The (Dis)Embodied Filipina

Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire

First and foremost, we would like to thank the staff at the Pacific Asia Museum whose contributions helped make the exhibition possible. We are especially grateful to Dr. Kavita F. Knox, former Curator of Exhibitions, Programs and Collections, for his enthusiasm and support of programming initiatives and the Museum's Filipina collection, and Yasmin Iqbal for her kind and invaluable assistance in many ways.

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PEARLIE KESS S. BAHUYUT AND AGNIEZ A. BERTO

October 14, 2009 - February 8, 2010
Pacific Asia Museum
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THE (DIS)EMBODIED FILIPINA: FASHIONING DOMESTICITY, WEAVING DESIRE

"All sort of things in the world behave like mirrors."
Jacques Lacan, The Seminar, Book II

From Ernst Grombich to Adam Gopnik, the aesthetic and popular theory that style and – by extension – fashion exist only because of context is obvious. With perceived and/or meaningful contexts, differences, definitions, boundaries, and values are reengendered. Style and fashion, however, are not constructed simply in relation to social or performative identities in as much as they are a product of consciousness. The "Het Dis/Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire" exhibition is an art historical exploration of the contemporary and cultural contexts of the Filipina identity and its discursive contrast, the "wild primitive." Two images fixed into one, these domesticated and/or desired women are made to behave like violent mirrors, disembodied to each other for the viewer through illustrations performed by an institutional stereotype, a spectacular apparatus of colonialism and democracy.

To trouble the polarized significations of the Filipina, this exhibition stages the language of contact by medium and subject. Tasked specifically to exhibit the museum's collection of textiles, these donations of items in various states of completeness and condition from historic private classes are paired with ethnographic photographs of the American colonial era chronicling the ethnographic sample of Filipino, Bánayan, and Sibuyan, showcasing the performance of an anthropological exhibition through the formation of a stereotype. The exhibition makes visible the illusion of three-dimensionality through the juxtaposition of four headless mannequins wearing delicate costumes with four large black-and-white nude portraits of tribal women appropriated from dusty museums, outdated travelogues, anthropological surveys, or tourist postcards. Indeed, context is made to co-exist so as to present both the "before and after" of a discursive interaction, a dramatic demonstration of the benefits of progress from the silk to the self-governed body. Activated and naturalized by the braided contexts of colonialism and democracy, the "Filipina" inevitably becomes a (dis)embodied landscape made the museum.

According to historian Minna Roess, the term – from its rural genesis to its national appropriation – marks a form of belonging and (em)powerment. But if clothing is its cyclical reflexes signifies citizenship, does partial and/or complete nudity automatically signify dehumanization? On could ask of the skin of the Negritos, the Bontocs, the Maroons, and the Banaue, in its resistance to a societal codestates that domesticates the body and institutionalizes identity, constitute subversion and independence from power? Could the wild in its (in)difference, in its refusal to conform, in its resistance to change, and its marginally perceived as fashionabile? Indeed, while the popular and national image of the Filipina woman in a dress of the and men in a shirt of the and the butterfly ideal, the complex choreography of its handkerchief, blouse, skirt and train, and the amorphous embroidery of its layered surface, the large portraits appear risqué, warranting censorship, and, consequently, a discernible fantasy. Yet the image of the forbidden and the fiction of desire it weaves are also discursively constructed and institutionalized. The visibility of the appearance of choice, which is already preempted and polarized.

Central to this binary of conquest and governance is the acknowledgment of its own ideological and corporal liminality, of being at the threshold. Under a gauze cabinet of personal curiosities and tourist-driven commodities, the once-incommunicable is plundered and policed against the refractions of the studied/modern and wild primitive co-exist more intensely, temporally, reflecting and spatially colliding as seen through a mirror. The rayon with a crucible pendant is in bed with a nookette of brass belts while a comb adorned with inlaiding pink pompeoi challenges the sobriety of the gold pellets. Beaded sandals are lined with 发源 development. While the dialogues % the collaged rings dangling from elaborate earlocks, the blue vistas, the crocheted coin pouch is entangled in the rhythmic hoops of another, and woven rattan wreathes with paper woven as a book of photograph and postcards.

While the popular stereotype functioned to overcome the obstacle of fluidness through three-dimensional viewing, the "Het Dis/Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire" uses the museological mirror to deface the illusion of the "Filipina" and its polarized identity and iconography. Through traditional textiles, ethnographic photograph and objects of a particular and domestic exhibitions, the narrative materializes and opens up the exhibition to the stream of demotic and domesticity, and the weaving of desire, and unifies the fiction of its imaginary reproduction in the late 19th and mid-20th century. Discursively constituted as "civilized" and "wild primitives," this "Filipina" is at once at home and exiled from herself – an allegorized unity. (dis)embodied with violence and intimacy as she gazes at the mirror.

ENDNOTES

1. Jacques Lacan, The Seminar Book III of Signs and Gender (In The Techniques of Psychoanalysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [New York: Vintage, 1993]. According to Lacan, the mirror stage is a point in the human development at 18 months old, a certain level of sandbanks which are experienced as disengagement of the body, in other words, appears to be merged and parted in unity. The body is known itself as unity, but an allegorized, virtual one.


3. In his 1943 essay Grombich terms the "style" dominates "as a desirable continuity and conspicuousness that makes a performance or sequence of actions the basis of indifference or averts their". While Grombich, "Style," in The Art of Charlotte Grant, Anthropology (Oxford: University Press, 1999), pp. 19-21:

4. "The way" of doing things, the term "fashionable" can be reserved for the fleeting preferences which carry social prestige." Adam Gopnik, "The attempt to understand the operation of the two sides in Paris, restores a certain friendship the idea that "the fashionable exists in relation to something that is not that way." See Gopnik, "The Art of the Two Sides" in Charlotte Grant, Anthropology (Oxford: University Press, 1999), pp. 45-46.

5. See Folder, "Women, Civilization, and the Politics of Dress in Twentieth Century Philippines," in Kaem, vol. 19, no.1, January 2001. (An noteworthy point: dress makes visible the politics of the dress to empower women is the "tartaric" and conscious gender identity met between women, but between men (average and normal) and women (renates).

6. Grombich argues that "only in the background of a theoretical climatic choices can the distinctiveness also be seen as expressive." Indeed, Grombich quotes a saying: "The point of the whole theory of expressiveness is the concept of choice." See Grombich, "Style," pp. 151, 152.

PEARL ROSE S. BALUYUT AND AGNES A. BARTIS

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GUEST CURATORS' BIOGRAPHIES

A fullbright scholar and foundation Fellow, Pearl Rose S. Baluyut received her Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Southern California, specializing in Indonesian Art. She currently teaches at the University of Southern California and contributes curatorial work to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the USC Center for Design in Los Angeles.

In addition to her language programs in India, Italy and at the University of California at Irvine, New York, as a post-doctoral fellow, Roseaux has published articles as well as the illustrated "Tribal Tongues" community manuscripts that appear in the anthologies and are available through the University of Southern California, forthcoming: Etc., and in the forthcoming work, "Tribal Tongues."
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Pearlie Anne S. Babauta and Arget A. Bartos

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