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salingpusa

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BEGINNINGS

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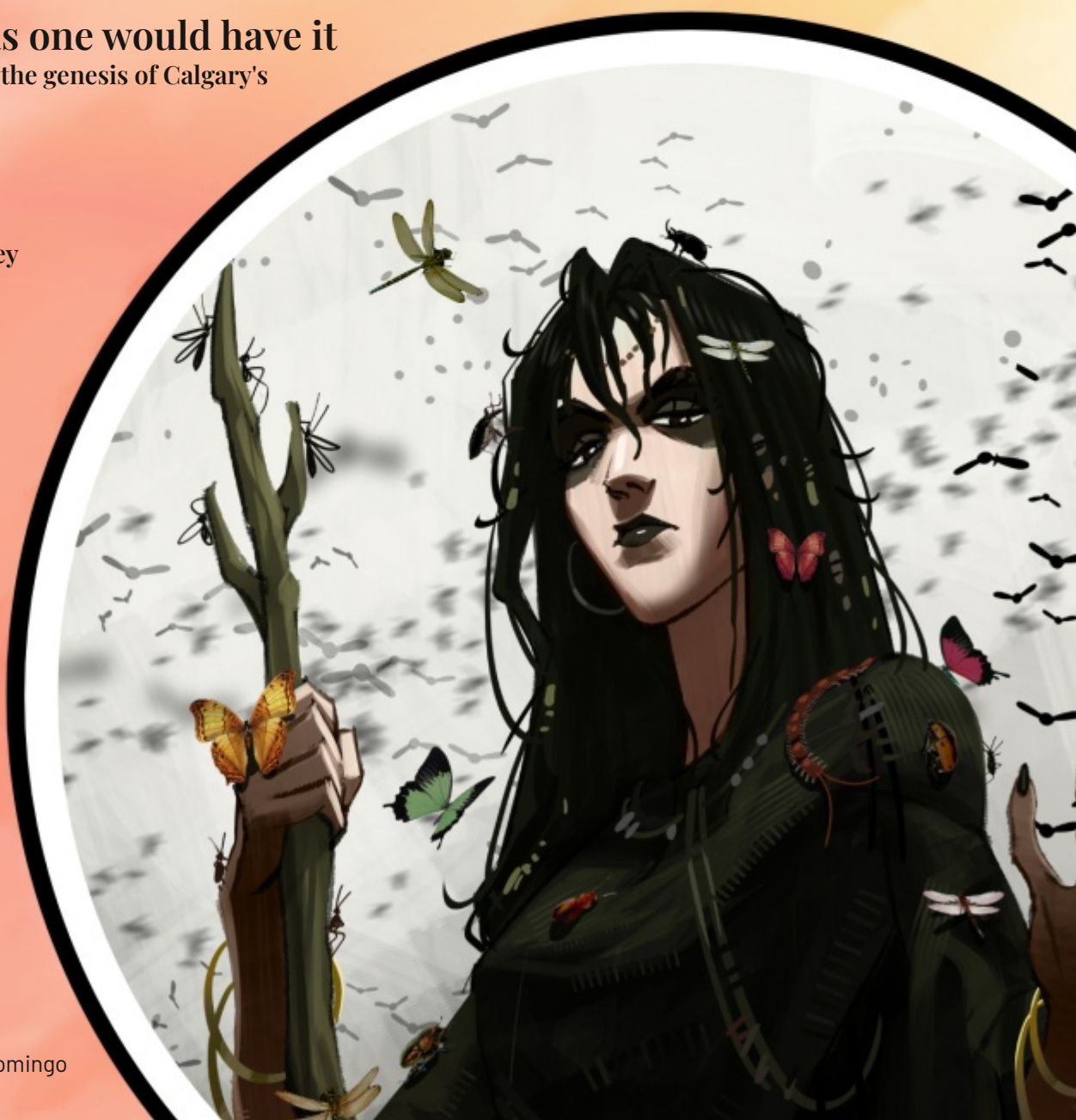

Illustration by Neki
Cover design by Ligaya Domingo


CARTA HYDROGRAPHICA
Y CHOROGRAPHICA
DELAS YSLAS FILIPINAS
DEDICADA
AL REY NUESTRO SEÑOR
NUEVA CASTILLA
O LU ZON
Cabo de
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Para la
Derrotero
Por el Embocadero de S.n Bernardino
TEABAO
O
SAMAR
LEYTE
BOHOL
PANAY
ISLA DE MINDANAO

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salingpusa

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Renato Gandia and Cecilia Ortiz Luna

Photo by R. Melvin Alcaraz

Salingpusa Magazine's new beginnings

by Cecilia Ortiz Luna

Renato and I met eight months ago at a poetry workshop where we both served as panelists. I have a modus operandi when attending events like these. As Executive Director of Salingpusa Creatives, I was always on the look out for Filipino artists to invite into the fold and was mercenary in my methods.

With Renato, though, I didn't need to concoct a line. I'd previously read his essay in the anthology Magdaragat, and his piece, for me, stood out in a collection featuring forty-three Filipino authors. It was about childhood trauma, and he wrote the scenes with such vividness that they stayed with me long after I read them. When I introduced myself to Renato, it was as a fan.

This introduction led to correspondences. He attended a grant-writing workshop I facilitated. We had sushi lunch at Kensington. By this time, I felt such awe that the boy with those heart-breaking experiences is now living a wonderful life, in a wonderful city.

We share a number of commonalities: migrated to Canada as adults, slight physiques, Tagalogs, adorers of our supportive husbands. More importantly, we are both writers at that stage in our journey where we are "putting our art out there".

Like Renato, I consider myself a writer first and foremost. But events in my life for the past year have pulled me aggressively toward community and arts organizing. The magazine has always been the core of Salingpusa's advocacy efforts, but it had suffered from inattention because of the shift in my activities. I always knew that what the magazine needed was someone with years of writing and editing experience and who matched my passion for the written word. Someone like Renato.

In July, I invited Renato to join me at the helm of Salingpusa Magazine as its managing editor. After a few days, he accepted. I thanked my saints and stars. Immediately, he poured himself into the job and set about putting structure and system into producing a revitalized magazine.

For this first issue in the new era of Salingpusa Magazine, with its theme of New Beginnings, I

thought it apropos to sit down with Renato at this lovely nook outside our Salingpusa headquarters at the Grand Theatre and talk about our individual projects and the future of Salingpusa Magazine.

(The conversation was edited for brevity.)

Cecilia: Renato, can you tell me about your recent publishing achievements?

Renato: I have a piece coming out in Ginger and Smoke Magazine at the end of October. It is a folklore story about bales? I also have a story that will be published by Yay! all queer: Free and Queer. It's about a trans woman who has not fully transitioned, then mistaken for a man and suspected to be a murderer.

The third story is for the anthology Beyond the Concert Hall by Laberinto Press. This story was narrated from the point-of-view of a 10-year-old girl perplexed at why their house was always quiet. This story explores collective memories of Filipinos during the Second World War.

Cecilia: One thing that I have learned and admire about you is that you are a prolific writer. You write well and you write fast. Have you always been like this?

Renato: I've started thinking of myself as a writer while I was in grade six in the Philippines. My teacher always asked me to read what I wrote in front of the class. My classmates then had always thought of me as someone different —a softie. When I read my stories, I felt that I have this power. I thought, you will sit there and listen to what I say, even though in the playground, you think of me as inferior, and you tease me for being gay. That was the impetus, because when I stand there reading my piece, they listened. That continued through high school and college.

When I came to Canada. I didn't stop writing but I stopped sharing what I was writing. Until recently.

Cecilia: For every writing assignment I throw at you, you always come back with an excellent piece, be it Tagalog or English. Even on a time crunch, you seem to always operate at a high level.

Renato: Part of it is being a BIPOC writer. I didn't always write in English. My medium was Tagalog. (Renato previously self published a collection of short stories in Tagalog, titled Kapirasong Pagkabagabag sa Nalilitong Magdamag). I started to write in English in Canada. I've always challenged myself. I needed to be better at everything I do and what I write. If I can be good from the beginning of the process (of writing), if it is of a quality I am willing to share outside my writing dungeon, then I will feel secure. I'm a very insecure writer, actually.

Cecilia: What are you envisioning for Salingpusa magazine?

Renato: For the Filipino voice to be heard, the Filipino word to be read— by Calgarians, by Albertans, by everyone who has access to internet. I want them to see and to witness that there's a lot of artists in this beautiful city, and some of them are Filipinos. A lot of Filipino artists have stories that need to be told, need to be heard. I think the magazine would be able to provide that locus for this creation of art to happen. For this creation of voice to spring from.

I would like to encourage the Filipinos out there who are shy about writing. By helping this magazine, I want to reach out to those people by encouraging them to be part of the creative community here in Calgary.

Renato: Cecilia, what's inspiring you to organize? To keep going with this?

Cecilia: By "this", I know you mean the often back breaking and uncompensated work of coming up with arts events and marshalling people to participate in them.

I'm very much a late bloomer in both the writing

and arts organizing scene. Growing up in the Philippines, I was into all activities that at that time, I didn't consciously consider as Art. I was into dancing, singing, drawing and writing, and I was good at all these things.

There were two things that I would have loved to have done when I was young. The first was to study at the Philippine High School for the Arts in Laguna where I will be surrounded night and day by fellow creatives. The second was joining the Bayanihan Dance Troupe and travel around the world dancing the magnificent singkil. But my parents, understandably, prioritized academic achievement over everything else.

I was already in my 50's when I decided to pivot to this fully creative life and it was only thanks to the serendipity of this major shake-up in my life (a story for another day). So I suppose this is me trying to make up for having missed that chance at living the artist life and interacting on a regular basis with fellow artists.

The other answer is that it has to be done—the work of teasing out these talented Filipinos out there from their shells and presenting their works, their voices to the public. And I feel able to do that work, and to do that work well, so why not?

Renato: What are your dreams for Salingpusa Magazine?

