PROJECT MUSE®

Conceptual Slippages: Reading between the Lines of the Roberto Chabet Archive

Eva Bentcheva

Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia,
Volume 3, Number 2, October 2019, pp. 13-44 (Article)

Published by NUS Press Pte Ltd

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2019.0023>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/737377>

[Access provided at 26 Apr 2023 16:22 GMT with no institutional affiliation]

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Conceptual Slippages:

Reading between the Lines of the Roberto Chabet Archive

EVA BENTCHEVA

Abstract

This paper takes the recently established archive of Philippine conceptual artist Roberto Chabet (1937–2013) as a starting point for discussing how the histories of performance art and conceptualism in Southeast Asia have come to be mapped via archive building. Compiled by artist Ringo Bunoan after Chabet's passing away, the archive drew largely on the private collections of his former collaborators, friends and colleagues who donated the bulk of the materials in the collection. These include photographs capturing the artist at work, off-guard and in the midst of creative experimentation, as well as correspondence, itineraries and publicity materials.

With the ongoing emergence of new materials, the archive continues to grow and shed light on Chabet's expansive career as an artist, teacher and curator. Yet, I would argue that there is an urgent need to look beyond the archive's ability to chart the artist's social relations—an oft-discussed feature of Chabet's legacy. Instead, recognising that the archive also exposes the slippages of definitions and media inherent in Chabet's conceptual practice feeds into the larger aim of discerning the unique features of conceptual and performance-based activities in the Philippines since the Second World War.

[**Southeast of Now**
Vol. 3 No. 2 (October 2019), pp. 13–44]

Ranging from the flippant photographs of Chabet tearing apart Manuel Duldulao's book on 1970s Philippine contemporary art in the private performance Tearing into Pieces (1973), to the detailed compilation of fake documentation for his fictitious alter ego, Angel Flores, the archive presents a wealth of material challenging Chabet's official stance that conceptualism was a largely material-based and ephemeral practice. Rather, I would argue that it exposes a practice rich in performativity and rooted in a desire to carve out an artistic identity different from that of his Euro-American and Philippine contemporaries. As the consolidation of similar performance and conceptual art archives of individual artists, organisations and collectives from Southeast Asia gathers momentum, I contend that it is important to explore the slippages in practices, concepts and media embedded between the lines of social relations and group activities.

Introduction

Initiated by artist Ringo Bunoan as a way to develop an in-depth, single-artist research project on the life and works of Philippines-born artist Roberto Rodríguez Chabet (1937–2013), the Robert Chabet Archive was launched in 2009. It has since grown into an official archiving project and an expansive exercise to salvage the personal collection of the artist.¹ Between 2007–13, Bunoan was employed as a researcher by the Asia Art Archive (AAA) and led a team who gathered and digitised materials, as well as initiated a number of exhibitions on Chabet's practice and its legacy.² With 4,504 digital items, it is currently the largest archive of a single artist within the online database of AAA,³ with digital copies also available in the Lopez Museum and Library in Manila.⁴ Meanwhile, the archive continues to grow and gather new materials.⁵

Recognised as one of the key archiving projects reflecting the importance of national and local histories within the broader framework of Southeast Asia,⁶ the Roberto Chabet Archive (henceforth referred to as the Chabet Archive) lends a useful framework for critically revisiting the notion of 'archival slippage'. This term denotes that archive-making not only entails gathering documentation, but also invites the active shaping and initiating of new discourses around the subject(s) being archived. As noted by Jacques Derrida, the very process of archiving is not a static activity, but rather "produces" further materials, interpretations, framings, discussions and offsprings in the present and future.

[T]he technical structure of the archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.⁷

Derrida's observation casts a spotlight on the need to remain conscious and critical of how archives are formed. It invites questions about the provenance of contents, the ways in which materials are annotated and organised, as well as how—and to whom—archives are made accessible. In the wake of an increasing drive to collect, digitise and make publicly available the collections of individual artists, art spaces, collectives and collectors from across Southeast Asia, these reflections also prompt questions around how archiving, in its many manifestations, from private archives to institutional databases,⁸ contributes to the active (re)writing of Southeast Asian art history. As noted by Charles Merewether in connection to the archives of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, the increasing emphasis on producing and exhibiting both historical and contemporary archives across Southeast Asia raises the question of what disappears, and what is brought to light, particularly in cases where the archives outlive their subjects.⁹

This paper takes up the Chabet Archive as a case study to consider the ways in which archiving is not a neutral or disinterested activity. Rather, it constitutes part of endeavours for recuperation, visibility and currency, in which it operates as both a retrospective and prospective 'slippage'. From the outset, the Chabet Archive was not intended solely to document the work of the artist. Rather, it was envisioned as a platform to shed light on further voices and events alongside the life and work of Chabet.¹⁰ In doing so, it placed emphasis upon networks, affiliations and institutions—or what Bunoan has described as "the person and the community around that person"¹¹—through its subdivision into five main themes or "layers"¹² which were devised when the archive was made partially available via the website of the AAA: (1) Chabet's solo projects and curatorial work, (2) Chabet's involvement with the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, (3) Shop 6, the short-lived alternative group founded by Chabet in 1974, (4) Chabet's time at the University of the Philippines, where he taught for more than 30 years, as well as documents relating to his students' work, and (5) Angel Flores, the fictional character conceived by Chabet in collaboration with two friends, Ramon Katigbak and Ben Bautista, in the 1970s. The existence of these five layers reflects a constant slippage between Chabet's artistic and collaborative practice, as well as his institutional and mentoring roles. It asserts from the outset that the archive plays a formative role within a larger process of artistic *and* socio-historical revisitation and (re)articulation.

This paper takes up the notion of archival slippage and explores how this is manifest in the Chabet Archive on three levels. The first pertains to the aesthetics and media presented within the archive, and how these have been selected and sorted in order to position Chabet as one of the central actors—at times referred to as the "father"¹³—of Philippine Conceptual Art after the

Second World War. It considers the slippages between existing definitions of Conceptual Art and the diverse practices encompassed within Chabet's oeuvre as reflected in the archive. The second slippage explored here emerges from the process of archive-building as it relates to the writing of Chabet's history *within* networks of affiliated artists, collaborators, friends, colleagues and supporters. It discusses the relationship between historiography and the parameters of inclusivity and exclusivity in the making of this archive, highlighting the fact that many materials were gathered from the personal collections and repositories of Chabet's associates. It questions to what extent this collection consequently historicises artists who are able to contribute, at the expense of others whose practices may have been deemed in the archiving endeavour as tangential to Chabet's circles. While this phenomenon is not unique to the Chabet Archive—archives are rarely democratically compiled and, moreover, always reflect their sources¹⁴—it is important to explore this partiality when assessing the centrality of the Chabet Archive for the writing of Conceptual Art history within the Philippines and Southeast Asia.¹⁵ The third, and final, understanding of the archival slippage explored here is the use of the archive as a resource to reproduce and display ephemeral works. By enabling recreations based on photographs, sketches, memories, plans and writings, the archive impacts both the forms and meanings of the works as they 'slip' from earlier politico-creative contexts in the Philippines into the present. This slippage of the archive across histories of aesthetics and networks, and present-day regional drives for recreating Conceptual Art,¹⁶ situates it as more than a mere historical resource; it also carries a transactional value or "currency"¹⁷ within an interwoven system of representation, documentation and dissemination through which national and regional histories of modern and contemporary art are being solidified.¹⁸ This renders it both an accessible and attractive resource to researchers, artists, curators and the public, yet also constitutes its main point of contestation.

