

Poverty and Migration in Art

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Time: 80 minutes

Overview:

Artists have played a major role in highlighting, challenging, and critiquing social issues and injustices that impact the most impoverished and mistreated populations in the Philippines. Artists often become the voice for the voiceless and have the ability to reach mass audiences, both locally and internationally, through their vision.

Objectives:

- Understand the similarities and differences between works of art.
- Understand the relationship of art history to other histories.
- Identify historical events that have contributed to the evolution of the arts.
- Develop observational abilities in order to critique visual art.
- Justify personal and non-personal critiques of art and architecture.
- Gain an overall academic awareness through the study of the fine arts.

Outcomes:

- Analyze the relationship between visual art and human rights.
- Connect human rights to larger social and cultural issues and movements.
- Understand how artists critique and challenge history and cultural conventions.
- Analyze the impact that artists have on improving the lives of those around them and society at large.

Background Information:

Corruption in the Philippines has led to a high percentage of poverty and lack of resources being channeled into the rural areas. Due to the wide-ranging geographic, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, there are difficulties getting educational resources where they are needed the most. In 2014, extreme poverty in the Philippines was estimated at 19.2 percent of the population, or about 18.4 million people, based on the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day. Most of the poor in the Philippines live in rural areas and work in the agriculture sector, mainly in farming and fishing. Urban poverty, however, has been increasing in recent years. Migrants without jobs or with low-paying jobs are unable to afford decent housing. As a result, Philippine cities have high proportions of the homeless who are among the poorest of the poor. Poverty is severe in parts of the country with high levels of conflict. The Philippines' 10 poorest provinces are conflict-affected or vulnerable to conflict. The poor in the Philippines generally have families of six or more members, with greater numbers of younger and older dependents. In the majority of poor families, the head of household has an elementary education or below. These families have few or no assets and minimal access to electricity, water sources and toilet

facilities. They also have limited access to health and education services. The poor are also the most vulnerable to natural disasters. Often their efforts to cope with these events result in deeper levels of indebtedness.

Since the 1970s, the Philippines have supplied a variety of skilled and low-skilled workers to countries throughout the world. Many Overseas Filipinos Workers choose to work elsewhere due to a financial need or opportunity. An estimated 10 million Filipinos, nearly 10 percent of the country's population, were working or residing in nearly 200 countries and territories around the globe. Some Philippine workers are the victims of human trafficking. Labor traffickers make false promises of high-paying job or exciting education or travel opportunities to lure people into horrendous working conditions. Victims frequently work long hours for little to no pay. Their employers exert physical or psychological control including abuse, debt bondage, and confiscating passports or money so victims believe they have no choice but to continue working for them. Immigration status, recruitment debt, isolation, poverty, and a lack of strong labor protections are just some of the vulnerabilities that can lead to labor trafficking.

Visual Art Slides:

Vincente Manasala, *Beggars at Malacañang*, 1971, Oil on canvas (Figure 1C)

- Manasala (b. 1910) is a National Artist and is considered a pioneer in Cubism.
- He developed transparent cubism and his works were done in a figural mode reflecting society and the local environment.
- His paintings are images of reality pushed towards abstraction. His style of cubism explores grim social situations that feature slums and extremely impoverished communities.
- *Beggars*, distorts slum dwellers and depicts a bleak life in poverty against the backdrop of industrialization. Cubism is used to fracture the surface area of the painting, symbolizing the fragmented mind and body of the people struggling to make ends meet.

Papo de Asis, *Third World*, 1981, Oil on canvas, NAGM, Manila (Figure 2C)

- Asis (b. 1949) is a Filipino artist and activist. When Martial Law was declared he left the Philippines and his art took on a political scope. He condemned human rights violations and called for independence and democracy in the Philippines.
- He founded Habi Arts, a collective of artists in L.A. committed to progressive social change.
- *Third World* depicts a bound and kneeling man struggling against his restraints. Above him two shadowy figures press their fists forward in a show of resistance.
- While the man is unable to participate in the resistance movement, the spirit of revolution embodied by the two figures presses on. Behind him a village dots the landscape; further back factories loom, churning out smog from their smokestacks.

