

EXHIBIT NOTES: Introduction

Inheritors and Active Builders of Traditions

"Many, many years ago, our ancestors believe that the sky is one with the land. The position of the sky was too low and made living difficult for the people. One day, however, just after the harvest season, as the folks start pounding their harvested rice, they noticed that the movement of the pestle pushes up the sky. From thence, the sky moves higher and higher and higher... (Culled from a Bagobo Folktale)"

Land is central to the life-world of the Indigenous Peoples. And the stories of the land, as told by the culture bearers, cradle the collective memory, help shape the collective personality and mold the cultural values of the members of the indigenous community. Likewise these stories are mirrors from which the community members draw lessons from to survive as a people.

This exhibition aptly titled "Under One Sky" presents some significant stories of the ancestral homelands and the survival of indigenous peoples as depicted in the visual interpretations of the life-world of the indigenous. Moreover, the variety of subjects portrayed and the heterogeneity of techniques explored by the featured visual artists illustrate diverse images of hope for the ancestral homelands as well as for the indigenous peoples of Mindanao.

In the various origin myths and stories of survival among the indigenous peoples of Mindanao, the sky is a very common motif. Likewise, the richness of their folklore traditions embodies the multifarious relations of the indigenous peoples with the sky-world.

Featured in this exhibition are some interesting traditional art works considered as icons in several Indigenous communities as well as new and innovative two-dimensional and three-dimensional contemporary visual art pieces. Twenty-eight visual artists participate in this event. They come from various indigenous lineages, are honed in a multiplicity of art practice and express varied persuasions and passions in their works. Aptly said, they are inheritors of the indigenous cultural heritage and are active builders of distinct indigenous peoples' visual arts traditions.

The art works done by the selected Indigenous Peoples' visual artists are indeed diverse, in terms of subjects, materials, medium, techniques and style, yet these creative works likewise insinuate shared themes and common aspirations that are of great consequence for their survival as a people. Moreover, through this exhibition, these artists, who represent various generations, gender and ethnicity, collectively assert their view of the world and they claim for a distinct place and their significant corners under the sky.

Section 1

"Phalas Gurasan"

Ritual to Dwell", seeking permission from the Spirit-world

Indigenous Peoples live in seasons and the performance of a ritual is observed in every significant event of the life-cycle of the Indigenous Peoples. In Western Mindanao, the indigenous Subanen consistently observe the Phalas Gunasan as an obligatory ritual of entrance and clearance and is done before one enters a newly built traditional Subanen house. The ritual of entrance is presided by a Timuay and a Baylan to ensure that all the essential elements of the ritual are faithfully observed. A "dega" is to be performed, the customary shedding of blood follows accompanied by traditional prayers and chants. The ritual ensues which is customarily observed to ask for the blessing and permission from the spirits to allow the mortals to occupy the new abode. The thulapok (for the males) and therung (for the females), are headgears traditionally given to very special guests as ritual offerings that symbolize the warm welcome for the visitors of the Phalas Gurasan.

This collaborative ritual-installation art done by Subanen artists from Zamboanga del Sur illustrates the many components of the "*Phalas Gurasan*" and it showcases their traditional arts: garbs, accessories and the offering altar assemblage popularly called "*Sulambi*."

At the backdrop of the installation is the "*Shurelat*", which was traditionally used as a cape by the Bai Dlibon (Woman Tribal Leader). At present, however, it is often used as decorations on the ceiling or as backdrop for special occasions, like weddings and other significant community gatherings. The geometric design and wavy patterns incorporated in the tapestry represent the common elements found in the environment of the Subanens, like mountain peaks and the ebb and flow of rivers.

Section 2:

"Halad ug Pag-alima" - From Ritual to Art, Working with Nature.

One cannot fully comprehend the aesthetic values inherent in the traditional arts of the Indigenous Peoples by mere investigation of the materials used or by sheer appreciation of the creative motifs and colorful patterns. The creative work of an indigenous artist, beyond its practical function, is a manifestation of an inner desire for harmony with the natural, social and spiritual environments.