Intermedial Slippages

Since the late 1990s, arguably commencing with Apinan Poshyananda's contribution to the exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* (Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999), there has been a growing interest in charting the regional history of Conceptual Art across Southeast Asia.¹⁹ As increasing scholarship and curatorial initiatives seek to plot this medium from the 1960s to the present, particularly in relation to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, Chabet's artistic practice, curating and teaching have come to the forefront of attention.²⁰

As the understanding of Conceptual Art develops into a broad-sweeping and uniting notion (as opposed to denoting a concrete medium) across the region,²¹ the creation of the Chabet Archive has served as a useful platform and testing ground for gathering, organising and presenting a range of media and activities under this collective rubric. Established largely between 2007 and 2013 (within ongoing activities continuing up to the present²²) by Ringo Bunoan and a team of researchers and archivists at King Kong Art Projects Unlimited,²³ this archive has shed light on the influential role Chabet played in fostering experiments with found objects, photography, light and installation-making in the Philippines since the 1960s.

With a background in architecture, Chabet became engaged in the Philippine visual art scene during the 1960s. In a career spanning five decades until his death in 2013, his notable roles included being the first director of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, a post for which he was specifically appointed during the institution's inauguration in 1969 and which he held only for a year before taking up a lectureship in Fine Art at the University of the Philippines Diliman in Quezon City from 1972 until 2002. In addition to these public roles, Chabet also mentored and curated exhibitions in private spaces showing artists working with abstract, conceptual, performance, assemblage and media art.

In order to understand how the Chabet Archive frames these roles and practices, it is important to note from the outset that the gathered materials, which include primarily visual documentation, writings, documents and original artworks, reflect a continual cross-referencing of ideas, surviving materials, documentation and memories around the life and work of the artist. These meanings, however, emerge only partially from Chabet's own writings and iterations; they are also actively produced by the organisation and structure of the archive itself. As noted by Bunoan, Chabet sustained a longstanding practice of gathering and collecting materials related to his own work, and that of his peers and students. He gathered these inside his home in the district of San Juan in Manila—a trait that fellow artist Judy Freya Sibayan has playfully referred to as a “pack rat”²⁴ mentality. This personal collection was not marked by any system of organisation. Rather, it reflected what Okwui Enwezor has described (in terms of artists' collection practices more generally) as a process of “compulsive hoarding and accumulations that defy the temporal legibility around which certain archival projects [...] are organized”.²⁵ After an initial open call for materials was issued in 2007–08, Bunoan subsequently salvaged, conserved, gathered, sorted and annotated the surviving materials after Chabet's home flooded in 2009. While these salvaged materials came to constitute one of the foundational sources for the

FIGURE 1: Drawings and collages by Roberto Chabet at the headquarters of King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, Manila, July 2017. Image courtesy of Eva Bentcheva.

Chabet Archive, the process of archive-building was, from the outset, open to other select contributors, largely from within Chabet's circle of colleagues, friends and collaborators who were invited to submit additional documentation and supporting materials from their own collections.

What is of interest here is how the term Conceptual Art operates within, or slips across, the forms, media and ideas in Chabet's art. To address this point, one must first clarify that the sortation of materials into the aforementioned five 'layers'—namely, the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, the University of the Philippines, Shop 6, Angel Flores, as well as personal and collaborative practices—plays an influential role in steering his diverse practices towards a shared understanding of Conceptual Art in the Philippines. While the original sortation of materials (2007–08) had been according to record type (catalogues, clippings, photographs, manuscripts etc.), the transfer of the materials onto the website of the AAA resulted in the sortation of the materials into the aforementioned layer.²⁶ These layers play a prominent role in highlighting a number of terms circulating from the 1960s to the present, through which Chabet's understanding of Conceptualism is related.

FIGURE 2: Drawings by Roberto Chabet at King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, Manila. July 2017. Image courtesy of Eva Bentcheva.

For instance, the category entitled ‘Roberto Chabet’, which encompasses the artist’s personal and collective practices, is subdivided into collaborations, curatorial projects, group exhibitions, individual works and solo exhibition, portraits and tributes, among others. It serves as a chronology of Chabet’s activities, within which one finds numerous manifestations and mentions of practices that may broadly be grouped into Conceptual Art. These include sculptural and installation works that appear in various guises, often making use of found materials such as plywood and glass, to which Chabet referred using the term “environments”²⁷ rather than Conceptual Art.

These “environments” approximate an understanding of Conceptual Art as following a lineage of Assemblage, and Land Art from Europe and the USA.²⁸ This interpretation, in turn, is bolstered by an inclusion in this section of documentation around Chabet’s travels to the USA and London on a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1969. What is noteworthy, however, is that the archive also does not ascribe this practice to one lineage of Conceptual Art. This is evidenced in the inclusion of works that speak to the performative underpinnings of his practice, for instance, in the impromptu enactment *Tearing into Pieces* (1973). In this work, Chabet decimated the publication *Contemporary Art in the Philippines* (1972) by Manuel Duldulao in the courtyard of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in view of artist Yolanda Laudico (later Perez-Johnson), who documented the process of destruction. Performed as a private gesture and subsequently exhibited in the form of a sculptural mound in the group show *An Exhibition of Objects* (1973), this work reflects an indebtedness to performance art practices in the works of Fluxus artists in Germany and ‘happenings’ in the USA. Simultaneously, however, it also relates to experimental performance practices from Asia during the 1960s and 1970s, as seen most prominently in the featured documentation of Chabet’s collaborations with the experimental composer José Maceda, with whom he co-organised and choreographed the staging of large-scale public participatory performances or “happenings”,²⁹ such as *Udlot-Udlot* (1975).

These examples illustrate that, in order to grasp Chabet’s understanding of Conceptual Art, it is necessary for the researcher to ‘slip’ across the different categories, timeframes and media contained within the archive. Only through this cross-referencing does one gain an understanding of the fact that Chabet did not align his practice firmly with Euro-American discourses around modern art, contrary to the critiques afforded to his practice,³⁰ nor did he root his work solely in the local cultural politics of the Philippines. Rather, his understanding of Conceptualism—a term that he himself consciously resisted defining—conversed between art criticism, history and theory on postwar abstraction, which was playing out on both the international and

FIGURE 3: Jose Maceda, *Udlot-Udlot*, durational performance ('happening'), University of the Philippines Diliman, Manila. Choreography and space programming by Roberto Chabet, 1975. Image courtesy of the University of the Philippines Centre for Ethnomusicology.

Philippine contemporary art scene.³¹ This stance is evidenced in an interview with critic Cid Reyes in 1973.

Reyes: You have been considered an initiator of a movement variously called "Conceptual Art" or "Art as Idea". What motivated you to explore this field?

