

Sites of Memory as Prospects of History: An Exercise on Wartime and Post-war Art Historiography

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to question the grand narratives of post-war Philippine art by providing an expansive historicization that covers wartime and post-war Philippine art history. Locating itself as a foil to such grand narratives, this study offers a direction for the decentralization and reimagining of these histories through several “sites of memory” as Pierre Nora suggests. This study analyzes three areas and texts where memory may reside: 1) wartime publications such as *Shin Seiki* and *Philippine Review*, 2) the graduate thesis of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, and 3) a course outline of Fernando Zobel on Philippine contemporary art. These “sites of memory” fall within the nexus of the Philippine art world but through its synchronic historicization, this study is able to critically assess the institutional framework that circulates myths of Philippine identity and a certain nationalist agenda that has been imbricated in the formulation of these grand narratives. Moreover, it can contribute to a review of how Philippine modern art was conceptualized after the Second World War by broadening the scope of midcentury art historical literature and sources.

Keywords: Philippine art, art historiography, modern art, sites of memory, archives.

The quest for memory is the search for one's history.

–Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire."

In 1955, the Annual Art Exhibition of the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) held its competition with the support of the Rotary Club where the winning entries were garnered mostly by the Modernists over the Conservatives. A walkout from the latter ensued as a protest against the allegedly biased selection by the jury. As an oft-cited chronicle in art history, this has become an apex in the grand narrative that advances the Modernists superseding over the Conservatives in the linear progression of history. In art historical survey texts such as *Art of the Philippines* (1958) and *Art in the Philippines* (1964), the competition becomes the pivotal moment chronicled as the rupture between the two camps, marking the distinction between them. This was seen as the event that culminated the published debates between the two camps, led by Guillermo Tolentino of the Conservatives and Victorio Edades of the Modernists.

It is within this context that this study locates itself. As a foil to these grand narratives, it is an attempt to dislodge art historical narratives that lean heavily on established stories. Instead of validating or reiterating these narratives, it offers variances in chronicles established by proposing directions to decentralize them, putting forward alternative histories that may offer new insights on how Philippine art history may continually evolve from the stagnancy that survey texts perpetuate, creating instead expansive histories that deal with multiplicities.

Historicizing "unwritten" or peripheral narratives is scarcely a novel idea as this is the duty of the discipline of history. This study, however, ventures into how the analysis of these texts can be seen as a productive metahistorical project that responds to certain tenets of New Art History which calls for a "more open, interrogative (questioning), and self-critical" historicizing (Harris 2). The affinity of this study to this New Art History approach to historicizing enables this research to resist a traditional paradigm in art history while likewise expanding the breadth of narratives on art that may exist. Hence, the movement of its historicizing is not a steady linear progression but rather points to the potential of a more synchronic approach in art history that enables a more incisive exploration of art historical

contexts, making it possible to analyze and reinstate other sources that may contribute to the narrative's expansion.

To achieve the goal of the study, the data covered in this research examines temporally parallel texts and literature that may have been glossed over during the writing of art historical texts. This harkens to a sense of excavation where the research is actively seeking for parallel texts, analyzing them as possible "sites of memory," which stems from the idea formulated by Pierre Nora in his 1989 essay "Lieux de Memoire." In this essay, he differentiates the seemingly imbricated concepts of history and memory and argues that the distinction between the two lies in memory's potential for movement and malleability in its construction. History, which is seen as a modern intellectual production, is predisposed to organize the past (Nora 7–9). Since history is constrained by its claim of being a neutral accounting of the past, Nora claims it to be a problematic and incomplete reconstruction. On the other hand, the concept of memory may be a more productive framework of the research. The rigidity and unyielding characteristics of history may seem to contradict the demand of New Art History to be more open and self-critical since Nora claims history to be fallible in its nature. The possibility then of creating a multiplicity of narratives lies in the concept of memory which is constantly in flux, where historicizing and creating a narrative may not necessarily be the end goal as history is also "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" and needs to be "periodically revived" (8).

Although Nora formulates "memory" such that it does away with the trappings of historiography, he still states that it is "vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation" (8) and may even be blatantly biased to a group by accommodating facts in order to suit its narrative. This slippery slope should not be feared as a mere post-truth construction of history, but an acknowledgment of its faultiness and fallibility. The concept of memory, then accommodates the aim of this study to move beyond the grand narratives and dispel anxieties of whether history could or should be complete. Issues of neutrality need not be the main concern when these biases are allowed to exist, but as Nora puts it, this does not necessarily mean that we unquestioningly identify with the established history and grand narratives (12). Memory still allows space for interrogation since the emphasis here is not to depend on history to make sense of a genesis but to decipher "what we are in the

light of what we are no longer” (18). And this might be one way to reconfigure a new historiographical perspective.

Nora argues that historiography is studied because of the implication that the identity of a nation or individual and its attendant narratives may be in question. But to look for memory since history is problematic will not yield a narrative. He argues that history is an intellectual pursuit, a social science that calls for analysis and criticism, while memory is a private pursuit (11). The overlap between these two concepts, however, is inevitable since to refer to memory also means to search for one’s history (13). Nora’s idea of modern memory is found through the archival along with “museums . . . cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders” (12). This means that while this study leans more on “memory,” it will still depend on historical traces to be able to find these remnants of memory.

Andrzej Spzoniciski holds that even though Nora never fully defines the term, “sites of memory” “[sensitizes] scholars to the existence of numerous, usually overlooked depositories (sites) of the past. Simply using our imagination allows us to notice in chronicles and legal acts, not to mention language, art or poetry, the depositories (sites) of memory” (249). It is in the broadened use of the term that the materiality comes in as secondary in importance; the properties of these sites of memories should then be identified, that is, whether they belong to a particular social group and “contain some or other values (ideas, norms, behavior patterns) important from the perspective of that group” (249). This framework will be used by the study to view sites of memory.

As mentioned by Nora, the archive is an example of where memory resides. This idea is the take-off point for this study in exploring its idea of memory. It should be noted as well that this study acknowledges how archives, as Antoinette Burton characterizes them, can be considered as “artifacts of history” in the sense that they “do not simply arrive or emerge fully formed; nor are they innocent of struggles for power in either their creation or their interpretative applications” (6). What underpins this framework is Michel Foucault’s idea that archives can be sites of struggles for power. As sites of memory, the texts in the archives analyzed in this study could be reinterpreted and represented. Unlike grand narratives that are more restricted, it is also possible for the texts in the archives to be emplotted

into multiple narratives. Furthermore, despite the “static” nature of the archives, tapping into them would surface the power dynamics involved in this knowledge production, incumbent on the accessibility and availability of these archives.

The magazines, thesis, and course outline were chosen not just for their archived nature. Their scope and presentation of art in the Philippines as post-war evidence, as well as the infrequent use of these publications and texts in art history may warrant them as data that have not been tapped by grand narratives in Philippine art history; they are significant works in this study’s metahistorical and alternative-history-making undertaking. Moreover, this study parallels how Anna Laura Stoler’s critical approach to colonial archives, which is to read them “against their grain” in order to “reveal the language of rule and the biases inherent” (91) in these texts.

This study groups the texts considered as sites of memory into three. The first are articles from *Shin Seiki* and *Philippine Review* accessed through Filipinas Heritage Library. These are interwar (acknowledging the presence of the Philippine-American War) or pre-war texts. Second is the Master’s thesis of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma from the University of the Philippines. Last is the course outline Fernando Zobel used in his 1954 graduate Contemporary Painting class at the Ateneo de Manila University. Exploring the syllabus as a site of memory may be a take-off point in showing how this pedagogical knowledge production can be seen in the writing of art history. The scope of the study does not claim to completely cover the entire midcentury Philippine art history that the research aims to explore, but it does set the parameters of this historicizing.

