



Logic surging through the Aether

Within the immigrant experience, the porousness of home is well understood. Home can exist *however* and *wherever* one so recognizes it. *How To Make A Painting From Memory* works with the emancipated spirit of the variable home, grounding ideas of the aether-place into the architectural structure of a house and the physical strength capable of bearing its weight.

Working within the seemingly contradictory genre of "Science Fiction Documentary,"¹ Stephanie Comilang commonly uses new media processes such as rapid prototyping, drone footage and augmented reality to compliment a video, sculpture and installation practice. Comilang forgoes the typical aesthetics of science fiction in favor of a visual approach that serves the histories that are being unearthed.

Though technology functions as the infrastructure in which deeply personal narratives can be built upon, here, the physical and metaphysical exist within exchange and reciprocation of each other.

A superstitious belief with the medium of photography is that a photograph could steal a piece of one's essence or soul. While unproven, this idea poses questions about the dynamic of the spirit, and humankind's attempts to make sense of it through technological means. A camera lens is like the human eye, which also interprets spectrums of light that bend and shape what we perceive as life; ourselves in cognitive interaction with the world around us.

If the science of optics begets the shape of life, the camera lens remains intertwined with both quintessence² and science, able to forge the stories our eyes witness with the freedom of being detached from a biological form. Perhaps this interest in synthesizing the unfathomable nature of the soul through technological intervention is intrinsic to this fear.

The walls of the gallery are covered in video screenshots of men in the communal process of physically moving a home; a cultural tradition often synonymous with the concept of *bayanihan*,³ an ethos of nationhood and community in the Philippines. The low resolution of this communal activity recorded on a modest iPhone screen is amplified so large that the pixels that constitute it must reveal themselves. The video has an aspirational quality to it—we witness the might of many counter the weight of this heavy structure and move it through a landscape. Rendered monumentally in this space through exploding the scale of it, the pixels evoke particles and atoms, fragmenting the home's deep sentimentality, national history and hopeful potential. The quintessential spectrums of light are made quantifiable by technological intervention.

How To Make A Painting From Memory, the video work from which this exhibition finds a namesake, acts as the center from which the expanded, spatial elements orbit. In the video Comilang interviews Thai women living in Berlin within a diasporic context, and Comilang asks them to first describe their former home, then draw it. They reflect, reminisce and recall the memories of a life before they began anew within drastically different geographic and cultural contexts. From there, Comilang created 3D printed reinterpretations from their recollections, and concentrated these dioramic forms within the center of the gallery.

These miniature structures are echoed by various spirit houses featured in the video. As ornate votive objects, spirit houses provide a space for spirits to reside in, and are commonly found in various countries across Southeast Asia. Comilang's work explores the *Thai* spirit house, using technological processes to give something as intangible and elusive as a memory a physical form. Use of 3D software pulls these structures further into the realm of metaphysical space, as elements within the base designs of these women's homes are duplicated, rotated, reflected, chopped and screwed.

How To Make A Painting From Memory screens in a room that is consumed by vinyl flooring that mirrors the room's happenings. As the video plays, and as we watch. Reflection as a refraction of light occurs in natural phenomena such as water, but within the installation, the artifice of a vinyl floor allows for a similar contemplation.

The relationship these processes have to the stories—from moving a home to recalling a life—feels reflexive. Segmented into supposedly different modes of thought, *How To Make A Painting From Memory* instead crafts a meditative space in which the metaphysical and the physical may ebb, flow and reflect each other. As technology is asked to behave non-corporeally, miraculousness is grounded in reason.

Logic surges through the immaterial aether.

Comilang suggests that collaboration has the ability to not only relocate a home, but remember it, and rebuild it too.

Philip Leonard Ocampo

Spirits flowing through the Circuit

Within the immigrant experience, the porousness of home is well understood. Home can exist *however* and *wherever* one so recognizes it. *How To Make A Painting From Memory* works within the emancipated spirit of the variable home to *lift* the very idea of the physical dwelling skyward into the aether-place of spirituality and diasporic memory.

Working within the seemingly contradictory genre of "Science Fiction Documentary,"¹ Stephanie Comilang commonly uses new media processes such as rapid prototyping, drone footage and augmented reality to compliment a video, sculpture and installation practice. Comilang forgoes the typical aesthetics of science fiction in favor of a visual approach that serves the histories that are being unearthed. Though technology functions as the infrastructure in which deeply personal narratives can be built upon, here, the physical and metaphysical exist within exchange and reciprocation of each other.

