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Julius Poncelet Manapul: Decolonizing Antiquities

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Decolonizing Antiquities: The Whitewashing Effects of Antiquities
Julius Poncelet Manapul

**An essay from Julius Poncelet Manapul's solo show *Decolonizing Antiquities*.
Curated by Carla Garnet from John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Canada.
November 5, 2020 to March 26, 2021.**

As a queer migrant Filipinx artist from the Ilocano tribe, and a descendant of Maria Josefa Gabriela Carino de Silang from my father's mother side of the Carino family, my research and artistic practice are informed by these embodiment, as I excavate the experience of immigration and assimilation through cultural erasure.

Gabriela Silang was known as an anti-colonial fighter during the 18th century Spanish rule over the Philippines, and the first female leader of a Filipino movement for independence from Spain.

Addressing eternal displacement through themes of colonialism, sexual identity, diasporic bodies, global identity construction, and the Eurocentric Western hegemony, my art practice focuses on the hybrid nature of Filipinx culture after colonialism and the gaze of queer identities as taxonomy. In the show *Decolonizing Antiquities*, I look at the narratives for many diasporic queer bodies that create an unattainable imagined space from lost countries and domestic belongings through colonial pedagogy of knowledge and globalized imperial power. These transnational experiences of the nomadic migrant bodies are left unsettled, thus exploring other notions of connections not rooted in land but through imagined spaces where art exists. *Decolonizing Antiquities* focuses on the collected images and objects that interrogates cultural recoding through erasure and replacements the contemporary outcome of neocolonialism while reflecting on the racialized Asian queer bodies that displaces them within the restrictive confines of the queer communities that uphold homonormativity through whitewashing and internalized racism, and act to challenge forms of oppression.

These re-articulated domestic objects dispersed in the gallery space is informed by tools of imperialism, whitewashed indigeneity, displaced cultural identities, colonized queer bodies, Western heteronormative standards, genderism, and neocolonialism as they relate to my experience of immigration and assimilation.

Through the installations of the *Kamayan Na (Eat With Your Hands)* dinner table, I re-interpret the display and rituals of colonial domestic antiquities to a diasporic queer lens in attempt to decolonize the symbolic presence of privilege, status, patriarchy, wealth, and the pompous staged performative these objects and rituals inhabits in keeping up appearances. As expressed through the character of Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced "bouquet") in the BBC tv series I grew up watching upon immigrating to Canada in the early 90's. Patricia Routledge's character embodies this obsessive painful act of performing hierarchal British status that often is exposed to its vulnerable truth of fear and proving that one's shortcomings and lack of upbringing should not be the main result of one's status and sense of belonging in hierarchal spaces. In a way I see pain and struggle through Routledge's character of endless sense of female bravado and justification. Hyacinth Bucket exemplified the power of objects that one poses as she places her Royal Doulton Figurine

to a spot that guests could easily see “I wonder if people realize how expensive you were. Sometimes worries me, I stand you there, and still there are people who have no idea how expensive you were”.

Just as Hyacinth Bucket’s use of objects as symbolisms, objects and narratives form my personal space and daily life becomes the materials I choose to re-examining my possessions and obsessions that reflects status and simultaneously address my struggles of the problematics on whitewashing and at the same time re-learning my past and cultural roots that had been erased, forgotten and replaced by a pound of English language, a cup of Western products, with a dash of Patriarchal sensibility, baked in Colonial cultural acceptance. A recipe that had been used throughout colonized countries such as the Philippines. As I recollect my childhood experiences growing up in a country that upholds whiteness and colonial upbringing as standardized idea of wealth, knowledge, class structures, and as a way of keeping up appearances while consuming the after effects of Western & Eurocentric programming’s, brands, culture, and habits.

