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Everyday, Elsewhere: Allegory in Philippine Art

Patrick D. Flores

Abstract

The essay traces certain contexts of the allegorical impulse in Philippine image making and art, specifically as it marks the self-consciousness of the maker of image and art to render time, place, and event legible. It conceives of it as an aesthetic of migration, prefiguring an elsewhere that is aspired to as well as a phantasm of affinity that describes a present condition. The allegorical, therefore, bears the desire to belong to the world, referencing both the critique of coloniality as well as the possibility of transcending it at the very moment of revealing its ethical failure.

Key Words

Allegory, colonialism, diaspora, globalization, migration, nation, Philippines, post-colony

Every day a Filipino leaves home. Somewhere a Filipino lives out what is left of home. Every day, too, a Filipino returns, finding a home elsewhere.



Antipas Delotavo, *Diaspora*, 2007.

In Antipas Delotavo's work *Diaspora* (2007), we measure the extent of a scene of passage, of people with their belongings heading off somewhere quite difficult to discern. They are facing a horizon that seems to be a dis-place, but their strides are decisive, their load roots them to their ground, and they are resolute in "being there" and disappearing into a depth. Are they coming or going? Are they in a vast terminal in the airport or on the tarmac to catch their flight or have they arrived? In some way an elsewhere is intimated, either a home to which they return or a foreign destination for which they long. There are more or less ten million Filipinos outside the Philippines, roughly ten percent of the country's population.

The Philippines was colonized by Spain for about four centuries, from 1521 to 1898, and ruled by the United States for around four decades, from 1899 to 1946. After recovering from the Second World War, it tried to develop an economy primarily nurtured in agriculture. But in the seventies, the government started to harness human labor as an export itself. At the present time the overseas Filipinos, whether workers or migrants, keep the economy afloat with their steady transfer of money to relatives and dependents; they send around 13 billion dollars in remittances every year, ensuring that the economy does not

totally sink and leading the government to call them the new heroes (*bagong bayani*) of the nation.

The dispersion of the country has been sensitively portrayed by contemporary artists in both monumental and intimate ways, testifying to the universal and particular conditions of migration.



Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, *Address*, 2008.

In Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan's project for the 2008 Singapore Biennale, they assembled homecoming boxes laden with belongings and created a gargantuan version of the same perhaps to represent the magnitude of the experience as well as the minutiae of its details. In Lani Maestro's imagination, the tale of travel takes on a more poetic register, as in her work *a book thick of ocean* in which she photographs the sea in seeming sameness, with the moment of difference initiated by the performance of turning the pages. In *I Am You*, she gathers benches cobbled together from found wood, arranges them in a church in France like pews, and invites the audience to sit and hopefully converse where they are in what may well be a congregation. The box, the sea, and the chair may be understood as allegorical figures indexing the Philippine diaspora and the desire to belong.

Even in the instance of colonialism in the Philippines, which began in 1521 when the Portuguese mariner Ferdinand Magellan, laboring under the auspice of the Spanish crown, circumnavigated the world and reached the islands to be known as the Philippines only to be killed on the shore by a local chieftain, the sensibility was allegorical. This is best gleaned in the early maps of the Philippines, evocations of the place through cartography that was allegorically conceived.

In *Conquista de las Islas Filipinas* (Conquest of the Philippine Islands), which depicts the story of Spanish colonialism, the intent was to acclaim the work of the Augustinian missionary Gaspar Aquino de San Agustin in the conquest of the Philippines.

It is inscribed that the temporal realm is assigned to King Philip II and the spiritual to the religious order of the Augustinians. This print has a triangular structure marked by three points: Jesus Christ, Saint Augustine and his friars, and King Philip and his soldiers. The heart of the allegory is the radiating anagram of

IHS, Jesucristo Hombre y Salvador (Jesus Christ Man and Savior). Around it are the phrases: "Praise Jesus Christ till the ends of the earth." "Light shines splendid and all of the earth adores you." The phrase "till the ends of the earth" is repeated five times and stresses the universality of the colonial conquest that is conflated with evangelization. The light from the heavens descends, refracted by the heart that St. Augustine carries, and falls on the map of the Philippines, conveying the grace of God on the islands under the aegis of the cross and the sword.

