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# Art on the Back Burner: Gender as the Elephant in the Room of Southeast Asian Art Histories

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EILEEN LEGASPI-RAMIREZ

## Abstract

*Despite the operative skepticism about the way compensatory art history appears to have reduced the feminist project to merely expanding rather than challenging the canon, the assertion here is that still too scant attention has been paid to studying the critical role that primarily woman artist-organisers have played in shaping narratives of practice. In focusing on their visible tasks through variable degrees of sublimating art practice in deference to less visible tasks like archiving, art education, organising and publication, the research also privileges the aspects of circulation and reception as it revisits the shaping of artworlds in stories that have ironically kept such 'maintenance' tasks virtually off the record.*

It is telling that certain visual correlatives for the woman in Southeast Asia continue to circulate: from Garuda's wing in Indonesia to an elephant's hind legs in Thailand, we find amidst these variably poetic depictions an emplacing that literally decentres women from the pivotal junctures of action. In either case, women are not entirely effaced, just playing less visible

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functions or occupying much less stellar roles in an otherwise compelling story. This research hopes to probe into such disenfranchisements of variable degrees across cases and sites (the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore), in which there appears a need to push a writing of selves into history that still keeps women at bay. As a mildly epistemic venture probing into why the labour of art is not enfolded enough, that is, beyond the narrowed space of production, the key question that this writing surfaces is: why does art historical 'genealogy' still not fully encompass the maintenance tasks that enable the making and or/encountering of work?

One ambition of this study is the further nuancing of research by conflating gender with systemic contingencies that compound the odds against producing a more equitable and critical telling. This is very much a kindred project with Yvonne Low's writing on the "social processes of art production" in her essay, "Women Re-modelling Artworlds: Exhibitions and Projects on Southeast Asian Women Artists (1990–2015)".<sup>1</sup> Taking a cue from this text and several other pieces of writing that have an implied affinity with it,<sup>2</sup> I would ask, might it benefit our work if we move away from mere recovery operations (as Low puts it)? Here, I hazard a more modest project of lining up a spectrum of categories for study. In this particular case, I would argue for paying keen attention to the division of labour in various artworlds, and thus thinking of gender more readily in tandem with conflating categories like class, race or citizenship, locality/transregionality, diverging social circumstances, among other subjectivity-nuancing options. By 'twinning' gender with such specificities, the hypothesis posed is that we enact both grounding as well as broadening gestures within our field.

That said, even compensatory art history succeeds in at least prying open research on unrecognised labour. And by this I mean variably undervalued or overlooked/dismissed labour, which we find in Low's writing on the "amateur",<sup>3</sup> and which I found to still underpin an interview with Thailand-based artist Varsha Nair, who was asked a question about women Asian artists still being seen as "dabblers".<sup>4</sup> In attempting this study, I found the idea of unevenly shared labour a productive category, given that gender apparently registers as still too fiercely charged or unequivocally ghetto-pushing for some living artists, particularly of later generations. For instance, in my case, one 'subject' was palpably put off in my having 'roped' her into research that privileged gender when it was a trope she did not feel was central to her practice. This was a very visceral experience of the baggage of language getting in the way of producing possibly new knowledge, since even early exchanges get pre-empted. My sense is that it might take such overtly agency-enabling leverage in the framing of research to keep the work going.

So how might we attempt to write history that as Low puts it, would not come across as “methodologically flawed and analytically limiting”?<sup>5</sup> How do we move away from generating narratives that interminably cast women as victims/cast-offs and instead render them as knowing subjects who make choices about how they might be known/placed in the artworlds that they themselves continue to be invested in shaping?

For this research, my recourse has been to reflect on a much more generic notion of ‘maintenance’, which the American artist Andrea Fraser’s work *Services* (1994) surfaced in regard to invisible labour in the infrastructure of museums. In the performative gestures making up *Services*, Fraser takes on backroom tasks that make the smooth operation of such venerable institutions possible. Over two decades down the line now, it would be easy enough to extend Fraser’s trope to look at more diversified notions of labour parsed in writings on artworld power dynamics: among those ensconced in elevated positions inside institutions with their interns and other underlings, for instance, or between more ‘senior’ artists and their assistants, or even between curators and their staff complements.

Another way to frame this is to see how those who take upon themselves such art housekeeping tasks get effaced by the focus on production, reception and circulation, that is, how the positionalities ascribed in our social relations prop up practice without adequately recognising that a certain luxury of time is needed so that artists can make, think and become legible in art history. That said, what is proffered are disjointed narratives not only of predictably omitted practice but tales of agentive women who were not only artists but many things besides, because that is how they determined to have their multiple selves play out—not isolated from encountering the obstacles set before women who do find themselves having to choose between practice and domicile, or between making art and making art appear publicly, but also perhaps simply refusing to be pushed into such reductive tracks and thus become subject to a hegemonic impulse: to be known singularly and caricatured in a region that is seen as easily figured out and thus to be administered accordingly by the logic of presently operative artworld structures.

### **Laying out the Field for Modernists in the Philippines**

I begin with two figures from Philippine modern art history, whom I cite specifically as I find that their pivotal roles in the shaping of the nascent stream of Philippine modern art goes under-credited in deference to three prefigured male tastemakers. These male artists—Fernando Zobel, Arturo Luz and the architect Leandro Locsin—have been, in the early writing of

critics such as Alfredo Roces and more recently Patrick Flores,<sup>6</sup> cast as the interminable titans who reared postwar Philippine modernism. This is not to say that the single gender reckoning comes wholly unqualified given the requisite doff to class privilege and cacique capitalism cleverly laid out in such framings. Yet the obviously peripheral positions to which key women agents remain relegated in such texts is disheartening to say the least. The point, of course, is not to replace one hagiographic account with another, but to shine light on the pre- and post-work that goes into such constructions of territory-bound practice, which it must be said, like this present writing, will always be subject to further critique and nuancing.

I draw your attention first to the artist-organiser-writer Purita Kalaw Ledesma (1914–2005), who is best known as the founding president of the longest-running art organisation in the Philippines, the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP), formally convened soon after World War II in 1948. Kalaw Ledesma was the daughter of the prominent suffragist Pura Villanueva and the historian Teodoro Kalaw. She was also younger sister to one of the earliest female Filipino senators, Maria Kalaw Katigbak, with whom she closely worked to lobby support for the institution of a government body solely dedicated to arts and culture. Purita came to maturity during a period when one of the earliest Philippine art schools, La Escuela de Bellas Artes, a precursor of the University of the Philippines School of Fine Arts, was offering non-degree vocational art classes. She would carve out time during her junior and senior high school years to simultaneously attend classes at the Escuela. These three years of art school were extended by Purita's taking on design courses as she accompanied her sister Maria, who had been awarded an Oriental Women's scholarship at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor from 1932–33. Purita herself would take on classes at the UM College of Architecture.

