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MYTHS AND IMAGINARIES

Interrogating Modern Art Narratives (1950-1960s)

GIANPAOLO L. ARAGO

Abstract

This essay attempts to question the portrayal of modern art in the post-war grand narratives on Philippine art through selected art historical survey texts from the 1950s to the 1960s. These include *The Art of the Philippines* (1958), *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the Philippines* (1963), and *Art in the Philippines* (1964). By analyzing the content and circumstances of these narratives, it may be able to yield the complexity of how modern art was depicted in these texts and surface how art history was utilized as a "site for the production and performance of regnant ideology" (Preziosi 35) that has manufactured a certain identity for the nation state.

Keywords: *Philippine modern art*, *art historiography*, *Philippine identity*, *book history*

> We must drain the stagnant cesspools of local art and art criticism, and let fresh water flow through them. Our age has no use for people who at the mere mention of the words 'progress' and 'modern' get hysterical and bury their heads like ostriches in the sands of the outwork creeds and outmoded ideas.
>
> –Salvador Lopez, "So It Seems," *Art of the Philippines*

This essay begins with an epigraph that encapsulates the oft-cited published debates between the conservatives and modernists that occurred before and during the aftermath of the Second World War. Even though the articles were mostly between Guillermo Tolentino and Victorio Edades, other critics and writers such as Salvador Lopez chimed in. The choice of this quotation then references how the historicization of the period relied on the squabbles between the two which would then be narrated to culminate in the walkout of conservatives in the 1955 Rotary Competitive Exhibition organized by the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) when mostly modern artists were awarded. The way this period had been historicized then was punctuated by these chronicles to indicate its progression from the conservative style. But this essay aims to veer from the predictable retelling of the narratives to expand its history and surface the dominant ideologies in these histories.

This essay positions itself to contribute to the expanding art historiography research in the time period, such as in Reuben Cañete's "The Connoisseurly Brotherhood: A Metacritique of Philippine Modernist Art Criticism from the Sixties to the Eighties" (2008) and "[Re]new-ing Philippine Art History: New Art History, 'Not New' Art History, 'In-between New and Not New' Art History, Nationality and the Globalist Subscription" (2011), or in the extensive *Art After War* (2015) by Patrick Flores. Specifically, this essay attempts to historiographically trace the portrayal of modern art in early Philippine art historical survey texts. Often characterized as spanning the time of American colonization and the Second World War as the impetus for its flourishing, and highlighting its tension with the conservative or academic school of art, the essay sifts through three texts to rearticulate and reposition them based on their historicization of modern art and consequently interrogating its actualization.

The texts in question include *The Art of the Philippines* (1958), which had a roster of authors: Leonidas Benesa, Emilio Aguilar Cruz, Angel Nakpil, Galo Ocampo, Rodrigo Perez III, Emmanuel Torres, and Fernando Zobel. Produced by the AAP, it was conceptualized as a follow-up to the two volumes dedicated to art in the 1953 *Encyclopedia of the Philippines* (Ledesma & Guerrero 53), and it stands as the first art historical publication that attempts an all-encompassing narrative for Philippine art. The AAP had a steering committee that included Gabriel Bernardo, Emilio Aguilar Cruz, Purita Kalaw-Ledesma, Arturo Luz, Armando Manalo, Dr. Eduardo Quisumbing, and Fernando Zobel (53). It was first funded by the UNESCO Philippine Educational Foundation and initially had Manalo as the editor. But due to an assigned post from the Department of Foreign Affairs, he was replaced by Winfield Scott Smith upon the selection by the Associated Publishers, which had helped with additional funding (54).

A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the Philippines from 1928 to 1962 (1963) was written by Leonidas Benesa and served as an accompaniment to the Modern Art Exhibition held at the National Museum under the auspices of the AAP in 1962. The inclusion of this text lends specificity even though its timeline only involved the Modern period. It can already be seen as a totalizing effort in its historicizing since it aimed to create a narrative about the progression of Philippine art that inevitably falls under Modern art. This text also offers a strong case study for the institutional ties and affiliations as they existed at the time, as it attempts to historicize contemporary art then.

Lastly, Dominador Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* (1964) was published by the Office of Research Coordination of the University of the Philippines Diliman. The survey text was compartmentalized by periods, namely: Spanish, American, and Modern, with each further organized by the art forms of architecture, painting, and sculpture. The selection of the book rested on the criterion that its sole author was a practicing artist and scholar in the university. Much like the other authors, Castañeda was embedded in the art system and commonly narrativized to be subscribed to conservatism. Additionally, the book was identified by Florina Capistrano-Baker as a formative text that helped foster courses in Philippine art during the "Filipinization" in the 1970s (247).

