

Women Reinventing Culture Their Role as Cultural Patrons in Postwar Philippines

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In the gendering of the fine arts in postwar Philippines, men are the artists while women are the patrons of the arts. Art patronage coincided with women's ascribed 'space' behind the scenes leaving the center stage to the artists. This essay explores the role and impact of women as patrons through case studies of former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos, Art Association of the Philippines President Purita Kalaw Ledesma, publisher Gilda Cordero Fernando, and those women in such cultural bureaucracies as the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Empowered by their role as patron, these women have succeeded in giving direction to the arts and in promoting their views on the debates about national identity. In this sense, the fine arts in postwar Philippines can be said to have become feminized.

THE CURRENT, ALMOST AXIOMATIC, BELIEF IS THAT WOMEN'S engagement with 'culture' has been in non-proactive roles as either supporters of the fine arts or 'bearers' of cultural values. The possibilities that women can be actual 'shapers' of culture and the arts remain unexplored in the production of knowledge on gender. Even if one utilized two definitions of culture—culture in the anthropological sense (i.e. as a broad set of social values) or culture referring to the fine arts, studies investigating women's roles as 'bearers' of culture' or as artists themselves reveal them as marginalized actors or effective 'mediators', but not 'creators' of culture.

Defining culture in the anthropological sense, scholars do not see women to have been exponential in 'shaping' culture. At best they are described as 'bearers' of culture or cultural 'intermediaries', transmitting culture to children and adults. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner's

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article, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', theorized gender dichotomy in terms of the nature/culture divide with women 'seen to occupy an intermediate position between nature and culture' (Ortner 1974). This middle rank as 'mediator' in a scale lower than culture, 'accounts for the pan-cultural assumption that woman is *lower* than man in the order of things' (Ortner 1974). Ortner's thesis has been critiqued and modified by scholars such as Susan Abeyasekere and Jean Taylor who have insightfully stressed women's critical roles 'as custodians and transmitters of culture' where women 'set the stage for the final male articulation of culture' (Abeyasekere 1983) as they laid the foundation for ritual feasts.¹ Using the colonial era in Indonesia with Batavia as a case study, both Abeyasekere and Taylor show how Batavian-born women in their roles as wives, mistresses, concubines, housekeepers, servants, nurses, cooks, and slaves have been crucial in the Indonesianization of the life of the Europeans and the Chinese. Women have therefore been critical in the process of cultural integration in Batavian society and perhaps even in colonial Southeast Asia (Abeyasekere 1983). Traditionally seen as the support system in kinship structures, women become the proverbial go-between in political and social life and are therefore well-placed as cultural transmitters.

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While women's impact as artists cannot be denied, they have been consistently outnumbered by male professional artists to the point that the fine arts is consciously perceived of as a male invention. Karen Blair's book on women's participation in amateur arts associations in America (1890-1930) articulated the gendering of the fine arts in America: Men were the professional artists while women participated in amateur arts associations, interested in fostering the arts in some form but, by and large, only as dilettantes. The expectation that women had to fulfill first and foremost the exacting role of wife and mother marginalized them from the life of a professional artist; devotion to art was seen to distract women from complying with domestic chores/roles.

Discouraged from becoming professional artists, women with artistic inclinations became active in amateur arts associations instead. But membership in amateur associations involved more than getting a group of women together and producing amateur art. Women's associations encouraged the development of art in their communities. They raised funds for exhibits and performances, lobbied for cultural shows and pageants, gave out scholarships, promulgated art in small towns, fanned the flames of nationalism by privileging American music, played the music of minority groups, and even supported the suffragette movement. Blair (1994) exposed how club-women's participation as a group, even in the amateur art world, gave some direction to the development of arts in America. Yet even in their own women's organizations they 'were content to defer to arts experts and the monied, powerful men in their towns...in order to see that their aim of placing the finest art before the public was realized' (Blair 1994).

The consequence of this gendering of the arts was that women 'were less occupied with making art than with the advocacy of art for their loved ones—defined by them quite broadly to include not only their families but their neighborhoods, social groups, communities, and municipalities as well' (Blair 1994). But as amateur artists, these women had a greater impact in their more subtle but effective role as 'patronesses'. Blair does not refer to the women as 'patronesses' of the arts, since the title of 'amateur artist' classifies them as 'artists' rather than as 'patrons' in the strict sense. A close examination of the activities of these 'clubwomen', however, reveals them as performing the duties of art patrons: Clubwomen were the fundraisers for artistic and cultural events; clubwomen commissioned art works, performances and pageants; clubwomen stimulated amateur art in the local areas and gave scholarships to promising children; clubwomen were both the amateur participants and the audience (most of the audiences were composed of women) in all these cultural events. Thus, Blair's clubwomen crossed the boundaries between patroness and artist (though still amateur artists) though I would argue based on her evidence that their impact on the art world stemmed from their role as patron rather than their role as artist.

Since women have been acknowledged to be 'bearers' of culture in the anthropological sense and women artists have been very few, they have generally not been seen to be influential in the shaping of national culture. But women have been very active as patrons. Most successful fundraisers in postwar Philippines have been women, and women have dominated the administrative arm of many cultural and civic organizations. In this essay, the following activities are included within the ambit of patronage activities so that definitions of patronage can go beyond the scope of the classic definition of the clientele or sponsor of an artistic project: (a) fundraising activities which include the selling of tickets and publicity for art activities, (b) the coordinating activities of patronage organizations which include disseminating information, catering for art openings, using the 'telephone brigade' or calling up friends and other patrons requesting for all forms of support (either as audience in events, doing administrative paperwork for cultural organizations, presenting beauty pageants for fundraising activities, or buying art and building collections for business corporations, foundations and museums), and (c) the activities of the more recent 'bureaucrat as patron or art supporter' who has a government position in a cultural organization with the duty of dispensing grants to artistic and cultural projects as well as conceptualizing and developing specific art projects for the encouragement of a national culture.

