

BABAE!

18 Fierce
and Fearless
Filipinas



Profiles by
Agay Llanera

Portraits by
**Abi Dionisio, Lui Gonzales,
and Nina Garibay**



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INTRODUCTION

In many cultures, including the Philippines', 18 is the age of transitioning to adulthood. Eighteen is also the number of women we have featured in this book—perhaps, to symbolize a coming of age when we as a society appreciate the role of Filipinas in history, a time to begin celebrating their unique grit and smarts in leading and shaping our country.

In truth, Pinay power is no stranger to our ancestors. In pre-colonial times, Filipino women were considered partners and equals. For instance, the babaylans—the community healers and ritual-keepers, roles which were reserved for women—enjoyed the same status as the datos.

We invite you to read our 18 colorful vignettes on some of the most impactful Filipino women, accompanied by 18 inspiring paintings by three Filipina artists. Once again, we remember (and never forget) that Filipinas are essential partners in national and historical development. They have influenced various fields, including medicine, culture, and public service among many others. Their relentless passion and love for the country continue to benefit our citizens to this day.




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COURAGE and REVOLUTION



Art by
Abi Dionisio

1731-1763

Gabriela Silang

First Female Leader of the Philippine Revolution

We often read or hear about Gabriela Silang in relation to her husband, but her merits as a revolutionary leader truly stand on their own.

Maria Josefa Gabriela Cariño was born in Vigan, Ilocos Sur after almost two centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Her mother was part of the Itneg, a cultural community that inhabited the mountains of Abra. During the early part of her childhood, Gabriela lived in her mother's village, but was later taken by her father, said to be a trader who shipped goods from Vigan to Abra.

Gabriela was placed in the church convent under the care of the town's parish priest, Father Tomas Millan. At 20 years old, she married not by choice, but to fulfill her father's wish for her to be financially stable. Gabriela's first husband was an old widower, who died a few years after their marriage.

Because of her inherited wealth, Gabriela had many suitors. After three years, she ended her widowhood by marrying Diego Silang. As Gabriela's husband, Diego successfully banished the oppressive Spanish rule from Vigan and established a government run by Filipinos. But after only four months, he was killed by two traitor friends. Where Diego's story ended, Gabriela's greatness began.

Before Diego's death, Gabriela stayed out of the spotlight, playing the role of her

husband's confidant and advisor. Having escaped her husband's assassination, she made the biggest decision of her life: to take over the rebellion. She blazed in her new task of leading a revolution at a time when women were considered the weaker sex.

To gather troops, she returned to her mother's mountain village with Diego's most trusted men. There, she raised an army. They first arrived at Gabriela's hometown, Santa in Vigan, where they drove out the enemies. In Cabugao where her husband first tasted victory, Gabriela built a fortress for her band. Here, the 6,000-strong Spanish force used firearms to defeat the mountain fighters who weren't used to battling in the plains. Once again, Gabriela and her men retreated to the mountains.

Gabriela did not give up. She raised a fresh army and this time, advanced toward the main city—Vigan. The Spanish got wind of her plans and Father Millan, by then the city's governor, readied 300 archers for the rebels' arrival. Before entering the walled city, Gabriela set fire to the homes of the elites and leaders.

Gabriela has been immortalized with an image of her riding on horseback into Vigan in her baro't saya. Her brows are furrowed, bolo raised, mouth open in a fierce battle cry. But it was also at this pivotal moment when arrows, cannon balls, and gunfire

rained down on her army. The few who survived from her troop fled back to the mountains.

The Spaniards pursued Gabriela. After a long mountain chase, they captured Gabriela and her followers. They brought her to Vigan's central plaza. After Gabriela was forced to watch the torture and execution of her soldiers, she was hanged from the scaffold for everyone to see.

Her leadership lasted four months, but to this day, her name remains synonymous with great strength and courage. Her story has become a wellspring of inspiration which generations of Filipinas continue to draw from.



Resources:

- "Silang, Gabriela 1731-1763" (Encyclopedia.com)
- "Gabriela Silang Facts and Worksheets" (kidsconnect.com)

1812-1919

Melchora Aquino

Mother of the Philippine Revolution

Born Melchora Aquino, the hero was given her famous moniker "Tandang Sora" by Andres Bonifacio, the Katipunan Supremo himself. While it is true that "tanda" means old—understandable since Melchora, nicknamed Sora, joined the revolution at the ripe age of eighty-four—the title was meant as an honorific.

The one actual photo of Melchora floating around the internet shows her as a grandmother, silver hair pulled back in a bun, unsmiling as she looked straight at the camera. But what Filipinos often do not know was that in Melchora's youth, she was known for her beauty and singing talent. She regularly sang in church and in local events. During the annual Santacruzán, she was often chosen to take on the most prestigious role of all—the Reyna Elena.

She married Fulgencio Ramos, the cabeza de barangay, a prestigious title for Filipinos during the Spanish rule. Together, they raised six children. But when their youngest was only seven, her husband died.

Thankfully, Melchora inherited farmland from her parents. She managed her farm, which enabled her to pay for her children's education. She was also a respected *hermana mayor*, organizing fiestas and town events.

When the Philippine revolution erupted in 1896, Melchora was more than halfway into her eighty-fourth year. But unlike most octogenarians who would rather retire, Melchora displayed vigor that would put people half her age to shame. Instead of chastising her son, Juan Ramos, who was involved in the Katipunan, Melchora embraced the movement. She literally opened her doors to the revolutionaries, her home becoming the venue for the Katipuneros' secret meetings. Bonifacio was drawn to her spunk and motherliness, and as a result, often confided in her.

Melchora not only housed and fed soldiers, but she also attended to those wounded and sick. Her in-kind contribution to the revolution amounted to around 100 cavans of rice and at least ten carabaos.

On August 23, 1896, the revolutionaries met in Juan's home in Pugad Lawin (now known as Bahay Toro in Quezon City) where they engaged in the historical moment of ripping their cedulas. Three days later, about a thousand rebels convened in Melchora's vast yard.

The Spanish authorities got wind of the old woman's activity. On August 29, Spanish authorities arrested Melchora in her home. Perhaps the conquistadores thought that it would be easy to intimidate a frail-looking

woman into revealing the Katipunán's secrets. They brought her to the Bilibid Prison, where she was extensively threatened and interrogated. But Melchora's spirit would not be crushed; she held her ground and refused to betray her comrades.

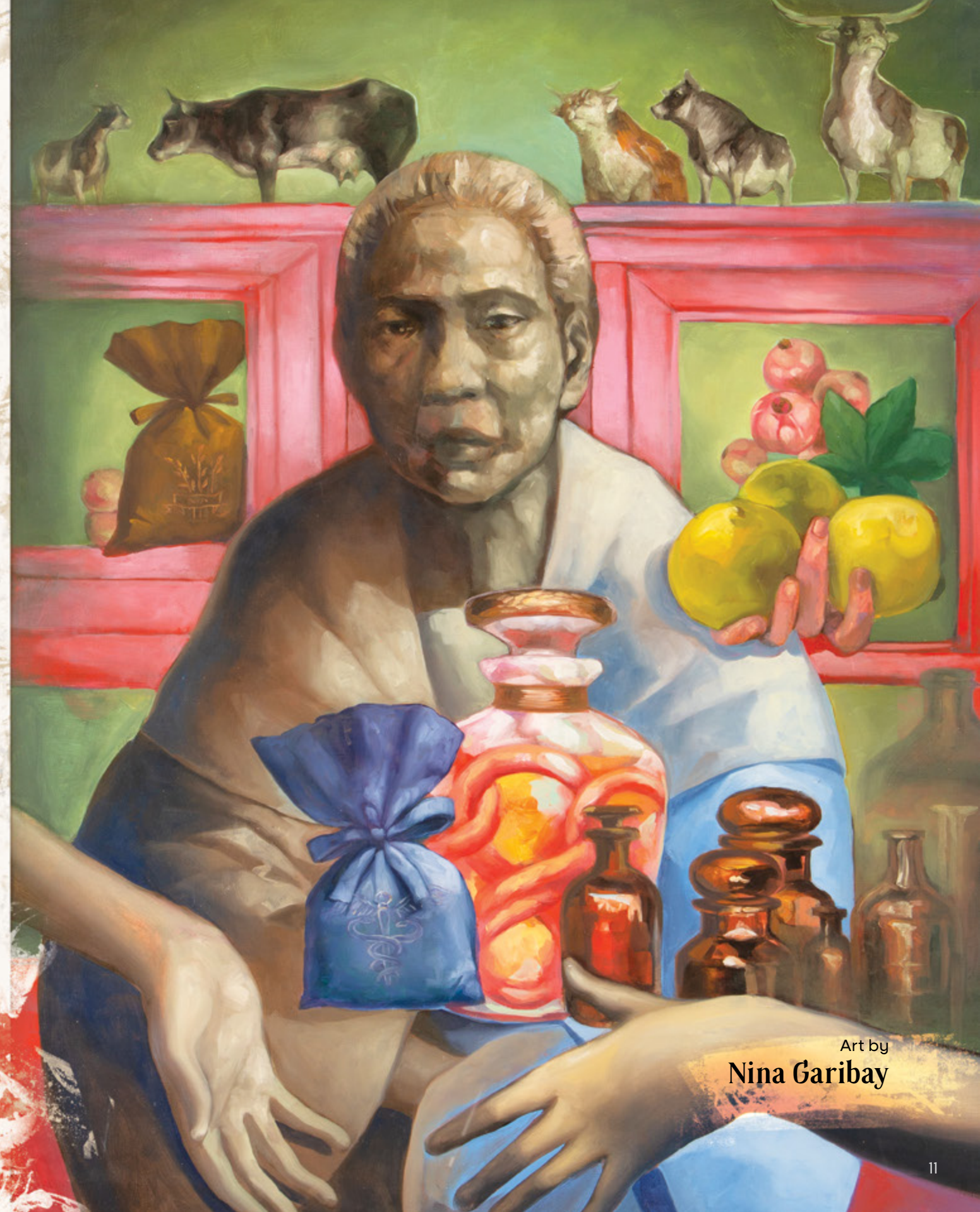
Giving up on their scare tactics, the Spaniards exiled her to Guam, where she served as a household helper. It took 7 years for her to be allowed to leave the don's home, this time back to her motherland. The year was 1903, and the Spanish had finally left the Philippines. Melchora was 91.