Purita grew to become the inveterate pragmatist, honed under the influence of a fastidious mother and an *abuelita* (a financially scrupulous grandmother who took her on as ward till her preteen years). Possibly also as a nod to her father's profession, she opted to enroll in a history programme at the UP College of Liberal Arts upon graduating from high school. Purita was, in fact, dissuaded by her family from pursuing a second degree in fine arts after coming home from Michigan. Thus she dutifully took on an education degree majoring in home economics instead.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, at age 72, she was freer to carve out the time to tuck an MA in art history under her belt.

Although she never actively painted, from 1948 Kalaw Ledesma became the intermittent head of the AAP for many years. She was a steady presence in the organisation even as she changed gears and became President Emeritus

in 1973, turning her energies to other platforms. She would singularly produce and co-author three seminal books (*The Struggle for Philippine Art* in 1974, *Edades: National Artist* in 1979 and *The Little Big Room* in 1987) on art practice, during the period when she was most active as both art worker and tastemaker. By her own account, Kalaw Ledesma was in her element when making art,<sup>8</sup> but for all intents and purposes, she appears to have made peace with not pursuing it full time. “Apparently, I was meant for things other than a lifetime of art,” she would say fatalistically.<sup>9</sup> It is possible that the fact that her name did not appear even once in the roster of AAP’s annual competition awardees is proof of this. Further probing would ascertain if she ever bothered to compete or whether it was just that she never won when she did join.

In 2017, a book on Kalaw Ledesma’s archives was published and in it, editor Petty Benitez-Johannot describes Kalaw Ledesma’s AAP years thus:

under Purita, the AAP had broad ambitions and took on tasks that museums ordinarily would have spearheaded. The Philippine Museum and Library were in ruins after the war, destroyed to the core and in the collective psyche of the residents of the city. Responsibility for artists and the arts came almost by default to the AAP and its board. The AAP became indefatigable in its efforts to organize annual art competitions, to place value on artworks, and to enable artists, poets, and writers to embark on study tours and programs to epicenters of the art world. Purita believed it vital that writers and poets experience modern art directly at its core; at one point she persuaded her mother<sup>10</sup> to provide travel grants to promising art critics.<sup>11</sup>

Let us, for the moment, set aside the discomfiting assumption underlying the aforementioned, that is, that modern art’s core was categorically elsewhere. Kalaw Ledesma was indeed a woman living at specific historical junctures, making do with the societal strictures imposed on her life. Hers was by no means a fully agentive existence. Yet enforced life shifts did not deter her from playing a central role in the agenda-setting and groundwork necessary to see through Filipino modernists in the incubation years just prior to and immediately following World War II. One of the earliest tasks she embarked upon after assuming the leadership of the AAP was a tribute to her former teacher and art school dean Fabian dela Rosa, and among her final projects was a compilation of 1990s art writing (1991) that launched the very first Kalaw Ledesma award for art criticism, since taken on in tandem with the Ateneo Art Gallery.

In between these years, she would facilitate (at times totally finance) scholarships for such artists as Vicente Manansala (to Canada), Manuel Rodriguez Sr. (to New York),<sup>12</sup> and was approached by artists' spouses to buy food they had prepared to shore up their family budgets; artists themselves offered her work in exchange for bridge financing (as in the case of sculptors/painters like Napoleon Abueva and Marciano Galang). In 1950, Kalaw Ledesma was instrumental in physically equipping<sup>13</sup> what would later become the workshop of the Printmakers Association of the Philippines under the mantle of Rodriguez Sr., who would in turn open it up to several generations of printmakers actively practising to date. It was in 1953, under her helm, that AAP arranged for Philippine participation in the Second International Contemporary Art Exhibition sponsored by the All-India Fine Arts and Crafts Society. Her archives contain fragments of communication attesting to her involvement in mobilising resources to enable Philippine participation in Venice, Paris, Havana, among others. Kalaw Ledesma also instinctively cast herself as an active advocate of art education through low-profile intervention in the work of the legal and underground left. She also acted as a magnetising force by capitalising on her own social stature and relational ties to further projects such as Art in the Home tours, after/out of school education through the defunct AAP Institute, as well as children's workshops in metropolitan art schools, with the help of artist-educators like Araceli Dans. Kalaw Ledesma extended this proactive approach from the years she was definitively setting the direction of the AAP and later, at the Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation.

In her final years, Kalaw Ledesma continued to play a quintessential maintenance role, building up personal and art reportage archives, which remain an under-the-radar task still regarded as too menial by today's batch of next-generation cultural workers. Kalaw Ledesma's daughter Ada elaborates: "[our father, long-time National Library Director] Teodoro Kalaw taught my mother how to maintain a scrapbook and the importance of archival documentation." She adds, "[I]n their home, Teodoro kept an archive of objects from history's celebrated heroes: the wheelchair of [the revolutionary figure Apolinario] Mabini, papers on the trial of Andres Bonifacio, the love letters of Gregorio del Pilar, and the manuscripts of [Jose] Rizal."<sup>14</sup> In addition to being indispensable to Kalaw Ledesma's keen desire to help develop artists who could intelligently converse on and situate their work, the archives she painstakingly built and kept have also helped researchers like myself to take a less personally invested and careful look at precedents, to peer into fragments of our recent past and derive incisive clues to make sense of the complex scenarios of current practice.

A second key figure from the milieu is Lydia (also Lyd) Villanueva Arguilla (1913–69), later Lydia Salas, a fictionist-gallerist-critic singularly but erroneously known as the energy behind the first modern art gallery in the Philippines, the PAG (Philippine Art Gallery). In truth, at least at the beginning in 1951, the PAG was propelled by an all-women collective comprising Arguilla, Estella Alfon, Lina Flor and Consuelo Abaya, who made up the firm Promotions Incorporated. This was a team of strong-willed and determined writers working across fields such as fiction and public relations. Arguilla, who graduated with a journalism degree from the University of the Philippines and went on to postgraduate studies at Columbia University, was rather famously described as someone who had taken up art to learn how she might write about it.<sup>15</sup> As a physical site, the PAG was an office space turned gallery, initially just with a feature wall to set off work for a limited period. The gallery would take up residency in several neighbourhoods in the metropolis until it folded in 1969. As an initial salvo to carve out still nascent artworld infrastructure, the opening up of the space itself was more a laboratory experiment than a full-fledged gallery launch. Acting much more like a one-stop place for artists and would-be artists (the de facto headquarters of the Neo-Realists, reading room/live critique session site, show and banter space, occasionally an antique showcase offering allied services, framing included), the PAG was clearly no self-respecting white cube.