Hence, a patron is defined as anyone who exercises power in the art world (whether through money or through the bureaucracy or positions in art foundations) including those in the machinery who control or give direction to the arts or affect the careers of artists. This would include owners of art galleries, museum curators, and art critics. Women, already socialized into functioning as the support system in the dynamics of kinship politics (here defined as utilizing political power to benefit the kinship group, the dominant dynamic in postwar Philippine political culture), are well-placed to be patrons. Women patrons are more visible than their male counterpart, perhaps because they can tap the network of women who can act as an administrative support group for the organization.

As patrons who may also occupy important positions in the administration of cultural organizations, women have the power to decide

which artists to sponsor, which exhibits to support, which performances to promote, and which artistic activities should be publicized in the society pages. In some cases, where patronesses have also exercised political power (whether official power as women politicians or unofficial power as wives or kin of male politicians, or power due to their bureaucratic positions in the Cultural Center of the Philippines or the National Commission for Culture and the Arts), these women have the leverage to decide which artists to catapult to the status of National Artist, which artist to give national recognition, or even what type of art should be encouraged or developed. To give one example, former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos as patron of the arts *par excellence* promoted Filipino painting by buying the works of Filipino painters so that by the 1970s Filipino painters, for the first time, could make a living from painting. Though Imelda Marcos' interest shifted to European art in the mid-70s, her initial patronage inspired a group of wealthy society matrons to continue buying works by Filipino painters.

I have argued elsewhere that in the gendering of power and politics while men exercise official power women hold unofficial power through their kinship and marriage connections with male politicians (Roces 1998). Since Filipino concepts of power (*malakas*) see power held not just by the individual in office but by the entire kinship alliance group, women are powerful political agents because they function as the support system in the dynamics of kinship politics through their roles as wives, sisters, mothers, daughters and mistresses of male politicians. And it is the dynamics of kinship politics which empowers them as prominent cultural patrons. Thus, women's participation as patrons articulates in complex ways the dialogue between culture as a set of social values and practices and culture as fine arts.

Patronage of the arts was compatible with cultural constructions of the feminine: Women were supporters of the artists, but as patrons they exercised power from behind the scenes. Becoming president of a cultural foundation, like the presidency of a civic or charitable foundation (or a beauty title), was one of the few organizational institutions where women were able to claim top positions and hold the official symbols of power. While there were also male patrons (Fernando and Jaime Zobel, Jaime Laya and Leandro 'Lindy' Locsin are some promi-

nent examples), particularly if one applied my broad definition of patronage activities which include administrative functions, women far outnumbered men as cultural patrons. The actual impact, dynamics (through kinship politics), and character of the patronage process itself may not be particularly gendered (with male patrons also having similar impact and performing somewhat similar duties as female patrons), but the numerical dominance of females in this sphere converges with the cultural construction of femininity and feminine power in the Filipino cultural matrix. Women as patrons are not only fulfilling traditional female roles as supporters of the kinship group, they also reinforce gendered images of power: Powerful women were expected to promote cultural and artistic activities. Patronage gels with women's ascribed 'space' behind the scenes leaving center stage to the artists. In fact, women patrons interviewed for this essay expressed a distaste for the classification 'patron', preferring to see themselves as 'art lovers' who went about soliciting funds and promoting art just for the love of it (Fernando 1998, Ledesma 1998, Laya 1998, Ancellotti-Diza 1998).

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Rather than problematizing the notion of 'patron', this self-perception highlights the complexities, ambivalence, contradictions and euphemisms unleashed by the gendering of women's power and the assignment of feminine roles, and obscures women's self-serving aims which rest primarily in the accumulation of cultural capital, celebrity status, and/or unofficial power. For instance, two of the women interviewed who objected to the use of the term 'patron' to describe their roles (preferring to classify patrons as those who buy art works or sponsor entire productions) were actually Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) GAWAD awardees for special categories (since they were not artists themselves). Purita Kalaw Ledesma received the award for her leadership of the Art Association of the Philippines and Gilda Cordero Fernando for publishing. The GAWAD Award is perceived to be the first step toward becoming a National Artist. In 1999, both women were

included in the list of 100 Centennial awardees honored by the CCP to celebrate the centennial of the Philippine Republic. It is significant to note that the CCP's list of awardees included patrons as well as artists. The term patron is seen by these women as someone whose role is merely to provide the money while remaining aloof and uninvolved in the art project itself. Since they saw themselves to be immersed in the art projects they supported, they were disinclined to label themselves as patrons. These perceptions and attitudes highlight and define the problems with the term patron because these women do more than just provide financial support to art projects; they also promote artists. These empowered women are engaged in reinventing Philippine art and culture.

Downplaying their roles and achievements, denying their power and presenting themselves as self-effacing selfless souls who sacrifice their time, money and energy so that other artists (mostly male) can reap the prestige and the financial success, these women are subscribing to both the traditional views of women as support system for the kin group and the modern discourse of doing everything only for the public good. But if men, as artists, are the 'actors', can women be the 'movers'? As patrons, women give direction to the arts and therefore indirectly shape the arts and culture of contemporary society. In the Philippine case, from the postwar years to the present, the arts have been inextricably linked to issues of national identity and national culture. Since all of these cultural art forms inevitably map a national culture, to what extent then is national identity or national culture a female invention?

Patronage styles in the postwar years underwent evolutionary changes. Patronage in the period from 1945-1965 consisted of organizations like the Manila Symphony Society (MSS) and the Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) where large numbers of women played the roles of fundraisers, promoters, ticket sellers, and administrative coordinators even as they still sought the advice of male artists (Legarda 1998, Roxas 1998). Both the president of the Manila Symphony Society and the Art Association of the Philippines were women. Those who were interested in fostering certain cultural and artistic activities formed organizations and raised funds to sponsor art contests, performances,

and scholarships abroad for Filipino artists. Some examples of these organizations include the AAP, the MSS, the Barangay Theater Guild and the Bayanihan Folk Arts Center. When Ferdinand Marcos became president in 1965, Imelda Romualdez Marcos became the cultural patroness *par excellence*. Her primary project was the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) wherein she introduced for the first time a government body which could act as the umbrella organization for the performing arts. The CCP had its own trust fund and it was run by a bureaucracy. Although it was only supposed to concentrate on the visual and performing arts, as the years went on, the lack of an umbrella organization for all the other cultural activities meant that the CCP also became embroiled in the administration and fostering of other artistic activities such as crafts, museum curatorship, outreach programs, and even a Women's Desk to encourage women artists (Roxas 1998, Javelosa 1998a, Endaya 1998).