Documented didactics of colonial knowledge and interpretations of artifacts and objects seen through Western & Eurocentric pedagogies becomes the norm and are also reminders for many Asian diasporic bodies of their positionality as an outsider looking in, and only through assimilation or reclaiming one’s cultural narratives can one partially be part of the ritualistic performance of power dynamics. By recrafting and rearranging personal objects I had acquired from trips to antique markets I question why I had wanted to obtain them in the first place. Was it for show or a sense of branding ones status of place? I then began to scrutinize these domestic objects through transformation and repurposing as artworks thus rendering them unusable, merely objects of reflections for a new understanding to colonial aesthetics and the reinterpretation of these antiquities in reflection to the homes these objects inhabits such as diasporic Filipino migrant homes like mine. Antiquities such as plates and tea sets starts to create these transformative understanding of decolonizing its origins of power by the act of covering its motifs with rice stained with Filipino soy sauce and Tagalog texts exchanged between Filipino families at dining tables that start to form from the rice incusted on the salad starter plates, while written English translations anchors the Tagalog texts with a tagging of a sharpie permanent markers on the main course plates. These arrangements represents the erasure of my cultural language and narratives just as many Asian migrants experience in North American countries, how far must one assimilate by completely removing ones Filipino accent as an unwanted stain, a reminder of how whitewashing are not only superficial exterior aesthetics but a way of living, speaking, and thinking. These problematic transformations and assimilations resurface through a slow process of cultural erasure, and how neocolonial mobilization can occur within aspects of belonging and displacement.

Through these series of Sculptures, Collage, Installations, Digital Collage, Animations, Videos, and Performances, I am left with the questions how can one decolonize histories and objects? How can one reclaim these understandings and contexts? And how can we move forward to a new informed and just possibilities beyond the horizon of belonging and equity that deconstructs colonial patriarchal status quo.

Decolonizing Antiquities is an investigation to conceptualize my personal journey of belonging in spaces crafted through assimilation while struggling to relearn and the re-acceptance of what it is

to be a Filipino living in colonized land such as Toronto, Canada. A sense of displaced belongings as I tiptoe between ideas of both imagined spaces, thus realizing the new country I belong in are thoughts and potentialities within an intangible land that is only a reflected concept I cannot obtain or own. A hybridized transnational imagined space that is a culmination of the nomadic migrant experiences that lingers within my art practice, as artworks dwells in temporal spaces mobilized by a moment of sequential happenings. In recent times of COVID our digital landscape had also been mobilized leaving the tangible land and space a gallery would have inhabit within the global positioning system.

Word Count: 1,133

Works Cited

Hyacinth Bucket character in Roy Clarke's BBC TV Series *Keeping Up Appearances*. BBC TV Sitcom, 5 Season, 1990-1995, United Kingdom.

Manapul, Julius Poncelet. *Decolonizing Antiquities*, 5th November 2020 – 26th March 20201, John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto.

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10 Images from the Artist



Cup of Rice Series, Before and After, Bone China and Basmati Rice stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, 2019-2020. Image by Julius Poncelet Manapul.

John B. Aird Gallery
Galerie John B. Aird



DECOLONIZING ANTIQUITIES

Julius
Poncelet
Manapul



Curated by
Carla Garnet

November 5, 2020 - March 26, 2021

Catalogue Front Cover & Poster, *Decolonizing Antiquities*. Image contains: *Jose Rizal Plate*, and *A Cup of Rice Tea Set Series*, Antique China plate & Tea Set, decorated with Basmati Rice stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, 2019-2020. Image by Francis Jay Manapul.

A Cup of Rice: Tea Set Series, 2019-2020

Antique bone china teacups, saucers, china plates, and silverware, placed on antique tea cart. Teacups, saucers and plates decorated with basmati rice stained with Filipino Soy Sauce in different dilutions with water to achieve varying shades of brown. The raw dried rice is then baked at 250° F for 30 minutes in order for the pigments to stick to the rice grains. It is then cooled off and dried overnight before use. Silverware contains cut-outs of printed images of Eskinol skin whitening toner.