With its roots undeniably in public relations, the PAG was deft at self-positioning its ventures within the Philippine art historical narrative that was yet to be written. Such was the case with its extension and third anniversary exhibition, *The First Exhibition of Non-Objective Art*, in Tagala in 1954 curated by Magtanggul Asa (pen name of Aurelio Alvero). The PAG would also hold other off-site exhibitions in places such as the Manila and Pines hotels, Taal Vista, the Manila Overseas Press and National Press clubs, as well as university campuses such as UP and Silliman in Dumaguete. By no stretch of the imagination could the PAG be construed as some pristine, sacralised site for art, and the benefit of hindsight after several decades allows us to see how art may have looked like an afterthought on the PAG's vaunted walls. But at the risk of being redundant, PAG survived in far from optimal conditions. To keep afloat, the PAG resorted to the practice of charging membership fees, though this was eventually abandoned. It also hosted a gamut of activities, such as photography, painting, writing and language classes, textile design, flower arrangement classes, art raffles, even fortune-telling sessions, on top of serving as office, gallery and space for lectures and fora. To say that the premises were not well suited for hanging work would be

an understatement, but the excitement of having even just a makeshift space to show art buoyed up the enterprise for almost two decades.

In the interest of laying down basic facts, it ought to be noted that both the establishment of the AAP (1948) and the PAG (1951) predate Fernando Zobel's seminal art appreciation courses at the Ateneo de Manila University by ten years and seven years respectively. At various points, Zobel would also serve as an officer of both the AAP and the PAG. He and Kalaw Ledesma worked closely together to put to bed the pioneering, though problematic, 1958 publication, *The Art of the Philippines: 1521–1957*, edited by Winfield Scott Smith III. I do not point this out to establish some imagined and unnecessary polarities, but rather to create a picture of a synergy of ventures that interfaced and fed off each other. The PAG did, in fact, give Fernando Zobel a venue for his first public outing as a visual artist. Kalaw Ledesma also recognised how the AAP-PAG tandem stood as a backbone to the yet flailing modernist movement.<sup>16</sup> She and Arguilla were warm bodies to each other's undertakings, trading roles in some instances between organiser, collector, promoter or pedagogue, whichever suited the occasion at hand. To further underline how closely interdependent these fledgling modernist organisations (the AAP and PAG) really were, let us cite other instances: Arguilla herself would win at least five times in AAP competitions held during 1950 and 1951 and would be declared among the AAP's Art Critics of the Year in 1954. She would also show in the lesser-known 1951 Neo-Realist Expanded exhibition at PAG. Kalaw Ledesma in turn would make significant purchases of early modernist work from the always cash-strapped PAG. Though still far too faintly cast as heroines in mainstream Philippine art history, as seen in seemingly truncated accounts about both the AAP and PAG, neither Kalaw Ledesma nor Arguilla were inoculated from an art climate that withheld commensurate regard for how their writing and organising made early Philippine modern art production and circulation possible.

Unlike too many other timid writers of the period, Arguilla fiercely took it upon herself to respond on behalf of artists, for instance, to the critic Armando Manalo's diatribe against Hernando Ocampo's "soapy green"<sup>17</sup> paintings (1952) and again to her Veronicans associate and later National Artist Francisco Arcellana's criticism of Vicente Manansala's perceived weaknesses in organisation and sensitivity, and his works' inferiority in comparison to that of Zobel and Arturo Luz (1954). Arguilla was already editor at the *Philippines Herald* prior to World War II and had much practice in fending off such biting rhetoric. Her annual exhibition surveys appeared in such publications as *Progress* and the *Fookien Times*, among others. It needs to be said too that Arguilla's shifting interest from writer-gallerist to foreign service

corps member actually gave the early modernists headway, despite the fact that frequent travel kept her away from the daily grind of the PAG. In 1953, for instance, Arguilla in her capacity as cultural attaché, presumably single-handedly undertook a PAG touring exhibition that ran for two years through Washington and New York (from the Carnegie Endowment International Center to the American International Underwriters Building to Paris, although it is unconfirmed whether this latter case was actually realised). Known as the 1953–54 Philippine Cultural Exhibition, this was one of the earliest aspirational showings of the period and would be one of a number of modest gestures in aid of Philippine art going ‘international’. It would also be material to point out how this project came firmly framed within Cold War rhetoric wafting from Washington to Manila. Then Philippine Mission to the United Nations Acting Permanent Representative, Salvador Lopez’s foreword for the catalogue on the vaunted outing of the Philippines to the ‘free world’ put it quite clearly: “Today and tomorrow, more and more Americans will be thinking of the Philippines as a free and friendly country in a part of the world where we badly need people who are friendly to freedom.”<sup>18</sup> The venture was also underpinned by a longstanding postcolonial neurosis, as we read in Arguilla’s exhibition notes:

Consciously he [the Filipino artist] strives to shake off the superficial polish of foreign and unassimilated culture, while giving expression to his own time and place such as he finds them. In his desire to express himself as a Filipino, he might place undue emphasis, as so many do, on history and archeology, and so become self-consciously regional and Philippine in subject matter chiefly, rather than in plastic feeling.<sup>19</sup>

This capacity to think in terms of plastic reality rather than mimesis became the rallying cry of the Neo-Realists, who privileged form and design in keeping with modernity, as opposed to classical ideas of illustration and pictorial representation. Arguilla, as had Kalaw Ledesma, cast precious energies behind such avowedly patriotic advocacies.