As mentioned, the scant art historical literature of the time led the AAP to publish *Art of the Philippines* to supplement what was then the lone text on Philippine art history. Even then, the volumes dedicated to art in the *Encyclopedia* were an anthology of essays from artists such as Fabian de la Rosa and Galo Ocampo as well as writers like Ignacio Manlapaz and Jose P. Bantug. As a collection of essays, they did not necessarily espouse a linear narrative. Aside from this, there were pre-war periodicals such as *Philippine Magazine* and *The Philippine Herald*; wartime publications such as *Shin Seiki* and *Philippine Review*; and weekend magazines of dailies such as *The Manila Chronicle*, which composed the art historical landscape prior to these texts.

Thus, these texts were selected based on how they have been identified as representative of the earliest grand narratives in Philippine art. Their conception as such hews closer to Jean-Francois Lyotard's definition of knowledge production, which views totalizing and comprehensive history with 'incredulity' (Munslow 166). And through the analysis of the selected texts, the research solidifies the identification of these as grand narratives based on how Lyotard conceptualized them as appealing to universal values—in this case, promoting Filipino identity and progress.

Furthermore, as grand narratives, these art historical texts that have been figured within the discourses of knowledge production serve to legitimate the modernism that the narratives tout to be the testament of Philippine art's unceasing development in the light of modernity. The research then attempts to unpack the zealous appeal of the texts to render Philippine modern art as a universal and totalizing progression in its historicization. What are seen are characteristics of Filipino identity and the progression that modernism is hinged on, where both are not seen as mutually exclusive in this regard but factors that cooperate to present the totalizing

and comprehensive art history. Furthermore, the conditions upon which these are ensconced depend on a fervor for internationalization that finds its motivation from the repercussions of Philippine colonial history.

As a historiographical project, the essay does not merely aim to compensate for the gaps in history nor does it find itself intending to dismantle the bulwark of such narratives, but it hopes to present another possibility in expanding the narratives that have been adhered to in Philippine art history. Interrogating these texts may prove to be beneficial to further the questions and concerns of art historiography, which furthers its scope from just alternative-seeking histories, and to reflexively question how these texts on Philippine art may have inevitably influenced a certain narrative discourse.

The research suspects it to be a creation of a myth and consequently takes on this mythmaking capacity of narratives, especially within the complicity and promulgation by institutions. Myths in this research hews close to Roland Barthes' conception of a myth propagated by discourses. Its capacity as a mode of signification lends itself to be vulnerable to appropriation (118), and the research settles its position based on how Barthes elucidates that such signification is value-laden (124). This allows inquiry as to how these art historical texts were formed and surfacing of myths and motivating ideologies that may persist in their discourses, enabled by the ecology of socio-historical contexts and the attendant institutions that surround them. Mythmaking and grand narratives then share the consequence of proliferating such universal values which the research wishes to analyze.

Another layer in its conceptual framework is to recognize that these texts were strongly shaped by the circumstances—specifically the ecology of artistic production and circulation of the time. The narratives of these texts were prompted by the demand to capture arts and culture within a postwar and recently independent yet semi-colonial Philippines. Acknowledging this context meant that the research would need to take on a metahistorical attempt that gleans the organization or matrix that may produce and disseminate social beliefs or customs that run parallel to the disciplinary practice of art history (Mansfield 6). If taken as a vehicle of the institution in this production/dissemination of myths, art history proves the narrative and "works to represent us to ourselves by reproducing the scenography of our most cherished social-historical mythologies" (Preziosi 11).

It should be stated at this point that these texts, along with the attendant institutions and figures that compose their mode of production, underscore their relationship between the promulgation of the mythologies in the connection of art and national identity. Even though the research acknowledges that these texts comprise a small portion of one of the artworlds, the implications can be far-reaching. Studying the texts already yields a glimpse of such production and figures: the involvement of organizations such as the AAP, the PAG, and the National Museum as an institutional stronghold, and the artists and writers that form the social nexus that maintain such myths.

