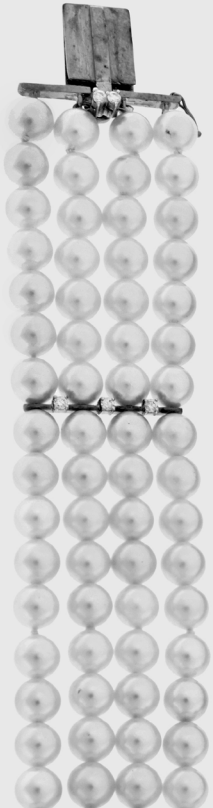
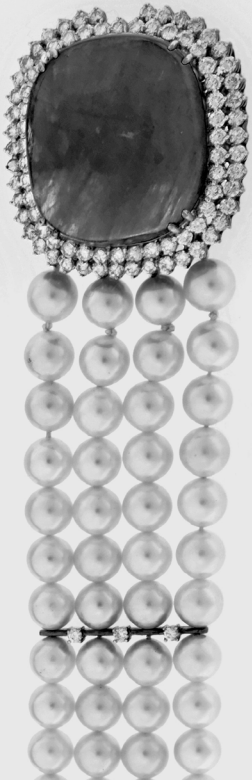

KISS
THE
HAND





Pio Abad, Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite

Shona Mei Findlay

The stars and stripes of the American flag ought to be replaced with a skull and crossbones. We cannot maintain an empire in the Orient and maintain a republic in America.

—Mark Twain[1]

Culminating his residency in San Francisco, Pio Abad's solo exhibition *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite* draws from multiple histories of exile, resistance, and displacement from the '70s and '80s that brought Filipinos to California, home today to one of the largest diasporas of this community in the world. The exhibition begins in KADIST's public facing display windows with political imagery (A) gathered from various archives in San Francisco. Situating the exhibition within the universality of empire, and denoting symbols of conquest, complicity, and impunity, the fly posters demonstrate the cyclical nature of the states of uncertainty we face today.

Inside the gallery, the newly commissioned body of work departs from narratives related to the former Filipino dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, and his infamously extravagant wife, Imelda. Choreographing a confluence of historical facts, Abad first

1. James Hamilton-Paterson, H. Holt, "A History Told by Foreigners" in *America's Boy: a Century of Colonialism in the Philippines* (Henry Holt and Company:1999), 462, pp. 37.

unearths the objects and archival material as proof of a perpetuated political fantasy that allowed the Marcoses to cling to their gilded power. An ostentatious 30-carat ruby bracelet with diamonds and cultured pearls materializes in the gallery as *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite* (2019) (B), a colossal concrete effigy produced in collaboration with jeweler Frances Wadsworth Jones. The jewels, along with silverware, Old Masters paintings, and other lavish goods belonging to the Marcoses, were smuggled into the United States in 1986 when they fled the Philippines following widespread anti-government protests across the country. Known today as the Hawaii Collection, the jewels were immediately seized by U.S. customs when they landed in Honolulu after being granted exile by the Reagan administration. Valued at a combined worth of twenty-one million U.S. dollars, the ill-gotten assets were eventually repatriated to the Philippines (their rightful owners) to be auctioned off and liquidated. However, shortly after President Rodrigo Duterte, a self-declared admirer of Marcos, assumed office in 2016, and despite Philippine's Supreme Court ruling that the jewelry was illegally acquired, no action to sell the loot has yet been taken. They remain locked in a bank vault in Manila, obscured from public consciousness and condemned to a permanent state of irresolution. The sculpture unmoors the bracelet from the vaults of the autocratic regime, manipulating its scale and function to contrast its corporeal frailty with the weight and monumentality of its new concrete form. Complicating the functions of a monument, the work simultaneously memorializes the bracelet's physical presence as a body—representing both a body of evidence and of the many exiled bodies upended by the Marcos dictatorship—while slyly suggesting the farcical monumentality of Imelda's sense of self as nation.[2] The bracelet at once interrogates the losses and victories, the singular and the multiple, and the people and nation. Further articulating these complexities, a photograph (C) of a hand clutching a piece of barbed wire, hangs adjacent to the sculpture. The image was taken by photojournalist Kim Komenich[3] in Manila in 1986 on the day that the Marcos regime was overthrown.

2. "She often used 'I' when she meant the Philippines, and 'the Philippines' when she meant I." Bob Colacello, "Chapter 27: Imelda," in *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up* (Harper Collins: 1990), 514, pp. 273, also in this brochure.

3. Kim Komenich worked as a staff photographer and editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2000-2009) and the *San Francisco Examiner* (1982-2000.) He was awarded the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for photographs of the Philippine Revolution he took while on assignment for the *Examiner*.

Confuting the myth that the sociopolitical legacy of the Marcoses is one isolated to the Philippines, the exhibition summons a transnational cast of characters that have either been in favor of, or vitiated by the United States quest for empire and the perpetuation of its political mythologies. *A Thoughtful Gift* (2019) (D) is based on a version of a letter written by First Lady Nancy Reagan to Imelda Marcos in 1986, assuring her of their safety from persecution in the United States, engraved onto a tablet of Carrara marble. The gesture of inscribing the letter onto marble functions as symbolic recuperation and concretizes the complicity, extent, and aftermath of the Marcos-Reagan friendship and the flippant deployment of protection from the United States defense at the highest level, long after the country's independence and despite recommendations from the State Department to remove Marcos from power.[4] *A Thoughtful Gift* rings the bell on historical revisionism, erected as a marker for histories that have been unintentionally or intentionally altered.