That said, apart from what was seen as poor managerial skills, Arguilla’s digression from the art track so to speak (leaving for extended periods to take up posts in Vietnam, Laos and Geneva) was seen as the reason for the PAG’s eventual demise. The artist Jose Joya elaborates:

Lyd was essentially a promoter but never a manager, the latter having won for her not a few enemies [...] Besides, with growing

demands (brought on by) other galleries with different orientation and with owners more trained in management provided competition. Like Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery in New York, the PAG met hardships as pioneers.<sup>20</sup>

Critique notwithstanding, Arguilla did bravely put together Philippine representation for several platforms. Apart from the 1952 Philippine Cultural Exhibition to New York and Washington, there was also the 1962 Southeast Asia travelling cultural exposition; as well as the Philippine pavilions for the New York World's Fair (1964), Sydney (1963), Bonn (1966) and Geneva (1968).<sup>21</sup>

All this being said, it would be good to stay upfront about how making more room for Kalaw Ledesma and Arguilla in the nationalist narrative fails to wrest Philippine modern art history from the perception that it serves as a mere elite and speculative dalliance with the new and international. Both Kalaw Ledesma and Arguilla did subscribe to an idea of modern art as potentially civilising and en-culturating—this is a fact. As part of the culturati emerging from World War II and operating within the remit of a newly declared independence from America, their writing and other public utterances betrayed a shared anxiety latent in other postcolonial Asian sites: a distancing from parochialism coupled with a pining to play catch-up as they negotiated the intangible aspect of the Philippines or an idea of nation. The immediate goal for the modernist kindred was to professionalise the artist, to make him/her intellectually competent beyond merely being skilled hands. Such a project would later be taken up more critically by other women artist-organisers such as those making up Kasibulan, the derisively regarded sewing circle of women artists formed in the late 1980s.

But for the moment, reverting to Zobel, who has been singled out<sup>22</sup> as the apparent apex in the proffered triumvirate within more circulated tomes, we point out that neither Kalaw Ledesma nor Arguilla reveled in the luxury of distantiation, which Zobel accorded to his cosmopolitan self as he eventually upped and packed up for Spain for good. What can be gleaned in Kalaw Ledesma's and Arguilla's pronouncements and engagements in the context of modern Philippine art is that they largely stayed the course. They remained literally in the trenches for the most part, and understandably they could not step back as casually from such matters as identity and the push to participate in the winnowing of national and international structures of the artworld, anchored as these were in the social sphere that was the Philippines, their milieu of work and home. While also playing *de facto* tastemakers and gatekeepers to a more diminished degree, both Kalaw Ledesma and Arguilla appeared to have broader and grounded affinities as they circulated within

a more catholic circle of relations in various artworlds that needed to be made to converse if their nationalist project was to have a modicum chance at succeeding.

By 1962, for instance, Arguilla, along with the playwright Alberto Florentino, co-published poet Jose Garcia Villa's anthology, *A Doveglion Book of Philippine Poetry*, a tome that would be instrumental in homebound attempts to reactivate interest in the work of the émigré Villa, who had been living in North America even before Marcos declared martial law.<sup>23</sup> It is here that Arguilla gets entangled in what literary scholar Epifanio San Juan calls Villa's "naïve aestheticism".<sup>24</sup> But it is also where we find Arguilla consciously acting upon a desire to stake her work in knowledge production, even if history now seems to have made suspect the wisdom of such an enterprise. It might also be of note how this desire to more directly consider the inroads made by such key agents as Kalaw Ledesma and Arguilla, figures alongside other desires, to wit, the re-examining of the place of socially engaged work in contrast to art that disavows the banalities of context while professing unwavering allegiance to purported muses, or poetry, in the case of Villa.

Arguilla was like most of her female writer peers at the time, subjected to the excesses of gendered elitism in the literary world, although I have yet to encounter her speaking her mind about this in her writings on art. In US-based scholar Denise Cruz's book *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina*, we find Arguilla responding to Leopoldo Yabes's 1941 essay, "What is Wrong with our Women Writers?" Arguilla then, with fellow writer Maria Luna Lopez, co-wrote a rejoinder: "Women writers, have so long been the butt of masculine contempt and its twin, humiliating tolerance, that they cannot help being just a little apologetic for presuming to write."<sup>25</sup> Cruz relates how women writers then responded to such demeaning characterisations by girding themselves through the convening of "alternative communities",<sup>26</sup> of which the PAG may have been a manifestation. Seen in this light, the case of Arguilla and Kalaw Ledesma's crossing paths may not have happened within the same 'sorority' so to speak, but I maintain that in working together, they aggressively set the terms for shaping an artworld that was not yet firmly in place, or coming to a place of note with many attendant inequities alongside.

Curiously, the Yabes-Arguilla et al. exchanges happened on the pages of the *Herald Midweek Magazine*, which is in the family of publications where the initial modernist-conservative debates had taken place before World War II. Predictably, however, only the impassioned debates between Victorio Edades and Guillermo Tolentino on matters of distortion and representation get heavy play in Philippine art history, and not the Yabes-Arguilla exchanges on

sexism among artists. Hopefully this latter case of ‘muting’ merely proceeds from a misguided attempt to ignore what is obviously now unacceptable. Needless, and however embarrassing this juncture stands within the Philippine intellectual history to which Yabes’s long-running literary anthologies firmly belong, the facticity of bias is there for the reading. Yabes was “most disturbed by those he calls the pedants, the Filipinas who are so intellectual that they ‘are as out of place in any order founded on human relationships as a porker in a drawing room’”.<sup>27</sup> “Our Men Writers Are Not So Hot” is how the wry retort from the women was phrased.

Cruz also writes on Ligaya Reyes Fruto’s *The Porch*, a none so polyannic tale of female literary relations in the 1940s, recognisably set in the garden of Lyd and Manuel Arguilla’s home. In it, we find how Manuel Arguilla casts a looming shadow in the story—how he had, in boredom, transcribed the overheard conversations that he dismissed as banal, presumably with the annoying chatter disrupting his own writing. Such an account might be best rounded off with Kalaw Ledesma’s own self-deprecating and arguably resigned tone patent in her description of Arguilla:

She was Art’s housekeeper and nursemaid. Countless times, she paid the rent with her own money to keep PAG going. She organized raffles to sell paintings and help modest collectors start to own artworks. To add to the gallery’s income she held French, Tagalog, and painting lessons. She wrote press releases, fought battles against dissenting art critics, supervised the framing and hanging of art works, nagged painters to meet their deadlines, looked for jobs to help the jobless ones, and even listened to their personal problems.<sup>28</sup>

Already a published author by the early 1930s, Arguilla was a woman of her time while also attempting some distance from it. Certainly still caught up in the idea of art as civilising discourse but also in tune with the project of wresting art from the grips of the merely economic elite, we see this in her own words from PAG’s archived literature:

We believe that if local art is to flourish, the support should come, not so much from others as from ourselves [...] We believe that art should be part of life and living, that the civilized person should go into an art gallery in the same way that he goes into a bookshop—to buy something he can take home, enjoy and live with [...] We will take a gamble on a painting executed primarily as a work of art, not as a commercial piece. We shall steer clear of nudes of no more

artistic merit than to decorate a bachelor's apartment. We shall not encourage landscapes of no deeper significance than to render photographic reproductions of surface nature. We shall avoid pseudo portraits created for the tourist trade.<sup>29</sup>

Arguilla posthumously shared centennial honors with Kalaw Ledesma in 1998, but unlike the latter, her biography has not been as closely read nor explored. The picture one gets from the sporadic data is of a woman fully engaged in spheres that interested her despite attendant difficulties. This makes for a picture of her fierce independence to some degree, but does not leave the impression that her diverse practice was insulated from the contestation of notions of art and its place in the politico-social sphere. One finds Arguilla the writer, an avowed formalist, co-existing with Arguilla the former World War II guerilla, and later the diplomat and foreign service state agent.

One also gets the sense from reading such accounts that these writer-organisers seemed too preoccupied with tending to questions of modernising their nation to focus specifically on their plight as disadvantaged women. Mention now too should be made of how even someone like the venerable critic Leonidas Benesa could utter a sloppy sexist comment in regard to the only reason the AAP functioned at all. Over and above clearly macho statements in commentaries of his peer critic Paul Zafaralla, Benesa's summing up of how the AAP survived (30 years at the time of his writing) is, again, telling: "The trick seems to be to elect as many women to the board as the men could bear, and let them manage the business side."<sup>30</sup> Yet this is not at all to say this paper's case subjects are without their own blind sides. In 1960, we find Arguilla, for instance, patronisingly citing the painter Emilio Lopez for "graduating" from regional to national artist.<sup>31</sup>

The proposed track here is to veer away from questions of representation for the moment and, instead of aiming for superficial parity, look upon the conditions of practice that perpetuate a level of invisibility or degree of effacement in the narratives thus far. Rather than mythify these women, the project is to point out that there have not been enough parallel attempts to be reflexive of other already offered up key movers in the field of modern art history.

Hopefully, without belabouring the point, we ask: how many other non-accountings out there have yet to be revisited? Wulan Dirgantoro in her book *Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia* references Griselda Pollock's notion of differencing.<sup>32</sup> I suspect, in fact, that some parallelisms between the life accounts of Arguilla/Kalaw Ledesma and an artist-writer like the

Indonesian Mia Bustam may surface upon further research and reckoning with chronological affinities as well as cultural specificities. And while granting that the art and writing being looked at may, in hindsight, appear somewhat naïve, or not measuring up in regard to a certain expectation of sophistication in summoning typologies and deft criticality in striking parallels, I would assert that the work done thus far by such fore-mothers laid the ground needed for more elegant discourse to develop. Thus the near silence on such contributions made at the historical junctures in which they were active and agentive in many respects begs for redress.

### **Crossed Spheres of Work**

Primarily in the interest of searching for regional kindred, we shift our lens to a latter generation of artists working beyond the Philippines, not so much with the intention of striking clear parallels, given divergences in class and racial moorings, but primarily as an attempt to more overtly locate artistic labour and its effacements amidst questions of multidimensional identity. To begin, we take the case of the artist Varsha Nair (b. 1957 in Kampala, Uganda, schooled in painting at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University, Baroda, India). Nair presently works between Bangkok and Baroda. I cite her here specifically in regard to her participation in the seminal international community art initiative *Womanifesto* (1997–2008),<sup>33</sup> which, if research serves, remains the only such venture to date emanating from within the region. Nair's specific plight as an artist in diaspora and thus ungirded agent repeatedly falling through the cracks of nation and locale, is certainly not a gender-specific predicament, but the occlusion, particularly of her work done for *Womanifesto*, remains no less pertinent because of its hybrid anchors.

It was at the Asia Art Archive-convened *Action Script: Symposium on Performance Art Practice and Documentation in Asia* in Hong Kong, 2010 that I first met Nair,<sup>34</sup> in the specifically troubling context of a symposium session featuring a roundtable discussion between exclusively male Asian performance art festival directors. At the venue then was Franklin Furnace's Martha Wilson, Nora Taylor, Nair, June Yap, among others, who were already engaged in a lively discussion just off to the side of the central symposium space, about why not a single woman was invited to this roundtable. This was already in swing as I happened upon the group, which by consensus decided that the faux pas had to do with *Womanifesto*'s position as primarily a women artists' initiative (the roundtable moderator was in fact a woman, the Hong Kong performance artist Ko Siulan).

Six years down the line, Nair and I were cast into another scenario, at Asiatopia's 2016 International Performance Art Festival, where we found that the organisers had dutifully convened a panel on gender and performance to take place during one of the half-day sessions at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC). As designated co-moderator of the session with Empower Foundation's Noi Chantawipa, I was faced with awkward pauses as we were made to ask each default 'national representative' from Asia through Europe to speak about 'the gender situation' in their country of origin/practice—all this time grappling with the multiply-charged constructs laid out but not unpacked around that table of mostly women artists. I cite these instances because neither really stand up as promising prospects for earnest exchange, knowledge-making nor historicising—one was a blunt demonstration of exclusion, while the second was a well-meant but still patronising venture that sliced out the gender question away from notions of art practice. It was also at this latter occasion that the Malaysian artist Sharon Chin, who had done collaborative performances with Nair in the past, pointed out that the artworld's fairly new-found interest in community work still left *Womanifesto* by the wayside. It seemed as if other newer but much more globally savvy undertakings, such as Rikrit Tiravanija's *The Land Foundation*, had eclipsed it by being enfolded into the relational aesthetics platform, which Nicolas Bourriaud had a heavy hand in propelling forward.

