

POLITICAL VISIBILITIES:

A REVIEW OF SCENES RECLAIMED: CCP 50 X CINEMALAYA 15

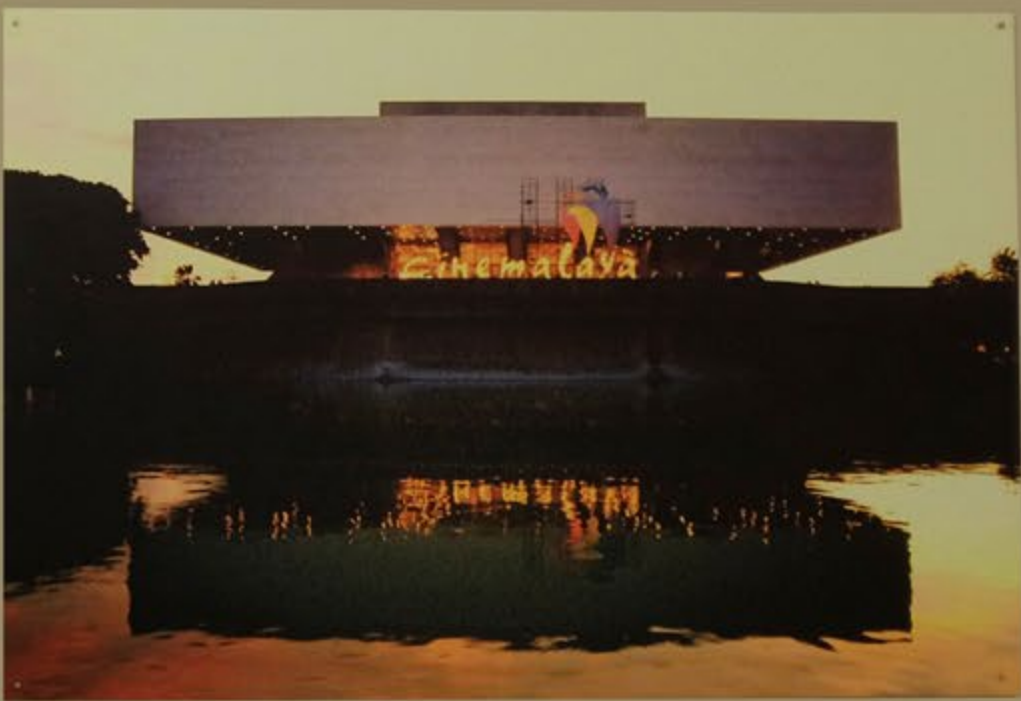
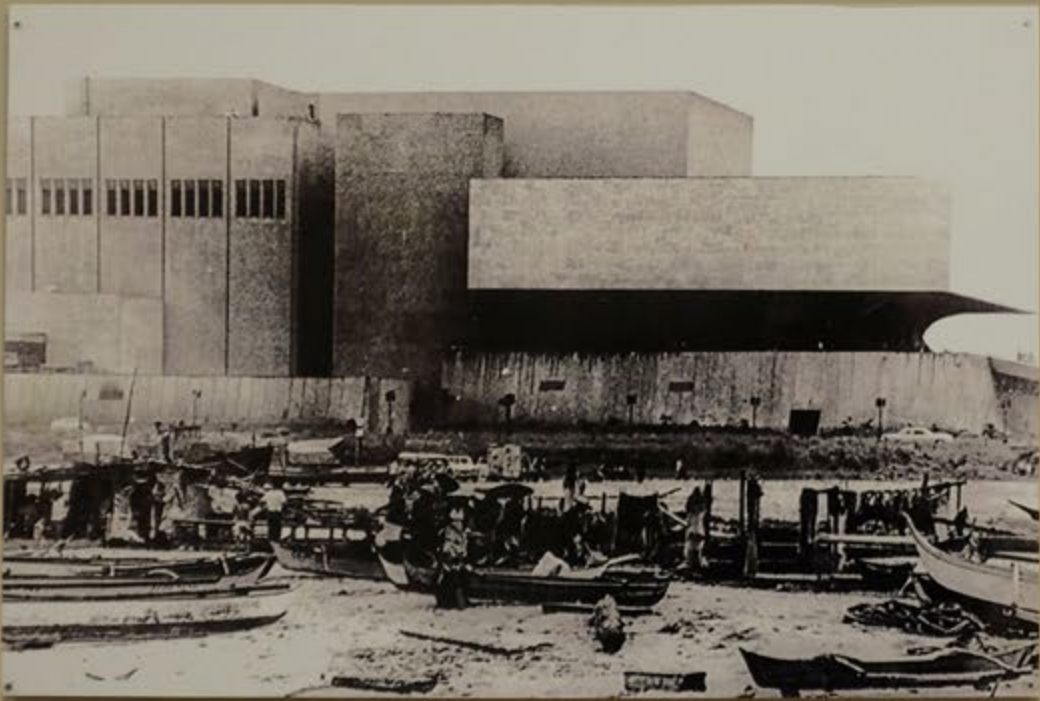
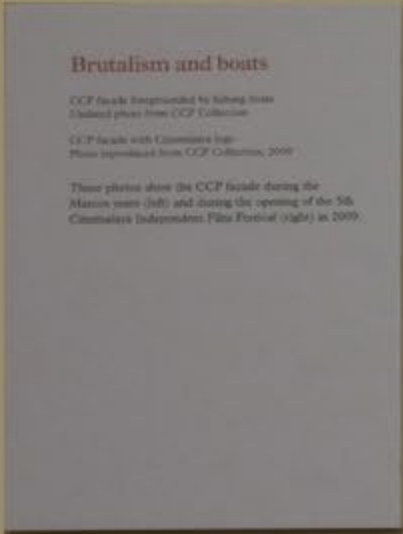
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BULWAGANG JUAN LUNA (MAIN GALLERY)