Former Katipuneros, her family, and friends gave her a heroine's welcome. The United States government offered Melchora money to make up for all that she went through. But the elderly refused, saying that it was enough for her to have helped regain the country's freedom. Six years later, at the age of 107, she passed away in her daughter's house—quietly and unobtrusively, in the same way she helped fuel a successful revolution.



Resources:

- "Melchora Aquino: The Old Lady the Spaniards Couldn't Break" (Mario Alvaro Limos, Esquire Magazine • August 26, 2019)
- "The Tandang Sora Bicentennial" (Official Gazette)



Art by
Nina Garibay



Art by
Nina Garibay

1893-1945

Maria Orosa

War Heroine and Nutritionist

The name Maria Orosa is familiar as a street in Malate, Manila. But most of us are clueless about the woman it is named after. In contrast, mention “banana ketchup” to any Filipino, and instantly, the condiment’s distinct sweet flavor comes alive in our memories. So, as the inventor of banana ketchup, shouldn’t Maria Orosa be a household name as well?

In fact, this culinary invention was only one of the 700 recipes Maria concocted over her lifetime. All her ingredients were locally sourced—proof of her strong nationalism. The banana ketchup made with mashed saba bananas, vinegar, brown sugar, and seasoning was her rebellion against the American-invented tomato ketchup. For her, developing these recipes was a fight for national independence.

Born in Taal in Batangas, Maria is no stranger to the resistance movement. Her father fought under Emilio Aguinaldo’s group against the Spanish, then the Americans. Because Mr. Orosa was a ship captain, he was able to smuggle Filipino troops and supplies into strategic areas. For a time, he was even detained as a political prisoner. He went on to become a member of the Philippine delegation in France and America that pushed for national independence.

While studying at the University of the Philippines, Maria showed exemplary talent

for science. Because of this, the government flew her to Seattle to learn pharmaceutical chemistry. Maria completed two more degrees—food chemistry in 1918, and her master’s in pharmacy three years later.

While studying, she made ends meet by working as a household helper, in a salmon cannery in Alaska, and as an assistant to the dean of Washington University’s pharmacy department. The knowledge she earned in school and in her jobs allowed her to land an assistant chemist position after graduation.

In 1922, she returned to the Philippines and led the organic chemistry section of the Bureau of Science, and later worked at the Bureau of Plant and Industry. Still, she was sent to different countries like Germany and Italy to study the latest food technologies. Her knowledge resulted in culinary innovations such as calamansi juice powder, frozen and canned mangoes, cassava flour, and pineapple vinegar. She also made insecticide from tobacco and invented the palayok oven, an earthen pot fitted with a metallic sheet and heated above a wood-fired stove. This allowed baking without electricity. Maria also taught culinary techniques and recipes in the barrios to address malnutrition and food security issues.

But it was decades later during the Japanese occupation when Maria was able

to use her recipes as weapons. Instead of fleeing with her family to the province, Maria stayed in the capital and joined the Marking guerillas. With the rank of captain, she formulated nutrient-rich foods such as the Soyalac drink made from soybeans, and Tiki-Tiki cookies from rice bran flour. These she fed to the Philippine troops and smuggled through hollow bamboo into prison camps in the University of Santo Tomas, keeping the Filipino and American captives alive throughout the war.

When the US bombed Manila in 1945, Maria was hit by shrapnel while working at her laboratory at the Bureau of Plant and Industry. One of the chemists rushed her to the nearby Malate Remedios Hospital. Sadly, while Maria was being treated, another shelling struck the building, killing more than 70 people in the hospital. Maria was one of them.

Still, her inventions live on in the kitchen and on our plate. The fact that we are likely to know banana ketchup brands more than Maria Orosa's deeds is a hard pill to swallow. But now that you know her story, you know whom to thank each time you dip fried food in our national ketchup.



Resources:

- "Freedom Fighter Maria Y. Orosa and Her Life-Saving "Darak" Cookies" (Norma Chikiamco, Philippine Daily Inquirer • September 13, 2018)
- "9 Kickass Women in Philippine History You've Never Heard of" (FilipiKnow.net)

1906-1996 or -1997

Nieves Fernandez

School Teacher by Day, Silent Killer by Night

Nieves Fernandez, a school teacher in Tacloban in Leyte, was used to living a quiet, nondescript life. Between teaching her pupils and being a wife, she managed a small business to make ends meet. But when the Japanese stormed Leyte in 1942, months after taking over Manila, her world turned upside down.

In a Lewiston Daily Sun article published in the US, Nieves described the imperialists, "They took everything they wanted. They had ways of persuading, like giving you scalding hot baths and freezing cold baths alternately, with never a rest, never any food, never any water except the soapy water in the baths." The Japanese soldiers also forcefully took women as sex slaves and called them "comfort women."

The Japanese took over Nieves's business, but when they began to threaten her students, the teacher fought back. She did this in secret, in a black dress while staking out the forest at night, her bare feet barely making a sound on the bare earth. In the dark, she would patiently wait, armed with a bolo and a homemade gun crafted from a gas pipe. Whenever a Japanese soldier crossed her line of vision, the teacher would fall upon him, literally going for the jugular. She killed by twisting the bolo through the soft spot below the earlobe and driving it upward to slash through the blood vessels

and internal jugular connected to the brain. This way, the victim would die instantly before making a sound. This swift and effective technique earned Nieves the name "The Silent Killer."

"Good teachers teach. Great teachers inspire," goes a famous quote. Through her nocturnal acts, Nieves inspired the people in her hometown to rise against the abusive settlers. Eventually, she was able to gather a 110-strong guerilla force under her command. Nieves's men called her "captain" and followed her technique in felling the foreign troops. In time, Captain Nieves became so notorious that the Japanese put a ₱10,000-bounty on her head, hoping that one of her men would betray her—but to no avail.

Many present-day Filipinos think that the Americans' 1944 Leyte landing headed by General Douglas MacArthur signaled the beginning of the end for the Japanese. But the truth was that the Americans' victory was largely due to the work of active guerilla groups like Nieves's who had already weakened Japanese forces. By that time, Nieves's small army had already freed villages and many Filipinos including comfort women. Through raids and sabotages, the Filipino rebel armies made life very inconvenient for the Japanese.

“That was when they called me Captain Nieves Fernandez,” said a 38-year-old Nieves during the interview with a US daily. “Now I’m just Miss Fernandez.” After her brief stint in the spotlight, Nieves faded into obscurity. Nothing more was written about her; even the exact year of her death is unknown. But one thing remains certain: she was a hero on all fronts—in the classroom, in the jungle at night, and in front of a hundred men, rising to turn the tides against the oppressors.



