

The Unknown Filipina (2010)

The Mangrove Selection (2016/2020)

Recently, when I was sorting out the cellar of my parental home, I found a huge photo album of my stepfather Günter. This particular album struck me because it had no description on the outside and it was thicker than the others, which were labelled with years starting from 1983. This one was obviously made before the time I came to Germany.

It contained a nice collection of snapshot photography, portraits and landscapes from Asia. The images were arranged in a collage style, some were cut to size to focus on a specific composition, and some were arranged together in a documentary narrative, telling stories about people on the streets, working on the field or praying in a temple. Like in a family album, Günter framed them with flight tickets and other documents. On some of the images I found colour dots placed on the lower edge of the frame.

In the last pages of the album, I found a copy of a 1977 newspaper article, folded together with a report of his impressions about the tour. The article explained that in the 1970s the Japanese company Osawa invited German camera salesmen and photographers to visit parts of Asia in order to strengthen economic relationships. This included informative tours to factories in Japan and other destinations in Taiwan and the Philippines. The highlight was when 91 Germans started their trip in February 1977. Günter was one of them, a photographer from North East Bavaria, who was working in a family company called *Photo Eckart*. The newspaper was praising his upcoming photo exhibition called *Fernöstliche Streiflichter* (Far Eastern Highlights).

I asked Günter about the album's story. He took the heavy album in his hands and was amused to see it again. He told me that it was made in the year when he was preparing himself to leave the family company to accept a new job challenge in Nigeria. The first and last photo exhibition he made was *Fernöstliche Streiflichter*. After that he started a new life.

Pointing to the coloured dots he said, 'I wanted to prepare the exhibition and involve others in the selection process. I divided the images in two parts, one part I was sure I wanted to show. The other part I was not sure which to

take for the exhibition, so I attached them on the corridor wall in the shop. I asked friends, colleagues and business partners from everywhere to look at them and give their selection. Everyone was given 10 dots for rating.'

I wondered who had selected which photographs. Checking my personal criteria of choosing, I started to look through the pages and stopped at one photograph. It caught my eye because of the woman's direct gaze into the photographer's lens. The photograph showed the upper body of a young Filipina, standing at a corner shop, with black shoulder length hair, blue T-shirt and jeans. In my understanding of a good snapshot, Günter had caught the precise movement of her head turning towards him. He captured the moment just where her self-realization of being photographed arises.

Did the unknown woman recognize him in the moment of image making? Did she identify him as a foreigner, a tourist, a photographer or an attractive male? How 'exotic' might he have appeared to her?

I showed Günter my favourite image. It turned out he had made a poster print of it, which he brought with him to Nigeria. He said that this picture was hanging in his living room and whenever guests came and saw it, they expressed surprise that he stopped working as a photographer.

I asked him if he knew more about this woman, but he assured me that he didn't know her. Nor did he talk to her before or after he made this snapshot of her, zooming in with a 210 mm lens. Suddenly in our conversation, he remembered having a small party in his house with a group of expatriates and Filipino guest workers. It was there that he met my mother for the first time; she was one of the Filipino English teachers working there.

At the party, my mother had stood in front of the image, wondering: 'How did you make your way to this place?'



FERN ÖSTLICHE STREIFLICHTER

JAPAN
TAIWAN
PHILIPPINEN
COLOR-GROSSBILD-REPORTAGE VON
GÜNTER ECKART HOF
IN DEN SCHALTERRÄUMEN DER
SCHMIDT-BANK
HOF, ALTSTADT 29-31
VOM 9. JUNI-8. JULI 1977
WERKTAGS WÄHREND DER SCHALTERSTUNDEN

INFO mation zu: **FERN ÖSTLICHE STREIFLICHTER** Günter Eckart, Hof Hof Altstadt 18, Tel. 498241-3000

Frankenpost/Hofer Anzeiger
Vorschau am 08. Juni 1977:

Fernöstliche Streiflichter
Photo-Galerie von Günter Eckart in Räumen der Schmidt-Bank

HOF — Eine Ausstellung besonderer Art ist in der Altstadt-Hof vom 9. Juni bis 8. Juli zu sehen. Günter Eckart zeigt eine "Fernöstliche Streiflichter". Er hat es sich dabei bei Fotoreisen, die er während seiner zwei Reisen in Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong, die Philippinen und Thailand gemacht hat. Und die Frau der Zeit bekannte Fotografin hat zu einer Fotoreise mit ihm. Japan, Taiwan, Hongkong, die Philippinen und Thailand sind die Länder, die er in seiner Reise besucht hat. Japan ging er mit dem ersten Weltkrieg im Werk. Höfer für eine Ausstellung an den Hof.

Die Galerie zeigt vielseitige Motive, vor allem Kinder, Landschaft und kulturelle Einzelheiten. Eckart hat auch einige Souvenirs mitgebracht, die im Zusammenhang mit den Aufnahmen, die er während seiner Reisen gemacht hat, zu sehen sein werden. Die Bilder, die er während seiner Reisen gemacht hat, sind in der Galerie zu sehen. Die Galerie ist in der Hof, Altstadt 29-31, zu sehen. Die Galerie ist in der Hof, Altstadt 29-31, zu sehen. Die Galerie ist in der Hof, Altstadt 29-31, zu sehen.

Info-Zentrale über die zweite Reise
Günter Eckart, Hof Hof Altstadt 18, Tel. 498241-3000



Info-Zentrale über die zweite Reise
Günter Eckart, Hof Hof Altstadt 18, Tel. 498241-3000