I bring up *Womanifesto*'s case here specifically as discussions with Nair and Chin have since continued in this light. And my sense of the almost non-registration of the initiative in pertinent texts comes informed by an awareness of the venture's own multiple positions—as women artists' initiative, as agrarian community undertaking, as environmental project, as dialogic practice done in schools with children and artisans, as well as Lao, Khmer, Suay and Yuea communities, among only some possible configurations. I would say that this self-made predicament is rendered simultaneously dynamic and imperiled by this mode of multiple identification. That is, that the artists behind *Womanifesto*—which variably (depending on the reference) includes Nair, Nitaya Ueareworakul, Mink Nopparat, Phaptawan Suwannakudt, Jittima Pholsawek, Khaisaeng Phanyawatchira, Charassri Roopkamdee and later with support from the critic Somporn Rodboon—embarked on plans to undertake their pairing of artists with crafts makers in Northeastern Thailand as, in a sense, they avowedly veered away from the political and cultural centre that was Bangkok. Moreover, they were not producing monumental objects nor architecture (as *The Land* has done), which could carry them over artworld circuits as a discernible brand of practice. They literally struck out elsewhere (later making their presence

felt in very transient sites on the Internet) and with Nair on the frontline in later years. She, a non-Thai working in a fairly low-key manner, the quietude working against getting visible.<sup>35</sup>

That said, it might be argued that the non-place that Womanifesto has found itself in has much to do with both an elected as well as enforced displacement. I say this too because Phapatawan Suwannakudt actually traces the roots of Womanifesto further back to 1995, specifically to the exhibition *Tradisexion: Five Thai Women Artists*, held at Concrete House, Nonthaburi. Her very vivid account appears as a chapter, “Catching the Moment, One Step At a Time” in the book *Asia through Art and Anthropology: Cultural Translation across Borders* (2013). In it, she recounts the indifference and dismissal that works by her and fellow Womanifesto artists received in those early years. While I have not had the chance to speak to Phaptawan about my sense of Womanifesto’s location within what I perceive as traces of a Thai art historical continuum, I imagine she would still have a lot to say about her own migrant experience and de facto defiance of stubbornly country-based narratives. I pick this up specifically from Claudette May Datuin’s writing on her, where Phaptawan herself is made to speak: “‘It was also my father’s nickname (Chang), taken from the way he mimicked the elephant walk. I am most comfortable when thinking about myself being an elephant. I carry my name as my totem.’ As we follow the elephant through her journey, we look up at the trees the artist herself called in a ‘language I am most comfortable with [...] The reward was, no matter how personal and how secret, that as I walked and looked up at the trees, all of a sudden people in the streets were not strangers to me anymore.’ And as we walk through the strange streets the artist endeavored to make less strange, we hear her humming a secret tune her father taught her when she was a child, one that plays a part with the ‘place I am in’.”<sup>36</sup>

Later in Datuin’s writing, where she more fully invokes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of the nomadic line, she again carves out generous space for Phaptawan to speak, this time about her painting process in relation and in resistance to the grid:

The grid disrupts ‘the flow of my hands and the rhythm of routine, and that is the moment I observe when the mind attaches and detaches [from] the object.’ Bisected horizontally and vertically, the grid creates a center around which figures and characters seem to be drawn in accordance with simple rules of proportion and balance. However, this sense of balanced weight and density required by the grid is disrupted. This comes from the movements of the painter’s

hands that tend to paint scenes in a way that allows multiple points of view rather than single focal or ‘vanishing’ points. The grid is also disturbed by the artist’s movement in the very space of the new environment. ‘I constantly changed and corrected the figure of Australian houses and buildings over and over.’<sup>37</sup>

It is as Phaptawan speaks thus about this tug and pull of limits upon sight, mind and body that I sense where her former collaborative venture, *Womanifesto*, also draws its own mobile and thus complex identity from.

### **A Coda of Denunciation**

Lastly I turn to Susie Lingham (b. 1965 in Singapore), artistic director of the 2016 Singapore Art Biennale and former director of the Singapore Art Museum. The instance of occlusion in this case is something I also encountered at the 2016 Asiatopia symposium on performance art mentioned previously. It was the German-American performance artist and theorist Ray Langenbach who clued me into an elision that this time seems to not have occurred so agentively, yet was also not engendered so maliciously perhaps. Nevertheless, the muting is undeniable just the same. This is an account from Lingham’s own essay, “A Quote on Expression: Visions, Vexations and Vanishings”, written for the catalogue of the Singapore Art Museum’s 2011 exhibition *Negotiating Home, History, Nation*. She states:

From what new perspective can one write a ‘history’ of art in Singapore in the last 20 years? So much has happened, so much gained, so much lost, so much left unrecorded and/or unanalysed. There will never be a seamless unequivocal narrative of a single ‘detached’ viewpoint; instead it can only be pieced together from many diverse perspectives located in lived experience, eye-witness accounts, ambiguous hearsay—mostly unreliable—but sometimes, surprisingly, the key source of truth otherwise traceless. And all these stories will be complicated and compromised by contention, (self-)censorship, repression, forgetting, purposeful omissions, indifference, and a host of *ambivalences* that render the past nearly irretrievable.<sup>38</sup>

Lingham is initially evasive but eventually lets on in the writing about an obviously pent-up pain born of the tragic fate of 5th Passage, the artist-run space that she and artist-peers like Suzann Victor, Han Ling, Iris Tan, among others had scrupulously set up in 1991. Lingham describes it thus:

5th Passage, unlike [the] Artists Village [TAV], did not have a ‘father-figure’ at its helm [referring to Tang Da Wu] [...] None of these practitioners had ever been overseas for studies then—they were literally ‘home-grown’ artists. 5th Passage’s vision was in direct contrast to Artists Village. Aiming to bring art right into the heart of society, its founders took its urban context by the horns. Suzann Victor approached Parkway Holdings, a corporate company that ran the very crowded Parkway Parade shopping centre in the east, with a proposal to turn the fifth floor passageway of the Office Tower Block—an incidental access to the car park—into a contemporary art space [...] These young artist-visionaries were doing something that was not done anywhere else on the island. Interdisciplinary from the very beginning, they organized 12-hour events which included local bands, and where local writers like Stella Kon, Gopal Baratham and Philip Jeyaretnam were invited to hold readings of their work [...] As an artists’ initiative, 5th Passage did not have a sense of hierarchy between ‘administrators’ and ‘artists’, since they had to be *both* artists and administrators simultaneously.<sup>39</sup>

5th Passage teamed up with TAV in the 1993/94 Artists General Assembly, an event now still most famously remembered for *Brother Cane*, Joseph Ng’s performative ode to 12 men arrested and caned for sexually expressing themselves. The 20-minute action involved Ng snipping his pubic hair with his back turned. Media coverage of this specific action led to the closing down of the space along with a decade-long virtual ban on performance art in Singapore. Scanning through the press trail of extant accounts about the shutting down of 5th Passage yields information primarily about the performance and its repercussions on performance artists, but very little data surfaces in regard to 5th Passage itself. Whilst the persons of interest from TAV have since literally moved on and upward in the artworld, apparently until recently, no thorough reckoning took place among the artists organisations jointly implicated in the events of 1993. Having done the due diligence tasks of securing necessary permits and licences, setting up audience advisory notices, and publicly defending itself before media and the National Arts Council, 5th Passage, specifically from Lingham’s purview, “was rendered [the] scapegoat”. Evicted from the Parkway premises and losing access to what had once been offered to them by the NAC as state grants, they took up a ten-month offer on a space on Orchard Road where Victor laid out an installation-performance done only for video to wail over the muteness dealt upon 5th Passage and presumably, Singaporean artists in general.