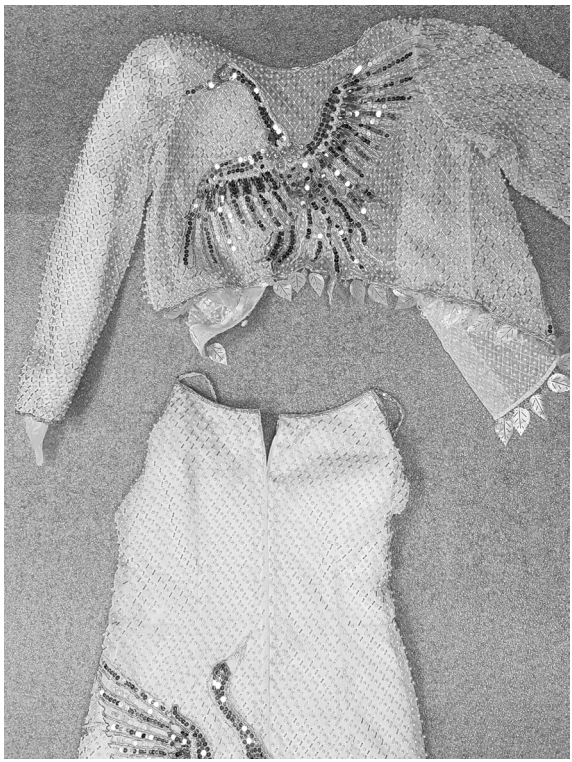
In the exhibition, these notorious figures become closely intertwined with the lesser known narratives of the individuals who put their lives on the line for the sake of democracy. A diptych of paintings *For Silme* (2019) (E) and *For Gene* (2019) (F) bear witness to the 1981 murders of Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes in Seattle, two young leaders of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP) who spearheaded the fight for social justice in the United States and democracy in the Philippines. Their deaths can be traced back to the Marcoses through expenses for a certain Mabuhay Corporation, a San Francisco held company. The statements showed the regime had illegally spent one million dollars in the United States between 1979 and 1981 on various activities, including political campaigns and a mysterious transaction labeled "special security projects."[5] The paintings appropriate the book covers of Ferdinand Marcos' manifestos, which detailed his political motives and included a defense of his decision to place the Philippines under martial law in 1972. While *A Thoughtful Gift* (2019) irreversibly inscribes, the paintings erase the textual basis of Marcos' political fictions, reducing them

4. Since1898, when one colonizer, Spain, ceded the Philippines to another colonizer, the United States' presence (even after the archipelago's independence in 1946) has loomed large over the Southeast Asian country: militarily, politically, economically, and culturally. After the country's independence, the U.S. support of the Filipino regime remained unfaltering (primarily for the sake of its Philippine military bases) until the administration faced a tide of critical global opinion following the assassination of Marcos's principal political rival, the exiled former senator Benigno Aquino Jr., upon his return to the Philippines.

to form and color, and repurposing them as tributes to those who resisted and suffered as a result of these fantasies. Abad re-dedicates these forms as austere emblems of a nation that never was—a nation on the cusp of geopolitical plaything and libertarian proxy. A final painting, *For Dina* (2019) (G), is dedicated to Abad's mother, who, along with his father, was involved in the democratic socialist movement in the Philippines—activities that placed his parents in the Marcos' unfavorable line of sight.

Revealing the underbelly of sociopolitical mechanisms that still allow authoritarianism to manifest today, *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite* performs an elegy for those whose efforts were muted by the absolute power that perpetuates empires and dictatorships, for painful personal histories and imminent collective futures.

5. Jim Douglas, "Defeating the Marcoses in a Court of Law," in *A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)*, ed. Rene Ciria Cruz, Cindy Domingo, and Bruce Occena (University of Washington Press: 2017), 368, pp. 246.



High Art As Object of Fascist Desire

Marian Pastor Roces

SELF-MAGNIFICATION

That Imelda Marcos styled herself in the manner of Empress Farah Diba, the consort of the Iranian Shah, is the first of all cues to pay attention to the links among these figures. In her case, the links are to do with marriage to despots who knew each other through the American ambit of the Cold War; with the flows of arms, goods, people around a belt of right-wing dictators that spanned the world; and thus with an immense ideological front that was as though a Great Wall against communists/barbarians. These flows crucially involved personal encounters, during which soft power enveloped the hard phallic power of despots.

It is within this global network of dictators during the middle to the third quarter of the 20th century and its relationship with art that the work of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), Imelda Marcos' most conspicuous creation, ought to be considered. The CCP is an unusually rich site of inquiry into the form of aspiration—indeed ambition—that Imelda contributed to the Marcosian statecraft during the Martial Law period (1972-1981), performing to the requirements of the modern State to realize a right-wing autocracy demanding legitimacy on the basis of pseudo-liberal cultural values.

In the context of the full range Cold War despotisms, Imelda Marcos was arguably the most desirous of validation. Both she and her husband were born to humble circumstances, and in their exercise of conjoint power exhibited (a well-remarked) avaricious behavior. They were particularly noteworthy for their fulsome expression of an *ancien regime* idea conflating the power of big money, recondite art, and muscular politics. They produced momentum around their emergence into prominence when they married in the '60s, in a fashion that prefigures their calculated restating, soon enough, of a Philippine origin myth of the native in a male/female godhead: The Strong and The Beautiful, *Malakás at Magandá*. Which is to say, they activated pre-modern sources of identity and foreordination, to buttress a modern State they construed as embodied in their persons. That Marcosian modern State was, in the view of its author, at once centralized, authoritarian, magnificent, patrician, merciless, and advanced; and, in addition, mythic. Ferdinand Marcos organized mythmaking around his person, not only to produce the folk hero figure he was not but more importantly to conjure old Philippine mysticisms around that hero figure. Magical talismans were as vital to this mythmaking as were the fake medals supposedly awarded for wartime bravery. And his attentiveness to divination equaled that which he gave to history, modern warfare, and legal culture.

Founded as a performance venue in 1969, the CCP became a governmental agency for the promotion and development of the arts and culture in the Philippines when Ferdinand imposed the Martial Law in 1972. The CCP was the only Philippine cultural agency that operated astraddle the inter-national. Of course, other entities organized forays to other countries (for example, the Philippine Women's University and the University of the Philippines), but did not have the wherewithal to accept exchange on a regular basis. Since only a State agency can do so, it fell to the CCP to accomplish the pertinent details of diplomatic protocols entered into by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), starting in the '70s. Immediately upon its establishment, the CCP took

up the tasks of hosting artistic delegations; tasks that the DFA could only accomplish prior to the CCP by asking to use privately owned theaters and other venues. The CCP, moreover, initiated and institutionalized its own cultural diplomacy, extending invitations to foreign artists through their managers and impresarios, and paying for these engagements. It likewise started organizing overseas tours for Filipino artists soon after its inauguration.

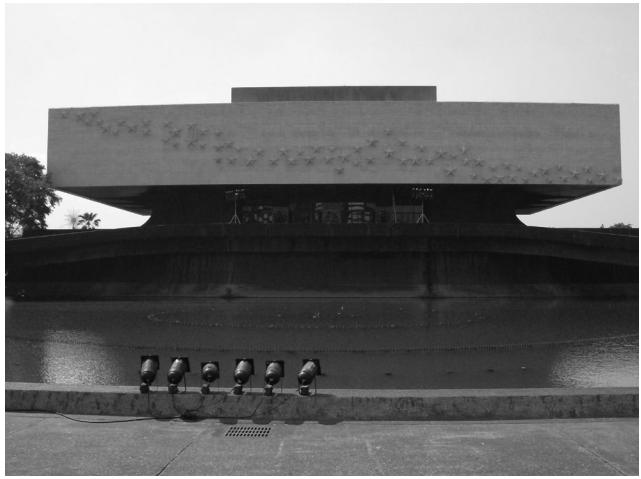
1. The National Arts Center is a cluster of buildings mostly given to the Philippine High School for the Arts, a secondary level public educational institution receiving scholars.