Frankenpost/Hofer Anzeiger 8 June 1977

FAR EASTERN HIGHLIGHTS

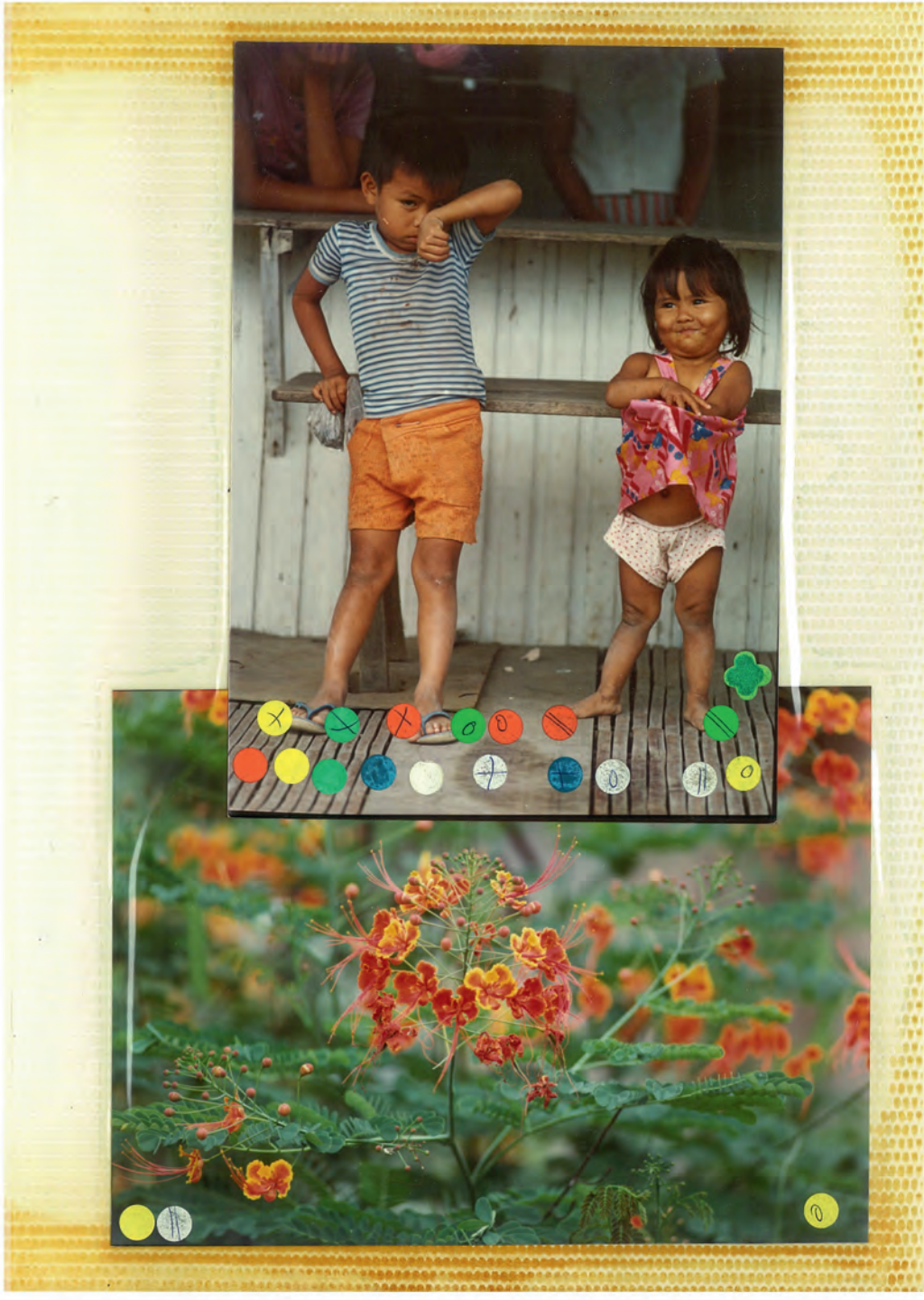
Photo Exhibition of Günter Eckart at the Schmidt-Bank

Hof. — A special kind of exhibition awaits the audience from June 9 to July 8 at the Schmidt-Bank. Günter Eckart's Photo Gallery entitled *Far Eastern Highlights* shows colour pictures taken during his two trips to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Thailand. It started when a well-known photo company invited a group of photographers to an educational and informative trip to Japan. Günter Eckart seized the opportunity and recorded his travel impressions with his camera. It was during the second trip (Bangkok, Hong Kong, Japan) that the decision was made to collect, and later to organize and select the pictures for an exhibition.

a unique idea. From the 93 participants of the trip, only one other participant in addition to Eckart has used the material for an exhibition. During the exhibition, a non-stop slideshow about the second trip (Bangkok, Hong Kong, Japan) can also be seen. Further information about the exhibition can be read in the posters around the city and flyers available from the Schmidt-Bank.

The general motifs depicted in the pictures are varied: mankind — especially children, landscape, and cultural places. Souvenirs brought from these different countries will lend atmosphere to the exhibitions, although they will not be on sale, unlike the pictures themselves. All the pictures, according to Eckart, can also be developed as posters or as wallpapers. What









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EXPLORE EXHIBITION

LIZZA MAY DAVID

The Mangrove Selection

Photographs courtesy of Günter Eckart

1977/2019

Photo album pages on carton board

Collection of the Artist

Why display photographs made by my stepfather Günter for this exhibition? Sending them from Germany back to the Philippines, where they were taken 42 years ago, is a gesture of "bringing back what was taken there". In addition, my artwork addresses a tourist's perspective of being in the Philippines, the photographic gaze, and authorship.

In the 1970s, the Japanese company OSAWA invited German photographers to visit parts of South East Asia in order to strengthen economic relationships through camera sales. Günter was one of those 91 photographers making this tour and experimenting with new MAMIYA cameras. Back in Germany, in preparation for a photo exhibition, he gave his friends colour dots for rating to accelerate the selection process. The exhibition was called "Fernöstliche Streiflichter" or "Far Eastern Highlights".





Left: Video stills out of *Looking Inwards* Down: Exhibition view, Congress of Cultures, Kunstraum Bethanien, 2008

LOOKING INWARDS

2008, One-channel video, 1 framed letter

One encounters the meticulously ordered household, from the kitchen through to the bedroom and into the laundry, that a Filipino domestic worker in Hong Kong had filmed with a video kamera. Her filming displays a caring, loving perspective on the objects whose cleanliness and order she cares for as the live-in housemaid. Does she love any of these possessions of her employer, possessions that she herself cannot afford? Do they remind her of her own belongings, that she had to leave behind in her own country in order to make money abroad?
Text: Nam-See Kim

The result of this is an intimate approach to her working and living space in Hongkong. It is a visual approach about the ethics of image-making, a reflection about philippine identity abroad and it's feeling of alienation. It is also about how power relations are interconnected with private space.



Untitled Painting #1- ∞

2020, 1335 Mabini Gallery in Manila, Philippines

Out of the ruins of modernity emerges a signal of light: the non-human entity Diwata leaves polygonal traces, turns the forms of satellite solar panels into dysfunctional abstract visions, accompanied by a rhythm of gesture making. A minimal note extracted and put into scale, transforming into subsonic frequencies, a memory of stargazing.

The exhaustion of fuel machines, composing soundscapes of constant alert, lulling each other into the sleep of the displaced. Abundance and debt playing the never-ending game between dream and reality. What she knows operates as violence, a cruel gaze, addressed only to the sincere ones. - lmd



exhibition view



5-6-7-8-9 -DIWATA", each 42x29cm, oil on wood panels, 2020

Untitled Painting #1-∞



exhibition view



1-2-3-DIWATA", each 42x29cm,
oil on wood panels, 2020

Bahala Ka [What do I know?]

2020, Kunstverein Hildesheim, Germany

In her solo exhibition Bahala Ka [What do I know?], Lizza May David shows small and large-scale oil paintings, inspired by texts on precolonial Philippines. Going beyond visual representation, her paintings suggest imaginations of non-time/-spaces, and are re-located through a dialog with the element of air, circulating through the architecture of the Kehrwiederturm.