In *Aspecto Symbolico del Mundo Hispanico puntualmente arreglado al Geografico* (Symbolic Aspects of the Hispanic World Geographically Set), the queen represents Spain, her crown signifying the Iberian peninsula. The dove above it is Italy. On her chest is a rose of thirty-two petals; flanking it are the Americas. On the folds of the skirt are the routes to the Pacific charted by the fabled trade of the Manila Galleon. On the feet are the Philippine islands of Luzon and Mindanao.

The *Carta Hydrographica y Chronographica de las Yslas Fillipinas* offers a more familiar cartographic image of the Philippines. What is interesting here is the way in which the allegorical dissolves into the everyday. The sense of locality that was being conjured in the earlier maps finally assumes a culture through the ethnographic vignettes that surround the map, complete with the habits of the place, flora and fauna, and the planning of cities. The elsewhere that was the Philippines in the time of global imperial conquest has become a country with everyday life, with the local artist for the first time signing his name and appending an ethnic reference, a sign of self-consciousness stamped on a map that locates and names him.

This sense of the elsewhere and migrancy is also embodied in the nineteenth-century painting *Spoliarium* (1884), the exalted work of the esteemed painter-patriot Juan Luna (1857-1899), which takes us to a distant place and moment. This is a Rome of Emperors, who preside over dreadful struggles between humans and beasts, slaves and rogues, before spectators who cry for blood in a coliseum of ignominy, entranced by carnage and exhilarated by grave games. This distance in history is paradoxically the painting's source of intimacy: the sight provokes beholders into professing their inalienable ethical belief, into unveiling the depraved deed of an empire that leaves corpses in its wake. Its estrangement is its immanent critique.

The spoliarium could be accessed through the southeast entrance of the Roman coliseum called the Porta Libitrinensis. Through this door passed such large creatures as elephants and rhinoceros as well as dead animals that were tossed to the beast-men. It was the chamber into which the fatalities of the arena, including Christian martyrs, were consigned and later burned. The drama that transpires in Luna's painting is akin to a deposition in which those who have died are taken down, either from the cross or the scaffold, and then finally despoiled, laid bare in full dispossession. It is said that such a scenario was partially taken from Charles Luis Dezobry's *Rome in the Time of Augustus; Adventures of a Gaul in Rome*, which was a popular publication of the day.

But this distant place and moment is Luna's contemporary Rome, too: the city that had been his address when he apprenticed for his mentor Alejo Vera, the "taciturn painter of Roman

catacombs," and the inspiration of a series of paintings like *La Muerte de Cleopatra* (1881) and *Daphnis y Chloe* (1881). Rome may have been a specter of antiquity to which his art aspired, the former colonizer of Hispania or Spain, which had been his country's conqueror. The *Spoliarium* was completed and was first exhibited at the Palazzo della Esposizione. Madrid was its destination, although Luna had his eye on Paris as the emerging center of art in light of the waning of the Salon. In 1884, when Luna received the First Gold Medal, one of the three highest, albeit not the ultimate, honors conferred at the Madrid Exposition, the Salon des Independents of the post-Impressionists Redon, Seurat, and Signac had already commenced. Indeed, *Spoliarium* would gather layers of both concurrent and discrepant time. Luna had been caught up in a cycle of provenance and future: Manila (colony), Rome (antiquity), Madrid (empire), Paris (modernity).

It is for this reason that the *Spoliarium*, far from being a static tableau, inhabits a moving allegorical space. If allegory permits a transposition of a tale impossible to narrate and offers a moral resolution to a predicament too intricate to reveal with directness, then Luna's opus finds affinity with Filipino Francisco Baltazar's metrical romance *Florante at Laura* (1838; 1875) in which its hero laments a failed homeland, in the guise of Albania, that is suffused with and surrounded by a regime of deceit:

All over the country
treachery reigns,
while merit and goodness are prostrate,
entombed alive in suffering and grief.^[1]

It is this allegorical device that enables *Spoliarium* to evoke a multitude of meanings beyond the anecdote that it depicts, and most of all, the sublime. It becomes a mode through which an abject disposition in another locale becomes so tangible and urgent and palpable back home that Luna's peer Graciano Lopez-Jaena would be so stirred to proclaim while in exile:

For me, if there is anything grandiose, sublime in the *Spoliarium*, it is that through this canvas, through the figure depicted in it, through its coloring, floats the living image of the Filipino people grieving over their misfortunes. Because, gentlemen, the Philippines is nothing more than a *Spoliarium* in reality, with all its horrors. There rubbish lies everywhere; there human dignity is mocked; the rights of man are torn into shreds; equality is a shapeless mass; and liberty is embers, ashes, smoke.^[2]

This allegorical insight invests Luna with valor, making him the visionary, the teller of truth as it unravels in paeans by his confreres, the elite coterie of his illustrious Filipino contemporaries in Europe who entreated for reforms from the mother country, Spain.

