

**CURATOR'S NOTE:
ZAMBOANGA CITY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ART SHOW AND
COMPETITION
FEBRUARY 22 TO MARCH 1, 2007**

The Indigenous Peoples' Art Show and Competition hosted by *the Kalinawa Art Foundation* held at the Mindanao State University, Social Hall on February 22 to March 1, 2007, was quite unique for the main reason that it was very spontaneous. As a co-curator for this particular exhibition, such spontaneity was already anticipated by me based on previous art shows by the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* in different key cities in the Philippines.

CURATING

Although there was a preliminary attempt to meet possible participating Indigenous Peoples' visual artists and their works, this would not give the curator a clear picture of the final exhibition set-up because the bulk of the actual art pieces submitted would come from participants not previously noted. Neither was there an attempt by the *Foundation* to restrict the submission of entries particularly for the competition, by giving specific parameters on its guidelines.

Confronted with such situation, the usual curatorial consideration such as the coming up of a particular theme or subject matter, the identification and classification of art materials, determination of creative processes involved, etc., were less-prioritized otherwise, the whole set-up would not be completed in due course considering time constraint.

In a way, spontaneity can be a blessing. With common sense, creative instinct, aesthetic experience and an ounce of guts, one can turn 149 assorted art pieces into a harmonious visual art showcase in less than twenty-four hours. Going through the selection process for the final lay-out of display was rather challenging considering the diversity of artworks submitted. The different themes expressed in each art piece are as varied as the materials, techniques and styles used by different artists. Setting the final display for these varied art pieces demanded not only visual skills of the curator but rather mental dexterity as well.

For the two-dimensional categories, technique and style were done in oil and acrylic paint, watercolour, charcoal, pen and ink, oil pastel and crayon. The three-dimensional art pieces were more extensive in the use of indigenous materials like wood, stone, metal, rattan, found object and others.

The participating artists, who are all members of different Indigenous Peoples' groups within the city of Zamboanga and nearby towns and communities, were elementary pupils, high school and college students, out of school youths, housewives and casual employee. A group of weaver-artists from the Yakan village of Zamboanga City added emphasis to the whole exhibition set up by occupying a conspicuous space within the exhibition area, and by installing a traditional loom amidst collections of colourful weavings in the form of tapestry, clothing and other indigenous handy items.

Fixing the entire exhibition area which included the final arrangement of display panels was made possible through the assistance of Mr. Anthony Barandino and his volunteer crew, also with the help of Mr. Edwin Jumalon and some members of their art group "*Hugis Kulay*".

JUDGING

Since the *Foundation* does not only provide art shows but art competitions as well, I would like to put into consideration the judging mechanics in relation to the curatorial process. In my experience as one of the judges for past two *Kalinawa* art competitions (Dipolog City and Zamboanga City), determining the rightful winners becomes complicated due to the vast diversity of artworks to be considered for a prize. The judges for the art competition in Zamboanga City were unanimous in saying that it was always difficult to "compare" a charcoal or a water color art piece with an oil or acrylic painting.

Another particular issue while "judging" at the Zamboanga City Art Competition was the inclusion of *cross-stitched works* whose images are just patterned after a commercial company's design. The "Indigenous Person" issue is unquestionable, but what is at stake here is the creative process. I am specifically referring to the Indigenous Peoples' exploration of new materials and techniques in contrast to their indigenous methods.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION

I would just like to focus my observation on this particular issue - Despite the fact that the main thrust of the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* is to support the Indigenous Person through his/her art, it might also be worth considering the guidance and proper advice as to what artworks are to be consciously dealt with especially when they are to be displayed for public view.

And in a way, a cautious method should be considered as not to "impose" things on the artists which might result into violating their creativity rights. On one hand there is a need for the artist to explore aesthetic possibilities thru

different media, ideas and mechanics, but on the other hand there must be a conscious effort to preserve their unique identities through cultural materials and traditions.

DON GURREA
27 March, 2007

COMMENT

This report raises important questions. However, before attempting to address some of them, it must be understood that Don Guerra did not have an adequate opportunity to demonstrate the full range of his skills for curating the exhibition in Zamboanga given the necessity to arrange for display materials for the art. To his credit, Mr. Gurrea made an important decision: build the display materials so that there could be an event, or focus solely on the curator's traditional responsibilities. He made the former choice, which not only allowed the event to occur, but also was a major contribution to its eventual success.



As to the questions, there is an ongoing dilemma for the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* based on two of the points raised in the report:

- “Neither was there an attempt by the *Foundation* to restrict the submission of entries by giving specific parameters on its guidelines” on the one hand, and on the other;
- “a cautious method should be considered as not to "impose" things on the artists which might result into violating their creativity rights.”

By design, the *Kalinawa Art Foundation* does not restrict entries for events, specifically so as to not impose a standard of what is considered to be art. While the *Foundation* may advise, especially through the use of a curator, it is a conscious decision not to restrict the opportunity for artists to exhibit their work. However, by virtue of participation in these events, a it is hoped that a better understanding among participants will result, but there will never be an occasion where an Indigenous Peoples' visual artist will be refused the opportunity to display his/her pieces of art at an open exhibition.

On the other hand, as the *Foundation* builds its capacity, record and sustainable relationships with reliable partners in these activities, nothing precludes other activities related Indigenous Peoples' visual arts being considered. For example, one idea is to arrange for an exhibition at another venue (possibly built around the work of previous year's winners) to occur during the open exhibition.

Difficulties in judging are understood, especially when it is not known what art will be presented. One of the important reasons to include a curator in the process of the open exhibition is to advise on the categories for the art as it is being presented for the exhibition. For the reason noted above, this was not possible. In addition, it must also be noted that the intent and commitment of the *Foundation* is to have recurring events at

each of the locations. Thus, there will be an opportunity to improve on the understanding of the art being presented, and organize the event accordingly.

The issue of organizing the open exhibition at the same time as a competition raises two points. First, organizing the exhibition of the art for ease of judging may not be consistent with organizing the art from a creative perspective. It is the *Foundation's* desire that the curator work on emphasizing the later over the former, to give the exhibition its best presentation

And second, while there will be an upper limit to the number of categories of art for which prizes will be awarded, there is no requirement by the *Foundation* to adhere to the announced four categories (open two-dimensional, open three dimensional, traditional and youth) if there are not adequate entries for each given the variations from venue to venue of the art being made. In other words, in consultation with the curator and the local partners for an event, the categories for organizing and considering for prizes may be altered, provided a clear and transparent rationale is provided to do so.

Carlton B. Hughes
Kalinawa Art Foundation
1 May 2007