

Ugnayang Sining at Pamana (USAP) Collective

GATHERED TIME



What truly pulls a community together? Is it a shared heritage, the resonant beat of a drum, or the simple act of gathering under a canopy of colourful bunting? For many Filipinos, both at home and in the diaspora, the fiesta remains an enduring symbol of coming together. Although its origins trace back to Spanish colonial celebrations of Catholic saints, its enduring cultural significance in the contemporary context warrants a deeper examination.

Through hospitality, storytelling, music, and performance, Ugnayang Sining at Pamana (USAP) Collective deconstructs the Filipino fiesta, re-examines its meaning, and reclaims the narrative in Artpod Residency's *Gathered Time*.

Over the course of residency, artists take a non-linear approach to exploring the prisms of fiesta, moving fluidly through time and context to celebrate iconic cultural anchors, uncover pre-colonial celebratory practices, and consider contemporary forms of gathering. The resulting explorations are expansive and lead to interrogations of the economic burden of fiesta, the gendered distribution of labour, familial and peer expectations, power dynamics and cultural complexities.

USAP Collective anchors the residency in embodying *pakikipagkapwa*, an essential Filipino core value embedded in their socialisation process, in which one veers away from self-centredness, always considering the other.

As artists turn Artpod into an ordinary home, they share this *kapwa* culture, unleashing the complexity and depth of the

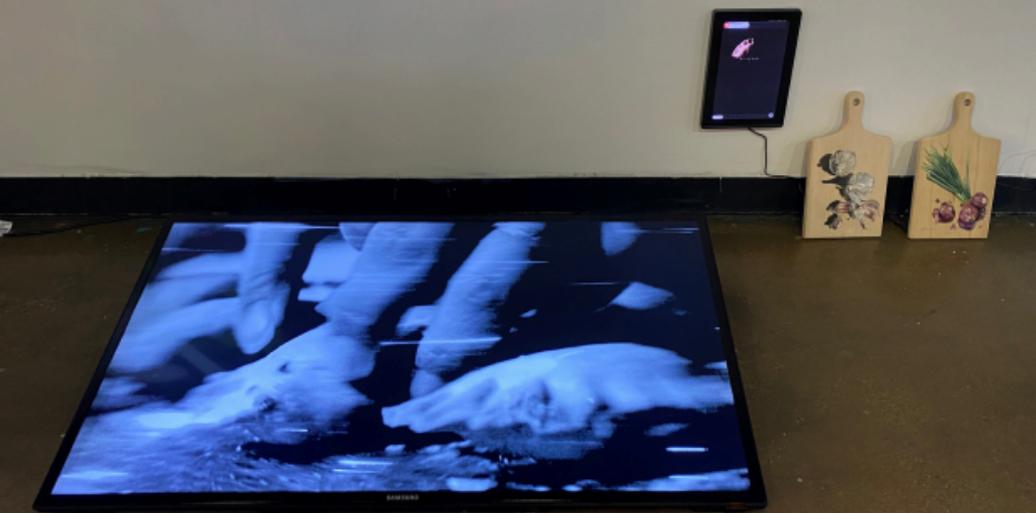
Filipino way of being that naturally allows them to make bids for connection, opening their house, checking if a fellow has already eaten, offering food and help, and simply doing something together. In contrast to Western individualism and the colonial narrative of "I" and "you", *kapwa* is a relationality where the inner self encompasses the other.

This natural openness is reflected in a series of community participatory events—bunting-making and *merienda* (snacks), happening every Friday, combined with dynamic activities from the artists. As Artpod is in the heart of the city, so is the *pakikipagkapwa*. Gathered Time offers the thread that weaves a socially cohesive society, from a *purok* small village, to a grand scale, racial, spatial and time difference. *Pakikipagkapwa* extends beyond ancestral psychology; it is an attempt to make bids for connection in a multicultural country, activating a sense of *pakikiramdaman* (knowing through feeling). Ultimately, this also requires acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land, elders, past and present, and their ongoing connection to the land.

From the social fabric of *kapwa* culture, this collaborative creative process is reminiscent of the way villagers gather together and make bunting (*banderitas*), made of recycled materials. Neighbours gather in the afternoon, elders cut pieces of old clothes, youth assembles them in rope, whilst men climb trees and poles to hang them using Filipino "Bahala na" technique, improvisation, making do until it works. Children await merrily around until they could run under canopies of bunting.



Left: *Balinsasayaw*, Gale Dy, 2025; Right: *Echoes from the past*, Clai Pasion, 2025



Left: *Ana's Empanada*, Ana Koch, 2025; Right: *Gathered Food, Gathered Time*, Lourdes Dueñas Blinco, 2025

Every fiesta, each house is open, and nobody leaves home hungry. This quirk is marked in "*Tuloy po Kayo*" (Please come in), a humble welcome event held by USAP Collective in the first weeks of the project.

Nodding to a decorative piece we find in a Filipino home, celebrated and prized, Gale Dy's *Balinsasayaw* (Glossy Swiftlet) endemic bird, is a celebration of culture. Drawing on the vibrant colours of major festivals like MassKara and Sinulog, the piece captures a festive spirit of creativity and community. Made from simple materials like papier-mâché and synthetic feathers, the design includes a hand-painted mask and headdress. The artwork highlights how traditional culture can inspire new forms of artistic expression and bring people together through movement, music, and storytelling.

