

On the Endless Quest for Justice

Kiri Dalena

visual story

5 min

The work of the Philippina audiovisual artist is closely tied to political protest. The six selected works reflect social inequalities, political despotism and violence in the Philippines.

Requiem for M

On November 23, 2009, fifty-eight people were blocked on their way to file a certificate of candidacy that aimed to challenge the continuation of the political dynasty of a powerful clan in the province of Maguindanao. From the highway, over a hundred armed men diverted the convoy to a dirt road leading to a hill, where they opened fire on the people, mostly media workers and women and hastily burying the bodies, including their vehicles, in mass graves. Playing footage from the funerals and the site of the massacre in reverse, *Requiem for M* is “no longer documentary or critical account” and transforms into “an experiential procession away from the event.”

From the Dark Depth

In June 2016, the then President-elect Rodrigo Duterte signed a joint statement to resume peace talks with the National Democratic Front. The NDF is the political arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines and represents the revolutionary group in peace negotiations to end five decades of guerrilla war waged by the New People's Army (NPA). Within this context of renewed hope, the artist decides that it is finally possible to delve into her own archive of political unrest, and interweaves dream-like underwater scenes with her analog and digital documentary footage. *Gikan Sa Ngitngit Nga Kinailadman* is a defiant expression of loss and mourning, unarticulated and accumulated through time.

Christmas in Our Hearts Reloaded

HindiOke is a portmanteau of not okay and karaoke and this collaborative work builds from a popular Filipino Christmas song, ubiquitous in the Philippines come the holidays. Filipinos in the Philippines and elsewhere are shown holding cardboard signs expressing their sentiment about the killings. The use of cardboard signs recall photographs of victims with signs that say "I am a drug pusher" or "I am a drug addict" next to their bodies. The lyrics were changed but the spirit of the song remained. It was released online as part of a campaign of RESBAK,

a network formed by the artist along with other filmmakers, media and cultural workers to counter the silence against President Duterte's deadly war on drugs.

Erased Slogans

Digitally-manipulated scanned photographs documenting the numerous demonstrations under the then Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos who declared Martial Law in 1972 and held power for over two decades. Deleting all the text written in the placards, the work-in the form of a slideshow- encapsulates the magnitude of the suppression and silencing during that period. In June 2022, the prints kept by the artist in storage were waterlogged because of strong rains. The water erased the images in the photographs even further, inadvertently conveying a situation that mirrors the present-day restoration of the family of the late dictator to power.

Alunsina

Dalena's film is a call to the deity Alunsina to bestow strength upon children and the elderly. The film, shown upside down to mirror distress/wrongfulness, dwells on the mundane life of a single family out of thousands that survived the war on drugs. In the film, one ailing grandmother takes care of her grandchildren, toddlers and teenagers, with quiet care and affection. In one scene, she sings a protest song as a lullaby to the youngest drinking milk from his bottle. The children play with each other. The children, of their own accord, draw to 'process' what has happened to their lives. They feel like weak chains. They let go of their father who was killed during a police operation because he allegedly 'fought back.' The children's mother was falsely accused of being a drug pusher.

Lines

People in various stages of life are shown in a queue to get food packs at a community pantry amid the pandemic and national elections in *Pila (Lines)*. Some queue before dawn for canned goods, meat, vegetables and rice, depending on the week's donations. They talk about life hacks, lining up early, how to extend meals, unemployment, odd jobs, wanting to put up a store, vaccines, storms, fires, housing, the failures of the local government, but also Facebook, Instagram, tattoos and biking, etc. As long as community pantries exist they vow to fall in line. In the end, the line moves. A dictator's son wins the presidential elections. Some voted for him. The pandemic continues on. Existential and arresting, this five-channel video, first meant to be life-size, was projected larger than life.