

# *To Even Out A Playing Field*

BASTINUOD • Faye Cura • Gantala Press • Hulyen •  
Renan Ortiz • Mako Micro-Press • Kevin Eric Raymundo

Curated by Marz Aglipay as part of  
Proto/Para: Rethinking Curatorial Work  
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# *Introduction*

**T**here is often room for a physical version of anything that is digital. Just as most would favor looking at art in person, yet it does not seem to be the case in the publishing industry. We see fewer print periodicals in bookstores due in part to economic factors.

Print media titles such as magazines used to fill an entire wall in local bookstores. Now with less print titles, the once dedicated section for magazines have been reduced to locations right before the checkout counter, as if to say print has less influence or have become a mere afterthought for most consumers.

The phrase “print is dead” can waver any aspiring writer or comic to pursue a career in journalism or print. As tough as it already is, the print in-

dustry became more dangerous as the politics beat brought a warzone closer to home. This was made apparent in 2009 when the world saw one of the most heinous crimes against journalists committed in a single day. The infamous Ampatuan massacre which took the lives of 32 media professionals made the Philippines the most dangerous place in Asia to be a journalist. Because of this event young writers then would become familiar with the words: “impunity” and “extrajudicial killings,” words that one would hope our country would no longer deal with a decade since that tragic event. Be that as it may, journalists and radio broadcasters based in the province have been living with this harsh reality prior to the massacre. Safeguarding the media seems like an impossible

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task so long as there are characters that see themselves above the law. This culture of impunity persisted into the quarantine period as the government made bold moves to shake some of the biggest news institutions. From refusing to renew ABS-CBN's franchise, to seeing the arrest of Rappler media's Maria Ressa, and the seizure of Pinoy Weekly magazine showed just how easy it is for people in power to skirt away from criticisms presented by the media.

In response to these events, displeased citizens turned to social media to voice their dissent. Social media became the most accessible platform for citizens to seek redress through questioning and voicing criticisms. However this has backfired when social media, particularly Facebook, was weaponized by internet trolls who cre-

ated dummy accounts of people who made posts about their disapproval of the government. The National Bureau of Investigation has also turned it into a hunting ground, so to speak, to track and subpoena individuals that published contentious statements on their personal Facebook profiles. As challenges beset both print and social media, the realm of visual arts acts like a padded platform where creative expressions may tackle sensitive topics without the same weight of censorship that news outfits carry. This is not to say that artists are devoid of criticisms or threats to their own safety. However, there is comfort in knowing that art affords a certain degree of freedom of expression that empowers artists to push the limits of what traditional media cannot.



*Can these mediums possibly  
even out the playing field where  
traditional media  
typically dominates?*

Nowadays news publications seem to be walking on eggshells when it comes to opinion pieces and reporting on anomalies within the politics beat.

This in effect, limits the variety of voices that need a platform. Mainstream media continues to report on how the government responds to its critics yet on the other hand, artists armed with the understanding of their rights to expression are able to address hard truths that would otherwise earn the ire of authorities especially if it had been put out on mass or printed media.

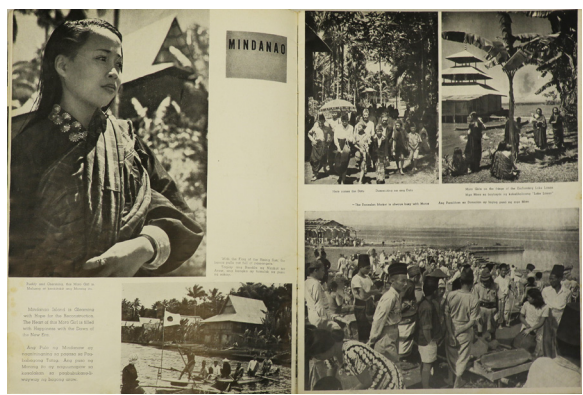
In “To Even Our A Playing Field” we take a look at how artists produce work with social media as their primary platform to showcase their work in response to current events in the shortest possible time or almost

even in real-time. This is not a new trend yet it is important to acknowledge that publishing one’s work for social media challenges the context of digitally produced work once it is brought into an exhibition space and the relevance of the white cube when such type of work can engage and exist on its own in a digital platform. With this in mind, the curator observes how current events become palpable to audiences when it is presented through art. In this exhibition art in the forms of memes, comics, and editorial illustration, seek to present deeper meanings that could otherwise feel alienating if packaged as news. In that sense, the curator asks “can these mediums possibly even out the playing field where traditional media typically dominates?”