But in 1992, a law was passed which called for the formation of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), an umbrella organization for patronage of all aspects of the arts (leaving the performing arts to the CCP). The NCCA now represented a new animal in the patronage game. It institutionalized what the CCP complex began: the reinvention of the patron as government bureaucrat. Appointments to the positions in the NCCA bureaucracy were a mixture of political appointments and practicing artists. In this sense, the lines of distinction between patron/bureaucrat and artist became blurred. Visual artist Imelda Cajipe Endaya was secretary (1995-1998) of the Executive Committee on Visual Arts in the NCCA and a consultant with CCP, and painter Jeannie Javelosa held positions in the CCP (as deputy director of the Coordinating Center for Visual Arts and the Contemporary Art Museum Division in 1990), the NCCA (as a consultant with the ASEAN desk and exhibitions from 1995-1997 and ASEAN projects coordinator in 1998), and in the Expo Pilipino, the centennial project built on a 60-hectare site in Clark, Pampanga, north of Manila (Endaya 1998, Javelosa 1998b & 1998c).

The NCCA's primary duty has been to dispense grants and funds to deserving artists and artistic organizations. Because it does not have to raise its own funds, the NCCA like the CCP differed greatly from

the myriad groups of organizations which compelled their leaders and members to solicit funds from wealthy benefactors. Although the NCCA is primarily a grant endowment foundation, it is evolving into an organization that is more proactive in shaping future cultural policy as artists in committees begin to propose new continuing projects (Endaya 1998). Despite the fact that the chair of the NCCA is male (Jaime Laya), the executive director is a woman (Carmen Padilla, up to 1998), and the board is dominated by women. Women artists and women political appointees are also very visible in the various NCCA committees.

Whereas the CCP and the NCCA represent national organizations dedicated to the patronage of both arts and culture (the NCCA also has languages under its wing), there still are a myriad number of traditional type patronage organizations which by and large are reworked versions of those in the 1945-1965 era. This evolution and proliferation of patronage styles has meant that, for the first time, women artists are also the women patrons. I think this is what problematizes the concept of 'patron' because this peculiar phenomenon conflates the two roles of artist and patron in the same persona. But at the same time it has also empowered women artists in the bureaucratic machinery who can now be both patron and artist, while giving women patrons official status in the government patronage machinery.

As art patrons, women have had an impact in at least two important ways. First of all, they have given preferences to certain artists or promoted certain types of art based on their own personal tastes. Secondly, women patrons have, in some instances, reinvented culture and history, directly engaging in the debates about the formation of national identity and national culture. Individual case studies of three women patrons will be presented to illustrate some of the arguments presented here. Former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos represents the patroness *par excellence* particularly for the period 1965-1986. Purita Kalaw Ledesma epitomizes the traditional type of patronage that began shortly after the war (1947) and which continues in various mutated forms until today (although she has retired from the presidency of the AAP). Finally, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, a publisher, has promoted visual artists and writers while reinventing Philippine culture and history through her publication of 'coffee table books' and other

Filipiniana literature. Apart from the activities of these three women patrons, such women in the cultural bureaucracy as Teresa Escoda Roxas (president of CCP), Jeannie Javelosa (CCP Contemporary Art Museum curator, 1990), Imelda Cajipe Endaya (founding president of the KASIBULAN Foundation for Women Artists and NCCA Secretary, 1995-1998), and Della Besa (CCP music director, 1986-1998, and vice-chair of the NCCA music committee) will also be included to broaden the discussion to include bureaucratic-type patronage and the new phenomenon of the artist/patron.

IMELDA ROMUALDEZ MARCOS

As the first lady to a newly elected president in 1965, Imelda Marcos believed that her role was to make the country a 'home for the Filipino people'. To fulfill this gendered role, she chose to concentrate on two types of civic work: (a) an emphasis on an integrated social welfare program, and (b) the promotion of Filipino traditional culture and the arts (Polotan 1970). According to her official biographer, Marcos wanted to particularly help two kinds of Filipinos: (a) 'the talented, whom the country had failed so far', 'the writers, the painters, the sculptors, the musicians, the dancers, the dramatists, all these artists...' and (b) the handicapped, the 'orphans, old people, the mentally retarded, prisoners, delinquents' (Polotan 1970).

Mrs Marcos was the first of the first ladies to receive a high profile as a cultural patron. The others concentrated on civic and charity work (though never in the same grandiose manner as Mrs Marcos) and did not single out the arts as a field that needed nurturing. Hence the artists (particularly the visual artists) were compelled to make ends meet by pursuing other careers without totally abandoning their art projects. Deprived of the financial wherewithal, Filipino artists had a low social status. Mrs Marcos changed all this. But she could not have done it without practicing kinship politics as first lady. For instance, kinship politics made her dream of a CCP a reality. Her husband, former president Ferdinand Marcos, had created a board of trustees for the CCP which then elected her chair (Marcial 1969). Imelda tapped into the Philippine-American Cultural Foundation grant of 90,000 pesos and a 3.5 million dollar American grant in the form of war damage claims

(which she had access to through her links with the president), but was also responsible for raising most of the funds as she applied a new method of approaching businesses and private corporations for donations (Marcial 1969, Polotan 1970).² Mrs Marcos' personal requests for donations in cash and even in kind were absolutely crucial to the realization of the majestic building of the performing arts center. Displaying acute business insight, she also set up a trust fund for the running of the center (Yap-Daza 1969). The point is that Mrs Marcos approached potential donors personally, using her feminine charm. Appealing to

Filipino male gallantry while at the same time using her political connections and her position as first lady, she succeeded in her objective. And indeed the CCP became almost synonymous to Imelda Marcos. She gave it her personal attention—from fundraising to attending rehearsals. The CCP was so closely identified with her that Senator Benigno Aquino, the president's main rival, used it to attack the Marcoses for extravagant spending in the midst of poverty (Marcial 1969, Polotan 1970).