FORM

When the American pianist Van Cliburn (1934-2013) was to be flown by chopper onto the CCP's newly built National Arts Center (NAC)[1] on the slopes of Mount Makiling in 1976, either Imelda Marcos or a sycophant sent a radio message with instructions to posthaste procure fresh papayas and other fruits, and to tie these invisibly to the appropriate trees for the guests to behold.[2] Fruitless trees would not suffice in the staging—no matter how agriculture is incongruous to a tropical rainforest on a mountain—of the inauguration of the Philippine High School for the Arts at the NAC.

2. I was with those who received the message.

Stories of this tenor have been plentiful since the days of the dictatorship, and their meta-narrative belongs to whomever the narrators may be—all of whom affect snobbish airs to mock a social climbing First Lady. In hindsight, no snobbery from any direction would have had an effect on Imelda Marcos, whose faith in herself and her mission appears to be a hermetically sealed condition. Notwithstanding her pretensions, Imelda Marcos was not sophisticated enough for haute couture nor the *beaux arts* of the period. Notably, the Madame did not channel Jacqueline Kennedy, another contemporary. It was a fairy tale queendom that was in her line of sight, and Empress Farah—and the Thai Queen Sirikit—were to her the figures to reproduce. The bejeweled band across the torso, the long, height-emphasizing, svelte silhouette in a single color, the tiara, and the resplendent necklace that heightened a swan-like neck, were elements of a popular culture fantasy of royalty. Imelda managed a Farah;



though, arguably, not Sirikit. Still, it bears noting that the bouffant hair enlarged the head, elongated the figure, and solidified an aura in black crowning the person. The monarchical look that Imelda Marcos affected may be described as in fact fascistic in the 20th century, in its aspiration to monumentality and projection of imperiousness, as it were, a sculpture set on a pedestal in civic parade grounds. This styling produced a rigidity or tautness, even if—indeed often because—executed as the couturier Jose "Pitoy" Moreno's heavily, multiple overlaid embroidery on *piña* cloth. So inert was her form, Imelda Marcos could very well have been wearing an 18th-century crinoline with a sculptural corset beneath.

The assiduous cultivation of (a gauche idea of) aristocratic form betrayed a lack of understanding of art. The woman who

purported to massively scale-up patronage of the arts styled herself in the iconic manner of a figure on an old coin. Inadvertently, she was the perfect anachronism to the art that she caused to happen at the CCP. She grandly performed the role of patroness in collecting art housed in different locations, notably, as she and her surrogates added pieces to older collections at Malacañang Palace, in which she lived for three decades. Mention must be made as well of collections purchased or otherwise acquired for the Santo Niño Shrine and Heritage Museum in Tacloban, Leyte; the Philippine Center in New York City; the Metropolitan Museum of Manila; the Philippine Museum of Ethnography at Nayong Pilipino,[3] and for short-lived places like the Philippine Costume Museum.[4] However, for all these places, art was simply purchased or borrowed long term. The totality of these *objets d'art* is the outcome of a three-decade collecting frenzy and will be critically evaluated as such from political, financial, and other perspectives in the future.

The CCP, for which a collection was also built,[5] was a different art place vis-à-vis Imelda Marcos, specifically in that the works of artists were and continue to be presented there. The CCP collected, so to speak, *art makings*, rather than art as finished material. And it was this in-process art making that was at variance in spirit from the *nouveau riche* unrefinement that she displayed in the utter fixity of her fashion statements. Whether in performed or plastic forms—and as early as the mid-70s in multimedia and ephemeral forms—the local and foreign artists the CCP gave space to were part of the cultural production whose center of gravity was the here-and-now, that is to say, the contemporary as it was playing out; and whose language was turning to the postmodern and postcolonial as early as the year of establishment, 1969. The period buzz words spun out of the CCP of the time, notably, "experimental," "avant-garde," and even "developmental"[6] and "relevant"[7] firstly concerned a heightened sense of time, and secondly, a giddy sense of arrival at a point of rupture. A kind parricide applied to events and ideas, this late modernity saw art-making as a linear relay of outbreaks from previous orders; and

3. The park Nayong Pilipino was located immediately next to the Manila International Airport (today's Ninoy Aquino International Airport).

4. This museum displayed a collection of Imelda Marcos' gowns designed by favored couturier Jose "Pitoy" Moreno. It was housed at the former Luneta Hotel in front of Luneta Park, and has since been lost.

5. The CCP art collection began to be built immediately upon its establishment.

furthermore regarded that thrust towards a more critically-savvy future to be driven by precisely the break with the past.

HAUTE, UNDERCUT

At its most *haute*, art at the CCP during the Martial Law years was immensely self-contradictory. That the CCP was the most prestigious physical emblem of a dictatorship that thus signaled (or argued) its benevolence did not pose a problem for the artists. Through the Martial Law decade from 1972 to 1981, no sign of increasing awareness about the abuses of the regime was evident in the artmaking presented at the CCP.

The absence at the CCP of signs of awareness of the times would have been unremarkable had not the CCP presented art that makes capital of critical thinking. The CCP's early institutional career played out with a yawning disjunct between the emancipatory claims of contemporary art, on the one hand, and on the other, the manifest lack of critical faculties being exercised in relation to the anti-criticism character of tyranny. That disjunct compromised the authenticity of the CCP as an institution purportedly enabling cutting edge artmaking for that period. It exposed the vintage of the thinking that created and run the CCP: an idea of patronage that can be described as a pastiche of Baroque ambition and popular Romanticism. Benevolent patronage was inconsistent with the imperative of contemporary art to seek release from patronage.

To be sure, not all genres of artmaking at the CCP proposed critical views of modernity. The CCP presented symphonic music and the full spectrum of musical genre. A vast range of repertoires was performed, of which avant-garde music was only one. Modern dance was presented, which, by the nature of the form was a celebration of high modernity. But so was classical ballet staged, if less frequently than modern dance. Moreover, folk dance at state-of-the-art staging was a staple. Conceptualism and its materializations as installation art and performance art was the expected form in the galleries. And the full range of theatre

6. The word "developmental" was used by Raymundo R. Albano in 1979 in an exhibition catalog for *A Decade of Developmental Art* he curated at the CCP. He said, "Pardon the attempt to borrow a trendy operative word to explain a type of art, but 'developmental' is such a word which was used to try to validate, or put within an art-critical context, some works which by their nature tended to be inaccessible, simple but difficult."