# *Print is Power*

**D**uring the Japanese occupation in the Philippines most publications were shut down save for those that were used for propaganda. One such publication is Shin Seiki, a Magazine published by the Manila Sinbun-Sya under censorship of the Japanese Imperial Army. The magazine is a multi-lingual publication in Filipino, English and Japanese. The stories presented in its issues

presents the Philippines as a progressive country under the Japanese occupation. Stories range from highlights of our agricultural industry from across the regions, educational pages that teach Nihongo, as well as features that spotlight Filipina icons from dance, theater, and literature. For the most part, the publication has focused its efforts to show how the country has benefitted from Japan's influence. In fact, then Chairman of the Philip-



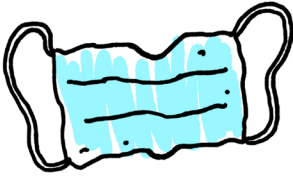
pine Executive Commission, Jorge B. Vargas himself said in one of its issues, “Publications like the Shin Seiki will undoubtedly play a leading role in marshalling the people behind this great Oriental crusade and in inspiring them with enthusiasm for the vital tasks of the future.”

It is obvious to which powers the publication kotows to as we are given this image of the Japanese Army as a Godsend force that has finally liberated us from the American-occupation.

In hindsight, we know that the magazine paints a very different picture from the accounts of war survivors. This is not to discredit the integrity of the publication considering that Shin Seiki, although heavily censored, has published articles that can be used as a reference to an idealized image of the Philippines under the rule of the Japanese. Shin Seiki is a testament to the power of print being an influential tool that can build an image.

# UGH... Same

## MGA KAILANGAN NANG ITAPON :



USED disposable  
face mask



Chat history na pang  
Subtle Clown Traits



Mga pulitikong wala namang symptoms  
pero nauna pang nagpatest.

@HULYEN

### Hulyen

Hulyen is a cartoonist, designer, and illustrator best known for her comics series UGH. Her comics also appeared in several magazines and publications. More of her works can be found online @hulyen.



**C**omic artist Hulyen makes poignant and unapologetic comics about herself. Her work is contained in one or several-paneled comics (as opposed to the four-panel comic strip) that make their rounds on social media for being relatable. During the quarantine period, Hulyen's work touched on existential experiences caused by the unusual time of isolation most of us found ourselves in. The artist consciously chose to illustrate personal frustrations that resonated with her followers. Viewing comics on social media

platforms during the lockdown was one of the few shared experiences netizens had. During the height of the quarantine Hulyen's work aimed to inform and as well as motivate the designated "tributes," a pop-culture reference to the film *Hunger Games* (2012) where a tribute is selected to participate in a closed arena battle where only the strongest survives. This scenario is more or less true for designated quarantine pass holders in every household. Typical comments left on her work such as "same" or "it me", apart from the thousands of "heart" reactions on her Instagram post is





proof of a strong online engagement. While there is no one thing or element that we can pinpoint as to how the artist and the audience are the same, we seek to find how this on-line engagement can be translated to an exhibition context.



# Acronym- aerobics

## **ORTIZ, RENAN URMENETA**

Visual artist and art educator. b. Manila 19 June 1977. He is the son of Ranulfo Ortiz Jr. and Erlinda Urmeneta of Calbayog, Samar. He studied Political Science at the University of the Philippines (UP) Manila from 1994 to 1999 and Fine Arts, majoring in Painting, at the UP Diliman College of Fine Arts from 2001 to 2005. He is a member of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines and the Philippine Association of Printmakers.

Ortiz expresses his activism and social advocacy through works that span various media. His installation works incorporate video and audio technology to reflect on issues related to globalisation and human rights. *Ode to Empire*, 2012, is a sound collage made from archival video and film clips, showing the rise of the United States as a world military superpower. *Murmur*, 2012, engages the phenomenon of *desaparecidos*—activists who have disappeared against their will due to actions by the state—by inviting viewers to listen to a poem through numerous earphones suspended from a low ceiling. Other installations explore the use of intermedia, such as television sets and video clips, to produce commentary on the state of mass media, land reform, and poverty. Ortiz is also regularly commissioned to produce illustrations, poster designs, comics, political cartoons and drawings for advocacy campaigns of people's organizations. This practice is reflected in his exhibitions through works such as the mural *Palabas-Papasok (Outgoing-Incoming)*, 2011.

# DDDS

*DO NOT DISTURB! SLEEPING!*



**A** number of editorial cartoons by Renan Ortiz illustrates big words we often hear in the news. Ortiz breaks down these words by showing how the meaning of these words have been reshaped by the actions of the Duterte administration. These works were originally published in *PinoyWeekly*, a free print publication that publishes alternative news in Tagalog. It is distributed for free in various urban poor communities, factories and offices in Metro Manila and some provinces near Metro Manila.

These cartoons show key officials as caricatures, an approach that keeps the message of the cartoon light or in most cases deliver satiric humor.