In the practice of indigenous cultural masters, the production of traditional art, in most cases, is preceded by a ritual-performance seeking permission from other unseen spirits. Before gathering the materials to be used in basket weaving, the weaver is obliged to perform a ritual-offering. When the artists have already sensed a positive confirmation from the "unseen spirits", then the production of the art ensues. In fact, the old B'laan basket weaver featured in this exhibition explains that the interventions of the spirits can be sometimes evident as represented in the figurative patterns that manifest in the finished products, be it in floral or animal form.

Similarly, the traditional weaver of the B'laan "*nabal*" invokes the Spirit Guardian of the fibers to maintain the strengths of the fiber so that the weaving process would go smoothly without any unwanted interruptions or problems. Side by side with the actual production of art then, is the continuing process of communicating to the Spirit-world.

The communicative function of a piece of traditional art continues even after the piece of art is fully completed. The "*Sabitan*" (beaded belt with small brass bells or *kulong*) is worn not only to emphasize the lithe grace in the movements of the one who wears it but also the pleasant sounds of the "*kulong*" sustain their connections with the unseen world.

In his essay on the origins and meaning of the *Sarimanok*, Dr. Nagasura Madale opines that the fish on the beak of the *Sarimanok* is a substitute to the food offered in rituals. And when the fish, a symbol of food, is transformed into an "okir" art form, the symbolism is basically the same --- that is associated with that of the unseen spirits. The art of *Sarimanok* then could have been evolved from the Maranao's notions of rituals.

Indeed, in the life-world of the indigenous, the observance of rituals contributes to the flourishing of traditional arts. While it is true that there is now a growing acceptance of the notion that traditional arts are considered as components of "fine arts" and not mere "craft", the indigenous peoples themselves can claim that in their own communities, traditional arts are very "special" forms of art.

Section 3:

“Balay, Pinuy-anan” (*Abodes and spirit domains*).

Evidently, there are a lot of interesting features in the vernacular architecture traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of Mindanao. These are formed by the demands of the environment and available building materials; and become integral expressions of identity, culture, and beliefs. Likewise the design and technology employed evolve over a period of time to address changing needs and external influences.

Balai (bay, balay, bahay, bal-lay in several Filipino languages) means home. It is also tightly connected to the Balangai (or barangay, balanghai) meaning community. What is significant is that the structures, forms, functions and symbols as well as the materials and technology used for construction of the traditional homes convey symbols and meanings that are distinctly Filipino in character and substantiate a distinct life-world.

Our indigenous communities prominently display special art pieces that carry symbolic and spiritual functions in the vernacular architecture practice. Among these are interesting totems and figures that evoke significant ways of relating when placed in the traditional dwelling places and are considered as integrative components that speak of the belief system and cultural traditions of the people.

One of the most complex vernacular architecture tradition can be seen in the floor beams of the “torogan” or the regal Maranao house. The ends of these beams are triangular-like projections called the “panolong”. These come in two forms --- the naga-naga (dragon-like, serpent-like) and the pako-rabong (growing fern). These two are prominently placed in the front of the house to indicate the high status of the owner, who is often the head of a large extended family, and having such alliances, becomes the acknowledged community leader.

Aside from the naga motif, the Maranao traditional artists also carve other motif such as the birdo or the seahorse motif called pilandok. These okir motifs are almost found in all material culture of the Maranaos, from the simple farming tools to the most elaborate malong fabrics and other functional art pieces.

Equally interesting are the Dibabawon (in the highlands of Kapalong) and the Ata-Manobo of Talaingod who still keep their ancestral traditions. Prominently displayed in the traditional Dibabawon Togan (common house) or the Ata-Manobo’s Binaloy (farm dwelling) are symbolic figures called “Tabanog” in the front of their extended roof. In the interior of the house, one can notice carefully carved totem figures such as the “Kinowago” (twin-bird figure) or the “Sinulayaw (fish-like figure). These figures not only indicate the social status of the owner of the dwelling but are revered as protectors of the dwellers.

Aside from symbols of power, social position and prestige the “Panulong” of the Maranao or the “Tabanog” of the Dibabawon signify connections to the spirit world for their protection and survival. The values and meanings of these architectural motifs surely enrich the worldviews of the contemporary Indigenous Peoples’ visual artists as they explore more expressions alongside its elemental and spiritual functions.

Section 4

“Asoy sa Kaliwatan” *Tales of Our Ancestors*

One common observation on the Indigenous Peoples Visual Arts is that in most cases, the imageries are drawn from the rich folklore traditions of the people.