Another Philippine painting, an earlier series of fourteen panels done in 1821 by the self-taught provincial painter Esteban Villanueva, testified as well to a tumult, a local revolt brought about by the attempt of the Spanish government to regulate the production of *basi*, the wine extracted from sugarcane. This work, which is the first historical painting in southeast Asia, may be allegorical, too, in the sense that the depiction of the

execution of the native rebels may well be a portent of revolution as presaged by a comet that streaks across the sky. Moreover, the series is composed of fourteen panels paralleling the fourteen Stations of the Cross that narrate Christ's suffering. In other words, the discourse of sacrifice allegorizes the revolution. The allegorical elsewhere, which is a universal moral world, the afterlife of oppression and pain, salvation and redemption, is key to the understanding of how the "people" are implicated in Philippine art. The people in this discourse are mortal, humans, incommensurate, and therefore in need of others and of a community for their emancipation.

This imagination of a community may also take domestic form. The *Quiason-Henson Portrait* by Simon Flores presents the "family" as patron holding court: a couple and two siblings, with the father playing the role of the patriarch, with hand on his hip, thus the masculine elbow seen prominently in Renaissance portraits. The representation of the family as a unit connotes a certain stability and comfort. Such security stems largely from the power relations that uphold traditional roles of "father," "mother," and "children" and how these roles come to make a "family." The family is not only to be apprehended as kinship based on blood, but also as a constellation of social ties. To reflect on this portrayal of the family is to reflect on the social system that allows this kind of family, obviously of the *ilustrado* (enlightened) kind, to prosper.

At first glimpse, the work looks staid and uninteresting. But if we look more attentively, we will realize that Flores carves a pictorial space that demarcates spheres. For instance, it is apparent that the family is enclosed within domestic parameters, framed by the architecture of the house with Western accoutrements. The latter implicates a window that alludes to an area outside, alerting viewers to a sight beyond the boundary or at least to an intimation of this possibility. This inside/outside revelation, as implied by a curtain that acts like a component of a proscenium of this colonial theater, refers to another distinction: the foreground and the background, the everyday and the elsewhere. And if we are to believe research on linear perspective, most notably of Hubert Damisch, this plastic visualization of spatial discrimination allegorizes the formation of a subject that is able to name the self in relation to the other. These ruminations deserve further investigation, most pertinently because the Flores painting and Eduardo Gelli's of the Chakri Royalty in Thailand in more or less the same period had been meant for a cavernous stone house in colonial Manila or a salon perhaps in the palace in Bangkok, a radiation and concentration of power in a private preserve that interiorizes a public virtually seeking an audience.

Allegory is deployed in this paper in its unique capacity as a rhetorical strategy to grasp an elusive reality. Having said that, it also tends to elude itself, thus the allegorical problem rests on its own provisionality, "seeming to be other than what it is. It exhibits something of the perpetually fluctuating, uncertain status of the world it depicts."^[3] And so, this tentativeness, this precarious balance between appearance and truth, stages a "likely story." It affords a kind of interpretation that "encourages its readers not only to aspire toward some world of perfect fulfillment, but to direct attention to the limited world of which they are a part."^[4] On the one hand, inscribed in the allegory is the instinct to see through what it says to what it really means.

On the other, "it does not need to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense."^[5] Walter Benjamin confirms this indeterminate feeling when he asserts that allegory is "inherently contradictory" because allegory is both: "convention and expression."^[6]