Pacita Abad, *Caught at the border*, 1991, Acrylic, oil, mirrors, sequins on stitched and padded canvas (Figure 3C)

- Abad (b. 1946) traveled to the U.S. to study law, when she switched careers and began painting. She is a Filipina activist, who has traveled to over 50 countries, created over 4,500 artworks, and exhibited in museums and galleries around the world.
- The *Immigrant Experience* series is created using the trapunto technique (stitching and stuffing canvases to give them a three-dimensional effect).
- When she arrived in San Francisco she met other immigrants who had come for diverse economic and socio-political reasons and were facing similar circumstances in the U.S.
- Living abroad she realized that immigration was a major social issue in many countries.
- Her immigrant paintings incorporate first-hand experience; she cut up a number of her earlier social realist paintings to incorporate them into her new trapuntos.

Antipas Delotavo, *Itak sa Puso ni Mang Juan (Dagger in Old Juan's Heart)*, 1978, watercolor on paper (Figure 4C)

- Delatavo (b. 1954) was a member of Kaisahan, which created a large body of political art.
- *Dagger in Old Juan's Heart* depicts a downtrodden man walking past an advertisement for the U.S. Corporation Coca Cola. The letter C nearly stabs him, and the red background resembles dried or smeared blood (perhaps foreshadowing his fate).
- The Coke icon represents the omnipresence of the U.S. globally through neo-imperialism and the cultural and economic enslavement of Filipino (and all third world) workers.
- This is particularly true in the Philippines, which was a U.S. colony for nearly fifty years.

Antipas Delotavo, *Diaspora*, 2007, Oil on canvas (Figure 5C)

- *Diaspora* depicts Filipinos heading off to unknown locations. The colored stripes on the ground may represent the different fates that wait for them: bad, good, and tolerable.
- They represent the ten million Overseas Filipino Workers that keep the economy afloat by sending money back to relatives and dependents. They send around 13 billion dollars home every year, ensuring that the economy does not sink.
- The Philippine government calls them the new heroes (bagong bayani) of the nation.

Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, *Project Another Country: Address*, 2008, 140 stacked cubes of personal belongings (Figure 6C)

- Alfredo (b. 1962) and Isabel (b. 1965) Aquilizan are married Philippine artists who collaborate on large-scale projects and installations.
- *Address* symbolizes the immigrant experience of packing together memories and objects into small, portable containers, and a commentary on their address-less reality.
- Life of migration hinges on the ability to take along as much as possible, to leave behind as little as possible, and to keep more than lose along the journey.
- The installation, constructed with boxes of uniform size in modular form, reflects the deconstruction and reconstruction processes typical of migrant reality.

Rodelio Cerda, *Dreamweaver Series*, 2009, Watercolor (Figure 7C)

- Cerda (b. 1959) is a Filipino watercolor painter whose main subjects are children, their unique perception, and world they experience.
- Set against urban and rural landscapes, he captures fleeting moments of pure joy and imagination representing innocence in their difficult, yet carefree world.
- Despite poverty and harsh living conditions the children are jumping, singing, smiling, drawing, and dreaming, reflecting a deeply rooted optimism and resiliency.

Cultural Comparison:

Kerry James Marshall, *Many Mansions*, 1994, Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, AIC, Chicago (Figure 8C)

- Marshall (b. 1955) is an African American artist who exemplifies his experience of growing up black and at times invisible in the U.S.
- *Many Mansions* depicts public housing in Chicago and LA: Rockwell Gardens, Wentworth Gardens, or Stateway Gardens. Struck by the absurdity of “garden” to describe low-income housing he challenged the stereotypes and contradictions of living there.
- The impersonal, official name of the housing project (IL 2-22) appears in red.
- In the foreground, men tend garden sprucing up the housing project many deem as unlivable. Their white shirts and ties contradict negative images of African American men.
- Two birds hold a banner “Bless Our Happy Home”, above the scene is a red ribbon with “In My Mother’s House There Are Many Mansions” inspired by the Biblical passage John 14:2.