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But the CCP was just the beginning of the vast potential of Imelda Marcos' cultural patronage. She gave out scholarships to the talented, held competitions for young artists of the performing arts (NAMCYA), and later, during martial law, built the Folk Arts Center, the Manila Film Center, and the Museum of Modern Art. She even founded a special school for children who wanted a career in the arts. Set in the rural landscape of Mount Makiling in Los Baños, Laguna and named the National Arts Center, the group of buildings became known as a training ground for aspiring artists (Duldulao 1997). Yet Mrs Marcos' cultural patronage was not limited to the performing arts. She also immersed herself in projects of historical value and those which promoted traditional arts and crafts. She supported the archeological diggings at Sta Ana where an entire prehispanic cemetery was unearthed. She also supported the restoration of the gates of the old city of Intramuros which included Fort Santiago and the Paco cemetery (de

Manila 1969). In 1969, she launched a project for a tourist village at the international airport. The Nayong Pilipino replicated in miniature the characteristic villages and the important historical sites of the entire country, while displaying Philippine traditional crafts such as weaving, Baguio filigree work, and Pangasinan lacemaking (de Manila 1969). She also collected Philippine antiques, eventually driving up the prices for Spanish period *santos* and pre-hispanic gold jewelry to unbelievable levels. During martial law, at the height of her power, she inaugurated her very own university: the University of Life.

Imelda Marcos' patronage of the visual arts was unprecedented. She graced art openings and one-man shows. She bought paintings and encouraged her coterie of Blue Ladies, wealthy society matrons who had campaigned for her, to buy paintings from local artists (Roces 1993, Ledesma & Guerrero 1974, Polotan 1970). She commissioned large paintings and sculptures for the Malacañang Palace and for the new edifices she built, as well as for landmark sites, including street intersections. She decorated Malacañang with paintings by Filipino artists whose works ranged from those by the pre-war Fernando Amorsolo to the abstract paintings of the 'modernist' school which she particularly favored. Eduardo Castrillo, for example, was commissioned by Mrs Marcos to do a sculpture of herself and the president, reinvented as the mythical *Malakas at Maganda*. This sculptural work was meant for installation at the University of Life. Castrillo was also asked to design the commemorative medallion of the CCP and participated in a program entitled *Kulay Anyo ng Lahi* where Mrs Marcos decorated buildings with murals, i.e. enlargements of paintings by selected painters (Roces 1995). National Artist Cesar Legazpi was commissioned to do her portrait, this time as the mythical *encantada* (Roces 1993). More significantly, Imelda Marcos gave due recognition to and elevated the status of the Filipino visual artist. For the first time in history, artists were invited to Malacañang to socialize with the president and the first lady. Mrs Marcos' avid interest in the arts was most graciously welcomed by most artists at first. In his daily column published in the *Manila Times* newspaper, painter/writer Alfredo Roces (1968) praised Imelda Marcos in this manner:

President and Mrs Marcos entertained painters, sculptors, and art lovers in Malacañang the other evening. This is the first time we can recall that artists were given an evening on Mt Olympus. This is the first time, in fact, we have seen so many artists together in a pleasant get-together, from such well-known personages as Don Fernando Amorsolo and sculptor Tolentino to the young bushy-maned group of Aviado, De Guzman, Bencab, Jolico Cuadra, and Nonoy Marcelo. From Angono came painter Carlos V Francisco, and from Davao painter Victorio Edades. The eminent collector Don Felipe Hidalgo graced the occasion along with such younger, more vigorous gentlemen collectors as Arturo de Santos, Antonio Bantug, Don Antonio Araneta, and Lindy Locsin. Mrs Marcos was like a mother hen to her brood, though the artists obviously took her in as their muse. This was the first time too that the artists had all (well almost all) meekly donned *barong Tagalog* and sat in their best decorum.

This could very well be a meaningful occasion, not merely a society note since the Palace, long opened to the people, had never really devoted one moment for an informal get-together of artists.... There will be speculation about its political motivation; even the most naïve (of) artists will concede this.... While we consider ourselves one of President Marcos' vocal critics, we fully support him in these shining moments.

Imelda Marcos invested the status of artist with cultural capital. The ultimate status symbol was the title of National Artist, first conferred posthumously on painter Fernando Amorsolo in 1972. This spear-headed the awards for National Artist in dance, literature, music, painting. All artists chosen by Mrs Marcos were given both national prestige and a financial stipend till the end of their days. Today, before each performance at the CCP, the National Artists in the audience are announced and asked to take a bow.

Can one divorce women's patronage from kinship politics? In the case of Imelda Marcos, being a first lady increased the success rate of her fundraising activities; her entourage of Blue Ladies provided the administrative network necessary to run projects. It was also her position as first lady which gave her the power to choose the National Artist. (In fact, she created/invented that status.) As a cultural patron,

Imelda Marcos went beyond providing financial support for artists and championing certain artistic activities. For example, she saw herself as one of the agents 'molding' the very 'soul' of the nation:

They say, why a Cultural Center now, when there [sic] so many poor people? But this is the time we need a Cultural Center. It is now that we need to develop the soul of this country, when it is young. You don't develop the soul of the country when it is 90 years old or 100 years old....The non-talented poor, I have helped. The more reason we should be helping the talented poor, like the writers, the painters, the sculptors. Like a mama. I have two children. You mean my one peso I will all give to my mentally retarded child? The other one who is a genius, or plays a beautiful guitar, or writes beautifully, I will not give a share? I have raised 157 million as First Lady. I have spent only 38 million for the talented. A hundred and 10 plus has been spent other projects. (Lacaba 1969)

