

# Carpark chic

## Art Fair Philippines 2017

Chloé Wolifson, *Manila*

With major Australian institutions showcasing Filipino artists this year (Rodel Tapaya's solo show recently opened at the National Gallery of Australia, while the 'Bayanihan Philippines Art Project' will take place at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and a number of state-wide galleries from mid-year), it's fitting that Australians include Art Fair Philippines (AFP) in their Asia-Pacific itinerary. The Manila-based event has expanded its reach since the inaugural 2013 edition, and while professionally run is a more grassroots affair than its neighbouring Hong Kong and Singaporean behemoths.

Like many muggy Asian cities, Manila has a fondness for shopping malls, which function as air-conditioned urban thoroughfares as much as retail destinations. It was refreshing, then, to discover that the fair takes place not in the mall-like labyrinth of false white walls and vast ceilings of a convention centre, but in a multistorey indoor carpark – a playful, edgy setting well suited to the prevailing mood of positivity and curiosity. This year's iteration saw 46 galleries participating, with a dozen of those based outside the Philippines, predominantly in Asia. AFP was a celebration of Filipino art, both emerging and established, and of formally recognised National Artists, who are an ongoing source of pride for Filipinos.

While work varied from the traditional to the experimental, there was a notable prevalence of collage, assemblage and playful materiality. This could be seen in many booths, from that of Manila stalwart Galleria Duemila, whose cross-generational survey included elegant monochromatic mixed-media works by Roberto M. A. Robles, to Malaysian–Singaporean gallery TAKSU, which featured a busy but well-curated stand that included the assemblages of Norberto Roldan and small textured oils by Nilo Ilarde.

While most galleries filled their booths, Jakarta gallery ROH Projects presented a spare hang which paid off with one of the best-curated booths, an engaging selection of three Bandung-based artists. Manila's Tin-aw Art Gallery drew viewers into an orange-painted structure inside the booth, which included an installation of teeth-shaped sculptures by dental school graduate-turned artist Pauline Abayon.

Manila art scene heavyweights presented full stands that showed off outstanding work by artists such as Mark Salvatus at 1335Mabini, and Pow Martinez and Gina Osterloh at Silverlens. Visiting the permanent spaces of these enterprises revealed a sparer approach, with 1335Mabini's slender gallery, housed in an elegant colonial building, presenting a show of high-profile Filipina artist Kiri Dalena, while Silverlens's cavernous new space in Makati included an impactful yet minimal installation of delicate brickwork paintings by Maria Taniguchi.

Attendance of AFP increased from 22,000 in 2016 to a remarkable 40,000 this year. Some were drawn to the scheduled talks, held in a marquee in an elegant rooftop café area (who says carparks can't be chic), with artists, authors and curators from around the globe. Audiences were curious and forthright with their questions, with a keenness to invite international visitors to understand and consider Filipino art within its broader international and regional context.

Commissioned special projects within the fair covered broad ground – from the chaotically playful installation of Maria Jeona Zoleta to the poetic concrete of Mark Valenzuela, and an interactive sound booth by Filipino collective WSK which was popular with punters but less so with neighbouring booths. AFP continued beyond the carpark with '10 Days of Art', a series of installations and events around the city that included a

large-screen presentation of *Street* (2011) by James Nares, whose hypnotically slowed scenes of New York pedestrians seemed right at home set against the bustling streets of Manila.

With the fair reporting that sales approached US\$10 million, it seems the positive mood was well-founded. Beyond fiscal measures, however, there was plenty to be excited about in the city that week, within and beyond the carpark walls: clearly the Philippines art scene is one to watch.



The 5th Art Fair Philippines was held at The Link Carpark, Ayala Center, Manila, 16–19 February 2017.