Folklore, as commonly understood, is the “lore” or “wisdom” of the folk. It is a shared way of explaining certain reality or phenomena. Likewise, it is a window from which we can comprehend the people’s shared values, beliefs and their particular view of the world. It is in the realm of the mythic and symbolic.

Take for instance the *"sari manok"* (*sari* - "not pure, has no life; *manok* is chicken – has life" or "not a complete chicken"). It is an art object of the Maranao in the form of a fowl with a fish in his mouth. It is ornately decorated in abstract floral forms and is placed on top of a pole during festivities. It is not just the Lanao royalty that cherished it as artistic symbol, but the common folks consider it their own as well.

One mythic interpretation of this particular "okir art" is that "there was a prince who was separated from his beloved princess, and he sends messages to her through a bird. The messages were in a form of a fish". A more fanciful story goes this way:

"There was a great prince named Radia Indarapatra who fell in love with the goddess of the moon. The goddess, who came to earth every Friday to take a bath in a perfumed well, told the prince that if he wanted to win her, he would have to go to heaven. The prince returned to his palace and, while idly toying with one of his treasures, a golden bird, he asked to carry him to the moon. It was an enchanted bird and no sooner had he expressed the wish that it rose with him into the air. The prince vanished forever. The people did not wish to forget the beautiful golden bird and tried to make a copy of it. When they finished the work they saw that it looked like a rooster and they called it "sari-manok"..."

The late Dr. Mamitua Saber, who initiated the establishment of the Aga Khan Museum in the Mindanao State University, mentioned in one of his essays, an ingenious way of explaining the possible origin of the "Sarimanok". He believed that this abstract "sari manok" is in reality different from the distinct culture-motif known as the *naga*, dragon or serpent. He further explained that the Maranao craftsmen, who get their interpretation from nature, must have observed the hawks frequently hovering over the waters of Lake Lanao. The predatory birds dive or skim over the waters catching fish that surface, hence the image of a bird with a fish in its claws or beak.

The interpretation, however, is not an end-all because the creative mind can derive from other perceptions and extract from other sources, even from itself. Influences are never uni-linear but are actually multi-linear --- they come from all over, from different sources. Later, the mind assimilates these influences into a single integrated image.

This is evident in the conceptualization and production process undertaken by the three contemporary Subanen artists featured in this section. They took inspiration from the rich folkloric tradition of their people. The art works, made from a variety of media and materials displayed vivid imageries of their epic heroes and tell stories of origins of the names of some significant sites within their ancestral homeland. The creators of the works have delved into the process of explaining their people's shared perceptions as they illustrated their own explanation of some of their origin myths.

The artists claimed that since their childhood days, these stories of their people were repeatedly told, hence have been fully internalized by them. Yet, in translating the tales from the "oral" to the visual mode or in their own way of re-telling these stories, they did conceive of proximate and concrete imageries that are ingrained in their own cognitive world.

A large relief artwork reveals the feats and adventures of "Sandayo", one of the Subanen epic heroes, who is endowed with extraordinary powers to ascend into higher grounds and fly high in the sky. To illustrate Sandayo's real might and weight, the artists presented an impressionist rendition of the hero's physical anatomy, with the intention of constructing an epitome of the Subanen's collective character.

Likewise, the three-dimensional piece entitled "Ginghuran Bae" (the dearly loved woman adored by generations of the Subanen living in that place named after her), has successfully bridged the domains of the mythical and the real, through the monochromatic rendition done by the artist. And, the commonly perceived gentleness and compassionate character of the "Bae" has been boosted by this poignant and creative art work.

"Phegepuyan" (meaning cooking), which is also the ancient name of the place now called "Lapuyan", in a simple manner presented a broader picture of the habitat by adding details that illustrates the elements of the natural environment that are culturally significant to the lives of the folk --- water, fire, wood, air and woman.

One interesting commonality of the art pieces is that the artists have deliberately emphasized the aspects of the stories that they want to tell and have been conscious in matching their subject with the most appropriate media. Undoubtedly, they succeeded not only in presenting attention-grabbing and appealing works of art but also in concretizing the intangible monuments of their people through visual representations --- their own contribution in promoting and conserving the rich oral traditions and wisdom of their people.