Having been a first lady at a time in postwar history when the country was preoccupied with the question of identity (see Roces 1994), Mrs Marcos not only wanted to 'rediscover' Filipino traditional performing arts and culture, she also expected to project this cultural package to the world. In doing so, she hoped to instill national pride, i.e. that Filipinos were just as good as the rest of the powerful western nations. In an interview with the author, Mrs Marcos (1993) explained:

Because you see we were suffering from an identity crisis. What was the Filipino? For over 400 years we did not know who we were. Some people thought we were Spanish, and yet we were brown, we were not living in Spain but in the Philippines...because we were Filipino. Some thought we were English because we were the third largest English speaking [country] in the world. Some thought we were Japanese or even Americans. And worse, we were ashamed sometimes of being Filipinos, we would say things made outside: "imported yata iyan", [that is imported, of course] "that's only local lang iyan" [that's only locally made], as though it was inferior. So the Cultural Center was... to help our identity crisis. Then what was a Filipino? A Filipino who lives in 7100 islands, an island between the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, East and West, what was the Filipino? The color was brown, just right. Then what did

they wear? The Filipino *barong*, and the Filipina *terno* or *saya* or *malong*, or whatever, the many costumes. Then how did they move? How did they dance? How did they sing? What were their values? And then when you started showing it to them and I remember I had the *Kasaysayan ng Lahi* which was the opening parade for the Miss Universe. I wanted to show to the whole world who the Filipino was. To show: who are we? Suddenly, in the mid-70s when we had this Miss Universe contest, we were now on the world stage, in front of the world. I started taking off the mask—like we were taking off our Spanish mask, one mask after the other, saying to the world: ‘Hi world, I have a face too, and I think it is a beautiful face’! The Filipino face!... The Cultural Center was there for the identity crisis, for pride and dignity as human beings so that we could become whole and we could stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of mankind.

Her motive was to prove to the world (notably the United States) that Filipino traditional performing arts, were just as good as western fine arts. But the cultural package she reinvented as ‘tradition’ was framed in western terms. Specifically, her invention of tradition was dictated by American tastes, institutions and high-society cultural values. For instance, she mentioned the Miss Universe contest as the ‘site’

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from which Filipino national culture was to be projected to the world via globalized television. (Part of the entertainment for the Miss Universe contest was a performance by the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company dancing a Muslim suite.) But the Miss Universe contest was a beauty contest conceptualized and produced by Americans, where American values and ideals of beauty and the feminine were institutionalized and reaffirmed. The USA for most of the postwar years up until the 1990s was the sole ‘other’ from which the Philippines defined itself (Aguilar 1996). Imelda Marcos slotted Philippine traditional performing arts into western paradigms and pandered to western tastes. Instead of imagining one’s identity in terms of a dis-

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inction from the 'other' (the USA), Imelda Marcos' reinvention of tradition³ was subsumed in the 'other'.

That Mrs Marcos was more attuned to western standards of culture became more evident in the later martial law years when she shifted her interest from Filipino paintings to western European art. She stopped buying works by Filipino painters and instead began to collect works by the so-called European grand masters (Valenzuela 1990). The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art began to show a preference for Italian Renaissance Old Masters: Titian, Canaletto, Bellini, Boticcelli. Imelda Marcos bought paintings by Monet, Picasso and Renoir for her collection. In the end, many, if not most, of the paintings she had bought since 1977 turned out to be fakes (Scott 1988). This shift in her cultural preferences affected the direction of painting. Social realist painter, Neil Doloricon, showed acute insight when he critically assessed Mrs Marcos' patronage of the visual arts as a form of patronage that was ephemeral: '*Yong sining na hindi sinasalamain o ipinahihirwatig ang tunay na aspirasyon ng mamamayang Pilipino. Ang standard na gustong habulin ni Madame ay iyong western pa rin ang concept*' [The arts did not mirror or express the true aspirations of the Filipino people. The standard that Madame emulated was still western in concept, Valenzuela 1990].

PURITA KALAW LEDESMA

THE Art Association of the Philippines (AAP) was founded by Purita Kalaw Ledesma. And indeed Mrs Ledesma was at the helm of the AAP from its founding until she retired and bequeathed the position to her daughter. The fact that the daughter became her successor attests to her hold on power in the Philippine art scene and her practice of kinship politics.⁴

Purita Kalaw Ledesma took art lessons in junior high school at the *Academia de Bellas Artes*. At the University of the Philippines, she took some units at the School of Fine Arts even though she was a history major. She also took a year of courses in painting at the University of Michigan where she accompanied her sister Maria who was a Barbour scholar there. In her autobiography, Mrs Ledesma (1994) narrates that the professors at the Design Department of the University of Michi-

gan were disappointed when they looked at her art portfolio upon her arrival but it did not prevent her from enrolling in second and third year arts subjects. Pressured by traditional attitudes to put all her energies into her role as wife and mother, she gave up painting when she married (Ledesma 1998). In 1947, a chance meeting with Pura Santillan-Castrencia, who had asked her if she regretted giving up her art, provoked her into thinking about returning to the art scene, but it did not inspire her to pick up her paintbrushes. Instead, she contacted her old teachers and classmates and formed the Art Association of the Philippines in 1948 (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). As AAP president, her major preoccupation was fundraising. In close contact with the artists, she had a feel for their concerns. For instance, she knew they did not aspire for the cultural capital of trophies, certificates or medals but preferred cash prizes. At a time when paintings sold for very little, Mrs Ledesma exhibited great empathy for the plight of these struggling artists whom she saw as '*kaarwa-arwa naman*' (very pitiful). To solicit money for the prizes of the art competitions (the most publicized activity of the AAP), she herself personally approached wealthy businessmen such as Andres Soriano, her friends, and various benefactors for donations in cash and in kind (Ledesma 1998), and grant foundations such as UNESCO and the Rockefeller Foundation which were sources of scholarships for overseas study (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). She also invited friends in the media, e.g. writer Lyd Arguilla (who also put up the Philippine Art Gallery) and columnist IP Soliongco, to the art openings and competitions so that the AAP's events would receive media coverage (Ledesma 1998). As fundraiser and president, she also had a voice on the choice of scholarship recipients. Artists Vicente Manansala, Cesar Legaspi, and Manuel Rodriguez were given overseas scholarships on the strength of her recommendation. She may have also been largely responsible in the choice of AAP scholarship recipients like Arturo Luz, Jose Joya, Nena Saguil and Larry Tronco (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). In the case of Vicente Manansala whose scholarship did not include air fare, Mrs Ledesma convinced her mother to donate the air tickets (Ledesma 1998).