Traces of the Filipino and the Oriental Ideology

The survey art historical texts mentioned at the beginning of this paper glosses over wartime art, often using the Japanese occupation as a pivoting chronicle for the linear progression of a grand narrative. Through a close reading of *Shin Seiki* magazine and *Philippine Review*, it can be gleaned that they were part of the strong cultural propaganda of the Japanese, with the primary agenda to shape national identity. Both were published by the Japanese bureau Manila Shinbun-sya that produced magazines such as the monthly *Shin Seiki* or *Bagong Araw*, bilingually published in Filipino and English. Aside from updating the progress of the military efforts of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the magazine featured articles

on Philippine and Japanese culture. It highlighted the sophistication of Japanese culture, implying that the Philippines should adopt or model themselves after their “Oriental” counterparts and not appeal to foreign or Western traits.

In a 1942 article titled “Muling Pagtatag sa Kultura ng Bagong Pilipinas” (“Rebuild the Culture of the New Philippines”), the movement to “rebuild the culture of the New Philippines” was described to be a pressing need since the “pride of being an Oriental race . . . behooves the Filipinos to exert all efforts towards the revival of the culture in the New Philippines” (1). The inclusion of this article in the premier issue of the magazine suggests that the significant cultural changes spurred by the Japanese was one of a nativist nature, a purist perception of Filipino culture that is claimed to be an inheritance their forefathers and “must be preserved and brought to life again by patient inquiry” (2).

The call to hark back to the Oriental, espoused as “the revival of the culture in the New Philippines” (1), can also be seen as a recalibration of the Japanese to undo the deep colonial inculturation of previous colonizers, which they believed to have resulted in the Westernization of the Philippines. The magazine recognized artists who shared the Orientalist attitude that they espoused. For instance, the article “Sining” (“Fine Art”) promoted Filipino artists Fernando Amorsolo, Victorio Edades, and Juan Arellano. While their works were not explicitly described as having conformed to the Japanese cultural propaganda, according to the article, their art practices emphasized “depicting the racial characteristics” of Filipino subjects, which the Japanese believed “must be boldly translated while retaining originality” (5). Following such rhetoric, the artists recognized in this study could be considered to have fulfilled such Oriental criteria, though what that constituted this “criteria” was not explicitly articulated.

Proposals for a hybrid identity between the indigenous and the Oriental can also be seen in the 1942 article “Ang Kabihasnang at ang Bagong Pilipinas” (“Culture and the New Philippines”), where Bienvenido M. Gonzalez, then president of the University of the Philippines, nuances this hybridity by claiming that Philippine culture is a “happy union between native and foreign influences,” profiting from the “adoption of cultural features from other countries, superimposing these to the substructure of pre-existing native culture” (8). The relationship of Philippine culture to foreign influences then is not of appropriation but of assimilation. He argues that Philippine

culture had not made use of the culture “that belongs to a people whose home is in the same section of the earth as ours and who springs from a similar racial stock—because we are thus more adaptable to our needs and temperament” (“Ang Kabihasan”). Gonzalez then proceeds to extol the adaptation of Japanese culture. He claims that the fine arts in the country will benefit from the study of Japanese art because “in these works one may observe that a distinct beauty lies in Oriental scenes which only require an adequate presentation in order to equal if not to surpass western models” (“Ang Kabihasan”). Gonzalez argues that this racial affinity of the Filipinos with the Japanese justifies this cultural adaptation and claims that the “sheer indisputability of the existing fact of geographical propinquity” of the Philippines to Japan as imperative (“Ang Kabihasan”). In a sense, he sees the occupation of the country by Japan as a welcome opportunity to fulfill the task of studying their culture. He finds that studying Japanese culture should be the “duty as an enlightened nation” since “adaptation is necessary to growth and progress” (“Ang Kabihasan”). If the previous articles persuaded the public to investigate the indigenous as the barometer of Philippine identity, Gonzalez pursues another tack by proffering a Filipino identity vis-à-vis Japan and the nations in the Asian region.

The 1943 “Paaralan ng Kultura ng Bagong Pilipinas” (“New Philippines Cultural Institute”) details the cultural proselytizing system through the New Philippines Cultural Institute. The article discusses how 63 young men in Tagaytay, Cavite were chosen to be prepared for the “weighty task of leading their fellow men towards Oriental ideals” (1). What was referred to as “rejuvenation” (the accompanying translation in Filipino was “bagong diwa” which I translate as “new thought” or “new essence”) meant that the young men’s “materialistic and individualistic perspectives and sense of values are being vigorously torn down” (1) which would lead them to the “realization that they are Orientals, basically far removed from the individualistic and materialistic culture of the West” (19). Trainees were taught Oriental philosophy by Lieutenant Sergeant Motizuki and underwent rigorous military drills and training in landscaping the institute’s surroundings as part of this “speedy rejuvenation.” Only after three months of conditioning were they seen as worthy leaders of the country. In the same issue, the article “Pagpapalaganap ng Kultura” (“Culture Dissemination”) relates how the reconstruction of the Philippines is also paired with the dissemination of Japanese culture. To introduce Japanese culture, the article explains the relevance of lectures on Japanese culture, art exhibits, film screenings,

and various contests sponsored by the Manila *Sinbun-sya* (the publisher of *Shin Seiki*), and training institutes (9). This also meant sending Filipino leaders to Japan to gain a better understanding of the country and its people.

In the first volume of the *Philippine Review* in March 1943, Claro M. Recto wrote “The Resurgence of Filipino Culture,” where he problematizes the domination of Western colonization in the Philippines. While he says that the “blending of East and West was happy and harmonious in some instances,” there were also moments where the “effect upon native culture was to stultify and corrupt rather than to improve and establish it” (3). Recto expresses that there is some benefit to such an Oriental distinction when it comes to identity. While the basis of his arguments questioning the adoption of Western culture may have escaped the article, his promotion of the Oriental culture via the Japanese is clear when he says that the “current Great East Asia War has afforded the Filipinos a singular opportunity to revise their mistaken concepts and give life once more to a culture which can be called truly their own” (4). It is important to underscore how this opportunity is anchored in the development of the country for their imminent and forthcoming independence. Recto quotes Lieutenant-General Homma, the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Japanese Forces when he addressed the Filipino people:

In the reconstruction of the new Philippines, the first step must necessarily be the laying of the spiritual foundation which is the vital nucleus of culture, and around which politics, economy, industry, and education are based Arouse yourselves! . . . The company with other kindred races having geographical affinity, your proper place in the universal order of things. The times strongly call for a great spiritual revolution. (4–5)

At a certain point in his article, Recto asks: “What would be the new Filipino culture?” (5). He responds by being impartial to whatever dichotomy he presented at the start, stating that the task of finding the “new Filipino culture” is being “narrow-minded and regionalistic” and that it resorts to denying “the benefits of certain desirable influences from the civilizations of other nations” (5). He states Japan’s assimilation of cultural influences from Asia and the West are guiding principles for the Philippines’ cultural resurgence which he describes to be a “tapestry of cultures, with basic elements drawn mainly from Asian cultural sources and with

some desirable traits taken from our Hispano-American civilization heritage –all blended harmoniously into a unified pattern” (7).