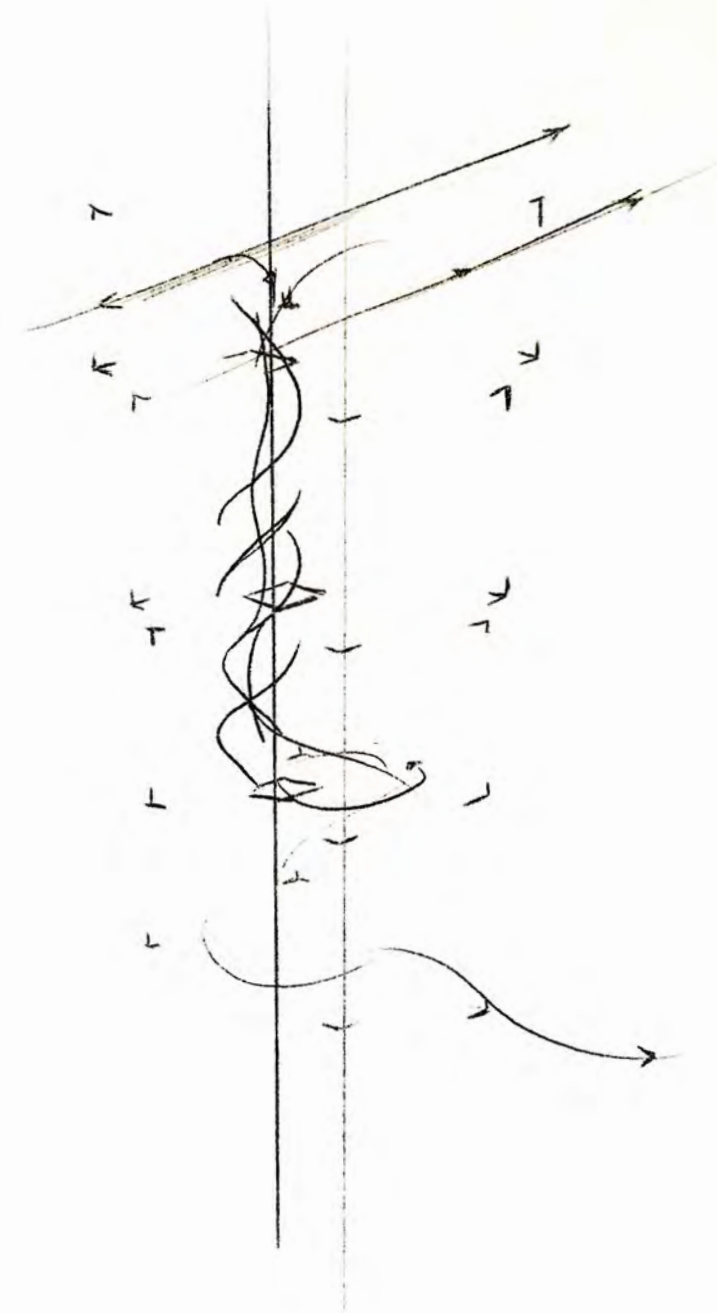
Out of an examination with the Western canon of art and the production of knowledge as well as questioning the academic production of knowledge, Lizza May David has also developed works in 2020 in Manila for the exhibition Untitled Painting Nr. 1-∞, which addresses the concept of not-knowing as well as the endlessness of space in relation to the body. She based this work on images produced by the Philippine earth observation satellites "Diwata-2", a name which means "Shepherd of the Heavens" in Philippine mythology. In the exhibition, the artist unites an examination on the perspective of the gaze (from above, mediated mechanically) with experiences of subjectivity in painting. Her pursuit of not-knowing/the Unknown is therefore to be understood as an important starting point and focus in her works.

The exhibition title is composed of a reference to not-knowing ("What do I know?") as well as the expression "Bahala ka", which can not only indicate a large number (Bahala: one hundred million) but can also mean "I leave it to you" (Bahala ka).^[1] An expression that through its ambiguity, is telling of precolonial mathematical numbering as well as the measurement of value and attributions of social responsibility.

[1]"Bahala" is translated from Tagalog of the 16th century to "one hundred million" (Noceda & San Lucar, 1754, cited by Jean-Paul G. Potet). According to Ricardo Manapat, for numbers that are more than one hundred million, one says "Bahala ka" ("I leave it to you") (Francisco Blancas de San Jose, Arte y reglas de la lengua Tagala, 1610, cited in Manapat's Mathematical Ideas, 332). "Bahala" also means "God of the Heavens" in the creation story of Luzon, and references its Sanskrit origin as "bhará" (=responsibility, weight, burden).



exhibition view
Mezzazin



Luftzirkulation Axonometrie, 2020,
78x68cm, gerahmte Kohlepapier-
Zeichnung auf Kunstdruckpapier

Bahala Ka [What do I know?]



exhibition view
2nd floor



mmmmmm, 2020
7 paintings, 78x68cm each
Oil on canvas

Bahala Ka [What do I know?]



exhibition view, 3rd floor:
Diwata [What do I know?] I-III, 2020
280x570cm (3x190x280)
Oil on Canvas

How Many Seas Will You Swim?

26'36" Videoloop, 2019

Lizza May David & Gabriel Rossell-Santillán

Installation with single-channel video and wallpaper

Brunei Gallery - SOAS University, London

Inspired by chants and myths from Mexico and the Philippines, *How many seas will you swim?* displays David and Rossell Santillán's ongoing exploration of the ocean as a spatial dimension and relational point of view.

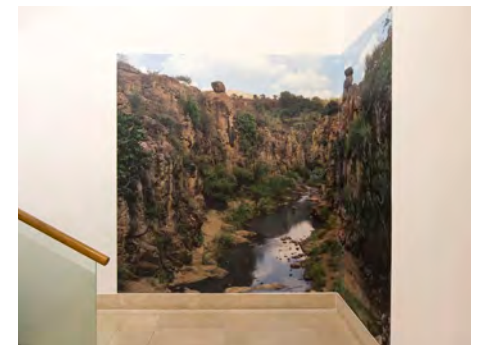
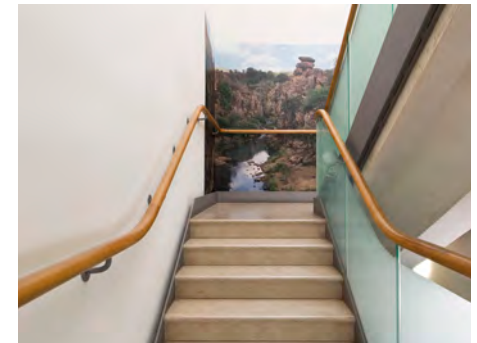
Trailing through the Brunei Gallery site—starting within the Foyle Special Collections Gallery, moving down the gallery staircase before situating itself in a darkened cove under the stairs themselves on levels 0 and -1—the artists follow traces of the Bauhinia orchid tree, using it to speculate upon trade relations during New Spain.

Bridging the natural with the spiritual, among the many tropes they explore is the figure of the Binukot, a noblewoman and spiritual guide of the Panay Bukidnon people in the Visayas region of the Philippines. Mysterious, as they are secluded from the common folk, the Binukot are first chosen among the most beautiful offspring of the nobles, then hidden from the sun, their feet not allowed to touch the ground. Binukot are tasked to memorise the genealogy of their families and commit to memory the traditional folklore only handed down from generation to generation by spoken word. Only the Binukot have the honour of memorising and retelling these epic songs and stories as they have no written form. The Binukot are living vessels to their peoples' histories, embodying memory, becoming archives.

Working from their own artistic and cultural backgrounds, their installation intuitively follows visual appearances, indigenous stories, archival materials, daily news, and dream-like states in order to sketch a dispositif for alternative knowledge and for unravelling multi-layered concepts of time.



exhibition view



exhibition view

video stills



How Many Seas Will You Swim?