Such revealed elusiveness is an inner world that cannot be affirmed without the threat of discipline in whatever semblance it may take. This is one of the impulses of the history of allegory as a category of device, an unburdening of an inward gaze that "sees, not the compact character of modern fiction, but the contending forces which cannot be described at all except by allegory."^[7] It is in this context that Filipino critics have cast *Florante at Laura* (1858/1875), an *awit*, roughly translated as a metrical romance involving courtly love, as an allegory of the colonial struggle: "To sing of his insufferable sorrows and miseries, his lost joys, his griefs, his misfortunes, and the life of one unjustly deprived of liberty in a country where the rich and the powerful oppress and tyrannize could only be done through allegory."^[8] Sources of romances of this type may be traced to chivalric ballads, Moorish tales, and historical narratives of Greek origin. This particular example serves up staple motifs: "setting in some remote foreign kingdom; brave and handsome heroes and beautiful and faithful heroines; a maiden disguised as a warrior to look for her lover; abandonment in a forest; forged letters; abductions; a Christian captive maiden being forced to marry a Moor; and conversions."^[9] But while it partakes of this convention, its expression is commensurately idiosyncratic to the degree that is a "faithful though veiled representation of the times in which he lived"^[10]: the truth of the torment in faraway Albania could have never been closer to the anguish in the Philippines, making it, as an observer contended, "a sustained poetic interrogation about the nature of justice, truth, and the human commitment to social-political equity."^[11] The allegory, therefore, is at once intimate and alien, distancing and complicit.

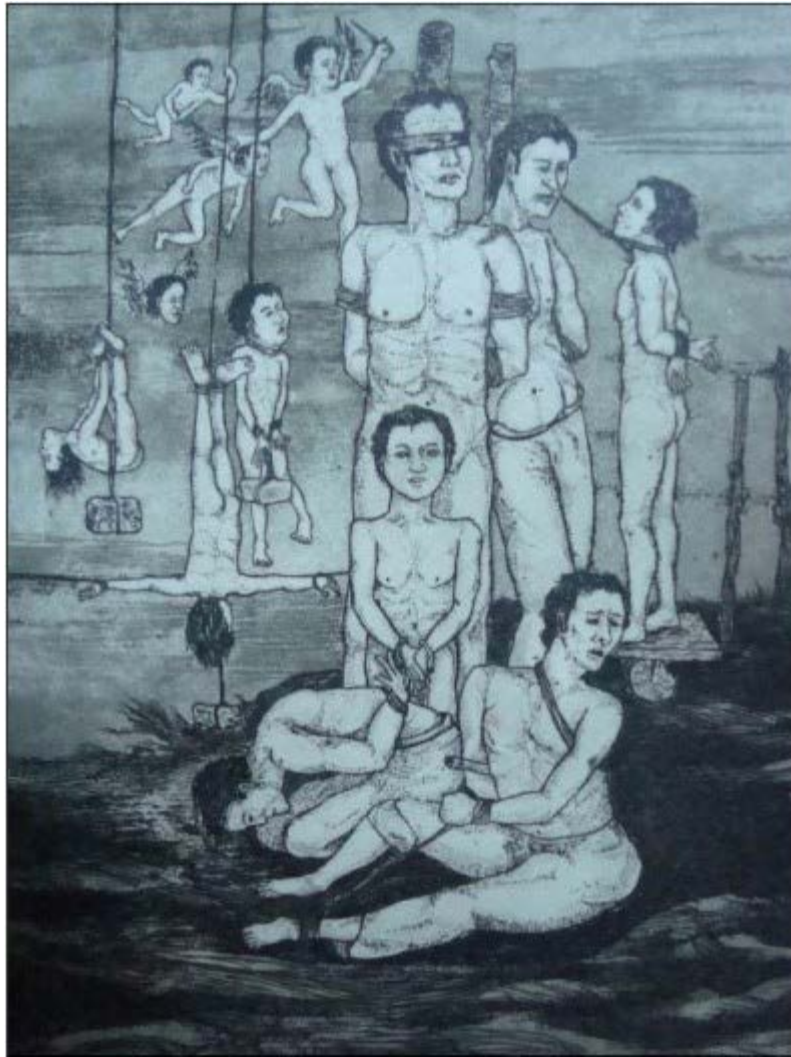
We can identify certain modes of this allegorical vision and visibility in selected works from Philippine art history that in their complex mediations materialize certain conditions that necessitate redemption:

1. Passion

Orlando Castillo portrays the plight of the people in the image of Calvary, the site of Christ's crucifixion, as setting of the struggle.

This agony and transcendence is paradoxical because death on the Cross had been decreed as disgraceful in Christ's time.