Bitterness is resonant in Lingham's words caught in print some two decades after 5th Passage closed. She writes about TAV's blunted edge: "somehow in this small nation, representative status is inevitable, and even persistent 'resistance-vision' manages to get incorporated into national expression."<sup>40</sup> Further on and as she is about to close, she invokes the fractiousness of the artists' community in saying:

in this labyrinth, the point is always vanishing. This secular-conservative society needs to allow history to take place and take its place, instead of thwarting, erasing and forgetting the work to be done and the work already done. In always starting anew, it is therefore operating in perpetual nascence, and never renaissance.<sup>41</sup>

Lee Wen, who was TAV's curator for the performances of the Artists General Assembly, has since responded thus:

how wrong we were to you that in all the dissertations and spoken debates we forgot your story. We spoke about the rights of the artist, the source of originality and re-enactments and the authenticity and the documentation etc. [...] but not once did we understand [sic] how you stood by us in earnest support, silently observed and suffered neglect. Your space got shut down, your programs forgotten, your artists dispersed and your names disappeared from theses, journals and from discussions. My heart goes out to you both and in fact I like to say you did it your way and most elegantly deserve the victory that is yours to claim.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps this present work will contribute somehow to enabling such closure, though more mindful remembering does still need to happen again and again. While it could be argued that Lingham's online and printed counter-accounts already provide a way for at least an initial self-rewriting into history, what I believe this instantiates is the need for a continued broadening of categories enfolded in the constant re-exposition of eventful units making up the narratives of art that obviously have aspects of gender, labour and social positionality entangled within them.

### **Fits and Alterations**

What this present research project perhaps raises too is the need to take a more ethnographic approach to the study of the history of art:<sup>43</sup> to look

not just at the objects and makers, but to consider the configuration and dynamics of the artworld system. Perhaps then the end goal would not merely be visibility and exploring alternative modes of representation, but rather a reconsideration of how the conditions of production, reception and circulation weigh into who and what goes on record.

Thus this attempt has to do not so much with merely replacing one set of gatekeepers with another but also plays into pushing for more earnest churning of the data field. Perhaps then this could mitigate the tendency for art histories to merely stay object-oriented, veer toward the hagiographic, and/or pander to the desired fluff of the market. Such predicaments do not operate solely in art history of course; the conundrum of engaging without being neutered is also shared by scholars whose writing proceeds from tropes like race and other similar identitarian tropes. While perhaps generating more questions than answers, the research does demonstrate how it might be possible to shift focus to locate multi-sited agentive instances. Thus, rather than merely aspiring to have the unknown appear, the bar might be set at a more critical legibility, not just of production as it becomes more widely public, but of production as it is negotiated in the interstitial sites—studios, backrooms, unintended staging spaces that largely remain intimate, particularly during unremarkable occasions when art is enabled sans much fanfare.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez** is Assistant Professor of the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines. Her current research focus encompasses attempts at variable forms of grassroots historiography, the reimagining and activation of contested space, and alternate modalities of exchange among artists navigating the institutional and extra-institutional. Her most recent essays include “Southeast Asia in a Crawl Space: Tempering Curatorial Hubris”, in *Southeast Asia Spaces of the Curatorial*, NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore/Sternberg Press, 2017 and “Shelved Lives: The Nineteen-seventies in the Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Trove”, in *The Life and Times of Purita Kalaw Ledesma*, KLF, 2017.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Yvonne Low, “Women Re-Modelling Artworlds: Exhibitions and Projects on Southeast Asian Women Artists (1990–2015)”, *TAASA Review: The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia* 24, 4 (2015): 4–6.
- <sup>2</sup> In her essay, Low writes on how, understandably, most early initiatives (such as *Women Imaging Women* and *Text and Subtext*) map into art history women’s art production and do still register as primarily ‘recovery projects’, and that developing complementary projects exploring ‘theoretical apparatus’ to think upon gender within nuanced and contextualised art practice is a logical next step.
- <sup>3</sup> Yvonne Low, “A Forgotten Art World: The Singapore Art Club and Its Colonial Women Artists”, in *Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia*, ed. Low Sze Wee and Patrick D. Flores (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2017), pp. 104–19.
- <sup>4</sup> Nair mentions this in a 2009 piece she wrote on Womanifesto for *C-Arts*, “Turning 12 This Year—Womanifesto, a Women Artists Initiative in Thailand”. Varsha Nair, “Womanifesto: A Women Artists’ Initiative in Thailand”, *C-Arts* (July/Aug. 2009): 70–3.
- <sup>5</sup> This is the key problematic that Low addresses in her essay “Women Re-Modelling Artworlds”.
- <sup>6</sup> Patrick D. Flores, “The Zobel Nexus”, *Kritika Kultura* 24 (2015): 182–205. See also Flores’s *Art After War: 1948–1969* (Manila: The Modern Reader, 2015), pp. 11–72 and 100–10, where the bookends are the founding of the Art Association of the Philippines and the closing down of the Philippine Art Gallery.
- <sup>7</sup> Purita Kalaw Ledesma, *And Life Goes On: Memoirs of Purita Kalaw Ledesma* (Manila: Vera Reyes Inc., 1994), p. 269.
- <sup>8</sup> As may be seen in this excerpt from Kalaw Ledesma’s memoirs: “Because of the excellent hand training we had at the UP School of Fine Arts, I was put on the second year level with some third-year students. Then I began the serious training of a creative artist. How happy I was there, working painting, designing, doing my project as best as I could. I will not be exaggerating if I say that these were the golden days of my life. I was very different then from what I am now—quiet, sensitive, introverted. Had fate willed that I become a full time artist, I would not have been the Purita Kalaw Ledesma the business and art circles knew today.” *And Life Goes On*, p. 265.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Purita Kalaw Ledesma and Amadis Ma. Guerrero, *The Struggle for Philippine Art* (Manila: Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation, 1974), p. 67 relates how Fernando Zobel similarly resorted to this track, appealing to the Ayala matriarch to backpedal expenses for the Philippine representation in the 1958 Spanish-American Biennale.

