

BISA: Potent Presences
at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila

BISA: Potent Presences opens to the public at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila's Upper Galleries on 20 May 2011. **BISA** is the Philippine contribution to *Self and Other: Portraits from Asia and Europe*, a series of exhibitions organized by the Asia-Europe Museums Network or ASEMUS under the aegis of the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF). The project started in Japan at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka with senior curator Dr Kenji Yoshida and Dr Brian Durrans curating the first exhibition which travelled to the National Museum of Art in the same city, the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, Hayama and the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History. Durrans, advisor of the British Museum, explains that in Japan, the exhibitions "outline the complex history of mutual perception through the medium of visual representations" between Asian and European peoples. It was contemplated at the outset that variations on the same theme would be presented in places like London, Stockholm, and Manila. Durrans continues that this was "one of the more ambitious of several core projects organized within ASEMUS...(which was) established in 2001 on the initiative of ASEF."

Curated by Patrick D Flores Ph D, eminent international curator and art critic, and director of the Vargas Museum of the University of the Philippines, the Philippine contribution is entitled *Bisa: Potent Presences*, its premise spinning from the Filipino word for potency, efficacy, charm, enchantment, specter, and prowess that is linked up with talismanic culture as well as cognate to the Bahasa Malayu word for ability, the possibility of doing.

The Philippines has had the longest engagement with western-style painting and its modality of image making in Southeast Asia. When the Portuguese mariner Magellan set foot on the archipelago in 1521, he presented an image of the Christ Child to the chieftain's wife; three centuries later, the first school of drawing in

Asia opened under the auspices of a homegrown miniaturist painter. It is this enduring liaison with image in a post-colonial scheme that gives the Philippine segment of *Self and Other* its distinction and the various guises of affection that the representation of self and other, conceived in the plural sense of presences, generate.

Four thematic sections in the exhibition comprise a range of materials and forms, and are crafted to discuss how presences make the world of the self and the other, and how they ultimate prefigure otherworldly aspirations. *BISA: Potent Presences* elaborates on its themes with archaeological and ethnographic objects, paintings, photographs and prints, installation and video art. The roster of artists also spans past and contemporary times. The sections are: *Ibayo/Afterlife*, which unfold visions of the future and the unknown; *Ganap/Here and Now*, which show material condition and struggle with nature; *Tuwina/Time and Again*, which illustrate the demands of history, repetition and change; and, *Dayo/Far and Away*, which explores the allure of the foreign, the allegory of the native/national.

BISA: Potent Presences was made possible by the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), ASEMUS (the Asia-Europe Museums Network), the Metropolitan Museum Board of Trustees, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, and the many individual and institutional lenders. **BISA** will open to public viewing on 20 May 2011, Thursday, and will run through 15 July 2011, at the Upper Galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Complex, Roxas Blvd, Manila. The Met is open Monday through Saturday (except every first Monday of the month) from 9 am to 6 pm. For more information, please call Fralynn Manalo at 523-0213 or Billy Ray Malacura at 523-7855, or email info@metmuseum.ph. The Met's website is www.metmuseum.ph.