Cecilia: For the magazine to be a vehicle for the Filipino collective story to be heard, appreciated and learned from. For the members of the Filipino diasporic community in Calgary/Canada to see themselves in this collective story. For individual Filipino storytellers to have a space where their writing dreams will be actualized in some way.

You and I, we both know the feeling when someone expresses that they connect with your writing. The validation that comes from that is the best feeling. I want to bring that experience to these writers, through the magazine.

The dream? The dream is for Salingpusa Magazine to be known as one of, if not the magazine Calgarians, and Albertans turn to for good quality Filipino writing.

Renato: Putting together a magazine is not an easy project, there are a lot of challenges. Tell me something about the first issue of Salingpusa Magazine.

Cecilia: The first issue was really challenging. We were putting it together when I had an incomplete vision of what and who the magazine was for. The early drafts of the first magazine was a case of lakas-ng-loob (or rather, kapal ng mukha) exceeding editorial prudence. It was a mish-mash of stuff that, if not for my daughter Arianna's superior developmental editing skills, would have turned into, at best, a mediocre issue.

But, if I may say so myself, it was a triumph in its own way. Members of the Filipino community responded to it with nothing but glee and positivity. They recognized that Salingpusa Magazine was a community thing, that it was about them and for them. That is what I want to preserve and use as inspiration in continuing with this project.

Renato: For my final question: we are relaunching the magazine with this new issue. It's a new beginning, which is the theme that we packaged for the magazine. How do you feel about that?

Cecilia: It is indeed a new beginning, a fresh start. We both have big dreams for this magazine and I feel sure that we will achieve those dreams, just going by how we've managed to get to where we are now. Baby steps in the greater scheme of things, for sure, but I feel we are headed in the right direction. I am super excited and feel very optimistic for Salingpusa Magazine's future.


Cover Story
ASWANGCON,
as one would have it
by Cecilia Ortiz Luna
Graphic art by NEKI

Most of life's consequential events occur during conversation over a casual meal. A throwaway comment about a creative idea bouncing around one's brain sometimes starts its journey outward into the world when another person says, "hmm...I like that." When left to the algorithms of fate, it can lead to something extraordinary.

A scenario similar to this took place one shivery day in December 2024 at the restaurant Ten Foot Henry's in Downtown Calgary. I was having lunch with Emma, a sorority sister.

In my job as Executive Director of Filipino arts non-profit Salingpusa Creatives, I have been perpetually dreaming up ideas for that big event that will be uniquely Filipino, that most members of the community will likely participate in, and will also appeal to non-Filipinos. After all, one of Salingpusa's advocacies is for Filipino arts and culture to be understood and appreciated by the larger Calgary society.

Folklore has been on my mind for the better part of 2024 because I was able to get a grant from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts to write my novel about an island populated by folkloric creatures with manananggal as chief matron.

Over striploin and seared scallops, I told Emma that I had a wild idea for an event. An entire festival around aswang. Emma put down her steak knife and fork, smiled and professed her own obsession with folklore.

"That's a great idea. Go for it," she said.

I had been workshopping this idea with my husband and the Salingpusa team for some time. But hearing this affirmation from Emma seemed like a signal from the universe that I was, actually, on to something.

So – I did. I went for it.

This was the plain and unadorned genesis of Aswang Con, the Filipino Folklore Festival which will be held on November 15 at the historical and appropriately atmospheric Grand Theater, participated in by Calgary's Filipino artists and underwritten by a project grant from the Calgary Arts Development (CADA). It will feature, among others, a folklore themed art exhibit, bazaar, cosplay competition and immersive museum.

What determined the arc from conversation to realization was who Emma was.

Emma happens to be Emma R. Sarne, Consul General of the Philippine Consulate General in Calgary with jurisdiction over the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The lunch date was our first after our surprise reunion at Likhaan, the Filipino arts festival that Salingpusa Creatives co-organized two weeks prior. Emma and I were members of Portia Sorority at the University of the Philippines College of Law in the mid 1990's which is also called in some quarters as the Early Eraserheads period.

After the obligatory catch up on careers, families, and health, our conversation turned to Filipino arts and culture. This was a "business topic" — a personal and organizational advocacy on my part and that of Salingpusa, and for Emma, an important piece in her mandate as head of the Philippine diplomatic mission in Calgary.

We both acknowledged the growing global interest in aswang, not only among the youth of the Filipino diaspora but even among non-Filipinos. We agreed that in the gallery of folkloric monsters from different cultures, our very own manananggal is the scariest, and yes, the coolest of them all. We were both teenagers in 1984 when that herald of modern Filipino horror movies, Shake, Rattle and Roll came out. We both couldn't remember how many Shake, Rattle and Roll movies there have been (sixteen as of this writing. Sixteen!).

A lively brainstorm ensued over dessert. I rhapsodized about this festival being

associated with the resurgence of the aswang tradition in Alberta. Emma's visible enthusiasm was spurring me to unspool the details of my wild plan. An entire event devoted to aswang? Yes – but something like a mini comic con with an aswang focus. Comic con means cosplayers. Yes! Yes! Also, the event should be a way to educate not only members of the Filipino community but also the Canadian public on the richness of our aswang tradition. An art exhibit then? Definitely.

I have always nursed this bit of worry about how a festival around the aswang will be received by the Filipino community in Calgary. Emma's encouragement was the validation I needed because, after all, she was, quite literally, sent by the motherland to see to the cultural edification of the Filipino community in Calgary.

By the time I brought the idea home to the Salingpusa team, the plan included a bazaar, an interactive museum and photo stations. Everyone in the team was behind the proposed project. When the time came to apply for the grant, it was the team's decision not to confine the event theme to the aswang but to the larger folklore genre, which includes deities, epic heroes and other creatures of legend.

Now, what to call the event?

A member of the Salingpusa team, Austin, came up with the term Aswang Con. There was no second or third alternatives for a name. Aswang Con was perfect.

The choice of the venue added another element to the event. The 113-year old Grand Theatre, the oldest theater in Western Canada and the second oldest in Canada, used to host visiting Hollywood and other international artists in the early 20th century. Its Art Deco interiors and low wattage lighting give the building a darkly whimsical vibe, perfect for the otherworldly themes of Filipino folklore.

The Grand is also Salingpusa's base, holding office at the Vintage Room which used to be the dressing room for the aforementioned Hollywood acts including the Marx Brothers and Mae West. A Filipino folklore event in a building steeped in Canadian/North American art history was a nice juxtaposition.

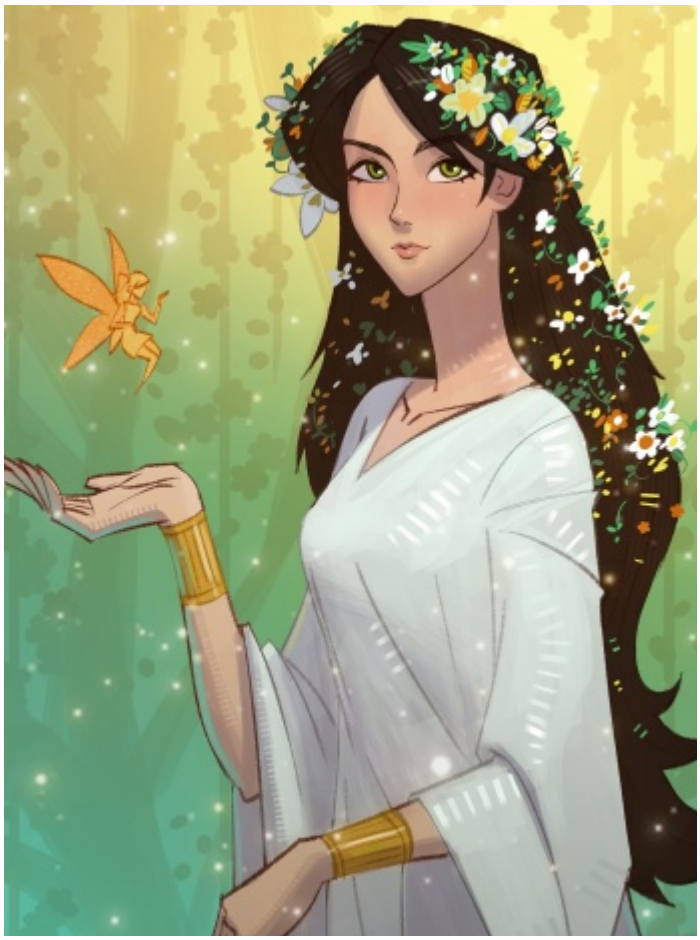
Another juxtaposition relates to the date of the festival. November 15 is only two weeks away from the traditional Halloween day of October 31. An event about Filipino monsters would be a fitting Eastern tail end to a Western tradition revolving around ghosts and monsters.

With the blessings of and conceptual ideas from the Salingpusa team, and an official Letter of Support from Consul General Emma, I applied for a project grant for Aswang Con with the Calgary Arts Development on May 7th.

Three months later, I received the great news that CADA approved the grant for Aswang Con.

An Aswang Con team has been formed and is now in the thick of preparations for the big day. Initial announcements of the event have generated excitement in the community and the team is refining the details of the activities to provide the best experience for Aswang Con attendees. Activities include Chasing Tiyanak Interactive Museum, a 12-artist art exhibit, a bazaar, a cosplay competition, Baybayin Bingo, and Diwata Diaries (storytelling session for kids).

In the happy eventuality that Aswang Con becomes a regular post-Halloween event for Calgarians, it will be part of its origin story that the key moment for its conception took place during a casual conversation over lunch.



