

DOUBLE VISION



NUS MUSEUM

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Siddharta Perez

1

One discursive track in the course of the conversations around the War Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador Dato' N Parameswaran Collection in the NUS Museum is the symmetries of Cold War encounters in the region. The American wars in the Pacific is an ongoing re-historicization project, and the vestiges of war are often unpacked in the reflection of parallel experiences. The affinities between countries managing the ecologies formed around the American occupation is a double vision that identifies not only the synchronous points where historical narratives overlap. The term “double vision” is used in works such as Yong Song Min's *DMZ-XING* (1994) where texts from transcribed interviews of Southeast Asian refugees living in Connecticut overlap to portray the intersection of affliction borne by the Korean and Vietnam wars. An actual mirror anchors her installation to signify not only the political demarcations vindicated by U.S. containment policy in the two countries but it also implicates the serial circumstances that reflect multiple repercussions echoing in the psyche and the larger social terrain.

The exhibition **Double Vision** identifies not only synchronous points in the history of American wars waged from the turn of the century, but also maps this continuum of empire building strategies. It begins with looking at the affinities found in the histories of the Philippines and Vietnam, and proceeds to speak about a political relationship where the Philippines stood as proxy in fictive re-enactments of Hollywood films on the Vietnam War all the while being situated as the proto-site that delivered the United State's expansion in the region. The artist films and videos in the exhibition unpacks the vestiges of war through superimposition of colonial “inheritance” that often departs from the hyphenation of identity as Filipino-American or the bewitchment and eventual disenchantment with the American ideal.

Stephanie Syjuco's *Body Double (Platoon)* implies that the eternal jungle that the Philippines could

provide signifies diplomatic ease. It exposes that alongside its scenographic interchangeability with any other tropical landscape in the region, it would also offer its military hardware as props (as it was the case for the film *Apocalypse Now*). However, her intervention on the original film reveals native imaginings of her motherland in a way that the margins that surrounds these blacked-out filmic narrative performed by Hollywood actors could give a glimpse of. The language of nostalgia translated by Filipino filmmakers is often served within the backdrop of the countryside – a place inhabited by purity, by characters living in their autumn years. For instance, *English* by Gym Lumbera casts in Super 8 his grandfather Kapitan Tagalog who lives in the country. However, the elegiac sensibility is marred by the flood-ridden damage on the film and cuts the serene non-narrative with splices from a found reel of Caucasian characters. Miko Revereza also shoots his grandparents who are part of the postwar generation that migrated to the United States. *Droga!* is a double vision of sights in Los Angeles and the Philippines, taking cue from touristic lens and airing a laundry list of the Filipino's assimilation of American popular culture. The American dream is frequently signified by the airplane, like that which flew over the masked male character's head in his film, and is also referred to by the character in *Perfumed Nightmare*. Flying overseas was one that brings pride and expectation of “progress” in the rural town where Kidlat Tahimik played as himself in the movie. Underhandedly, the idolization of the Voice of America and the infamous V-2 rocket inventor Werhner von Braun is a play of the illusory lens that perpetuates in the history of forgetting the American occupation and war.

Projecting the ideal also translates in the gesture of making knock-offs - a double vision that superimposes the local version and the source of appropriation. The jeepney, which stands as a major prop Tahimik's film, is the celebrated mass transport vehicle. As surplus of military Willys, they have morphed into what is said in the film:



Left
Angel Velasco Shaw
Nailed (1992)
Video 8, 00:49:39

“These vehicles of war become vehicles of life.” A reconstruction comes from gestures of mimesis. Referencing the conventional modes of learning the alphabet – a basic, if not first, lesson in learning English – A no longer stands for apple. Instead, for Roxlee, “M is for Militarization” and “N is for No” in his animation video *ABCD*.