Resources:

- “The Untold Story of ‘Ms. Fernandez,’ the School Teacher Who Killed 200 Japanese in WWII” (Mario Alvaro Limos, Esquire Magazine • September 15, 2020)
- “School-Ma’am Led Guerrillas on Leyte” (The Lewiston Daily Sun • November 3, 1944)



Art by
Abi Dionisio



Art by
Abi Dionisio

1917-1991

Carmen Rosales

Silver Screen Star and Guerilla Soldier

Januaria Constantino Keller, a young wife, mother, and dressmaker, took her first step toward stardom as a radio singer. In the public eye, she was known as Carmen Rosales, her last name derived from the Pangasinan town she hailed from. In 1938, she made her silver screen debut in *Mahiwagang Binibini (Ang Kiri)* as a supporting actress. Just a year later, she snagged her first starring role in *Arimunding-munding*.

Soon, Carmen enjoyed a steady stream of Sampaguita Pictures projects opposite matinee idol Rogelio dela Rosa. In 1941, while Japanese troops advanced to Manila, Carmen's movie, *Lolita*, were on theater signboards.

The Japanese occupation caused hundreds and thousands of deaths among Filipinos. One of these tragic deaths was of Carmen's husband, a radio personality who opposed the Japanese. Instead of mourning quietly, Carmen enlisted in the infamous rebel group, HUKBALAHAP (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon), as a guerilla fighter.

Trading her glamorous look for a fake mustache and .45 caliber gun, Carmen went all over CALABARZON to take part in enemy encounters. In Santa Rosa in Laguna, she was said to have proven her sharpshooting

skills when she struck down a makapili, a Japanese collaborator.

Later, the Japanese caught up with Carmen. At the time, the Japanese screened propaganda films that were largely ignored by Filipinos. Hoping to capture the Filipinos' hearts, the Japanese persuaded Carmen to star in a movie they would produce—which meant they asked Carmen to choose between doing the project and death. In 1944, she top-billed in the romance movie *Tatlong Maria*, written by a Japanese screenwriter and based on a novel by Jose Esperanza Cruz.

With the combined effort of the armies from the Philippine Commonwealth, Allied Forces, U.S., and the Filipino guerillas, the Japanese formally surrendered in 1945. Carmen resumed her show business career, starring in a slew of films including *Gerilya* (1946), which featured her life as a guerilla fighter. At one point, the box-office queen became the country's highest-paid movie star and was hailed as the "Queen of Philippine Cinema." A FAMAS Best Actress winner, Carmen gracefully retired from the movies in 1965, but she will be forever remembered for her real-life role in helping secure the country's freedom.



Resources:

- "A Warrior is Born: How Carmen Rosales, The Queen of Philippine Cinema, Became a Guerilla Fighter and Sharpshooter" (Anri Ichimura, Esquire Magazine • March 3, 2020)

1948-1976

Maria Lorena Barros

Feminist Leader and Activist

Her playful nicknames like Laurie, Lorie, and Wowie are proof of her endearment to many. But when Lorena Barros went to the mountains to join and lead rebel soldiers, her pseudonyms became more dramatic—Luningning, Solita, and Ligaya among others. And for those whose lives Lorena had touched, her names were as many as her roles as an inspiring leader, a sensitive writer, and a relentless warrior.

Born in Baguio City, Maria Lorena Barros was said to have gotten her activism from her mother, a messenger for the HUKBALAHAP (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon) during the Japanese occupation. Lorena's eyes were opened early to poverty, often asking her mother during regular visits to Quiapo Church why there were a lot of beggars. The young girl wanted to find out what and how the poor were eating. She would ask her mother these questions: What's the government doing for them? Can't we do anything for them?

When Lorena was a scholar at the University of the Philippines in the mid-1960s, many were rebelling against the government due to worsening poverty, inflation, unfair labor practices, and the state's abuse of power. Lorena joined a youth activist group that held demonstrations in front of Malacañang. She immersed herself in the lives of laborers and the poor.

As part of the fight against the government's oppressive ways, Lorena also focused on promoting gender equality. In 1970, she co-founded MAKIBAKA (Malayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan) to promote women's rights. As its first chair, Lorena was instrumental in boosting MAKIBAKA's reach throughout the country. Mothers and young women who worked in factories and studied in all-girls' schools took to the streets, chanting against the patriarchy and social inequality. As a result, MAKIBAKA became the country's first exclusive women's group to campaign for national democracy.

Lorena was said to be a charismatic speaker, easily bonding with people of different backgrounds. After graduating magna cum laude, she taught at UP while leading rallies. Her skill in verbal communication carried over to her writing. From writing poems as a child and being an editor for her high school paper, she moved on to being a contributor to the Philippine Collegian and president of the UP Writers Club.

Her poetry reflected her journey toward adulthood, digging deep into the Filipina's revolutionary role, the importance of armed struggle to attain national freedom, and the plight of the masses.

"The new Filipina is first and foremost, a militant," Lorena wrote in a 1971 article



Art by
Lui Gonzales

entitled “Liberated Women II.” In the same year, Marcos suspended the writ of habeas corpus, charging Lorena, along with other student activists, with subversion. MAKIBAKA went underground.

Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. To avoid arrest, Lorena escaped to the countryside where the NPA (New People’s Army) resided. There, she married a guerrilla fighter and former professor and gave birth to a son. A year later, Lorena was sent to Bicol to be a political instructor. But it took government forces only a few months to track her down. From a local precinct, she was transferred to a military camp in Laguna, and finally to the Ipil Rehabilitation Center in Fort Bonifacio.

Even during captivity, Lorena refused to be silent. She joined other prisoners in staging hunger strikes to call for their release. She then learned that her husband had defected to the government side. Despite her husband’s betrayal, Lorena was determined to continue fighting for the cause. Boosting the morale of her fellow detainees, she urged them to continue their hunger strike. In 1974, she successfully made a bold escape along with other prisoners.

The palace offered ₱35,000 as a reward for her arrest and Lorena rejoined the underground movement, continuing to write poetry and essays that detailed the

Marcoses’ abusive ways. In one letter to a colleague, she recounted how she led the opening of a guerrilla zone in Southern Tagalog.

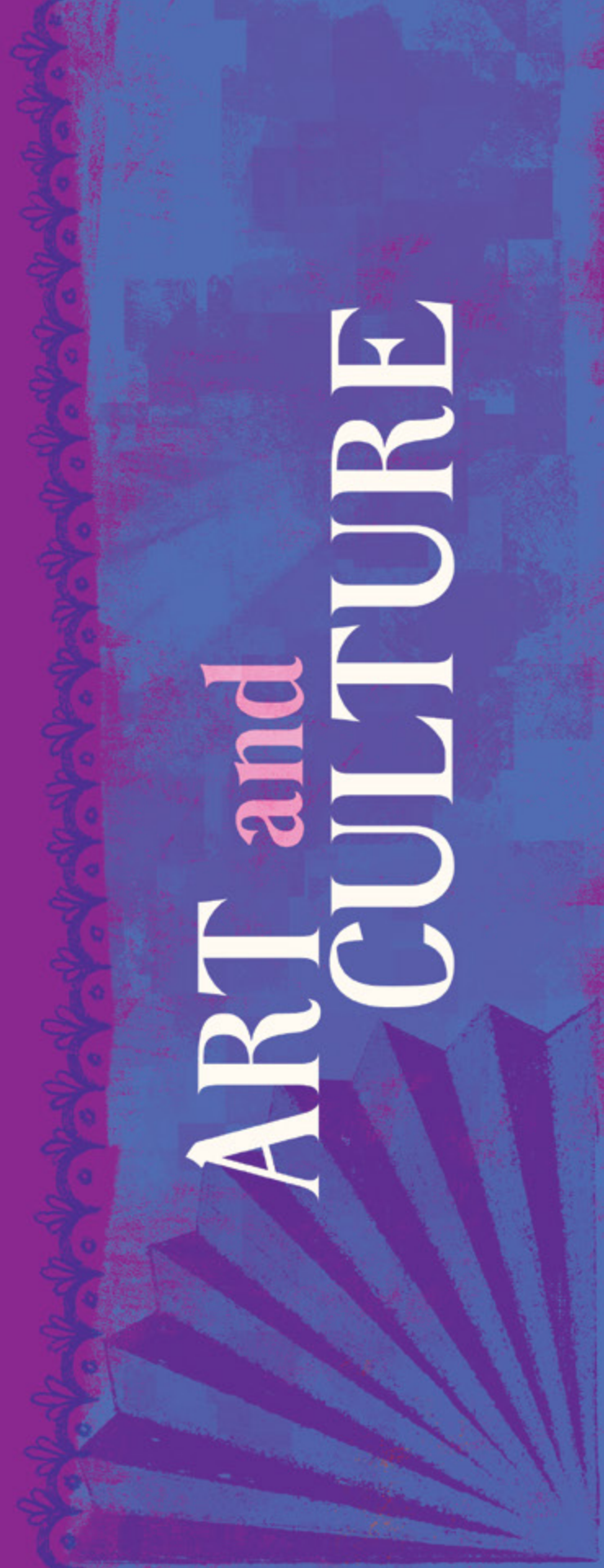
But the government military was closing in, driving the rebels to often change headquarters. Many NPA members were captured, tortured, and killed. On March 23, 1976, less than a week after Lorena’s twenty-eighth birthday, the military discovered her hiding place in Quezon. Just before morning broke, the regime’s soldiers closed in on Lorena, fatally wounding her. She was promised medical care in exchange for rebel information, but Lorena refused. She was shot in the nape, and instantly died.