Chabet: My works really are more properly the works of an art critic. I mean they are the works in which the concept behind the work of art is the art itself. These days – and especially in a country like ours where there are no art critics – the artist assumes the role of a critic by questioning the nature of art. And I don't necessarily mean writing about it, the way an art critic would.³²

This "artist-as-critic-pose" embraced by Chabet is reflected in the archive's structure and contents.³³ Here, the continual slippage across documentation, media and writings fosters an understanding of Conceptual Art as a means for discursive and historiographic production. This discursive *productivity* of the Chabet Archive even works in opposition to propositions such as Lucy Lippard and John Chandler's notion that Conceptual Art was geared towards

defying and even, erasing art criticism.³⁴ Nowhere is Chabet's contestation of this definition more prominent than in the archive's category entitled 'Angel Flores'. This 'layer' is devoted to the textual and installation-based works developed by Chabet in collaboration with friends Ramon Katigbak and Ben Bautista, around the life and works of a fictitious USA-based Philippine expatriate artist known as Angel Flores (1936–68). This made-up persona serves, on the one hand, as a classic example of Conceptual Art as an idea-based medium. On the other hand, it also functions as a site of critique and parody of Philippine art history, in which Angel Flores' background speaks to the glorification of living abroad, as well as the incongruences of the Philippine art market and institutional demands in the 1960s and 1970s. Certain works, such as the CV of Angel Flores printed on the back of a sheet resembling an official government document titled 'Top Secret', goes as far as to suggest a critique against government policies on social surveillance, censorship and repression. In doing so, the work inadvertently sheds self-critical light on the intertwined nature between Chabet's Conceptual practices and the resources available to artists working under the politico-cultural framework of the Marcos regime.

While criticism has been levelled against Chabet (as well as a number of artists working in the realm of abstract and Conceptual Art) that he failed to engage with political discourses and critique,³⁵ these examples show that the archive does not aim to explicitly refute this position. Instead, it looks to highlight moments in which Chabet's Conceptual practices were framed within, alongside, or in conversation with, the politics of the Marcos regime (1956–86), particularly during the early decades of his career, in order to highlight the discursive (rather than critical) function of his art. Speaking of the crossover between Conceptual Art and the works of the anti-government traditions of painting and multimedia art in the Philippines (otherwise known as 'Social Realism' in the Philippines), Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez has noted, "They bare out to me that in regard to that period which they associate with 'received ideas', there was still some patent nationalism underpinning it, even if there was a desire to participate in the global art world."³⁶ While the archive does not seek to elaborate upon the crossover between Conceptual and politically-engaged art, it emphasises the underlying relationship between Chabet's practice and the building of national and politically-informed discourses around contemporary art. This is manifest in the featured texts and photographs of group exhibitions such as *Developmental Art in the Philippines* (1979), curated at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines by the institution's second director Raymundo Albano, in order to celebrate a decade of its establishment.³⁷ As outlined by Patrick Flores, Albano proposed use of the

FIGURE 4: Roberto Chabet, fictitious CV of Angel Flores printed on the back of the cover sheet of a classified document. Date unknown. Image courtesy of King Kong Art Projects.

FIGURE 5: Roberto Chabet, fictitious CV of Angel Flores printed on the back of the cover sheet of a classified document. Date unknown. Image courtesy of King Kong Art Projects.

term ‘developmental art’ to describe the making of fast, conceptually-leaning artworks (most often in the form of installations, sculptures and performances) within the rubric of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, and the cultural politics of the Marcos regime.³⁸ The inclusion of Albano’s writings on ‘developmental art’ within the Chabet Archive not only highlights the diverse terms and practices encompassed within the scope of Chabet’s understanding of Conceptual Art, it also stresses that Conceptualism was not only defined by Chabet alone, but by a range of artists who took differing approaches to its parameters, yet whose histories nevertheless hold an important connection to the discursive productivity of Chabet’s work and legacy. In order to understand how these collective discourses were built, it is thus necessary to consider the Chabet Archive not only in terms of intermedial slippages, but also as a site of ‘social slippages’ that were abundantly inherent in the artist’s career.

Social Slippages

In contrast to the artist’s hesitation to sort and annotate his own work, the process of archive-building captured the social legacy of Chabet’s practice and the stories of affiliated individuals.³⁹ The notion of the archival slippage can thus also be applied to the Chabet Archive to consider how the archive was created, and on whose behalf its history speaks. As mentioned previously, following an initial open call for materials in 2007–08, a number of materials were salvaged from Chabet’s personal collection held in his home in Manila. As the archive continued to grow, it further incorporated materials from the archives of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, the Lopez Museum (which co-funded scanning and to-date houses copies of the digitised materials), the University of the Philippines Fine Arts Library and Main Library, as well as select galleries in Manila such as the Finale Gallery. One of the challenges described by Bunoan in this process of gathering these materials was the abundance of incomplete documentation, reflecting the fact that not all of Chabet’s shows were photographed.⁴⁰ In addition, the process of annotation took a long time because Chabet could not remember all of the details. In order to fill in the absences and lapses of memory, Bunoan made the decision to approach other people connected to Chabet in order to gather further information. As part of this effort to expand the process of archive-building into an exercise of collective recollection, works and documentation were annotated in consultation with others, and additional supporting materials were sourced from the private collections of the artist’s collaborators, friends and colleagues. Remarking that “there are a lot of voices in that archive,

it's not only about Chabet",⁴¹ Bunoan has noted that over 500 people from the Philippine art scene are featured in the archive, leading her to describe it as a "collective project". Acting as 'further voices' to Chabet's personal collection, individuals were invited not only to lend materials from their collections to be digitally captured, but also to partake in the annotation of photographs and, in some cases, to provide appended interviews that came to be included in the collection. A number of exhibitions, events and discussions were also organised at the stage of gathering, through which public responses and inputs served to gather deeper insights into the life, works and networks of the artist.

Acknowledging that the contents of this archive are not comprehensive, this seemingly collective process of gathering materials has implicated the artists who are featured within—and those omitted from—the archive. On the one hand, an undeniable predicament of the Chabet Archive is that the resources invested in it have rendered it a powerful platform. The story of Chabet has been framed as a connecting thread through which the contributions and affiliations of other artists, particularly the generation who had either studied under or collaborated with him from the 1970s up until his passing away in 2013, were written into the lineage of Conceptual Art. This has enabled a number of previously obscured and locally-rooted histories to be made publicly accessible, on both national and international platforms. On a positive note, this visibility and investment has highlighted certain artists as central figures within Chabet's legacy and has arguably given impetus for further research into their practices. Amongst these, important contributors included the artist Joy T. Dayrit, a close friend and collaborator of Chabet since the 1970s, and one of the main documenters of his practice. During the initial phase of gathering in 2007–08, Dayrit was among the first contributors. After her passing away, her family granted continued access to materials related to Chabet, before Dayrit's own works and writings subsequently became the subject of an independent archive housed at the Ateneo de Manila University.⁴²

Likewise, the archive has also served as a means of recovering lost moments and histories through accidental encounters. For instance, in the process of carrying out research for her master's dissertation, Legaspi-Ramirez recalled consulting the Chabet Archive, wherein she encountered a photograph of a performance by artist Judy Freya Sibayan at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines.⁴³ This image depicted Chabet and art critic and curator Marian Pastor-Roces amongst the audience during a work entitled *Sound Bags and Three Kings* (1975), which Sibayan conceived with Raymundo Albano. While Sibayan is altogether absent from the image, the presence of Chabet

fosters an imagined slippage into the practices and archives of another artist. In this specific case, Sibayan's background as a former student of Chabet emerges at multiple points across the Chabet Archive, albeit tangentially and in the interstices. While presenting Sibayan as an artist imbricated with Chabet, what the archive fails to account for is the ways in which Sibayan later sought to distance and differentiate her own practice and philosophies from that of her former tutor, as she later outlined in an autobiographical publication.⁴⁴ In part as a consequence of the surfacing of new materials via the social making of the Chabet Archive, Sibayan has also embraced a new impetus to explore her own archives in order to glean the different narratives of Conceptual Art that emerge from them.⁴⁵