The implications of linear, grand narratives position the research to depend on Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as one of its conceptual

posts. Informed by its notion of deconstruction as a way to open the design of knowledge production, this analysis can expose and surface the elements that compose the narrative of each text. More importantly, doing so would be in the purpose of also revealing the ideological values—myths, as proposed—which overlap the narrativization of the artworks and the events that it constitutes. It may also postulate associations or correlations, connections within power relations, to unexpected events of unique positions and beliefs propagated at that time. Ultimately these ideologies and values were deemed to be necessary to include and discuss in these art historical texts as well. And to uncover such myths, the research employs discourse analysis as an approach to study how a certain phenomenon or idea is represented in the art historical text (Krippendorff 16).

The Traction of Philippine Identity through Art

The editor of *Art of the Philippines*, Winfield Scott Smith, wrote in the book's foreword about the value of art and culture as invariably connected to society and its identity. Since he claims that the Philippines is a "young" country, it is inclined to seek to know and understand itself. Hence, art becomes a part of that process for figuring its identity, "for works of art have been recognized, from earliest times, as reflections of their makers" (v). This is echoed in the introduction of Alejandro Roces, then Secretary of Education, in *Art in the Philippines*, where he made the connection between the arts and culture, and their relationship to society. He hoped that despite the dearth of research materials and even scholars dedicated to Philippine studies, this text may hopefully encourage more scholars to "devote their time and talents to recording our greatness and nobility as a people" (iii). The immense significance of arts and culture here is even stated as the "greatness and nobility" of the Filipinos, an idea that is echoed as well by the letter of Evangelina Macapagal to Galo Ocampo, then Director of the National Museum for the Modern Art Exhibition, to which *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the Philippines* is dedicated. She said that the "art and culture of a people represent the sum total of a nation's history and civilization," and this exhibition and museum "contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the masses of our people" (Macapagal 3). And to reiterate the same point that Smith makes in *Art of the Philippines*, Macapagal also believes in the reflective capacity art has with respect to the nation. In fact, she believes that the "nation is only great as its culture and the true image and soul of a nation is reflected in its arts" (3). Hence, the role of the museum is crucial, since Macapagal suggests this tripartite relationship between arts, a built institution catering to the arts such as a museum, and the effect that these would have in the "true image and soul of a nation" (3).

What these demonstrate is a dependence on utilizing art as a national identifier, substantiating Donald Preziosi's characterization of art history and historiography as "a complex apparatus [to] manufacture certain forms of ideology as knowledge" (52). In the manner by which art was described in the foreword and introductions of the texts, the research proposes that this manufacturing capacity of art history tends to promote a nationalist project. Such remarks contained in the texts reason that objects of art and their historicization

are found to be able to function, as Preziosi states, as a site "for the manufacture, validation, and maintenance of ideologies of idealist nationalism and ethnicity, serving to sharpen and to define the underlying cultural unity of a people as distinct from others" (41).

Historicizing art objects then not only preserves such items into a collective history. It can be fashioned to fulfill a "nationalist" duty of constructing a unique identity, which unifies the people that identify to belong within such a group. The snippets above demonstrate the potential of art to be utilized as a reflective expression of the collective identity of society within the confines of its art historical narration.

Certainly, this point can be truistic at best—texts are invariably value-laden and would possess their own ideological implications. But articulating it within their timeline, alongside the exhaustive scope of charting Philippine art, reiterates the significance they put upon these art historical narratives to execute such a duty, and carrying with them the onus of representation. It may be inevitable then that the noble and idealist approach to writing these texts would peg notions of national identity based on ideological agendas that were deemed relevant then.

The 'Autochthonous' Imbued in Modern Art

In the May 1944 issue of Philippine Review, Emilio Aguilar Cruz, one of the writers of *Art of the Philippines* writes in his article, "The Autochthonous Tradition," that Philippine art should be engaged not within the confines of indigenous forms but with depictions of the quotidian in painting, and he distinguishes Fabian de la Rosa to personify this term. While the use of the term "autochthonous" connotes a disengagement of identity from foreign dependence, as a means to reclaim it based on what is considered "Filipino," such identity politics and the appeal for this essentialist tendency may spring from the historical moment and the ideas permeating during the time of American colonization.

In *The Americanization of Manila 1898-1921* (2010), Cristina Evangelista Torres states that this Americanization process through government and education imbibed the very colonial mentality in Filipinos, which was believed to have delayed the development of the Philippines (2). The 1960s saw the change of opinion on the United States with the "emergence of a nationalist fervor that made American bashing popular, particularly among academicians and university students . . . with American neocolonialism at home" (2). The research suggests a connection between this nationalist fervor, which encompasses the publication timelines of these books, and the identity-seeking direction taken by the writers across the art historical survey texts.