Her wake was held at the UP Campus, with friends and family singing revolutionary songs and reading their tributes. Her written words echo in our consciousness today: “The new Filipina... is a woman who has discovered the exalting realm of responsibility, a woman fully engaged in the making of history... No longer is she a woman-for-marriage, but more and more a woman-for-action.”



Resources:

- “Ang Panulaan ni Maria Lorena Barros” (Pauline Mari F. Hernando, Philippine Humanities Review, Vol 15, No 2 • 2013
- “14 Amazing Filipina Heroines You Don’t Know but Should” (FilipiKnow.net, 2022)



ART and CULTURE



Art by
Lui Gonzales

1805-1860

Remigia Talusan

Founder of First Daily Newspaper and First Filipina Publisher

Progress and book publishing go together.

When the Manila port opened to international trade in the 1830s, the local industries of rice, sugar, and tobacco boomed. This led to the prosperity of mostly Chinese mestizos, who then had more opportunities for creative pursuits. This was also true for the women from the noble class, who were able to afford house help.

As the local economy improved, the appeals for book printing from the Archdiocese of Manila rose significantly. Back then, printing a book first required a permit from the Church. A book went through the prelate, a censorship body, and the archbishop before it was published.

At the time, a book publisher financed and printed the books. The most famous book publisher then was Don Candido Lopez, the director of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Press. Don Lopez held the honor of publishing the first Filipina author, Doña Luisa Gonzaga de Leon. Her book, *Ejercicio Cotidiano*, contained daily Spanish prayers translated into Kapampangan.

A year after Don Candido passed away in 1845, his widow, Doña Remigia Salazar began her own publishing business. This courageous move earned her the prestige of being the first woman to own and operate

a printing press in Manila. Other women followed in her footsteps, but only Doña Remigia's publishing business flourished, perhaps because she was also a writer.

Like her predecessor Doña Luisa, Doña Remigio translated Spanish prayers, which she published as her first book, *Novena de Santo Tomas de Villanueva en Idioma Panayano*. In only her first year, she published seven books by other authors. She also began publishing *La Esperanza*, the country's first daily newspaper. She outsourced the newspaper's printing from Don Miguel Sanchez, who was the most reputable printer during that era. The newspaper ran from 1846 to 1850. Doña Remigia retired after that and passed away a decade later.

Not much was written about Doña Remigia. Historians say she came from the Tagalog region. In 1849, when the governor-general ordered for surnames to be organized, Doña Remigia decided to drop her Spanish-sounding family name in favor of the local name "Talusan." Hence, succeeding records stated her name as Doña Remigia Talusan. This decision and her unwavering support for Filipino authors showed her strong patriotism.



Resources:

- "The Flowering Pen: Filipino Women Writers and Publishers during the Spanish Period, 1590-1898, A Preliminary Survey" (Luciano P. R. Santiago, *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 4, The Book • 2003)

1849-1884

Leona Florentino

First Internationally Acclaimed Filipina Poet

Nowadays, young people look for the “feels” and “hugot” in appreciating art and media. But back in the mid-nineteenth century, expressing raw and powerful emotions about love and “pagkasawi” was taboo.

Such were the themes penned by poet Leona Florentino, who hailed from Vigan, Ilocos Sur. She started writing poems at ten. Her own writing journey was fraught with obstacles, mainly because she lived in a patriarchal society. Because of her gender, she was denied a university education despite her promising talent. Her Spanish and Ilocano love poems, which exuded eroticism, feminism—and possibly, lesbianism— were frowned upon. In fact, her work became so controversial that it affected her marriage.

It was said that her husband, who was once the alcalde mayor of Ilocos, sent her away because of her poetry. She married the politician at fourteen and bore five children, including labor activist Isabelo de los Reyes, dubbed as “The Father of Philippine Folklore.”

Leona did not live long enough to witness her son’s success.

Leona died in exile at only 35 years old. But it was after her death when she was finally given due recognition—this time, in foreign soil. In 1887, her poems were exhibited at the Exposicion General de Filipinas in Madrid. Two years later, the Internacional Exposicion in Paris showcased her work. These events brought honor not only to Leonor but also the country. In the same year, 22 of her poems were included in the Encyclopedie Internationale des Oeuvres des Femmes (International Encyclopedia of Women’s Works)—the first time such an honor was bestowed on a Filipina.

Her monument proudly stands in Vigan, a tribute to a woman whose lyrical and fearless words were truly ahead of her time.



Resources:

- "A Threshold of Flowers: Public and Private Eroticism in the Poems of Leona Florentino" (Sarah Blanton, MA thesis, University of North Carolina • 2016)
- "Leona Florentino: Mother of Filipina poetry" (Ruth Elynia Mabanglo, Philippines Graphic • November 2, 2020)



Art by
Lui Gonzales



Art by
Abi Dionisio

1867-1939

Pelagia Mendoza

First Recognized Filipina Sculptor

Art is a universal language, which is why the Spaniards used it to spread Catholicism when they arrived in the Philippines. The language barrier dissipated when Filipinos beheld the breathtaking images of saints, Mother Mary, and Jesus Christ. Through wood carvings, paintings, and engravings, the conquistadores were able to expound on the components of the Catholic faith.

Filipinos who have long been practicing pottery began using these religious images as inspirations for their sculptures. The friars encouraged this by commissioning the sculptors to make art for the churches. This explained why Philippine art during those years were mostly religious in nature.

This practice went on for hundreds of years. With the flourishing of international trade in the nineteenth century, indios who enjoyed a financial upgrade were able to send their children to Europe to study. These young people grew up and were called ilustrados whose eyes were opened to foreign art. With their wealth, they dictated the Philippine art scene by commissioning new works which were no longer religious.

Filipino artists realized the need for formal training to create world-class art. The go-to school back then was the Escuela de Dibujo y Pintura, which included sculpture in its curriculum Pintura in 1879. Up until 1889, the school accepted only male students.

The academy changed its mind when it saw 22-year-old Pelagia Mendoza's astounding potential as a sculptor. Right there and then, the escuela changed its rules, and accepted Pelagia as a student. At that moment, two firsts happened—Pelagia being the first female student in the school and the school becoming the first co-educational institution during Spanish rule.

Born in Pateros, Pelagia had already been artistic as a child, sketching, embroidering, and making small models. Her encouraging parents facilitated her entry into the Escuela de Dibujo. There, she formalized her artistic training, and ended up with two courses—painting and sculpture. In sculpture, she graduated with the highest honors.

Her most famous work is a sculpture of Christopher Columbus entitled "Colon" in 1892. It was entered in a Spanish government-sponsored contest celebrating the Italian explorer's 400th anniversary of "discovering America." Among all the entries—some from foreign sculptors—Pelagia's bust was crowned as the winner. The following year, the same sculpture was entered at the World's Columbian Exposition where it won second prize.

This victory was not only Pelagia's but also of female artists'. Previously, Filipinas' artworks were considered accessories for their homes. They were considered having no value and

were given away as gifts. Pelagia's win signaled a new era for Filipina artists.

However, Pelagia's sculpting career ground to a halt when she married fellow artist Crispulo Zamora, her classmate at the escuela. Instead of sculpting, Pelagia focused on Crispulo's engraving business, which he inherited from his father. Crispulo Zamora & Sons' excellent workmanship became known, the company often commissioned to craft military awards and tokens for foreign officials.

