The (Dis)Embodied Filipina

Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire

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Pacific Asia Museum
Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut and Agnes A. Bertiz

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Lastly, to our dedicated and energetic team of volunteers who helped with the exhibition's preparations, we express our deep gratitude and appreciation. Andrea Cajucom and Carrie Moore provided assistance with the planning of exhibition events, and Dana Stull aided in research of exhibition objects. Nicholas Colon created the stereocard image for the exhibition and Younhee Lee designed the elegant brochure.

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CREDITS

Image Credit: "A Negrito Woman has her body scarified in order to be in style," in Mabel Cook Cole, *Savage Gentlemen* (London/Calcutta/Sydney: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1929).

Photo Credit: Nicholas Caesar Colon, Detail of *(Dis)Embodied Filipina*, 2009. 1898 Keystone stereocard reproduction with digital prints, 7 x 3 1/2 inches.

Brochure Design and Layout: Younhee Lee

The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire

THE (DIS)EMBODIED FILIPINA: FASHIONING DOMESTICITY, WEAVING DESIRE

"All sort of things in the world behave like mirrors."

Jacques Lacan, The Seminar, Book II[1]

From Ernst Gombrich to Adam Gopnik, the aesthetic and popular theory that style and – by extension – fashion exist only because of contrast is obvious.[2] With perceived and/or meaningful contrasts, differences, definitions, boundaries, and values are engendered. Style and fashion, however, are not construed here simply in relation to sartorial production in ateliers and seasonal performance on runways; rather, they are ideological patterns of a distinct fabrication. "The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire" exhibition is an art historical exploration of the contour and couture of the so-called "Filipina" identity: the "civilized/modern" and its discursive contrast, the "wild/primitive." Two images fused into one, these domesticated and/or desired women are made to behave like violent mirrors, (dis)embodying each other for the viewer through illusions performed by an institutional stereoscope, a spectacular apparatus of colonialism and democracy.[3]

To trouble the polarized significations of the Filipina, this exhibition stages the language of contrast by medium and subject. Tasked specifically to exhibit the museum's collection of textiles, these donations of *ternos* in various states of completeness and condition from hitherto private closets are paired with ethnographic photographs of the American colonial era circulating in public domain. While domesticity is fashioned through the former, desire is woven through the latter. Functioning as a stereoscope, the exhibition simulates 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 memoirs, outdated travelogues, anthropological surveys, or tourist postcards. Indeed, contrast is made to co-exist so as to reenact the "before and after" of a discursive makeover, a dramatic demonstration of the benefits of progress from the ill- to the self-governed body.[4] Activated and naturalized by the braided contexts of colonialism and democracy, the "Filipina" inevitably becomes a (dis)embodied landscape inside the museum.

According to historian Mina Roces, the *terno* – from its rural genesis to its national appropriation – marks a form of belonging and (em)power(ment).[5] But if clothing in its cyclical reinventions signifies citizenship, does partial and/or complete nudity automatically signify disenfranchisement? Or could the skin of the Negrito, the Bontoc, the Manabo, and the Banaue, in its resistance to a sartorial code 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 marginality be perceived as fashionable? Indeed, while the popular and national *terno* overcomes flatness with the starched architecture of its butterfly sleeve, the complex choreography of its handkerchief, blouse, skirt, and train, and the anecdotal embroidery of its layered surface, the large portraits appear risqué, warranting censorship, and, consequently, a desirable fantasy. Yet the imaged anatomy of the forbidden and the fiction of desire it weaves are also discursively constituted and institutionally staged as is the appearance of choice, which is already preempted and polarized.[6]

Central to this binary of conquest and governance is the acknowledgement of its own ideological and corporal liminality, of being at the threshold. Under a glass cabinet of personal curiosities and tourist-driven commodities, the once incommensurable and polarized significations of the civilized/modern and wild/primitive co-exist more intimately, temporally reflecting and spatially colliding as seen through a mirror. The rosary with a crucifix pendant is in bed with a necklace of brass bells while a comb adorned with intoxicating pink pompoms challenges the sobriety of the gold *peineta.* Beaded sandals and velvet-lined slippers dance like the coiled rings dangling from elongated earlobes. In the blue vitrine, the crocheted coin pouch is entangled in the rhythmic ropes of another, and worn rattan wrestles with paper woven as a book of photographs and postcards.

While the popular stereoscope functioned to overcome the obstacle of flatness through three-dimensional viewing, "The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire" uses the museological mirror to deflate the illusion of the "Filipina" and its polarized identity and iconography. Through traditional textiles, ethnographic photography, and objects of personal adornment, the exhibition rehearses the material and spectral dialogue, dramatizes the fashioning of domesticity and the weaving of desire, and unveils the fiction of its imaginary (re)production in the late 19th to mid 20th century. Discursively constituted as "civilized/modern" and "wild/primitive," the "Filipina" is at once at home and exiled from herself–an alienated unity, (dis)embodied with violence and intimacy as she gazes at the mirror.