7. "There must have been something relevant (another operative word) to such visual exigencies, because the issues stayed on to pursue the logical innovative achievement of the '70s."

genres was quotidian fare for CCP's audiences, notably including experimental theatre and, with the latter-day emergence of a form thus called, experimental cinema. The visual and performing artists were both foreign and local; and of the local, there was an immense number of artists from the various provinces of the Philippines. A "Philippine" quality, character, citation, content, or suggestion was always involved in the presentations by Filipino artists. It bears saying that programming was not overly skewed to foreign artists.

Still, notwithstanding this vast range, the CCP was not eclectic. Its institutional personality followed an international art mainstream trajectory of critical interlocution of the past. Modern dance as developed by the CCP resident company Ballet Philippines physically shifted the dancers' center of gravity and silhouette from that of classical ballet; and took up local content. An immense amount of innovation similarly took place in theatre, at the lead of both Teatro Pilipino and Tanghalang Pilipino, which explored different relationships between audience and actor, between stage and auditorium seating, between theatre itself and its purpose. Conceptual art at the CCP questioned what art was or could be. It investigated the limits of what materials, ideas, processes, gestures, and protocols might liberate art from previous imprisonments in set forms, traditions, and spaces of presentation. Avant-garde music at the CCP was a conceptual work to be freed from previous confinements in the musical structures of the past. This music used non-musicians at times, who made sounds with materials which were not musical instruments. This collective body of work—which produced a good many National Artists in due course—was "happening" (to use a correct period term) as similar practices happened in the First World.

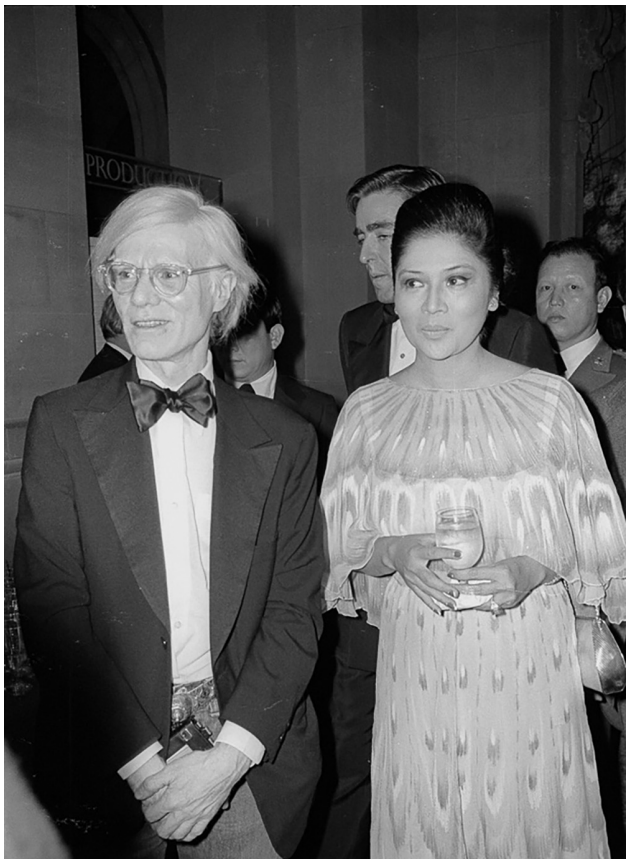
Some obvious reasons can start addressing how all this questioning transpired without addressing the same quality of interrogation towards Martial Law itself, and the role of the CCP within a dictatorship. Firstly, the leading artists of the time—Lucrecia R. Kasilag, long-time CCP President and avant-garde composer; Roberto Chabet and Raymundo Albano, heads of the CCP Art

Museum and pioneering conceptual art avatars; Rolando Tinio, theatre genius; Alicia Reyes, innovative choreographer—were not only artists of integrity. They were, each in inimitable ways, seductive individuals who maintained a following out of sheer genius. These artists were such bright lights that, at the CCP, they obscured Imelda Marcos' paltry star.

Secondly, the intellectual infrastructure to sustain this kind of avant-garde did not exist to the degree needed to even recognize the contradictions the CCP imposed on all artists who worked in it; much less to address the contradictions. The criticism of the CCP by the Left constructed a dichotomy between art-for-art's-sake practices "within the center" and socially-conscious art practices "outside the center." It is a false dichotomy in that the critical cast of Conceptualism, for instance, and of avant-garde music, is unrecognized; notably, in that the phrase art-for-art's-sake was coined in the late 19th century as a critique of capitalism's stranglehold on art making. And conversely, the conservatism of Social Realism, for instance, is not conceded; notably, the lack of criticality in relation to the limited capacity of figurative illustration to change society. The too simplistic dualism did not acknowledge the critical traditions of both philosophical lineages. The dichotomy did not, therefore, offer an intellectual framework for true debate to have transpired, that could or may have assisted artists on either side of the divide in taking on the Marcos regime, albeit in various ways.

Yet, these two obvious reasons for the inability of critical art to criticize the CCP and the dictatorship do not quite get to what should be the actual object of interrogation. And that is fascism itself, as embodied in the case of the CCP by Imelda Marcos.

This text is an excerpt of an essay delivered at the conference, *The Remains of a Dictatorship: An International Conference on the Philippines under Marcos*, held at the Ateneo de Manila University, August 3–4, 2017.



Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite
Pio Abad
June 5—August 10, 2019

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IMAGE CAPTIONS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE): A ruby, diamond, and pearl bracelet from the Hawaii collection, Presidential Commission on Good Government. Imelda's gift to Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, photograph by Pio Abad. Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila. Andy Warhol and Imelda Marcos in 1976 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, Getty Images.

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EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

A

Untitled (Bolerium), 2019
407 posters, each 11 x 17 inches

B

Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite, 2019
Concrete sculpture, dimensions variable. Produced in collaboration with Frances Wadsworth Jones

C

Kim Komenich, *Hand and Barbed Wire*, February 25, 1986
Inkjet print on Hahnemühle Baryta paper, 10 x 15 inches