Lizza May David & Gabriel Rossell-Santillán

Installation with single-channel video, metall structures, plaster, curtains, framed orchid prints

VIVA EXCON 2018, Roxas City, Philippines



video still

the Royal Botanical Expedition dating from 1787
I also found the names *Bahuinia divaricata*,



exhibition views



ORNAMENTAL ECHOES

2016, Installation with paintings and videos

(Part of the event series: No new kind of Duck: Ways of carving out space for conflicting realities, Rosa-Luxemburg Platz, Berlin)

1. Into Not to it, oil on canvas, 75 x 85cm
2. I try, acrylic on canvas, 30x40 cm
3. Trias/#3 (red painting), oil on canvas, 30 x 40cm
4. You try, oil on canvas, 40x40cm

5. Drawings
single-channel-video, 4:54 min. voices: Lizza May David and Ricky Francisco.

The video shows drawings by Jose Ruize Tence, a proponent of Social Realism in the Philippines. He worked for several newspapers in the Philippines during the times of Martial Law in the 1980s.

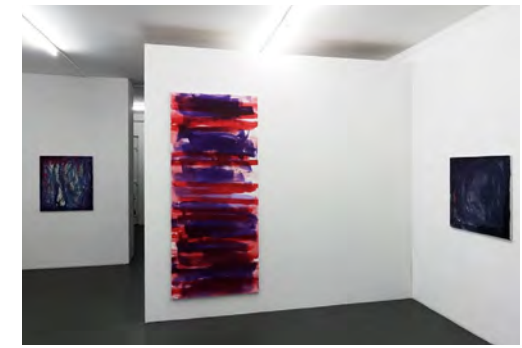
6. Plants
single-channel-video, 12:45 min. voices: Lizza May David and Jan Verwoert

The video shows pages from A Pictorial Guide to the Native Plants of Mt. Tapulao, courtesy of Ulysses Ferreras. Ferreras documents plants throughout the Philippines which face extinction due to the massive destruction of jungle habitats caused by resource mining and climate change.

7. Trias/#1, oil on canvas, 70x70cm
8. See you through the end of times, oil on canvas, 90x70cm
9. Backstage - horizontal/#1, acrylic and ink on canvas, 210 x 90cm

Exhibition view, videos „Drawings“ and „Plants“, painting 2.4

Exhibition view right, painting 1. 9. and 7



Screenshots of Videos „Drawings“ and „Plants“



UMWELT

2015, Galerie Duemilla, Manila, Philippines

Performing the tropic

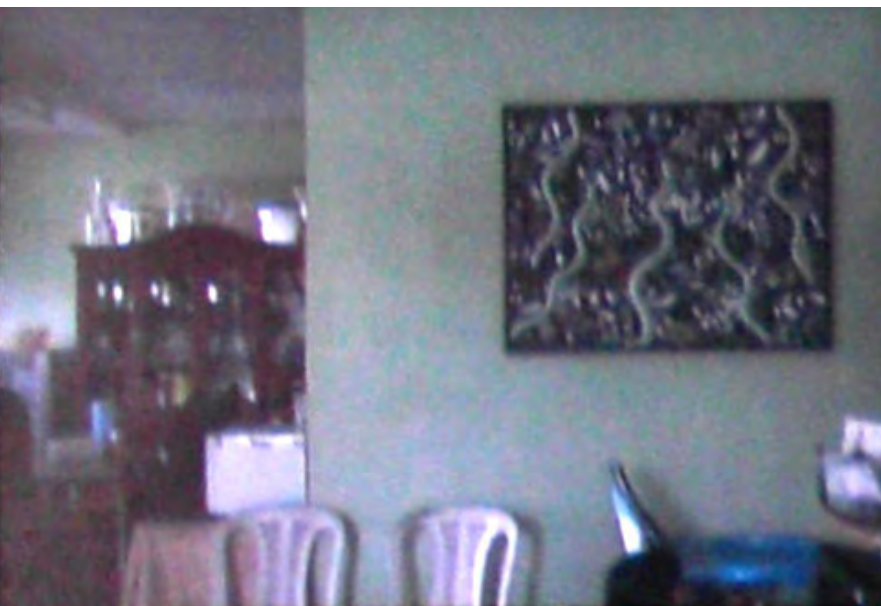
Exhibition text by Lisa Ito

Lizza May David's fifth solo exhibition of new works reflects on how the encounter with the tropical is likened to utopia: an ideal and othered state. Utopia exists in the imagination as an elusive condition; conversely, the artist explores the idea of the tropics as social construction, with its attendant stereotypes, tropes, and possibilities. Titled after the German word for 'environment', Umwelt begins with the artist's exploration of the affective qualities of nature: proceeding from her own physical response as a painter to the "plurality of beauty" represented by the color green, in particular. Her own transnational background (born in the Philippines and based in Berlin) may have provided the conceptual and sensory impetus to bridge the distance between the contested notion of paradise and its translation into contemporary painting. (...)

Animal Look, 2015,
C-Print, 60x80cm
ausgestellt in Galerie
Zimmermann-Kra-
tochwill, 2016



Exhibition view, Das Urbild, 2015,
oil on canvas; Jungle Fever, 2015,
C-Print, 60x80cm



Up left: Screenshot video material
Others: Exhibition views at Beyond
Reproduction: Mothering, Kunst-
raum Bethanien, 2011



LUDY'S PAINTING

2011, Installation, One-channel video, loop, Acrylic painting,
80x60 cm, Videomaterial out of *Cycles of Care*

Ludy was a former care worker once living in Israel. In her house
- now in the Philippines, where she came back after years of
being abroad - she talks about a painting, which was given to
her after the death of her employer.

The painting and the wall color are mixed and repainted upon the
basis of the rgb-videoimage. The question of translatability and
representation of content and media material as a starting point
goes to reflections on painting itself and its transfer to digital
reproduction and vice versa, making links to the moving subjects
in the realm of transnational migration.





View at Ateneo Art Gallery, 2013

THE INCOMPLETE PROJECT

2013, 140 x 200 cm, Acrylic and Oil on Canvas (triptych)

30.5 x 44.5 cm, Stamp pad Ink on Paper, 50 pieces

30 x 36 cm, Oil and Ink on Canvas

Engaging with the permanent collection of Ateneo Art Gallery The Incomplete Project focuses on Filipino Modernity. David introspects on her own background of education abroad and re-discovers these works under the backdrop of hierarchal classification models, translation, representational practices and reproduction techniques touching sensitive notions like the concepts of “originality” and “copy”, the “periphery” and “central”.

Beyond the practice of research-based art, David translates the language to her own familiarity through the process of painting. She finally traces back early Filipino painters who copied engravings with religious motifs, which came from Spain by the way through Mexico, mostly done by Dutch and Flemish engravers.



ARTIST UNKNOWN

2014, Installation Inside: Photographs of archived paintings, Curtains, Canvas; Installation Atrium: 7 Tarpaulins

In ARTIST UNKNOWN, Lizza May David works with a marginal aspect of the CCP Visual Arts Collection: the unclassified works. Established during modernization efforts of the postwar era, with an emphasis on the seventies and eighties, the CCP Visual Arts Collection consists of more than 1000 artworks. David focuses on the 43 works in the collection that are listed as 'Unknown' in the categories of 'Artist', 'Title' and 'Year of production'.

Exploring the syntax and grammar of an "exhibition", the artist experiments with "installation", and "display", investigating the potency of an institutional space, and thereby its architectural framework.