The AAP not only sponsored painting exhibits and art seminars, it also held competitive art exhibitions annually and semi-annually. It ensured that the country was represented in international art competi-

tions and published a monthly art bulletin. The AAP even showed concern for the next generation of artists. It sponsored the training of teachers in public schools (through a UNESCO and Shell Corporation grant together with the Philippine Women's University), opened children's arts classes, launched competitions in children's art, and pioneered an interesting way to expose the public to painters by conducting special tours of the artists' homes (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). It also had links with Mrs Marcos' CCP and the PAG (Philippine Art Gallery).

Mrs Ledesma's clout as patron had its source in her practice of kinship politics and her administrative skills. As the sister of Senator Maria Kalaw Katigbak, and an in-law of Senator Eva Estrada Kalaw, Purita Kalaw Ledesma was well-placed to exercise unofficial power. She had the connections that would help her as president of the AAP; these same links gave her access to funding resources. At her instigation, her sister Senator Katigbak proposed a Senate Bill creating a National Commission for the Arts. When the bill was passed, Mrs Ledesma was appointed by no less than former President Diosdado Macapagal as the

commissioner-representative for painting (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). Mrs Ledesma saw her role as patron to involve more than just the sponsorship of artists or even of encouraging and developing the next generation of artists. She self-consciously perceived herself to be in a position to frame cultural policy and therefore participate in both the 'search' for a national identity and the reinvention of culture. For instance, she resisted the

Purita Kalaw Ledesma perceived herself to be in a position to frame cultural policy and therefore participate in both the 'search' for a national identity and the reinvention of culture.

American attempts to dictate terms to the Philippine-American Cultural Foundation regarding the building of a cultural center in Quezon City because she believed 'cultural domination was the key issue of the Foundation crisis, and what had been at stake was the preservation of our national identity.' In an emotional but adamantly nationalistic move, the AAP rejected the funding for the center (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). On her role as commissioner, Mrs Ledesma recalled that 'on the long range level, we wanted to create a national cultural policy—to estab-

lish a national identity that would eventually replace or absorb imported culture, underscore the dignity of the artist and increase the audience for the arts.’ (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974).

In the end, the National Commission for the Arts proved ineffective. Kinship politics was responsible for the birth of the commission, but it was also the reason why it failed. Close to election time, 600 applicants made personal appeals to President Macapagal requesting for a position in the commission. Reluctant to displease anyone so close to election time, Macapagal complied and those requests and the irascible influx of new members paralyzed the workings of the commission (Ledesma & Guerrero 1974). Furthermore, Macapagal had lost the election and a new president was taking over the reins of government. A new regime signaled a new group of powerful people, a new kinship alliance group that can practice kinship politics and begin new cultural projects that could be identified with the new regime. Ferdinand Marcos succeeded Macapagal, and his wife Imelda Marcos proceeded to launch her own cultural projects. She became *the* Cultural Commission and dictated Philippine cultural policy until Marcos was overthrown in 1986.

Purita Kalaw Ledesma also published a number of books on art history (classified as ‘coffee table books’) as well as her own autobiography. The four books which she authored all endorsed her interpretation of what she termed the ‘struggle for Philippine modern art’. One of the most publicized incidents in the history of the AAP was the infamous walkout of a group of painters (labeled by the AAP as the ‘conservatives’ who painted representational art) who took down their paintings from the AAP annual exhibit in 1955 as a form of protest against the continuous awarding of prizes to the ‘modernist’ group of painters. In three of her four books (Ledesma 1994, Ledesma & Guerrero 1974, Ledesma 1987), Ledesma interprets this split in the artistic ranks as an ideological conflict between two painting styles: representational art versus modern abstract art. In this conflict, modern art eventually triumphed over conservative art. Those who had walked out were labeled in later years as the Mabini painters who became known for their Manila sunsets and Philippine boats—art that later on became associ-

ated with cheaper paintings for the tourist market. The implications of this walkout was that the AAP was no longer the umbrella organization for Filipino painters of all colors and styles, for it excluded the group branded 'the conservatives'. When asked in an interview about the negative implications of this split in the membership of the AAP, Mrs Ledesma (1998) confessed that although the entire incident was a very painful experience for her, in the end, she believed that it was a positive development because it purged the AAP of the lesser artists who viewed art as mass produced commodities for the tourist market.

From the point of view of some of the artists, however, the AAP dispute could be explained in terms of the discourse of kinship politics: as a clash between two alliance groups fighting for supremacy, neither having any real stylistic or ideological differences. In his book, *The Philippine Art Scene*, Manuel Duldulao (1997) described them as 'rival camps' that 'waged a fight in a zone that had no battle lines'. And indeed, some artists classified as 'modernist' were 'conservative' in terms of aesthetic form (Roces 1996, Ang Kiukok 1998). Painter Ang Kiukok (1998) was quick to assert that not all the conservatives who left were Mabini artists; there were some good artists who concentrated on representational art.

In privileging modern art over conservative or representational art, Purita Kalaw Ledesma was endorsing the progressive linear view of art history shared by the more vocal of Filipino art critics. It was believed then that modern abstract art or whatever was 'new', 'modern' or 'post-modern' was of a better quality than representational art classified as 'traditional'. Even a number of today's contemporary art critics like Harvard Phd Rodolfo Paras-Perez and US trained painter/art critic Jeannie Javelosa state this perspective in their books and columns. Jeannie Javelosa's columns in *The Manila Chronicle* in 1990-1992 and 1995 also adhered to Purita Kalaw Ledesma's interpretation of the AAP split, an interpretation now 'officially' institutionalized in the coffee table books on art history (except those by Manuel Duldulao and Alfredo Roces).⁵ That this viewpoint is widely accepted attests to the powerful presence of the patroness/publisher.

