

On the Environment, Magic, and Politics of Art Residencies Across Regions

by Portia Placino
A day ago



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(SPOT.ph) As the dust settled with the wrap-up of [Art Fair Philippines 2023](#) on February 19, the conversation on [art](#) continued. One of its notable highlights was the [ArtFairPH/Residencies exhibit](#) on the fourth floor of The Link. Given the different personalities of the artist residents and the diverse locations and programs offered, the incubation of ideas presented was provocative and inviting. The program also included a talk on the fair's first day, February 17, wherein the artist residents elaborated on their concepts and shared their experiences with the public. ArtFairPH/Residencies is only on its second edition, having started in 2021 at the height of the pandemic.

Also read:

[Kiko Escora on the Subtleties of the Body and Erotic Art](#)

[Artist Yeo Kaa's Brutally Vibrant Works Hide an Unexpected Optimism](#)

Anthropocene Across Regions with Art Fair Philippines' Residencies

A thread that ties the art projects together was the concept of Anthropocene, a term used in art and science as a geologic timeframe where human activities

deeply impact climate change. **Nicolei Gupit's *Searching for Water***, which she developed at the Linangan Art Residency in Alfonso, [Cavite](#), looks into the complicated relationship of Filipinos with water.

As an archipelagic country, the Philippines is surrounded by water. Yet access to clean water for drinking and day-to-day activities is challenging for most. Gupit shared in her residency talk how access to water was incidentally cut off on the day she needed to cook for the residency. Though explained lightheartedly, this is a daily and deeply rooted struggle in many places.



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Searching for Water has three components—a multi-channel video, watercolor paintings, and resin sculptures. The presentation was eye-catching, with the blue wall mimicking the blue water jugs that Filipinos use to store filtered water. Another point of interest is "In the Age of Abundant Scarcity," an installation of 44 resin sculptures in the shape of bottled water plastic. Instead of the expected pristine water in the bottles, they contain contaminants often found in lakes and oceans. The beautifully lit installation invites reflection as the conversation about water comes into focus, knowing the problem but having little access to a solution. The video series "Not All Rivers Flow into the Sea" and the watercolor series "Residues of Water" supported the installation. The colors in both video and watercolor bled out of the bottle, much like how contaminants penetrate bodies of water.

Rethinking Indigeneity

Connected to the conversation on climate and environment are the connections with indigenous culture. **Aaron Kaiser Garcia**, a performance artist, spent his residency at Emerging Islands in [San Juan, La Union](#). His engagement with the environment extended to creating connections with artists and indigenous groups near La Union and the [Cordilleras](#).

As a Philippine High School of the Arts graduate, he trained in Filipino folk dances mostly invented by choreographers, rather than by the indigenous. Upon further exploration, he began contextualizing the idea of Philippine dance and opened himself up to the sound and movement of local communities.

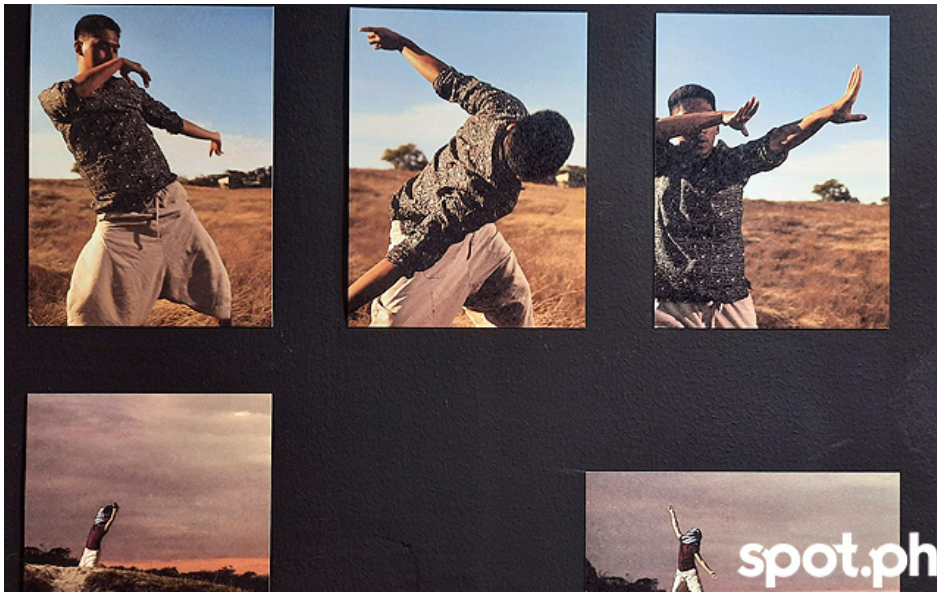


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Dancing from the North and towards an Archipelago presents an installation, photographs, sound, and later a video and performance to express the unlearning and engagement process. Garcia does not claim authenticity but rather a shared process in exploring movements with the communities he connected with.