D

A Thoughtful Gift, 2019
Etching on Carrara marble, 10 x 13 x 0.75 inches

E

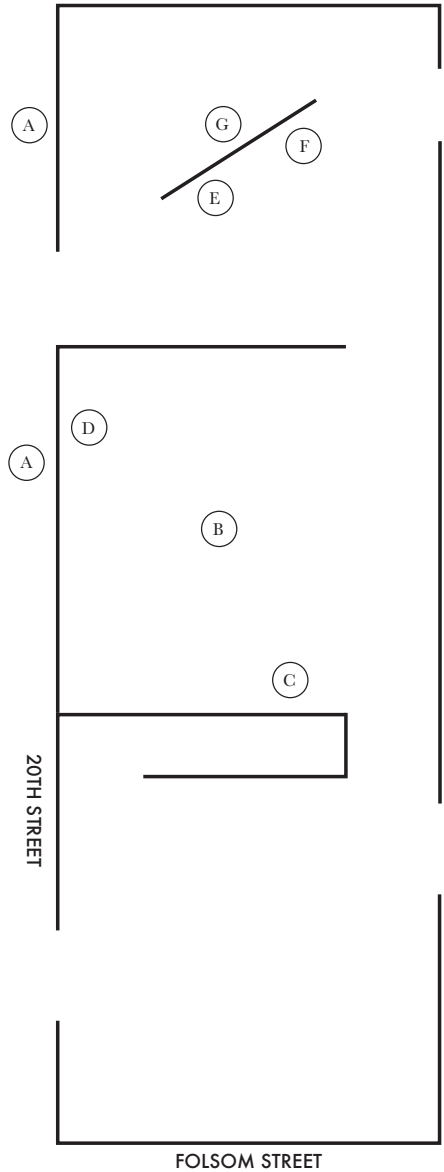
For Silme, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

F

For Gene, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

G

For Dina, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches



KADIST


YOU
CAN
NOT
BITE

Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite

Pio Abad

I have thought since about this lunch a great deal. The wine was chilled and poured into crystal glasses. The fish was served on porcelain plates that bore the American eagle. The sheepdog and the crystal and the American eagle together had on me a certain anesthetic effect, temporarily deadening that receptivity to the sinister that afflicts everyone in Salvador, and I experienced for a moment the official American delusion, the illusion of plausibility, the sense that the American undertaking in El Salvador might turn out to be, from the right angle, in the right light, just another difficult but possible mission in another troubled but possible country.

—Joan Didion[1]

SEACLIFF

At my mother's wake two years ago, I found out that she was adept at assembling a rifle. I have always been aware of her radical past but there are certain details that have only surfaced recently. The intricacies of past struggles had always surrendered to the urgencies of present ones.

My parents were both working as labor organizers when they met in the mid-70s. Armed with Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*

1. Joan Didion, *Salvador* (Vintage: 1994), 112, pp. 87-88.

(1971) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), they would head to the fishing communities on the outskirts of Manila to assist fishermen, address their livelihood issues and educate them on the political climate of the country. It was this solidarity work and their eventual involvement in the democratic socialist movement that placed them within the crosshairs of Ferdinand Marcos' military.

In April 1978, Marcos held elections to fill a new legislative body called Interim Batasang Pambansa. The election was called in response to the Carter administration's severe and critical stance towards the Marcos dictatorship's human rights records and U.S. threats to withhold further financial assistance—a performance of democracy for the international community. As expected, the elections were marred by widespread cheating and violence. Marcos' candidates proclaimed complete victory. My father was imprisoned for the first time, along with scores of other activists, for taking part in protests. Up until that moment, the democratic socialists advocated for elections or civil disobedience to topple the dictatorship, seeing themselves as a third force in Philippine politics between Marcos' military and the Marxist National Democrats. The fraudulent elections and the unrelenting oppressive tactics of the regime convinced many of the group to abandon any peaceful way of confronting Marcos, leaving them with only one option: armed insurrection.

In the summer of 1979, a small group of urban guerrillas, calling themselves the Light-A-Fire Movement, set off a number of crude incendiary devices, burning several government buildings, hotels, the crony-owned Rustan's department store and a luxurious floating casino owned by Imelda's brother. The movement was broken up a few months later when many of its members were arrested, including its leader, a Harvard educated business executive named Eduardo Olaguer.

From June to October 1980, a series of sixty coordinated bombings rocked Manila, exploding inside banks, government offices, high-rise buildings, and pro-Marcos newspapers. The most dramatic operation took place on the 19th of October at the grand opening of the

American Society of Travel Agents Conference. A bomb exploded a few feet from where Ferdinand Marcos had just finished delivering his welcome remarks, causing chaos to some 4,000 delegates and the cancellation of the conference.

A new group calling themselves the April 6 Liberation Movement (A6LM) took responsibility for the bombings. Their name was a reference to the 1978 noise barrage demonstration in Manila where tens of thousands of urban Filipinos honked car horns, banged pots and pans, pealed church bells and blew whistles in protest of the Marcos regime—the first manifestation of the People Power that would eventually overthrow the dictatorship eight years later.

Marcos was initially quick to dismiss A6LM as a fringe group of young radicals living in a world of fantasy, but the success of their operations presented an organized group with a strategic plan to overthrow his regime and significant support from the moderate opposition. It would transpire later on that members of A6LM had undergone training in the Arizona desert on the use of explosives and techniques of guerrilla warfare.[2] My parents were initially to be part of the group traveling to Arizona but soon decided that violent adventurism of this type wasn't their solution. My mother never used that rifle. Nonetheless, they were implicated in the bombings and were forced into hiding for months. Eventually, they were found and charged with conspiring to assassinate the President of the Philippines.

From the Arizona desert, the setting of this narrative shifts to an even more unlikely location. At midnight on December 17, 1981, twenty FBI agents, San Francisco police and local sheriff's deputies raided a Spanish style house in affluent Seacliff, California. The property was the home of Steve Psinakis, a 50-year-old Greek American engineer and his wife, Presy Lopez, a Filipina whose wealthy family had been driven out of the Philippines by the Marcoses. The raid was part of a crackdown instigated by the newly-elected president Ronald Reagan. Psinakis was one of the officials of the Movement for a Free Philippines (MFP), an organization of exiles and sympathizers dedicated to the

2. The idea of revolutionaries coming to train in the very country coddling their enemy is ironic but not unusual. The Sandinistas National Liberation Front of Nicaragua were said to have purchased weapons in pawn shops along San Francisco's Mission Street and run five times a day on the Bernal Heights ring road in preparation for battle.

overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship and a return to democracy. It was alleged that Psinakis was the mastermind behind the training operation in Arizona and that the Seacliff home was a bomb factory for A6LM. An informant working for a garbage company in San Francisco claimed that he had found six hundred feet of detonating cord stripped of its explosive core that morning. Psinakis insisted that the evidence was planted, as FBI agents went through his files, slit open garbage bags, unwrapped Christmas presents, and had two police dogs sniff through the whole house for explosives. Nothing was found.

Psinakis remained evasive about his direct involvement with A6LM, although he was explicit about his belief in the need for armed conflict as the way to end the dictatorship. He implored each MFP member to donate US$ 330 as one unit of material support for the Philippine guerrillas—the cost of one Armalite rifle. The combined forces of Ronald Reagan and Ferdinand Marcos were never able to catch Steve Psinakis. Even an attempt to indict him for transporting incendiary devices across state lines in 1989, long after the dictatorship had fallen, proved fruitless.

