

**SALA 2023 Review:** *Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan | Those who do not look back to their origins, can not get to their destination.*

**Artist: Alyssa Powell-Ascura**  
**Written by Alanna Caluya**

Video work can be accessed [here](#). Artist [website](#), [bio](#) and SALA [write up](#).

Traversing a domain governed by racialized thought-patterns is an arduous pursuit. Yet with consideration of what we possess, and what has been passed down, strength and dexterity is unveiled at the crux of those lineages. Cognition of our inheritance is our power play.

*“Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan | Those who do not look back to their origins, can not get to their destination”* is anything but ephemeral. Alyssa Powell-Ascura’s performance piece, showing at SALA 2023 and a Finalist for the City Rural Emerging Artist Award, is the emerging creators’ unapologetic assertion of strength. It looks beyond colonial ruminations and is a celebration of the nuances that constitute Filipina cultural identity.

The piece opens with the Kaurna coast, the soundscape and blue horizon sitting serenely. Cutting to a close-up shot of the artist, donned in her adopted Lola’s dress, the artist dynamically engages in Filipino martial art, kali. This instantaneously juxtaposes the prelude as her personal narrative ruptures the scene, setting a tone of resistance and reclamation.

She opens with “Taga saan ka? / Where are you from? / Taga dito ako. / I am from here.”, a recurrent call-and-response that this reviewer is familiar with. How can we, as Filipinas, decolonise the Asian diasporic canon? This question reverberates upon viewing, as we are reminded of unsolicited prejudices that have historically ostracised Filipinas.

‘Mail-order bride’ Powell-Ascura says, “You must feel so lucky to have escaped poverty”. Anxiety seeps outwards, as these are not easy words

to metabolise. In Australia, the migrant circumstance is underlined by dominant powers grappling with what they don't understand — who find assurance in superimposing their own order, in a process that compromises existing frameworks.

For the Filipina, this propagandising tends to the pulverisation of origin. Identity politics for *her* is torn between imposture and requiem. We attempt to find ourselves within these Eurocentric binaries as an impulse.

As we navigate in and between this involuntary situation, liminality arises, and it can be an ambiguous threshold. However, Powell-Ascura embraces this third space with authority. Her uncompromising performance only insists reaffirmation of personal identity against disparagement. Ultimately, Powell-Ascura is handing us, the Filipino-Australian collective, the *carte-blanche*. “You must dismantle what has tainted your precious minds” she says imperatively. Speaking in present tense, “Ang dalagang filipina ay / Matapang / Matalino / Magaling / Lahat ay kayang gawin” (Translation: The young filipina woman is strong/intelligent/talented. They can do everything.) imparts belief where it may be lacking, due to the concepts mentioned in her previous stanza.

The stylistic audio-visual amalgamation of Powell-Ascura's piece can be interpreted as a visual manifest of cultural liminality. Tenacious yet softly spoken poetry permeate the quaint Kaurna scenery. Powell-Ascura's white Filipiniana lap and sway with the rigorous kali sticks. In conventional visual arrangements, these elements supposedly antithesis one another. Yet they intersect harmoniously as Powell-Ascura poignantly decolonises the experience related to identity and culture of the Filipino-Australian diaspora. We are not the impoverished 'mail-order bride' perpetuated by sensationalist media, nor will we be the silenced minority. We are an intersection of varied cultural and personal truths.

Thus, as the work's title suggests: to move forward, we must look back.

I'm a second-generation Filipina-Australian, who likewise, shares a migrant ancestry. My adolescent years were spent unconsciously failing to acknowledge this; My forebearers were vague, distant outlines. Powell-Ascura's performance catalyses an internal detangling of this imposition. An ode to Filipino migrants' strength and sacrifice, the line "For those who have come across the ocean / We come from those who took a chance" is a sovereign reminder to reject the hegemonic agitations that can influence personal-cultural identity.

Personally, the piece inspires self-reflexivity as I navigate cultural liminality, a third space. I see my cultural background, the shapes, patterns, and colours are filled with opacity. I can *feel* the undulations and nuances that constitute the joyous experience of cross-cultural existence.

*"Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan | Those who do not look back to their origins, can not get to their destination"* radically disrupts ways of thinking, fracturing Filipina-Australian migration bias. At the heart lies an unravelling of perceptions of time and heritage, illuminating the richness of intra/intercultural cohesions - enabling us to grasp our senses of self, existing in this third space, with fortitude.

### **Artist Bio:**

Alanna Caluya is a Filipina-Australian artist and advertising creative working on Wurrundjeri Woi Wurrung Land. Her creative practice explores the multiplicities that characterise Filipino/Filipina cross-cultural existences. She blurs the lines of binary thought through personal stories, painting, and mixed media forms. She acknowledges such cognitions throughout her life and ad/comms work.

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