The genesis of this cultural reorientation is not an outlook that is exclusively Filipino in cultural tradition. It likewise nods to the regional affinity in Asia, a consequence of the cultural propaganda strongly enforced especially at the beginning of the Japanese colonization. Recto was able to operationalize this agenda in his lateral positions as president of the Constitutional Convention, as well as commissioner to the Department of Education, Health, and Public Welfare. Aside from this, he was also the president of the Nippon-Philippine Cultural Association. Whether or not this was a personal belief of Recto or a result of pressure from his Japanese superiors, he tried to promote such ideas for the formulation of Philippine identity.

How were the visual arts postured alongside Japanese propaganda? In 1944, a slew of articles published in *Philippine Review* explored this quest for cultural reorientation, particularly pointing at the direction arts and culture could take. I.V. Mallari, the in-house art critic of the magazine wrote a feature on Philippine art that spanned the precolonial to the contemporary period. While his survey breezes through indigenous art, Mallari dwells heavily on fine art: Guillermo Tolentino’s monuments and the paintings of Lorenzo Rocha, Lorenzo Guerrero, and Antonio Malantic were identified as Filipino Primitives characterized by a “certain hardness and stiffness in modelling, by the flatness in their color treatment, and by a strong preoccupation with details” (15). He identifies Juan Luna, Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo, and Rafael Enriquez as figures representing the apex of Filipino Painting notwithstanding the European influences characterizing their works.

Included in Mallari’s article are Victorio Edades, for his “modern” tendencies and Fernando Amorsolo for his influential virtuosity. For him, the Filipino people are more “imitative than creative” (18) which is the reason for the Western influence despite his claim that neither Europeans nor Americans imposed their culture on the Philippines. Regardless of such ungrounded assertion, he said that Philippine art will inevitably be impacted by Japanese culture soon enough.

This morose prediction of the Japanese occupation’s effect on Philippine culture that Mallari states seems to deny the possibility of any desire for self-determination by the Filipinos. Regardless, this sentiment is not shared by other writers in the

magazine. For Salvador P. Lopez in “The Problem of Our Culture,” the intellectual’s preoccupation should be to problematize Filipino culture (4). This article explores the tension between the idea of Philippine culture as hybrid (Lopez uses the term “crossbreeding”) as opposed to the idea of pure form of identity. According to Lopez:

... this thing we have deigned to call Filipino culture is the product of crossbreeding that has taken place over such a long period of time that only by using the word in its loosest sense can it be called a culture at all Layer upon layer of new influences have gathered upon us through the centuries; infusion after infusion of fresh elements into our life has created infinite permutations in our cultural characteristics and idiosyncrasies. (4)

His proposition involves a reexamination Philippine culture and retaining its various aspects, regardless of their origin. This would also mean examining and possibly retrieving the customs, traditions, and ideals from the indigenous past (4). And if Philippine culture needs to assimilate a foreign culture, such features then need to “harmonize with the spirit of our traditions and have power to enhance our fund of beauty and truth” (4). Although there is sophistication in its argument, less rigid and myopic in its configuration, Lopez does not provide any concrete direction as to what it would mean to reexamine Philippine culture and what would constitute retaining a cultural artifact’s aspect.

Emilio Aguilar Cruz takes a different approach and pursues the impetus to search for the purity or originality of Philippine culture in his essay “The Autochthonous Tradition.” He attempts to respond to the trivialization of Philippine identity as non-existent by arguing that finding autochthonous art does not necessarily entail referring to the past but instead can also refer to contemporary artworks. According to him, art becomes artificial if it “[takes] refuge in the past or seen an impossible future” (32), asserting that artworks of the present should then be related to the past to provide a semblance of a tradition.

Due to their popularity, the tendency would be to assume that artists such as Luna and Hidalgo are the “site” of Philippine identity in art, but Cruz likewise recognizes homegrown artists such as Vicente Rivera y Mir or Teodoro Buenaventura who stayed in the country. Cruz states that these “homespun” artists provided the “native

tradition”; they were “more obscure craftsmen who eked out a living in smoky studios in Quiapo and Santa Cruz, simple men who depicted life as they knew it, with marvelous insight if not with much polish” (32–33). This ostensible tradition is the bedrock of artistic influence that is embodied by Fabian de la Rosa, who Cruz extols as an “original genius” and through him, “the autochthonous Philippine painting of the [century] reached full flowering, and in his whole career is summed up all the good in the past” (33). De la Rosa is also the foil to the celebrated Fernando Amorsolo whose works were described by Cruz as “easy” and implied that he was as one of the artists succumbing to “popular demand for stereotypes glorifying native life” (34).

Cruz then uses this line of argument to demonstrate the continuation of such autochthonous tradition as actively located in Modernists such as Diosdado Lorenzo, Victorio Edades, Carlos Francisco, Cesar Legaspi, and Ricarte Purugganan. He says that these artists should also take cues from de la Rosa in the sense that “they must paint not to identify themselves with schools and movements but to express themselves in the light of their own experience and not through another’s vision” (35).

Unlike the previous articles, Cruz at the very least provides a starting point to enable this cultural reorientation that leans toward being Filipino-centered. He does not find the need to cull from the indigenous past of the Philippines as Salvador Lopez suggests. Furthermore, unlike Mallari’s argument that Filipinos are not creative but imitative, Cruz does not harbor any misgivings about the assimilation of colonial culture; his proposal to review the artists trained in the Philippines, as opposed to the *Ilustrados* with European schooling, is evidence to his belief that this autochthonous culture has been in existence.

On the other hand, Galo Ocampo’s article “A New Direction in Filipino Art” presents the role and condition of the Modernists during the Japanese colonization. It is through Modern art that Ocampo finds this new positioning of Philippine art within the discourse of national identity. He centers this narrative on Victorio Edades whom he maintains to be the “first Filipino artist to give Filipino art a new impetus and direction” (22). Ocampo argues that it is also through the visual language of the Modernists that Philippine art is expressed, as exemplified by artists such as Edades, Carlos Francisco, Demetrio Diego, and Bonifacio Cristobal. He also claims

that Philippine art has not been this “healthy” and full of potential (23), with the younger Modernist artists providing a “new clarity of aesthetic purpose, [and] new direction” (23) for Philippine art.

The context of Ocampo’s article is the Second Art and Architectural Competition and Exhibition which was sponsored by the KALIBAPI or the *Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas* (Association for Service to the New Philippines). All the major prizes in the exhibition were won by the Moderns (21), with Ocampo’s *First Harvest* garnering second honorable mention. This exhibition, and the institutions involved may need to be further discussed in other scholarly works as this could be a productive start in showing how the cultural reorientation of the Japanese was performed in such platforms. It also presents the question of whether Modern art’s narrative was colored by Japanese cultural propaganda.

A close reading of articles from *Shin-seiki* and *Philippine Review* provides the research a glimpse at the conditions that surround art and artmaking during the time. Although the objective of this study is to surface some historical and ideological moments in Philippine post-war art history. These articles likewise show the compulsion of the visual arts to discursively participate in the formation of Philippine identity. The articles from *Shin Seiki* and the *Philippine Review* show a range of writings that may assemble a narrative of the time, which can likewise be seen to foreground issues of Philippine identity that troubled artists and post-war critics. As sites of memory, thus, the articles could surface the blatant propaganda through the usual platforms such as print and media, as well as through a plethora of art forms, and finally concretized through the New Philippines Cultural Institute.