These objects that had been excavated from Antique Markets and now had been re-appropriated with Basmati Rice that had been stained with Filipino Soy Sauce is the act of tracing the colonial patterns to be covered, replacing colonial aesthetics to mimic the detailed tactile Filipino Indigenous Mark-Makings found in textiles and body tattoos. The origin of tea drinking goes as far back to the 3rd AD in China, during the Chinese Tang dynasty. I expressed this information to the fact that now in popular culture it had been appropriated as a British Colonial practice of Afternoon Tea to act out elite Patriarchal entitlement. This acts from past histories of acquiring the practices, objects and lands from these colonized spaces is important to be reminded of the power dynamics and effects of colonialism that still lingers in our current times, that normalized our knowing and understandings of these antiques and objects that inhabits our daily rituals.



Rice Queen's Regalia, Sculpture, Paper Digital Collage, Synthetic Bag, Basmati Rice some stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, Artists Finger Nails, Bag of Brown Rice, 2020. Projected on TV Digital Animated GIF on a 25 seconds looped, *Ladlad Bakla Tea Set*, this digital animation is crafted from homonormative male gay bodies, templates of indigenous Filipino butterflies, and Tagalog texts. The words *Ladlad* and *Bakla* (terms that translates to *Coming Out* and *Queer*), 2020. Installation Dimension: Width 13" x Depth 19" x Height 13" inches. Image by Francis Jay Manapul.

The Rice Queen's Regalia, 2020

Sculpture Installation of a replica of the Spanish Royal Crown constructed from synthetic recycled red Dollarama bag, plain Basmati rice and Basmati rice stained with Filipino soy sauce, printed images of Filipino whitewashing product logos, white gay porn, and the artists collected fingernails. The crown sits on a square altered bag of rice, replacing the pillow that the crown usually sits on. The square bag of rice crafted by the artists mother Juliet D. Manapul, 2020. The choice of the Spanish Monarchy Regalia symbolizes the colonization of Spain to the Philippines. The Rice Queen character have always been present in my art practice and at times performed by myself, and through most of my digital body of work. The term "Rice Queen" is a derogatory word that is given to white queer men who has a preference for Asian queer men, usually as an exoticization fantasy of objectification of the Asian characteristics, merely viewing us as objects of fetish that perpetuates racist representations with a narrow spectrum of understanding. This context of understandings represents the Asian Queer Male bodies viewed as passive, domestic, soft, feminine, docile and ready to serve any master which then would fall as the white colonial representation of homonormative entitled queer whiteness that are usually placed upon a pedestal through the social media of the templated queer representations.



Kamayan Na! (Translation: Lets Eat With Our Hands Now!), Installation Shot from John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 2020. Image still by Julius Poncelet Manapul. *Balibkayan Tea Cart*, Installation. Antique late Victorian, early Edwardian tea cart decorated with white text "*Balibkayan*" (Translation: *To Return to Your Country or Go Back to your Country*) Collage Decorative Images derived from Manapul's unique, hybrid, gay porn cut-outs, and whitewashing products. 2019-2020. *Traditional Filipino Clay Ceramics, Water Jug & Tea Set Collection*, 19th Century which informs the cart settings through decolonial aesthetics. Image by Francis Jay Manapul.

Kamayan na! (Let's eat with our hands now!), 2020

Installation of a dinner table setting design, constructed from antique plates with basmati rice stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, forming Filipino/Tagalog texts. The table's center piece is constructed with faux flowers made from gay porn images and Filipino whitewashing products in crystal vases, candles encased in paper with *Snow Skin Whitening Cream* logo in a candelabra, *Philippine Kalesa* (horse and carriage toy purchased from souvenir shop in the Philippines), napkins with *Likas*, a Filipino whitening soap logo and Basmati rice stained with Filipino soy sauce, an act "to stain back the soap", as well as antique silver salt and pepper shaker with images of whitewashing products.