GILDA CORDERO FERNANDO

PRIOR to her career as publisher of GCF Books, Gilda Cordero Fernando was a successful short story writer in English and then an associate editor of a 10 volume encyclopedia series on Philippine culture, art, anthropology, and history entitled *Filipino Heritage*. Her time with *Filipino Heritage* exposed her to Filipiniana material and inspired her to launch her own publishing company, concentrating on producing large 'coffee table books' which enlivened, illustrated and popularized Filipiniana subjects. She has since published around 15 books, the most successful being the *History of the Burgis*, a bestseller which sold around 14,000 copies (Fernando 1998).

The unique aspect of GCF books is that all the books published have been Gilda Fernando's own concepts. She is not the typical publisher who receives unsolicited manuscripts from aspiring authors. Instead, each book is her 'baby' from start to finish. The project is her own original idea and she appoints the authors, selects the illustrators and usually edits the manuscript herself. The books are then sold *en masse* to a distributor. The success of her books attests to her creativity as well as her feel for the public pulse.

Since illustrated books are her forte, Gilda Cordero Fernando's choice of artists has been instrumental in fostering artistic careers. Painter Ben Cabrera was chosen for the illustrations for the book entitled *Being Filipino* (1981), a combination of essays by a mixture of scholars and writers on the Filipino's roles as wife, father, mother and others. For *The Body Book* (1993) which was about the various parts of the body though Filipinized to include myths, beliefs and various Filipino attitudes to these body parts, she handpicked artist Onib Olmedo and for *The Soul Book* (1991), it was Roberto Feleo. For her best-selling *The History of the Burgis* (1987), she preferred art designer Nik Ricio. For *Philippine Food and Life* (1992), a book that she wrote but was published by Anvil publishing, she chose Manuel Baldemor to make the drawings.

Gilda Cordero Fernando's projects are all her own original ideas which usually blend scholarly writing on Filipiniana topics with comic illustrations accompanied by lively commentary and humor. She prides herself in the fact that no one could really label or pigeonhole any of

her books and projects; that is, it is difficult to classify her books as serious history or ethnography or lively, witty, non-serious commentary. In this eclectic mixture she sees herself 'blazing trails', trying something new, breaking new boundaries (Fernando 1998). The epitome of the syncretic nature of her ventures was her project called 'Jamming on an Old Saya' an extravaganza (it cost 1.3 million pesos) in the category of the performing arts (though it was also launched with an accompanying coffee table book), which was staged at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in honor of her 65th birthday on 28 June 1995. The concept for the production began when Gilda Cordero Fernando wanted to do something with the cloth collages she had made out of old *sayas* (the traditional 19th century Filipina dress). Convincing four top fashion designers to sew fantastic dresses from this material, she produced a two-hour show which was a combination of a fashion show, a rap music show, a visual art show highlighting the work of artist Roberto Feleo (pieces GCF commissioned for the evening), with some dance and theater work. But though she claimed that it was difficult exactly to name what category of the performing arts it was, as a spectator I observed that it was mostly a fashion show. It was a financially successful show attended by Manila's high society with some members of the audience dressed in their 'old' *sayas* or parts of old *sayas* to keep up with the spirit of the program. This performance epitomizes the quintessential GCF: original and outrageous, while still promoting Filipiniana or bits and pieces of Filipino culture. In fact Gilda Cordero Fernando sees her skills lying mostly in the art of bringing all sorts of artistic forms together (Fernando 1998).

Her best-selling book, *The History of the Burgis*, is very interesting because in it she endorses the leftist view of history where the *burgis* are a self-centered class of people who have consistently betrayed the rest of the Filipino people throughout history. (The 1986 people power revolution is a mild exception because it was a *burgis* revolution.) According to the book, the *burgis*—from the pre-hispanic *datus*, to the *principalia*, to the *ilustrados* all the way up to the Marcos cronies—were a monied exploitative group who were more 'westernized' than Filipino in identity and aspirations. And yet the book's authors blatantly admit they are *burgis* themselves, even as they argue that their class showed

signs of metamorphosing into true nationalists because they had risked their lives for democracy in the 1986 People Power revolution that toppled Ferdinand Marcos (Francisco & Arriolla 1987). In this sense, GCF books have participated in the reinvention of history. That *History of the Burgis* sold 14,000 copies reveals the extent of the influence of Gilda

Gilda Cordero Fernando's example highlights the point that women patrons are proactive in the dissemination of historical interpretation.

Cordero Fernando's power as patron/publisher. Her example highlights the point that women patrons are proactive in the dissemination of historical interpretation, in the debates on 'being Filipino' (to borrow one of the titles of GCF books), and in the formation of a national culture.

In 1997, Gilda Cordero Fernando made the transition from patron to visual artist. She made the illustrations for her latest books: a children's book and a book on the mythical *aswang* (viscera suckers) based on the work of anthropologist Frank Lynch.

THE BUREAUCRAT AS PATRON

BUREAUCRATIC patrons can be classified into three types: (a) the political appointees, (b) the traditional women patrons who had a previous reputation as supporters of the arts or fundraisers for organizations, and (c) women artists who were given positions because of their expertise. For instance, the longest serving president of the CCP, Lucrecia 'King' Kasilag, is a National Artist for music (though she was also a close friend of Mrs Marcos). She was succeeded by Teresa 'Bing' Escoda Roxas who was a traditional type patron with a record for fundraising and promoting burgeoning performing arts groups like the Madrigal Singers (prior to their rise to fame and before Mrs Marcos 'hijacked' them from her patronage and offered to be their 'manager') and the Alice Reyes Dance Company which later became the CCP Dance Company (Kasilag 1998, Roxas 1998). Many artists were included in the bureaucratic machinery of the CCP as consultants or advisers. For instance, Jeannie Javelosa (1998), a visual artist, was the curator of the gallery and museum at the CCP while pianist Della Besa was its music director. Jeannie Javelosa decided which artists to feature in the

CCP art gallery, and during her brief stint with the NCCA she was responsible for project submissions as head of the ASEAN desk. Freed from the burden of fundraising, these bureaucrat/patrons could concentrate more fully on specific projects. For instance, Bing Roxas conceptualized the 'Filipino Artist Series' at the CCP (Besa 1998, Roxas 1998).