What led to this enthusiasm towards nationalism in the 1960s may have its source from the desire for self-determination that Filipinization initiated. This can be witnessed in William McKinley's 1898 Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation or William Howard Taft's tricky slogan, "The Philippines for Filipinos," which may have been perceived as pro-Filipino. These have always been portrayed by the Americans in the public discourse as sympathetic to the Filipinos' desire for self-determination, but the insidious discourse reveals veiled imperialist interests (Torres 7).

The socio-historical implications of Filipinization also meant that the employees in the government or the faculty or teachers in the education sector secured tenure for Filipinos. This would mean that the underlying principle would be a fervent essentialist distinction between what is Filipino and foreign. Torres narrates how this nationalist tendency was manifested when Manuel Quezon, during the inauguration of the first Filipino president of the University of the Philippines Ignacio Villamor, reminded the new president that the University belongs to the Filipinos, since it was one of the first moves of the Philippine Assembly, and that "they belong to a race separate from the Americans and they should seek their own destiny as a separate nationality with a separate political existence" (150-151). Drawing the line from this divide between the Filipino and the foreign contributes to the notion of the indigenous (the "autochthonous"), as part of the meaning-making of art in terms of the self-determination of the Filipino.

The rendering of the "Filipino" is equally important in terms of how these writers and historians perceived or interpreted this notion of the "autochthonous." While there is a predilection to create an idea of the distinctly Filipino, the instances of this Filipino-ness are certainly diverse. In *Art of the Philippines*, the moderns are the ones given the spotlight as to their new representation of the Filipino. The book recognizes these moderns as creating a new fluency in the interpretation of such a nationalist fervor. They extol Hernando Ocampo's non-objective paintings as an exponent of the "Filipino style" (65), which is a terminology art critics say Arturo Luz upheld through his depictions of "untapped aspects of Philippine life, as in [*Musicians*] and his series on Filipino games" (69). While Galo Ocampo encapsulates nationalistic flair in *Brown Madonna*, the writers of the book were also careful to say that this nationalist tendency was a "flavor of the day" (65)—as if it was an ephemeral trend in the available topics for the arsenal of subjects artists could paint. This interesting idea can be considered as moot only because of the way it underplays the topic of nationalist painting as a mere trend, and this idea was never picked upon by the other texts.

Other paintings that were perceived by the writers as Filipino were the scenes and subjects that were a clear representation of what is uniquely Filipino. Romeo Tabuena—whose paintings hark back to subjects from the Genre style elements—continued to paint the *bahay kubo* and carabaos even as an artist in the United States and as an expatriate in Mexico. Vicente Manansala's painting, *Jeepneys*, also becomes written in art history as a clear representation of Filipino painting because of the way that he "fused subject matter and color completely to achieve an authority of statement" (68).

Some of the painters mentioned in *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art* are also referencing nationalist art most especially through the subject matter featured in their works. In what seems to be a rehash of the description of Luz's work in the previous text, it was claimed to have reached success through his rendering of quotidian Philippine scenes in *Musicians* and his series on Filipino children's games (22). And Hernando Ocampo was also recognized for "basic Philippine patterns and bold incursions into . . . abstract art" (22).

A development from the singular nationalistic identity that the usage of the term "autochthonous" promotes would be the idea of the amalgamation of

cultures that contribute to the formation of a unique national identity. Benesa, at the latter part of his own text, chose to highlight the 1957 Southeast Asian Art competition as a historical chronicle to describe the newer directions of modern art in the Philippines, which he narrated to be motivated by the Philippine artist's need "for a definition or a confirmation of . . . Asia or Eastern identity" (30). This surfaces an attempt to underscore the direction of the Filipino artist as one that would have the self-reflexivity to dislodge their practice from the inculcated tradition of the West and to reconsider how Asian culture would figure in their artmaking. This historical chronicle was also mentioned in Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* and even though this was not mentioned in *Art of the Philippines*, the contemporary artist was coaxed to "take a cue from his Oriental brother artists, particularly great Chinese artist-draftsmen . . . developing, not only their craft, but the sensibility of the artist" (74). Hence, despite the pull to give priority to the nationalist identity in art, the search for the autochthonous was much more nuanced in the sense that it still kept tabs on possibilities of relating and creating connections to a global scope, such as in reference to the regional.