When Crispulo died, Pelagia headed the business with the help of their seven children. She upscaled her work through patterns and technologies she picked up from her travels in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. Her research led to new engraving and metalwork techniques. As a result, Crispulo Zamora & Sons garnered both local and international awards.

But Pelagia will always be famous for her sculptures which, sadly, had not survived the World War II bombings.



Resources:

- "Women Artists and Gender Issues in 19th Century Philippines" (Raissa Claire U. Rivera, Review of Women's Studies, Vol 8, No 2 • 1998)

1886-1915

Maria Carpena

First Filipino Recording Artist

Filipinos are known all over the world for their singing talent. The international fame we enjoy today in the musical field can be traced back to the country's first recording artist, Maria Carpena.

Dubbed as "Nightingale of Zarzuela," Maria was born in Santa Rosa, Laguna in the late nineteenth century. One of eight children of a rice farmer and homemaker, Maria showed an intuitive ear for music early on. She often sang in the choir as soprano in her town church.

Eventually, she was sent to the Colegio de Sta. Rosa convent in Intramuros, Manila. Between household duties and embroidering for the nuns, Maria sang as a soloist in the school choir.

At 15 years old, Maria made her public singing debut in a benefit concert at the famous Zorilla Theater, along what we know now as Claro M. Recto Avenue in Manila. She impressed the audience so much that she was commissioned to perform in a zarzuela. This angered her father, who tried to keep her from appearing in theater. But Maria went against his wishes, for which her father disowned her. A year later, she dropped school and got married.

While performing as a soloist at the Biñan Church, she caught the attention of renowned zarzuela writer and director,

Resources:

- "Sta. Rosa, Laguna honors 1st Filipino soprano recording artist" (Saul Pa-a, Philippine News Agency • October 24, 2019)
- "Featured Artist: Maria Carpena" (filipinaslibrary.org.ph, Filipinas Heritage Library)

Severino Reyes, who was part of the audience. Severino asked Maria to star in his latest work, *Minda Mora*. After that, Maria appeared in other famous plays such as *Walang Sugat* and *Lukso ng Dugo*.

Two years later when she was only 18, Maria became a widow with two children. Unfazed, Maria continued life as a single mother, singing in churches and on the stage. In 1908, Governor-General Howard Taft requested her to visit the United States. There, Maria recorded the Filipino folk song *Ang Maya* and other tunes for the Victor Recording Company. This feat earned her the honor as the country's first recording artist.

American anthropologist Henry Otley Beyer was captivated by her voice and described her as a "real nightingale." According to him, when Maria sang in Luneta for about 20,000 people, her voice would carry over all the way to the Manila Hotel.

In 1915, Maria underwent an appendectomy. Due to health issues, she died the same year. She was buried at the La Loma Cemetery in Manila. A street in Quiapo was named after her, while her memorabilia are preserved at the Santa Rosa government museum. These are testaments to Maria's talent and determination, which blazed the trail for future generations of Pinoy musical artists.





Art by
Lui Gonzales

1921-2014

Damiana Eugenio

Mother of Philippine Folklore

Folktales are an important part of our national heritage. The legends, epics, and songs passed on by our ancestors make up our identity and rich history.

American folklorist Dean Fansler and anthropologist Henry Otley Beyer are recognized for first collecting the country's folk tales. But it was a Filipina who significantly added to the collection, elevating it to a scholarly level.

Born in Bulacan, Damiana Eugenio was always passionate about learning. After graduating from Nueva Ecija High School, she relocated to Manila to pursue an economics degree at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. But even after graduating as cum laude, her heart was set on something beyond numbers. She flew to Massachusetts to work on her master's degree in English literature and later, finished her Ph.D. at the University of California.

She returned to the Philippines and taught at the Department of English and Comparative Literature at her alma mater. It was during this time when she started collecting Philippine folk tales. In 1966, her Philippine Proverb Lore was published as part of a UP review. Later, she established the UP Folklore Studies Program. After receiving a grant from the National Research Council, she began an extensive publication of Philippine folklore.

It has been said that men are born hunters while women are foragers. And forage, Damiana did. She collected bits of native literature—both oral and written—on a much wider scale than her American predecessors. Even the beliefs and literature of pre-colonial Filipinos were well-presented in her work, which totaled eight volumes. These include *Philippine Folk Literature: An Anthology*, *The Myths*, *The Legends*, *The Folk Tales*, *The Riddles*, *The Proverbs*, *The Folk Songs*, and *The Epics*.

Damiana's books are the first local folk literature compilation of such magnitude and depth in mass publication. They became precious resources for teachers, students, and academics both here and abroad.

Damiana herself admitted that her task was extremely challenging because our country's folk literature was as scattered as our islands. She pored over magazines, newspapers, and both published and unpublished collections from different regions. Then she grouped them into genres, while striving to represent the different ethno-linguistic groups that comprised our abundant culture.

Because of her comprehensive and professionally presented books, Damiana was rightfully named the "Mother of Philippine Folklore" in 1986. Her work was

cited by the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Manila Critics Circle, and many others. Until now, her anthologies remain bestsellers.

Despite being often attributed as an author, Damiana never considered herself one. In her first anthology volume, she wrote, "Compiling work including editing is scholarly effort, not authorship." A simple quote that speaks volumes about her lifetime spent on academic passion and love for country.



Awit and Corrido

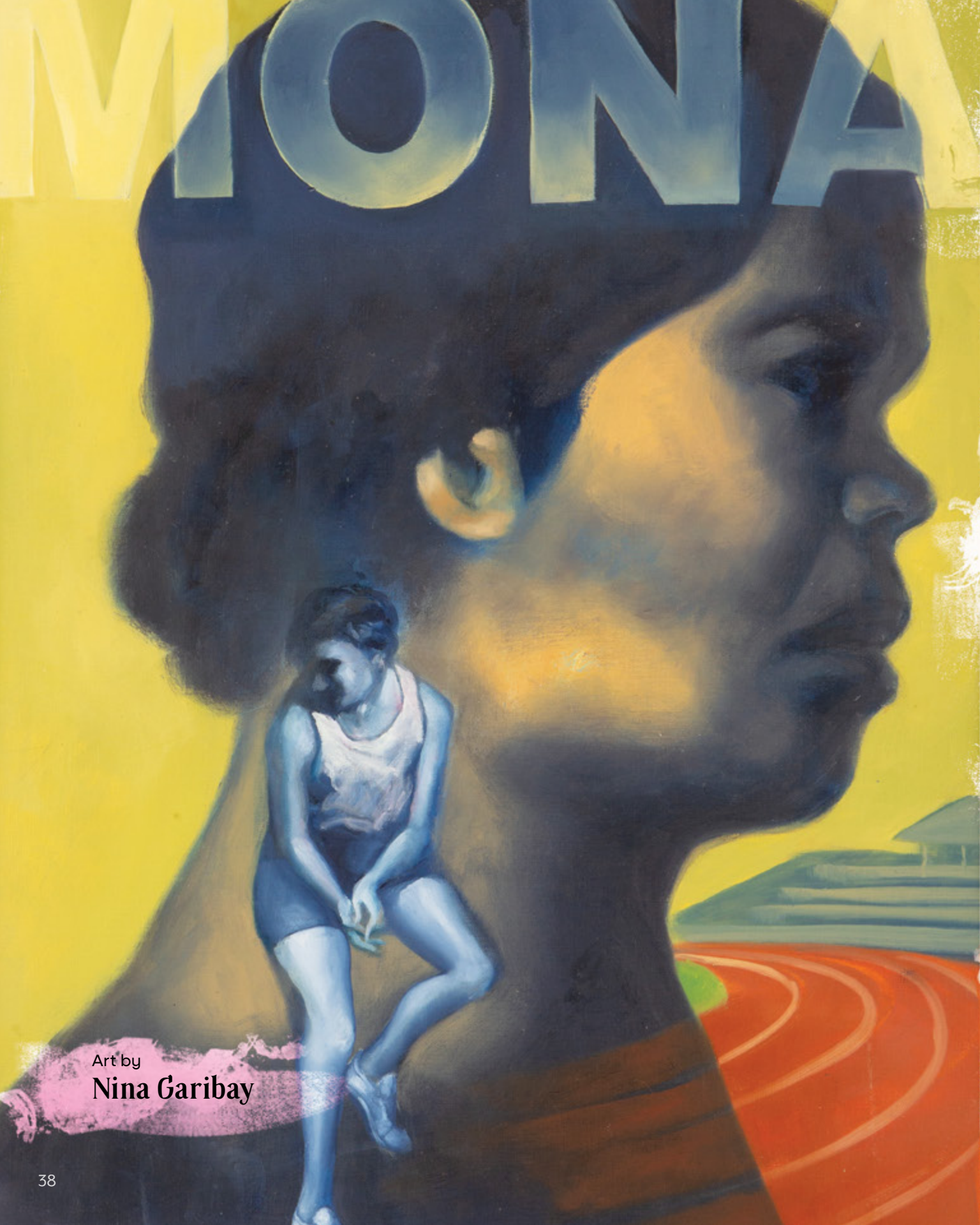
PHILIPPINE
METRICAL
ROMANCES

Resources:

- "Mother of PHL Folklore Damiana L. Eugenio Dies" (Rose-An Jessica Dioquino, GMA News Online • October 13, 2014)
- "Damiana Eugenio, master compiler of Philippine folkloric myths, legends, riddles, and proverbs" (Gerardo P. Sicat, Philippine Star • October 22, 2014)



Art by
Lui Gonzales



Art by
Nina Garibay

1942-2017

Mona Sulaiman

Philippines' First Sprint Star

Asia's fastest woman in the 1960s was a Filipina—Cotabato-bred Mona Sulaiman who was barely out of her teens when she won two gold medals at the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta.

The eldest in a brood of five, Mona was first discovered not through a track meet but a baseball event. While she dashed across the bases, she caught the eye of a representative from the Bureau of Public Schools, who relayed the story of the barefoot fifteen-year-old's lightning sprints to Cotabato officials. This marked the start of Mona's professional athletic career.

Soon, word spread about the stocky young woman who easily outran her competitors. During a school competition in Pangasinan, she caught the eye of a Far Eastern University coach. Mona enrolled in the said university, training while pursuing a management degree. Later, the Philippine track team recruited Mona. In a 1960 national meet, she broke the Philippine record in the 100-meter dash at the Rizal Memorial Stadium. In that same year, Mona represented the country at the Summer Olympics in Italy and made the quarterfinals.

A year later, she shone in the Singapore Open, breaking another national record. But 1962 was her year. At the Jakarta Asian Games, Mona won the gold for both the

100-meter and 200-meter events. The double win would have been enough, but Mona's third gold came in a team event, the 400x100-meter relay. She also won a bronze medal for the women's shotput. Her achievements made her the first Asian to win two sprint gold medals, and the first Filipina to snag three golds in a single event.

In 1964, Mona returned to the Olympics, this time in Tokyo. She did not win a medal, but Mona continued to hold national records, and even gained recognition in the pentathlon.

Mona's tough demeanor and rugged features, coupled with her obvious strength, made competitors question her gender. Though the 1966 Asian Games was supposed to be an exciting time for Asia's sprint star, Mona was battered by controversy. On grounds of her Islamic faith, Mona refused to undergo a gender test. She left the Asian Games village and never looked back. Later, Mona would admit her hurt over the gender allegations.

To secure her income, Mona was said to have taken all sorts of jobs—a checker at an appliance center, an assistant in a film production outfit, and a bar manager. Urged by her friend—actor and producer Jun Aristorenas—Mona appeared in a string of 1970s action films such as *Santa Fe* and

Interpol Malaysia 5. In the 1980s, an accident reportedly injured Mona, preventing her from athletic pursuits.

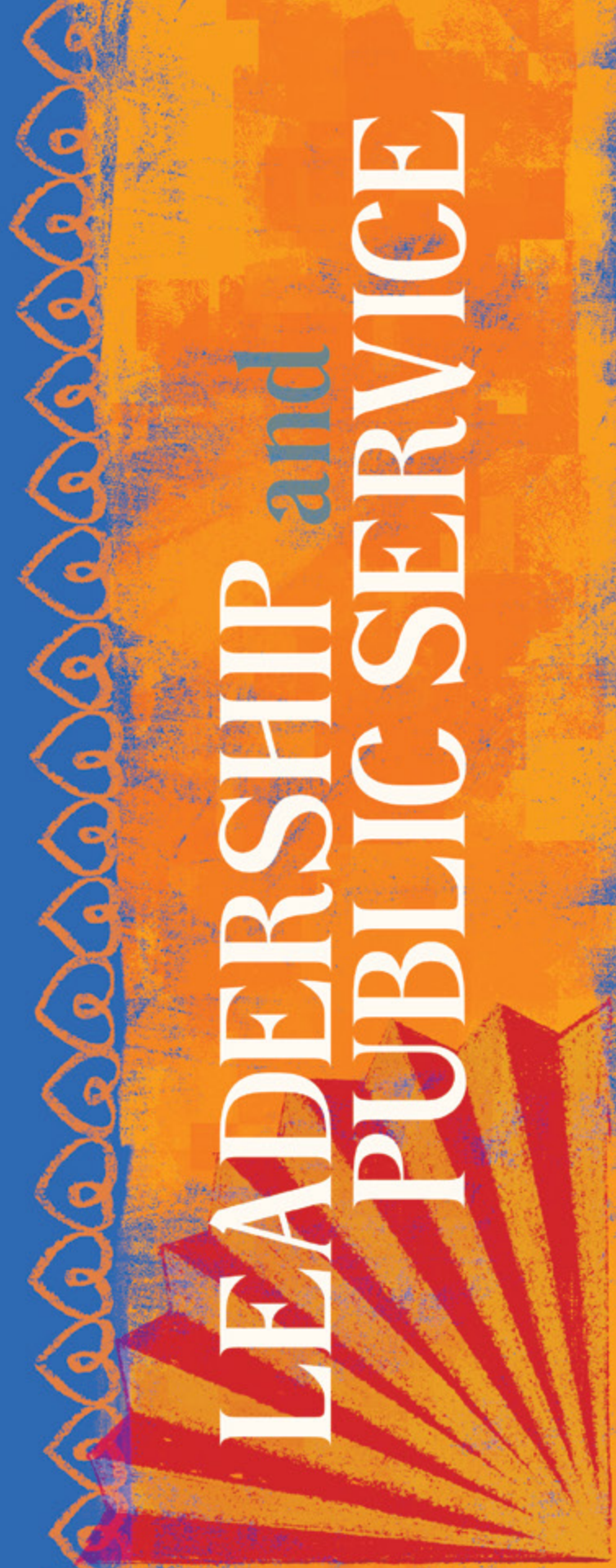
In the 1990s, she made a comeback as a Philippine Sports Commission consultant for the national track and field team. When she was installed in the Philippine Sports Hall of Fame in 2016, Mona was already in a wheelchair and was said to be suffering from diabetes. She quietly lived her twilight years in obscurity, with former colleagues clueless about where she resided. When Mona resurfaced again in the news, it was about her death—as a 75-year-old breathing her last in a hospital just four days before Christmas.



Resources:

- “Remember Mona Sulaiman?” (Marc Anthony Reyes, Philippine Daily Inquirer • October 23, 2016)
- “Mona Sulaiman, Asia’s fastest woman of early ‘60s, dies at 75” (Rappler.com • December 22, 2017)





LEADERSHIP and PUBLIC SERVICE



Art by
Nina Garibay

Tuan Baluca

The Power Behind the Power

“Behind every successful man, there is a strong woman,” goes an old saying. A classic example of this was Basilan-bred Tuan Baluca, who married the Sultan of Sulu at a most opportune time—at least for the sultan.

The wedding took place in 1638, the same year Spanish Governor-General Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera led a force of more than a thousand in 80 vessels to capture Sulu. Historians say that Tuan Baluca’s influence over her sultan-husband was so strong that she basically took charge of the Jolo government—Sulu’s seat of power.

The battle ensued with Corcuera and his army managing to tightly blockade the defenders. Not one of the Sultan’s men could exit the fort—a situation worsened with an outbreak of dysentery. To save her soldiers, Tuan Baluca bravely faced the conquistador to negotiate a peace treaty.

According to a written account of the Jesuit priest Juan de Barrios, the Sultan’s wife arrived in style, sitting on the shoulders of the men who carried her, followed by a female entourage. Tuan Baluca alighted in front of the door that led to Corcuera’s hallway. The Governor-General went out to greet her and led her to a purple cushion, where she gracefully sat down. De Barrios wrote this

about Tuan Baluca: “She responded very courteously to the courtesies of the governor; for the Moro woman was very intelligent, and of great capacity.” Baluca was a natural diplomat, and the treaty was a success. The sultan’s men were allowed to leave the fort, unharmed. For more than a century, the Spanish did not attack the province of Sulu.