Section 5

"Hamiling Paghanduraw"

Traditions and Contradictions, Tenacity and Identity

To understand the art, most specially the art of indigenous peoples, it is necessary to have an understanding of the totality of their culture. The wellspring of creativity is the manner by which the environment is perceived and internalized by the artists through the filters provided by culture.

Aptly said, one of the marked characterizations of the arts of Indigenous Peoples' is its rootedness to traditions. Likewise, the interplay of subject, form, materials, medium and function and its inherent aesthetic value are directed towards achieving harmony. However, the social context from which an art form is given birth is dynamic and replete with contradictions. What happens when forces and influences from outside weakens tradition? What happens to Indigenous People's arts when an identity is threatened?

The anthropologist Jesus Peralta wrote that "art is a form of adjustment to the way the people integrate their strategies for existence, including the alternatives and must therefore be taken within the context of the culture of the people. There is then a direct relationship between the character of the art and the complexity of the socio-political organization."

In this selection of contemporary arts of Indigenous Peoples, we purposely included the works of two Moro artists --- Al Nezar Ali and Alner Alharan R. Macarona which, albeit stylized clearly carry signals, signs and symbols that represent how the artists responded to certain aspects of their social, cultural as well as political existence.

Clearly, these art pieces speak of their perceptions of their artistic life especially the colorful traditions of their people and of Islam's prohibition of human or animal figures as artistic representations. For the two artists then, stylization in terms of forms and imagery is imperative.

The quaint compositions and great emphasis on details in the works of Ali truly captured the multi-hued and vibrant cultural traditions and expressions of the Maguindanun society. On the other hand, the bluntness and forceful conditions in some communities caught up with the atrocities of war and the indispensable actions for defense is clearly and carefully illustrated in Macarona's "Buhay, Baril, Tao".

The imagery in the works of the two artists uniquely expresses a peculiar cultural assertion. The aesthetic values of their works direct the viewers towards the concerns of preserving and enhancing their distinct ethnicity and identity. The two artists succeeded in rooting their subjects in their own memories of their experienced past and shared vision of the future, indeed, their art, as creative expressions, reverberates their subjective statements and objective truths of the dynamics of traditions and change --- provocative yet stimulating, incendiary yet conciliatory.

Section 6

Mabuhing Gamut

Regenerating Roots.

For the indigenous artists, the homeland is a rich source of stories --- of ancient myths and contemporary events. While artists try to capture indelible images of the homeland in their artworks, their works also capture the transformations that their environment and their world are undergoing.

Today, the indigenous peoples particularly in Mindanao can no longer speak of an "authentic" ancestral homeland free from the reaches of outside influence, or self-contained in idealized purity. The indigenous villages are now encroached by roads and public infrastructure, schools, churches, markets, the presence of the lowland body politic, traders, land speculators, among others.

In some ancestral domains, sacred sites are desecrated, kinships are threatened, traditions are lost and communities are caught up in the crossfire of on-going un-peace situation. If the tapestry of colorful traditions and meanings continues to be defiled, it will be lost for all time. And with it will go the wealth of experience and insight of their ancestors, and all the indigenous wisdom that has sustained them.

Yet, a new generation of T'boli, Tala-andig, Manobo and Lapacnon artists have endured and continued to produce works of art that tell stories of the homeland. What is essential is that --- while they cope with the complexity of the rapid socio-economic changes and the threatening pace of a globalizing world, they have showed greater resiliency and infuse in their medium their own cultural roots and personal vision as they weave expressive works of art with significant themes

Together, they show, in varying intensities, their strong connections to age-old traditions and beliefs. At the same time, their works portray the anguish of a people in the process of confronting the social conflicts alongside the rapid modernization of their life-worlds.

Equally remarkable, however, are their unique explorations of age-old techniques and in using natural materials as pigments and dyes --- soil, sap, wood, leaves, and stones among others. They have proven their innovativeness and novelty in their portrayal of the culturally significant themes --- identity, change and complexity.

They have been successful as they perform on the role of the Shaman – the storyteller and the medium who connects the community members to the outside other world.

The thrilling interplay of such traditions, transactions, and transformations evident in their creative works may be fruitfully viewed with the changing indigenous "lifescape." Yet, the foundation of identity, the source of life, the repository of meaning, the home that one turns to and returns to is still present.