Returning to Derrida's notion that the process of archive-building spawns new investigations and new archival projects, the example of Sibayan's practice and its placement in relation to the Chabet Archive presents an understanding of the archival slippage as not only a process of restitution, but also of (competitive) 'supplementation'. In other words, the creation of this one archive has also fuelled the desire to explore other narratives through alternative means not limited to archive-building but also encompassing research projects, as seen in Flores's long-standing exploration of the artistic and curatorial practice, as well as discursive writings, of Raymundo Albano (1947–85).⁴⁶ Having worked as Chabet's assistant director at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines from 1969 until Chabet's resignation in 1970, Albano subsequently took over the post of artistic director, which he held until his passing. Throughout the 1970s, Albano and Chabet collaborated on a number of artistic and curatorial projects and ran within the same networks. As such, mention of Albano features frequently in the Chabet Archive. The research and curatorial work of Flores on this history has sought to map Albano's career beyond the framework of Chabet, asserting him also as a formative figure in the formation of Philippine Conceptual Art.⁴⁷ While this research does not stand to contradict the Chabet Archive, it seeks to challenge its primacy over the status of Chabet as the core figure, and to highlight the exclusions within the archive. It pays particularly close attention to the archive's discursive parameters and its engagement with artists who did not belong to Chabet's circuits, or who worked with other media and modes of Conceptual Art.

The examples of Sibayan and Albano's partial representation within the Chabet Archive thus raises the question of which, and to what ends, other figures related to the making of idea-driven, site-specific, multimedia and performance art are left out of the archive altogether. One other prominent example of its partiality is seen in its relationship to artists working in

the mode of Social Realist art.⁴⁸ Coming into fruition in the Philippines between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, this genre was spearheaded by a dozen artists known as *Kaisahan* ('Solidarity'), a loose group that came into formation during the height of martial law (1972–81) under the authoritarian rule of President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–86).⁴⁹ Described by Alice Guillermo as inspired by a rising tide of international student and youth movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, this movement formed concurrently to a number of collective artistic gestures across Southeast Asia, whose cultural agitations were marked by socialist sympathies.⁵⁰ Despite their call to break with Westernised, modernist modes of representation, Social Realist artists in the Philippines also adopted a number of practices and gestures that expanded upon the international lineage of Conceptual Art; their staging of public protest gestures and intermedial practices also conversed with the notions of 'avant-garde' art as not officially sanctioned by the state. As noted by Legaspi-Ramirez:

... pronouncements by both Conceptualists and Social Realists show that both groups of artists were interested in formal play and explorations with alternative materials, even though they were negotiating around the strictures of mandated party didactics and aesthetics subjected to whether their work would be 'readable' by the masses.⁵¹

Legaspi-Ramirez is among the art historians who challenge the conception that Conceptual Art and Social Realism stood in opposition with one another. She argues rather that both experimented with found materials and public engagement. This position has also been voiced by Flores, who has argued that the very term 'Conceptual Art' has a limited—and *limiting*—scope in terms of explaining the forces at work in the Philippines.⁵² According to Flores, the notion of Conceptual Art may even restrict the appreciation and interpretation of artists' works to the networks within which they ran. Given the Chabet Archive's strong focus on Manila-based practices and Chabet's circle of acquaintances, it does not reflect the wider breadth of 'experimental' art in the Philippines that existed in the crossover between Conceptual practices and the works of groups such as the Social Realists, or artists working abroad, such as Europe-based David Medalla.⁵³ The existence of such alternative figures and groups testifies to the fact that inclusivity was never a core ambition or parameter of the Chabet Archive. With this point in mind, the elevation of the Chabet Archive as a forefront historiographic resource on Conceptual practices in the Philippines, particularly in international

circuits, necessitates a more nuanced recognition of the specific networks on whose behalf the archives speaks, and for whom the archive has yielded new potentials.

Slippage into the Afterlife

As argued above, both the archive's structure and contents play a formative role in rooting Chabet's Conceptualism at the interstices of ephemerality and documentation. However, rather than embracing a common understanding of Conceptual Art as steering towards 'dematerialisation', as outlined by Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler in 1968,⁵⁴ the Chabet Archive also relies on the *promise* of materiality. Despite existing primarily as a digital archive, this audio-visual and textual repository serves as an important resource for recreating a number of Chabet's works based on existing photographs, sketches, plans, memories and remnants.

Before Chabet's passing in 2013, his practice was the subject of numerous exhibitions: *Archiving Roberto Chabet* (2010) at the Jorge B. Vargas Museum in Manila; *Roberto Chabet: 50 Years* (2011–12) at the National Gallery of Singapore, the Osage Gallery in Hong Kong and numerous venues in the Philippines; and *To Be Continued* (2012) at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in Manila, all of which entailed recreation and restaging. As a core characteristic of Chabet's practice was the use of found materials that could be dismantled after their display, few of the original materials used in the early installations have physically survived. For the above-mentioned retrospectives, the artist authorised reconstructions of his works to be made using similar materials, drawing on photographs and written specifications by the artist, when available. The artist Nilo Ilarde has been responsible for a number of these reconstructions, having worked closely with Chabet since the 1970s, and consulted the artist on the specifications for individual installations. In order to carry out these recreations, a formal agreement was also created between Chabet's estate and King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, which gives the latter permission to archive, showcase and recreate a number of Chabet's works.

Returning to Derrida's observation that the very process of archiving "produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future",⁵⁵ the availability of photographs, sketches and memories of Chabet's assistants and collaborators, has fuelled the reconstruction of individual works by Bunoan and her team even after the artist's passing. While several of these recreations have incorporated the artworks' original surviving materials, they have oftentimes required materials to be sourced in

FIGURE 6: Roberto Chabet, *Waves*, MO_Space X, Manila, 2017 (1972). Image courtesy of Eva Bentscheva.

the present. Speaking of the difficulty of finding suitable materials, Bunoan has also described this process of reconstruction as fitting within Chabet's original vision that materials exist as multiples, and ought to be sourced from the local environment for the purposes of art-making.⁵⁶ This process is seen, for instance, in the remaking of one of Chabet's earlier plywood installations, *Waves* (1972),⁵⁷ for the private gallery MO_Space X in Bonifacio Global City in Manila in 2017.⁵⁸ Displayed in isolation, the form, materiality and layout of this installation were gleaned from pre-existing photographs of its original in the main gallery of the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in 1975. Moreover, works have also been recreated for sale at private galleries and acquisitions by museums. This is most evident in the recreation of Chabet's early conceptual installations, such as *Sky Horizons* (1973)⁵⁹ for the exhibition *Stick Up Don't Move Smile: Reinventing Black, 1957 to Today* (4–31 October 2014) at Finale Art File in Manila, and more recently for the exhibition *The 70s: Objects, Photographs and Documents* (20 February–2 July 2018), curated by Bunoan at the Ateneo Art Gallery.