But this was not the first time Tuan Baluca showed her diplomatic skills. In 1630, Datu Ache’s warriors caught up with the boat of Spanish cartographer Father Pedro Gutierrez. The Spanish crew would have suffered if they had not possessed Tuan Baluca’s flag and message that guaranteed their safe-conduct pass. Because of that voyage, Father Gutierrez was able to make the first map of Mindanao.

Father Gutierrez’s work was used by Father Pedro Murillo Velarde in creating the Philippines’ first highly detailed map in 1734. Considered as the “Mother of Philippine Maps,” the Murillo Velarde map is used today as our country asserts its territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea. For this, we thank Tuan Baluca’s strong spirit and astute thinking which still benefit us centuries later.



Resources:

- “Philippine Cartography and the Jesuits” (Angel Hidalgo, *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4 • Third and Fourth Quarter 1981)
- “Wither the Roses of Yesteryears: An Exploratory Look Into the Lives of Moro Women During the Colonial Period” (Carmen A. Abubakar, *Review of Women's Studies*, Vol 8, No 2 • 1998)

Sultana Nur ul-Azam

Herstory That Never Got Told

Long before the Spanish landed in Cebu in 1521, Islam was already practiced in the Philippines, having arrived in Mindanao through Muslim traders in the fourteenth century.

In the early sixteenth century, Muhammed Kabungsuwan, who sailed from the Malay Peninsula, helped spread not only Islam but also the concept of sultans—rulers guided by Allah—and became Maguindanao's first sultan. All the subsequent sultans and present-day datus trace their roots to Kabungsuwan, who traced his to the Prophet Muhammad.

Across generations, religious leaders kept tarsilas which showed the branching lines of Kabungsuwan's descendants. The genealogies of Muslim leaders were meticulously documented. When the tarsilas became worn, they were recopied to preserve history. But despite this great care, a name vanished from the tarsilas not because of neglect but discrimination. This name was Sultana Nur ul-Azam, the first and only female sultan of Sulu.

The sultana, who was also known as Sitti Kabira or Pangyan Ampay, ruled Sulu around

1680. She inherited the sultanate from her mother's father, Sultan Muawil Wasit. When Nur ul-Azam's mother died, her father Balatamay and her grandfather literally battled for the future sultana's custody. In the end, Balatamay's cousin won against his father-in-law's chosen warrior. Still, Balatamay decided to leave his daughter with Sultan Wasit—a game-changing move that shaped Nur ul-Azam's future.

When Sultan Wasit died, Nur ul-Azam became the country's first sultana. But it was a prestige wiped out from the tarsilas. Tradition keepers could not accept the fact that a woman ruled their region.

Sultana Nur ul-Azam ruled Sulu for five years, yet we do not know the details of her leadership. We do not know her feats, the challenges of her administration, and the battles she fought and lost. All these stories about our country's first sultana were wiped out, a glaring gap in the tarsilas and our country's history.



Resources:

- "Unang babaeng Sultan" (GMA News Online • June 3, 2007)
- "Insurgents: Constructing the Moro Gender Order in Mindanao Conflict and Migration" (Teresa Lorena Jopson, Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University • 2021)



Art by
Abi Dionisio

1879-1954

Rosa Sevilla de Alvero

Suffragist and Patriotic Educator

The 1935 Malolos Constitution, which signaled the beginning of an independent Philippine government, allowed only Filipino men twenty-one years or older to vote. But Article 5 of the constitution also stated that women may be granted suffrage if at least 300,000 women voted yes in a plebiscite to be held in two years.

In those two years, Rosa Sevilla de Alvero and other feminists aggressively campaigned for their suffrage through lectures, articles, posters, and home visits. When the plebiscite was held in 1937, a whopping 447,725 women voted in favor of suffrage. This gave birth to Commonwealth Act No. 34, which officially upheld the Filipina's right to vote.

This achievement was highlighted eighty-four years later on March 4, 2021 when search engine Google featured a cartoon version of Rosa dropping her election ballot into a box. It celebrated Rosa's 142nd birthday, and her feats as an educator and activist.

As early as 1916, Rosa advocated the Filipina's rights to not only vote but also run for office. She founded the Liga Nacional de Damas Filipinas (League of Women Voters), and co-founded the Federacion Catolica de Mujeres, which was eventually called the Catholic Women's League. She also helped

establish *Woman's Outlook*, a monthly magazine with articles written in English and Spanish. It discussed social issues such as poverty, academic freedom, and women's suffrage.

What sparked Rosa's activism? A relative of playwright and revolutionary Aurelio Tolentino, Rosa was born in Tondo in 1879. Early on, her eyes were opened to the injustice of colonization. Her father, who worked as an army sergeant, received considerably less pay than his Spanish colleagues. Rosa's revolutionary tendencies were strengthened in her Tia Asiang's home, a meeting place for patriots led by Marcelo del Pilar.

When Rosa was nine and studying in a private school in Manila, she was repelled by its teaching through memorization and discriminatory beliefs against the poor. She was transferred to a more progressive school which fostered open discussions and scientific approaches. Rosa's knowledge was further honed in the Assumption Superior Normal School, where she studied to be a teacher, and graduated as *maestra superior*.

In 1898, when Emilio Aguinaldo returned from Hong Kong to continue the fight against the Spanish, Rosa helped her brothers and aunts feed the soldiers and tend to the wounded. She was also one of only two Filipino



Art by
Nina Garibay

women who wrote for *La Independencia*, the Philippine revolution's paper headed by Antonio Luna.

When the Spanish surrendered to the Americans, the Filipinos rose against their new colonizers. Rosa's brother died in the conflict, urging Rosa to cut off her hair and don the soldier's uniform to fight. A Filipino general convinced her to flee with her family to the mountains instead. When her parents succumbed to cholera, twenty-year-old Rosa became the head of the family, her youngest sibling just seven years old.

Perhaps it was this grave responsibility that pushed Rosa to put up the Instituto de Mujeres (Women's Institute) only a year later. Rosa made history with the first Filipino-founded school for lay Catholic Filipinas. Rosa taught religion, Spanish, and local languages coupled with practical home skills and Philippine history—in contrast to the curriculum of American-established schools in the country.

At the heart of Rosa's teaching was an advocacy for social change. Students were welcome to work in the school in exchange for a portion of their education fees. At night, Rosa gathered volunteers to conduct free reading, writing, and math classes to adult Filipinos. When she got married and became a mother, she visited the Bilibid Prison with her sons to teach religion to inmates. Unwed mothers found their home in Good Shepherd House, which Rosa also initiated with the help of others.

Resources:

- "Rosa Sevilla de Alvero and the Instituto de Mujeres of Manila" (David E. Gardinier and Josefina Z. Sevilla-Gardinier, *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 • First Quarter 1989)

As a patriot, Rosa included Tagalog in her school's curriculum. She wrote and produced plays and organized poetry readings in Spanish, English, and Tagalog. She was part of the first *balagtasan*, a Tagalog debate carried out in verse. The *balagtasan*, named after poet Francisco Balagtas, triggered a movement for Tagalog to be recognized as the national language.

To further her knowledge, Rosa studied in the University of Santo Tomas, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1931. After four years, she finished her master's and doctoral degrees. Shortly after, she became the first Dean of Women at the same university.

The Instituto she founded produced female graduates that excelled in different fields such as medicine, law, and education. In 1948, then Philippine President Elpidio Quirino awarded her with a decoration, while Pope Pius XII sent his representative to bestow knighthood upon her in the Order of St. Elizabeth.

Rosa died in 1954, but not before leaving behind a legacy of women's suffrage and empowerment, proving the Filipina's vital role beyond the home.



1927-1997

Maria Rosa Henson

Giving Comfort to Women

In 2017, using the hashtag #MeToo, women from all over the world shared their stories of sexual assault and harassment. The movement penetrated powerful circles, causing officials to resign and apologize for their misconduct.

But years before this social issue stormed the internet, a Filipina decided to come forward with the painful truth about her past. In 1992, at sixty-five years old, Rosa went public to tell her horrifying stories of sexual abuse from Japanese soldiers during World War II.

Born in Pasay City in 1927, Maria Rosa Luna Henson herself was a product of rape. Born to a household helper taken advantage of by a wealthy employer, Rosa grew up unacknowledged by her father. Her impoverished childhood spurred her to study hard. To fund her education, she tutored classmates and did dressmaking on the weekends. She was in the seventh grade when war disrupted her education.