Shireen Seno's *Shotgun Tuding* is constructed after Pancit Westerns – the Pinoy form of Spaghetti Westerns – and abridges the tropes of this genre that gained traction in the Philippines simultaneous to the popularity of its US counterpart. This nascent mode of liberating the look from its entanglement with the colonial gaze exposes the way in which mainstream film circuit adapts Hollywood movies in the closest approximation possible. The anxiety of keeping up with Hollywood at the sake of offering lives only to be abandoned is embodied in the script of *Where's Francis* by David Griggs. Buried with only their heads snug above the ground, the two characters make comic the situation of being forgotten by the director. Thirty years later, they still attempt to be steadfast to the instruction of not breaking character. Surely another stretch of thirty years is enough for the director to remember to declare “Cut!”

It has been more than thirty years of waiting for redemption for the Philippines. This “splendid little war” that the United States fought at the turn of the twentieth century for Philippine independence casts a new series of warfare and betrayal narratives. Propelled by demystifying the consequences of war and “benevolent assimilation”, Angel Velasco Shaw embarked on a lifework that began with *Nailed*. A dizzying montage, this video covers an expanse of a Filipino-American psyche marked by a return to ritual and prompted by fragments of histories unspoken of in the general knowledge of the Philippine inheritance. The work confronts the enemy's gaze by the recognition that one performed that very gaze which makes one the momentary and accidental enemy, erases this self an idea of transcendence and eventually comes to terms with the double vision in the colonial subject.

The Americans defines the Filipino resistance as an amigo warfare. Historically, the amigo warfare supported their conquest strategies in the tropics - how else could they have fought in Vietnam without learning to fight in the Philippine jungle? But it is also identifies how the resistance was mastered in the mode of disguise, that by performing as comrades or wearing the American uniform the Filipino revolutionary is a double vision.

2

ABCD is an experimental animation video shot on Super 8 film. It utilises techniques such as hand-drawn animation, painting on film, found footage, and collage to advocate a radically new and personal understanding of the alphabet. The result is a film that is both socio-political commentary and surrealist whimsy closely reminiscent of equally surreal sequences from American educational shows for children that teach the alphabet.

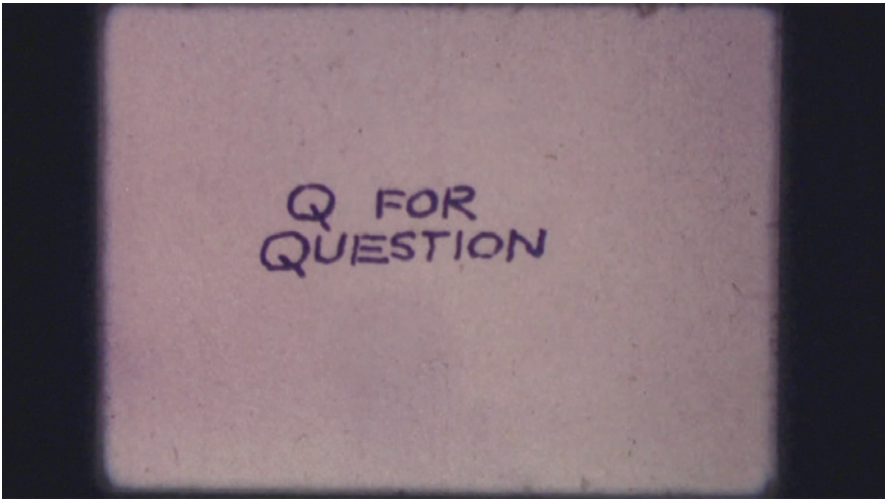
Born in 1950 in Naga City in the Philippines, Roque Federizon Lee alias Roxlee is an animator, visual artist, musician, filmmaker, and an icon of independent and underground cinema in the Philippines. Roxlee's career as an artist began in high school, illustrating poems and essays for the school paper. In addition to the animated and collage films he has made since 1983, Roxlee is the creator of the comic strips *Cesar Asar* and *Santingwar*. His films and illustrations have been featured in exhibitions, retrospectives and film festivals in Germany, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Netherlands, and South Korea through the late 1980s and 1990s. Roxlee's contributions to animation in the Philippines were recognised with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Animation Council of the Philippines in 2010.