While all recreations entail an inherent loss of the original context, as has come to be widely accepted, particularly for performance-based practices,⁶⁰ the remaking of works by Chabet merits closer inspection on two grounds. The first relates to the dispersal of works that were originally created to exist

FIGURE 7: Roberto Chabet, *Sky Horizons*, 1973. On display at *The 70s: Objects, Photographs and Documents*, curated by Ringo Bunoan, Areté, Ateneo de Manila University, 20 February–2 July 2018. Image courtesy of Eva Bentcheva.

in seriality or in conversation with one another. For instance, the recently-displayed installation *Sky Horizons* comprises a series of 12 suspended wooden frames, intersected by stretched strips of rubber from the interior of tyres. It was first shown at Chabet's solo exhibition *Chabet: New Works* (1–20 February 1973) at the Luz Gallery in Manila, where it featured as part of the series *For E.H.*, an homage to the German-American artist Eva Hesse, who passed away in 1970. This display included two further works: *Kite Traps*, a smaller series of wooden frames with stretched rubber bands, and *Pink Painting*, comprising a grid made of plywood with stretched out nylon stockings. *Kite Traps* was also reconstructed by King Kong Art Projects Unlimited in 2015 for the inauguration of the National Gallery of Singapore where it was shown as part of the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery's exhibition *Between Declarations and Dreams: Art of Southeast Asia Since the 19th Century*. The division of these works across multiple collections and their display at different exhibitions does not remain true to one of the artist's most prominent understandings of Conceptual Art as a making of 'performative environments'. By this term, the artist placed emphasis on the encounter with performance and installation-based art within a specific setting, and in relation to the adjacent works and the space within which they were shown.

FIGURE 8: Roberto Chabet, *Onethingafteranother*, 2011, G.I. sheets, halogen lamps, variable dimensions, Manila Biennale, 2018. Image courtesy of Eva Bentcheva.

The second ground on which the recreation of Chabet's works based on materials in the archive requires closer attention, relates to the question of what power this lends to those entrusted with recreations. In addition to the showcasing of works in retrospective exhibitions of Chabet's art, a number of recreations have also been showcased alongside contemporary artists at local and regional group exhibitions and biennales, such as the Manila Biennale (3 February–5 March 2018)⁶¹ and the 9th Asia-Pacific Triennale in Brisbane (24 November 2018–28 April 2019).⁶²

By placing these historical works on a par with contemporary art, the Chabet Archive has also taken on the status of a "currency",⁶³ which David Teh has described (in relation to contemporary art in Thailand) as an intertwined ecology between historical resources, discourse-building and contemporary art production. This notion lends a useful framework for recognising that the building of contemporary art archives extends beyond the preservation of historical knowledge; it also generates new relations of power and control which have implications on the circulation of art and artists within the circuits of exhibitions, private and public collections, and the art market. It occupies a fluid space between a communal and private status by, on the one hand, maintaining a degree of public accessibility for the purposes of research

and consultation, and by working in partnership with host platforms such as AAA. On the other hand, the estate and custodians retain the rights over the intellectual property of the materials, thus rendering the archive also as a repository for exclusive recreation, exhibition and sale.

Conclusion

Returning to the concept of the archive as ‘slippage’, the Chabet Archive highlights a number of questions around the evolving nature of contemporary art archives, particularly those focused upon or built around individual artists, and whose legacies are carried forth by their peers and colleagues. In this respect, the Chabet Archive is one among numerous artist-initiated archives operating across Southeast Asia. This notably includes others such as the personal collection of Singaporean artist Koh Nguang How and the Independent Archive in Singapore, in which the individual engagements and networks of the archive’s progenitor, in the latter’s case Singaporean artist Lee Wen (1957–2019), plays a central role in the archive’s identity. Through the case study of the Chabet Archive, this paper has aimed to show that there has been a recent surge of interest in contemporary art archives that have germinated around the collective histories of omitted or marginalised narratives beyond official canons. Simultaneously, however, the founding of such autonomous archives has also fuelled the desire for counter-archiving, as seen in the practices of artists such as Judy Freya Sibayan in the Philippines. This illustrates a coexisting desire to gain further recognition for practices left outside ‘alternative’ archives, as they gather greater profiles and currency. This can be described beyond the over-used trope of an ‘archive fever’ in Southeast Asia, and also be considered as birthing a ‘counter-archiving fever’, in which archives act as tools for excavation, contestation, and visibility.

While a more nuanced consideration of the differences between the Chabet Archive and other autonomous artist-led archives across Southeast Asia, such as the aforementioned collection of Koh Nguang How and the Independent Archive, remains to be undertaken, it is important to remain aware that the increasing circulation of these autonomous archives on a local, regional and international platform, has also incurred changes in the ways in which featured works have been exposed. Concluding with a discussions of how the Chabet Archive has also ‘slipped’ into an afterlife in which the archive has served as a repository for the recreation of Chabet’s works, this essay has proposed an understanding of the archive as having both a *retrospective* and *prospective* role. Here, archives emerge as a form of

“currency” in the contemporary art sphere by giving profile and impetus for further displays and sales, at the discretion of its custodians. Seen in terms of an ‘archival slippage’, the Chabet Archive thus reflects an increasing practice in which archives come to be intertwined with discourse-building, historiography and the economy of contemporary art. Where once archiving was seen as a tool for recording history, it has now evolved into a tool of public interface between discourse-production and the circulation of artworks and artists.

Finally, emerging from these conclusions are also considerations around the role of ‘supra-archives’, such as AAA, which merit further research. As this essay has aimed to show in the case of the Chabet Archive, AAA served not only as a platform for international exposure by way of providing (partially) open access to materials which would otherwise have been accessible within Southeast Asia. It also actively shaped the presentation, structure and, consequently, key concepts emerging from the Chabet Archive, by way of influencing the thematic groupings and online presentation of materials. While this ‘intervention’ has been justified on the grounds of creating easier structures for digital reference, it is undeniable that this process has also shaped the positioning of archives—as a whole, and in terms of their individual components—in relation to both regional and international art histories. What has fallen outside the scope of this essay is an exploration of *which* historiographic frameworks the Chabet Archive has come to be aligned with when cross-referenced, or read in conjunction with, other archives ‘hosted’ by AAA. By advocating for an active reading of archives as ‘slippages’, this essay has aimed to launch further considerations into the symbiotic exchanges, as well as altercations, which occur when independent archives, both within and beyond, Southeast Asia are activated and ‘slipped’ into other host domains, platforms and collections.

BIOGRAPHY

Eva Bentscheva is an art historian and curator with a focus on transnational performance and conceptual art. She completed her PhD at SOAS, University in London. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Paul Mellon Centre in London, writing a monograph on cultural politics and transnationalism in performance art in Britain since the 1960s. In 2018–19, she was the Goethe-Institut Postdoctoral Fellow at Haus der Kunst in Munich. Her previous appointments have included Adjunct Researcher and Visiting Research Fellow for the Tate Research Centre: Asia, and Senior Teaching Fellow in Art History at SOAS.