Illustrations by Neki

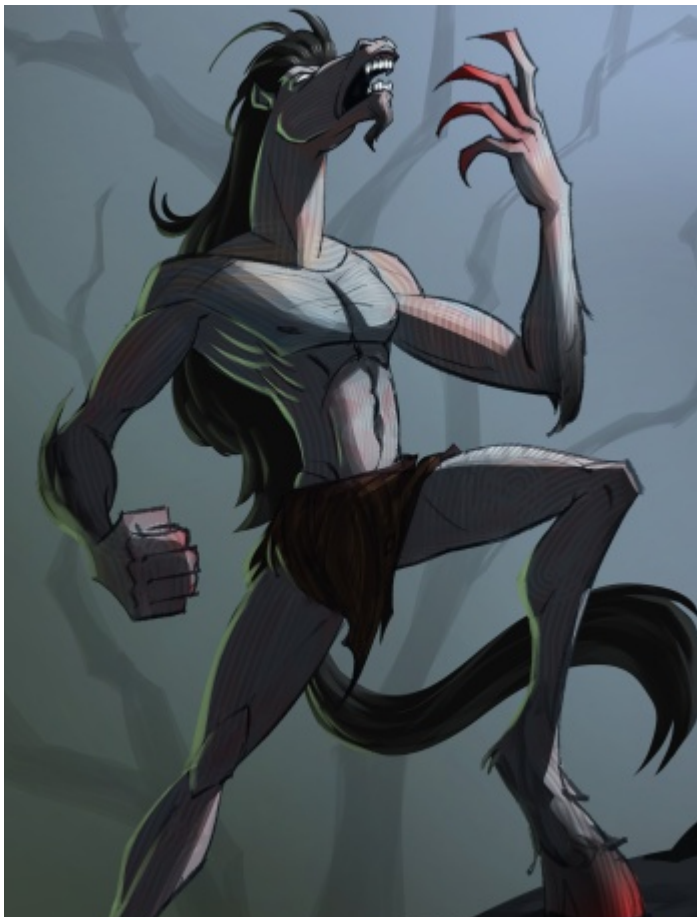


Photo by Stefano Pollio

When the monster knows your name

by Renato Gandia

I

The night in Maragondon, Cavite smelled of damp earth and smoke residues from a pile of dried mango leaves my uncle was burning earlier, the air thick enough to drink. I was ten years old, sitting on the bamboo floor of my paternal grandmother's house, knees drawn to my chest, listening to the hum of the kerosene lamp because there was another power outage. Outside, the mango trees shivered in the wind, their shadows stretching like fingers across the yard.

Nanay Ding, my grandmother, had just finished telling me to close the windows before nightfall. "Para hindi makapasok ang aswang," she said, her voice low, as if the creature might be listening from the dark. Her words lodged in my chest. The aswang—that shapeshifter whispered about in every barrio, part woman, part predator—could be anyone: the market vendor with the friendly smile, the neighbour who offered sweet suman, even the quiet aunt who kept to herself.

The grown-ups never said it outright, but I could feel the edges of their fear. They talked about the tik-tik, the birdlike sound the aswang made as it drew near, how it was loudest when the creature was still far away, and quiet when it was right outside your window. That night, I strained to hear it between the chirping of crickets and the occasional bark of a dog.

From the far side of the house came the clink of dishes and the muffled laughter of my aunts. The thin walls made every sound close, but beyond them lay the vast dark of Maragondon's fields, where the river slid past banana groves and the earth smelled of water and secrets. I thought of the aswang moving through that dark—silent, patient, wearing the face of someone I might greet in daylight.

I didn't know it then, but I would meet many more aswangs in my life. Not the ones with wings or dripping fangs, but the kind that move unseen through offices, through politics, through the glowing blue light of a computer screen. The kind that wears respectability like a mask, smiling as they drain the lifeblood of communities, of trust, of hope.

II

The aswang has been with us for centuries, older than the towns and barrios whose stories keep it alive. In some places, it flies on leathery wings, hunting for the unborn. In others, it walks on human legs by day, speaking softly, passing as an ordinary neighbour until nightfall. In certain regions, it can split its body in two, leaving the lower half hidden while the upper half glides through the air in search of prey.

It has never been just one creature. It shifts—woman to bird, dog to man—slipping between forms as easily as it crosses the threshold between the familiar and the terrifying. Sometimes it is a vampire, sometimes a ghoul, sometimes a witch, and sometimes all three. Its danger lies in its ability to blend into the everyday until it chooses to reveal itself.

In the oldest stories, the aswang was not merely a nuisance or a shadow at the edge of the yard. It was a force of concentrated harm, as relentless as hunger itself. It could slip into a house without disturbing the air, its long, hollow tongue sliding through the smallest crack in the walls to draw the breath or blood from a sleeping victim. It was said to uncoil intestines like ribbons, to leave a body emptied but whole, as if death had crept in on its own.

No prayer could drive it away once it had chosen you. It moved with the certainty of nightfall, feeding on what was most precious—the unborn child, the freshest corpse, the vitality of the strong—because to take those was to unravel a family's future. People feared the aswang not just for the deaths it caused, but for the way it warped the living left behind, filling them with suspicion and grief.

It was a predator of more than flesh. It was a breaker of bonds, a sower of mistrust, a reminder that safety was never certain, even among kin. This was the true terror: that it could make a village doubt itself until the silence between neighbors grew wider than the fields.

In the old rural tales, the aswang was a warning: pregnant women told not to go out at night, children told to stay close to home, strangers eyed with suspicion. These stories kept invisible boundaries in place, shaping behaviour through fear. Yet the aswang also thrived on uncertainty. It lingered in silences, in rumours, in the unexplained death of livestock or a sudden wasting sickness no one could name.

What kept it alive was not proof, but possibility.

III

The aswang of my childhood lived in the dark edges of the barrio, but the ones I know now do not need the cover of night. They thrive in broad daylight, often dressed in pressed suits or lit by the glow of a phone screen. Like their folkloric counterpart, they shift shape to fit their

surroundings, wearing whatever face will earn them trust before they feed.

Some smile from campaign posters, promising reform while quietly draining public coffers. Others sit in corporate boardrooms, extracting not blood but resources—forests stripped bare, rivers poisoned—leaving the land and its people weaker than before.

They haunt social media too, not to steal bodies but to consume attention and sow division. Disinformation spreads like the quiet flutter of tik-tik wings: the closer it gets, the softer it sounds, until you don't notice its presence at all.

And then there are the ones that live within us—the self-doubt, envy, and shame that shape-shift into something that feeds on our own confidence. They are perhaps the hardest to recognize because they speak in our own voice.

The genius of the aswang is not in its power to kill, but in its power to pass—to move unseen, to adapt, to belong just enough until it no longer needs to pretend. In this way, it remains a perfect metaphor for the forces that threaten us today: invisible until they are inevitable.

IV

The aswang has survived because it is never only one thing. It does not live or die in the way other monsters do. It migrates. It adapts. It slips across geography and time, wearing whatever shape the moment requires.

Once, it flourished in places where medicine was scarce, where darkness came early and the night was thick with sounds the ear could not name. Fear was a kind of survival, and the aswang gave that fear a face.

In the diaspora, it changes again. Among Filipinos in Canada, the aswang can stand for the quiet erosion of identity—the slow forgetting of language, the flattening of accents, the urge to make oneself smaller to fit. It can also be a name for the more systemic forces: the racism that hides behind politeness, the bureaucracy that grinds hope down with paperwork, the pressures that drain without leaving marks.

Its most potent weapon has never been claw or fang, but the gift of passing for human. In every era, it reminds us that the threat is often hiding in plain sight—sometimes across the street, sometimes across a boardroom table, and sometimes in the mirror.

V

I think of that night in Maragondon often—the kerosene lamp's thin flame, the smell of damp earth, the way the shadows of the mango trees moved like they had a life of their own. I was ten, straining my ears for the faint tik-tik, convinced the danger would announce itself if I only listened hard enough.

What I didn't know then was that the aswang rarely arrives with warning. It does not always come with wings or claws. Sometimes it comes with a handshake. Sometimes it comes with a smile. Sometimes it comes wearing your own face, whispering that you are not enough.

The world I live in now is far from that bamboo-floored house, yet the aswang has followed me here—through airports and office buildings, through glowing screens and quiet moments of doubt. It still waits in the dark, still shifts its shape, still feeds when it can. But I have learned something my ten-year-old self did not yet understand: naming the aswang is the first act of resistance.

We tell its story not because we believe in monsters, but because we know they believe in us.

Jamillah Ross, Ray Strachan, Daniel Fong, Photo by Fifth Wall Media.

Haunting beyond the visible

A review of The Brothers Paranormal

By Renato Gandia

There's a moment in The Brothers Paranormal when the stage sinks into near-darkness and the sound of a ghostly shuffle slices the air. The audience holds its breath. When the apparition finally appears—half-seen, half-imagined—the theatre jolts. Yet the play's most unsettling revelations are not spectral but human: grief that lingers, guilt that cannot be exorcised, and the unease of belonging in a country that never fully welcomes you.

Staged at Vertigo Theatre, The Brothers Paranormal is a ghost story that transcends genre. Written by Prince Gomolvilas, the Thai-American playwright fuses horror, comedy, and drama, balancing jump scares with meditations on loss and cultural survival.

At its heart are two Thai-American brothers hired by an African American couple convinced their apartment is haunted. The premise hints at fright-night spectacle, but Gomolvilas builds something richer: ghosts as embodiments of trauma—migration's ruptures, fractured families, and memories that refuse burial.

The Calgary production embraces this layered haunting. The set, a cluttered apartment, becomes a liminal zone where reality blurs with the supernatural. Lighting and sound anchor the tension—shadows stretch with menace, blackouts snap like traps, eerie noises creep beneath the skin. But spectacle never eclipses substance. Every scare is tethered to emotion; every flicker reveals the living as the most haunted.

The ensemble is uniformly strong. The brothers ground the play: one pragmatic, trying to monetize ghost-hunting; the other fragile, plagued by visions and a fraying mind. Their bond captures a familiar immigrant tension—between adaptation and unspoken sorrow. The couple who hires them bring warmth and heartbreak; their grief, heavy yet unshowy, becomes the haunting's emotional core. Even

Daniel Fong, Aaron Refugio, Ray Strachan
Photo by Fifth Wall Media

the ghost resists cliché—less a shrieking phantom than a presence both terrifying and pitiable.

