Maia Cruz Palileo: Long Kwento
Curated by Kim Nguyen
Organized by Diego Villalobos

September 14 - December 4, 2021

Self-Led Tour
(Suggested for Teen and above)
About Maia Cruz Palileo

they/them
b. 1979, Chicago, Illinois

Maia Cruz Palileo 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.

→ Stop 1
Gallery wall of small frames, to the left of exhibition text

• This show tells the story of family, migration, and the Philippines through conversation with archival material. Palileo drew from archives of Philipinx artists, cultural custodians, and their own family, as well as from archives created by colonial figures.

• These archival collections included that of Dean C. Worcester (Secretary of the Interior for the United States during the American colonization of the Philippines), Damián Domingo (celebrated Filipino painter), and Isabelo de los Reyes (writer and
activist known as the “Father of Philippine Folklore”)

- This wall includes works of **gouache paint on paper** and **graphite on paper**.
- The graphite on paper works are rubbings Palileo created by looking at archival photos and paintings, drawing isolated images from these materials onto cardstock, then cutting out each image and layering the cardstock cut-outs into various new arrangements.
- The arrangements of cardstock cut-outs are “recorded” by placing paper over the arrangements and making a graphite rubbing.
- Making the rubbings was a way of processing the complexity of the archive by treating the figures encountered with special care. It involved time to carefully draw, cut out, and re-assemble the figures for rubbings.

Q.1: *What histories do you carry within you? Do they entwine, conflict, ask for reconciliation? What does it feel like to have them as a part of you?*

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**→ Stop 2**

“Sayaw (Dance)”, to the left of gallery wall of small frames

- Many of the works in the show deal with multiplicity and duality. This reflects a diasporic subject’s experience of “cobbling together” a sense of self from divergent histories and disappearing pasts, all of which converge to create a complex present.
- In “Sayaw (Dance)” and “Flashing Like Two Gems of a Pendant” (by the gallery door/windows), this commentary can be particularly palpable.
- These pieces call to mind the experience of being part of a diaspora, the constant pulling between different senses of self, untold histories, and imposed narratives. It’s a dance between the various forces that seek to impress
themselves on, and make, the subject.

Q.2: Are you a member of a diaspora? What collective or ancestral memories do you participate in, seek to recover, or try to disrupt? What & whose narratives function to make you forget who you are? To remember?

→ Stop 3
“Moving Toward the Sea, Our Many Wishes Lit and Burning,” main back wall

- This is the biggest piece in the show and largest scale Palileo has worked on to date
- The smaller figures can appear more distant/indistinct in some paintings, paralleling how the colonial gaze makes choices about what is centered in a particular story.
- Here, Palileo asks what happens when those “background figures” are scaled up and “take us in.” The colonial narrative is destabilized, the margin becomes center.

- **Layering** (of paint on paint, graphite on paper on paper, relics in wood) continues to show up in these works, a metaphor for the layeredness of ancestral stories within a person.

Q.4: What & whose narratives function to make you forget who you are? To remember?
Stop 4
“Flute Song”

- Water imagery is used frequently in the works in this show.
- Ellen Tani writes about how the treatment of water/ground in Palileo’s work “evokes the archipelago of more than 7,000 islands [the Philippines], in which the relationship between water and land, or figure and ground, is everywhere and always changing.” (Tani, 2021).
- Water also serves as a metaphor for the ancestral, what we cannot see but what remains with us, especially in the creative act.
- **Layeredness** again shows up in the many figures that seem to slowly emerge from this piece, the longer you stay with it.

Q.5: *How do you remember what you can’t see? How do you remember your ancestors?*

Stop 5
“Wind, Water, Stone”

- Like many of the pieces in this show, this work takes up the concept of time. It delves into that longer, larger historical time that is bigger than a single lifetime and beyond a human understanding (taking geological time as an example: the time it takes for moss to grow over and breakdown a rock).
- This piece was inspired by a visit Palileo took to a cemetery that was overgrown with vegetation. The visit evoked the many lives that had existed, or all been brought, to the same place.
- Rather than seeing any of these works as a dreamscape, Palileo intended the pieces to speak to the existence of simultaneous realities, overlapping timelines, and cyclical time beyond traditionally Western concepts of linear time.
- The figures occupy a non-linear temporal space.
- Many paintings have figures that have been painted over and are no longer visible to us, but they still exist.
Stop 6
Center/sculptures - “Afterword,” “the Love Letter,” and “Big Lolo, Little Lolo”

- All three figures are based off of three paintings Palileo did in 2019 & 2020
- Palileo approached the show with the idea of making the whole space into a single organism, with the figures occupying the same ecosystem as the walls and paintings
- Long Kwento means “long story.” The title comes from letters Palileo’s aunt and grandmother used to write them about their lives and the past.
- The title references that the legacy of colonialism is a very long story we find ourselves in, but also that oral and familial history are long stories, ones we now get to contribute to. The past is with us even now.
- The sculpture of a woman’s bust (“Afterward”) is of a woman writing a letter, while “the Love Letter” is of a figure reading a received letter. Both papers are blank, reiterating that we are a part of continuing this ancestral communication, this long story.