

**Exhibition** 29 October, 2021 – 6 March, 2022

Parque del Retiro, Palacio de Cristal

# Kidlat Tahimik

Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey  
& Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years  
of Conquistador RockStars



*A Filipino Artist/Filmmaker Plays with his Colonized Nightmares... Since the Circumnavigation of 1521, 2021*

500 years after his archipelago was first “visited” by an armada bearing Magellan’s conquistador mission, 2021 is an auspicious year for Kidlat Tahimik to return the 1521 visit to Spain — with his own wooden ships bearing his un-conquistador cargo.

As a Filipino artist, Kidlat Tahimik creates large-scale installations wherein *visual* crossovers and *thematic* synergies with his cinematographic work are clearly evident. Seemingly chaotic, these creations articulate anachronistic relationships in narrative fashion, building stories by drinking from a variety of sources and bringing them through to the present with open-endings and no pre-determined script. Just like his script-less films.

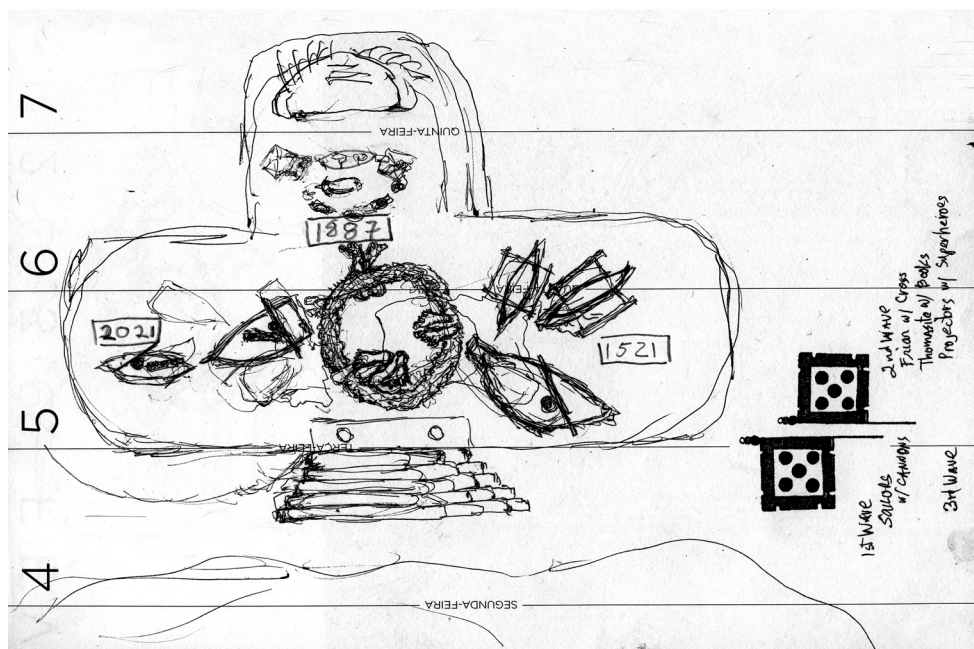
He favours an organic creative process and works with a large team of collaborators who produce a whole world of component parts, items that gain meaning only at that moment they are placed together in the scene or installation. His work typically incorporates items made by local artisans, people who are totally removed from the “sophisticated art” world of the west — just as he uses non-professional actors for his movies.

For Tahimik, the Tagalog term *kapwa* is the basis and essence of Filipino culture. *Kapwa* is the core value — wherein *the other* is included with *the self*. *Kapwa* is community, collective work and compassion for others. It is an *including* culture. Tahimik’s art thus feeds off this ancestral philosophy and is the result of interactive work driven by Filipino artisans and organically shaped by their interpretations of the story he seeks to tell.

### **Raised in a Colonial Cocoon**

Tahimik was born 1942 in Baguio, a colonial hill station created by the Americans after they took the Philippines away from Spain in 1898. He was initially named Eric Oteyza de Guia before he took the *nom de plume* Kidlat Tahimik, which in his native-tongue Tagalog means “silent lightning”. After undergraduate studies in theater and an MBA in America, he worked at the OECD in Paris (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). His first job as an economist soon made him aware of how the demands of material progress can distort an ancestral culture — in such a way that a people loses their pre-colonial strengths.

Disillusioned, he decided to give up a career as an economist, he actually tore up his MBA diploma, to burn his bridges. He returned home to become a self-taught independent filmmaker. He has since worked as a director, performer, writer and actor, creating contemporary myths and fables that critique colonialism, capitalism, globalisation and cultural imperialism. He moved into a hut above the rice terraces of the Ifugao tribe to better understand better their pre-colonial roots. The narratives and imagery that Tahimik employs in his art speak of cultural globalisation as a comparable experience to that of being colonised. As the Filipina writer, Chitang Nakpil aptly describes that Filipinos have spent “300 years in the convent and 50 years in Hollywood”.