Andres Serrano, *Nomads (Payne)*, 1990, Silver dye-bleach print, MCA, Chicago (Figure 9C)

- Serrano (b. 1950) is an American photographer interested in challenging and critiquing reality, as much as documenting it.
- In 1990, he used portraiture to create a body of work depicting *Nomads* or homeless peoples he saw on the streets and subway tunnels, often photographing them on-site.
- By photographing the homeless, a group often overlooked by society, he elevates their pride and dignity. Serrano asked his models to be in charge of their own self-presentation.

Jacob Lawrence, *Free Clinic*, 1937, Gouache on tan wove paper, laid down on ivory cardboard, AIC, Chicago (Figure 10C)

- Lawrence (b. 1950) is an African American artist who found his voice at Harlem Community Art Center during the Harlem Renaissance.
- He used silhouettes of flat shapes and bright colors drawn from African visual sources. His compositions are flattened and angular with strong diagonals to create movement.
- He used a limited palette arranging colors to create focal points to direct the viewer's eye.
- The people in the panels are not individualized, but represent collective characteristics.
- His early work devoted to African American or African diaspora history recounted in series of small narrative panel paintings accompanied by text.

Thomas Hart Benton, *Cotton Pickers*, 1945, Oil on canvas, AIC, Chicago (Figure 11C)

- Benton (b. 1889) is an American painter known for fluid imagery, figures with rubbery distortion, and complex scenes of rural America.
- His work was politically progressive, bringing into focus the bleak social and economic landscape of the South and West in the early 20th century.
- *Cotton Pickers* shows the dignity of African American farm workers enduring backbreaking labor in the hot summer heat.
- The workers pick cotton by hand to be collected by horse-drawn wagons. One woman offers another a drink of water, and a makeshift shelter protects a child from the sun.

Pablo Picasso, *The Old Guitarist*, 1903–1904, Oil on panel, AIC, Chicago (Figure 12C)

- Picasso (b. 1881) was a Spanish painter and leading avant-garde artist in the 20th century.
- *The Old Guitarist* was created during his Blue Period reflecting themes of misery and alienation. His artwork from this time depicts the destitute, ill, and social outcasts.
- A blind man holds his guitar close, its brown tone the only color shift present among the blues. His angular figure reflects Picasso's sympathy for the plight of the downtrodden. He knew what it was like to be poor, having struggled financially during his early career.

In Class Discussion Topics:

- What techniques do the artists use to get their message across?
- How does the medium help to convey the message of the artwork?
- What makes these artworks successful or unsuccessful?
- What works fall under our traditional understanding of what art is and what works fall under contemporary art?
- How does each work of art engage with a human rights issue?

Homework Activities:

- Bring in an object from home that symbolizes a human rights issue to be used as part of a collaborative class project.
- Make a compilation of human rights images found on the Internet to share with the class during discussion.
- Look for a poem or short story that correlates with one of the artworks presented in class.

Resources:

Books:

Stanly Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines*, Random House, 1989.

- Goes back 500 years to paint a portrait of Philippine history, focusing on the U.S. imperial experience in the islands. Portrays the U.S.'s attempt to remake the Philippines "in our image" complete with American political, educational, and cultural institutions

Vicente Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*. Ateneo de Manila University, 2000.

- Cultural and political history of Filipinos and the Philippines examining the period from the onset of U.S. colonialism in 1898 to the emergence of a Filipino diaspora in the 1990s. Adopting the essay form to disrupt epic conceptions of Filipino history, its clusters of historical detail and reflections that do not easily fit into a larger whole.

Alice G. Guillermo, *Protest/Revolutionary Art in the Philippines, 1970-1990*, University of the Philippines Press, 2001.

- Documents social realism and other protest and revolutionary artists. Begins with the origins of protest art in the 19th century and pursues it to its full flourishing in the Marcos regime and variations during the Aquino administration. Projects the trajectory of art in the future as new issues emerge to engage political artists.

Flaudette May V. Datuin, *Home, Body, Memory: Filipina Artists in the Visual Arts, 19th Century to the Present*, University of the Philippines Press, 2002.

- Charts the itinerary of the history of Filipina artists in the visual arts and contains a comprehensive demonstration and discussion of how women's art-works present the female body using different media.

Wayne Baerwaldt, ed., *Memories of Overdevelopment: Philippine Diaspora in Contemporary Art*. University of California, Irvine, 1997.