- <sup>11</sup> Petty Benitez-Johannot, *An Overview: The Life and Times of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma* (Manila: Kalaw Ledesma Foundation and Vibal Publishing, 2017), p. 9.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162–70.
- <sup>13</sup> She convinced the publication firm Carmelo and Bauermann to donate a working press.
- <sup>14</sup> Pristine De Leon, “One for the Books: The Great Archives of Purita Kalaw Ledesma”, *The Philippine Star*, 30 Jan. 2017.
- <sup>15</sup> Author not indicated, Arguilla artist’s biographical note in *Philippine Cultural Exhibition: 1953–1954* (New York: Philippine Mission to the United Nations and Embassy of the Philippines to the United States, 1954), p. 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Kalaw Ledesma and Guerrero, *The Struggle for Philippine Art*, pp. 42–3.
- <sup>17</sup> Benitez-Johannot, *An Overview*, p. 164.
- <sup>18</sup> Salvador Lopez, “Foreword”, in *Philippine Cultural Exhibition: 1953–1954*, p. 4.
- <sup>19</sup> Lyd Arguilla, “Notes on Philippine Art”, in *Philippine Cultural Exhibition: 1953–1954*, p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Jose Joya, “Philippine History of Modern Art not complete without PAG”, *The Manila Times*, 9 Jan. 1970, p. 9-A.
- <sup>21</sup> *Filipino Women Writers and Their Works* (Manila: National Centennial Commission Women Sector, 1999), p. 35.
- <sup>22</sup> Patrick Flores did belatedly lay more emphasis on Kalaw Ledesma’s role in the story of Philippine modernism when he was commissioned to write for the book, *The Life and Times of Purita Kalaw Ledesma*, 2017, within which his essay “To Rear the Philippine Modern: Purita, Zobel, Arcellana, and the Circulation of Critical Discourse” appears, but still inevitably subsumes Kalaw Ledesma’s discursive contributions through arguably macho lenses referencing Fernando Zobel, Francisco Arcellana, Leonidas Benesa, and to a lesser degree, Raymundo Albano. Patrick D. Flores, “To Rear the Philippine Modern: Purita, Zobel, Arcellana, and the Circulation of Critical Discourse”, in Benitez-Johannot, *An Overview*, pp. 50–83.
- <sup>23</sup> Villa was eventually declared National Artist for Literature by Marcos in 1973, barely a year after martial law was imposed on the Philippines.
- <sup>24</sup> Epifanio San Juan, *Jose Garcia Villa: A Post-mortem Report (Revised and Expanded)* <https://philsc.wordpress.com/2009/04/04/jose-garcia-villa-repetition-compulsion-trauma-and-the-haunting-of-patriarchal-poetics/> [accessed Oct. 2017].
- <sup>25</sup> Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 61.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>28</sup> Kalaw Ledesma quoted in the Filipinas Heritage Library’s webpage in an anonymous account titled “Lydia Villanueva Arguilla, Mothering Modern Art”,

<http://filipinaslibrary.org.ph/filipiniana-library/filipiniana/70-features/278-lydia-arguilla-mothering-modern-art> [accessed Aug. 2017].

- <sup>29</sup> Lyd Arguilla, excerpt from a mailer sent out on the occasion of the opening of the Philippine Art Gallery in 1951.
- <sup>30</sup> Leonidas Benesa, "Art Association of the Philippines: It's a Crisis When There's No Crisis", *Philippines Daily Express Weekend*, 29 June 1979.
- <sup>31</sup> Lyd Arguilla, "New Canvases by Old Painters", *Progress* (1960): 93.
- <sup>32</sup> This was a key point in Dirgantoro's presentation about the premises behind her book launched at the Gender in Southeast Asian Art Histories conference at the University of Sydney, 2017. Wulan Dirgantoro, *Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia: Defining Experiences* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).
- <sup>33</sup> See <http://www.womanifesto.com> [accessed Sept. 2017].
- <sup>34</sup> My coming to know of Nair was enabled by our having written on different occasions for yet another all-woman online endeavour called *Ctrl+P: Journal of Contemporary Art*, which was founded by Datuin in 2006. The next two live encounters would be occasioned by events organised around the parallel sphere in which I do research, which is performance art from the Philippines.
- <sup>35</sup> Of course, Womanifesto is present within [www.thaiartarchives.mono.net](http://www.thaiartarchives.mono.net), and Yvonne Low and John Clark, among other scholars, have written on Womanifesto. But by and large, what is on record are, give or take a few words, essentially liminal citations in books such as David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge, Mass. and Singapore: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press and National University of Singapore Press, 2017), pp. 30 and 126, and Caroline Turner, *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Australian National University Pacific Institute and Pandanus Books, 2005), pp. 286 and 294.
- <sup>36</sup> Flaudette May Datuin, "The Grid and the Nomadic Line in the Art of Phaptawan Suwannakudt", *Contemporary Aesthetics Special Volume 3* (2011), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/ca/7523862.spec.304/--grid-and-the-nomadic-line-in-the-art-of-phaptawan?rgn=main;view=fulltext> [accessed 10 Oct. 2017].
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> Susie Lingham, "A Quota on Expression: Visions, Vexations and Vanishings: Contemporary Art in Singapore from the late 1980s to the Present", *Negotiating Home, History, and Nation*, exh. cat. (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011), pp 55–70. Singaporean curator June Yap has also taken this up in her essay "Singapore: Censorship, Institutions, and Alternatives", working paper, March 2016, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316990701\\_Singapore\\_Censorship\\_Institutions\\_and\\_Alternatives](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316990701_Singapore_Censorship_Institutions_and_Alternatives) [accessed Sept. 2017].
- <sup>39</sup> Lingham, "A Quota on Expression", p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Lee Wen, “An Apology, Congratulations & a Caution”, 2013, <https://republicofdaydreams.wordpress.com/2013/07/06/an-apology-congratulations-a-caution/> [accessed July 2017].

<sup>43</sup> Art historian Nora Taylor has written about this in several essays, including in Nora A. Taylor, “Art Without History? Southeast Asian Artists and Their Communities in the Face of Geography”, *Art Journal* 70, 2 (2011): 6–23.