The installation deals with in/exclusion, visible/invisibility of cultural knowledge. It plays with the visitor's expectation of what can or cannot be included in a museum collection. Detached from expectations of the "artist name" and its novelty, David developed an alternative reading approach to exacerbate the visual language of tradition. Art history has generally been taught on the basis of the history of works of art, their formal characteristics and materials, and the circumstances that contributed to their coming into existence.^[1] Works of art are exhibited according to a determined spatial grammar. The architecture used in the interiors of most exhibition spaces tends to privilege a certain type of art, mostly paintings or sculptures and architecture is constructed to suit the exhibition of painting and sculpture.

In ARTIST UNKNOWN, curtains are installed at the track lights that are conventionally used to hang spotlights for exhibited art works, blank canvases invite engagement as to what images need belong. The documentation process as photography is being displayed itself. A selection of documented paintings show methods of parallel tracks to modernist forms. What can we discover in reading the visual language of Philippine Modernity? What kind of potency does institutional critique play in the construction of art and artistry in the complex formation of identities?^[2]

Excerpt of text by Lian Ladia together with Lizza May David.

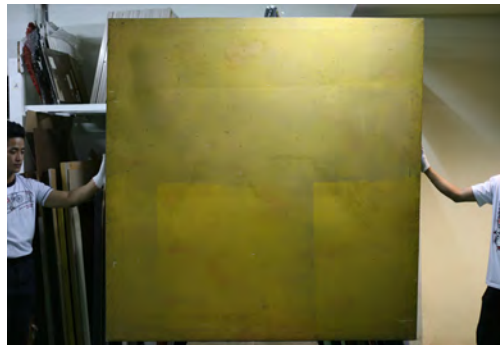
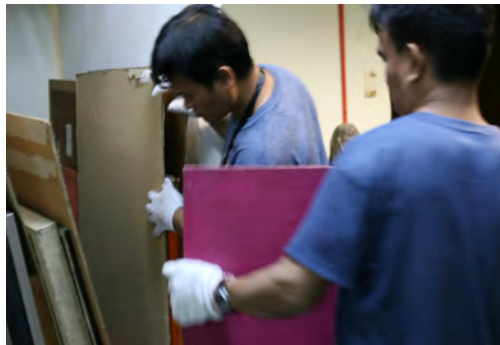
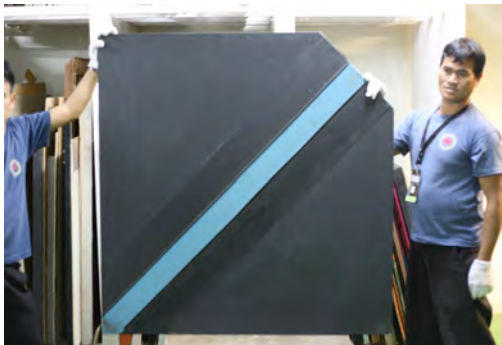
[1] Bartomeu Mari, "The Tasks of Curating", *Manifesta Journal* No 7, 2009.

[2] Flaudette May Datuin, "Imaging/Restaging Modernity: Philippine Modernism in An/Other Light", *Perspectives on the Vargas Museum Collection: An Art Historical and Museological Approach*, 1998.

Right: Dokumentation images of unclassified works



Right: Exhibition view/ Outside Atrium



ARTIST UNKNOWN Documentation images of unclassified works; the photographs were exhibited in the gallery

L-Stellen

2018, Hamburger Bahnhof

Performance Workshop im Rahmen der Ausstellung
Hello World - Revision einer Ausstellung

Ausgehend von einem „L-förmigen“ Objekt, wird der Bezug zwischen Besucher_innen, Architektur und den Kunstwerken analysiert und verhandelt. Das Objekt wurde von der Künstlerin in Anlehnung an ein Objekt aus einer philippinischen Sammlung gestaltet. Gemeinsam mit der Kunsthistorikerin Dr. Eva Bentcheva werden Hintergründe des Objektes erörtert und eine Performance entwickelt.



L-Stellen, performance by Lizza
May David at Hamburger Bahnhof, 29
July 2018. Photographs by Lizza May
David and Trinkä Lat



From L to E: Working with Archival Contingencies

Lizza May David and Eva Bentcheva in conversation

Since 2013, Berlin-based artist Lizza May David has developed works which explore the histories and potentialities of archival gaps. While working with the art collection of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 2014, David chanced upon a series of grey L-shaped paintings unidentified as to their author and thus were listed in the inventory under “Artist Unknown” which she took up as the subject of several exhibitions and performances in Manila and Berlin. In conversation with art historian Eva Bentcheva, the artist discusses her interest in archival gaps in her work in the Philippines and Germany, and details how their collaboration unearthed the author of the “unknown” works from the CCP collection.



Fig. 1 Documentation of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Art Collection, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David

Eva Bentcheva (EB): I recently had the pleasure to work with you on developing a workshop on Philippine conceptual art which accompanied your live performance, *L-Stellen*, at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin on the 29th July 2018. Interestingly, this project has its roots in a series of grey L-shaped paintings by an unknown artist which you encountered in the collection of one of Manila’s most influential art institution, the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) in 2014. As it turned out, the story behind these paintings is connected in a fascinating way to Philippine art history—and its omissions—as well as your own practice. For me, your project speaks to certain debates around the current state of modern art institutional archives and collections and how they operate in the Philippines and Germany. To understand all this, perhaps we can start with your earlier projects. Can you tell me how the concept for this recent performance evolved?

Lizza May David (LMD): In 2014, I was part of the CCP’s annual Venue Grant Program. This gave me the opportunity to create new work and present it in an exhibition at the CCP exhibition spaces under the directorship of Ma. Victoria T. Herrera. In preparing for this work, I took the CCP’s art collection as my starting point to delve deeper into Philippine modernism. This project was, in fact, inspired by an even earlier work which I did with the Ateneo Art Gallery Collection in Manila in 2013, for which I found the method of “painterly appropriation” to be best suited to the concepts I was engaging. The work was called *The Incomplete Project*, and was displayed as part of the group exhibition, *You Have Every Right* curated by Lian Ladia. On that occasion, I referred to works from the Ateneo Art Gallery’s collection which were being exhibited in parallel. Inspired by Jürgen Habermas’s text, *Modernity: An Unfinished Project* (1980), I worked with processes of appropriation, archival research, observation, memory and the translation of painterly forms and gestures. Further study of the works I selected from the CCP art collection brought me to search for transnational resonances by comparing them to my

own artistic training and production in Germany and use this knowledge very consciously as material to work with critically.

EB: When you mention “transnational resonances,” it is of course impossible not to think about the history of the CCP which has held a very influential position in Philippine art. Established in 1966 upon the initiative of then president Ferdinand Marcos, with Imelda Marcos as its Chair, the CCP was closely tied up to the cultural politics of the dictatorial Marcos regime whose national drives towards spectacle, “greatness” and “progressiveness” became imbricated with notions of the “avant-garde” practices in the Philippines.¹ In the first two decades of its existence, under the directorship first of Roberto Chabet, followed by Raymundo Albano, the CCP Art Museum particularly supported artists who worked with minimalist, abstract and conceptually-leaning practices which did not espouse explicit political messages and resonated instead with international movements. In this respect, both the CCP’s archive of documentation, publications and publicity materials, as well as its collection of artworks, are closely bound up with its own curatorial programme and political history. How did you go about carrying out your artistic and archival research?