Other activists were less fortunate.

Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes were members of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP), a revolutionary organization that was founded in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1973 to advocate for civil rights in the United States and national liberation in the Philippines. Silme and Gene met as workers in the Alaskan canneries, packing and cutting fish on an assembly line just like their fathers, grandfathers and many other Filipino immigrants before them. It was a shared advocacy to reform the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the union of cannery workers on the U.S. West Coast, Hawaii, Alaska, and in British Columbia in Canada, that brought them together. The union leadership had long been in collusion with the industry and had been infiltrated by gangster elements. It consistently failed to address workers' grievances, shaved off the earnings of Filipino workers and profited from gambling operations in the canneries. The president was a certain Tony Baruso, an

outspoken champion of the Marcos regime, who continuously blocked efforts for rank and file reform. Silme and Gene were planning to challenge Baruso for the presidency of ILWU. At the same time, they were gathering United States labor support for the worker's movement in the Philippines against the Marcos dictatorship.

On June 1, 1981, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes were shot in broad daylight in a gangland style operation at the ILWU office in Seattle. Gene died immediately, a bullet piercing his heart. Silme was shot five times in the stomach but managed to call out for help. He died in hospital the next day having identified the hitmen as members of a gang that ran the gambling at the canneries. A week later, police found the murder weapon—a gun that was registered to Tony Baruso. Both Silme and Gene were twenty-nine years old.

The KDP initiated the Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes and, for over ten years, their quest to prosecute the perpetrators was constantly frustrated by the efforts of Philippine and American intelligence to suppress their own roles in the assassinations. It would eventually come to light that the U.S. government not only knew that the Marcos dictatorship was monitoring opposition in the U.S. but was also abetting the surveillance. United States agents conveyed incorrect intelligence to Philippine officials that Gene had been carrying US$ 300,000 with him, intended for the opposition, on a trip to the Philippines a month before he was shot. Baruso also made three phone calls to the U.S. State Department within twenty-four hours of the murders.

It wasn't until after the fall of the dictatorship that further evidence of complicity would come to light. Prosecutors came across a statement of expenses from Mabuhay Corporation, a company set up and managed by Dr. Leonilo Malabed, a Marcos crony in San Francisco. It showed how the Marcos regime illegally spent almost US$ 1 million dollars in the United States between 1979 and 1981 on various activities, including political campaign donations to both parties and an attempt to purchase a popular San Francisco Bay Area radio station. A small entry for fifteen thousand dollars was filed under 'special security projects' on May 17, 1981, two

weeks before Silme and Gene's murder. May 17 was the same weekend that Tony Baruso made a quick trip to San Francisco. The same amount would appear in his bank account shortly after the killings.

In November 1989, the Domingo and Viernes families filed a U.S. federal civil lawsuit against the Marcos family. At the end of the month-long trial, the judge and jury awarded US$ 23.3 million to the family, ruling that the Marcos regime committed numerous acts of harassment, intimidation, and violence against the opposition and that Silme and Gene posed a substantial threat to the dictatorship because they were rising leaders and effective members of the opposition. Tony Baruso would later be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In both of these trials, no mention was made of the role played by the U.S. State Department or the intelligence community.

SIMI VALLEY

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum is perched on a mountaintop in Simi Valley, California, with sweeping views of the surrounding mountains, valleys, and the Pacific Ocean. The 100-acre site is the epitome of American fantasy, a shining city on a hill enveloped by a landscape so rugged and redolent of the iconography of the Wild West that one almost expects Ronald Reagan to appear astride a horse, which he inevitably does, in bronze form.

The museum charts the rise of Reagan, from the Hollywood studios to the White House, through displays that alternate between cloying sentimentality and violence. Photographs of Ronald and Nancy looking longingly at each other during his inauguration are followed by a three-channel video showing John Hinckley Jr.'s attempt at Reagan's life played on a loop. A parade of Margaret Thatcher's dresses, in a section called *The Friendship That Changed The World*, culminates with a decommissioned Cold War missile. After alighting Air Force One, where the last object on display is an impeccably preserved maraschino cherry and chocolate cake (Reagan always had one available in case members of the press were celebrating their birthdays) you are ushered to the *Threat Theater*, a visual catalog of the horrors of the Soviet Union justifying U.S. attacks on that "evil empire," and to the *Crisis Corridor*, which features large portraits of America's enemies, from Khomeini of Iran, Gadaffi of Libya and Ortega of Nicaragua.

It is in the section entitled *Peace Through Strength* where the museum's presentation of Reagan's political legacy bears utmost scrutiny. A single panel is devoted to the Iran-Contra scandal, a major controversy where U.S. administration officials facilitated the clandestine sale of arms to Iran, despite Iran being subject to an arms embargo, with the proceeds intended to fund the Contras in Nicaragua, and Congress prohibiting such support. A video of Reagan's speech in March 1987 accepting full responsibility for the Iran-Contra affair is placed alongside a statement claiming that Reagan was not aware of the extent of such agreements.

Adjacent to this panel, in a section devoted to Reagan's diplomatic successes in Southeast Asia, is a small photograph of Corazon Aquino. This photo is accompanied by a short description stating that, after the revolution of 1986, the Reagan administration immediately recognized Aquino as the president of the Philippines, granting refuge to Ferdinand Marcos in order to avoid civil war—a summary that ignores the complications of history, placing Reagan's legacy above the truth.

It took two months for Reagan to personally congratulate Aquino for assuming the presidency. A few days after this exchange, he stopped by Honolulu on his way to Asia and contemplated visiting Ferdinand and Imelda, who was now in luxurious exile at a crony's Makiki Heights estate, having been welcomed a few months earlier with leis and a red carpet. Though dissuaded from visiting by his aides, Reagan insisted on telephoning Marcos, who still proclaimed himself president and bemoaned his maligned fate. Imelda, seeking to prove that the Marcos and Reagan special relationship was still intact, secretly recorded this conversation and arranged for a Honolulu television station to broadcast segments of it.

