Maia Cruz Palileo: *Long Kwento*
Curated by Kim Nguyen
Organized by Diego Villalobos
CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art
*September 14 - December 4, 2021*

Maia Cruz Palileo, "Bulaklak (flower)," 2021; Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery.

Education Guide
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The Artist

Maia Cruz Palileo (they/them) is a multi-disciplinary, Brooklyn-based artist. Migration and the permeable concept of home are constant themes in Maia's paintings, installations, sculptures, and drawings. Influenced by familial oral histories about migrating to the US from the Philippines alongside the troubling colonial history between the two countries, Maia infuses these narratives using both memory and imagination. When stories and memories are subjected to time and constant retelling, the narratives become questionable, bordering the line between fact and fiction, while remaining cloaked in the convincingly familiar.

Information

- Born in Chicago, IL 1979
- Currently based in Brooklyn, NY
- Recipient of the Nancy Graves Grant, Art Matters Grant, Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant, Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Program Grant, Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant, NYFA Painting Fellowship, Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA Award and the Astraea Visual Arts Fund Award
- MFA in Sculpture from Brooklyn College, City University of New York
- BA in Studio Art at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts
- Recent solo exhibitions: The Way Back, Taymour Grahne, London; Meandering Curves of a Creek, Pioneer Works, Brooklyn; and Maia Cruz Palileo at Katzen Museum, American University, Washington, D.C.
- Palileo teaches at Parsons School of Design in New York
Artist Statement on Long Kwento

Influenced by the oral history of my family’s arrival in the United States from the Philippines, as well as the colonial relationship between the two countries, my paintings infuse these narratives with memory and care. Figures appear and disappear in lush landscapes, domestic interiors, and colonial structures. Deep blues and reds suggest dark realms where superstition, myth, and history blur. Evoking a hybrid sense of place, they serve as metaphors for migration and assimilation.

In 2017, at Chicago’s Newberry Library, I researched Damián Domingo’s watercolor album, Isabelo De los Reyes’ El Folk-lore Filipino, and the Dean C. Worcester photographic archive. The Worcester archive was commissioned by the US government to document the imperialist project of William McKinley’s “Benevolent Assimilation” and Rudyard Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden”. Together, these sources presented an image of Filipinos constructed through native eyes and through the eyes of the other.

I was drawn to the people in the pictures and felt the impulse to remove them from this historical framework. With the detailed and loving care of Domingo’s watercolors in mind, I drew figures, plants, and other elements from the archive. Then, I cut out each drawing, creating a new library of cutouts: people, animals, foliage, moons, and mountains. The pieces were then placed in various arrangements and recorded via graphite rubbings. This process allowed for the cutouts to be combined into potentially infinite visual narratives and led to the generation of full color oil paintings.

Improvisation through color and composition mimic the spontaneous manner in which oral histories are recounted. Figures mingle with specters with defiance and gentleness. In contrast to the heavily captioned US photographic archive in which a westerner claims a singular narrative about a group of people, these paintings seek to resist such categorization, with agency, without explanations or captions.

About Long Kwento

(See also the curatorial essay, available online or at the Wattis front desk)

This exhibition of new paintings and sculptures stems from research Palileo conducted at the Newberry Library in Chicago, which has one of the largest collections of Filipiniana in the world (comprising the collections of Edward E. Ayer, an American who assembled a vast trove of Phillippine 17th and 18th century manuscripts upon US victory over the Spanish at Manila Bay in 1898; and the photographic archive of Dean C. Worcester, an influential and controversial figure in the early years of American presence in the Philippines). These varied
documents, spanning centuries and cultures, offered a kaleidoscopic vision of the Philippines as seen through numerous eyes, and recalled by Westerners.

Palileo recontextualizes these stories, portraits, and images in an attempt to resuscitate these figures from the exploitative gaze of these ethnographic images. Inspired by Damián Domingo, Palileo’s expressive, gestural paintings imbue a sense of humanity and dignity to the subjects. Palileo integrates historical narratives from the colonial past of the Philippines with stories and memories of life as a Filipinx American growing up in the United States, producing paintings that possess dream-like qualities that hover between fact and fiction. Combining Palileo’s extensive research with narratives of American Imperialism, beginning with the Filipino–American war, and the artist’s own understanding of a fractured and complex past, the work evokes nostalgia and romanticism while critiquing the ramifications of colonization, past and present.

**Process/Techniques**

Image of rubbings with cardstock cutouts used to “record” rubbings
Sculpture references:

Afterwards, 2019, oil on panel

Big Lolo and Little Lolo, 2020, Gouache on paper
The Love Letter, 2019, Oil on panel
Past Work

Whispering Titas
2015
Foam and fresco
28 x 41 x 8"

Exceptionally Mild and Kind to My Throat II
2020
Gouache on paper
7 x 5.5"
The Old Table
2014
Oil on canvas
32 x 24"

Kambal (twin)
2018
Oil on canvas
24 x 48" (Diptych)
The Spell
2019
Oil on canvas
34 x 30"

Wild Flowers, 2019, Oil on canvas, 72 x 66"
Press release

CCA Wattis Institute presents new work by Maia Cruz Palileo

In *Long Kwento*, September 14–December 4, Maia Cruz Palileo presents a new exhibition of paintings and sculptures inspired by historic Filipiniana materials and the artist's own memories.


Influenced by the oral history of a family’s arrival to the United States from the Philippines, as well as the history between the two countries, Maia Cruz Palileo investigates larger questions pertaining to identity, history, migration, and concepts of time. Infusing narratives with both memory and
imagination, Palileo translates diverse materials into a novel formal language to describe a new world of the artist's own making.

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Following the close of the exhibition at the Wattis Institute in December, *Maia Cruz Palileo: Long Kwento* will travel to Kimball Art Center in Park City, Utah, and will be on view beginning January 14, 2022.

*Maia Cruz Palileo: Long Kwento* is curated by Kim Nguyen and organized by Diego Villalobos.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to generous support from Pamela and David Hornik. Special thanks to Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. The CCA Wattis Institute program is generously supported by San Francisco Grants for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Wattis Leadership Circle contributors the Westridge Foundation, Lauren & James Ford, Jonathan Gans & Abigail Turin, Steven Volpe, and Mary & Harold Zlot; and by CCA Wattis Institute’s Curator’s Forum. Additional support provided by the Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation. Phyllis C. Wattis was the generous founding patron.
Further Reading/Resources

- Educational video on the artist and exhibition produced by the Wattis Institute, 2020
- Maia Cruz Palileo’s website: https://www.maiacruzpalileo.com/