Lourdes Dueñas Blinco's work centres on the Filipino fiesta as a fundamental tradition built on the act of gathering. She highlights that a successful fiesta hinges on the communal effort of collecting resources, particularly food, which serves as the central catalyst for bringing people together. The shared preparation and consumption of a feast create a space for family, friends, and even strangers to connect, share stories, and strengthen community bonds. Blinco notes that this time-honoured ritual allows Filipinos to escape daily struggles, reconnect with their roots, and collectively remember their past. As an artist, she herself "gathers" time, colours, and memories through painting, transforming these festive and personal feelings into culinary representations.

Documentary-style photographer Ana Koch explores the emotional complexities of cultural inheritance and colonial history through a deeply personal lens. Her work centres on the empanada, a Filipino food symbolising both joyful community and a burdened past. Koch's work begins with the bittersweet act of preparing her grandmother's recipe, which she then intentionally destroys, documenting the smashing and discarding of the food. This act serves as a powerful metaphor for grief and a personal rebellion against the burdens of history. By using her restored childhood camera, an act of reclamation in itself, Koch reclaims her own narrative. Her photographs capture not just the physical remnants of the empanadas but the invisible weight of inherited identity, highlighting the power of choosing what to carry forward and what to leave behind.

Althier Alianza reflects their fluid identity as a queer, Filipino immigrant through an evolving creative process. Working across mixed media, photography, and graphic design, they build layers of visual narrative to deconstruct and re-contextualise their observations. Their current work on Philippine Fiestas aims to unmask how celebrations can conceal deeper, unspoken truths about family dynamics and societal structures. By presenting these juxtapositions, Alianza encourages viewers to question what lies beneath the surface and engage with the work on a profound level.



The imperfect memory of memory part 3, Maui Mauricio, 2025

Exploring the fragile nature of memory for Filipinos living abroad, Maui Mauricio's piece uses an AI image-to-video generator to create a series of looped animations from photographs of fellow USAP members. The images gradually degrade and distort as the output of each animation becomes the input for the next. This digital decay serves as a metaphor for how human memory fades and becomes imperfect over time, particularly when separated from home. Mauricio's work also critiques the biases within AI technology, questioning whether these systems, often trained on Western datasets, can accurately represent minority identities. He fears that the unique features of Filipino culture might be "flattened or even lost" in this new, algorithm-driven landscape. Ultimately, the work is a meditation on the act of remembering and the fear of forgetting.

Clai Pasion, a multidisciplinary artist and musician, draws from her immersive experiences with the indigenous peoples of Southern Philippines- Maguindanaon, Tboli, and B'laan. She explores traditions and collective memory in her project, "Echoes from the Past", viewing her work as a "weaving of memory," honouring the past whilst acknowledging the present using traditional instruments like the Kulintang, Saronay, and Agung. She sees them as embodiments of place, memory, and identity, and playing them connects her to ancestors. By incorporating contemporary instruments like drums, she creates a bridge between generations. Her music is an offering and a celebration of resilience, aiming to transport her audience through time and space and reminding them that understanding the past is key to becoming whole in the present.



Dayalogo, 2025 , Michelle Kenney



Himay, 2025, Michelle Kenney

Michelle Kenney, cultural leader and community organiser, explores the profound act of gathering as a means of connecting with nature, ancestry, and community. Her work is a three-part journey that begins with introspection captured in a self-filmed, *Dayalago*, (dialogue), which is about preserving and changing family recipes using vegetables she grows herself, symbolising her journey of acculturation. The second film *Hagpat* (sort) captures her Philippine home village immersion with women, gathering, sorting, cooking in their community garden. She highlights the importance of communal bonds, dialogue and reciprocity to nature.

The trilogy culminates in a participatory performance called "12 confessions," where women are invited to share their deepest thoughts, an act designed to reclaim spaces of confession, vulnerability and foster authentic connection whilst sorting together her home-grown vegetables (an act from hagpat). Ultimately, Kenney's work aims to "decolonise the fiesta" by moving beyond traditional gatherings to explore the true essence of connection and "collective effervescence" in a village-like space where all perspectives, stories, wisdom are held.

The residency will culminate in MAGDIWANG, meaning to celebrate, a vibrant closing event showcasing the works created. *Magdiwang* also alludes to the significant revolutionary organisation that liberated the Philippines from Spanish occupation. Instead of *Pagdiriwang* (Celebration), *Gathered Time* intently embraces the titular closing event *Magdiwang* as a radical act of invitation.

Collectively, these artistic expressions will enrich, complicate, and deepen understandings of the Filipino fiesta, cultivating a space for the community to gather and connect through shared experiences of music, dance, food, and art.

At the heart of *Gathered Time* is the attempt to rediscover and reframe the fiesta. Remembering that in pre-colonial Philippines, communal activities were deeply tied to important life events and natural cycles, such as rites of passage, planting, harvesting, and rituals for healing and rain. Villagers gathered because they have something to share together. This exhibition aspires to bring it home to the people, the bids we make to connect, to commune, to gather, to nurture the deepest threads that weaves communal solidarity.

Essay by Michelle Kenney.





Echoes from the past, Clai Pasion, 2025