The efforts of the Japanese to recalibrate Philippine identity to an oriental one, ushering in a parochial perspective on Philippine identity, points to a resistance to a modern conception of hybridity. Organizations such as KALIBAPI, in their attempt to carry out a cultural upheaval, belies such a fraught proposition for identity. This can be gleaned from the circularity of arguments which shows how cultural reorientation was contrived to begin with. This cultural reorientation constituted a range of ideas from a call for an “autochthonous” tradition, to a move to cull aspects of culture that do not represent a “New Philippines”, and to the dismissal of Philippine culture as merely “imitative” and lacking inherent creativity. And since most of these assert that Philippine culture is but an amalgamation of other

cultures brought about by colonizers, it was not advantageous for the Japanese to forward an Oriental agenda and promote the perceived need for the country to shed its colonial influences.

The Modernist Imaginary and its Inadvertent Historicizing

As a site of memory, the archive of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma may figure as an obvious selection but its abundance in sources also points to the furtive corners in the archive that may be left untapped. The approach of this research acknowledges that Kalaw-Ledesma, as a big figure in the cultural landscape and founder of the AAP, is inevitably inextricably linked to the Kalaw Ledesma Foundation, Inc. archives. Since Kalaw-Ledesma had the privilege to select the content of the scrapbooks or art collection, the researcher had to wrestle with the difficulty of viewing the collection with complete objectivity, that is unmarred by the figure that eclipsed the archive. Hence, the *piece de resistance* in the collection of her scrapbooks of pre-war and post-war clippings invariably point back to the founder and the midcentury artworld mostly in Manila. But the site of memory identified here is Kalaw-Ledesma's 1955 Master's thesis titled "A Critical Analysis of Modern Painting in the Philippines Today."

When closely analyzing the thesis as a site of memory, it can be inferred that her work could stand as an art historical text, providing a firsthand account of how Kalaw-Ledesma characterized the Modernist impulse of the artists in Manila post-war. The thesis may have preceded another art historical text she wrote, *Struggle for Philippine Art* (1974), but the former influenced how the book characterized the "modern" and the identification of the key figures, likewise providing the nexus of interactions in the Artworld of the Modernists. The thesis was able to identify the involvement of artists/producers, critics, organizations, and institutions. Kalaw-Ledesma's deep knowledge of the topic attests to the role she played in the artworld as a cultural agent and art historian.

Due to the limited availability of copies, the thesis itself has not been used as a reference until late. Although Kalaw-Ledesma mentions in *Struggle for Philippine Art* (1974) that she used the thesis as she was writing the book, this research found no citations of the thesis since 1955. But lately, it has been taking its space: in 2014, the exhibition *Articles of Disagreements* at the Lopez Museum and Library

exhibited a copy of the thesis, books such as *Art After War* by Patrick Flores or *The Life and Times of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma* edited by Purissima Benitez-Johannot used the thesis as a source, and quotations from the thesis are now shared by the Kalaw Ledesma Foundation in its social media accounts. The thesis's growing presence in terms of knowledge production in art history can be traced to the archive's active participation in the public sphere.

Kalaw-Ledesma writes a broad yet incisive take on contemporary art that she identifies as "modern"; her broad strokes providing a historical context and identifying key figures are complemented by the rigor of her research. Her interview with artists also provide an early ethnographic methodology for her own historicizing. The main topic of her thesis was supposed to be the educational curricula and the inclusion of modern art in arts education, but Kalaw-Ledesma emphasizes in the thesis her interest in modern art and its necessity in basic education. While establishing the definition and characteristics of modern art which covers the breadth of her thesis, the topic on education and curricula is just merely mentioned. But she makes a case for the reason behind the unpopular opinion and even stigma against art, specifically modern art and its practice, which she claims is a result of the American colonial government's failure to prioritize the inclusion of art in its curricula. This problem served as a pivot for Kalaw-Ledesma to propose and present how the study of modern art and its artists could be a solution to the problem. She sought to comprehensively analyze contemporary art of the time through the expression of the moderns and initiate a change in viewing art.

In identifying the thesis as an art historical text, it can be inferred that Kalaw-Ledesma's approach to modernism's arrival was inevitable. Despite stating that the numbers of Modernist artists are dwarfed by the Conservatives during the 1950s (AAP classified 68 artists out of 269 members as self-identified Modernist in 1953), she still insisted on the significant role the Modernists played in her proposal for basic education.

Kalaw-Ledesma's involvement in the art scene as a patron, co-founder, and president of the AAP influenced her own research. As a figure in the thick of things and moving within the social circles of artists and critics alike, Kalaw-Ledesma had the advantage of being informed by such interactions. Aside from holding interviews with the artists of the moderns for her thesis, her working relationship with them

was intimate enough that they showed her their sketches and works in progress for comment before their final iteration (6). The participation of Kalaw-Ledesma in social and institutional structures that scaffold the moderns is seen in the thesis's interviews as data, thus constituting the former as a site of memory.

To parse out the multitudes of "sites" in the thesis, this study focuses on the marginal data in its content analysis. "Marginal" refers to data that may not have been included or foregrounded in the grand narratives analyzed previously, yet occupy a significant space in the configuration of the thesis. The marginal here enables the study to track traces of history in order to interrogate grand narratives. The analysis done on this data also includes some themes that may nuance what were already present in the articles from *Shin-seiki* and *Philippine Review* earlier discussed where the definition of "modern" and the conception of Philippine identity and style were problematized.

To begin, Kalaw-Ledesma identifies the "Moderns" and its artists vis-à-vis the Conservatives. Based on her interviews, artists who were considered Modernist before the war were eventually labelled as conservative: Diosdado Lorenzo, Demetrio Diego, Bonifacio Cristobal, Victorio C. Edades, Carlos V. Francisco, and Ricarte Puruganan. The reason behind this is that there were no changes in the artistic practice of their art (8). Her revised list of Modernists includes Hernando R. Ocampo, Fernando Zobel, Romeo Tabuena, Vicente Manansala, Arturo R. Luz, Manuel Rodriguez, Cesar P. Legaspi, Nena Saguil, Anita Magsaysay-Ho, Lyd Arguilla, Galo B. Ocampo, Victor Oteyza, Cenon Rivera, and Hugo Yonzon. The roster demonstrates a keen eye for artists and their works, especially when tracing the development of modernism. Although not expressly stipulated, the set of criteria of Kalaw-Ledesma enabled her to identify and categorize the moderns accordingly.

Even her own characterization of modernism is compartmentalized— a neat division of groups and schools of thought to make sense of every artistic oeuvre. This is appropriate for Kalaw-Ledesma's thesis since her use of the term "modern" is a "loose nomenclature for all the artists who revolted against the accepted way of painting" (65). And while each modern artist is placed either as a Conservative or a Modernist, Kalaw-Ledesma states that an artist is not permanently pigeonholed in categories; an artist may "shift from any one school to another in search of the best way to express his idea, or because of the influence of his readings, or due to

a due to a change in his personal philosophy, or because some internal or external force which affects him” (65).