This staging distinguishes itself with an all-BIPOC cast: Daniel Fong as Max, Jamillah Ross as Delia, Ray Strachan as Felix, Carolyn Fe as Tasanee, Aaron Refugio as Visarut, and Heidi Damayo as Jai.

Filipino representation is especially resonant—Refugio, Fe, Damayo, and Strachan, who is half-Filipino, deliver layered performances steeped in diasporic experience. Their presence affirms that stories of haunting are not only theatrical but lived across migrant generations. Behind the scenes, assistant director Kodie Rollan, also Filipino, adds another diasporic lens. In a city where representation on major stages has been limited, this breadth feels both urgent and celebratory.

What gives the play its staying power is its refusal to be one thing. It's funny—disarmingly so, with humour slicing tension at perfect beats. It's terrifying, weaponizing stillness as deftly as movement. And it's profoundly sad, plumbing displacement and longing. Gomolvilas layers cultural specificity without sermon: Thai spiritual beliefs mingle with African American histories of survival, creating a textured meditation on what it means to be haunted in North America.

Grief here is both personal and collective. The couple mourns a loss too vast to name; the brothers wrestle with family fractures born of migration. The haunting extends beyond the ghost in the room—it lives in unresolved stories carried through bodies and generations. The play quietly asks: Who among us is not haunted?

Even the comedy deepens this inquiry. Laughter erupts like a nervous exhale, a coping mechanism for the unspeakable. The humour never dilutes gravity; it illuminates it, reminding us that absurdity often walks beside pain.

Director Esther Jun orchestrates this delicate weave with impressive control. Few productions balance suspense and empathy so seamlessly. Jun sustains a rhythm that keeps the audience both alert and introspective—

Daniel Fong, Carolyn Fe, Photo by Fifth Wall Media

Aaron Refugio, Daniel Fong, Photo by Fifth Wall Media

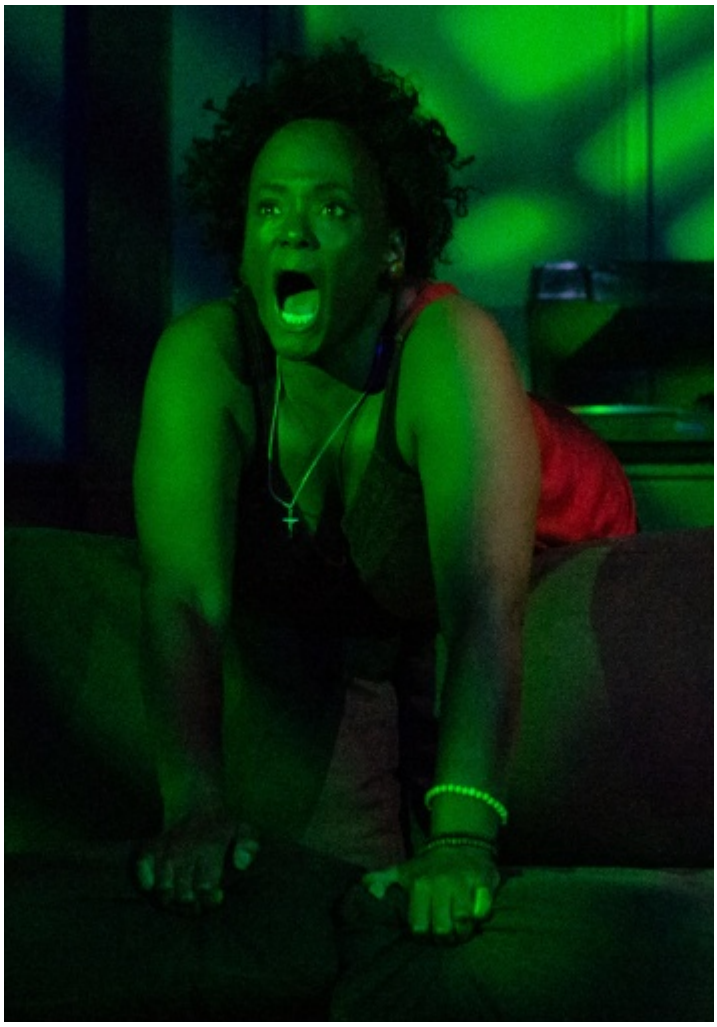
startled one moment, hushed the next.

If a flaw exists, it's pacing. Certain dialogues linger a beat too long, momentarily easing the tension. Yet these pauses also grant breathing room between shocks, allowing emotions to settle. And when silence falls—characters straining to hear what can't be named—the theatre itself feels haunted.

By the final scene, the nature of the haunting has shifted. What endures is not fear but recognition: migration, grief, and fractured belonging are specters beyond ritual banishment. They inhabit us, reshaping lives in silence.

Exiting the theatre, one feels the mirror handed over. The Brothers Paranormal blurs the boundary between stage and spectator, inviting each viewer to confront their own ghosts—memories, losses, unspoken inheritances.

In an era when theatre often chooses between entertainment and resonance, this production insists on both. Horror, humour, and heart coexist, revealing that the deepest hauntings are born not from the dead but from love, loss, and longing that refuse to fade.



Jamillah Ross, Photo by Fifth Wall Media

Nanay's gift

by Reva Diana

"Tessa?"

I glance around the busy coffee shop. A Filipina girl about my age smiles and sinks into the armchair across from me. Her head is shaved on one side and she wears a heavy-looking leather jacket covered in patches of obscure bands I've never heard of. I look at her and take a nervous sip of my coffee. Do I know her from St. Jude's? I don't have friends from school and keep mostly to myself.

"It's Mirabel," she looks at me expectantly. After a moment of awkward silence, she continues, "from Sunday School!"

I stopped attending Sunday School after First Communion years ago. Mirabel...I remember her now. During our First Communion mass, Mirabel drank the entire chalice of sacramental wine dry. Her parents had the unfortunate task of taming an obnoxiously loud and drunk eight year old for the remainder of mass. I lost track of her after her parents switched parishes.

Mirabel pulls a flask from her leather jacket and pours its contents into her coffee. She winks at me. She offers me whatever is in the flask, but I decline. I guess things haven't changed much.

"I heard about your mom," she says softly. "How is she doing?"

My mom...Nanay. Everyone asks about my mother, and I hate having to talk about her failing health, about her inevitable death. Reluctantly, I tell Mirabel that Nanay isn't doing well and I fear I will be alone very soon. I saw Nanay earlier that day and she could barely move. I was afraid to hug her, she looked so frail. Even though she has lost her thick black hair, she has taken to wearing headscarves and somehow her makeup is always perfect when I visit. I wonder if the nurses help her with that. Still, it hurts to look at her. She is not the Nanay I remember. My Nanay is strong, invincible and until recently, would chase me around our house with her slipper in hand when I angered her. She could be terrifying when she chose to be. Now only a shadow remains.

Nanay had wanted to discuss my plans for after she dies. It's too much too soon! In a panic, I left her room, the hospital, and eventually found myself at Starbucks. Nanay is alone in a hospital room several blocks away. I should be there with her, but instead I'm a coward nursing a cold coffee. It's been three weeks since my Nanay told me her diagnosis. Tonight could be her last. I give a long sigh and stand up.

"It's okay to take a break," Mirabel says quietly and places her hand on mine. "You're allowed."

I don't know why I sit back down. Maybe I need to connect to someone beyond the constant grief and fear that chokes all joy from my daily life. Mirabel chats nonstop, deftly avoiding any painful topics and fills the silence with stories about art school, poetry , and her much-older girlfriend, Vivienne. I gladly slip into her world for a little while; but it always comes back to Nanay. I tell Mirabel about my mother's wish for me to carry on the family tradition.

"I don't want to disappoint Nanay," I explain. "She doesn't have anyone else..."

She shrugs and tells me I don't have to follow the rules. She grins and says Asian parents have three standard career paths for their children: 1. Doctor; 2. Lawyer or; 3. Disgrace to the Family. She says she obviously chose option three. She chuckles and says she has no regrets. I laugh. Laughter feels strangely foreign and I feel a stab of guilt for the moment of reprieve. I nod and tell her I will think about her advice. We exchange numbers and promise to keep in touch. I head back to the hospital and wonder if I will hear from Mirabel again. I hope so.

“Ay nako! Tessa! Thank God you came back. Susmariosep! Where did you go? You should not leave now,” Maria scolds me. The older Filipina nurse ushers me roughly into my mother’s room. “Dali! Dali! She does not have much time.”

I hurry over to Nanay’s side and hold her hand. Too soon. Too soon. Maria takes my mother’s vitals and makes some notes. She squeezes my shoulder.

“She is in God’s hands now. Bahala na,” she proclaims. With a final glance at my mother and me, she closes the hospital room door behind her and leaves me alone with Nanay.

My mind goes numb with shock. This can’t be happening. I watch Nanay struggle with each agonizing inhale. There is pain and sorrow in her eyes; but I also discern the unspoken question she is too weak to voice. Will I follow her path? She looks hopeful. I close my eyes guiltily and listen to her pained breathing. Could there be another way? Do I want the future she envisions for me? Could I disappoint Nanay? I feel her weak attempt to squeeze my hand. Hurry.

“Ang tigas ng ulo mo!” I imagine Nanay saying. How can I refuse her? I make my decision. I take a deep breath and I nod. Yes. I open my eyes and Nanay is smiling proudly.

“Tessa,” she mouths, before she doubles over and starts coughing violently. Her hands claw at the fabric of her hospital gown as her body convulses with each gasp for air. I feel so powerless to help her. Once Nanay’s coughing subsides, I arrange the pillows and ease her back onto them. Her eyes widen slightly. It’s time, her eyes implore. I feel fear and panic swell inside me.

“Remember what Nanay taught you.” I repeat to myself anxiously.