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The contradictions and tensions that inform notions of artistic independence are at the center of the curatorial vision of *Scenes Reclaimed: CCP 50 x Cinemalaya 15* (2019). Installed in celebration of the fifteenth edition of the Cinemalaya independent film festival, and more than fifty years of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), this exhibition is curated by Patrick F. Campos, Karl Castro, Tito Quiling, Jr., and Louise Jashil Sonido, with the CCP Visual Arts and Museum Division and the CCP Film, and New Media and Broadcast Division. At once an institutional biography of CCP, a political genealogy of artistic practices in the Philippines for the past half century, and a retrospective of the indie film movement, the exhibition assembles a multimodal array of audio-visual artifacts—from projections of newsreels and film scenes, screenshots, quotations from various personalities in arts and politics, to memorabilia such as cameras, costumes, and film posters—to trace the dialectics of incorporation and disengagement, complicity and refusal, agency and structure, and dictatorship and democratization that shapes and continues to shape cultural politics in the Philippines.

Scenes Reclaimed examines the history of intimacies between Philippine cinema and Philippine politics across historic fluctuations in the degree of artistic autonomy and political democracy. It takes as its starting point the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, and their romance with technologies of visibility such as cinema, and the edifice complex. Artifactual displays of Marcos vanity projects like biopics, paintings, and dance performances alternate with news clippings of Marcosian brutality—from the death of construction workers in Imelda’s “Parthenon of Film” to the mysterious killings of government official Guillermo de Vega—revealing the sinister underside of this cultural megalomania.

But here, the exhibition refuses the seamless narrative of the state-cinema complex that forecloses agency and resistance in the face of dictatorial patronage and state regulation, and teases out the uneasy yet real coexistence of complementarities and tensions between the motives and impulses of state functionaries and artists. In this account of cultural politics under the dictatorship, artistic and political contestations that revolved around the issues of national identity and culture, as well as freedom and human rights, took place within the very edifice of artistic hegemony and cultural control.





The exhibition, for instance, features the filmic outputs done through the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP), which, through its support of New Cinema auteurs in producing films that also served as thinly-veiled critiques of the dictatorship, exemplifies the possibility of aesthetic and political subversion in the context of a restrictive cultural sphere. Along with these forms of artistic protest performed in and through state auspices, filmic practices that contested the hegemonic visibility of dictatorial politics emerged through independent artists' formations. *Scenes Reclaimed* foreground these forms of dissent across different fronts, and reveals the creative ways by which artists implemented tactics of complicity and circumvention in their participation in the anti-dictatorial resistance, and in their figuring of alternative nationalist politics.

The (dis)continuities between the dictatorial “distribution of the sensible” and post-EDSA cultural politics shape the exercise of artistic autonomy in a nominally democratic order built on, and sustaining, elite rule. After EDSA, CCP embodies the contradictory impulses in the country’s frustrated and protracted quest for genuine democratization; the exhibition shows how the edifice is at once the site of anti-dictatorial film screenings and other politically progressive artistic endeavors, as well as the space of Marcosian rehabilitation as ritualized through, among others, a recent tribute to Imelda. Meanwhile, wider, commercialized access to profit-oriented broadcast media platforms among the population has shaped a political system that is more intimate with, and dependent on, the spectacularizing dynamics of celebritification that the dictatorial regime earlier mobilized. The exhibition thus treats the figures of Kris Aquino, Joseph “Erap” Estrada, Noli de Castro, Fernando Poe Jr., and more recently, Bato dela Rosa as embodiments of show business’s participation in the accumulation of political capital, especially in the context of media-saturated electoral politics.

In tracing how filmmakers and artists participate in the de/re/construction of political imaginaries through visual culture, *Scenes Reclaimed* complicates the question of artistic independence in the contemporary independent film movement, of which Cinemalaya is a significant marker. The exhibition conveys the varied insights of film practitioners, cultural activists, critics and scholars to reveal the multidimensionality of claims to autonomy.



These dimensions—commerce, artistic liberty, ideology, audience reception, among others—underpin, not just the formulation and application of an alternative framework for film practice, but also the relationship between art and politics, creative expression and democracy, complicity and resistance—relationship significantly shaped by the recent half century of dictatorship, democratization and another imminent dictatorship. In this sense, the exhibition regards Cinemalaya—and the indie film movement, in general—as an aesthetico-political formation in which such volatile relationship is made, unmade and remade according to the tempests and temper of the times.

That *Scenes Reclaimed* is installed in the CCP in the context of the looming dictatorial threat under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, and the rehabilitation of the Marcoses, renders even more provocative and relevant its critical formulation of the usefulness of cinema—and art in general—to both fascist politics and democratic aspirations. The exhibition displays a visual corpus of violence that includes recent films and television productions that sanitize the bloody drug war, as well as the spectacle of Duterte's State of the Nation Address helmed by mainstream and indie film directors, ushering in the spectres of fascist visibility. Through the examples of dissident artists and filmmakers who worked within and without the state apparatuses of culture and the arts, *Scenes Reclaimed* also instructively points to the ways in which such regimentation of the political imaginary through the arts can be undermined. Even in the very interstices of cultural hegemony, scenes are, and can be, reclaimed to convey emancipatory visions in these dark times.

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