I.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
ABCD (1985)
Super 8, 00:05:22

II.



III.

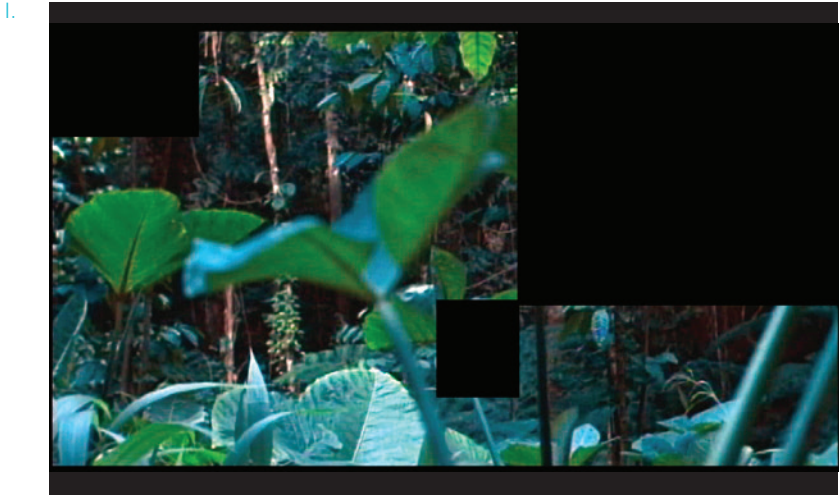


IV.



Body Double (Platoon) is a video work that excerpts from *Platoon*, an Oliver Stone film on the Vietnam War that was filmed and produced in the Philippines. The sounds are muted, narrative discarded, and the telling sections that turned the Philippines landscape into Vietnam are covered by black boxes. What remains are videos that show the endless tropical jungle, and leave little indication of the role the Philippines played in providing a production-friendly location for Hollywood movies set in the Vietnam War. *Body Double* is also an attempt by Syjuco to reclaim ties to her homeland in the Philippines.

Stephanie Syjuco is a conceptual artist and educator who lives in Oakland, California. She received her Masters of Fine Arts from Stanford University in 2005, and her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1999. Syjuco creates large-scale spectacles of collected cultural objects, cumulative archives, and temporary vending installations, often with an active public component that invites viewers to directly participate as producers or distributors. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, her projects leverage open-source systems, shareware logic, and flows of capital, in order to investigate issues of economies and empire. Some of her projects include the *Counterfeit Crochet Project*, a global collaborative project with crochet crafters to counterfeit high-end consumer goods, and Shadowshop, an alternative vending outlet embedded at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art that explores the ways that artists manage the production, consumption, and dissemination of their work. Syjuco is currently an Assistant Professor in Sculpture at University of California at Berkeley.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
Body Double (Platoon) (2005)
Digital video, 01:30:00

Droga! is a black and white Super 8 film that closely examines cultural identity. It looks at the Los Angeles cityscape and American pop culture icons through the eyes of Filipino immigrants to the USA. Through navigational directions – by reciting a list of missing things, or by varying key themes – the film makes visible the gap between the attributes and expressions of diverse cultural identities. The cinematic techniques used in *Droga!* produces an aesthetic that mirrors the daze that one experiences while under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs. Revereza uses it to highlight the addictive nature of American cultural influence on the Philippines.

Miko Revereza is a Filipino-American director based in Los Angeles. Born in Manila, Revereza lived in San Francisco before moving to Los Angeles in 2010. His past works include music videos, commercials, and live video installations for the experimental music scene in Los Angeles. His films explore issues of diaspora, colonialism and the Americanisation of the Filipino immigrant to the USA.

I.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
Droga! (2013)
Super 8, 00:08:07

II.



III.



IV.