Given the nature of editorial cartoons, these works take on a straight-forward political commentary expressing the artist's opinion. Editorial cartoons printed in big daily publications aren't as accessible as the works of Ortiz who posts his works on Instagram. For some, being able to publish opinion driven works can be viewed as an act of courage but as a contributor to this publication, the artist keeps in mind that he is serving the interest of the

# MECQ



## MALACAÑANG ESCAPES COMMUNITY QUARANTINE

reader. As a contributor, Ortiz not only has a responsibility as an illustrator to convey complex concepts but also to uphold the editorial integrity of the publication he contributes to. During the lockdown, PinoyWeekly suffered an illegally seizure of its publication in one of its distribution points, an office of an urban poor group called Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (Kadamay) in Pandi, Bulacan. To this day the publication faces threats of red-tagging for their alternative news reporting.





# News Memes

## **Kevin Eric Raymundo**

Kevin Eric Raymundo is the comic artist most commonly known as Tarantadong Kalbo. He works as a freelance animator. He is bald in real life.



**K**evin Reymundo, better known by his social media handle @ *TarantadongKalbo*, had one of the most active social media platforms during the lockdown. He creates comic strips that often become instant memes given the number of shares of his works get. Reymundo is possibly an outlier in the creative scene as his work blossomed the more he made tongue-in-cheek commentary on current events.

From a cultural perspective, satire isn't easily understood as a form of humor especially if its in the written format. More often than not, it

is mistaken for fake news, a label that has plagued the likes of websites like Filipino Freethinkers, a satire blog that earned the ire of pro-administration netizens. Using satire is often a rocky path to tread but Reymundo has managed to find a sweet spot where his work provides cushioned critique on current events. What makes comics like *Tarantadong Kalbo* successful may be influenced by the factor of immediacy, being able to respond quickly to news is an attribute that is not often found in exhibitions. Exhibitions can be responsive and timely but cannot be as fast as posting an artwork on social media.



# Medium is the Message



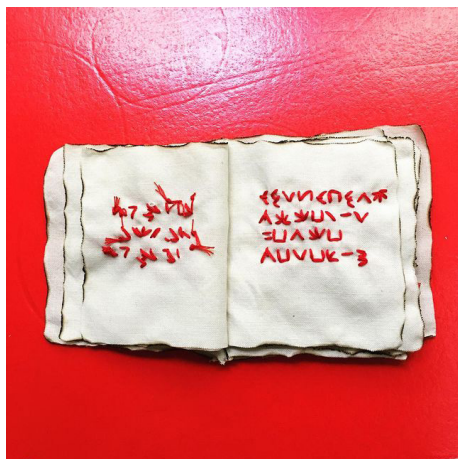
## **Faye Cura**

Faye Cura is a writer, editor, and coordinator of Cantala Press, a feminist small press/literary collective. She is a member of Rural Women Advocates, the volunteer arm of Amihan National Federation of Peasant Women. She is the author of four books of poetry and several cloth books and zines.

## **Makò Micro-Press**

Makò Micro-Press is a mode of relationship or “ugnayan,” in the form of a self-publishing micro-press, which aims to create and sustain counter-hegemonic cultures through zines and other DIY (Do-It-Yourself) artworks.





**Z**ines have a history of being used as a tool for marginalized voices to be heard, as such Faye Cura's self-made zines highlights the plight of women activists. She has sewn two cloth zines, one is "Makibaka," a zine that features an essay, poem and song dedicated to women activists who were unjustly held as prisoners, a reality that goes far back prior to the pandemic.

During the lockdown activists were prone to being oppressed. We've witness women activists like

Reina Mae Nasino be detained and separated from her 3-month old daughter River and peasant organizer Amanda Lacaba Echanis, daughter of slain activist Randall "Randy" Echanis later followed Nasino's arrest in a similar manner.

Another zine is "#", this was made in observance of the Katipunan's anniversary. "#" makes use of a fictitious code language just as Katipuneros used secret codes in order to evade authorities and keep their identities hidden during the Spanish occupation.

Zines aren't limited to the traditional magazine-like formats we are accustomed to, Makò Micro-Press has been actively engaging their audiences to reimagine how zines are made. On their social media platforms, Makò Micro-Press engaged



their community through online workshops where they create zines using unconventional materials, from electric bills to talismans. Here we see how this micro-press live out the Marshall McLuhan quote “the medium is the message.”

Makò Micro-Press uses zines as a creative platform for activism, in the hopes that it would make activism less intimidating to engage with. With this in mind, they made a zine in sticker format titled



200 Days of Lockdown. This sticker collection gives their community a taste of activism while chronicling pressing issues of the time through a format that young audiences can relate to.