The lack of utensils echoes the cultural way of "eating with our hands".

This installation speaks about the etiquettes to the colonial, patriarchal ceremony of dining and hosting. As a Filipino who grew up eating with my hands on a special BBQ party (Kamayan/Eating with hands) back home when we eat specific grilled food spread on banana leaves called Boodle Fight. A boodle fight, in context of Filipino culture, is the military practice

of eating a meal. The explanation on its etymology says that the term “boodle” is an American military slang for contraband sweets such as cake, candy and ice cream. A “boodle fight” is a party in which boodle fare is served. The term may have been derived from “kit and caboodle”. My experience of the boodle fights is grilled seafood such as Tilapia, Shrimps, Mussels, Squid, as well as BBQ Pork, Rice, Mango Salad, with a Lechon/Roast Pork. In this installation I will create a hybrid of both dining etiquettes with a Colonial ways of eating that was introduced to the Indigenous Filipinos during the Spanish Colonization to eat with the utensils rather than their hands, but rather I will dispose of the utensils and lay antique plates that had been adorned with rice creating Filipino/Tagalog texts of sayings exchanged in a Filipino family table. The translation of the Tagalog words into English echoes how most Filipino migrants experiences of forget the language of our mothers tongue as we continue assimilate and colonize ourselves in order to belong and be accepted in the Colonized lands we inhabit. The center piece of the table settings will be adorned with flowers, candles and white washing products purchased from my local Filipino Store, and Filipino toys from souvenir shops in the Philippines.

6 Filipino Narra, Kamagong, Rattan, Carabao Bone Dining Chairs, 19th Century

The table is accompanied by six chairs made by the artisans from Paete, Laguna who are well known as native furniture makers in the Philippines. The chairs are made of Phil mahogany (narra) wood and inlaid with native carabao bones creating intricate designs. The seats are made of interwoven well treated rattan. **On loan by Rick & Tess Malonzo from the Malonzo Family.**

Rice Ka Ganda Hosts the Dinner, 2020

Video Installation projected on the wall.

Ka Ganda translation: Very Pretty.

The video and photo projections are the artist’s alter ego in drag “Rice Ka Ganda” who echoes the same template of showing audiences how to become a domesticated colonial host to prepare a formal sit-down dinner party in the tone of a ramshackle version of the Martha Stewart Show. This documented performance interrogates the acts of gender prescribed roles of the domestics re-interpreting the Filipinix experience of the Diasporic nanny intertwined with the colonial perspectives of the Western ideals of the Host in context of the Happy Home Maker. The video is intertwined with images the artist took during their last visit to the Philippines back in 2004, echoing the act of the Balikbayan embodiment (to return back to the country). The Balikbayan boxes were used by Filipino immigrants in the west to send western products to their families back home. It is also Intertwined with the Digital Archive of the 1609 book “*Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*” (English: Events in the Philippine Island) a book written and published by Antonio de Morga, an early historical account of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, a first-hand account of the early Spanish colonial venture into Asia. The first English translation was published in London in 1868.



Gabriela Silang, Plate, Antique China Plate, decorated with Basmati Rice Stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, 2020. Dimension: 9.25" inches diameter. Image by Francis Jay Manapul.



A Plate of Rice Series: Kamayan Na! (Translation: *Let's Eat With Our Hands Now!*), Antique China Plate, decorated with Basmati Rice Stained with Filipino Soy Sauce, 2020. Image by Julius Poncelet Manapul.