English began life as *Tagalog*, a short film starring Lumbera's grandparents which documents the infidelity that comes between a husband and wife, and reconciliation in their twilight years. The floods that ruined the only copy of *Tagalog* Lumbera possessed prompted him to create *Taglish*, a bastard hybrid of damaged film and found footage that reflects the hodgepodge nature of its title. *Taglish* is named after the sub-language created from the corruption of English and Tagalog, a result of Filipinos' lack of mastery of either language. It serves as a tribute to provincial life, and a reflection on infidelity in both love and language. *English* is the abridged version of *Taglish*.

Gym Lumbera is a Filipino cinematographer. He was born in Batangas, and currently shuttles between Manila and his birthplace. Notwithstanding its abridged sister film *English*, *Taglish* is Lumbera's second feature film, after *Anak Araw (Albino)*. Like his short films, Lumbera's feature films highlight the depth of his connection to his Batangas. As a cinematographer, he has worked with directors such as Shireen Seno, John Torres, and Sherad Anthony Sanchez to produce films like *Big Boy*, *Lukas the Strange*, and *Jungle Love*.

I.

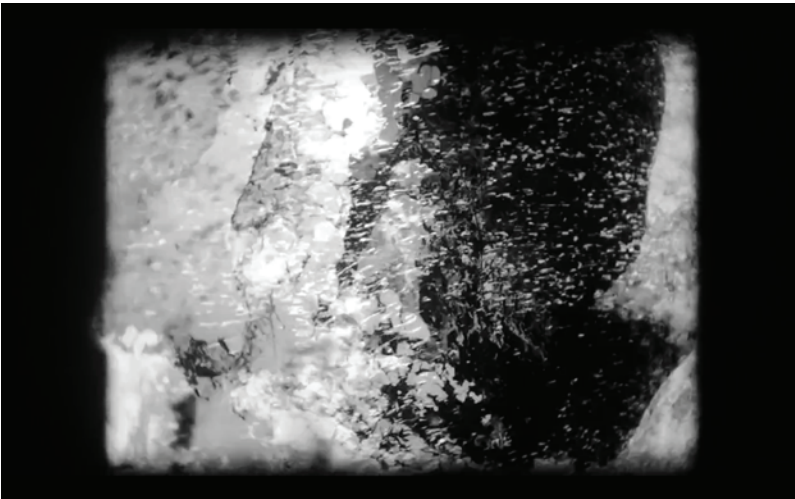


II.



I – V
Film stills taken from
English (2012)
Super 8, 00:36:51

III.



IV.



V.

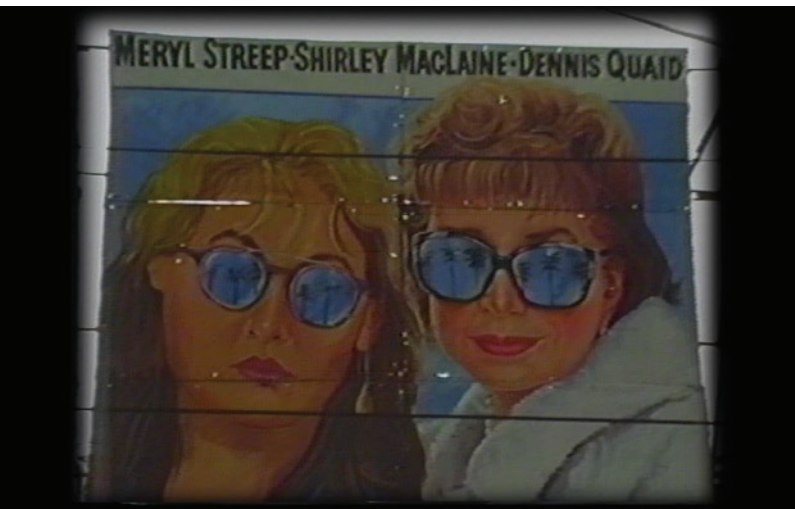


Nailed is a Filipina's exploration of the Catholic Church and 400 years of Spanish and American colonialism woven in a montage of images, sounds, stories and performances. Inspired by Lucy Reyes, a woman who has been re-enacting the Crucifixion for 16 years by being nailed to a cross, the film looks at the implications of worship, national, cultural, and personal identity. Culled from 36 hours of footage, *Nailed* constructs very poetic montage sequences of fragmented stories and stylized performances to explore the performative aspects of "pagan" and Catholic religious practices, and challenge the way documentaries are viewed as "linear truths."