Catholic belief, however, would reshape Christ's identity as criminal and the Cross of his punishment into a precondition to salvation. The Crucifixion, therefore, lends itself well to allegorical interpretation as it strikes at the heart of an ethical dilemma, making its "penal character" indispensably penitential, the "deep structure of Christian thought and devotional feeling."^[12] Two works cogently express this, centered on the grisly procedures of torture.



Orlando Castillo, *Different Forms of Torture: Tribute to the Political Prisoner*, 1975.

In *Iba't Ibang Uri ng Torture: Alay sa mga Bilanggong Pulitikal (Different Forms of Torture: Tribute to the Political Prisoner)*, 1975, Castillo strips political prisoners naked and relocates them in their own Calvary, tied to wooden posts and evoking the ritual of slow death in the different permutations of persecution. In his other works, a winged figure bears witness to the life in the fields and hovels, the revolution, and even the aftermath of strife.



Antipas Delotavo, *Dagger at the Heart of Mang Juan*, 1976.

Antipas Delotavo articulates this visual argument in *Itak sa Puso ni Mang Juan (Dagger at the Heart of Mang Juan)*, 1978, in which the tail of the letter "c" of the transnational logo of Coca Cola pierces the chest of an emaciated man, egregiously wrought by brutish labor -- and the red of Coke bleeds across the entire surface. This, too, may be considered a crucifixion of the proletariat by a harsh capitalist system. In an earlier time, Hernando R. Ocampo painted *Calvary: Three Crosses* (1948), a Crucifixion scene that rises amid smokestacks of factories, forging the bond between the affliction of Christ and the dire straits of the working class after the Pacific War. Delotavo had an earlier series of works involving the Pieta iconography in which the Marian figure transforms into the Motherland making plaintive pleas on behalf of her languishing sons as in the work *Lucas (Luke)*, 1986) and in *Pieta* (1986), she looks after them as they lie dying.

While these images focus on suffering, they actually form the basis of a possible redemption within the discourse of the history of salvation in which sacrifice is a prelude to an afterlife that is free of the impediments of power and discrimination, liberated from their obsessions. Death, therefore, is not to be conceived as an end but as an emergence of a political will to outlive a fatal destiny. This is perhaps the reason that in Delotavo's pictures, the elements of blood and motherhood are essential because they are formative and generative.

2. Vagrancy

The image of woman as allegory of nation or a social condition can also be gleaned in Benedicto Cabrera's Sabel figures (*Untitled*, 1967; *Misericordia*, 1968; *Sabel*, 1968; and *Sabel Looking Through Time*, 1973). It is in fact the basis of his early drawings that signaled the transition from the abstraction in the sixties in the Philippines to a new figuration in the seventies.

Sabel as a subject was taken from real life, a vagrant of the city, whom the artist saw on the street and its environs where his house stood in Bambang in Manila. The sight of a drifter afflicted by dementia, with a "flimsy dress that billowed,"^[13] and was a symptom of homelessness caught Cabrera's eye. According to

him: "She used to gather the plastic sheets and wrap them around the body. They made the most beautiful abstract shapes."^[14] The artist molds her as emblematic of the dispossessed, one who has survived ruthless conditions and vagaries by making do with what she had to shield her from the severity of nature and society. It is worth mentioning that the vagrant figure has had its apparitions earlier in the fifties when the "beggar" would come to demonstrate the abjection in post-war Philippine cities, as can be seen in H.R. Ocampo's *Pulubi* (*Beggar*, 1946) and Romeo Tabuena's *Beggar* (1957), for instance.

This type of Philippine modernism derived significantly from the work of Victorio Edades, whose exhibition in 1928 unsettled the conservative school of pastoral and picturesque instincts. *The Builders* is a key work in this sequence in which we see workers toiling, disfigured, misshapen, grimy, a sharp departure from the idyllic scenes of the gentle academic master Fernando Amorsolo. Edades formed a coterie of kindred artists including Carlos Francisco and Galo Ocampo, who collaborated in art nouveau and art deco murals for cinemas and residences, like *Rising Philippines* for Capitol Theater, that is an allegorical depiction of the legacy of Spanish and American colonial regimes. At the center is the Philippines under American tutelage rising above the everyday towards an elsewhere, carrying a film reel, a sign of progress alongside education, commerce, and transportation.