I open my trembling hands and carefully place them together below her lips exactly as she instructed me since I was a child. She opens her mouth and with a final cough, spits out a black chick covered in thick, oily slime into my hands. I look at it in wonder. It’s smaller than I thought it would be. Hurry! Nanay’s eyes plead. Hurry! Dali! I gently place the dark, slick quivering bird into my mouth and swallow.

Raw power surges through me, my blood feels like it is on fire.

Nanay first talked about this Gift when I was very little. One night I was frightened awake by a loud thunderclap and ran to Nanay’s room. Usually, the door was locked, but that night I crawled into her bed. Something was wrong. Horrified, I found only the bottom half of her body, the rest of her was missing. Weeping uncontrollably, I searched every corner of the house for her lost half just to see her face again. Her remains were nowhere to be found. Not knowing what else to do, I tearfully returned to Nanay’s room and cautiously climbed into bed. I’m unsure how long I cried out for Nanay, hugging her legs tightly until I fell into an exhausted sleep. I awoke the next morning to find my Nanay stroking my cheek. Nanay was whole again! I desperately clutched her long black hair in my fists unwilling to let go. She held me close and whispered she loved me again and again until I calmed down. She apologized for scaring me and explained she was special. At night, she could fly to go hunt for food, but had to leave her legs behind. Now this power- her power was mine.

My senses explode. The stench of disinfectant, hospital sheets, human waste, and perfume magnified a thousand-fold assaults me. The odour of disease eating Nanay’s body is sickly sweet. I sob when I smell the earthy scent of her final breath as it leaves her body. I meticulously wipe the black oil from her smiling lips and gently close her eyelids. This Gift is her final legacy to me. As the Gift coiled and gains strength inside me, fear and doubt seep away. Nanay will forever be a part of me. I will never be alone. I feel an itch start across my navel and circle around my back. The first pangs of a fathomless hunger pulsed seep in my belly. I glance at the clock above the hospital door. It will be midnight in a few hours. Soon I’ll be able to fly. Soon I will need to hunt.

The Power of

Every story starts somewhere—with a tremor of wonder, a whisper of possibility, a first brave act. The new issue of Salingpusa turns toward origins and beginnings: those fragile, electric points where something new insists on being born.

Here, we gather stories of firsts that ripple outward into community. We revisit Magdaragat: An Anthology of Filipino-Canadian Writing, the first Filipino-Canadian literary anthology, a landmark that carved space for our narratives in a national landscape. We listen to Calgary-based artists tracing the uncertain, luminous paths of their early steps in art—moments of guidance, risk, and unexpected discovery. We bear witness to the birth of Aswang Con, the city's first festival dedicated to folklore and the creatures that live in our collective imagination. And we celebrate BIPOC 8 Voices, where both established and emerging writers shared the stage, affirming that beginnings are not only about youth or inexperience, but about the courage to stand in one's voice—again and again. And we mark the first series of Sining sa Konsulado, where Filipino art enters the heart of the consulate, turning official walls into a gathering place for culture, memory, and vision.

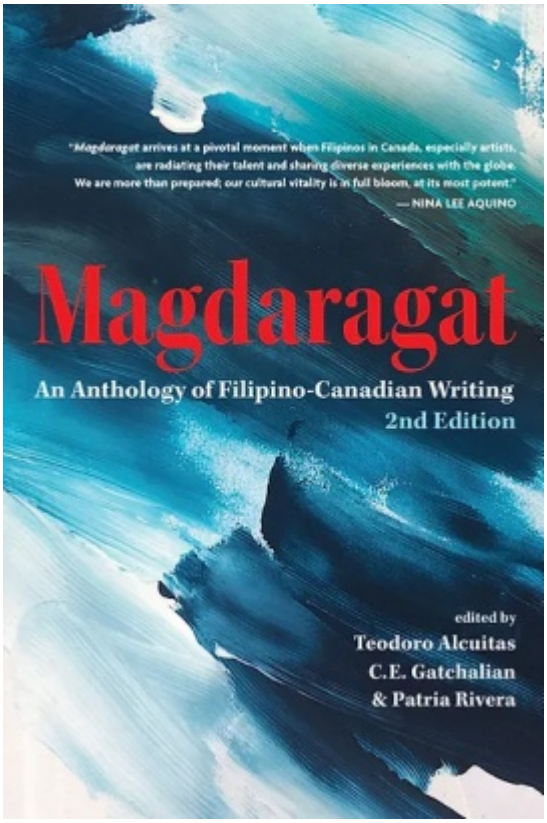
In all these stories, a truth emerges: beginnings are never solitary. They are braided from inheritance and community, carried on the shoulders of those who walked before, and made possible by those who stand beside us. Each first is both an echo and an opening: the weight of histories that brought us here and the doorways to futures not yet written.

May this gathering of origins remind us that beginnings are everywhere—within memory, within risk, within the art of telling. And may it inspire each of us to begin again, with faith that the smallest spark can light the way toward lasting legacies.

As the keel meets the water: a contributor's journey into Magdaragat

By Renato Gandia

When the acceptance email arrived, I was already standing at the edge of a different shore, imagining the day I would leave the familiar tides of corporate communications for the uncharted waters of literary writing. It was the voyage I had long postponed but never stopped dreaming of. My contribution, Tubigan, tumbang preso, taguan, and other preludes to a trauma, would set sail in Magdaragat: An Anthology of Filipino-Canadian Writing, alongside forty-two other voices gathered by Teodoro Alcuitas, C. E. Gatchalian, and Patria Rivera. It was my first time sharing literary space with so many Filipino-Canadian writers. The yes from the editors felt larger than an acceptance—it felt like the moment a keel first meets the water.



Magdaragat takes its name from the Filipino word for "seafarer" or "mariner," an image that moves like a current through the book. The title recalls the journeys that have carried us from our small rivers to vast oceans, across time zones and climates, into communities both welcoming and wary. In these pages, each piece becomes a vessel—some cutting through calm waters, others weathering storms—but all moving toward the same horizon: to be seen, to be heard, to take our place in the wide sea of Canadian literature.

For Teodoro "Ted" Alcuitas, the anthology marks both a personal and community milestone.

"To me personally, it is a dream come true in that I have always thought of writing my story, albeit not in an anthology," he said in several interviews.

At 85, Alcuitas—a self-described "accidental journalist"—has spent nearly half a century telling the stories of Filipinos in Canada.

"I believe this is a breakthrough for our community that will hopefully spur other writers to share their stories... I am convinced that it is our own responsibility to write and document our struggles, histories, and not rely on others."

The title Magdaragat, he explained, "alludes to our experience of being 'voyageurs of the sea'—being travellers from our small rivers to the vast oceans of other lands... not by ship in all cases but mostly transported by modern means of transportation."

In many ways, Alcuitas is a magdaragat himself. He recalled travelling by ship from Cebu to Mindanao, and eventually emigrating to Saskatoon in 1968 with his wife and eight-month-old baby, later moving to Winnipeg where he started the community newspaper Silangan.

Teodoro Alcuitas Photo submitted by Teodoro Alcuitas

"Like the ocean, my life seems to be in constant flux."

As Patria Rivera told me when the book was launched in Toronto in 2024, the release of this tome is a cause for celebration.

"I think it means a lot for us as a people who have not been read, seen, or heard, to be out there with the rest of the Canadian literary community, to share our work as poets, short story writers, novelists, essayists, or playwrights."

For Rivera, contributing her own family's migration story was "like a personal revelation," allowing her to reflect on both pre- and post-immigrant years. She noted the shared joy of the contributors. "They're able to share with our kababayan as well as with the rest of the world, that Filipinos too have a love for food, a love for fun, as well as a love for work."

Her hope is simple but far-reaching. "That more people will become aware that there's a community here for almost a million... It will be a delight if people will know more about what we think, what we feel, how we think about the world by sharing them through our story."

C.E. Gatchalian spoke about the difficulty of narrowing over a hundred submissions to around fifty:

"One of the great joys of that process—of course we knew some of the writers—was to find out the richness and the level of Filipino-Canadian literary talent was. We've got brilliant submissions... and some were from writers none of us had heard of. As an editor that's always a great discovery to make."

For Gatchalian, the anthology is also a beacon for the next generation.

"If there had been an anthology like this when I was growing up, as a young, aspiring writer, I think it would have made my journey towards being a writer a little bit easier... knowing that there are other Filipino writers writing things about being Filipino. I didn't have that growing up."

As a contributor, I read Magdaragat differently than I would any other anthology. I was not only meeting the work but also meeting my neighbours in print—writers whose lives and imaginations are bound to the same currents of migration, history, and survival. My Tubigan... looks back on childhood games in the Philippines as preludes to an unspoken trauma. On its own, it is one story. In this book, it becomes part of a larger map of how play, memory, and violence coexist in the diasporic imagination.

One of the anthology's fiercest voices is Kaia M. Arrow in Dreams of Pinoy Joy: Decolonial Rage and Disabled Resistance in the Diaspora. Arrow's piece blends declarative prose and

italicized refrains, part manifesto, part prayer. Speaking as a sick and disabled Pinay, Arrow lays bare the cost of existing under white "tolerance"—a tolerance that evaporates when it becomes inconvenient. "My body is an act of defiance / That I'm an un/willing accomplice to," they write, refusing to smooth over discomfort for the reader. The poem expands the anthology's scope by making disability justice inseparable from anti-colonial struggle. The final lines—Will this Land embrace me / Or spit me back, unknown daughter / I'm afraid to find out —crystallize the paradox of longing for a homeland that may no longer feel like home.

Hari Alluri's Body Is Not a Thing to Escape takes another route into the same waters. Here, memory is braided through ghost story, family history, and wartime trauma. Lolo's ghost appears during a shared cigarette, then the narrative flows back to his Death March from Bataan. Alluri collapses timelines so that the living and the dead, the past and the present, share the same breath. The poem refuses to treat the racialized body as something to be shed; instead, it is a vessel for love, grief, and survival. "Those islands whose roots are centipedes of flame" is an image that carries the full weight of colonial violence. By ending with Lolo walking "on any day but that" of the March, Alluri performs an act of quiet resurrection—restoring what history tried to erase.