Angel Velasco Shaw is a Manila-based independent filmmaker, media artist, curator, cultural organizer, and educator. She was born in Los Angeles and raised in New York. Since 1988, her documentaries have been screened in American, European and Asian Film Festivals, museums and schools. These include *The Momentary Enemy*, *Mother Load*, *Umbilical Cord*, and *Asian Boys*. Shaw's films can be found in the collections of many American, European, and Asian museums, among them the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, the Museum of Modern Art New York, and the Cinematheque Suisse Schweizer Filmarchiv. Shaw was also the originator and project director for *Vestiges of War 1899-1999: The Philippine-American War and Its Aftermath*. The project included art and film exhibitions, performances, and a conference in 1999 culminating in an anthology co-edited by Luis H. Francia. From 2014 to 2015, Shaw was the director of the cross-cultural exchange project *Markets of Resistance* set in the Philippines. Shaw is currently an associate professor and the Director of the Institute of Heritage, Culture and the Arts at Philippine Women's University.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
Nailed (1992)
Video 8, 00:49:39



Perfumed Nightmare is a story of encountering the motions of globalisation and the bewitchment of American culture through the eyes of a countryside jeepney driver played by director Kidlak Tahimik. Inspired by Voice of America radio broadcasts and the rocket scientist Wernher von Braun, the main character dreams of going to the US to be an astronaut. Over the course of his adventures in the Philippines, and later Paris and Munich, he becomes disillusioned with Western technology and culture. He rejects the chance to fulfil this dream by the movie's end. While *Perfumed Nightmare* premiered during the Martial Law period in the Philippines, it was produced independent of the Philippine's mainstream film industry. The film was produced, with support from Werner Herzog, on a modest budget and made use of found footage and loaned equipment. *Perfumed Nightmare* won the International Critics Award at the 1977 Berlin Film Festival, making it the first avant-garde Filipino film to gain international renown. Not only did *Perfumed Nightmare* propel Tahimik to fame in the filmmaking world, it also had an immense influence on younger independent filmmakers in the Philippines and in Asia.

Eric de Guia alias Kidlak Tahimik ('silent lightning' in Tagalog) was born in Baguio City in 1942, during the Japanese Occupation. Tahimik was an economist by training, having earned an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business and worked as a researcher for the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris. While in Europe, he became interested in filmmaking and returned to the Philippines to begin his independent filmmaking career. Many of Tahimik's works, including *Perfumed Nightmare*, critically examine globalisation and neocolonialism. Tahimik is widely regarded as the "Father of Philippine Independent Cinema", and he continues to be active in making and screening films. A recently concluded retrospective on Tahimik's complete works was organised by the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin in March 2016.

13

I.



I – IV

Film stills taken from
Perfumed Nightmare (1977)
16mm, 01:34:21

II.



III.



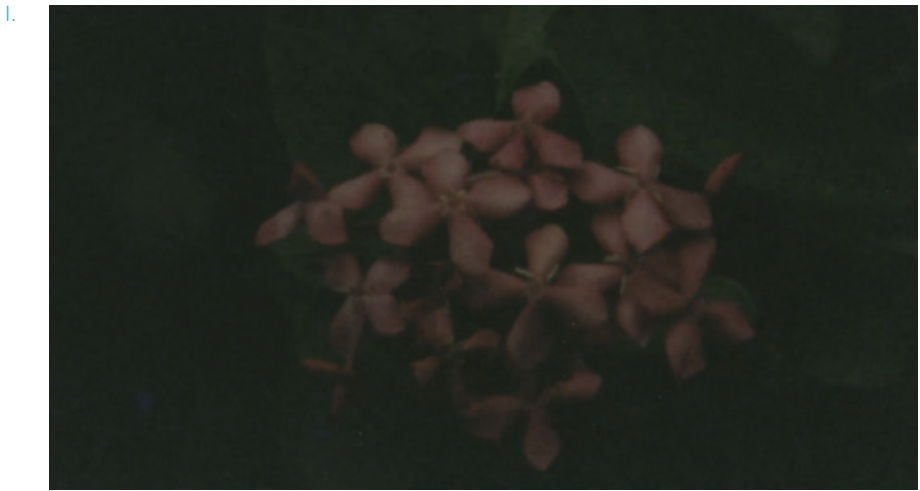
IV.