LMD: Upon my initial inspection of the inventory list of the CCP’s collection, I was struck by the fact that alongside a number of names which were already known to me—for instance, Roberto Chabet, Arturo Luz, David Medalla—there were also 43 works whose authors were categorized as “Artist Unknown” which caught my attention. This applied to photographs, prints, paintings and two sculptures. Upon my request, the CCP Visual Arts and Museum Division staff granted me access to these works in order to engage with them artistically. After being sent available photographs of these “artist unknown” artworks, I became eager to search the archive myself and photographically appropriate the works *in situ*. As part of this effort, I paid particular attention to the conditions in which the works in the CCP art collection could be found, and my documentation process. This focus on their condition resulted on my choosing to display only my process of documentation, and not the works themselves. For me, it was more about making a conceptual gesture, rather than about producing research to update the inventory list. This also led me to question the role of the artist when working with archives.

EB: Why this interest in the “unknown”?

LMD: For me, when a museum’s archive is made publicly available, it provides not only an understanding of institutional interests, but also a reading of the so-called “gaps” and “marginal occurrences” in the system; a sort of micro-mirror of the place in which that specific archive happens to be anchored at a given moment in time. It is a place where diverse subjectivities become entangled with one another. I believe that when placed in the spotlight, archives have a certain power both to illustrate specific perspectives, as well as alternative narratives if reorganized. In this respect, working with the concept of the “unknown” sets up an artistic framework for me; it serves as a speculative suggestion where alternative thought processes are possible, and where space is left for coincidences to develop.

¹ On the CCP’s support for showing performative, conceptual and installation under the rubric of “avant-garde” practices, Patrick Flores has argued that “the ‘avant-garde’ in this situation was an investment in ‘culture’ as a mode of agency: the Filipino as an expressive force, and relationality as a scheme for the gathering of energies. It converged in the performative, in a *palabas*, that is at once spectacle and ruse.” Flores, Patrick. “‘Total Community Response’: Performing the Avant-garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila.” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 13-38, p. 14. For further discussions on the relationship between experimental and performative practices as espoused by the CCP in the late 1960s until the 1980s, see Pastor Roces, Marian. ‘Outline for Reviewing the Avant-Garde’, San Juan (August 1985): 8-10.; Cruz, Joselina. “Transitory Imaginings.” *Pananaw: Philippine Journal of Visual Arts*, no. 5 (2005): 18-29.

EB: In other words, the “unknown” serves as a signifier of the archive’s contingencies? It is certainly intriguing that you were already conscious at this stage of the importance of coincidence, particularly as this later came to play a very big role in this project, but we will come to that shortly. In the meantime, could you explain whether your initial motivation was to excavate and discover the collection for yourself, or did you set out to intervene?

LMD: Yes, I intended to intervene to a certain extent. With the help of the CCP VAMD team and their team of interns, I was given permission to rearrange certain works in the collection and to photograph them according to my own system of ordering over the course of two days. During the photo shoot, I was struck by three single grey paintings that seemed to be part of a series, or to comprise a section of a larger work. They lent their form to a performative play of arrangements within a framework of speculation, all of which I photographed. The students were key in playing around with and exploring how these grey-toned, L-shaped art objects could be put together.

EB: This process makes me think back to Jacques Derrida’s understanding of archives not as static, but as generative spaces. How did these experiments serve to develop your sense of familiarity with the works?

LMD: After photographing the 43 works, I noticed that some of them reminded me of pieces I had seen during my art studies at the Academy of Visual Arts in Nuremberg around 1998. Over the course of my studies, several former classmates studying under Prof. Rolf-Gunter Dienst had experimented with squares and stripes, within the context of Concrete Painting. He was known during the German post-war period for his paintings with calligraphic textures, as well as his work as editor of the art magazine, *Das Kunstwerk*, from 1965 to 1991—one of the key publications on modern and contemporary art history in West Germany. Prof. Dienst had a critical orientation towards Conceptual Art. I was now observing what seemed to be a similar influence on several of the works in the CCP art collection. I wanted to explore this resonance of forms, or parallels, more closely. Thus, I decided to look for similar, low-relief surfaces which I could work with in the form of a photographic document for my planned exhibition in the CCP Small Gallery.

EB: There is an interesting parallel here between your encounter of these works in the collection and how you perceived them through the prism of discourses from the USA and Europe. As you mentioned, this has partially to do with your own training in Germany. However, it is important to note that these very same discourses around minimalism, abstract expressionism and conceptualism also played a very influential role in the CCP’s visual arts programme after its inauguration in 1969. Many of the works which you were viewing in the collection were likely produced between the 1970s and 1980s, a period in which the discussions around “experimentalism” and “institutionalism” were central to CCP’s curatorial programme, first under the directorship of Roberto Chabet and later under Raymundo Albano.²

LMD: Indeed, this raised several questions for me; how were the paintings from the CCP art collection and those by my former classmates related? To what extent did the post-war American orientation of both countries—Germany and the Philippines—have a lasting

² The adaptation of discourses on the avant-garde, and “experimentalism” from the USA to the Philippine context and the institutional demands of the CCP was a particular point of interest for the writings and curatorial statements of the CCP’s second artistic director, Raymundo Albano, who held the post from 1970 to 1985. See Albano, Raymundo. “A Decade of Developmental Art.” Cultural Center of the Philippines, January 1979; Albano, Raymundo. “Developmental Art of the Philippines.” *Philippine Art Supplement* 2, no. 4 (July to August 1981): 15-16.



Fig. 2 Documentation of the Cultural Center of the Philippines Art Collection, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David.

influence on the production of knowledge and the transmission of Western ideologies and aesthetics in their localities? To what extent did Concrete Painting's insistence on being "universal" lay the groundwork for transmitting ideas of modernity in the form of Western ideologies? And finally, how did all these questions relate to my own paintings which I had been producing in both countries—Germany and the Philippines.

EB: How did you go about translating these ideas into an exhibition which centered on these L-shaped forms by a (then) unknown artist?

LMD: To understand the L-shaped paintings better, I should first explain what my exhibition, *Artist Unknown* (2014), comprised. Up until that point, the unclassified works which I had found consisted of photographs, paintings, some sculptures and prints with Indian motifs. The *Artist Unknown* exhibition itself took place in two spaces of the CCP building. The first was in the Small Gallery in which I placed an installation of nine A0 formats and ten 10cm by 15cm digital photos, apart from two canvases with white backgrounds measuring 14 inches by 16 inches, and black curtains all along the exhibition space mounted from the pre-installed lighting strip. I did not work with the original pieces from the collection, but rather the work took on a documentary character. I exhibited ten digital photographs. These depicted the process of archival work, along with a small selection of photographs of the color field paintings themselves.

In addition, two unpainted canvases were included in the space as a reference to a concept which only revealed itself later in the performance: namely, the disclosure of the biographical and the interrelated questions about the value of the painting, the artwork in itself. The movable black curtains set up a field of architectonic interference, inviting the spectator to playfully observe the photographs from near and far. The second iteration took place in an atrium where I mounted three documentation pictures in a row in order to create an allusion to—and an illusion of—the L-shaped objects from the collection. Simultaneously, along the seven windows, the photo-documentation were scaled up to 240xm by 227cm, printed on tarpaulins, which gave the impression that the photographed archive shelves merged into to row of windows in the atrium.