From the first pages, the anthology shows its range in form and sensibility. Deann Louise Nardo's "Where Do You Come From" unfolds as a prose-poem catalogue of memory, moving from "the arthritic crackle of my grandmother's hands" to "the eerie creaking of Maplewood floors." It holds the Philippines and Canada in the same frame, letting sensory detail bridge oceans. Nathalie de los Santos's Over the Rainbow spans generations and continents, from Bohol to New Brunswick, charting the dissonance of being "not Filipino enough" and "not Canadian just by looking at me." These pieces sit comfortably alongside more experimental work, hybrid forms, and pieces that switch between English and Philippine languages without apology or footnote—affirming that translation, when it happens, is a gift, not an obligation.

Reading the anthology front to back, patterns emerge. Belonging is not treated as a destination but as a series of crossings—

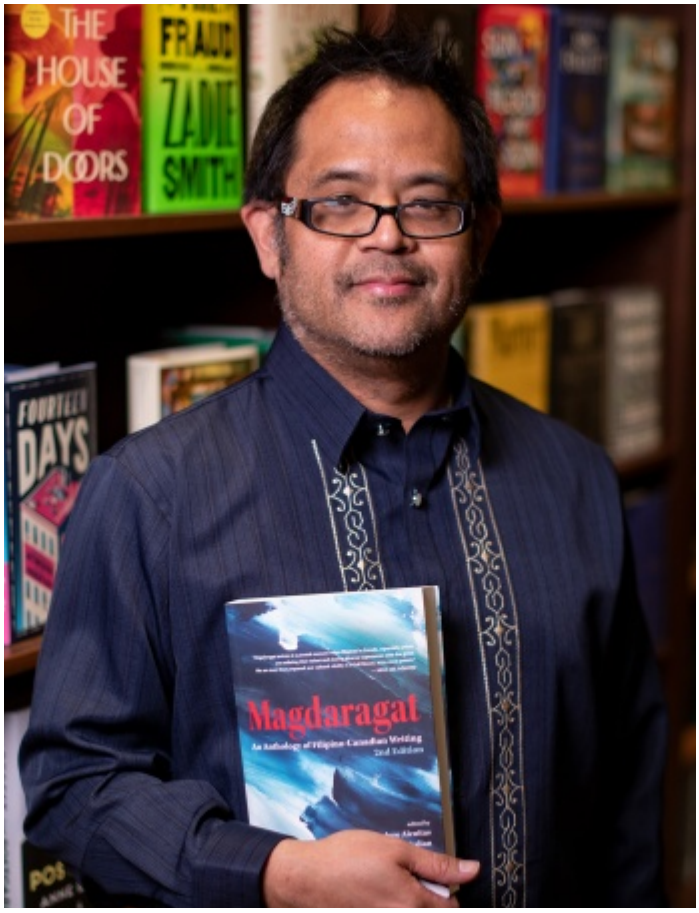
Patria Rivera / Photo by Jose Lagman

sometimes voluntary, often forced. Nostalgia is complicated, tinged with both love and suspicion. The homeland is not romanticized; it is a place still marked by colonial capitalism, political corruption, and inequality. Canada is neither pure refuge nor simple antagonist; it is a place where microaggressions and systemic exclusions shape daily life even as communities take root. Language itself becomes a site of negotiation—the editors note the cultural weight of hiya, often mistranslated as "shame" but more accurately a sensitivity to context and propriety; the discomfort with terms like "Filipinx," seen by some as a Western imposition; the colonial residue in "Philippine," a name not of our choosing.

The editorial vision is clear: to assemble not a definitive statement but a foundational one. This is, as far as I know, the first anthology to explicitly centre Filipino-Canadian writing across genres. In a literary landscape that often collapses Asian diasporas into a single category, Magdaragat insists on the specificity of our histories—the labour export policies that have shaped migration patterns, the colonial entanglements that predate our families' departures, the climate and geography that make settling in "Winterpeg" or the Prairies its own test of endurance.

The book is also an act of record-keeping. The inclusion of writers at different stages—from emerging voices to established authors—means that it functions as both archive and launch pad. For emerging Filipino-Canadian writers, it says: here is proof that we are here, we have been here, and our stories matter. For readers outside the community, it offers a textured, sometimes uncomfortable portrait that resists the tidy narratives often sought from migrant communities.

Of course, no anthology can contain every strand. One could wish for more pieces in French to reflect Filipino communities in Quebec, or more intersections with Indigenous narratives given our shared but distinct relationships to colonialism. But these are less gaps than invitations—spaces for future work to fill.



C.E. Gatchalian / Photo by Jose Lagman

By the time I reached the last page, I was thinking less about my own contribution and more about the collective one. Magdaragat is a fleet, not a single ship. Each piece navigates its own route, but together they form a crossing that feels historic. The sea between here and the Philippines is still there, but in these pages, it is alive with voices—questioning, mourning, resisting, celebrating.

For me, being part of Magdaragat has meant seeing my work in a lineage I had not yet claimed. I'm no longer only writing into the void; I'm writing into a body of work that speaks back, that answers, that argues. For me, that's the gift of this anthology—not just to the contributors, but to the literature of this country.

Bongga ka Day! A profile on painter Day Pajarillo

By Cecilia Ortiz Luna

Day Pajarillo's story of new beginnings in Canada is not an immigrant story. It is an artist's story, because her immigration to Canada was only part of, even merely incidental to, her artist journey.

Art, was, for Day, (pronounced as in May Day) the one true passion of her life, the singular thing that held her interest as far back as she could remember. She started drawing at age three, which means she has been drawing for 53 years, encouraged by her father who supplied her with note pads and then later, special drawing books so she didn't have to use her school notebooks. At sixteen, one of her fashion designs was chosen by the eminent couturier Danilo Franco and published in Women's Magazine.

She majored in Painting at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, after studying architecture at Far Eastern University for a year and fashion design at Slims Fashion and Art School for brief spells. Post-college graduation, all her jobs, whether in the Philippines or abroad, involved either painting or fashion design. Such was her commitment to pursuing her chosen field that she stayed with her employer in Qatar for a full year despite the deplorable treatment she and other Filipino workers suffered. "At least, I was working as an artist."

She got married and had a child. They had plans of migrating as a family to Canada but before that could happen, the marriage crumbled. Leaving behind her daughter, she moved to Canada in 2008 to work for Tim Horton's on a Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) permit.

Day worked long work schedules on a $10.42 per hour wage. This meant that there was not enough money to buy art materials, and even if she had materials, there was not enough time and energy to create art. Worse still, even if she were able to come up with the money and the time and the energy, she didn't have the space. There was nowhere in the tiny room that she rented in a house she shared with other Filipino TFWs where she could place an easel and store her paints and brushes. Worse still, her employer made her and her eleven coworkers pay $500 a month for their bed spaces on a

house that the employer himself rented for $1,600 a month.

Most artists would have been discouraged by all these constraints and indignities.

But Day Pajarillo was not like most artists.

For one, she possessed an unshakeable belief in her capacity to prevail over adversity. This was complemented by another quality of hers, which proved to be her saving grace time and time again; her over-the-top sense of humour.

She scrimped on her modest wages and bought art materials from Mission Thrift Store and Dollarama. A small mercy was that the Tim Horton's she worked for was one of those kiosks in an ESSO station. During her breaks, she would sit on the kiosk chair, whip out her small sketch pad and draw. Day said of this time in her life, "Hinahanap ng dugo ko yung pag-drawing."

Her sense of humour endeared her to her coworkers and even customers. One elderly customer, upon learning that she was an artist, came one day with an armful of art materials for her.

This resourcefulness, positivity and refusal to be deterred from engaging in her art not only sustained her spirit but it led to the first pivot in her life's direction.

One day, Debbie, the owner of the ESSO gas station, saw her drawing. She asked Day to paint for her a 3 feet by 5 feet collage piece that combined snapshots of places Debbie and her then-boyfriend had visited. As compensation, she paid Day two hundred dollars, a set of oil paints and a big easel crafted by the subject boyfriend who was a wood worker.

Debbie also asked Day to coach her eldest child on painting techniques for an upcoming skateboard painting competition. For eight weeks Day taught this kid how to paint, while doing double duty as a babysitter. That kid ended up winning the top prize in that painting contest.

This made her job situation a little bearable, but only for a time. By 2011, the government was starting to crack down on TFW permit holders. She was still finding it hard to make ends meet. She had to look for an additional source of income.

She found an artist gig at a seniors' home in the southeast teaching Basic Painting to the

residents for two hours every weekend for $60 per hour. There was a dilemma, however. TFW permit holders are not allowed to receive salaries or fees outside of their designated employment. She did the moral thing and declared her employment status to the home administrators, leaving to them the decision whether to hire her or not. What these administrators did was work around Day's issue by issuing the payments to her as gifts rather than fees.

She had enjoyed her teaching stint with the skateboard painter. But teaching these appreciative seniors had Day seriously considering her educator role. She liked doing the lesson plans and found immense joy in seeing her students get competent with painting. Naturally, the residents become enamoured of this painting teacher who was always cracking jokes. There was even one elderly gentleman who loved her so much he would drop her off at the train station to ensure that she got home safely.

She still continued drawing in her few days off. She also made some changes in her personal art making. Oil was her medium for the longest time but in Canada, living in her small, enclosed room, the fumes from the paint was damaging her lungs. She transitioned to acrylic and quickly adapted to it.

Weathering the several TFW scares over the years, she found herself moving to British Columbia to work at establishments like Little Ceasar's and Dairy Queen. It was while in B.C. that she eventually obtained her permanent residency in June of 2015. Her landing status was now secure and was even able to get her daughter to join her. Her employment situation, on the other hand, still mostly in the food service sector, was still precarious.

