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# ART STUDIES JOURNAL

## **Art Studies Journal**

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The Art Studies Journal is the official journal of the Department of Art Studies, College of Arts and Letters, University of the Philippines Diliman. It is envisioned to foster discursive and scholarly engagements on Philippine art, in conversation with the regional and the global, through deploying the lenses of art history, art theory and aesthetics, art criticism, curatorship, and arts management. Taking the Philippines as a geographical, historical, and theoretical starting point, it aligns with the department's commitment to a humanistic and interdisciplinary approach and to the decolonization of art, which have been its response to dominant Euro-American epistemologies and practices in the discipline.

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# Under the Radar, Off-Beat and Off-Track

**FLAUDETTE MAY DATUIN, PhD**

*Editor, Art Studies Journal*

It was a beautiful Sunday in June 2022 when I explored the idea of reviving the Art Studies Journal with Mark Louie Lague, one of the editors of this revived publication. In our exchange of emails, I informed Louie that the Art Studies Journal, at its inception 30 or so years ago, was very informal, but also a very informative repository of writings, aiming to compile and consolidate possible readings for Art Studies classes that the faculty wrote themselves. Energized by this modest ambition, we were not working under the pressure of lifting our research performance by submitting our output in publications that count—those sleek, highly ranked academic journals. Enabled by a desktop publishing software, the mimeographed publication was a backyard production produced beyond the pale of refereed publications and other parameters of the Culture of Audit and its unfortunate mediagenic offspring—World University rankings.

For this revival issue, we are reprinting the fruits of this DIY and under-the-radar labor of love to provide historical continuity from 1992 to the present. The three issues reproduced in our archive with permission from the authors, could also make us reflect on our intellectual journey and our own raw and “sophomoric” (as one colleague puts it) attempts at theorizing and reflecting on areas that were then considered off-beat and off-track. It was the 1990s—a time when radical foundational and epistemic challenges were taking place in faculty meetings and curricular workshops. We were trying out a new set of interpretive tools and what were then considered cutting edge critical theories smuggled from literary theory, “new” art history, Cultural Studies, the social sciences, and other disciplines. Back in the day when we were enamored with semiotics, for example, and Cecilia Tule’s essay (Volume 1, No. 2) on SM Megamall’s floor plan became standard reading

in most of our classrooms. I believe it remains operative and instructive up to today as it spotlights—what editor Pearl Tan called—an important, but under-investigated area of study (Introduction, Volume 1, No. 2).

Aided by conceptual frames that made it possible to rethink and refunction the premises of defining “art,” “society,” and “culture,” we were expanding the parameters of our study to include the “popular” and the “folk.” But at the same time, we were also questioning and breaking down boundaries and categories. Patrick Flores asked: “Is folk fine?” (Volume 1, No. 1)—a question that cautions against the uncritical and taken for granted valorization of the folk, from the mainstream and dominant discourses up to the resistant spaces of feminist visual practice.

We were examining our role as academics and posing questions on how the academe makes sense of art and culture and how it addresses “the potential recalcitrance of a public that must continuously modify the meanings which the various bureaucracies of the institution preach, and consequently reintegrate it into and within certain situations of lived lives.” (Flores, Volume 2, No. 1).

Nothing followed Volume 2 No. 1, as we buckled under funding constraints, overloaded faculty and staff, and shifts in our academic pursuits and personal lives. That it took us this long to reboot and restart is a reminder to us that while there are things that might happen in a few hours or years, there are those that require decades of preparation and incubation to emerge. Sometimes, as Paul O’Donohue writes, “the greatest challenge is to actually begin; there is something deep in us that conspires with what wants to remain within safe boundaries and stay the same. ... Sometimes a period of preparation is necessary, where the idea of a beginning can gestate and refine itself... [before] we can simply take the risk and leap into a new beginning.”

This issue thus marks a new beginning to the unfinished story of the Art Studies Journal. We pick up from where we left off, with the same waywardness that animated the pioneering volumes—a waywardness that cannot be muted, contained, and measured within institutional limits and quality assurance criteria. Even amidst changing norms that are displacing a system based on trust and autonomy by one based on visibility and compliance to quantifiable and auditable performance indicators, this journal aims to provide a space for the gathering of colleagues sharing common, and at times conflicting, discourses and ways of seeing. Through its pages, we aim to converse—in an office or halls, over coffee or a meal, off and on campus—just to think, reflect, and try out crazy, new ideas and possibilities, and make modest and perhaps—at certain key moments—groundbreaking change.

Thus we begin again, with a new look, a new platform, and a fresh mix of hardworking young and not so young but chastened senior bloods, eager to respond, with much courage and humility, to the urgency of producing new writing, of clearing yet another path against the spell of stagnation, and adding yet another story, yet another puzzle piece into our continuous acts of beginning and becoming.