NOTES

- ¹ Bunoan has argued that when the initial collecting process began in 2007, AAA had no online collection and was not focusing on creating archives of only one person, but it has since gone on to create more such archives. She described that it took a long time—approximately one year—for Chabet to agree to do the project, and that after his home flooded during the tropical storm Ondoy in September 2009, he agreed that materials be salvaged from his home for the archive. Ringo Bunoan, “Roberto Chabet”, *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Archives* (Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 24 Aug. 2017).
- ² Over the past decade, Chabet’s own practice has been the subject of a number of exhibitions, most notably, *Archiving Roberto Chabet* (2010) at the Jorge B. Vargas Museum in Manila; *Roberto Chabet: 50 Years* (2011–12) at the National Gallery of Singapore, the Osage Gallery in Hong Kong and numerous venues in the Philippines; and *To Be Continued* (2012) at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in Manila.
- ³ AAA’s website currently features 39 Research Collections, spanning digital records of materials in individual, organisational and group archives. Currently the largest digital archive on AAA’s website is the Hanoi-based experimental venue Salon Natasha, comprising of 4,992 records (recorded in July 2019). According to Bunoan, the original number of records in the Chabet Archive given to AAA was over 7,000; however, the records were compressed to the current figure (4,504) when changes were made to the AAA website. Correspondence with Ringo Bunoan, Aug. 2019.
- ⁴ Select digital copies were also given to the Cultural Centre of the Philippines of materials scanned from their library and Visual Arts office. All physical records remained with their respective owners.
- ⁵ At the present moment, a team of researchers headed by Bunoan continue to gather materials on Chabet’s life, affiliations and practices via the framework of King Kong Art Projects. Based in Manila, King Kong Art Projects currently holds over 20,000 digital records in the form of photographs, exhibition materials, correspondence and scans of original artworks, among other supporting materials, with more materials being continuously added to the collection. Ringo Bunoan gave the estimate figure of 20,000 records. Ringo Bunoan, Roundtable, 24 Aug. 2017.
- ⁶ It is particularly AAA’s vision to map local initiatives as part of opening up the understanding of Southeast Asia. The Roberto Chabet archive reflects this vision by focusing heavily on the local ecology within which Chabet practised and worked. Claire Hsu, *Asia as Method, Archive as Method*, MoMA, 13 March 2014, https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/412-asia-as-method-archive-as-method [accessed 10 Oct. 2018].

- ⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 17.
- ⁸ The digitisation and dissemination of the archives of artists and writers such as Ray Langenbach on Malaysia and Singapore, and Koh Nguang How on Singapore, chart the lineage of conceptual art practices in modern and contemporary art in Southeast Asia. The museum M+ in Hong Kong, which is due to open, also maintains a strong interest in collecting and representing conceptual and performance-based practices from Southeast Asia, along with the National Gallery of Singapore. In Europe, recent exhibitions and talks hosted at leading institutions such as Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin and Tate in the UK also reflect an interest in conceptual practices produced within Southeast Asia and enacted by its diasporas abroad.
- ⁹ Merewether's observations stem from a study of how photography and archive-building were used as part of the repressive and genocidal state apparatus of the Khmer Rouge regime. Charles Merewether, "Archival Malpractice and Counter Strategies", in *Influx: Contemporary Art in Asia*, ed. Kavita Singh, Parul Dave Mukherji and Naman Ahuja (Sage Publications India, 2018), pp. 233–44.
- ¹⁰ This function resonates with the public identity of AAA in particular, as described by founder Claire Hsu: "As evidenced by the increasing use of the word "archive" as a generic term, the proliferation of archive-driven networks, institutions and programs, as we see here today, and the move to digitize and make public previously inaccessible bodies of material, the archive has evolved into a multi-functional space. It is no longer about the ordering of objects within a structure, but a platform that enables the co-creation of meaning and experiences, where knowledge is envisioned as an inter-subjective space. And I would argue that the idea of the network is inherent as a form within this." Hsu, *Asia as Method, Archive as Method*, 2014.
- ¹¹ Bunoan, "Roberto Chabet", 2017.
- ¹² The term "layers" has been used by Bunoan to describe the structure of the archive once it was made available via the website of AAA. Bunoan, "Roberto Chabet", 2017.
- ¹³ For references to Chabet as the "father" of Philippine Conceptualism, see Elvira Araneta, "Remembering Roberto Chabet", *Contemporary Art Philippines* 27 (2013): 44–9; B. Carlo M. Tadiar, "Conceptual master Chabet gets unprecedented retrospective at CCP", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 March 2012: C1–C2.
- ¹⁴ See Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse", *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3–22.
- ¹⁵ I draw here on art historian and Isabel Ching's observation that the canon of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art is not yet solidified. While this produces many gaps of knowledge and leaves open spaces for researching the interconnections and differences between national art histories, it also leaves

space for struggles to distinguish—and assert—who is important on a national level and speaks for wider, regional practices. See Isabel Ching, “Southeast Asian art history doesn’t have a canon yet”, interview, 28 March 2014, <http://artradarjournal.com/2014/03/28/singapore-wants-it-all-too-quickly-thats-the-problem-isabel-ching-on-singapores-art-scene-interview/> [accessed 29 Sept. 2018].

- ¹⁶ The drive to restage and represent earlier conceptual and performance-based practices may be seen in recent exhibitions such as *A Fact Has No Appearance* (2016), curated by Russell Storer, Adele Tan and Clarissa Chikiamco, around the practices of Johnny Manahan from the Philippines, Redza Piyedasa from Malaysia and Tan Teng-Kee from Malaysia/Singapore.
- ¹⁷ David Teh, *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), pp. 1–19.
- ¹⁸ I have borrowed the term “currencies” from art critic David Teh’s recent study of Thai contemporary art, in which the term refers to both the strategies taken by artists to negotiate narratives of the national and international, as well as tendencies and practices in contemporary or ‘current’ art. Teh, *Thai Art*, p. 15.
- ¹⁹ Apinan Poshyananda, “‘Con Art’ Seen from the Edge: The Meaning of Conceptual Art in South and Southeast Asia”, in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss and Luis Camnitzer (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), pp. 142–6.
- ²⁰ Chabet has been credited with bridging local developments, with international discourses in modern and contemporary after the Second World War, alongside formative figures such as David Medalla (b. 1938) and Raymundo Albano (1947–85) from the Philippines, Redza Piyadasa (1939–2007) from Malaysia, Tang Da Wu (b. 1943) and Cheo Chai-Hiang (b. 1946) from Singapore, and Jim Supangkat (b. 1948) from Indonesia. See Ahmad Mashadi, “Framing the 1970s”, *Third Text* 25, 4 (2011): 409–17.
- ²¹ Isabel Ching has noted, “As a historical phenomenon in Southeast Asia, conceptual art is not often spoken of. If you look at the language itself, it can look very minimal and sometimes it can look a bit formal. The message itself is not necessarily clear to anyone and it can look like minimal art from the West. It’s not what [the West] wants to see as coming from Asian artists, it’s not what they think it’s an important art coming from Asian artists.” She also cites how the birth of institutions such as the National Gallery of Singapore—and I would add, the Asia Art Archive—has explicitly privileged the documentation of conceptual practices. See Ching, “Southeast Asian art history doesn’t have a canon yet”.
- ²² At the time when research for this paper was carried out in 2017–18, King Kong Art Projects was continuing to archive and annotate materials for the archive, although this new material is currently not added to AAA’s digital repository and may be accessed only onsite in Manila. Bunoan, “Roberto Chabet”.