Kidlat Tahimik. Preparatory sketch for the exhibition at Palacio de Cristal, 2020

## Palacio de Cristal Hosts a second Filipino Exposition after 1887

For this show, the Palacio de Cristal in the Retiro Park — originally built to house the 1887 General Exposition of the Philippines Islands — is the perfect setting for a reflection on Spain's colonisation of the Philippines five hundred years ago. Tahimik has assembled a huge, epic scene of three sculptural ensembles clustered like a 3-ring circus — each ring employing an array of artisanal items to tell a particular story. Together the three groupings offer an open-ended narrative (like his films) that weave together encounters between historic figures and modern-day icons of our homogenizing world, snapshots of Filipino indigenous resistance to European and American cultural assimilations, and references to specific moments of cultural struggle in the history of the colonized archipelago.

## Ring1 Cluster: 1521. Close Encounters of the Conquistador Kind

As a starting point the first cluster in the installation has an almost life-sized galleon focusing on Ferdinand Magellan's 1521 defeat by the islanders of Mactan. Although the 1st circumnavigation of the globe is credited to Magellan's expedition (1519-1522), Tahimik focuses on his slave, Ikeng or Enrique de Malacca — who could speak the islanders' language. Ikeng was the interpreter for his master connecting with the natives. Ikeng's historic feat is still archived in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville.

Add Tahimik's re-framing of historic texts: Ikeng's Austronesian seafarers' knowledge of star-mapping (his indigenous GPS) and Ikeng's being conversant with his *kapwa ocean amigos* (those sea monsters feared by European seafarers). Therefore, Ikeng showed the best route to the Pacific Ocean

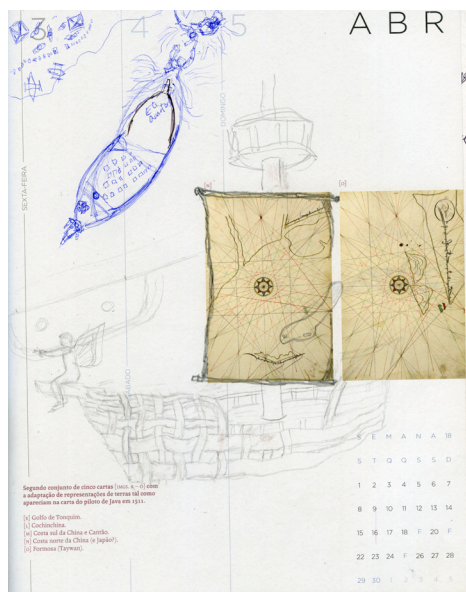
via the strait that now bears Magellan's name. Followed by a westward crossing of the Pacific to reach the 7000 islands of home. Had this native of Austronesia returned finally, to the island of his mother tongue?

Ikeng has been ignored by history. However, according to the artist's interpretation, events described by Antonio Pigafetta (Vicenza, 1480-1534) the official chronicler of the expedition, actually recorded Ikeng's role in 1521. *A playful framing* of post-colonial counter-history is a constant theme in Tahimik's work. Indeed, he acted the role of Ikeng in his film *Balikbayan #1. Memories of Overdevelopment Redux*, made between 1979 and 2017. This installation not only reflects Tahimik's primary concerns as an artist, but offers a prime example of the fluidity between his audiovisual work and his visual art.

As an act of resistance, it celebrates the cultural triumph of the native over the invader with particular attention paid to the meeting between Magellan and Lapulapu, the *datu* or tribal chief of the Filipino island of Mactan, which led to a battle in which Magellan lost his life. Tahimik's 1521 cluster poses the question directly to European viewers: might that military tragedy recorded by your historians at Mactan island actually be our indigenous victory — seen from our native eyes?

## Ring2 Cluster: 1887. How MadExpo Made Jose Rizal Mad

A second cluster alludes specifically to the Madrid Expo in 1887 (promoted by the Overseas Ministry) to showcase the life and culture of the Filipino archipelago, a Spanish dependency at the time. Was the grand spectacle of 1887 mounted to justify colonization and the "civilizing" of the natives? Exhibits of flora-fauna included *Igorrotes*, an indigenous tribe presented like an exotic species. A vehement reaction to this show was written by José Rizal, the great



Kidlat Tahimik. Preparatory sketch for the exhibition at Palacio de Cristal, 2020

hero of Filipino independence — a medical student in Madrid at the time in his letter exchange with Ferdinand Blumentritt.