14

Tuding, the titular character of *Shotgun Tuding* arrives at a rural town to track down the man who got her youngest sister pregnant. She is dead set on finding him with whatever it takes. Set in late-1940s Philippines, *Shotgun Tuding* is a tribute to Filipino adaptations of films set in the American Wild West known as 'Pancit Westerns', a vernacular play on the Spaghetti Western subgenre of Wild West films. *Shotgun Tuding* was commissioned for the Malaysian non-profit WOMEN:girls initiative.

Artist and filmmaker Shireen Seno was born to a Filipino family in Japan, where she spent most of her childhood. She received an Honours B.A. from the University of Toronto with a double major in Architectural Studies and Cinema Studies. Seno started out in film shooting stills for Lav Diaz. In 2011, Seno directed her first feature-length film, *Big Boy*, which won the prize for Best First Film at the Festival de Cine Lima Independiente in Peru. *Big Boy* was screened at numerous film festivals including Jeonju in South Korea, New Horizons in Poland, and Edinburgh in the UK among others. Her latest film project, *Nervous Translation*, was one of 15 projects selected for Venice's Biennale College Cinema in 2013 and was a recipient of a grant from the Hubert Bals Fund. In 2014, it was invited to CineMart in Rotterdam, where it received a grant from The Global Film Initiative and went on to Produire Au Sud in Bangkok. Seno also runs several film and video curatorial projects, including The Kalampag Tracking Agency, a collection of experimental films from the Philippines filmed over the past 30 years.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
Shotgun Tuding (2013)
16mm, 00:13:00

II.



III.



IV.



Where's Francis? is inspired by *Apocalypse Now*, a film on the Vietnam War which was filmed and produced in the Philippines by Francis Ford Coppola. The protagonists of *Where's Francis* are two Filipino movie extras for *Apocalypse Now* who have been buried up to their necks; they are to act as severed heads. In the ensuing nonsensical dialogue filled with gutter and scatological humour and other random things, we find out that the unfortunate extras have been waiting for their director to yell 'cut!' for 30 years. While it makes references to film culture and history in the Philippines, *Where's Francis* also investigates the historical consciousness surrounding the relationship between the Philippines and representations of the Vietnam-American War.

David Griggs is a Sydney-born Australian contemporary artist based in Manila. He graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Painting) from Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney in 1999 and an a Master of Fine Arts (Sculpture), College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales in 2007. Known primarily for paintings that highlight the darker side of humanity, Griggs is currently focusing on video and film. As part of his artistic approach, Griggs interacts with various communities both in the Philippines and Australia while exploring socio-political themes through the use of humour and aesthetic irony. His themes have tackled local festivals and prison life in Manila, outlaw culture in Australia, reactions on the policies of anti-terrorism, and the war imaginary as portrayed on film. In addition to other short films like *I Shall Return* and *Sexpat Idiot Cowboy*, Griggs has produced a full-length feature film about Manila entitled *Cowboy Country*. His paintings and films have been showcased extensively both in Australia and internationally.

I.



I – IV
Film stills taken from
Where's Francis? (2014)
Digital video, 00:07:08

II.



III.



IV.



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Double Vision

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DAVID GRIGGS

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GYM LUMBERA

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ANGEL VELASCO SHAW

ROXLEE

STEPHANIE SYJUCO