- ²³ King Kong Art Projects Unlimited was founded in 2010 by Ringo Bunoan while Chabet was still alive. The organisation was originally established in order to represent Chabet for the retrospective exhibition *Roberto Chabet: 50 Years* (2011–12) and its ensuing publications. An agreement was made with the artist granting King Kong Art Projects permission to document and manage his existing works, as well as to reproduce works for the exhibition. After the artist's death in 2013, the agreement was re-signed with the artist's family and estate, granting King Kong Art Projects continued rights to represent the artist and maintain his archive.
- ²⁴ Judy Freya Sibayan, "Judy Freya Sibayan", *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography* (Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 22 Aug. 2017).
- ²⁵ Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument", in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, pp. 11–51 (New York: Steidl, International Center of Photography, 2008), p. 40.
- ²⁶ Correspondence with Ringo Bunoan, 24 Aug. 2019.
- ²⁷ The term "environment" appears in a number of descriptions of Chabet's installations in the 1970s. See "Roberto Chabet's Environmental Sculpture (CCP Gallery, Nov. 14–25, 1972)" (Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Nov. 1972).
- ²⁸ Influenced by the work of Marcel Duchamp and Fluxus, Chabet's early work demonstrates an engagement with transnational discourses around conceptual art, performance and assemblage art during the 1960s and 1970s, in an effort to assert the inherent place of these media within Philippine and Southeast Asian art and culture. See Ringo Bunoan, "Seeing and Unseeing: The Works of Roberto Chabet", in *Roberto Chabet*, ed. Ringo Bunoan (Manila: King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, 2015), pp. 63–91.
- ²⁹ The term 'happening' was used to describe several large-scale public performances conceived by ethnomusicologist and experimental composer José Maceda in the late 1960s and 1970s. These notably included *Cassettes 100*, where Maceda staged the simultaneous playing of sound clips of indigenous music previously recorded during his fieldwork expeditions. The clips were played simultaneously from 100 tape recorders, held up by 100 participants at the CCP, all the meanwhile moving around the space in a choreographed pattern. The work was devised with the assistance of visual artists Jose E. Joya Jr. and Ofelia L. Gelvezon-Tequi for the design and projections, and the theatre light designer Teodoro Hilado for lights and effects. The performance was documented by the official photographer of the CCP, Nathaniel Gutiérrez, through whose visual records the memory of *Cassettes 100* has survived not only as an experimental composition, but was also described as a pioneering immersive public 'happenings' in the Philippines in fliers and other marketing materials compiled by Maceda. See *Invitation to premier of Cassettes 100*, signed by Salvador P. Lopez

(President), 3 March 1971. In a similar spirit of collective enactment, *Udlot-Udlot* (1975) premiered at the University of the Philippines with the participation of students simultaneously playing instruments such as bamboo flutes, stamping tubes and stick beaters. Their collective organisation and spatial movement was choreographed by Roberto Chabet, thus developing a work that once again saw the meeting of experimental music, participatory art and theatre.

³⁰ Patrick Flores, “Raymundo Albano”, *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography* (Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 22 Aug. 2017); Judy Freya Sibayan, *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)* (KT Press, 2014).

³¹ Speaking more broadly about Conceptual Art practices in the Philippines during the 1960s–80s, Marian Pastor-Roces has noted, “The belief system that sustained the frenetic art-making was based on a certain Philippine art version of, believe it or not, nationalism. There was this hyper-consciousness about local art finally, ecstatically moving in synchrony with New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, and possibly even pushing ‘ahead’ more progressively than in Paris, London Rome.” Marian Pastor Rocas, “Outline for Reviewing the Avant-Garde”, *San Juan*, August 1985: 8–10.

³² Roberto Chabet, “Roberto Chabet: Interview by Cid Reyes”, in *Conversations on Philippine Art*, ed. Cid Reyes (Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines, 1989), pp. 123–6, esp. p. 126.

³³ Eilee Legaspi-Ramirez, “Chabet’s Conceptual Paradoxes: Reneging on the Last Word”, in *Roberto Chabet*, ed. Ringo Bunoan (Manila: King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, 2015), pp. 333–62, esp. p. 337.

³⁴ According to Lippard and Chandler, “Idea art has been seen as art about criticism rather than art-as-art or even art about art. On the contrary, the dematerialization of the object might eventually lead to the disintegration of criticism as it is known today.” Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “The Dematerialization of the Art Object”, *Art International* 12, 2 (Feb. 1968): 31–6.

³⁵ Some writers have argued that Chabet attempted to initiate what Bunoan has described as “veiled critiques” towards the art world, through a positioning of himself not only as an observer but also a critic. According to Bunoan, “Chabet was the leader of a new generation whose works were labelled as “anti-museum” for they made use of unconventional materials that are perishable and hard to keep. Against the backdrop of Martial Law, in a venue such as the CCP, one could also surmise that Chabet’s works were veiled critiques from within the institution itself.” See Bunoan, 2015, p. 73.

³⁶ Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, “Performance Art in the Philippines”, *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Archives* (Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 24 Aug. 2017).

- 37 Raymundo Albano, "A Decade of Developmental Art in the Philippines", *Philippines Art Supplement* (July–Aug. 1981): 15–6.
- 38 Patrick Flores, "Roots, Basics, Beginnings: The Textual and Curatorial Work of Raymundo Albano", *Dhaka Art Summit 2018* (Dhaka: Dhaka Art Summit, 8 Feb. 2018).
- 39 A selection of the artists featured in the archive were included in the recent exhibition *The 70s: Objects, Photographs and Documents*, curated by Ringo Bunoan at the Ateneo Art Gallery (2 Feb.–4 July 2018). It featured works by Raymundo Albano, Hugué Bartolomé, Joe Bautista, Danilo Dalena, Joy Dayrit, Nathaniel Gutierrez, Nap Jamir, Johnny Manahan, Red Mansueto, Fernando Modesto, Butch Perez, Yolanda Perez–Johnson and Judy Sibayan. Bunoan has described this exhibition as an effort to present a historical look at the 1970s without focusing on Social Realism, as has been represented in other exhibitions such as *The Philippine Contemporary: To Scale the Past and the Possible* at the Manila Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 40 Bunoan, 2017.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Bunoan, correspondence, 2019.
- 43 Conversation with Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez, Manila, July 2017.
- 44 See Sibayan, 2014.
- 45 Sibayan has recently undertaken a residency at Calle Wright in Manila (3 Oct.–11 Nov. 2018), revisiting her archives and making a selection of materials publicly available in the form of performances, lectures and publications.
- 46 An anthology of Albano's writings, *Raymundo Albano: Texts*, edited by Patrick Flores was published in 2018 by the Vargas Museum in Manila.
- 47 Albano's work was the focus of the exhibition *Turns in Tropics: Artist as Curators*, curated by Patrick Flores alongside the Gwangju Biennale in 2008. Positing the 1970s as an important moment in which censorship took place in a number of Southeast Asian nation states, this exhibition examined the role of artists who assumed curatorial positions and brought Albano's work into conversation with Redza Piyadasa from Malaysia, Jim Supangkat from Indonesia, and Apinan Poshyananda from Thailand. The display emphasised that these four artist-curators were not only key figures in showcasing art from Southeast Asia on international platforms, they also played important roles in developing critical discourses around contemporary art in their respective countries.
- 48 Patrick Flores, "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines", *Afterall* (Autumn/Winter 2013).
- 49 The group *Kaisahan* ('Solidarity'), formed in 1976, comprised Papo de Asis, Pablo Baens Santos, Orlando Castillo, Jose Cuaresma, Neil Doloricon, Edgar Talusan Fernandez, Charles Funk, Renato Habulan, Albert Jimenez, Al Manrique and Jose Tence Ruiz, who were later joined by Vin Toledo.