Kalaw-Ledesma identifies the nucleus of modern art through the Neo-realists. Their *raison d'être* as articulated in their manifesto, is anchored in the oft-quoted writing of Francesco de Santis:

To create reality, an artist must first have the force to kill it. But instantly the fragments draw together again, in love with each other, seeking one another, coming together with desire, with obscure presentment of the new life to which they are destined. And the first real moment of creation in that tumultuous and fragmentary world, is the moment when those fragments find a point, a center around which they can press. It is then that the artist's creation comes out from the unlimited, which makes it fluctuant, and takes on a definite form –it is then that it comes to birth. It is formed and lives, is developed gradually in conformity with its essence. (69)

She describes The Neo-realists as she describes them, is a “very unusual fraternity for the arts in Manila” that is defined by the “spirit of comradeship and loyalty” (65). Formed on June 17, 1950, the group gathered on Saturday afternoons at the Philippine Art Gallery (PAG) which served as their headquarters. The establishment of PAG, through its proponent Lyd Arguilla, was described by Kalaw-Ledesma as “the greatest single factor which has influenced contemporary modern painters,” taking in crowds and fresh fine arts graduates to experiment with their art practice. Within the group, Hernando R. Ocampo was identified by Kalaw-Ledesma as the most influential member, acting as “organizer and acknowledged leader” of the group (71).

PAG served not only as a venue for the group but as a support system for these artists. According to Kalaw-Ledesma, the group was originally composed of Hernando R. Ocampo, Cesar Legsapi, Vicente Manansala, Victor Oteyza, and Romeo Tabuena. Members who joined later were Lyd Arguilla, Jose Joya, Fernando Zobel, Nena Saguil, Arturo Luz, and Cenon Rivera (71). One reason for artists joining such a group was to find “moral support and for mutual self-protections” (71) when exploring other visual idiom in furthering their practice. Kalaw-Ledesma reasons that these could neither be found in other art institutions such as the UP School

of Fine Arts which rejected modernism nor at the University of Santo Tomas Fine Arts which only accepted undergraduates. Hence, younger artists such as Tabuena, Joya, Zobel, Luz, and Rivera joined the group for the opportunity of further studies.

Kalaw-Ledesma further categorizes the Neo-realists by dividing them into two “schools” despite their individual approach to painting. She also includes artists that may not be part of PAG per se but exemplify the latter’s style. First, non-objective artists are identified as Hernando Ocampo, Nena Saguil, Lee Aguinaldo, and Constancio Bernardo. Second, she also includes surrealism through the works of Lucy Cattaneo, Galo B. Ocampo, and Victor Oteyza. Presently, it would be limiting and confining to depend on these categorizations considering the oeuvre of these artists. But at a specific historical juncture, these descriptions indicate the direction artists were taking in their practices. Kalaw-Ledesma’s thesis is able to capture the existence of these schools of thought, which grand narratives may have simply conflated in reference to the Neo-realists.

Kalaw-Ledesma describes the post-war art system of the moderns by identifying the producers and the institutions that scaffold it. She also includes critics of the time: Francisco Arcellano, Aurelio Alvero, Emilio Aguilar Cruz, Fernando Zobel, I.P. Soliongco, Victorio C. Edades, Guillermo Tolentino, Galo B. Ocampo, Arturo Luz, Armando Manalo, Victor Oteyza, Pat Brooks, Emmanuel Torres, Lyd Arguila, Nita Umali, Fidel de Castro, Fr. Alfredo Paniso, and Romeo Tabuena. Noting that criticism had not flourished after the war, Kalaw-Ledesma claims that there was an inordinate amount of cultural production of artworks as opposed to the written art criticism available. She describes that critical works are necessary in artistic activity since “they point out the significance of a work of art both to the layman and to the artist as well” (83). She bemoans that there was not only a lack of critics; the quality of the critical writings was likewise quite unsatisfactory. She claims that there are some “home-grown” writers who have dabbled into art criticism in an amateurish manner since their works “have the quality of parlor opinions rather than serious studies” (83).

Certain critics are favored by Kalaw-Ledesma, nonetheless. Albeit home-grown and self-studied in terms of his practice of art criticism, Emilio Aguilar Cruz is seen to have the “uncanny intuition of what is beautiful and right, with an acute understanding of Filipino art” (Ibid.) exemplified in his writings. His writings have

“detachment and a sense of history and perspective” which Kalaw-Ledesma states as astonishing despite his lack of exposure to or education in Europe or America. The privilege of studying abroad may be a highly valued quality for Kalaw-Ledesma since she identifies Fernando Zobel, with his post-graduate Harvard pedigree, to possess enough credentials to qualify as an art critic.

Zobel remains the linchpin in art criticism. Illustrating how art criticism goes hand in hand with education, Kalaw-Ledesma narrates the formation of the intensive art appreciation classes held at the Ateneo Graduate School which was originally handled by Fernando Zobel. Started in 1953, it was described to have “created a nucleus of what might well become the future body of competent art critics in the Philippines” (85). Aside from Zobel, who employs the Harvard method of informal illustrated lectures and other art teachers and painters in Manila, Arturo Luz also taught in the class after Zobel. Unlike other art appreciation classes found in other universities such as the University of Santo Tomas, University of the Philippines, Philippine Women’s University, University of the East, and Centro Escolar University, the class in Ateneo also focused on art criticism.

Addressing the institutional aspect of the artworld of the time, Kalaw-Ledesma also sought to characterize modernism by looking into the relevant issues that were prevalent at the time. Unsurprisingly, she recognizes modernism’s concern with the identification of a Filipino style by acknowledging that there is an undercurrent of urgency on their part to identify a national style but she argues that a singular style is hard to produce from a mixture of different cultures. She relates how artists have “just started to taste the feeling of self-assurance; sufficient enough to give him the confidence to work out a style of his own” (97). She says that this is in stark contrast to the manner of painting then which echoed an acceptable Western work in a Filipino artist’s practice:

Painting as a creative art began for the first time only a few years after Liberation . . . it started from a hazy idea and realization that the Filipino has no style of painting to claim as his own. From this idea, sprung out the desire to paint in a truly Filipino way. Even though the desire was there, the will was not, and so many modern painters still continued to paint in the manner of the School of Paris. However, a

restlessness was being felt; a questioning, a re-examination of values have been done. (101)

For Kalaw-Ledesma, the search for a Filipino style is a causal phenomenon stemming from a post-war inclination brought about by a country stepping out of the throes of colonization. And embedded within this inclination is what she ascertains as an “inferiority complex caused by over three hundred years of political and cultural subjugation” (101).

She cites how artists like Carlos Francisco and Galo Ocampo primarily interpreted the idea of Filipino style by incorporating indigenous forms and subject matter, such as Muslim designs and Ifugao textiles and carvings into their paintings. On the other hand, she extrapolates the claim that true Filipino style can be found in artists like Hernando Ocampo whose use of colors remind foreigners of the tropics, or in Romeo Tabuena whose romantic approach to painting the carabao and nipa hut became the identifying mark of his painting practice. The dependence on the representational subject as the element of Filipino style is also seen in Nena Saguil’s depictions of Negrito women and the genre paintings of Vicente Manansala whose canvases “explode with emotion (like a Filipino gone amuck)” (99). And while she distinguishes these artists, Kalaw-Ledesma might have understood the Filipino style as layered, in the sense that she recognized that the tendency to paint “cockfights, nipa huts, carabaos, *sabungeros*” (101) was only rehashed from the conservatives that may appear limiting and regional.

Taking these concerns into consideration, this subsection of the study presents a brief sketch of Kalaw-Ledesma’s thesis in relation to the pertinent points to this study: the conception of Filipino style and modernism, post-war historicization of art, and the institutional ecology that prevailed during the time. It must be noted that this perspective is closely associated with Kalaw-Ledesma and her subject position in the artworld; she had no qualms about her involvement in the Modernist movement which she explicitly acknowledges. In fact, she uses this to her advantage to create a critical stance on what modernism is.