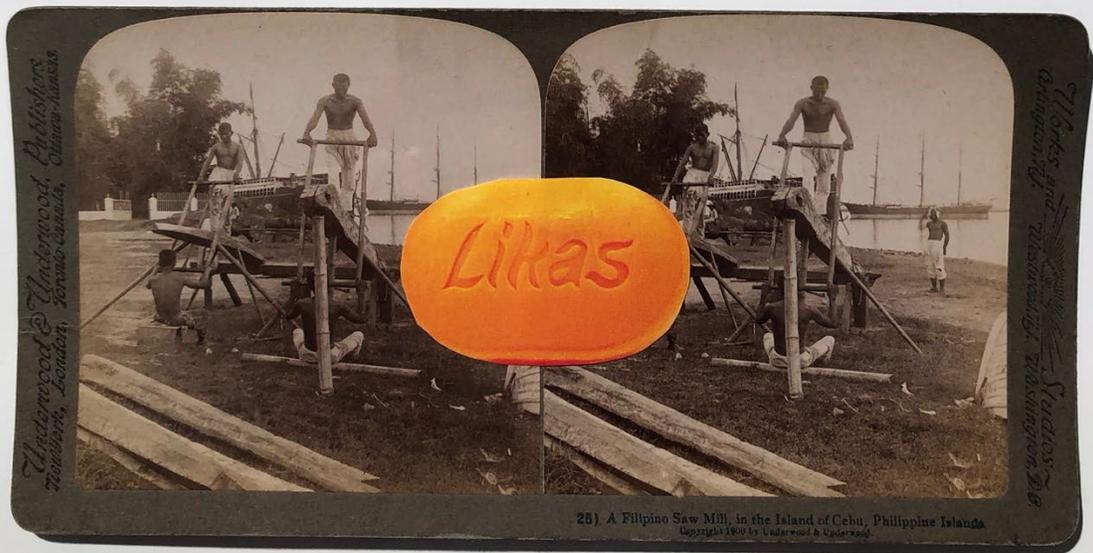
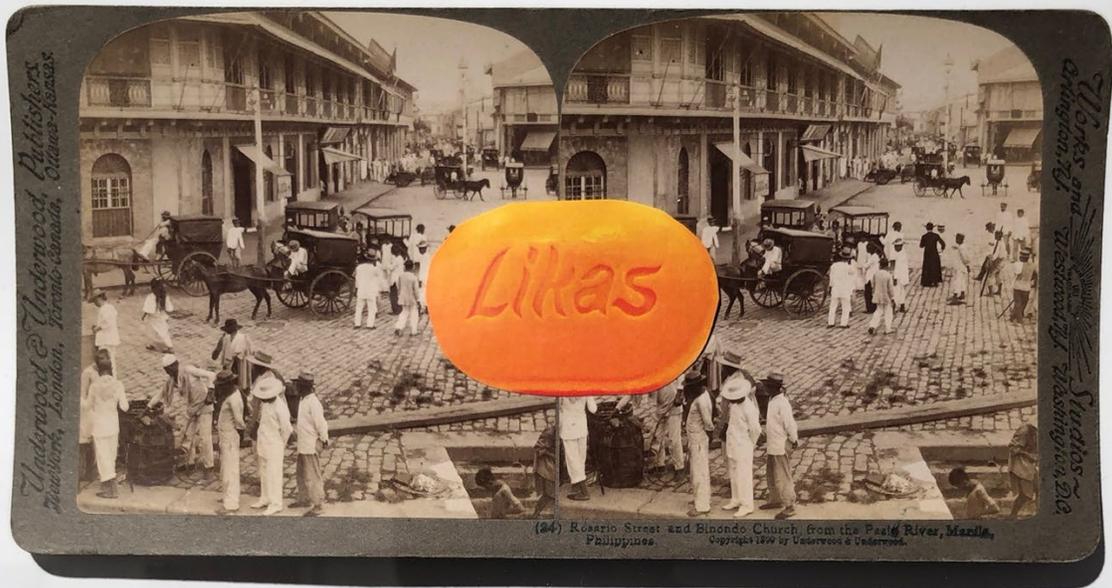


Take a Picture It Will Last Longer, Stop-Motion Video Animation Projected on TV Screen, 11 seconds looped GIF Animation, *Balibbayan Wall Sconces*, with white Vinyl Text in Tagalog (Translation: *Go Back To Your Country*), and *Bongga Ka 'Day*, Set of two framed decorative floral prints with white Vinyl Silhouettes of the artist in stilettoes. The title comes from a popular Filipino disco song, meaning “proud and fierce”, usually this terminology is used between Filipino queer communities. Installation at John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 2020-2021. Installation Image by Francis Jay Manapul.

