#)

Relative Nothing
Video installation
2015



Mutable Truths: Perspectives in Philippine Contemporary Art

Poklong Anading, Martha Atienza, Lyle Buencamino, Charles Buenconsejo, Buen Calubayan, Marina Cruz Garcia, Kawayan De Guia, Leeroy New, Mark Salvatus, Ronald Ventura

With the special participation of Lisa Andrew, Maria Cruz, Neil Fettling, David Griggs, Kiron Robinson, Juni Salvador, and Tony Twigg

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Cover image

Lyle Buencamino, *Speculations on Potato and Tomato* (detail), 2009, oil on canvas
Image courtesy of the artist

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