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Taking this further is his collaboration with Jao San Pedro, Kristone Capistrano, Joar Songcuya, [Genavee Lazaro](#), JD Yu, and Wendell Garcia—artists of different mediums and translated the sound and gestures into photographic expressions and material remnants of the performance. During the residencies talk, he presented his video and performed, carrying the beats of his engagement to viewers.

Also read:

[Mark Andy Garcia on Finding Unanswered Questions in His Art](#)
[Artist Faye Abantao Dwells on Collective and Personal Memories](#)

Perspective of Preservation

Continuing the engagement with the natural environment is **James Clar** with his residency at Barrio Butanding in [Puerto Princesa, Palawan](#). His engagement with the community focused on exploring the current situation in the island province, particularly the environmental challenges faced by the region. To demonstrate this, he spent much time and effort transporting seized chainsaws

from the area, bringing attention to environmental threats and ongoing degradation. The installation includes the back-and-forth communication between Clar and agencies in Palawan as they negotiated the transport of chainsaws to the ArtFairPH venue.



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Where There's A Will, There's A Way explored the complexity of art and the intricacies of the legal system in the country. Tagged as evidence, there was reluctance to lend the chainsaws. Presenting evidence as artwork traverses unexpected lines. Clar's work exposed the weave of communication channels needed to unravel the bureaucratic system meant to protect the environment. It invites the viewer to see the efforts in protecting the environment, as well as the challenges within the system.

Also read: [MOVIE REVIEW: *Delikado* Exposes the Real Threat to the Philippines' Last Frontier](#)

Unexpected Twists

With three of the six residents exploring the natural environment in some capacity, there was an expectation for [IC Jaucian](#)'s residency at the Manila Observatory in Ateneo de Manila University to engage with the same. Yet he came up with entangled *Resaonlabe Uneertainty*. Claiming to be a lifelong atheist in the artist talk, he now looks into the plausibility of the existence of god due to complex mathematics found in sacred geometries and further expounded by records found with Manila Observatory.



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Resaonlabe Uneertainty includes stained glass with religious imagery and a Metatron's cube—a geometric shape that supposedly encapsulates god's sacred energy. Metatron, a mythical archangel found in a few passages of the Talmud, is connected to the shape in numerology. On the floor under the stained glass, Jaucian casts Solomon's magical seal in chalk, which the audience accidentally walks over as they view the stained glass. Diving deep into the ties of mathematics, religion, and mythology is a rabbit hole that Jaucian finds himself in and brings the audience with him. Jaucian play with complicated data doesn't provide answers or a way out but challenges the audience to explore, not knowing where they may end up.

Political Turn

ESL Chen and **Jonathan "Jeeb" Baldonado** presented the most playful exhibit, reflecting the playground approach of their residency at Orange Project in [Bacolod City, Negros Occidental](#). They opened their talk with "kaon ta" and "inom ta," Hiligaynon phrases that serve as invitations to eat or to drink. It's also common practice in Bacolod City's art district to start any in-depth discussion about art practice and politics with snacks and coffee.

As bright as their introduction to the residency was, Chen and Baldonado's collaboration with **Frelan Gonzaga**, a Bacolod-based artist, was a serious commentary on the country's political environment.



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Chen and Baldonado's practice starts with photography. Their presentation began with photographing a dead dog they found on the street. The gruesome image found itself on a canvas, one splattered with various hues of green (titled "The Contagion of Conditioning II"), the other in red (titled "The Contagion of Conditioning I"). Under the green canvas is a reverse of P1,234,567.89, and beneath the red, P1,234,567.89. The artists impishly state that it is the price of the works, and as the closing hour of the fair comes, *Buy 1 Take 1* appears under the figures. The collaboration shows the depth of "kaon ta" and "inom ta" in the environment of Orange Project and Art District.

Residency Across the Regions

The diversity of practice unraveled in the residency exhibition of Art Fair Philippines shows the capacity of spaces to help incubate and develop [art projects](#). Resident artists could develop and even explore practices beyond their usual style and materials as they immersed themselves in the environment outside their usual spaces.

From the rigorous program of Linangan Art Residency, the free-flow approach of Orange Project, the environmental immersion of Barrio Butanding and Emerging Islands, and the scientific data of Manila Observatory, the possibilities are endless—and often unexpected. Art Fair Philippines 2023 may be over, but the influence of residencies is just beginning and hopefully will continue to expand the horizons of young and emerging [artists](#).