Rizal angrily critiqued such exhibitionism as a human zoo. Tahimik depicts how such abusive treatment of his compatriots provoked Rizal to write his subversive novels *Noli Me Tángere* (1887, Latin for *Touch Me Not*) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891, *The Subversive* and *The Reign of Greed*). Both books were banned in the Philippines due to their depiction of abuse and corruption by the Spanish clergy (represented by Fr. Dámaso, the villain in Rizal's novel). The maltreatment of natives is metaphorically satirized with the capital punishment of those who resisted colonial assimilation: the *garrote* of the *Igorrote*.

## Ring3 Cluster: 2021. Trojan Horse of Hollywood vs. Homegrown Storytellers

A third cluster considers contemporary culture clashes, presented here as



indigenous cultural resistance to icons Marilyn Monroe and Mickey Mouse, who came to global prominence via the silver screen. Tahimik earlier broached this *Trojan Horse of Hollywood* in a 2018 piece at the 14<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennale entitled *Ang Ma-bagyon Sabungan ng 2 Bathala ng Hangin. A Stormy Clash Between 2 Goddesses of the Winds (WW III - the Protracted Kultur War)*. Five-meter high wooden sculptures depict Inhabian, the wind goddess of the *Igorrotes*, blowing away Marilyn Monroe, as the wind goddess of Hollywood. Tahimik thus satirizes the way American Superhero iconography has infiltrated every corner of the planet and highlights the need to neutralize the impact of this seductive entertainment on traditional, local cultures. It's a subject he regularly tackles in his films, most directly in *Why is Yellow at the Middle of the Rainbow? (Bakit Dilaw Ang Gitna ng Bahaghari)*, made between 1984 and 1994.

Hovering above the 3-ring circus, is a celestial ring of indigenous deities who observe the three cultural battles displayed on the floor of the Palacio de Cristal: pre-colonial life disturbed by the arrival of the Spanish; the awakening impulses of European liberalism/art in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as represented by José Rizal; and today's colonisation in the form of ubiquitous Hollywoodian language. The circular structure above the Palacio de Cristal is made from wicker and invokes the traditional *dap-ay*, the village venue where tribal elders pass on knowledge to the next generation through oral transmissions of ancient tales (today displaced by Wonder Woman and Captain America blockbusters). The pantheon of deities display their optimism that in the protracted *Kultur-War*, indigenous knowledge and ways of life will survive.

Kidlat Tahimik has won numerous cultural awards and film festival prizes, including



Kidlat Tahimik. Preparatory sketch for the exhibition at Palacio de Cristal, 2020

an International Critics Prize at the 1977 Berlinale, an Emerging Film Countries Jury Prize at the 1983 Filmfestival Mannheim-Heidelberg, the Caligari Prize at Berlinale 2015 and most recently the Overkill Prize at Toronto Images Festival in 2021. For Tahimik's lifetime achievements as a cultural warrior, he has been honoured as a Laureate of the Fukuoka Arts & Culture Prize in 2012, and the Netherlands Prince Claus Award Laureate in 2018. At home, Kidlat Tahimik has also been declared a National Artist of the Philippines.

Kidlat lives in Baguio with his wife Katrin where they work with indigenous artists and the *Kapwa* culture-bearers of the Cordilleras (including their 3 sons and 4 grandchildren). Now on his 80<sup>th</sup> orbit around the sun, Kidlat sums up in Palacio de Cristal his life's *indio-genius* artistic framings.

## Collaborators

Kidlat Tahimik kindly expresses his gratitude to the following people who have collaborated in the production and installation of the exhibition

### Family artists

|               |                  |
|---------------|------------------|
| My wife       | Katrin de Guia   |
| My three sons | Kabunyan de Guia |
|               | Kawayan de Guia  |
|               | Kidlat de Guia   |
| My grandson   | Kalipay de Guia  |
| My cousin     | Martin Friedel   |

### Indigenous artists

Christopher Atiwon  
Santos Bayucca  
Randy Bulayo  
Apilis Mahiwo  
Jason Domling  
Rogelio Ginanoy  
Jayson Taguyungon

### Baguio artists

Ruel Cabato  
Alan Manasatas  
Michael Palomar  
Rommel Pidazo  
Jun Ritomalta  
Karl Tawan  
Carlo Villafuerte  
China Villafuerte

## Related Activities:

### Workshop

Kidlat Tahimik and Sally Gutiérrez  
2, 3, 5 and 6, November 2021  
Attendance upon registration  
Consult website

### Encounter

Kidlat Tahimik  
3 and 8 November 2021

### More information

[www.museoreinasofia.es](http://www.museoreinasofia.es)

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