Women are a majority in the various committees of the NCCA (Laya 1998, Besa 1998). This female dominance, however, has not resulted in a bias in favor of women artists nor has it introduced a feminist patronage philosophy. Though the CCP once had a Women's Desk (headed by feminist Fe Mangahas) and despite the fact that the NCCA visual arts representative Imelda Cajipe Endaya is a feminist artist who is founding chair of Kasibulan, the artists' group established to support and foster women visual artists, there has not been any official push from the bureaucrat/patron to focus on female artists. Perhaps this is in compliance with the general perception of the cultural construction of women as supporters of the arts rather than as artists themselves. None of Jeannie Javelosa's newspaper columns mention anything remotely linked with feminist art or with patronage support for women artists (she agitates loudly for the government support of *all* artists), a point reaffirmed in an interview.

Women in the CCP bureaucratic machinery had a voice in the nomination of GAWAD CCP awardees for artists. Although it is still possible (as in Mrs Marcos' time) for the president to declare someone a National Artist, the selection of the National Artists in the various artistic categories (since 1986) has been made by a selection panel involving the CCP (from 1986-1992). Since 1992, another panel composed of (mostly female) board members of the NCCA have been screening nominations. Positions in the bureaucracy also kept the women plugged into the dynamics of kinship politics. They can award grants to artists they know and they could lobby for the artist of their choice to receive the most prestigious of all titles: the National Artist.

Women like Imelda Marcos, Purita Kalaw Ledesma and Gilda Cordero Fernando engaged in the complex process of reinventing Philippine culture. Able to exercise unofficial power and practice kinship politics, these women chose to focus on cultural development in a self-conscious attempt to shape a national culture. In the case of Imelda

Marcos and Purita Kalaw Ledesma, unofficial political power was an important source of their patronage. At the same time, their patronage of the arts also enhanced their female power. (One can even argue that in Mrs Marcos' case at least art was shaped by a dilettante and not by a qualified artist.) Art was therefore directed according to their tastes as patrons and as 'movers', and although none of these women ever really espoused the cause of women artists specifically (there was never a feminist angle to their patronage), they became the unofficial muses of the male artist. The group of Blue Ladies who were encouraged to buy paintings by Mrs Marcos and a group of wealthy society matrons often used their charm to tell painters what type of paintings they wanted. The artists, tickled or at least thrilled by the attention they received from these prominent women who took the trouble to visit the humble artist at his/her home, more often than not, willingly obliged.

Did the patronage help the artists? Financially, one could no doubt argue that the patronage of Mrs Marcos, the AAP, and Gilda Cordero Fernando benefited a specific group of artists: those chosen by the patrons or those who complied with the particular artistic taste of the patron. The type of art favored by Mrs Marcos, still largely framed within the paradigm of western high society's tastes, kept the development of the arts in the stratosphere of the 'frivolous decorative arts'. The stress on fashion shows, beauty contests, and later a shift to supposedly European grand masters kept the development of art in the Philippines in the ambit of 'high' society American taste. From the perspective of Mrs Marcos the patron, art had to be presented to meet American taste in order for it to be equal to western art. Obviously, female power in the arts has not always had positive effects, with the more glaring flaws being the reduction of artistic production into a battle of personalities, the emphasis on the 'frivolous' side of art, and the most palpably dangerous tendency to shape artistic and cultural policy according to the tastes of the uninformed, the unqualified and the dilettante. Hopefully, the NCCA and CCP decision to appoint some artists to the bureaucratic arm of cultural and artistic policy development will ensure that qualified and trained artists have the larger voice in giving direction to the arts.

While women have not been very visible as professional artists, women patrons have been able to shape art and culture, participate in the making of cultural policy, and reinvent culture and history. That Mrs Marcos can declare to a stunned anthropologist that a pile of rocks she found were Paleolithic rocks and should be displayed as such was a testimony of her capability for reinventing art and art/cultural history. It is the women patrons who are active in the collection of data and the publication of books on cultural and art history. Purita Kalaw Ledesma's interpretation of the development of Philippine art with the AAP occupying center stage has been institutionalized. In this sense, not only has her role as founder been immortalized but her interpretation of the struggle between the 'conservatives' and the 'modernists', as well as other important events in post-war art history, has also become the version of art history that is being heard and propagated. Gilda Cordero Fernando's book publications propagate her unique views on Filipino art and culture while popularizing some Filipiniana themes. Since it is mostly women who dominate the bureaucratic arm of the patronage system, particularly the NCCA, women decide which cultural projects to dispense grants to and which artists will be given the National Artist award.

Patronage in the fine arts has given women the power not only to shape the direction of the arts while also boosting male artists, it has also empowered women in the task of reinventing culture. Because women patrons are also powerful in the realm of kinship politics and are very active in documenting, publishing, promoting, and advertising their sponsored projects, their ideas on the fine arts and Filipino fine arts inevitably had a momentous impact on the Filipino art world. In this sense, although the artists are predominantly male, the fine arts in postwar Philippines can be said to have become feminized.

NOTES

1. See also Taylor (1992 & 1983) and Abeyasekera (1989).
2. The John D Rockefeller Foundation donated fellowships for the CCP staff. A businessman gave a 35,000 peso grand concert piano. The Spanish ambassador donated the proceeds of a Sevilla Fiesta night. Private collectors donated art objects for the gallery and museum. And a

Japanese firm presented Imelda Marcos with a gift of 100,000 cement bags. (Polotan 1970)

3. I borrowed the term 'invention of tradition' from Eric Hobsbawm (1983).

4. The current president of the AAP is Ramon Orlina, an artist.

5. Art critic Emmanuel Torres (1992) also endorsed this viewpoint.

See also Duldulao (1997), Roces (1993 & 1995).

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