# Dispatches from Cebu



## **BASTINUOD**

An expository of different thoughts and criticisms on current socio-political matters encapsulates Sebastian “Basti” Dequiña Penayes III’s body of work. The artist portrays his narrative through the use of elements found in ethnic Filipino culture given a millennial twist. His art style translates to both being an identity and an attempt at actively promoting our culture to younger generations as a way of showing them what “Pinoy Pop Art” is as envisioned by him.

Basti’s comics-inspired aesthetics deliver a sense of familiarity to the audience that urges them to discover deeper meanings behind the simple, crisp lines and bright colors of his work.



**T**he shutdown of ABS-CBN, one of the largest broadcasting networks in the Philippines, made it obvious that news gathering in the regions is more challenging with their absence. This was especially felt during the typhoon season and the fact that traveling to the regions during the lockdown is restrictive.

BASTINUOD's digital illustrations offer a fresh perspective to Philippine cultural icons and imagery. His reimagination of traditions and realities experienced by the working classes, be it on the ground or as reported in the news, is one way his works makes these topics relatable to digital natives. BASTINUOD's works on social media during the lockdown gave us a peek into life in his locale particularly in transportation.



@Bastinuod



@Bastinuod

# Magtanim Ay Di Biro

“Nanay Tess” is an excerpt from “Kamusta Kayo”, a zine published by Gantala Press. The anecdotes from this zine provide a first hand account of how the pandemic is felt by farmers from around the country.

Zines of this kind, in a way, reports marginalized narratives, one that does not often make the news. In spite of being a small publication “Kamusta Kayo” is an important print documentation that serves a marginalized group of laborers.

## **GANTALA PRESS**

Founded in 2015 in Metro Manila, GANTALA PRESS is an independent, non-profit, volunteer-run Filipina feminist press that centers women's stories and issues in our projects (publications, small press fairs, discussions and workshops) and in our participation in people's movements. We believe in the potential of feminist publishing as a social practice and in solidarity work with women artists and collectives as vital political action.

Gantala Press always donates part of its earnings to projects that support the dispossessed and other victims of state violence. All our sales go to publishing projects for long-silenced communities in the margins.



**A**ko si Nanay Tess, isang magbubuikid ng Lupang Ramos. Hindi kami makapaghanapbuhay. Pupunta ka sa tindahan, may pulis, tanod, at may sundalo sa daan. Ang aking mga anak na dati ay nakakatulong sa akin, nauutusang lumbas, ngayong hindi pwede. Masakit mag-isip kung saan kukunin ang pang-araw-araw na kakainin ng mga katulad naming isang ka-

hig, isang tuka. Bawal ngang lumabas, paano ako makakapagtinda? Tinakot na kami nang tinakot, sa virus at sa makabagong tipo ng Marital Law. Akala ko, doktor ang kakalat kasi sila ang may alam gumamot. Hindi. Ang kumalat, mga walang pusong tagapagtanggol daw ng mamamayan. Napapamura na lang din ako 'pag nagsasalita si Duterte sa presscon. Di ba virus ang kalaban natin? Bakit may mga baril? Ano nga ba ang puntirya: vi-



rus o NPA? Dapat ang pagtuunan ng gobyerno ay paglikha ng gamot at ingatan ang ating mga manggagamot. Magpakalat ng mga manggagawang pagkalusugan sa mga barangay, hindi pulis at sundalo. Ang takot ay nagpapalala pa ng sakit, wala pang makain. Mamamatay sa virus dahil humina ang resistensya sa gustom. Patay sa gustom, graben isipin

'yun ng nanay na tulad namin. Sa panahon ngayon ng lockdown, mas nakilala ang mga pulitikong para sa tao, at mga pulitikong walang alam sa pamumunong makatao at isa na diyan ang pangulo. At lubos na nakilala ang totoong mga tagapaglingkod na mga taong simbahan. Salamat at marami pa rin sila na gumampan ng tulong para sa amin.

Tula ni Nanay Tess  
COVID-19

COVID, China daw ang pinagmulan  
Nguniit bakit lahat ng bansa ay tununguhan?  
Walang pinipili mahirap man o mayaman,  
Pati ang Pilipinas ay ginulantang.

Ano nga ba ang dahilan?  
Tunay ba ang tinuruan ng duktora na dayuhan  
Na ang COVID ay nilikha para sa mamuka  
Upang mabawasan, populasyon sa mga bansa?

Hindi pa natatapos punatutupad na lockdown  
Nguniit nagugutom na ang sambayanan  
Diyan mo masusubok kasamahang tunay  
Sa panahon ng pagsubok sa iyo'y nakaagapay.

Ako'y nanawagan sa mga kinauukulan:  
Huwag namang kalimutang hikahos na kabayan  
Dahil malaking katanungan na wala pang sakagutan  
Ang kaylan matatapos ang COVID na naturan.

