

PT: Lilibeth, Can you tell us about your work for the show. Yours has the installation with volcanic rocks?

Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen: When I got invited for this show, I was at the same time invited for a show in Denmark, wherein the topic of the exhibition was earth. So somehow I thought this was a good opportunity to make a parallel exhibition. Just two weeks ago, I did a performance in Denmark. It was a father and daughter earth ritual. The name of my piece is called GAIA, which means "mother earth". Part 1 was in Denmark, and Part 2 in the Philippines is happening this Saturday; I invited my mother and daughter to perform this ritual with me. The performance is a ritual of the earth. I've been doing research about the Philippines. What is it concretely? What is the physical soil of the Philippines? Most of the Philippines is made of volcanic islands, and maybe it's not all active volcanoes but a lot of it was volcanic islands earlier on. And so, I went to Pampanga (home to Mt. Pinatubo) last week with my local interns to collect lahar rocks. So physically, there's going to be a lot of lahar rocks in the space and we are performing this ritual. And I am changing the materials I will be using for this performance in the Philippines compared to Denmark. I will be using materials that are connected to me in a very personal way, like for example using the Sampaguita flower, which is for me the smell of the Philippines, and I am using volcanic rocks, and watermelon, a fruit that I remember, which I think tastes better here than anywhere in the world. I am changing some of the oils that I used in Denmark, changing pine oils to coconut oils. Actually, there will also be a

third part in the future. I'm going to perform this alone as a third part because the conceptual idea of making this mother earth ritual is to detach myself from my two different ethnic backgrounds so I can be a person that can fit in everywhere without having any nostalgic feelings about missing Denmark or missing the Philippines.

It's all at a very conceptual level.

PT: I kind of want to respond to what Lilibeth was saying about this distance and closeness to Manila and the Philippines. I know that some of you were born here, some of you live here, and for some of you it's your first time in Manila. What was your response like in conceptualizing your work as a response to the city and what it means to you either as experiencing it for the first time or having experienced it many times before?

LCR: I've explored it many times but I've never exhibited in the Philippines before. If you were here for my talk earlier, I showed many works that I made here. The first was "Shout" in 2001, the Born Again Christian music video. I also created work on the crucifixion, the flagellations, and many others. So for me, it's exciting to work here and try to work with materials, as opposed to having myself document events with a video camera, going back home, and editing. So it's interesting to use actual concrete material and to produce the work here, and not just record and go home.

PT: What about you Lizza? I know we were having a conversation the other day about nationality, when you were telling me that you were born and raised here until you were eight and then you immigrated, but you come here pretty often lately. So how is it for you to create work about Manila?





Left to right:
Maria Cruz, Liva Beckmann,
Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen,
Lizza May David,
Claudia del Fierro,
Kiri Dalena

LMD: It's a bit different for me this time because it's the first time that I am painting inside the studio. Normally, I explore the city, or I visit and go around and edit at home but this time, I experienced some kind of focus. In the end, the noise in the studio, some influences traveling from home to the studio, all these issues came into the painting because it is not about production of the painting of the modernist, it was about a reflection of my experiences in daily life. So it was interesting to have this connection between now, and this modernist painting, and daily life. It was putting away historical mindsets. It was intense because it was a dialogue between me and the canvas, but I didn't feel isolated because it went to the painting, it went to the work itself, on the surface. Actually this "on the surface" issue was already involved in previous works I was working with, but this time it was like, "Okay, the surface is the canvas! It's easy."

CDF: I think the work always responds to place, even in your own place, or sometimes you don't have a place anymore, there is a detachment between yourself and a particular place. It always has to happen somehow. For me, here it involves waiting also, like waiting for a place to respond to me, as well. Which is I think a cowardly way of doing things instead of a reaction, when you don't have this program and you wait for it. As a foreigner working in the place, you are always out of this layer, unfamiliar with what is normally going on there, with the artists' practice, with the topics being discussed. There is no way you will fit in so you work with that, with looking at things from the outside.. And you work with yourself in that situation and it's good to make that decision in that sense.

PT: And what about you, Maria?

MC: I'm here frequently so I don't have the same issues as Claudia with space; I don't have this confusion with the different places I work in. I did the work in Berlin because I think I did need time to kind of develop the work. I changed the form that it would be so many times, until I got to this point. I felt like I cheated a bit, because I didn't do it here, but my work is based on my memory, so I think that wasn't such an issue. I did the work in Berlin and rolled them all up, and I'm going to hang them on the wall tomorrow.

KD: I'm the one who lives here permanently. I'm a filmmaker and I have so much footage. I documented all of those floods, but what I found interesting was that we Filipinos were communicating through social networks and we were using text. I think that can be seen beyond the flood, how Filipinos from Metro Manila were using these short messages to communicate and how even though the majority was using English, the language was changing: the way we produce it through text and the limited characters that Twitter provided, or through Facebook using emoticons. Perhaps it's a dimension of Manila that's not in the physical space, but it's a huge part of our culture so I decided to focus on that.

PT: I'm going to ask one more question before opening up the floor so everyone can get an opportunity to speak to the artists and ask your questions. Being here now in the space, I don't know if all of you were able to see each other's works, but just hearing you share about it, how do you feel like your work responds to each other? I know that you guys are dealing with similar themes—you are responding to political structures, some of you incorporate text in your work, whether in a research stage or actually part of your work. So what would that dialogue look like?

LCR: We are still in the process of exhibition-making and I think it will be connected more as the days progress.

KD: There was a specific discussion with Lian about lay out, because Ateneo has cubicles and walls. I think it was with Lizza and myself, Lian was asking for feedback on how we would see our work. We intentionally thought that it was good to, as much as possible create dialogue between the works so we asked Ateneo to remove the walls. For me, with my video work, normally it is expected that you create a space, an isolated cubicle, but in our case, I took the risk of bringing it out to see how it will clash or mesh with the other works and create a dialogue or sense of openness.

MC: I think our communication is purely on a social basis, I don't know how it will feed the work but it must.

PT: Thank you for your time. I think now let's open up the floor to the audience.

Man from the audience: I just learned about you [Lilibeth] and the rest of the women through this talk, and for me this will do something for the community and uplifting the art scene. The performance scene is still very young here. We lack this kind of communication with artists themselves, though we want to learn more about them, we are not given a chance to talk to the artists. This gives us more of a chance to talk to working artists for more open dialogue. It would be beneficial for younger people to attend these kinds of events like artists talks for us to know more about the process of the artists. This will open art to regular people who are not in the art

community, but who are able to appreciate these kinds of processes. Even the younger generation may learn to be more critical in terms of their thinking about what we have in the country. Most of us are influenced by the West with this colonial perspective—we don't appreciate our own resources. I think art can do something about it, and these talks and open dialogues can help us explore more of what we have.

PT: Very well said.

LCR: That is good to hear that.

CDF: There should be a bus everyday picking up people from downtown Manila and bringing them to the gates of Ateneo!

(Laughter from the audience.)

PT: Thank you all for coming.

Lian Ladia: The exhibition is programmed longer, so there is a lot of opportunity to see the exhibition. It is running until April 20, 2013.

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