As a site of memory, the contents of the Kalaw-Ledesma’s archives along with her Master’s thesis not only preserve but also reproduce an art historical stance

which an art historian could either perpetuate or deviate from in the process of historicizing. In other words, analyzing this thesis reminds us to underscore how Kalaw-Ledesma was also memorializing AAP and its efforts. As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this subsection, the figure of Kalaw-Ledesma looms high as she is inevitably ensconced in this archive. The scrapbooks in the archive, for example, derive their content from Kalaw-Ledesma's own selection; artists featured might be those favored within her circle—one can liken these scrapbooks, quite inelegantly, to PR dossiers or a media mileage collection of institutions and businesses for marketing.

This is also the reason why this study complemented the analysis of the rich archive with wartime propaganda on art. The selection itself of materials to analyze deviated from the usual narration and reiteration of the grand narratives. Instead, subtleties in these grand narratives are detected by looking into unexplored aspects of the rise of modernism vis-à-vis AAP exhibitions and discourses on modernism and conservatism.

Zobel's Pedagogy and the Modern Filipino Imaginings

The last site of memory was encountered by the researcher in an exhibition titled *Figuring Filipino Utopia* (2017) at the Ateneo Art Gallery. In one row, mounted on the wall, barely protected by its mat board and mylar cover, was a copy of Fernando Zobel's lecture outlines for the 1954 graduate course Introduction to Contemporary Painting. Charlie Samuya Veric, the curator of the exhibition, used the outline as a starting point for tracing the modernist shift of Philippine art vis-à-vis Thomas More's notion of utopia. The course outline could be considered as a site of memory that contains the unparsed field of art education in that timeline. Notwithstanding the reiteration of the themes that have been taken up so far in this study, there appears also overlapping concepts of the modern and the vexed Philippine identity.

Zobel had a multifaceted involvement with Ateneo de Manila University: his several published articles in *Philippine Studies*, his teaching stint in the university, and his hand in the establishment of Ateneo Art Gallery indicate a close relationship with the institution. It is in these instances in which the outline as "site of memory" is situated and analyzed. These are narrative instances in which philosophical underpinnings are set in motion by Zobel through the figuration of modernism

and Philippine identity. The course outline may be the jump-off point for parsing the various and embedded discourses that surround it. Note that the 1954 class in Contemporary Painting was only one of the classes in Zobel's teaching stint from 1953–1962 (Flores, "To Rear the Philippine Modern" 62). His classes were gatherings of artists and budding critics of the time: Arturo Luz and David Medalla were in attendance as well as writers Leonidas Benesa and Emmanuel Torres— prolific cultural agents whose accrued cultural capital would be most pronounced in their work as critic and museum curator, respectively.

The course outline can be historically placed preceding the famed walkout of conservative painters in the 1955 8th Annual AAP competition, which Patrick Flores also figures to be overlapping with Zobel's series of classes in the graduate school. Note as well the walkout's temporal proximity to Kalaw-Ledesma's thesis, submitted the same year as the exhibition. These two historical events plus the courses in Ateneo need not be seen as the consequence of modernism's inevitable culmination. Instead, historiographically, these can be viewed as emplotments to narrativize the triumph of the protagonist, or in this case, modernism. This study views these as the interactions between varied entities such as institutions/social formations, education/pedagogy, theory/critique, and the continuous oscillations of ideas between them that may then be later cemented by history.

Hence, modernism and its characterization and portrayal in the course, should be seen as an active participant in the "making" of modernism of 1955, or better yet, the figuration of modernism which Zobel proffered to his students. Indeed, Zobel's course outline states that discussions are highly encouraged, and students should not "hesitate to interrupt, ask questions, dispute points, or get involved in arguments" (Zobel "Lecture Outlines for the Course Introduction to Contemporary Painting," 2). And he says, "I do not have all the answers; in fact I intend to learn a good deal from this course myself" (2), an acknowledgement on the part of Zobel of his students' substantial contribution based on their immersed involvement in the art scene. His pedagogical role then should not be seen as funneling modernism to his students, but instead as facilitating the idea of modernism through his class. Again, his introduction to the outline states that the aim of the course is to "arrive at certain principles that apply to the art of all time 'modern' or otherwise" (2).

Perhaps to enable the opportunity to initiate contributions to the figuration of the “modern,” Zobel employed a historical survey of what he believed constituted the trajectory of modern art and to level the understanding of modern art’s historical lineage and direction before venturing into the “contemporary.” The historical narrative that he taught, which was informed by his American education, provided a backdrop that broadly spans post-Impressionism, expressionism, abstraction, dadaism, surrealism, and non-objective painting. The course outline includes only discussion points for a more global take on contemporary art: “The gradual shift from Paris to New York,” “Difficulty of seeing beyond the critics,” “The future of the non-objectives,” “The ‘new’ classicism,” “The new public for painting,” and “The situation in Asia.” Discussion points for the lecture on contemporary painting in the Philippines are also included. In the section “Voices of revolt,” the course outline also cites the progression of the French academic tradition towards impressionism as comparable to the changes in the visual language that Amorsolo employed up until he became the “Philippine ‘Academy’” and followed by Edades (30). In short, Zobel’s outline shows that there is a similar “progression” in the case of Philippine and French art. The Second World War is emplotted as a pivot for the discussion of modern art, but Zobel opens the conversation to the topics of “American influence” and “Nationalism.”

The most interesting topics related to this study are the last two. The first, “the difficulties of creating a national style” lists Arturo Luz, Hernando Ocampo, and Vicente Manansala. The second pertains to the prevailing conditions of the Filipino painter in terms of training, finances, public, critics, and opportunities. One can only wonder what kind of discussions took place in Zobel’s class—the figuration of the Filipino and nationalism, the assessment of the landscape of contemporary art, public reception and accessibility, critical discourse, and even the practical concerns that visual artists experienced. A brief glimpse of Zobel’s classes is provided by the five pen and ink illustrations by David Medalla in the Cultural Center of the Philippines visual arts collection that give an impression of how these classes were conducted. Done in 1956, Medalla’s *Fernando Zobel Lecturing on Art and a Student Listening II* and *Zobel Lecturing on Art III, IV, V, VII* portraying Zobel either listening to students or lecturing in a classroom setting. One is more particularly detailed, with Zobel on one side and a painting on his right; the inscription states, “Fernando Zobel beside a slide project of Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night.’”

As a pedagogical reference, the course outline could be studied for the discourses and concerns of the Filipino artist in modern art. Since Zobel set the tone for the class discussions, he may have been able to surface the modern art idiom considering that his graduate students were already or would soon be part of the visual art scene.

This Modernist perspective is what Charlie Samuya Veric characterizes as an aesthetic sensibility prompted by a postwar reimagining of the future. He claims that Zobel “saw the future as an ongoing site of cultural reconstruction, a place to come in which one could countenance the modernity of Filipino artistic becoming” (“Modern Art and its Institutions” 106). Certainly, only describing Zobel’s advocacy for modernism as a poetic reimagining of the future flattens the characterization of modernism as it seems to only credit Zobel in this future-orientation. However, Zobel’s involvement in different expressions and sources of this modernism must be acknowledged: he was closely involved with the Neo-realists that were influenced by Francesco de Santis or the heritage of Edades’ introduction to modernism which was a result of his sojourn to the United States and his support for the Modernists. Corollary to this would be the issues on Philippine identity in art that Zobel himself and the Neo-realists engaged with.