An accompanying performance took place on another day within the Small Gallery. I changed my positioning between the curtains separating the exhibition space based on the three perspectives which I was speaking from: a curatorial description, a biographical reflection, and an iteration of the "unknown" artworks from the CCP's catalogue. Who sees the archive and who has access to which archives or collections? Who speaks and from

Fig. 3 Detail, *Artist Unknown*, Small Gallery Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David



which space do you speak? This is why it was important for me to make a performance to emphasize the relationship between body and architecture—“Le point de vue est dans le corps,” says Leibniz/cited by Deleuze/cited by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.

EB: This work was, in a sense, very timely. The past decade has seen a flourishing of interest, not only in the Philippines, but also across Southeast Asia to redress the histories of erasure.³ This has taken place through artistic initiatives, as well as exhibitions, archive-building and research.⁴ It seems to me that the very form of your exhibition—its fragmented picturing of the archival research process, juxtaposed with allusions to the works categorized as “Artist Unknown” lends a critical tone towards the erasures and gaps in Philippine art history. What new insights did you gain through this process?

LMD: Through this exhibition, I came closer to understanding the fragility of archives. To anyone who has ever worked with archives, it is very evident that documents can easily be lost or rendered untraceable. Even more gravely, when misused by authorities, the narratives of archives can also be treated as flexible and easily “told” in a different way. This made me think back to what a friend of mine, Claudia del Fierro, once said to me, that archives should *not* be fixed; it is in the hands of the subjectivities entangled within those archives to rewrite their own stories. For me, this remains a very interesting debate — where is the divide between the private and public, fact and fiction, violence and repair, when it comes to searching for facts and narratives in archives? When preparing for

³ For recent discussions of the role of archives in Southeast Asian art history, see Allen, F.; Kwan, A.; Wolfarth, J. (eds.), “Archives,” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2019.

⁴ Examples of individual practices focusing on historical research, collecting, and archiving include Arin Rungjang’s *And Then There Were None, (Tomorrow we will Become Thailand)* (2016) examining Thailand’s involvement and diplomatic relations during the Second World War; Pao Houa Her’s *Hmong Veterans: Attention Series* (2017), centering on the lack of recognition afforded to veterans of Hmong descent who fought in the Vietnam War on behalf of the USA; Erika Tan’s series of works excavating the history of the Malay weaver, Halimah Binti Abdullah, who passed away in London after participating in the 1924 Empire Exhibition in Wembley. Tan has staged this research in the form of multiple expositions, including the performance debate entitled *Art Rhetoric: Debating History, Nation, and Art: The Ontological Status of the Forgotten Malay Weaver* (2015), the performance-based video installation *Halimah-The-Empire-Exhibition-Weaver-who-Died-Whilst-Demonstrating-Her-Craft* (National Gallery of Singapore, 2015), an installation featuring copies of archival footage and sculptural weaves titled *The Weavers Lament* (2016–7), the performance-based video *Apa Jika, The Mis-Placed Comma* (2017), and the installation *The ‘Forgotten’ Weaver* (2017) at the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017. For a discussion of Rungjang and Tan’s research strategies, see Bentcheva, Eva. “On the Heels of Forgotten Histories: Review of Kilapsaw: Everything Must Go (2016).” *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia*, February 2018: 207-219.



Fig. 4 *Artist Unknown*, Atrium, Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2014. Photographs by Lizza May David

my exhibition at the CCP, I had to constantly question myself; who am I to intervene in this field? May I appropriate not classified works? Is it not a colonizing gesture to do so? How can I work together with those ghosts, those invisible agents in the archive and how should we deal with questions of authorship? These questions kept cropping up, coupled with a growing awareness that Philippine modernity was just one of the many thrusts which governed the CCP's archive and collection. Recognising this, I later worked in collaboration with artist Gabriel Rosell Santillán on a project tracing historical relations between Mexico and the Philippines through the lens of the Bauhinia Tree. This opened up further perspectives on the writing of history, erasures and authorship.

EB: What drove you to revisit your research and exhibition at the CCP in 2018, and to expand upon it in the form of a workshop-performance, *L-Stellen*, at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin?

LMD: This revisitation came about after an invitation to respond to the exhibition *Hello World: Review of a Collection* that took place at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin from April to August 2018. *Hello World* marked for me the first in a series of exhibitions happening throughout Germany which reflected upon discourses around decolonialization in order to review the contents and histories of Germany's art collections. With the participation of numerous curators from different backgrounds, the exhibition reminded me of an endeavor reminiscent of biennales; it sought to make room for multiple perspectives, yet remained at the level of an attempt. For instance, perhaps by virtue of the limitations and absences in the collection of the Nationalgalerie, no artistic position from the Philippines was featured in the exhibition. Reacting to this, I decided to work with the L-shaped wooden panels by the unknown artist from the CCP and, more specifically, to position these within the spaces of Hamburger Bahnhof as an invited "parasitic implantation." This was to take place in the form of a workshop-performance—a form of "feedback" towards *Hello World*. I wondered whether perhaps this could produce a kind of a "closed circuit" situation, in the of manner of an "echoing with post-colonial transliteration."

The title *L-Stellen* was a play on the German term *Leerstellen*, meaning "blank spaces," and the fact that objects were produced in a form that could be associated with the letter "L." The plural word "Stellen" by itself refers to its architectonic associations, both in terms of place (*Stelle* = a location/site) and as the verbal form, "site-ing" or lying down. Because of these associations, I referred to the objects as "L-shaped canvases." With your contribution, the ten participants of the workshop-performance were able to learn more about the

history of these L-shaped canvases. Finally upon your suggestion, we approached Judy as to the author of these paintings. She finally came into the picture, which gave the context of *Artist Unknown* a new twist.

EB: I recall this very well! After you initially told me about your unsuccessful search to find the creator of the L-shaped objects, we had a lengthy discussion about the nature of art which the CCP had championed during the 1970s and 1980s. We decided to take the matter of the “Artist Unknown” into our own hands and to search beyond the information in the CCP’s records, knowing fully well that there had been a large number of artists working with minimalist and conceptual art whose works had been shown at the CCP over those two decades. From Berlin, we shared images of your documentation with artist Judy Freya Sibayan in Manila, in the hope that she would be able to assist us in identifying the maker. Having previously researched Judy’s art in the context of early Philippine Conceptualism, I knew she had not only been an active artist during the 1970s and 1980s, but had also exhibited and worked at the CCP. Our initial message to her thus listed possible (and, naively on our part, all male) artists, including Roberto Chabet, Raymundo Albano and Constancio Bernardo. These were all famous figures who had worked with abstraction, readymade materials and Conceptualism in the manner which approximated the L-shaped objects.⁵ In a very surprising turn of events, Judy promptly responded that the works in question were in fact her own, explaining that they had likely remained at the CCP art storage after the exhibition *Untitled Painting No. 1 and Other Paintings* (16-30 April 1974) curated by Chabet in the Small Gallery. Over the course of time, it seemed that they had been catalogued and integrated into the collection with an unknown provenance and without the knowledge of the artist. This surprise discovery proved a very fruitful outcome. Yet, it also made me think back to an observation by Nora Taylor that in the face of archival absences and incomplete record-keeping in Southeast Asia, chance conversations, friendships and exchanges still play a formative role in the writing of art history.⁶ This was very much a case in point!

