

Press Release from the Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale (PAVB) Coordinating Committee

Philippine Pavilion Announces the Participating Artists to Represent the Country's First Participation to Venice Architecture Biennale

Muhon: Traces of an Adolescent City, the selected exhibit for the country's National Pavilion at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition in the Venice Biennale, has gathered the country's foremost architects and contemporary visual artists to be part of the historic first participation of the Philippines to the Architecture Venice Biennale. The Philippine Pavilion will hold its vernissage on May 27 and will open from May 28 to November 27, 2016 at Palazzo Mora in Venice, Italy.

The exhibit's curator Leandro V. Locsin Partners (LVLP) has invited six architects and three contemporary artists to start a conversation about the rapid creation and destruction of Metro Manila's built heritage and whether such a condition precludes the formation of the city's cultural identity. The curatorial team is composed of Leandro Locsin, Jr., Sudarshan Khadka, Jr., and Juan Paolo de la Cruz.

The nine participants surveyed buildings, structures, landmarks, boroughs, and urban landscapes, and evaluated their cultural merit and analyzed their potential as national heritage. After which they created three sets of abstracted models built for each of the subjects corresponding to their original state, their current condition, and their projected future.

The intent is to abstract and distill the essence of these muhons or markers in order to explore the presence or absence of significant value. The three rooms of the Philippine Pavilion have been categorized as-- (1) Imprints, (2) Markers and (3) Projections, and the three abstractions of each subject will be distributed accordingly.

The individual architects and firms are Eduardo Calma, Jorge Yulo, 8x8 Design Studio Co., C|S Design Consultancy, Lima Architecture, and Mañosa & Co. Inc. The internationally recognized Filipino contemporary artists, represented by 1335 Mabini—Poklong Ananding, Tad Ermitaño and Mark Salvatus—complete the list.

The subjects that will be featured in the Pavilion are KM 0 in Luneta (Ananding), Pandacan Bridge (Ermitaño), Chinatown (Salvatus), Philippine International Convention Center (Calma), Mandarin Hotel (Yulo), Magsaysay Center (8x8 Design Studio Co.), Pasig River (C|S Design Consultancy), Makati Stock Exchange (Lima Architecture), and Coconut Palace (Mañosa & Co.).

With the main impetus being the destruction of post-war brutalist buildings and urban features, LVLP aims to underscore the urgency of inclusive public conversations about the relationship of the built environment and the identity of the city.

Muhon aims to extract conjectures that reconcile the diametrically opposed vectors of progress and of permanence in relation to corresponding notions of modernity and an emerging identity. Simultaneously, it aims to make sense of the implications of the destruction of signifiers of built heritage and the lack of social consciousness about this issue. LVLP's exhibit aims to be a venue for a collaborative and collective act of contemplation about the built environment to transpire.

The 2016 International Architecture Exhibition, organized by the La Biennale di Venezia presided over by Paolo Baratta, is curated by Alejandro Aravena and titled Reporting From the Front. In 2014, the exhibition had a duration of six months and attracted 228,000 visitors, in addition to the 12,214 visitors who attended the preview.

Architects and Artists and their selected Muhon:

Poklong Anading - KM0

Location: Across the Rizal Monument in Luneta Park

Anading continues his investigation of the social condition through three video installations slated for the Venice Biennale Architectural Exhibition. The individual projects surround varied conceptual frameworks – from proverbial and literal convergence points, notions of malformed progress to predicaments in urban mobility – but nevertheless and seamlessly stitch together a single reality that is the omnipresent force known as Metro Manila. Revisiting notions on identity and unearthing questions about the collective mind and memory, Anading presents us with a standpoint that is at once ubiquitous and particularly characteristic of his worldview.

Tad Ermitaño - Pandacan Bridge

Location: P. Zamora bridge

Ermitaño's work for the Venice Architecture Biennale tackles how the notion of iconic architecture becomes paradoxical in a Philippine context where informal settlements abound. The artist points out that even though the two are intuitively opposite, iconic architecture and informal settlements are in fact each other's shadow-twin. This relationship is rooted in the brute fact that the businesses housed by iconic structures need staff to run. Personnel requirements and the lack of affordable housing means that all large enterprises --factories, malls, gated communities and so on-- effectively generate informal settlements in their vicinity. Through the use of three video installations in the shape of iconic monuments, Ermitaño is set to explore this duality, examining the peculiar socioeconomic reality that nurtures their symbiotic growth.

Mark Salvatus - Chinatown

Location: Manila City

Year Established: 1594

For the Venice Architecture Biennale, Mark Salvatus once again draws his inspiration from Manila, particularly Chinatown, which is held to be the oldest settlement of Chinese emigrants in the world. The district has been the center of trade even prior to the Spanish colonial period, and is currently a microcosm of commerce in the Philippines, where huge industries are owned and controlled by family-run conglomerates. The cyclical course that the city has charted for itself - from the destruction wrought by war, the construction of an identity bent by unbridled power, to the deterioration of social security by capitalism - is the subject of Salvatus' work, in line with curatorial concept that initiates discourse on the lack of social consciousness - or blatant utter disregard - for the balance between economic, cultural, and humanitarian development.

