

## ARTS AND CULTURE



## Berlin Forecast Festival features Renan Laru-an and Buen Calubayan

Rappler talks to the two Filipino artists who are participating in the festival this October

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PICC. The building is the subject of artist Buen Calubayan's work at the Berlin Forecast Festival. Photo courtesy of Berlin Forecast Festival

MANILA, Philippines – Renan Laru-an, a curator, and Buen Calubayan, an artist, both from the Philippines, will be participating in Berlin's Forecast Festival this October 21. The festival is unique in that it brings together 6 pioneering talents from different disciplines and pairs them with leading mentors who help them realize their project proposals.

As a curator, Laru-an's project consists of an exhibition, performance, and site-specific mediation that looks at how dictators around the world have used speech as a vehicle for image production and world-making.

In the '70s, several leaders of nation-states addressed the world in notable speeches: Libyan Prime Minister Gaddafi at the Islamic Summit Conference in 1974; MNLF founder Nur Misuari at the International Congress on Cultural Imperialism in 1977, and Imelda Marcos at the UN General Assembly in New York in 1975.

Calubayan will be exhibiting work based on his research into the Marcoses' broad social programs and in particular, their architectural schemes with a focus on the PICC building, which was constructed to host the IMF World Bank Conference in 1976. Rappler talked to Laru-an and Calubayan about the project, which is supported by the Goethe Institut in Manila, ahead of the festival.

***Your curatorial project, *The Artist and the Social Dreamer*, is concerned with how various dictators or authoritarian leaders in the 1970s have constructed their worldviews and disseminated them, in particular through speeches. What is the significance of these speech acts, which were delivered on a global platform?***

**Renan Laru-an:** The speeches of the Marcoses, Gaddafi, and Misuari took place at a time where nationalism and ethnocentrism were strongly identified and positioned as an accommodating ideology, almost a way of life to recuperate from the crimes of colonialism and imperialism. For the international diplomatic channels, these figures gave a form to the postcolonial body. The international accessed the wounded bodies of the local through the revolutionary image that these personalities had portrayed. On the other hand, their acts of speaking to the world became the most audible voice that transmitted the situation and desires of the postcolonial spirit. They single-handedly amplified the picture and murmur of a collective body.

In *The Artist and the Social Dreamer*, the speeches of these figures, who were at one point celebrated either by the local or the international to be "revolutionary" and then later on categorized as dictators/authoritarian leaders, serve as a legible trace that allows me and the artists to complicate the study around the relationship of the revolutionary and the dictatorial. These are documents that could slowly divorce from orthodox and universalist readings of what could be revolutionary and what could be dictatorial.

***Some 4 decades later, right wing/populist/autocratic movements are rising up again in the world. To what extent does the current political climate inform this inquiry into the former iconic autocrats?***

**Laru-an:** The *Artist and the Social Dreamer* works with artists coming from Indonesia, the Philippines, Spain, and Iran. They have different experiences, understanding, and relationship to right wing, autocratic and populist movements and histories. There is no central position that could amalgamate these artistic and curatorial passages in relation to the current political situation. A good number of institutions and practitioners in the regular Euro-American circuit have been actively responding and organizing around this condition already. I think there is a place and rhythm for a slower approach to it. Another degree of intensity, perhaps lower. Some of us have been preoccupied with the urgency of intensifying political tasks that have worked before. I am more interested to know what other possible tasks could be done or made possible, and where and how to initiate them.

***Buen's work focuses on the PICC, which has some interesting parallels with the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of World Cultures) where the Forecast Festival will be held. How do these two buildings interact with each other in terms of the exhibition?***

**Laru-an:** Both buildings were built during the Cold War Era: the early phase, the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (1957) during the INTERBAU building exhibition in Berlin; and the aggressive phase in Southeast Asia, the Philippine International Convention Center (1976) in preparation for the country's hosting of the World Bank's International Monetary Fund Annual Meeting. HKW is considered as a site of mediation, while the PICC is taken as a site that migrates and infects. It feels like a brutalist architecture from the humid tropics is penetrating a building in post-war Berlin. A number of elements in the structure of PICC, such as the elevation and interior of the space, become subjects of artists' new works. HKW's auditorium will be the main site where a number of interventions and performances will be initiated. The auditorium, present in two buildings, becomes a shared stage of intervention. No one could really own it. The singular voice would have a hard time to stand out. Together with the artists, we are spreading ourselves inside the space as if taking it as a collective podium.

***The festival is also sort of an experiment with six different individuals under the mentorship of six leaders in their disciplines. Can you tell us more about curating as a discipline, or medium or form of expression, alongside architecture, design, music, dance and video art?***

**Laru-an:** In this project, I have been drawn into the practices of the artists whose artistic lineages and languages are contaminated with or embodied by the curatorial and the intellectual. When one experiences the project, one can hardly distinguish the position of the artist, the curator, and the thinker. The simultaneity of form and medium, and how they continuously displace and cultivate each other stimulate us in this way of curating.

***Your planned work for the festival makes use of archival material of the PICC, Marcos speeches, and images from the book "Indigenous Materials for Low Cost Housing." The work makes use of your previous exhibition "Instructions on viewing the landscape" as a framework or way to visualize the Marcosian landscape. Can you explain a bit more about this process?***

**Buen Calubayan:** Instructions on Viewing the Landscape is a kind of a mind map that helps to locate coordinates of a world view. Finding these coordinates tends to reveal mechanisms of history, framing, access, and location. In the current project, the Marcosian landscape has been identified with its political, economic, and cultural coordinates. This was done by understanding the kind of world view the Marcoses have projected through their architectural schemes characterized by internationalism through indigenization. Furthermore, the project attempts to present how the people experienced this world or the nation from their given point of view.

***Architecture was one of the mediums through which the Marcoses channeled their worldmaking or mythmaking. The CCP complex stands as a testament to their idea of modernity, a new society, and a singular national identity. To what extent have the buildings achieved or failed at their desired purposes? What do you think has this exercise actually accomplished, or where does its "vanishing point" lie?***

**Calubayan:** It was a modified modernity adapted, if not imposed, from the "IMF-World Bank manual" if you will and not a modernity from historical discontent that can give you the courage for a genuine break from history. The vanishing point lies in people's emancipation but that can only happen if there is accessibility that

allows negotiations and discourse. This access has been blocked. Literally and figuratively, the CCP Complex blocks the horizon where peoples can view their sunsets/futures. What has been given is the view of a horizon from above – for the few – at the expense of the people's view. On the other hand, this kind of chaos and discontent during the Marcos regime can be the supposed condition for a kind of historical break or modernity from below if you will, but that access has been suppressed also by the following regime – we still have to gain this access.

***Renan mentioned that the exhibit might provide a different way of understanding the meanings of “revolutionary” and “dictator.” Does your research so far support this?***

**Calubayan:** I think the key is how we activate and negotiate this terms. My work attempts to provide some points of departure from where one can teach him/herself to understand "the world" he/she is in. Ultimately, the work lies in how you activate the landscape and how it activates you through engagements – the results can be revolutionary, if not dictatorial.

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