All of a sudden, it also meant that new information about the works became available. For instance, Judy explained that she had not conceived the objects as L-shapes, but rather intended them to be joined up and displayed in the form of an ‘E’ in reference to the works of Donald Judd⁷ and made to fit the measurement of the wall they were installed on. These revelations unfolded only days before your performance in Berlin. How did you go about navigating your use of the ‘L-shapes’ afterwards?

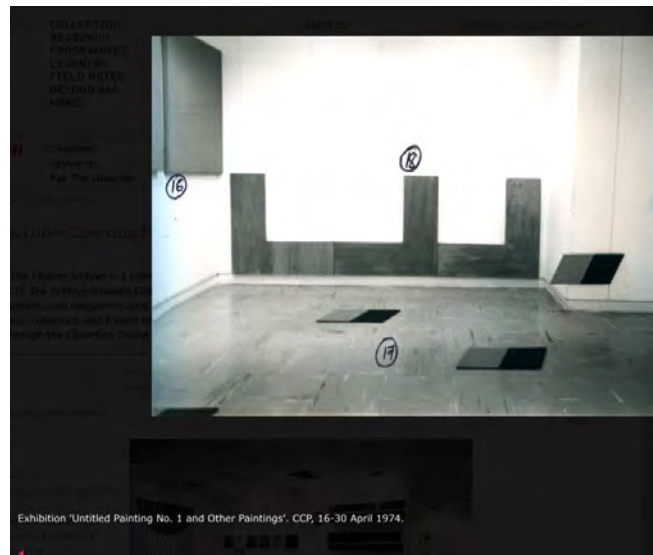
LMD: I already had an intuitive impulse to work with the L-shaped objects in preparing for Hamburger Bahnhof. Apart from that, I admit my old preference for hard-edged canvases shows. Since I had already selected the L-shaped objects as the basis of my work for the CCP atrium, I picked these objects because of their performance potential. The playful approach of the students in the archive in piecing together the three grey elements

⁵ Our inquiry named Roberto Chabet and Constancio Bernardo, both of whom were Sibayan’s mentors at the University of the Philippines from 1972 to 1975. Correspondence with Judy Freya Sibayan, 26.07.2018.

⁶ Recent scholarship seeking to map performative and conceptual histories in Southeast Asian art has stressed the importance of hearsay, chance encounters, networks and coincidence, particularly when looking to account for archival documentation is often fragmented and incomplete. See Taylor, Nora A. “Performance as Site of Memory: Performing Art History in Vietnam and Singapore.” London: Tate Britain, 6 May 2016.

⁷ Judy Freya Sibayan has described classroom exercises in which her tutor, Roberto Chabet, encouraged students to make art based on the works of contemporary artists in the USA. The students’ works were therefore based on “received ideas.” Sibayan, Judy. “Judy Freya Sibayan.” *Mapping Performance Art and Conceptualism in the Philippines: Historiography*. Roundtable Discussion, University of the Philippines, Tate Research Centre: Asia, Manila, (22 August 2017).

Fig. 5 Screenshot from Asia Art Archive website, *Untitled Painting No. 1 and Other Paintings* (16-30 April 1974), Small Gallery, Cultural Center of the Philippines. With permission from Asia Art Archive



had convinced me of this. The objects were shorn of their two-dimensionality and could thus relate so much more to the performer and to the architecture itself—a painting that becomes more of a sculpture as it comes into dialogue with the architecture.

I found it interesting to hear Judy say that this work was influenced by Donald Judd. In my speculative opinion, this abstract object also entails a negotiability through its simple form that seems distant to any idea of authorship; it embodies a kind of “creative commons” form. Precisely because of this, it ironically also echoes Judd’s claim that “the history of art and art’s condition at any time are pretty messy.”⁸ I point this out because I saw on Instagram how a similar L-shaped sculpture by Carmen Herrera was featured by the Lisson Gallery in New York. Having seen these very similar looking works be produced in different contexts, I now ask myself how this abstract minimalist form can lead back to a single author or place, whether New York, Manila or Berlin? It is this field of tension between collective and individual authorship that I see expressed in this form of performance. I was very happy to learn that Judy had created the object instead of a male artist from the Philippine art canon. I had a very enriching dialogue with her when we met during her project *Moving House, Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making* (3 August - 11 November 2018) at Calle Wright in Manila where I learned about her art practice.⁹ I find her position extremely important.

EB: On a conceptual level, this project also echoes several recent attempts to artistically “excavate” art historical knowledge from archives and collections. I am thinking here in particular of examples such as Erika Tan’s ongoing series of research-led works around the history of the Malay weaver, Halimah Binti Abdullah, who was brought to England to perform her craft at the Empire Exhibition of 1924-25, and passed away of pneumonia shortly after. Erika’s practice incorporates primary research into museum and state archives, and often uses abstract modes of installation, video and performance in order to “stage” Halimah’s identity, historical presence and craft in the present. In the process, the boundary of authorship between Erika and Halimah becomes increasingly blurred and

⁸ Donald Judd, “Local History” (1964); Quoted in: Judd (1975, p. 151); and cited in: David Raskin. *Donald Judd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

⁹ An exploration of the gaps in institutional archives is currently the subject of Judy Freya Sibayan’s own initiative ‘Moving House: Unpacking a Life of Critical Art Making’ (3 August – 11 November 2018) at the arts space Calle Wright in Manila, in which Sibayan is revisiting her self-archive, and sorting its contents through a series of interactive and public events, discussions and performances.



Fig. 6-7 *L-Stellen*, performance by Lizza May David at Hamburger Bahnhof, 29 July 2018. Photographs by Lizza May David and Trinka Lat

intertwined across space and time. There is a certain spirit of “transnational *resonance*,” as you have pointed out, that also reverberates in your project as it traverses Manila and Berlin, the CCP and Hamburger Bahnhof, your own voice in the present and Judy’s past practice. Yet, what I find interesting here is that the very notion of the “unknown” has remained central, both in your formal presentation and in your approach to archives and collections as sites of contingency. Even though the author of the L-shapes is now known, you have continued to reactivate the L-forms in order to evoke new “unknowns” in the art collections of Germany.



Fig. 8-9 *L-Stellen*, performance by Lizza May David at Hamburger Bahnhof, 29 July 2018. Photographs by Lizza May David and Trinkla Lat

LMD: It is important to note that when we set up in the spaces of Hamburger Bahnhof, the objects worked again in another way which was different to their original appearance in the CCP. It was no longer about finding out how their forms came together, but rather they worked more as a prop to introduce a kind of interference in the exhibition space and the narratives which *Hello World* was presenting. There were spontaneous dialogues formulated around and with these objects, like horizontal movements, body movements and dance-like reactions; long and short, fast movements. Some participants even laid down with the objects, whereas others produced impromptu sculptures which were staged in relation to the architecture. Observers were irritated since there was no label for the work to be found. These are considerations taken from my own practice in painting where I incorporate errors as artistic material and allow coincidences to happen. In the context of this project, my approach to the “unknown” was to mark the space created *before* it became a “known.” In other words, marking out the space wherein things can still manifest themselves—a space for knowledge that unfolds itself.

Lizza May David’s part of the conversation was translated from German by Cecilia Avanceña.

Snare for Birds

(with Kiri Dalena and Jaclyn Reyes)

- Responding to the Photographies from the Philippines out of the Archive of the Rautenstrauch Joest Museum