ENDNOTES

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1988). Originally delivered in 1954-1955, Lacan states: "The mirror stage is based on the rapport between, on one hand, a certain level of tendencies which are experienced as disconnected and, on the other, a unity with which it is merged and paired. In this unity, the subject knows itself as unity, but as an alienated, virtual one."
2. Ernst Gombrich, "Style" in Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 150-151. In his 1968 essay, Gombrich writes that the term "style" denotes "a desirable consistency and conspicuousness that makes a performance or artifact stand out from a mass of 'undistinguished' events or objects." While Gombrich's term 'style' is "used descriptively for alternative ways of doing things, the term 'fashion' can be reserved for the fluctuating preferences which carry social prestige." Adam Gopnik, in his attempt to understand the competition between two cafés in Paris, restates a Parisian friend's explanation that "[t]he fashionable exists only in relation to something that is *not* that way." See Gopnik, "A Tale of Two Cafés" in Adam Gopnik, *Paris to the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 85.
3. The "viewer," in this case, is an individual seeking to find oneself in (an)other(s). "[T]his image," according to Judith Butler's reading of Jacques Lacan, who analyzes the ego as an object with an imaginary origin and function, "not only *constitutes* the ego, but constitutes the ego as *imaginary.*" See Lacan, *The Seminar, Book II* and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 261, footnote 23.
4. Butler, *Bodies That Matter,* p. 260, footnote 20. In her reading of Jacques Lacan's seminar, Butler explains that the "mirror-stage *gives form* or *morphe* to the ego through the phantasmatic delineation of a body in control."
5. Mina Roces, "Women, Citizenship, and The Politics of Dress in Twentieth-Century Philippines," in *Kasama,* vol. 19, no. 1 (January-March 2005). A noteworthy point Roces makes besides the politics of the dress to empower women is the "sartorial binary" and concomitant gender inequity, not between women, but between men (colonizers and natives) and women (natives).
6. Gombrich argues "that only in the background of alternative choices can the distinctive way also be seen as expressive." Indeed, Gombrich quoting a linguist, "The pivot of the whole theory of expressiveness is the concept of *choice.*" See Gombrich, "Style," p. 151.

– Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut and Agnes A. Bertiz

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GUEST CURATORS' BIOGRAPHIES

A Fulbright Scholar and Ford Foundation Fellow, **Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut** received her Ph.D. in Art History at UCLA, specializing in Modern and Contemporary Art. She has presented her research in national and international conferences, as well as published articles and co-edited *Confrontations, Crossings, and Convergence: Photographs of the Philippines and the United States, 1898-1998.* In the past, she has served as Guest Co-Curator at the UCLA Fowler Museum, National Juror of the Philippine Art Awards in Manila, and Director of The Sam Francis Gallery in Santa Monica. Besides teaching at the Institute for American Universities in Aix-en-Provence, France, Baluyut is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at the California State University, San Bernardino.

Agnes A. Bertiz received her Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Southern California, specializing in Italian Renaissance Art. She currently teaches Western and Asian art history courses at the University of La Verne and the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. She has taught previously in USC's Summer Italian Language Program in Verona, Italy and at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York as a post-doctoral fellow. Recently, Bertiz has published an essay on the illuminated *Tacuinum Sanitatis* manuscripts that appears in the anthology on the cultural history of gardens, *Auf der Suche nach Eden. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Gartens,* E-M. Stolberg, ed. (Vienna, 2008).

EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

Saturday October 31 2:00 pm	Lecture by guest curator Pearlie Rose S. Baluyut: "The (Dis)Embodied Filipina: Fashioning Domesticity, Weaving Desire."
Saturday November 21 2:00 pm	Tour with guest curator Agnes A. Bertiz.
Saturday December 5 2:00 pm	Spoken Word and Performance moderated by poet and writer Irene Soriano Brightman. Bi-lingual (English and Tagalog) poetry and prose readings and performances on/by women.
Saturday January 30 2:00 pm	Film Screening: *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2002) by Sari Lluch Dalena and Camilla Benolirao Griggers documents the Philippine-American War of 1899. Camilla Benolirao Griggers will be on hand to answer questions following the screening.
Saturday February 6 12:00–4:00 pm	Free Family Festival. Celebrate the Philippines with dance, music, demonstrations, performances, hands-on activities, and more!

All events are free with admission.

PACIFIC ASIA MUSEUM

46 North Los Robles Ave., Pasadena, CA 91101
626-449-2742 www.pacificasiamuseum.org
Open Wednesday through Sunday 10 am to 6 pm.
Admission is $9 general, $7 students/seniors,
and free for children ages 11 and younger.
Admission is free every 4th Friday of the month.

Free parking is available in the Pacific Asia Museum parking lot on the corner of Los Robles Avenue and Union Street, directly north of the Museum.