Etymological origins of the word *circuit* derive from the Latin word *circutus* ("a going round"); synonymous with technology, as electrical currents surging through circuitry is a fundamental aspect of technological function. By way of the word's origins, however, a circuit could be much more simple. It merely exists as a specific action to be carried through concert and coordination.

The walls of the gallery are covered in video screenshots of men in the communal process of physically moving a home; itself a migratory circuit. While the enormity of the act can be rationalized in that the total weight is dispersed amongst each hand that lifts, the sheer monumentality of the act itself imbues something so easily factualized with a wondrous awe.

House moving has been a subject of Filipino folk art for decades. A staple in Filipino households, *Bayanihan*² paintings capture the spirit of community and cooperation that the nation was interested in contributing to a national identity after the colonial era in the Philippines concluded.³ Paintings of this nature are stylized, heightening the lush environments of the Philippine islands, the dedication and passion of the men carrying these homes, and the unity of a nation. While physics can dissect the magic of moving these homes, the human circuit lifts not only the structure, but also the weight of the home's deep sentimentality, national history and hopeful potential, as if for eternity.

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These miniature structures are echoed by various spirit houses featured in the video. As ornate votive objects, spirit houses provide a space for spirits to reside in, and are commonly found in various countries across Southeast Asia. Here, Comilang explores the malleability of the architectural form: Seeking to give shelter to something as intrinsically immaterial as a spirit, the interior space of architecture is asked to contain a transient, infinite and limitless makeup, housed just behind the measure of architectural design and rapid prototyping. The physical form of the printed object is asked to sustain the emotional weight of the stories, memories and aspirations of these women alongside the spiritual space that permeates throughout the house.

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The relationship these processes have to the stories—from moving a home to recalling a life—feels reflexive. Segmented into supposedly different modes of thought, *How To Make A Painting From Memory* instead crafts a meditative space in which the metaphysical and the physical may ebb, flow and reflect each other. As technology is asked to behave non-corporeally, miraculousness is grounded in reason.

The spirit flows through the circuitry of the technologic.

Comilang suggests that collaboration has the ability to not only relocate a home, but remember it and rebuild it too.

Philip Leonard Ocampo

1 Stephanie Comilang, in conversation with the author, September 14th, 2023.
2 Thought of as the fifth addition to the four elements, quintessence encompasses regions of the heavens beyond this physical earth; the immaterial matter found both in the universe and within every living being.

3 "Bayanihan, Indigenous Mutual Aid," Kularts, July 16, 2020, <https://www.kularts-sf.org/blog/resilience-through-community>.

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3 Ibid.

How to Make a Painting from Memory

Stephanie Comilang

January 5 – February 6, 2024

Stephanie Comilang is an artist living and working in Berlin. Her documentary-based works create narratives that look at how our understandings of mobility, capital and labour on a global scale are shaped through various cultural and social factors. Her work has been shown at the Tate Modern, Hamburger Bahnhof, Tai Kwun Hong Kong, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Julia Stoschek Collection and Haus der Kunst. She was awarded the 2019 Sobey Art Award, Canada's most prestigious art prize for artists 40 years and younger.

Philip Leonard Ocampo is an artist and arts facilitator based in Tkaronto. Ocampo's multidisciplinary practice involves painting, sculpture, writing and curatorial projects. Exploring worldbuilding, radical hope and speculative futures, Ocampo's work embodies a curious cross between magic wonder and the nostalgic imaginary. Following the tangents, histories and canons of popular culture, Ocampo is interested in how unearthing cultural touchstones of past / current times may therefore serve as catalysts for broader conversations about lived experiences; personal, collective, diasporic, etc.

He holds a BFA in Integrated Media (DPXA) from OCAD University and is currently a Programming Coordinator at Xspace Cultural Centre and one of the four founding co-directors of Hearth, an artist-run collective based in the city.

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is an artist-run centre committed to supporting diverse approaches to photographic and image-based practices through exhibitions, education programs and facilitating artistic production. Gallery 44 provides space and context for meaningful dialogue between artists and publics. Together, we offer an entry point to explore the artistic, cultural, historic, social and political implications of the image in our ever-expanding visual world.

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