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**Thelma B. Kintanar and
Sylvia Mendez Ventura,
Self-Portraits 2**

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Thelma B. Kintanar and Sylvia Mendez Ventura. **Self-Portraits 2: Fourteen Filipina Artists Speak**. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003. 286 pages.

Women visual artists have not been adequately represented in Philippine art histories. A review of such books would reveal that they feature mostly male artists and their works. Thus, *Self-Portraits 2*, a book that focuses on fourteen women visual artists, is a very welcome addition to Philippine art history in general and to profiles of women visual artists in the Philippines in particular.

Like its predecessor *Self-Portraits: Twelve Filipina Artists Speak*, the book consists of profiles and interviews. In this volume we hear Pacita Abad, Lilia Pablo Amansec, Charito Bitanga, Tala Isla Contreras, Ivi Avellana-Cosio, June Dalisay, Tessie Dichupa, Teresita Sarmiento Duldulao, Lanelle Abueva Fernando, Jeannie E. Javelosa, Baidy Mendoza, Susan Fetalvero-Roces, Nelfa Querubin-Tompkins, and Lia Torralba Tayag. Thelma B. Kintanar and Sylvia Mendez Ventura, distinguished scholars in the field of literature, education, and women's studies, interviewed and wrote the profiles of the artists.

The authors say it was not their intention to do art history as they have neither the formal training nor the expertise. But writing about art is not the sole province of art historians (p. vii). Kintanar and Ventura relied on the "freewheeling interview," a method appropriate to women visual artists whose voices have been silenced in mainstream art history. They supplemented this with observations of art critics and historians.

The profiles are very informative and insightful, although there are places where the quotations from the critics and historians are excessive and threaten to drown out Kintanar and Ventura's voices. There are nuggets of information about various art materials, techniques, and processes (such as *trapunto* painting, naïve art, the use of *alibata*, *calado*, and so on.). We read about how these artists were trained, or how they educated themselves, coped in a "man's world," struck a balance among their multiple roles as mothers, wives, and artists; and how they participated in the art world, and sometimes even broke down its barriers. The work challenges the Western dichotomy and hierarchy between fine arts/high art and crafts/traditional arts with its inclusion of potters and

ceramic artists (i.e., Fernando, Mendoza, Querubin-Tompkins, and Tayag). How they struggled to break into the gallery system and how they were able to work eventually in and around it are inspiring stories.

However commendable the book is, some questions remain. Why and how were the fourteen artists chosen? What standards were observed in their selection? What was the process of selection? The authors explain

This work, therefore, continues *Self-Portraits* by looking into the interaction between the lives and works of Filipina artists. Our selection of artists for interview was guided by this principle and includes a wide range of artists, from the established to the not-so-well established, from the formally trained to the self-taught who developed their art through practice and exposure to the art form of their choice. Without exception, however, all of these artists have integrated their life concerns and experiences into their works in interesting and creative ways. (p. vii)

The “interaction between the lives and works of Filipina artists” is a rather imprecise gauge, since all artists, whether male or female, integrate their life concerns into their art.

While I agree with most of the authors’ choices, I find the inclusion of the other women visual artists uneven. While some of them have consistently produced works of art, some have not produced a significant enough body of works. While some admirably broke new ground in their particular medium and even introduced new media to the visual arts landscape in the Philippines, some have been contented with using the same forms of expressions for their entire artistic careers. A quick check of the artists’ curriculum vitae, which should have been placed appropriately in an appendix, will prove this.

Excluded are visual artists who use traditional media but contemporary forms of expression like papier mache (Nora Cadawas) and textile (Alma Quinto and Mac Valdezco); visual artists who use the more contemporary medium of installation art (Genera Banzon and Lani Maestro) and performance art (Jean Marie-Syjuco); and visual artists who are in “new media” like digital art, computer art, and video art

(Gigi Alfonso-Javier, Fatima Lasay, Vivian Limpin, and Krista Dalena). Then, there are artists like Karen Flores, Nona Garcia, Geraldine Javier, Francesa Enriquez, and Yasmin Almonte—all are young but established and all have produced consistently works that are innovative, insightful, and responsive to the times. Absent, too, are lesbian artists (Tita Lim, Lingling Ramilo, and so on). Finally, it is interesting that Filipino women working abroad are included in *Self-Portraits 2*, but the women outside Metro Manila remain marginal. *Self-Portraits 3* may bring us the voices of the women visual artists in Davao, Baguio, Cebu, Dumaguete, Iligan, and Palawan.

Nonetheless, the achievement of this book cannot be denied.

More than portraits of women as visual artists, this book shows us the face of the woman visual artist as mother, wife, lover, daughter, niece, widow, student, teacher, poet, writer, restorer, actor, performer, activist, fighter, community organizer, administrator, cultural worker, and visionary. Even if there are silences in *Self-Portraits 2*, the voices of the women resonate with passion, creativity, resilience, discipline, power, and strength.

By giving these women the opportunity to speak and be heard, *Self-Portraits 2* enriches the landscape of Philippine art history.

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Rosario de Guzman Lingat, **Ang Balabal ng Diyos/Ang Silid ng Makasalanan**. Edited by Soledad S. Reyes. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003. 197 pages

The publication in one volume of the serialized novels *Ang Balabal ng Diyos* and *Ang Silid ng Makasalan* by Rosario de Guzman Lingat is a welcome reminder to the literary establishment of the efforts not only