Aquino had strong reason to believe that Reagan secretly yearned for his old friend's restoration to power. It was speculated at the time that Reagan disdained Aquino for refusing to allow Marcos to stay in the Philippines after his ouster. This mutual unease was made even more apparent when, on her first trip to Washington in late 1986, Aquino was denied the full honor of a state visit—a privilege Reagan had accorded Marcos a mere four years earlier, despite the mounting evidence of brutality and corruption in his regime. At a state dinner on this visit, Reagan's affection for the dictator and his wife were made evident by his toast. After greeting Irene, the youngest Marcos daughter, a happy birthday, he reminisced about first meeting his "old and good friends" on his trip to Manila with Nancy in 1969, where they had both been treated like royalty. Then the governor of California, Reagan had been sent by President Richard Nixon to represent the United States at the opening of Imelda's pet project, the Cultural Center

of the Philippines. Reagan ended his toast with a commitment to friendship:

> *President Marcos, we have accomplished a great deal together over the years. We will all do more in the years to come. Common determination to achieve a better life does not mean we need to be alike—we only need to treat each other in a spirit of generosity and mutual respect. If we do that our continuing commitment to one another, resting as it does on many years of close relations, will be solid now and for the future.*

When the Marcoses were finally indicted for fraud and racketeering charges by the U.S. Federal Court in 1988, Ferdinand wrote to Ronald Reagan stressing this friendship. He pleaded with him to intervene in the proceedings, insisting that Reagan had the right not to prosecute present or former heads of state. Ferdinand signed the letter off with: "I remain your obedient servant."

Less than a year later, Ferdinand would succumb to lupus in a Honolulu hospital. He would never stand trial. Imelda would later be acquitted on all counts by a Manhattan Court and return triumphantly to the Philippines.

WOODSIDE

October 10, 1988

Dear Robin,[3]

I am writing to set out for you the results of the search executed at the home of Irene and Gregorio Araneta,[4] the daughter and son-in-law of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, as this search implicates the prosecution in the District. The results of this search provide further evidence that the Marcoses have continued to commit crimes and to conceal the fruits of their racketeering enterprises since they arrived in the United States. The search further emphasizes the urgent need to move forward with this prosecution.

The search of the Araneta's home began at about 7:40 pm on Thursday, October 6, 1988. The case agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) who has worked on this District's

3. Robin Ross, Executive Assistant to U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh.

4. The house is at 915 Mountain Home Road in Woodside at San Mateo County. It is still owned by Marcos and Araneta.

case almost from its inception was accompanied by Internal Revenue Service, FBI and Customs agents, who were conducting independent investigations. Based upon information provided by a confidential source, the FBI agent was searching for items from the Samuels Collection. As you recall, the Samuels Collection[5] is a US$ 6 million collection of fine art and antiques that were purchased by Imelda Marcos in 1981, through a nominee. The monies used by Mrs. Marcos to purchase the collection were stolen from the Philippine government. The purchase and transfer of this collection is charged in the proposed indictment as an interstate and foreign transportation of stolen property.[6]

The search was executed a day ahead of schedule after news of the warrant was apparently leaked to the press. In fact, television crews were already on the scene when the agents arrived, and it was the consensus of the FBI agents that some valuable evidence had been lost before the search began.

Nevertheless, we recovered 113 items from the Samuels Collection. Some of the chairs, tables, artworks, and figurines were displayed in the house, but most of the items were stored under sheets in a carriage house, stacked in a guest house garage and boxed in the residence. Many pieces were damaged, but the agents did recover one Chinese screen, about nine feet in size, which was in near perfect condition. The 1981 value of the property recovered was approximately US$ 324,000.

The ongoing concealment of the stolen property—much of which was hurriedly packed away and transported from a Philippine government townhouse in New York on the eve of Marcos' departure from the Philippines—is part of the continuing efforts of the Marcos enterprise to conceal the Marcos wealth and to prevent its forfeiture. The Marcoses' children are now implicated in this ongoing scheme.

I am enclosing the latest draft of the proposed indictment. As I told you last week, we intend to present an indictment to the Grand Jury tomorrow that charges the Marcoses' co-racketeers with the crimes contained in this indictment. We will be attempting to arrest these

5. The art and antiques collection of Leslie R. Samuels, a New York City philanthropist who made his fortune in retail outlets in the Midwest, and his late wife Fan Fox Samuels, heiress to a mercantile fortune, was to have been auctioned off by Sotheby's in October 1981 and was expected to raise over $US 5 million. The sale was abruptly cancelled in September when Imelda Marcos purchased the entire collection of rare 17th and 18th century English paintings, furniture, and pottery. Mrs. Marcos also offered US$ 9 million to buy the Samuels' Upper Park Avenue triplex apartment, but was turned down by the co-op board members after anti-Marcos activists threatened to picket the building.

co-racketeers abroad over the next several days. As we agreed, we cannot delay going forward with these charges now, though we are hopeful that the proposed Marcos indictment will supersede this interim indictment by October 18, 1988, at the latest.

Substantial evidence exists to prove that Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos obtained hundreds of millions of dollars through embezzlement and fraud. They used the United States as their "safe haven" for this ill-gotten wealth and, in the process, perpetuated frauds on United States bank and regulatory agencies to secure that wealth and to acquire over US$ 166 million in additional monies. Since their arrival here, the Marcoses have not abandoned their crimes, but have continued to flaunt the judicial system and, indeed, the Grand Jury.

Although there are some who are reluctant to prosecute Marcos because of his prior position, it should be clear (and the fruits of this search make it clearer) that to fail to prosecute would give Marcos a protection against application of United States law enjoyed by no other person in our country, including the President of the United States. If we fail to prosecute Marcos we would be giving him carte blanche to continue to violate the law. Despite the reluctance to prosecute an alleged "former ally," even a "former ally" cannot be permitted to continue ongoing crimes.

Let me summarize the reasons that prosecution of Marcos is required. The indictment is based on crimes that continued after Marcos came to the United States. The fraud is arguably the largest ever and it continues. All of the others included in this indictment will be and must be prosecuted. The forfeiture will be of direct benefit to the Philippine government.

If you need any assistance in expanding upon or clarifying any of these arguments, I am ready to be of help.

Respectfully yours,

Rudolph W. Giuliani
United States Attorney

6. A portion of the Samuels Collection was also seized in France from co-racketeer and Saudi arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi, who was also implicated in the Iran-Contra affair. Following this seizure, Khashoggi stated under oath that he purchased the seized items from Imelda Marcos.

Imelda

Bob Colacello

Andy was always in a rush to pin down a potential portrait, but he was particularly anxious about this one. It could be the big break in his campaign to become the official portraitist to the leaders of the world. And, unlike President Ford, or any other leader of a democratic nation, Imelda Marcos really could order up scores of her silk-screened likeness, for every cabinet member's office, governor's mansion, and ambassador's residence, fulfilling one of Andy's fondest fantasies: the single commission that miraculously multiples ad infinitum. And then, wouldn't President Marcos want *his* portrait too, to hang side by side with the First Lady's in every post office, train station, and national-bank branch in the land? And once the Marcoses set the trend for official portraits by Andy Warhol—so flattering, so easily reproduced—wouldn't the Pahlavis and the Saudis, Hassan and Hussein, the King and Queen of Thailand, all follow? And how about Imelda's new best friend, Mrs. Mao Tse-tung? Why, Andy had her husband's portraits in every size and color, just sitting there at the Factory, waiting to be shipped to China the minute the check came in the diplomatic pouch.