- ⁵⁰ Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines 1970–1990* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 2001).
- ⁵¹ Legaspi-Ramirez, 2017.
- ⁵² Patrick Flores, “Classic But Needless: The Social Realist and Conceptual Divide”, in *Ginto: 50 Years of the AAP* (Manila: Art Association of the Philippines, 1999).
- ⁵³ For a discussion of David Medalla’s positioning in relation to Philippine conceptual art, see Patrick Flores, “‘Total Community Response’: Performing the Avant-garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila”, *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, 1 (March 2017): 13–38; Purissima Benitez-Johannot, 2012; Eva Bentscheva, “Conceptualism-Scepticism and Creative Cross-Pollinations in the Work of David Medalla, 1969–72”, *Conceptualism–Intersectional Readings, International Framings: Black Artists and Modernism in Europe after 1968*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 8–9 Dec. 2017.
- ⁵⁴ In one of the seminal essays on the evolution of conceptual art in Europe and North America, Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler argued in 1968: “as the object becomes merely the end product, a number of artists are losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art. The studio is again becoming a study. Such a trend appears to be provoking a profound dematerialization of art, especially of art as object, and if it continues to prevail, it may result in the object’s becoming wholly obsolete.” Lippard & Chandler, 1968, p. 31.
- ⁵⁵ Derrida, 1998, p. 68.
- ⁵⁶ Bunoan, 2017.
- ⁵⁷ At the time of writing this article, *Waves* appears dated in the archive as 1975. However, new documentary evidence found by King Kong Art Projects has determined the original date of the installation to be 1972. Bunoan, correspondence, 2019.
- ⁵⁸ *Waves* (1972) was recently exhibited at the private gallery at MO_Space X, curated by Nilo Ilarde, from 1–30 July 2017.
- ⁵⁹ The work comprises a series of 12 suspended wooden frames, intersected by stretched strips of rubber from the interior of tyres. It was first shown at Chabet’s solo exhibition *Chabet: New Works* (1–20 Feb. 1973) at the Luz Gallery in Manila, where it featured as part of the series *For E.H.*, an homage to the German-American artist Eva Hesse, who passed away in 1970. This display included two further works, *Kite Traps*, a smaller series of wooden frames with stretched rubber bands, and *Pink Painting*, comprising a grid made of plywood with stretched out nylon stockings.
- ⁶⁰ Given the ephemeral nature of many of Chabet’s works, the archive’s ability to serve as a repository of information for recreations fulfils a function held by many other archives of Conceptual Art. For discussions on the relationship between performance-based practices and documentation, see Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in

Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation”, *Art Journal* 56, 4 (1997): 11–8; Rebecca Schneider, “Performance Remains”, in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 137–50.

⁶¹ Chabet's installation *Onethingafteranother* (GI sheets, halogen lights with stands, 2011) was featured at the first Manila Biennale (2018).

⁶² The forthcoming Asia-Pacific Triennale will feature Chabet's installation *Waves* (plywood, 1972).

⁶³ Teh, 2017.

REFERENCES

- Albano, Raymundo. “A Decade of Developmental Art in the Philippines.” *Philippines Art Supplement*, July–August 1981: 15–16.
- Araneta, Elvira. “Remembering Roberto Chabet.” *Contemporary Art Philippines*, no. 27 (2013): 44–9.
- Benitez-Johannot, Purissima. “Origins: Medalla in the Fifties.” In *The Art and Life of David Medalla*, ed. Purissima Benitez-Johannot, pp. 4–23. Manila: Vibal Foundation, Inc., 2012.
- Bentcheva, Eva. “Conceptualism-Scepticism and Creative Cross-Pollinations in the Work of David Medalla, 1969–72.” *Conceptualism – Intersectional Readings, International Framings: Black Artists and Modernism in Europe after 1968*. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 8–9 December 2017.
- Bunoan, Ringo. “Seeing and Unseeing: The Works of Roberto Chabet.” In *Roberto Chabet*, ed. Ringo Bunoan, pp. 63–91. Manila: King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, 2015.
- . “Roberto Chabet.” *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Archives*. Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 24 August 2017.
- . “Roberto Chabet Archive.” *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines*. Manila: Tate Research Centre: Asia, 24 August 2017.
- Chabet, Roberto. “Roberto Chabet: Interview by Cid Reyes.” In *Conversations on Philippine Art*, ed. Cid Reyes, pp. 123–6. Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines, 1989.
- Ching, Isabel. “Southeast Asian art history doesn’t have a canon yet”: Isabel Ching – interview, 28 March 2014. <http://artradarjournal.com/2014/03/28/singapore-wants-it-all-too-quickly-thats-the-problem-isabel-ching-on-singapores-art-scene-interview/> [29 September 2018].
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

- Enwezor, Okwui. "Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument." In *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, pp. 11–51. New York: Steidl, International Center of Photography, 2008.
- Flores, Patrick. "Classic But Needless: The Social Realist and Conceptual Divide." In *Ginto: 50 Years of the AAP*. Manila: Art Association of the Philippines, 1999.
- . "Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines." *Afterall*, Autumn/Winter 2013.
- . "'Total Community Response': Performing the Avant-garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila." *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 13–38.
- . "Raymundo Albano." *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography*. Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 22 August 2017.
- . "Roots, Basics, Beginnings: The Textual and Curatorial Work of Raymundo Albano." *Dhaka Art Summit 2018*. Dhaka: Dhaka Art Summit, 8 February 2018.
- Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse." *October*, no. 110 (Fall 2004): 3–22.
- Hsu, Claire. *Asia as Method, Archive as Method*. MoMA. 13 March 2014. https://post.at.moma.org/content_items/412-asia-as-method-archive-as-method [accessed 10 October 2018].
- Jones, Amelia. "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation." *Art Journal* 56, no. 4 (1997): 11–18.
- Legaspi-Ramirez, Eileen. "Chabet's Conceptual Paradoxes: Reneging on the Last Word." In *Roberto Chabet*, ed. Ringo Bunoan, pp. 333–67. Manila: King Kong Art Projects Unlimited, 2015.
- . "Performance Art in the Philippines." *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Archives*. Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 24 August 2017.
- Lippard, Lucy R. and John Chandler. "The Dematerialization of the Art Object." *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968): 31–6.
- Mashadi, Ahmad. "Framing the 1970s." *Third Text* 25, no. 4 (2011): 409–17.
- Mereweather, Charles. "Archival Malpractice and Counter Strategies." In *Influx: Contemporary Art in Asia*, ed. Kavita Singh, Parul Dave Mukherji and Naman Ahuja, pp. 233–44. Sage Publications India, 2018.
- Pastor Roces, Marian. "Outline for Reviewing the Avant-Garde." *San Juan*, August 1985: 8–10.
- Poshyananda, Apinan. "'Con Art' Seen from the Edge: The Meaning of Conceptual Art in South and Southeast Asia." In *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, ed. Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss and Luis Camnitzer, pp. 142–6. New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999.

“Roberto Chabet’s Environmental Sculpture (CCP Gallery, Nov. 14–25, 1972).” Manila: Cultural Centre of the Philippines, November 1972.

Schneider, Rebecca. “Performance Remains.” In *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, pp. 137–50. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012.

Sibayan, Judy Freya. *The Hypertext of HerMe(s)*. KT Press, 2014.

—. “Judy Freya Sibayan.” *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography*. Manila: University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, 22 August 2017.

Tadiar, B. Carlo M. “Conceptual master Chabet gets unprecedented retrospective at CCP.” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 March 2012: C1–C2.

Teh, David. *Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017.