To offer a sharper distinction to this, Castañeda kept mum about providing a connection to modern art as a representation of such autochthonous bearing. But this cannot be simply accounted to an allegiance to the conservatives—the boundaries to such artistic subscriptions can be porous as a social formation—nor can it be attributed as an unpatriotic sentiment. To illustrate this, his text chronicles how Vicente Rivera's painting *El Sueño Dorado*, then exhibited by the Asociación Internacional de Artistas at Bazar Filipino in 1908, was an allegory to Taft's "The Philippines for the Filipinos" (Castañeda 74). The painting, featuring a figure of a woman resting on a hammock while holding an issue of *La Independencia*, exemplifies how art historical narratives can be of service to the creation of specific identity-forming agendas.

It would be of interest to see how this mode of Filipinization through literature on art captured the commitment to Filipino identity that preceded its resurgence in the 1970s in the academic institutions like the University of the Philippines. Reinforced by the socio-political conditions of the time and the rise of progressive and protest movements, the indigenization of disciplines such as in historiography and psychology—like in the case of *Pantayong Panaw* and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*—likewise bled into the humanities. The research finds these connections not to be mutually exclusive but may even serve as its intellectual lineage albeit their circumstances may have differed; the myths from these texts can be seen to have set notions of colonial influence on a more critical purview.

Modern Art's International Direction for Progress

As stated earlier, pursuing a singular Filipino identity does not, in any case, completely bar any form of interaction with the rest of the world. Instead, ways of internationalization became a yardstick of success or an indication of an artist's skill. These texts also depended on the international exposure of some artists as a valued chronicle in their narrative, their sojourn abroad often portrayed as central to the shift of their artistic practice for the better.

For instance, as a pivotal figure positioned in modern art, Victorio Edades was formed as a figure narratively pitted against the artistic status quo maintained by traditionalists or conservatives. In *Art of the Philippines*, his historicization during that time touted him to be the figure to "credit for having broken academic dominance and for having initiated change in Filipino painting" (43) and these were narrated by making pivotal his overseas education in the Art Department of the University of Washington wherein he supported himself by working in the salmon canneries of Alaska—an oft-occurring anecdote in historicizing his practice. This parallels Benesa's *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art* almost in verbatim (11) and Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* likewise begins his historical chronicle for Edades by stating his return from his studies in the United States (95). His stay abroad figured as pivotal chronicle in his historicizing which figured the disposition of his art practice due to being surrounded by modernist art in the West Coast of the United States and viewing The Armory exhibition. *Art of the Philippines* relates that such exposure inevitably influenced Edades and this was proven in the text to be seen in his painting, *The Sketch* (1927), which won the second highest honors in competition with other professional painters in the Pacific Northwest Coast of the United States (43). Moreover, this fervor for the international bleeds through how Edades stated that it would be pertinent for the modernist Filipino artist "to investigate every department of our environment which we directly experience, and to blend and integrate all of our impressions with our *Oriental heritage and our traditional Christian culture*—these are profound lessons with which the great modern art movement is inspiring our progressive artists today so that they may create *masterpieces which will claim their places in the art galleries of the world*" (49, emphasis added).

For Edades then, to harness the "oriental" or "traditional Christian culture" is to extend the artist's scope of inquiry, whether within the continent or religious systems, but this coalesces with his claim that these will bring works to a global platform, that such investigation is an indicator of their own criteria for success, which would be possible by exoticizing their aesthetic. And as a figure positioned in the forefront of modern art, it would not be too far-fetched to point to how Edades' statement illustrates the postcolonial anxiety that strains the modern artist to find a unique artistic identity rooted in their own origin and at the same time compelled to seek international validation.

But in the writing of Philippine art history, the impulse for the international figures most pressingly in the way that the international exhibitions were historicized in conjunction with the moderns. *Art in the Philippines* details the First Southeast Asia Art Conference and Competition that was held in Manila in April 1957.[1] This was presided over by Dr. Gregorio Lim and held in the conference room of the Philippine Women's University with its exhibition at the Northern Motors Showroom. The exhibition and competition gathered artists and artworks from India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, and China (Castañeda 138). In Benesa's *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art in the Philippines*, he mentions how the competition was also held in conjunction with the annual exhibition of AAP as the organizing sponsor (30). He reasons that the possible acknowledgement of the Western influence led Filipino artists to root themselves to

their "Asian or Eastern identity" (30) and the causality of this led to the formation of the competition. Additionally, the other art historical event included in this subsection is the "Asian Tour of Philippine Art" that was sponsored by the AAP with the assistance of the government and the United States Information Service.