The one thing that worried Andy about hanging out with this group, aside from losing his limousine-liberal clients, was their tendency to attract assassins. Mrs. Marcos, for example, had already been stabbed in the arm by one of her Filipino subjects.

Andy didn't want to be there, popping Polaroids, when the bullets sprayed. But then, what if the Marcoses were killed or toppled *before* getting Andy started on this imagined merry-go-round of monarchs and potentates commissioning portraits by the dozens, or hundreds, or thousands? There *was* a Communist insurgency in the Philippines and martial law had been declared in 1972. So we had to hurry and pop the question right away, and just hope that there weren't any crazed revolutionaries with machine guns lurking in the lobby of the Carlyle. As Jerry Zipkin had advised Andy a few nights before, "Never get in an elevator with Imelda. And if you have to, always let her get our first."

When we got off the elevator on the 34th floor of the Carlyle Hotel, we were confronted by a U.S. Secret Service post, set up between Imelda's suite, 34b—the one where President Kennedy had always stayed, noted Fred—and suite 34a, which was owned by Henry Ford II, whose second wife, an Italian jet setter named Christina, was one of Imelda's most intimate friends. The Secret Service men checked our passports and then announced us—by walkie-talkie—to their Filipino counterparts, who were standing a few feet away. "Gee," whispered Andy, "this is glamorous. And scary. I better not tape, right?"

The Filipinos checked our passports again and opened the door to Imelda's suite, where a video crew was waiting, with its bright lights on, to record our entrance. "They've got us on film now," whispered Andy. "We're linked with her for good so we better get her portrait, Bob." Still being videotaped, we moved into the center of the sitting room and admired the view of Manhattan, Queens, *and* New Jersey, while noting the names on the cards attached to the flower arrangements set up on pedestals: Jerry and Betty Ford, Nelson and Happy Rockefeller, Henry and Nancy Kissinger… When the camera started taking Polaroids of us Andy really got worried: "They're putting us on a file, Bob. And when the revolution comes, the Communists will find our pictures. This is all your fault, Bob."

Then Mrs. Marcos swept in the form of the bedroom, tall, dark, and handsome, with her soft half-Oriental features and hard jet-black pompadour, a kind of cross between the middle-aged

Merle Oberon and the juvenile Elvis Presley. She was wearing a simple black dress, set off by a big Bulgari diamond pin, which immediately caught Andy's eye. She waved away the camera crew imperiously, telling them, "*Please*. Let us get to know each other first." She turned to Andy and explained, "It's the Filipino TV. They are making a documentary of my trip to America and Mexico." "What can I do?" she went on in a voice that was simultaneously very feminine and very strong. "They follow me everywhere I go with their cameras and their lights because the Filipino people can't get enough of me. They want to know everything I do, everyone I see… I am their star. Their star and their slave."

"Oh, gee," said Andy. "We brought you our magazine."

"But you won't write in it that I am extravagant," said Imelda, "will you? I don't know why the American press always writes that I'm extravagant. Do I look extravagant?" She had conveniently covered her diamond pin, all twenty karats of it, with the copy of *Interview*.

"Oh, no," said Andy, stuck now that he couldn't talk about the one thing they had in common: jewelry. After a long dead pause, he added, "Gee, isn't Franco Rossellini great?"

Imelda agreed that he was, but she wasn't in the mood for gossip. Instead, she launched into a long speech about art, full of platitudes and clichés (but no suggestion that she was aware that Andy painted portraits), finally concluding that artists brought people together, just as she was trying to do in her travels, to bring nations together and join the East and the West. Every time she said East she turned her head one way and every time she said West she turned the other East, West, East, West, and then we turned ours with hers, until we were dizzy, and stifling yawns. The Philippines, she said, was ideally positioned to play the go-between for the East and the West, because it was neither one nor the other, but both." She often used "I" when she meant the Philippines, and "the Philippines" when she meant I.

This text is an excerpt of "Chapter 27: Imelda" from the book *Holy Terror: Andy Warhol Close Up*, published by Harper Collins in 1990.

Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite
Pio Abad
June 5—August 10, 2019

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Image captions (in order of appearance): Imelda Marcos dancing with Ronald Reagan at the 1969 opening of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, Getty Images. Imelda's gifts to Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, photographs by Pio Abad.

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EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

A

Untitled (Bolerium), 2019
407 posters, each 11 x 17 inches

B

Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite, 2019
Concrete sculpture, dimensions variable. Produced in collaboration with Frances Wadsworth Jones

C

Kim Komenich, *Hand and Barbed Wire*, February 25, 1986
Inkjet print on Hahnemühle Baryta paper, 10 x 15 inches

D

A Thoughtful Gift, 2019
Etching on Carrara marble, 10 x 13 x 0.75 inches

E

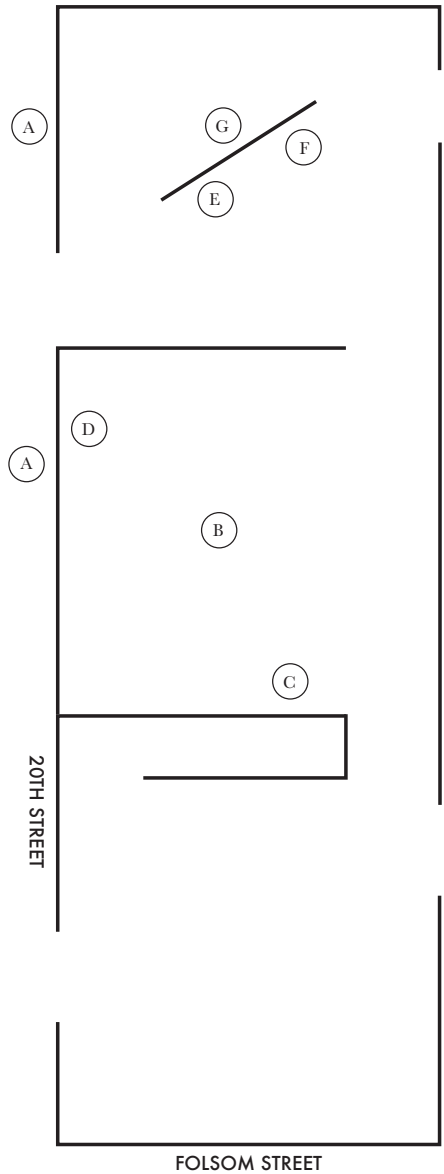
For Silme, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

F

For Gene, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches

G

For Dina, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 12 x 16 inches



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