Thus, as they imbibe their ancient myths and recall their origins to affirm their own identify as indigenous, there are certain aspects of their lives that have changed as certain terrains and landscapes of their territories have indeed

transformed.

Yet, the creative works of the indigenous artists suggest that the seasons of change and continuity of their societies are to be worked, or reworked, in the context of their communities' tenets for cultural survival.

Section 7:

Quotes from the Elders

Acknowledgment

This exhibition is both a celebration of creativity and homage to the culture bearers of our indigenous communities. It expounds the notion that: "amid the diversity of themes and subjects or the plurality of methods and techniques or the variations of styles and materials used, the Indigenous Peoples' arts convey harmony because they are created "under one sky" --- guided by a distinct worldview that is closely related to "nurturing the earth".

"Under One Sky" is supported by the Kalinawa Art Foundation, a private institution based in Makati, committed to the development and enhancement of the IP Visual Fine Arts sector. The mission of the Foundation is to build on the inherent talent of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines by creating institutional mechanisms that contribute in building a visual fine arts sector that celebrates their culture, promotes talent, develops skills, facilitates training, and builds cross-cultural education."

In order to promote the Indigenous Peoples' Visual Arts, the Foundation conducts series of exhibitions built around a competition and sales of IP visual arts in several regional centers of the country. To create a sustainable activity, a focus on more than creating art is imperative. The Foundation will work with others to establish copyright standards to protect the arts and foster institutional mechanisms to maximize the opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' visual arts that are consistent with the Indigenous People's cultures and communities.

The Museo Dabawenyo shares the pride of this special exhibition of the creative and poignant works of the Indigenous Peoples' Visual Artists of Mindanao that runs from August 30 until September 30, 2008.

In order to provide a wider vista and deeper understanding of the collection of art pieces, the Museo Dabawenyo organizes a side activity --- Lecture-Forum on "Indigenous Peoples' Visual Arts: Motifs and Patterns, Functions and Worldviews" scheduled every Saturday for the entire month of September.

The organizers of this exhibition would like to extend their appreciation to the following Indigenous People's Visual Artists who responded positively to our invitation to participate in this event:

Alectis Salatandre (Subanen)
Al Nezzar Ali (Maguindanao)
Ebeneer Samuel Betil (Bagobo)
Dodo Karani Bigkas (Tagabawa)
Gauden Serig (Subanen)
Josue Bustamante (Higaunon)
Jun Porlares (Tagumenyo)
Lalenia Atyalang (B'laan)
Marcelino "Balugto" Necosia (Talaandig)
Motom Bandule (B'laan)
Doming Mansabanlay (Matigsalog)
Dyna (Matigsalog)

Nene Bandule (B'laan)
Reymond Imbing (Subanen)
Roland Fortun (Lapacnon)
Roland Lusay Jr (Subanen).
Ronald Tamfalan (T'boli)
Salvador Ligonan (Dibabawon)
Soliman Poonan (Talaandig)
Sonia Maguana (B'laan)
Subing Landawi (B'laan)
Sultan Cruz (Talaandig)
Carlito Guinto, Jr. (Matigsalog)

Likewise we would like to thank our special Guest Artists – Mr. Ricardo Obenza Jr. and the Student-artists of the Davao City National High School Special Program for the Arts for sharing us their time and talent.

Lastly, our very sincere appreciation for the generosity and support of Architect Jose Racho, for loaning some of the Maranao Traditional Art pieces featured in this event.

Curatorial Team:

NESTOR T. HORFILLA (Main Curator), GAUDEN S. SiREG (Assistant Curator), LUCIO JUN JAMERO (Event Coordinator), BERNIE P. PIMENTEL (Exhibition Assistant), WALTER JAY M. TOMPONG (Lights Installation), ROLAND FORTUN (Text Editor), REYNATO L. DEJORAS Jr. and J R A. NAGBA (Installers).

Comments: “Under One Sky – Nurturing the Earth” a convergence exhibit of Indigenous Peoples visual artists with different ethnicities, cultures and influences was designed, proposed and curated by Nestor T. Horfilla, actually ran from August 30, 2008 to November 3, 2009 – extended upon the request of Museo Dabawenyo.

