

## **Kidlat Tahimik. *Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador RockStars***



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Exhibition view. Palacio de Cristal. October, 2021  
Photographic archive of Museo Reina Sofía

**DATES:** 28 October 2021 – 6 March 2022

**LOCATION:** Palacio de Cristal (Retiro Park)

**ORGANIZATION:** Museo Reina Sofía

**COORDINATION:** Soledad Liaño in collaboration with Carlos González

With the collaboration of:

Kidlat Tahimik presents **Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador**

**RockStars** at Palacio de Cristal, a site-specific project that **analyses the building's past, the history of colonialism in the Philippines and the influence of cultural imperialism nowadays.**

Born in the Philippine city of Baguio, Eric Oteyza de Guia (1942) changed his birth name to **Kidlat Tahimik**, which means "silent lightning" in Tagalog, the native

language from the center and south of the island of Luzon. He has worked as a **filmmaker, performer, writer and actor, creating contemporary myths and fables that critique colonialism, capitalism, globalization and cultural imperialism.**



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Tahimik's artistic practice comprises **large-scale, seemingly chaotic installations**, which articulate anachronistic relationships in narrative fashion, building stories by drinking from a variety of sources and contemporary mythologies and bringing them through to the present with open-endings. On this occasion, the Palacio de Cristal in the Retiro Park — built in conjunction with the General Exhibition on the Philippine Islands, in 1887 — becomes the ideal setting for him to **reflect on the colonialism processes in the Philippines, five centuries after the arrival of the Europeans to the archipelago.**

The exhibition shows **an epic scenario composed of three sculptural groups that refer to three key moments in the history of colonialism in the Philippines:** in 1521, the arrival of the Magellan expedition and the death of the explorer at the hands of the native people; in 1887, the creation of the Palacio de Cristal for the General Exhibition and the revolutionary context of the Philippine's national hero José Rizal; and finally the current cultural clash between American colonialism and indigenous resistance to the importation of foreign cultural models such as Spiderman, Mickey Mouse or Marilyn Monroe.

For Tahimik, **the Tagalog term kapwa is the basis and essence of Filipino culture.** Kapwa is community, collective work and compassion for others. Tahimik's project at Palacio de Cristal thus feeds off this ancestral philosophy and is the result of interactive work made by **a team of collaborators from his entourage and local artisans who work outside the art world.**

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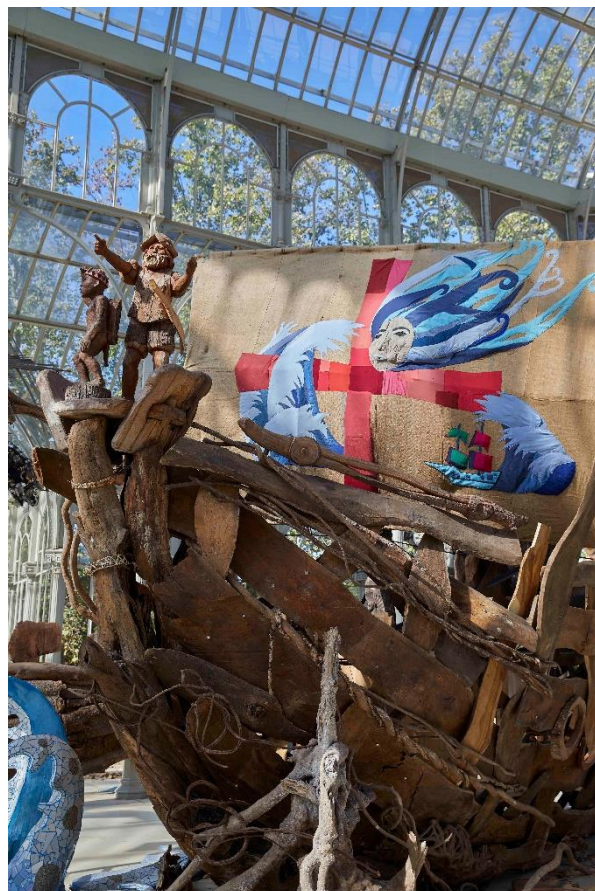


### Three sculptural ensembles, three cultural battles

**Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador RockStars** is a reflection about the impact of colonialism on local cultures in the last five hundred years of the history of the Philippines. Tahimik has assembled a huge, epic scene composed 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, 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.

The first sculptural ensemble, located at the right area of the palace, takes as its starting point the expedition of **Fernando Magallanes**, Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521), and his death in the confrontations with the indigenous people of the island of Mactan, located in the Philippines. **Lapulapu**, the *datu* or tribal chief of the island, opposed to collaborate with the conquerors and is seen as a symbol of resistance celebrating the triumph of the native culture over the invader, a question that underpins Tahimik's entire trajectory. In the installation Magellan is presented falling to the ground, surrounded by the figures of Lapulapu and his wife, queen **Bulakna**, who delivers the coup de grace to the Portuguese explorer. According to the artist himself: "The battle between Magellan and Lapulapu is also a cultural battle".

Tahimik also claims the role in the expedition of the slave **Ikeng**, also called Enrique de Malaca, represented here next to a second personification of Magellan on the prow of an almost life-size wooden galleon. According to the interpretations of some literary sources, **Enrique de Malaca** (born in Indonesia, Malaysia or the Philippines, ca. 1495) would have relied on traditional knowledge based on astrology and nature to indicate to Magellan the way that would lead to the Pacific Sea through the Strait later known by the name of the Portuguese navigator. However, according to the artist's interpretation, events described by **Antonio Pigafetta** (Vicenza, 1480-1534) the official chronicler of the expedition, hardly references Ikeng's true 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 *Balibayan #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.