In his early exhibitions in the middle to late sixties, Benedicto Cabrera would sketch, in the vein of the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, social types that inhabited the urban landscape, from workers to scavengers to everyday folk subsisting on bread of salt, as in *Sacada Worker* (*Plantation Worker*, 1969), *Scavenger* (1968), *Coconut Man* (1974), and *Pan de Sal* (*Bread of Salt*, 1968). This reflection on the relationship between labor and the plantations or slums would further deepen his engagement with Sabel, who is made to belong to this thematic of alienation that breeds madness. This primes the propensity to read into Sabel an allegorical reference to another well-known madwoman in Philippine letters, Sisa, from National Hero Jose Rizal's fin-de-siecle incendiary novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). Sisa descended into mental malaise when her two sacristan sons were accused of theft by a Spanish friar; one died in the hands of his accuser and the other fled to the hinterland.

The link between Sisa and Sabel is salient; it enables the artist to create the nexus between the misery of contemporary society and its possible roots in the nineteenth century. It also affords him the opportunity to inflect Sabel with a historical tone, not only to fix her in the vise of the past but to draw out her allegorical potential as a wraith that hovers in history. At this intersection we begin to decipher Cabrera's transcodings of Filipino female labor, from Sisa to Sabel to Flor Contemplacion.

The latter is the domestic helper in Singapore hanged in 1995 for allegedly killing her fellow Filipino worker, Delia Maga, and her Singaporean charge. The incident sparked widespread protest in Manila against the governments of the Philippines and Singapore, denounced for their indifference towards the well-being of migrant workers.^[15]



Benedicto Cabrera, *Flor Contemplacion Portrait*, 1995.

Cabrera's portrait of *Flor Contemplacion* (1995) comes after a series of depictions of women from the historical archives and present-day scenes, specifically focusing on indentured labor through the images of servants in the Spanish period to the chambermaids in Europe in our time. This lays the predicate for the eventual allegorization of Sabel from native to national. And his trajectory is the *Larawan (Image)* series in which *Ang Tao (Everyman)*, 1972 is exemplary and from which his pictures of migrants (*Migrants of Europe*, 1982) would spin, as well as his suite of women, including *Portrait of a Servant Girl* (1972), *A Family of Servants* (1972), *A Domestic Worker* (1978), and *Two Filipinas in the Era of Multinationals* (1983), to cite some variations.

In some kind of logic of practice in which the woman transforms into the nation, Sabel would dovetail with the same tendency in a later work, a shift that is sustained by Cabrera's keen attention to women figures from the colonial chronicles. To a certain extent, this woman ceases to be merely archetypal, because she is moored in the materiality of an experience through the artist himself, who was moved by her real existence in the streets, as well as her presence in history as an actor in the colonial annals. Ultimately, Sabel as phantasm infuses a feeling of spectrality in Cabrera's work, or a melancholy that pervades in the wake of loss. We get this impression through the patina of the archive and also because Sabel seems to dematerialize over time,

overcome by her drapery that in one instance becomes the Philippine flag in *Imaginary Patriot* (1975), which is presaged by *The Imaginary Portrait of Sabel* (1969). This is, indeed, a culmination of the allegorical project, with the vagrant becoming the nation.

This outlook is supported by cognate appropriations of allegory as a tactic of containment and subversion in the colonial period in the Philippines. Vicente Rafael investigates such penchant through the American census of the Filipinos and the latter's nationalist melodramas in theater: "Whereas the allegory of benevolent assimilation regarded imperialism as the melodrama of white love for brown brothers, seditious plays used the language of melodrama to express the love of nation."^[16] He continues: "Where colonial archives characterize and classify in order to render their subjects available for discipline, nationalist melodramas resignify the vernacular so as to reclaim the capacity of people to nominate themselves as agents in and interpreters of their experiences."^[17]

The image of the woman as Mother Country may have religious resonance, as seen in earlier efforts to indigenize the Madonna and Child iconography, as in Galo Ocampo's *Brown Madonna*, that is at once nativist and Gauguinesque. In recent time, Alfredo Esquillo has appropriated the template to propose an allegory of Philippine-American relations, with the Marian persona supplanted by the face of American President William McKinley, author of the phrase "benevolent assimilation," cradling the Filipino child with talons and a gun's nozzle on the sleeve.