Through all these, she didn't stop painting. With her daughter in tow, she was able to move to bigger lodgings and had space to set up the woodworker's easel. She had by then divined the secrets of acrylic as a medium, among which is that it is perfect for portraying movement. Her creations now featured Filipino folk dancers, the most notable of which was her series on pandanggo sa ilaw.

In 2018, she was introduced by a high school friend who lived in Edmonton to the organization Canadian Artists Against Poverty (CAAP). The organization engaged her to be their resident artist and arts teacher. For the first time since she arrived in Canada, she felt her soul settle in its proper place. Shortly thereafter, she made the definitive decision to jump back into being a full-time artist, whatever that entailed. She will embrace this new life of a working painter in the City of Calgary.

To her amazement, the city embraced her back. Inkubator Gallery and Apik Art Galley were the first places to feature her Filipino dance-themed works, and she was making decent sales. She met the executive director of

Immigrant Council for Arts and Innovation (ICAI), Toyin Oladele, who chose her as the organization's first artist-of-the-month. This was her first one-woman-show which was held at the Central Public Library. She was gradually making a name for herself.

At this point, she was still experiencing financial struggles. Day was literally living the life of a starving artist but with her signature forbearance and humour. And the city that embraced her art was now about to come to her succor in other ways. It came to a point when she, her daughter and grandson were down to their last dollar. Day was wracked with anxiety as she stared the prospect of homelessness in the face. Then came the call from the Calgary Housing Company that she qualified for their housing program. She also got a part-time job at the University of Calgary Dining Center. Day's little family was going to be fine.

She captured this experience in her mural for the Calgary Homeless Foundation titled "The Longest Night of the Year".

And still, she pursued her art with singlemindedness. She would walk around the snowy streets pushing a double stroller, one seat for her grandson and one seat for the art materials that she was slowly accumulating. The same double stroller would come with her to gallery openings of her artwork or attending the arts classes that she continued to teach. From time to time, she would access offerings by the Calgary Food Bank to augment her food supplies.

Despite these circumstances, Day's outlook was always one of complete contentment. She was a working artist, and that was all she had aspired to be.

According to Day, "I feel fulfilled because I am living the life of a true artist. God is always good, Canada is always good. To be poor in Canada doesn't mean you live a miserable life."

Nowadays, Day's artworks can be found all over Calgary. She even has the distinction of having her artworks exhibited in two proximate venues at the Beltline, the Philippine Consulate General and Semantics Café. Her current preoccupation is hand painting terno sleeves for the European exhibitor La Mode En Moi. She recently got a full grant from the Calgary Arts Development to create more of these fashion pieces.

This city has been good to Day. Art has been good to Day.

And as far as Day is concerned, she is living the dream.

A show of Hans

By Cecilia Ortiz Luna

It was the family summer trips to Cabanatuan during his childhood that set Hans Suarez on a trajectory to his chosen discipline. For in Cabanatuan lived the woman who created that most magical thing that Hans still rhapsodizes about years later: her killer leche flan.

“Filipino leche flans are usually dense and egg heavy. My auntie’s version is different; it’s light and has this unique flavour from the dayap (Philippine lime) she puts in there which has a more floral zest.” Chef Hans said, smiling in reminiscence.

Chef Hans was no less effusive when talking about his second favorite dish of his Tita’s. “Her bibingkang kanin is like biko, but with cassava custard bruleed on top. It had this faintly smoky flavour because she cooks it on a tray with charcoal.”

Of the hundreds of leche flans and bibingkas this writer had eaten, none had the form or taste that Chef Hans described in such loving and evocative detail. Small wonder then that Chef Hans’ pastry creations always present with these stunning features, a little bit more whimsy in this raspberry cheesecake here, a little bit more drama in that lemon pavlova there. And that’s just the plating.

This writer has sampled a wedding cake Chef Hans created, a towering croquembouche with ube cotton candy swirled around it like a showgirl’s purple boa. Tasting the cake (after getting over the heartbreak of having to dismantle the creation in order to eat it), the flavour produced by the competing splendours of ube and cream puff makes one understand the exact meaning of the phrase “party in the mouth”. Yum, yum and yum.

Sense memories of top notch leche flans and bibingkas may have been the impetus for his culinary career but Chef Hans is also a perennial student of his craft. A nerd by his own admission, he absorbs anything and everything around him that is culinary related. When asked about his opinion of the movie Ratatouille, he shared (aside from the fact that he watched it with an ex-girlfriend) that it was a lighthearted way to see French cuisine in action. When Hans is intrigued by a new flavour, he tries to replicate it. One instance was when he traveled back to the Philippines (with...er...a different ex-girlfriend) he tasted patis caramel for the first time at a Tagaytay restaurant. That specific umami taste so impressed him that when he was invited to render a dessert dish for the four-course Filipino meal event Subo at Maven in June 2024, he adapted that patis caramel for his version of turon.

Hans almost did not become a chef. He was all set to enrol in a nursing course but for some reason missed his spot. He enrolled instead in

the last course on the roster that interested him -- Hotel and Restaurant Management with a major in Culinary Arts. The switch from hospital to hospitality was likely orchestrated by the gods who may have seen that croquembouche and ube cotton candy in the young man's future and decided to intervene. He says Ely Salar and Peachy Juban's mentorships were particularly influential during this period.

Another switch occurred in his life, this time geographical. His father, an expat for Shell, decided to move the family to Calgary in 2014. Hans was initially left behind but he eventually followed his parents and two brothers to this Canadian city that he had never heard of. "I found it lonely at first, but I slowly assimilated."

The first job he applied for was as a student cook at the Westin Hotel. He was interviewed by a fellow Filipino, Priscilla Rubio Gutscher (the future owner of Maven on 17th), who instead of giving him the student position, hired him as an apprentice cook. This meant he would do rotations through the different parts of the restaurant. He quickly made it known that he would like to be assigned often to pastries, an indication of his surefootedness in determining the course of his career.

It was around this time when he was keeping an eagle eye out for the local food scene in Calgary which he noticed was "quieter" than the one in bustling Manila. This state of affairs changed soon enough. "From 2015 to 2020, I noticed a change, an evolution in Calgary's food scene." To his delight, part of this evolution was the burgeoning presence of Filipino cuisine.

He eventually left the Westin and worked as pastry chef for, among others, the Dorian Hotel and Fine Print restaurant. During the pandemic, when the evolution he had noticed earlier was in full throttle, he was very much at the centre of the action when Filipino cuisine started making significant inroads in Calgary's gastronomic landscape.

Now one of Calgary's top pastry chefs, Chef Hans has his sights beyond these horizons. He is working on a five-year-plan, with the goal of joining and winning the Coupe du Monde de la Patisserie, the World Pastry Cup, in France.

While not part of said five-year-plan, another thing that he would like to do in the near future is write a pastry cookbook, and he is doing the prep work for this, too. He is a meticulous note taker, writing down techniques he is learning on the job or in his own experimentations, and making sure he is perfecting "the ratios and numbers of ingredients."

When asked what he would name his own restaurant, he has a ready answer. "Lasa, written in baybayin letters." And chocolates, his specialty, will be its headliner. He was recently part of a popup restaurant project with other Filipino chefs where he showcased his signature chocolate creations. "I put a lot of my heart and soul into it." Chef Hans is currently the proud co-owner of Lasa Chocolates.

Surely, his chocolates were the most well received of his concoctions. Right? "Actually," Chef Hans breaks out that boyish grin, "it's my stuff with ube."

Photo by Kaz Nagao

Of hardships, hardy spirits, and Halo Halo

By Cecilia Ortiz Luna

COVID-19 impacted friendships in various ways. People found themselves engaging in activities they wouldn't have done in less dystopian times, like breadmaking projects, acapella groups, and Tiger King viewing parties, among the many, many things people found they could do together online. On the other hand, there were relationships that collapsed under the weight of political differences caused by parallel events that occurred during the pandemic.

And then there were friends like Sam Mendoza and Jasmine Atay, for whom all that forced isolation provided the space within which to jointly create one of the most exciting and outstandingly well-organized events the Filipino community in Calgary has seen in recent years–the Halo Halo Merkado.

Halo Halo Merkado was a community marketplace and mixed media showcase which opened on February 7, 2025 and ran until July 27, 2025 at the Confluence Historic Site and Parkland. The opening ceremony, held on May 4, featured a bazaar, a baybayin workshop, a community kwentuhan among Filipino-Canadian civic and arts leaders and an animated luggage carousel video that reeled off a list of Filipinos who migrated to Alberta since the 1960's.

More than two hundred people flocked to the Confluence on the day of the opening reception. And these attendees had great things to say. Julie Alatiit loved the community conversation and the baybayin workshop. "There was a great vibe. Lots of art to check out and a good variety of vendors. I liked that it wasn't so loud we couldn't have a conversation. It was a really a well-run event."

Well-run events happen to be this creative pair's jam. Sam is a strategic events specialist with Bird Creatives and Jasmine is an arts director and designer specializing in client engagement.

"We had known each other for a few years at that point," Jasmine shared, "during COVID-19

we were checking in on each other, constantly talking on the phone. We thought of collaborating on a portrait using both our styles. I was doing digital collage work while Sam does these whimsical surrealist artworks."

Their conversation about a prospective artistic collaboration took a turn to their shared Filipino heritage. Sam said, "We started talking about our commonality, our parents migrating to Canada, our sense of identity growing up, our ideas on what being Filipino means."

Another commonality was their incomplete understanding of their parents' migration stories. Jasmine said, "My mom's backstory, there was a blank spot there," while Sam quipped, "I didn't even know how my parents ended up, of all places, in Ponoka, Alberta."

From this interrogation of their respective families' immigration stories grew an idea to create an event that will centre the experience, especially the hardships, of moving to a new country. In workshopping their concept, they thought of the perfect subjects who could tell their stories of migrating to Canada. They were Moses Aquino, Harvey Nichol, Sylvia Atay (Jasmine's mom) and Euniz Brown. "Four different perspectives across different generations, whose stories will not only resonate with Filipinos but also with other immigrants," said Sam.