In the last portion of his text, Benesa discusses the contemporary art history of the moderns (30). He starts by focusing on the events leading to the publication of the text. He simultaneously historicizes the exhibition *The Development of Modern Art in the Philippines* as part of the new directions that would lead Philippine modern art. This was followed by a chronicle about a group of artworks sent to Saigon for an international art festival (not specified) which was sponsored by the Vietnamese embassy in the Philippines, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Philippine Art Gallery (PAG). The third event was the tour of an exhibition of Philippine art to four cities in Australia that was sponsored by the Australian Embassy, Qantas, AAP, and the Cultural Foundation of the Philippines. Another international exhibition, entitled 8 Filipinos—featuring the Philippine moderns—toured Asian cities and exhibited at the Lambert in Paris funded by the International Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Aside from the exhibition at the National Museum, all of these are international exhibitions that Benesa characterized as Philippine modern art "seeking after new horizons, not only internally in search for a more personal vision, but also internationally in search of universal recognition" (30). Validation then of the international kind can be seen as highest in regard, with institutions such as AAP and PAG at the helm, initiating and facilitating such a direction. As a precursory event that may emphasize this matter, Lyd Arguilla of the PAG was also able to manage a two-year touring exhibition for the gallery from 1953-54 in the United States. Entitled "Philippine Cultural Exhibition," Arguilla's work as a cultural attaché enabled the project, which Legaspi-Ramirez characterizes as "one of the earliest aspirational showings of the period and would be one of a number of modest gestures in aid of Philippine art going 'international'" (33). The historicizing of the moderns in this case surmises that their "progress" can be evidenced in the sophisticated and cosmopolitan "direction" of Philippine modern art vis-à-vis a global reach that has given it its "vitality" (30).

Regardless of whether they were in Southeast Asia, as in the case of Benesa and Castañeda, or a touring exhibition in the United States, these were historically chronicled to be benchmarks of success and the continuation of such practice as the direction for Philippine art. Their historicizing recognizes a critical disposition or self-reflexivity in terms of the western influence within Philippine art practices. The course of action then is directed to a more nativist approach in relation to the oriental identity contained within Southeast Asian regionalism.

These international exhibitions and competitions were easily the highlighted information in these texts, particularly with the direction of modern art in Benesa's text. And to view it in relation to the search of national identity implies a sense of security to showcase what is inherently "Philippine," while fronting modern art as a representative not only of the identity, but a visual language that

may resonate to a more global arena—whether for artists to encourage and lean on what is perceived as "oriental" or to have institutional support for more internationalized endeavors.

Moreover, the meaning-making for these artworks were portrayed through the themes and ideologies that were prominently circulating then—the search for Philippine identity and the keen interest to assess how they fare on an international level as most present. In the grander scheme of the narratives, the moderns are positioned as the denouement to these, with artistic practices that come out as fully realized and validated internationally. Philippine modern art then is seen as an entity that clinches the conundrum of national identity. Thus, notions of nation building via identity-seeking directives for art and the likewise significance of these to culture—and consequently the nation—are the general interpretation for these texts. And in this research, solely depending on these narratives without reassessing them within the purview of today's historicizing may perpetuate what figure as myths concerning Philippine art history.

Modern art and its historicization in these grand narratives can be reviewed to be underpinned by more complex circumstances that surround it. And while the brief discussion only focused on the text, it is pertinent to extend this foray deeper into the institutional art ecology which would productively encapsulate the key figures involved in the writing and production of these texts. Additionally, it would be fruitful to explore how the term 'modern' was indeed conceptualized and came into fruition as a way to further assess these ideologies and interests.

Interrogating these texts underscores the complexity of how modern art was depicted in these grand narratives. By comprehending them within the context of postwar Philippines, they can then be viewed with much more reflexivity: the preponderance to depict a national identity can be seen as an ongoing process in the desire for self-determination in a way that is wary and privy to the agendas that may permeate in them.

Notes:

[1] It should be noted that Castañeda's *Art in the Philippines* dates the competition in 1956 while Benesa's *A Brief History of the Development of Modern Art* dates it in 1957.

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