If, perhaps, this reimagining of the future was indeed the root of his modernity (“Modern Art and its Institutions” 106), then the conversation surrounding it necessitates the inclusion of Zobel’s capacity to think in such a manner. Privilege begets such capacity to think loftily—and this is how his modernity was characterized by Patrick Flores in his own take of Zobel’s construction of the discourse behind modernity (Flores, “The Zobel Nexus” 200). Zobel’s adopted modernist idiom then can be traced to his Western educational background, reinforced by the neorealists and the graduate classes he held, and manifested and concretized in his establishment of the Ateneo Art Gallery (AAG).

Provided for by Zobel, the AAG’s preliminary collection spanned his arrival from Harvard in the early 1950s until 1960 when the museum was first established (Veric, *Children of the Postcolony* 106). The donations were mostly paintings and some works on paper from artists such as Jose Joya, Vicente Manansala, Federico Aguilar Alcuaz, Arturo Luz, Lee Aguinaldo, Roberto Chabet, Cesar Legaspi, Ang Kiukok, Juvenal Sanso, Manuel Rodriguez, Jr., Vicente Manansala, David Medalla, Anita Magsaysay-Ho, and

J. Elizalde Navarro. Part of the donations were a few paintings by Alfonso Ossorio, Zobel's distant cousin who stayed in the United States and supported abstract artists such as Jackson Pollock (Flores, "The Zobel Nexus" 200). While Modernists made up the collection, there were also works by Fabian de la Rosa and Fernando Amorsolo. Furthermore, there were monetary donations from Zobel that enabled the museum to secure a couple of works such as Marciano Galang's *Cavite* (1964) and *Mag-Ina* (1969) by BenCab.

The AAG collection was entrusted to the first curator of the museum, Emmanuel Torres, a former student of Zobel in his graduate classes. His tenure lasted from the opening of the museum in 1960 until his retirement in 2002. First housed in the Bellarmine Hall of the campus and moved in 1967 to the ground floor of the Rizal Library, the museum stayed there until 2017 when it moved to the Areté building, which is touted to be the "creativity and innovation hub" of the Ateneo University.

Despite these changes in location, the museum remained steadfast to the modernist principle that its founder envisioned. In 2017, AAG held the exhibition *AAG in Review: Bellarmine Hall (1960–1967)* which historicized the first seven years of the museum. These were years that featured mostly the collection of Zobel. The figure of Zobel remains strong even in the 2018 exhibition *Love It and Leave It: A Legacy of Gifts to the Ateneo Art Gallery* which narrates that the donation of Zobel prompted other Ateneo alumni and artists to donate their artworks, serving as the core artworks in the collection.

Today, the landscape of contemporary art is also shaped by the AAG and its programming. The exhibition direction of the museum is notably contemporary, featuring mostly midcareer to established artists. Often, some exhibitions also feature a guest curator to widen the network of contemporary artists that can be featured. But this legacy of Zobel and the modernist strain is most visible in the Ateneo Art Awards, eponymously titled Fernando Zobel Prize for Visual Art. As Flores puts it, the award "still invokes Zobel as a beacon in current art making in its annual recognition of artists supposedly on the cusp" ("The Zobel Nexus" 200). It recognizes artists under the age of 36, and based on the merit of their exhibition work, chooses three finalists from a group of shortlisted artists. The age limit served as a criterion for awarding "young and upcoming Filipino visual artists" ("Ateneo Art Gallery Announces the New Shortlists"). Since nominations are

culled from exhibitions of local galleries and museums, it has become a force in the contemporary art award system of the country. The Fernando Zobel Prize for Visual Art differs from the 13 Artists Award of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in the sense that the former judges a recent exhibition work of the shortlisted artist, as opposed to the 13 Artists Awards which judges based on a retrospective consideration of an artist's practice. The Fernando Zobel Prize for Visual Art has also paved the way for opportunities for local and international artist-in-residence programs since AAG has collaborated with artist residency institutions such as the Liverpool Hope University in the United Kingdom, La Trobe University in Bendigo, Australia, and Artesan Gallery + Studio in Singapore. It has also recently included the Embassy of Italy Purchase Prize through former Italian Ambassador to the Philippines Giorgio Guglielmino.

Interestingly, Kalaw-Ledesma is also closely associated with the Ateneo Art Awards through the Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Prize which has a partnership with the AAG and the Kalaw-Ledesma Foundation, Inc. Established in 2014, the Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Prize chooses a winner out of the shortlisted entries to be contributing writers for *The Philippine Star* and *Art Asia Pacific*. Writers joining the competition are expected to write about selected exhibitions on contemporary art. It was initiated to "put art criticism into the public sphere" ("Purita Kalaw-Ledesma Prizes in Art Criticism"), since Kalaw-Ledesma also insisted that criticism and writings about art are necessary in the development and proliferation of art and its discourse, as she stated in her Master's thesis (83).

If the annual art awards of the AAP were supposed to bring together artists all over the Philippines, the Ateneo Art Awards (including both eponymously titled awards) can be seen to be more selective since the basis of shortlists is mostly confined to gallery and museum exhibitions, aside from thesis exhibitions of Fine Arts students of the College of Fine Arts of the University of the Philippines Diliman.

There is a faint echo of the how the Modernists built their careers through scholarships from institutions such as the Fulbright or the Rockefeller Foundation that seem to parallel the university residency programs of La Trobe or Liverpool Hope, and even the 1951 William J. Shaw prize is recalled in the presence of the Embassy of Italy Purchase Prize today. The AAP and its awards are different from the AAG Art Awards in configuration, but it does articulate the structures that were

also present during the time of the Modernists, which covers the courses of Zobel, and the start of the AAG. The impetus here of the award is to carry on the vision of Zobel which is to capture the pulse of visual arts, an effort that can be observed not only in the way he handled his courses as facilitator of “modernism” but also how this directed AAG to locate itself historically within the ambit of the Zobel’s “modern” and while pushing it forward.

To recapitulate, it is a modernism that may be characterized by a future-oriented sentiment prompted by postwar conditions but is also grounded in the class privilege afforded to Zobel as a scion to a family of comprador elites. All these are manifested in his graduate course outline on contemporary painting and the establishment of AAG and its annual awards; these legacy-building initiatives enabled this study to dissect Zobel’s modernist idiom and to study its configuration. But this study posits that the inclusion of Zobel’s question on Philippine identity should also be woven into this characterization of the modern. Indeed, this was an issue that he floated even in his classes, as one of the topics taken up in the last part of the course.

A 1953 essay of Zobel in *Philippine Studies* may give a clue to this notion of Philippine identity. In “Filipino Artistic Expression,” Zobel attempts to nuance this nationalist tendency to “discover what can, with pride, be pointed at as being truly Filipino” (125). He claims that the Filipino expression is elusive in the sense that many artists refer to or explore it in their art practices, but it cannot be pinned down to a style or a single subject matter. Relying solely on a subject matter as basis for determining a Filipino expression is most contentious for him since he finds this limiting and excludes works from artists like Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo. It also creates the tendency for such works to fall into the “souvenir trap,” which could be a limitation for the Filipino visual language, where art may be conditional on what tourists see as typically “Filipino.” Instead, he suggests that the Filipino expression can first be found in the nationality of the artist, an imbibed value so to speak. He says,

Does it follow then that any Filipino wielding a brush has Filipino expression? I suppose that if he has expression, he has Filipino expression. It is a simple as all that, except that it doesn’t answer

what Filipino expression is; it just gives a hint as to where one might search for it. (126)

Zobel's noncommittal answer to the question regarding Filipino expression does not pin down any concrete ideas on the subject matter. Arturo Luz, who was also a student of Zobel in the graduate classes in Ateneo and eventually replaced him as lecturer around 1955 (Kalaw-Ledesma 81), follows the same line of logic: nationality is the prerequisite for Philippine art. In his short 1972 article "Filipino Painting" in *Pamana*, he states that "There is yet no Filipino painting, only paintings by Filipinos" (32).