In planning the project, which spanned five years, the key things for Sam and Jasmine were bringing other creatives into the project and being able to pay them. They applied for a grant with the Calgary Arts Development and got it on their first try. They started creating the pieces for the exhibit while applying for more grants and shopping the project around. Then they met Rebecca Jarvis of the Confluence who offered them a space at the storied cultural site which was then in the midst of rebranding. The Confluence was able to apply for a substantial grant on their behalf.

Flush with funding, exhibit pieces created, and their artist collaborators now enlisted, Sam and Jasmine went about organizing the exhibit and the opening reception of the event that they had now named Halo Halo Merkado.

The event was a triumph – as an art exhibit, as a community gathering, and as an homage to the Filipino migrant story.

Photo by Kaz Nagao

Photos by Kaz Nagao

What is halo-halo?

Halo-halo, which literally means “mix-mix” in Tagalog, is a quintessential Filipino dessert made of shaved ice, evaporated milk, sweetened fruits, beans, jellies, and often topped with a slice of flan or a scoop of purple yam ice cream. Each serving is a colourful jumble of textures and flavours—sweet, creamy, chewy, and cold—meant to be stirred together before eating. There’s no single recipe; every region, every household has its own version, making halo-halo not just a dessert but a celebration of improvisation and abundance.

For people in the Filipino diaspora, halo-halo becomes more than a taste of home—it is a symbol of identity itself. Its mixture mirrors the Filipino experience of blending languages, histories, and influences from East and West. Like migrants whot gather fragments of memory and belonging to create something new, halo-halo embodies resilience and adaptation. To eat it is to remember that being mixed, layered, and ever-evolving is not a loss of purity but an affirmation of wholeness.

Photo by R. Melvin Alcaraz

Sining sa Konsulado: Showcasing Filipino creativity in Calgary

By Romeo Honorio

"Art is visual expression of conceived reality. Literature is mental expression of perceived reality."
– Ymor H.

From the beginning of civilization, art and literature have played a vital role in shaping humanity's imagination and progress. Discovery, curiosity, and expression guided our collective journey. The brush and the pen, wielded by great minds, inspired generations and fostered bonds of cultural understanding, reciprocity, and resilience. Even in today's digital era, arts and literature remain potent vehicles for dialogue, new ideas, and shared progress.

That spirit has been alive at the Philippine Consulate General in Calgary, with four installments of Sining sa Konsulado showcasing the city's Filipino artists. The series opened on February 25 with Spotlight on Emerging Filipino Artists in Calgary, continued on May 15 with a collaborative program pairing visual artists and writers, and on September 25 featured a double exhibition by Filipina painters on The Waters of Batangas. It concludes this October with Aswang Con, a celebration of Philippine folklore.

The series local Consulate General, presented the series in collaboration with Salingpusa Creatives, a community-driven collective dedicated to Filipino arts and literature. The partnership brings together institutional support and grassroots creativity, creating a platform where emerging and established artists alike can share their work, build connections, and strengthen cultural visibility in the city.

"The Philippine Consulate General Calgary has always been supportive of the arts" said Emma R. Sarne, Philippine Consul General. "Art is and will always be a powerful medium for connection, identity and cultural preservation."

Cecilia Alcaraz, Executive Director of Salingpusa Creatives, said, "Our goal with Sining sa Konsulado has always been to give

Photo by R. Melvin Alcaraz

Filipino artists and writers in Calgary a platform to be seen and heard."

"Each installment has shown how powerful it is when we come together as a community to celebrate our heritage and creativity. This series is more than just exhibitions—it's about building visibility, fostering collaboration, and ensuring Filipino voices have a place in the cultural life of this city."

Among the painters featured in the series are members of the Hawak Kamay Art Collective, community artists from The Alcove Centre of the Arts, independent visual artists such as Day Pajarillo and Kath Beredo, as well as both established and emerging writers and performers—together reflecting the depth and diversity of Calgary's Filipino creative community.

Artists Featured at the Sining sa Konsulado series

- Aby Quan - Fashion
- Alex Carreon - Drawing
- Alyanna Dacquel- Visual Art
- Arvin Dauz - Prose
- Ashley Sayson - Fashion/Fabric Arts
- Chris Duncan - Prose
- Day Pajarillo - Painting
- Dianne Miranda - Prose
- Dolly Castillo - Prose
- Hanna Benitez - Poetry
- John Asilo - Graphic Art
- Julia De La Pena - Visual Art
- Julie Alati-it - Prose
- Justine Pozon- Graphic Artt
- Kath Beredo - Painting
- Krystelle Celestino-Wurtz - Painting
- Kuhlein Migue - Painting
- Ligaya Domingo - Painting
- Marcelo Lorenzo Amogan - Sculpture
- Marcus Madelo - Poetry
- Maria Berena - Prose
- Marissa Boutet - Visual Art
- Max Tabora - Painting
- Nicole Ann Reyes - Prose
- Nicole Bree Dauz Slaymaker- Graphic Art
- Noah Milo- Painting
- Precious de Leon- Prose
- Renato Gandia- Poetry
- Romeo Honorio - Prose
- Tet Millare - Poetry/Photography
- Thea Galang - Graphic Art
- Tobi Sinclair - Music

Photo by R. Melvin Alcaraz

Eight Voices, One Stage: A retrospective on Calgary's multilingual literary gathering

By Julie Alati-it and Aggie Legaspi

Eight Voices, One Stage was a multilingual literary gathering curated by Salingpusa Creatives in June. The event brought together eight writers to share their distinct voices and lived experiences. Each writer, representing a different cultural background, read for eight minutes—a rhythm that echoed the event's theme.

The concept for Eight Voices originated from the Diverse Voices Roundtable, a monthly gathering of writers at various stages of the creative process. The roundtable has fostered focused discussions on published works of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) writers. Facilitated and hosted by Cecilia Ortiz Luna through the Alexandra Centre Writers' Society, the roundtable became the inspiration for Eight Voices.

The lineup featured Jaime Cesar, Eve Edwards, Huck Kahng, Samuel Kugbiyi, Dale Lee Kwong, Cecilia Ortiz Luna, Olivia Van Guinn, and Lisa Webster. Their range of styles and subjects made for an engaging and captivating evening. As the room quieted, the audience listened intently, eager to absorb each story.

Each performance left a lasting impression.

Eve Edwards, a Trinidadian Canadian writer, read an excerpt from a travel piece about encountering a bear—a story balancing humour and tension that left the audience wanting more.

Huck Kahng, a Korean writer, shared a witty and warm ghost story that drew laughter throughout the room.

Jaime Cesar, originally from Venezuela, commanded attention with lyrical prose and a powerful voice.

Samuel Kugbiyi, a Nigerian writer, offered a dark, mysterious tale steeped in myth and ancestral storytelling.

Dale Lee Kwong, a Chinese Canadian

playwright, reflected on her family's migration to Canada in the late 1800s.

Cecilia Ortiz Luna, a Filipina writer, read two excerpts—one from her novel set in historical Intramuros (present-day Manila) and another featuring a steamy love scene.

Olivia Van Guinn, a Vietnamese Canadian poet, presented a quiet, meditative poem about visiting a cemetery to honour ancestors.

Lisa Webster, a Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) poet, read Haudenosaunee, a piece rooted in Indigenous wisdom and life lessons.

Adding a visual layer to the evening, artist Day Pajarillo sketched live portraits of each writer as they read—capturing gesture, movement, and presence in swift, expressive strokes.

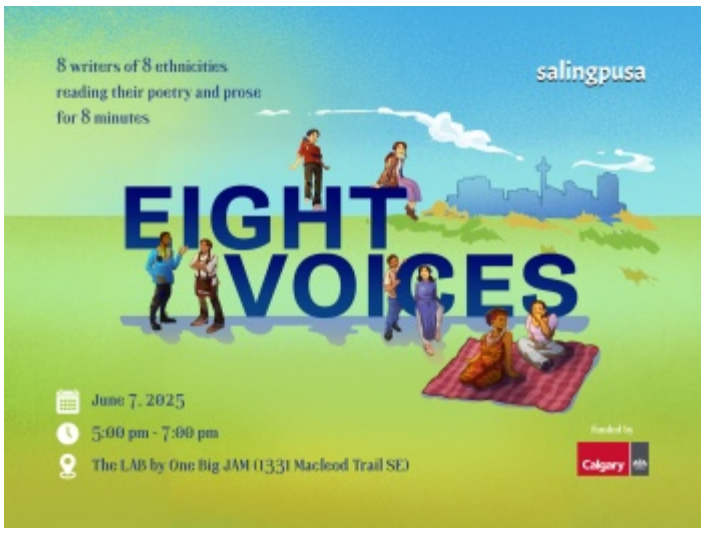
The event evoked a full spectrum of emotions: laughter, joy, grief, and wonder. Faces in the audience mirrored these emotions—captivated, reflective, and perhaps remembering their own stories.

Many of the readings incorporated ancestral languages and mother tongues, deepening the audience's sense of understanding and belonging. Hearing these languages invited a more intimate connection to story and heritage, affirming cultural identity and pride while strengthening the bond between storyteller and listener.

Through these performances, the audience glimpsed themselves within the narratives. In doing so, the writers helped shape a collective story—one that celebrates connection, community, and shared well-being through diversity.

As Calgary's artistic landscape continues to evolve, Eight Voices, One Stage stands as a reminder that language is not a barrier but a bridge—one that connects across difference and time.

Photo by R. Melvin Alcaraz



Graphic Design by Justin Pozon

Aswang Con

FILIPINO FOLKLORE FESTIVAL

November 15, 2025

The Grand Theatre, Downtown Calgary

salingpusa

Illustration by Neki
Cover Design by Nicole Reyes

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