Antipas Delotavo deepens this impulse of Cabrera with works that situate inhabitants of an impersonal and indifferent society, man and the machine. Delotavo situates these people in the context of either the machine or the ostentatious edifices built by the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos, who was President of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986. He declared martial rule in 1972 and was deposed by a popular uprising in 1986. Works like *Dambuhala* (*Giant*, 1990), *Saan ang Daan* (*Where is the Way*, 1987), *Bulong ng Umaalingawngaw* (*Whisper of the Echo*, 1983), and *Istruktura* (*Structure*, 1990) represent this mode. We see the people in them dazed, lost, displaced, catatonic, as they seem to stray into the internationalist-style buildings of reinforced concrete, steel, and glass that they themselves had built and at times died for, as in the case of the Manila Film Center, in which in the hectic pace of construction, a floor collapsed and trapped workers in quick-dry cement. The documentation of the extrication in the media could only be terribly distressing. That Delotavo throws glaring light on the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the centerpiece of First Lady Imelda Marcos's policy on culture built in 1969, is an index of his inclination to examine the violence that the ideology of culture inflicts on the people in whose name it is invoked. All told, there is something haunting in how the characters in these paintings stare long and hard into what might well be an abyss, again a dis-place. This painful gaze is, however, also ominous, a sign of an imminent insurrection as may be seen in *Rurok* (*Peak*, 2000) as capitalism scales its summit.

The themes of drift, deprivation, and homelessness are reckoned through these images of people caught in the vicissitudes of social inequity but simultaneously standing their ground, coming

together, and morphing into a collective as well as an allegory that is alternately enigmatic and menacing. In his new works in a similar register done in 2007 like *Bungkal (Digging or Tilling)*, *Bahay na Kristal (Glass House)*, *Retroaktib (Retroactive)*, and *U.K. Culture (Surplus Shop Culture)*, people wander around the gleaming metropolis of globalization, seemingly bewildered by how they might fit into the scheme of neoliberal things. It is as if the space of painting becomes a reclaimed space of allegorical critique, an elsewhere that is staked out for people who might be written off in the script of progress, made invisible in the glamour of high finance. This space makes them unerringly manifest within the terrifyingly sleek locale of a central business district, in a way disrupting the flatness of global capital and encrusting it with the texture of class antagonism.

3. Mass Formation

This takes us finally to the processes depicting of a multitude, of the people as a moment in the totality of forces.



Antipas Delotavo, *Hundred Years*, 1998.

Delotavo's *Daantaon (One Hundred Years, 1998)*, a work made for the centenary of Philippine independence in 1998, presents the history of gains and losses in the struggle, of deaths and survivals in Asia's first democratic republic. It is an unfinished one, suggesting that the revolution is an unfolding drama that still pursues its denouement. That this revolution dissolves into an image of the diaspora also by Delotavo is again an allegory of the global that is always bedeviled by the contentions of equivalent localities, the universal desire for emancipation every day, elsewhere.

The monumental work alludes to the "march of time," a movement in history. The Filipino revolutionary Salud Algabe during the American period before the Second World War, had said that "No revolution is a failure. Everything is a step in the right direction." The totality, therefore, is constituted as a progression, a development, a sequence of ruptures. On the other hand, if we revisit Delotavo's *Diaspora*, it is also a dispersal. This dynamic of consolidation and fragmentation, of patriotism and resettlement, of home and overseas, may seize the life world of the global and the people who suffer and try to outlive its breathlessness. Here the allegorical sensibility is most potent because it conjures the melancholy inhering in the condition of not being able to fully come back to an origin, a characteristic of both the subject of allegory like migration and even of allegory itself: "the allegorical sign refers to another sign that precedes it, but with which it will never be able to coincide... reaches back to a previous stage and in this constant attempt at return incorporates a structural distance from its own origin, a constitutive temporal relation that it never manages to overcome."^[18]

It may well be that in the coming and going of the Filipino, the

everyday has been transcended elsewhere, only to be reminded of its impossibility. The astute anthropologist Fenella Cannell is insightful in this regard. In an amateur singing competition in a village in a peninsula south of the capital Manila, a contestant crooned the standard *Autumn Leaves* with so much wistfulness that it gave the foreign observer the impression that the reality of autumn is deeply felt in the culture and so could be expressed so inalienably in music through a voice so unbelievably authentic. The scholar would later remark that what may be revealing in this moment is the sadness of both the sentiment of not having fully understood the world in which autumn happens and the aspiration to inevitably belong to it, to weather the depression of the tropics and hope for a better season elsewhere. [19]

This paper in the end poses the question: How could image in paintings, trapped in pictorial protocols and bound to be consumed in the market, ever attend to this demand and this guarantee of transcendence? It could be proposed that from the long view of post-colonial politics, image is fundamental because it was the rudiment of conversion during conquest, the language through which civilization and humanity took hold as an end.