Jorge Yulo - Mandarin Hotel

Location: Makati Avenue, Makati, 1226 Metro Manila

Architect: Leandro V. Locsin

Year Established: 1976

For Yulo, the Mandarin Hotel stood as the pivotal urban element sitting in the cradle of Makati's urbanization. It is a tumbok to the major streets of the central business district and pre-existed the CBD. Leandro Locsin's "Brutalist" expression and interpretation of that junction's urban significance set the DNA for the rest of the CBD's development. While the building is in the process of being chipped down to rubble, and the embers of preservation sentiment are still warm, it would be an opportune time for Yulo to internalize the 40-year-old structure with whatever bit of connectivity he has left with its historicity. Yulo aims to be able to get a peak at the author's initial thoughts and exploratory processes.

8x8 Design Studio Co.- Ramon Magsaysay Building

Location: Quintos St, Malate, Manila, Metro Manila

Architect: A.J. Luz Associates, Pietro Belluschi, Alfred Yee Associates

Year Established: 1967

Built in 1967, the ingenious and unique structural design was done by A.J. Luz Associates in consultation with Italian-American designer Pietro Belluschi of Boston and Alfred Yee Associates of Honolulu, a pioneer in designing pre-cast, pre-stressed concrete building structures. The building designers decided to employ the use of a novel structural system -- the pre-cast, pre-stressed concrete beams and multiple in-place floor slabs and wall panels. The main column of the building is the cast-in-place concrete shear wall core over deep concrete piles. The structure has resisted lateral forces from earthquakes or wind load. It is designed like a big tree with the columns as its deep-rooted trunk that sways with the wind and movement of the ground. 8x8 will study the the Ramon Magsaysay Building as it becomes a center of economics and trades, as well as Manila's congested development.

C|S Design Consultancy - Pasig River

Pasig River is one of the most important environmental features of the city of Manila. It flows right through the heart of the Metro, anchored on one end by Manila Bay and Laguna Lake on the other. Historically, it was where trade among the pre-colonial tribes and

kingdoms of Manila with its Chinese and Arab neighbours flourished, establishing Ilog ng Pasig as a main transportation artery. It was central to the daily activities of colonial Manila.

In modern times, its significance has sadly faded, with cities developing inland and motorways proliferating as the main mode of transportation. Shanties and factories have replaced the mansions of old, and its waterways have been polluted with filth. The Pasig River deserves its place as a landmark, as a “muhon”, surviving despite our indifference and neglect. We hope with these sculptures, we can ignite contemplation of the potential role of a river in the life of a community. The sculptures are envisioned to serve as a reflection of our relationship with the Pasig River, through which we can compare its significance in history, in modernity, and project our hope for its desired reality. Our conjecture being that if we were to celebrate our context, the river can be perceived as an element that not only bisects through but also connects our cities and the landmarks surrounding it. We may find in our relationship with the river the unique identity that has been lost.

Lima Architecture – Makati Stock Exchange

Location: Ayala Avenue, Makati

Architect: Leandro V. Locsin

Year Established: 1971

According to Don Lino and Andro L. Magat of Lima Architecture, to keep one’s heritage and at the same time move forward to stir economic growth has been in the center of an on-going battle in the field of architecture between creating and retaining cultural identity. Lima Architecture explores Makati Stock Exchange (MSE) as a subject and deconstructs to find out if it has enough merit to be kept without hindering new developments that will help the economy to move forward. In doing so, Lima Architecture brings a larger issue – if it is possible to “remove” heritage structures such as the MSE and also at the same time retain the “essence” of it to protect our cultural identity as Filipinos. Lima asked, “Is it possible to design something new but still have heritage and cultural identity without sacrificing modern day solutions?”

Mañosa & Co. Inc.– Tahanang Pilipino

Location: CCP Complex Manila

Architect: Francisco Mañosa

Year Established: 1978

Tahanang Pilipino also known as the Coconut Palace is valued for its unique and locally sourced construction, the building utilizes the coconut tree for both its architectural and design components. Its creation symbolizes the beginning of many things- a design revolution and a cultural icon- all while harnessing the power of people coming together, a concept known as bayanihan or community effort.

Akin to the concept of the "binhi" (seed), the Tahanang Pilipino paints a picture of life and growth, planting the seed of innovation and creativity that will go on to evolve through the decades. A true testament of Filipino ingenuity, design and art, It is a work in progress - a

myriad of the endless possibilities of indigenous materials in the spirit of collaboration. More than being a relic of the past, it is an iconic building whose soul has shined through the decades- and will continue to do so in the future, leaving an indelible imprint on the pages of history.

Eduardo Calma – Philippine International Convention Center

Location: Vicente Sotto St, Pasay, 1700 Metro Manila

Architect: Leandro V. Locsin

Year Established: 1976

According to Calma, there is no guarantee that built architecture can be preserved. As population increases in highly developed urban areas, structures are destroyed and neighborhoods erased to make way for much needed infrastructure, housing, institutional and commercial developments. New structural codes and building guidelines make it more economical to demolish and rebuild than to preserve old buildings.

Calma chose the Philippine International Convention Center as one of the few remaining Leandro Locsin buildings surviving. Yet there is still no guarantee that this building will survive in the future. The only hope in case the inevitable happens is to preserve a memory of its presence and its architectural qualities in a new proposal.

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