If Filipino expression is not found in the subject matter, Zobel takes another direction in the issue by addressing foreign influence in the Philippines. He subscribes to a nativist approach: "primitive works" are the most obvious testament to Philippine identity but understands that the circumstances of the country eroded whatever artistic practices existed then. He points at how Philippine art, then, has impermanence as an essential characteristic. But to search for the "primitive," Zobel proffers a formula of sorts to draw out such Filipino characteristic: "Object (minus) foreign influence/s (equals) residue, which is the Filipino expression we hope to find" (128). He cites Philippine churches as an easy application for his formula wherein the adaptation of the Baroque style churches in Europe included a multitude of foreign and indigenous influences, structures which he described as "curiously satisfying combination of Spanish, Mexican, Chinese, Filipino and even Hindu all rolled into one" (129).

To claim that Filipino expression is mere *residue* could be perceived as a problem since Zobel only wishes to sift through the foreign elements to look for the Filipino. This may be an unavoidable tendency of the nativist approach, where such residue provides a "pure" identification of the Filipino, that is, indigenous. The search for the residue implies that there is no conception of an identity that acknowledges the overlap of the foreign and the "primitive" as if identity only exists in strict binaries.

To nuance the ideas thus far, this search for the Filipino can be compared to a 1967 interview of Zobel by Rolando Perez and Raymundo Albano, then student writers for the literary folio of Ateneo, *Heights*. When asked about the handicap that

Filipino painters face in their growth or development, Zobel's take on nationalism has noticeably cooled:

... another handicap that is peculiar to the Philippines has to do with nationalism misunderstood in terms of art.... It is a feeling particularly prevalent among the young that in order to be a good Filipino you must paint Philippine [sic]... [and] in the effort to paint Philippine [sic], very often you end up painting banalities that are rather of no interest as art, although they may be interesting as information or a variety of things. I say that it is a circular argument because it's perfectly obvious to me that the Philippine look in art is going to be determined by what Filipino painters paint. It works backward. The Philippine look is what will happen *after* you have painted, no matter what style you paint in. It will happen by itself. It's a natural byproduct. (Albano and Perez, "Interview with Zobel")

To search for the Philippines, which he describes as "natural and even healthy," has become a limitation for artists wanting to pursue such a direction. If his word is taken as a condition for contemporary art, then art could be described to be in an impasse (or a circular argument as he expressed), forever searching for the Filipino.

The changes in attitudes in the pursuit of the Filipino points at the shifts in Zobel's perception. It could also be inferred that his art practice is suggestive of variations in perspective; Zobel's 1953 essay dovetails with his painting *Carroza* (1953) winning in the Modern category of the AAP of the same year. The subject matter, an ornately decorated religious float—regardless of its stylistic rendering in a more expressionist manner—registers his own formula of the Filipino, with distinct Catholic religious elements such as the church example in his essay. The folk practice in *Carroza* is the residue that Zobel cites to be the location of the Filipino. On the other hand, the movement of his artistic practice in his abstract series *Saetas* (between 1957–1958) and *Serie Negra* (between 1959–1962) conveniently postures a consideration for the Filipino identity (though still referencing Catholicism in *Saetas*) that is less rigid in its visual language to distinctly characterize a Filipino artistic expression demonstrated by his abstract paintings.

This change in attitude can be located within Zobel's figuration of the modern. The reluctance to consent to a narrow definition of the Filipino can already be detected in his 1953 essay when he acknowledged the significance of foreign influences in the Philippines. Hence, this may also be the provisional manner in which the discussion on national style proceeded in his course. And if this is brought into the configuration of the modern, it should then be noted that even Zobel, in his course outline, never underscored the course as a self-reflexive practice on contemporary or modern art. Instead it focused on "certain principles that apply to the art of all time 'modern' or otherwise" (Zobel, "Lecture Outlines" 3). As Zobel reminds the class in the course outline: "the first thing we must do is learn to see paintings. There is more to seeing than just looking. Give a picture a chance, rather than a glance. Paintings are at the mercy of the glance" (4).

Despite Zobel's earlier association with the Neo-realists, it could be possible that his point of entry was to find a more accommodating environment for his explorations in his artistic practice, ceasing to be limited to certain definitions. There is a refusal on his part to be simply pegged as a "modern" or a "non-objective" painter. Moreover, he does not pay attention to whether his artworks come from his Spanish, Filipino, or a more cosmopolitan international perspective. Clarissa Chikiamco, quoting Leonidas Benesa, states that Zobel was "least bothered about the universal character of his style" relying on an observation that "the vocabulary of art has become international in almost every respect" ("Fernando Zobel").

This captures a modernism that oscillates between "Filipino" and "international" but also confirms that, in the case of Zobel, the search for identity can have multiple directions. It further complicates how this site of memory can in fact show a multidimensional approach to modernism of such time. Considering the goal of this study's subsection, which is to sift through the discourses contained in the course outline, it may be safe to say that it has succeeded in doing so in the sense that it has portrayed the active participation of Zobel's Contemporary Painting course in discussing and characterizing the modern: the content of the course, the AAG, and Zobel's writings or quotations on modernism and Filipino identity. By treating the course outline as a site of memory, the discussion has proceeded to surface and problematize terms such as "modernism" and "Filipino."

An Exercise in Historicizing

As a proposed historical endeavor, this study anchored itself in the framework of Pierre Nora's *Lieux de Memoire* to veer away from the mythmaking tendency that a grand narrative may have and purposely centered its attention on sites of memory that have been eclipsed by grand narratives. Arguing that the archive is a site of memory, this study considered the materials as memory and engaged with them to discover new historical directions that have the potential to imagine and generate new insights. This study aspires to contribute to the midcentury art historical literature by extending its scope and breadth, including and concentrating on sources and materials that were either mentioned or referred to, but were not utilized in historicizing.

This study is an exercise in synchronic historicization, and not a mere discussion of national identities and its politics—yet the surfacing of such may have been an unavoidable result when taking into account the pulse of wartime and post-war materials such as *Shin-seiki*, *Philippine Review*, Kalaw-Ledesma's thesis, and Fernando Zobel's course on Contemporary Painting, along with discourses that surrounded these texts. What this study offers is a rendering of how these sites of memory grappled with modernism, nuancing that national identity is not the only *métier* of these texts. Also, as sites of memory, they are not mere references but instead considered as “always already stories” (Burton 20). As discussed, analyzing these pre-war articles on art and culture revealed the process of cultural assimilation and the stark nativist approach of the Japanese propaganda as seen in *Shin Seiki* and *Philippine Review*. By analyzing the Master's thesis of Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, this study was able to offer additional perspectives in viewing institutions such as the AAP. And through the few pages of Zobel's course outline, this study repositions his own take on modernism and Philippine identity that are manifested in his courses and involvement in the founding of AAG.

To excavate these embedded discourses, the concept of “memory” is important since it justifies how these narratives are constantly in flux. This study, however, does not claim to exhaust all possibilities and narratives that may surface. Yet, it has proven that one can look at other sources, whether a collection of articles or a course outline, and deem to imagine other narratives.

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