Antipas Delotavo, *Steal Life*, 2008.

Delotavo's work titled *Steal Life* (2008) is instructive in this respect because it repositions the image as property into a critical meditation on property, laying out a feast of life's vanity, with an odalisque at the background and the embarrassments of affluence resting on a tattered Philippine flag. The genre is still life and the medium is watercolor; it is a tribute to copiousness but its allure is flimsy, soluble, and fleeting. This contradiction

between attachment and ephemerality is provocative and reminds us that it is the image that forms the idiom of worldliness and the knowledge of an afterlife as equally envisioned by the prospects of salvation in Catholic catechism. And it tells us that its mediation, though complicit with the enterprise of reification, and irresistible materiality could never be reduced to its capitalist appropriation.

This very pictorial construction allegorizes an untenable condition, and the still life is the most efficacious modality to carry out this operation. The art historian Norman Bryson theorizes, proceeding from the Dutch still life, that the viewer of the still life is "related to the scene not only through a general creaturely sense of hunger and appetite, or of inhabiting a body with its cocoon of nearness and routine, but through a worldly knowledge that knows what it is to live in a stratified society, where wealth nuances everything, down to the last details."^[20] In Delotavo's still life, this density and luster of reality constitutes only one part of the picture of a life stolen, or following Juan Luna, of a life despoiled. The other is the illusion, which is disclosed through an allegorical reading of the way in which it is constructed through the method of perspective. The latter, according to art historian Hanneke Grootenboer, "serves to represent truth in painting by functioning as the foundation of a rhetoric of the image. Truth can thus be allegorically represented by means of the rhetoric of perspective."^[21] This kind of "thinking in visual terms" is revelatory because it pierces through the veil of mystification, prompting the scholar to claim that "still-life painting in particular calls for an allegorical mode of looking because it calls attention to its two-dimensionality, thus undermining perspective's promise of depth."^[22] In the context of globalization and in the era of art as Hans Belting would put it, the image remains primordial because it may still hold the truth and dispel the temptations of the world, the burdens of belonging and the trappings of art history. And at this axis, the passion of the vagrant and the masses of which Sabel and the other figures are exemplary tend to come together because they render the form of contingency that must be suffered and hopefully surpassed, a Filipino subjectivity that must be stitched in time.

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Endnotes

^[1] Patricia Melendrez-Cruz, and Apolonio Chua, eds., *Himalay:*

Kalipunan ng mga Pag-aaral Kay Balagtas (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1988).

[2] Teodoro Agoncillo, ed., *Graciano Lopez Jaena: Speeches, Articles and Letters* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 1974). Quoted in *Zero In: Private Art, Public Lives* (Manila: Eugenio Lopez Foundation, Inc., Ayala Museum, Ateneo Art Gallery, 2002), p. 78.

[3] Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 13.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 7.

[6] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 175.

[7] C. S. Lewis quoted in A. D. Nuttall, *Two Concepts of Allegory: A Study of Shakespeare's The Tempest and the Logic of Allegorical Expression* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 17.

[8] Lucila Hosillos, *Originality as Vengeance in Philippine Literature* (Manila: New Day Publishers, 1984), p. 52.

[9] Damiana Eugenio, *Awit and Corrido: Philippine Metrical Romances* (Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1987), p. 203.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[11] E. San Juan, Jr., *Balagtas: Art and Revolution* (Manila: Manlapaz Publishing, 1969), p. 3.

[12] Mitchell Merback, *The Thief, The Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 17.

[13] Alfred Yuson and Cid Reyes, *Bencab* (Manila: Mantes Publishing, 2002), p. 29.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[15] Luning Ira and Isagani Medina, *Streets of Manila* (Manila: GCF Books, 1977), p. 113.

[16] Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 2000), p. 44.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[18] Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 137.

[19] *Filipinas Puerta de Oriente: De Legazpi a Malaspina*, Comisaria para la Celebracion del V Centenario del Nacimiento de Don Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, 2004.

[20] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1990), p. 135.

[21] Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 162.

[22] *Ibid.*

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