

# CONCÈNTRIC- BAR PROJECT

## GIAN CRUZ

## EN

# THE GARDEN OF IMAGINARIES

## 13.07 – 03.09.23

Communities are to be distinguished,  
not by their falsity or genuineness,  
but in the style in which they are imagined.

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*<sup>1</sup>

### INTIMATING IMAGINARIES: SOUTHEAST ASIA IN CATALONIA

In the vertigo of navigating myself in the cosmopolitan imaginary of Barcelona as a Southeast Asian and Filipino artist of Spanish-Chinese origins, the imaginary anchor of a garden in my displacement, my mandatory confinement and re-intimimation and re-imagining of the limitless power of the tropes of affectivities.

It is easier to imagine elsewhere and communities or intricate, complex tropes of belonging or a potent anchored sense of place. In the omnipresent challenge of intimating faraway

Je te parle dans ta langue,  
et c'est dans mon langage que je te comprends.

Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde: Poétique IV*<sup>2</sup>

geographies to currently grounding myself here, where often the pluralities of my Southeast Asian self become systemically silenced; it allows the possibility of a grounded, encompassing elsewhere. Meanwhile, in a not so far away oscillation, there is also the languorously perplexing seductiveness of Southeast Asia in the words of Amitav Acharya as to not being a 'natural region' but an 'imagined and socially constructed community'.<sup>3</sup> I therefore like here an intimate gesture culminating in the suppleness and whispered illuminations of the proposition of 'Southeast Asia in Catalonia'.<sup>4</sup>

### NOTES:

1. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised Edition). Verso Books: Londres, 1983, 1991, 2006 & 2016.

2. Glissant, Édouard. *Traité du Tout-Monde: Poétique IV*. Éditions Gallimard: Paris, 1997.

3. Abdullah, Sarena; Low, Yvonne; Scott, Phoebe; i Whiteman, Stephen. "Aligning New Histories of Southeast Asian Art." *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945-1990*. Ed. Stephen H. Whiteman, Sarena Abdullah, Yvonne Low, Phoebe Scott. Power Publications and National Gallery Singapore: Sidney, 2018.

4. The project and term 'Southeast Asia in Catalonia' was a proposition and challenge suggested by my former professor from Manila, Dr Patrick Flores (who is renowned for elevating the profile of Southeast Asian Art on a global scale), when I serendipitously crossed paths with him on MACBA grounds. It was also the time I was the first Asian participant in the Independent Studies Programme at MACBA for the 2019-2020 edition, which was quite hostile in assimilating Asian let alone Southeast Asian contexts.

This led to a direction for me to pursue and embark on an alluring enterprise to confabulate within the contours of my artistic practice. Meanwhile, as my time in Barcelona is coming to a close due to bureaucratic and financial constraints and personal and emotional exhaustion with this exhibition, it becomes a fleeting gesture of an unassuming end to this supposed long-term project, but also perhaps a start of an elsewhere that can provide concrete spaces and activated imaginaries for those of Southeast Asian contexts here in Catalonia.

Gian Cruz (Manila, 1987) is a multidisciplinary Filipino artist of Spanish and Chinese origins whose artistic practice is heavily rooted in photography integrated with his institutional work and background in art theory and criticism. Cruz's work is central to the volatility of the image in contemporary culture and the multiple discourses that come along with it. His practice extends to performance, translation, history, architecture, ecology, cinema, HIV/AIDS activism and several other fields and contexts that engage with his current preoccupations as an artist.

## A GARDEN UNFURLING... ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING

The garden operates somewhat like a latent image – invisible and on the verge of being, or a process about to assume form or visibility. But the curious part is it never fully wants to assume a so-called formalism or clear-cut perceptiveness, as it resists to be perceived in its essence or a concrete form. In this case, it will lose this gesture straddling between silences and fast-fleeting movements like oral traditions transmitted or stories passed on fated to a kind of visibility and invisibility all at once. It is a garden in the process of a performance in its state of limbo or an archive in the process of being put together by creating constellations, but also laying the groundwork for the possibility of an alternative geography that seems to be elusive and never fully assuming form in this side of the world.

This garden also has vestiges of the identifiable colonial, but its further oscillations on what is perceptively Western and its inner workings evoke something else, uneasy to precisely describe or define in words but rather easier defined in a constellation of universes in flux.

The term operates on a liberal adaptation and reinterpretation of Benedict Anderson's concept of the same title. I work on the idea of my garden by somehow recollecting a peculiar nostalgia for home and how my previous preoccupation as a plant collector as a point of encounter and a point of settling yet restlessly imagining. And these imaginings from here recall perhaps past lives, novel and unheard of legacies, ancestral wisdoms, intimating alternative topographies, intuitive and telepathic voyages, yet still very well within the here and now. The garden here performs a collective yearning and intimation, negotiations in language, visibilities of crevices and silences, a garden on the verge of leaving manifold gestures of constant flux and a circumscribing dialogue in the midst of belonging and non-belonging, placelessness and placemaking, clarity and ambiguity, and how the indescribable *ailleurs* leads us altogether.

## INDEX OF IMAGES

1. CHAPTER IX, PORTAL No. 9, *liberty... topicality... Alma!* (alternative title: *Alma Moreno dancing to Gilbert Montagné's 'Liberté' on the 'My Loveliness' show on Canal 2 of Philippine TV*, c. 1985; actual broadcast date unverified). From the *Portals* series (2021-2023), Gian Cruz in collaboration with the artist Gisela Marcelang.

2. CHAPTER X, PORTAL No. 10, *Ang mga alon na patuloy na maguugnay sa amin ni Balai Ama mula dito sa Amposta hanggang sa dulo ng Pilipinas* (after *Badjao*, 1957, dir. Lamberto V. Avellana, 105 min., Philippines). From the *Portals* series (2021-2023), Gian Cruz in collaboration with the artist Gisela Marcelang.

3. CHAPTER XIII, PORTAL No. 13, *Ang Pagibig kong Stateside: the exceptional love story of Rizelle and Eric* (after the romantic comedy *Isang Tanong, Isang Sagot*, 1997, dir. Mac Alejandre, 104 min., Philippines). From the *Portals* series (2021-2023), Gian Cruz in collaboration with the artist Gisela Marcelang.

4. CHAPTER XXX, PORTAL No. 30, *Self-portrait sa ilalim ng mga dahong mukhang plumahe, Amposta – Liblib na mga pook sa Pilipinas sa isla ng Luzon at isang hipnotikong tanawing panlalawigan sa Luzon sa Days of Being Wild* (1990) dir. Wong Kar-Wai, 95 min., Hong Kong, Philippines, 2021-2022. From the *Portals* series (2021-2023), Gian Cruz in collaboration with the artist Gisela Marcelang.

5. CHAPTER XXXIX, PORTAL No. 39, *Love Me Like A Love Song: Self-portrait as a karaoke video actor*, 2023, with lyrics from Tootsie Guevara's hit cover of 'Kaba' released in early 1999 and originally performed by Ten-ten Muñoz, Vilafranca del Penedès, Barcelona, Spain. From the *Portals* series (2021-2023), Gian Cruz in collaboration with the artist Gisela Marcelang.