- Exhibition catalogue commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Philippine drive toward democratic independence, a movement that caused thousands to flee political persecution or depart to find employment outside the country. Identifies contemporary artists whose work touches political issues like traditional materials and cultural icons.

David Brody, *Visualizing American Empire: Orientalism and Imperialism in the Philippines*, The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

- Explores the way visual imagery shaped the political and cultural landscape, drawing on sources including photographs, tattoos, the decorative arts, popular press, maps, parades, and material from world's fairs and urban planners. Argues that the way Americans visualized the Orient greatly influenced the fantasies of colonial domestication.

Articles:

Patrick Flores, *Social Realism: The Turns of a Term in the Philippines*. Afterall, Issue 34, 2013.

- Looking at the legacy of 1970s social realist painting in the Philippines, it reflects on the intersection of postcolonial discourse, historical imagination, and political art practice.

Patrick Flores, *Everyday, Elsewhere: Allegory in Philippine Art*, Contemporary Aesthetics, 2011.

- Traces the contexts of the allegorical impulse in Philippine image making and art, as it marks the self-consciousness to render time, place, and event legible. The allegorical bears the desire to belong to the world, referencing both the critique of colonialism as well as the possibility of transcending it at the very moment of revealing its ethical failure.

Jonathan Beller, *Visual Transformations in Philippine Modernity: Notes toward an Investigation of the World-Media System*, Acquiring Eyes.

- Concerned with the changes in visual art wrought by culture and technology accompanying and enabling economic development. The Philippines given its status as an American colony was subject to U.S. media yet produced its own counter-visions.

Websites:

<http://www.nationalmuseum.gov.ph>

- The National Museum is an educational, scientific and cultural institution that acquires, documents, preserves, exhibits, and fosters scholarly study and public appreciation of works of art, specimens, and historical artifacts representative of the cultural heritage of the Filipino people and the natural history of the Philippines.

<http://ncca.gov.ph>

- The National Commission for Culture and the Arts, Philippines is the policy making body, coordinating, and grants giving agency for the preservation, development and promotion of Philippine arts and culture. The National Endowment Fund for Culture and the Arts funds the implementation of culture and arts programs and projects.

<http://www.gov.ph/the-order-of-national-artists/>

- A National Artist is a Filipino citizen who has been given the rank and title of National Artist in recognition of his or her significant contributions to the development of Philippine arts and letters. It recognizes excellence in Music, Dance, Theater, Visual Arts, Literature, Film and Broadcast Arts, and Architecture or Allied Arts.

<http://malacanang.gov.ph/7054-the-andres-bonifacio-monument/>

- The Presidential Museum and Library features a comprehensive essay, videos, and traces the history of the Bonifacio Monument and the legacy it has left.

<http://www.artic.edu>

- The Art Institute of Chicago collects, preserves, and interprets works of art, representing the world's diverse artistic traditions, for the inspiration and education of the public and in accordance with our profession's highest ethical standards and practices.

<https://mcahicago.org/Home>

- The MCA's mission is to bring artists and audiences together to experience and contemplate contemporary art and culture in ways that can deepen what it means to be a citizen of both Chicago and the world.

<http://www.metmuseum.org>

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a museum and library of art, for encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, for the application of arts to manufacture and practical life, for advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and for furnishing popular instruction.

<http://www.moma.org>

- Founded in 1929 as an educational institution, The Museum of Modern Art is dedicated to being the foremost museum of modern art in the world. Central to MOMA's mission is the encouragement of an ever-deeper understanding and enjoyment of modern and contemporary art by the diverse local, national, and international audiences that it serves.

<http://www.guggenheim.org>

- The Guggenheim Museum is a vital cultural center, an educational institution, and the heart of an international network of museums. Founded on a collection of modern masterpieces, the Guggenheim is a growing institution devoted to the art of the 20th century and beyond.

<http://www.getty.edu/museum/>

- The J. Paul Getty Museum seeks to inspire curiosity about, and enjoyment and understanding of, the visual arts by collecting, conserving, exhibiting and interpreting works of art of outstanding quality and historical importance.

Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD-NDGmdVag>

- René B. Javellana, Associate Professor of the Fine Arts Program at Ateneo de Manila University, discuss the intersection between Philippine art and social change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq1IDGs6l9k>

- Isang documentary project para sa Art Studies sa University of the Philippines, Diliman.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw902x3fC3o>

- Salcedo Auctions presents the highlights of its Art Today: Contemporary Philippine Art.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ_ogmgFDfg

- Poverty tourism is a growing sector of the tourism industry where western tourists visit the poorest places on earth, most in the developing world. Manila is densely populated with half of its residents living in slums. Critics have labeled these tours degrading, while supporters contend that they promote social awareness and help the local economy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHnFG92Kzxo>

- Gawad Kalinga is aimed at ending poverty in the Philippines by 2024. Having built 2000 communities around the country in 10 years, Gawad Kalinga seeks to develop social entrepreneurship, social education and social tourism to create wealth at the bottom.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNrzuELmZTY>

- Tribal Journeys: The Agtas. Documentary of the Agta with a cultural studies emphasis. In English, with a western lens of observing or studying the indigenous group.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmgJRgH9W2c>

- Concerned with the continuing violations of human rights the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility produced a video to help the lay audience contextualize the discussion of human rights in the realities of the Philippines and its history.

Poverty and Migration in Art Image Sheet (C)

Vincente Manasala, *Beggars at Malacañang*, 1971, Oil on canvas (Figure 1C)



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Papo de Asis, *Third World*, 1981, Oil on canvas, NAGM, Manila (Figure 2C)



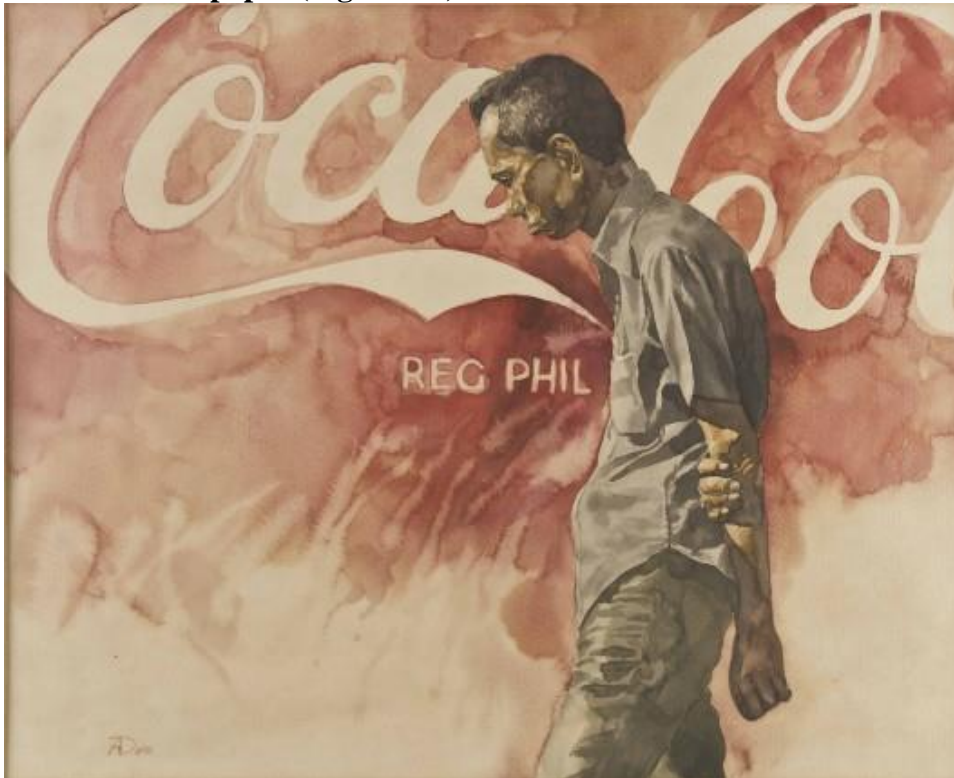
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Pacita Abad, *Caught at the border*, 1991, Acrylic, oil, mirrors, sequins on stitched and padded canvas (Figure 3C)



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