Take a Picture It Will Last Longer, 2020

Stop-Motion Video Animation Projected on TV Screen, 11 seconds looped

Indigenous Filipino Face Tattoo GIF Animation. The bust of Beethoven is an example of a Decolonized Eurocentric whitewashed objects I started to acquire in my collections to decorate my home. I often question why I gravitated towards these colonial Eurocentric aesthetics which further question my learning and conditioning growing up from the Philippines & Canada. Collections of whitewashed objects from second hand stores occupies my personal space, reflecting on the aspects of colonial belongings and an unconscious act of assimilating and performing whiteness, class, and acceptability that had been generalized through interior and the decorative aesthetics that can be sold and acquired. This bust is adorned with tribal face tattoos from the Visayan Langi face and Luzon (warrior markings from the Philippine History of pre-colonial times) with a permanent sharpie marker. Trying to acquire the permanence of re-learning my cultural indigeneity through the objects that had settled in my daily life.



You're Whitewashing Me With Your Soap, Collage made with Stereoscope photos of the Philippines from the Late Victorian Era of 1900s, juxtaposed with printout of Likas skin whitening soap from the Philippines. Framed Dimensions: 11" x 17" inches. 2020. Image by Julius Poncelet Manapul.



Balikbayan Bakla After Jose Honorato Lozano Series, (Translation: Return to Your Country Queer) Digital Collage: Archived Painting, Artist Selfie Silhouette, Queer Images, Filipino Text, and Balikbayan Box Template. Dimension: 11" x 17" inches. Image by Julius Poncelet Manapul.

Balikbayan Bakla, Bading, Ladlad After Jose Honorato Lozano Series, 2020

Digital Collage: Archived Painting, Artist Selfie Silhouette, Queer Images, Filipino Text, and Balikbayan Box Template.

11 x 17 inches

Jose Honorato Lozano's paintings from 19th century depiction of the Philippines shows Filipino Indigenous life which became part of my appropriated medium that I interrogate in my cultural belonging and unbelonging. Grappling through the painting's problematic taxonomy studies of Indigenous exoticization and the perpetuation of the "otherness" which in turn limits the understandings of race and culture. Inserting the whitewashed silhouettes of myself from selfies taken from my iPhone thus inserts and subverts these pictorial archives that then travels through Colonial Lenses. The blank absence of myself in the image points to my distance from the representation while the presence of my outline tries to reconnect myself to what was erased and washed out from my ancestors, cultural histories and sense of unbelonging. Thus, excavating the problematics of many diasporic bodies about the erasure of a country. The Balikbayan Box is then inserted central to the image, confined while connecting the Box's symbolism of cultural flight and exchange between Filipinos in the Philippines and Diasporic Filipinos from Western

Countries. Balikbayan box is a corrugated cardboard box which is a repatriate box containing items sent by overseas Filipinos. The surface of the image is then flattened with the injection of decorative Tagalog texts, of Bakla, Bading and Ladlad which translates Gay, Fag and Openly Queer. These decorative aesthetics creates a screen between the edited narratives and the viewers, linking boundaries in the act of looking between public space and the personal present space of the selfie. The last insertion is a bleached out subtle hints the Toronto map compiled from a surveys made in 1866, around the same century Jose Honorato Lozano's paintings of the Philippines landscape were made.



Decolonizing Antiquities. Solo Show of Julius Poncelet Manapul at John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 2020-2021. Image by Francis Jay Manapul.