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The second sculptural ensemble, located at the back of the palace, refers to the specific context of the General Exhibition of the Philippine Islands of 1887, for which the Palacio de Cristal was originally built. The initiative, led by the Ministry of Overseas, aimed to showcase the life and culture of the Philippine archipelago, colony of Spain at that time. Within the framework of the event, where the flora, fauna and populations of the archipelago were shown, a series of performances were programmed, where the indigenous Igorrotes were exhibited as an exotic species. This fact was denounced and defined as a “human zoo” by **José Rizal**, the precursor of the Philippine Independence, who was at that time in Madrid. In the installation, Tahimik represents Rizal as the young medical student he was back then, noting in his notebook the abusive treatment his compatriots were receiving. However, contrary to the traditional representations of the national hero, Tahimik decides to dress him with a loincloth, thus symbolizing his union with his culture of origin.

Within this ensemble we also find characters from Rizal’s literary world, who wrote the novels *Noli me tangere* (1887) and *El filibusterismo* (1891) to

denounce the abuses of the Spanish clergy and authorities on the local population, and which were banned during the colonial period. Fray Dámaso, villain of the story and the personification of the vices of some Spanish friars, is represented here as a wolf, placed in the installation together with other characters from Rizal's novels such as Maria Clara.

A third sculptural cluster considers contemporary culture clashes, presented here as indigenous cultural resistance to icons such as 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 14th Sharjah Biennale entitled *Ang Ma-bagyong Sabungan ng 2 Bathala ng Hangin. A Stormy Clash Between 2 Goddesses of the Winds (WW III - the Protracted Kultur War)*. Wooden sculptures depict Inhabian, the wind goddess of the Igorrotes, blowing away Marilyn Monroe, as the wind goddess of Hollywood. As Tahimik states: “It’s a cultural war that still goes on, where Hollywood dominates all our stories. This was a way of telling Hollywood to go away, that we have our own narratives, and that we are tired of their sex and violence stories. We have our own mythology”.

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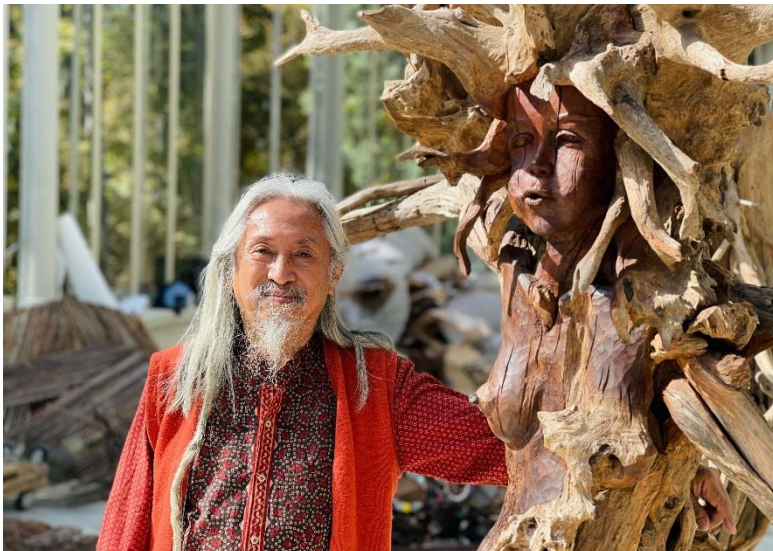
On the left side of the palace the visitor can see very well-known characters in present-day's Hollywood imagery, such as Spiderman, Captain America and Wonder Woman. "These superheroes continue to colonize us, they are like a cultural virus", states Tahimik. The artist has chosen to represent them riding American army's missiles and battling numerous indigenous protective deities.



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Finally, hovering above the central area of the palace, there is a celestial ring of indigenous deities who observe the three cultural battles displayed on the floor. This circular structure 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. "These deities are looking down and knowing that the cultural fight will not die and that we will win it. Our culture is strong", says Tahimik.

### About the artist



Kidlat Tahimik at his show: *Magellan, Marilyn, Mickey & Fr. Dámaso. 500 Years of Conquistador RockStars*  
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Tahimik was born 1942 in Baguio, a colonial hill station created by the Americans after they took the Philippines away from Spain in 1898. After undergraduate studies in theater and an MBA in America, he worked at the OECD in Paris. His first job as an economist soon made him consider 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 and return home to become a self-taught independent filmmaker, and he has since worked as a director,

performer, writer and actor. Kidlat lives in Baguio with his wife Katrin where they work with indigenous artists and the Kapwa culture-bearers of the Cordilleras.

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Tahimik has been honoured with numerous awards at international film festivals, most notably the International Critics' Prize at Berlinale (1977) and, more recently, the Prince Claus Laureate Award (2018). At the 2019 Sharjah Biennial he presented Ang Ma-bagyong Sabungan ng 2 Bathala ng Hangin, A Stormy Clash Between 2 Goddesses of the Winds (WW III – the Protracted Kultur War) to great critical acclaim.

**For further information:**

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