It was said that the Japanese soldiers often preyed on young Filipinas doing chores outside their homes. Rosa was only fourteen when she was caught while gathering firewood and raped by three imperial soldiers. Two weeks later, the incident was repeated. In both instances, Rosa was with her uncles, who were helpless against the soldiers.

Fearing for her daughter's safety, Rosa's mother brought her to their Pampanga hometown. Still reeling from the trauma, Rosa joined the HUKBALAHAP (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon). Her job was to transport food, medicine, and other essentials. She was pushing a cart full of hidden guns when a Japanese patrol stopped her and discovered her goods.

Fifteen-year-old Rosa was taken to a hospital-turned-garrison in Angeles City, where she began her life as a sex slave. The Japanese used the term "comfort women" for their abducted females, not only in the Philippines, but also in their other occupied countries such as Taiwan, Korea, and Indonesia.

Later, Rosa would recount how she was forced to have sex with about a dozen soldiers at a time. She was only allowed to rest until all the men were finished. Then the process would begin again. After three months, Rosa was transferred to a rice mill, and was fetched at night so she could sleep in the garrison. In both places, she was forced to have intercourse with soldiers. Sometimes, she and the other comfort women were brought to other quarters and houses where officials and soldiers awaited. Their refusal meant instant death.

Rosa described feeling isolated, as the comfort women were not allowed to talk

to each other. They were beaten up if they did something the soldiers did not like, often went hungry, and were left untreated when they fell ill or injured. The attending Japanese doctor only checked them for sexually transmitted diseases.

For nine months, Rosa's life was a living hell until the HUKBALAHAP saved her. When the Japanese were defeated, she married a Philippine army soldier who eventually left to join the communist army. Left to raise their three children on her own, Rosa worked in a cigarette factory and as a laundry woman to provide for her family.

Decades later, she was listening to the radio when the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women called for stories about the claimed sexual abuse of Filipinas by the Japanese imperial forces. Up to that point, only Rosa's mother and uncles knew about her past ordeal, but Rosa did not hesitate to go public.

Through her testimonies, the terrible war crime was put to light. She debunked the earlier claim that Japanese sex camps were not set up in the Philippines. Lola Rosa, as she was eventually called, talked to journalists and spoke in both local and international conferences. Her courage inspired fifty other women to come forward to share their own experiences.

Lola Rosa's fight to uncover the truth led her to participate in protests and form

partnerships with NGOs. Her outspoken nature shone when she testified in congress and filed a case in a Japanese court. In the end, the Japanese government had no choice but to listen to this feisty senior citizen and others like her. In 1994, it established the Asian Women's Fund. Lola Rosa was one of the three Filipinas who accepted financial compensation.

But Lola Rosa continued to tell her story. With her penchant for remembering dates and events, she painted a clear picture of a hidden part of our history. In 1996, her memoir, *Rosa Henson: Comfort Woman, Slave of Destiny*, was published. The detailed narrative of the nine months she spent with the Japanese was complemented by Lola Rosa's own illustrations. The book was nominated at the National Book Awards for Best Biography.

A year later, Lola Rosa succumbed to a heart attack. It was a quiet end to a meaningful life that taught women that it is never too late to speak up and demand justice.



Resources:

- "Lola Rosa, Maria Rosa Luna Henson, A Story of Pain and Courage" (pvao.gov.ph, Philippine Veterans Affairs Office)
- "Comfort Women: Korean, Chinese, and Filipina Survivors and their Portrayals in the Media" (Taylor Runquist, Western Illinois Historical Review, Volume XI · Spring 2020)
- 14 Amazing Filipina Heroines You Don't Know but Should (FilipiKnow.net)



Art by
Lui Gonzales

MEMORARE



Art by
Abi Dionisio

1941-2005

Haydee Yorac

Fearless Defender of Human Rights

In our country, the term “public servant” is often tarnished with deeds of corruption and incompetence. However, there is one public servant whose name still shines with integrity and justice. This is human rights lawyer Haydee Yorac, known for her penetrating glare and her head full of untamed curls.

Haydee was born in the small town of Saravia in Negros Occidental. Her father was the municipality mayor, while her mother was a teacher. As a young girl, Haydee immersed herself in books and ended up rereading the ones about lawyers and their quest for justice. As a result, she took up her Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of the Philippines Diliman and finished eighth at the Philippine Bar Exams.

Perhaps influenced by her mother, Haydee taught at her alma mater after graduation. But her passion for justice often took her out of the classroom and into the streets where she joined marches against the Vietnam War, and later, the Marcos rule. Because she often spoke against human rights violations and lent legal assistance to victims, Haydee was among the first to be captured when Marcos declared martial law in 1972.

After being imprisoned for over three months in Camp Crame, Haydee was set free. She returned to her academic life with renewed

vigor. Unfazed, she continued championing human rights by joining a group that gave free legal aid. She often found herself at the Supreme Court, defending notable artists like film director Lino Brocka and theater pioneer Behn Cervantes. Haydee ended up winning several cases—providing hope amidst those dark times. In 1981, she finished her master’s degree at Yale University in the US.

The Marcos era was marked by fraudulent elections. When the dictatorship was toppled by the 1986 People Power Revolution, Haydee was appointed to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to help regain its credibility. Eventually, she was promoted to Comelec Chair from 1980 to 1991. Her firm and forthright manner and knowledge of the law helped restore the Filipinos’ belief in democracy. As head of the Comelec, Haydee refused bribes, and organized elections in the country’s remote areas prone to electoral violence. She was known for her high work standards, constantly keeping employees on their toes.

A year later, Haydee took on another challenging role. As chair of the National Unification Commission, she forged and facilitated talks between the government and rebel soldiers. She traveled all over the country to hold peace talks and dig deep

into the causes of conflict. In a year, her gathered reports helped the commission recommend paths to achieve national peace. They also became essential guides in the government's future peace process.

While taking a break from public service, Haydee graduated with a Doctor of Humanities at Xavier University, and a Doctor of Laws at Far Eastern University. She dove into private practice, and resurfaced in the public eye when she ran for senator in 1998. Unfortunately, she lost.

But little did Haydee know that another challenging role was around the corner. In 2001, the government requested Haydee to lead the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG). Here, Haydee's career seemed to have come full circle as she took charge of retrieving money and properties embezzled by the Marcos family. Founded 15 years prior, PCGG had been making slow progress in retrieving the stolen funds estimated at USD10 billion. When Haydee entered PCGG, she found heightened bureaucracy, a demoralized staff, and disorganized records.

Quickly, Haydee called for her former students to help clean up the agency. With her young team, Haydee computerized litigation data and widened the commission's network. This way, PCGG was able to trace the dictator's ill-gotten wealth. Before Haydee took over PCGG, the staff only recovered about 20 billion pesos.

But under her leadership, it retrieved almost USD 700 million. She also helped recover coco levy funds including over 50 billion pesos' worth of San Miguel Corporation shares.

In 2003, Haydee suffered from a mild stroke. She was hospitalized for two weeks but emerged with her speech and mental faculties unharmed. Haydee was used to fighting difficult battles, but just two months after her stroke, she learned she had to face her biggest foe: cancer. She continued to work while going in and out of the hospital.

In 2005, Haydee died in the States while undergoing treatment. After her death, the PCGG tied black ribbons in its offices and lowered its Philippine flag at half-mast for nine days.

With the senate's unanimous approval, Haydee was buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani, usually for military and government figures. Because of Haydee's notable contributions to the government, she was given a burial worthy of a national hero.



Resources:

- "Women With Balls: Top 10 Fierce Pinays" (Amber del Fuego, spot.ph • June 25, 2010)
- "Nation mourns as Haydee Yorac passes away in US" (Sandy Araneta, Philippine Star • September 14, 2005)
- Ramon Magsaysay Recipient Haydee Yorac interview (Lorraine Hahn, Talk Asia • September 18, 2004)



1911-2011

Fe del Mundo

Mother of Philippine Pediatrics

Not all battles involve guns and soldiers. Sometimes, the most important fights happen inside the body, against diseases that target helpless infants and children. In this battlefield, Dr. Fe Del Mundo was not a mere soldier, but a general—a brilliant tactician who strategized ways to save children's lives.

Born in Tayabas in Quezon, Fe encountered death early in her life. Her three siblings died as infants, while her eleven-year-old older sister died from appendicitis. These experiences may have shaped young Fe's decision to specialize in pediatric medicine.

After graduating from the University of the Philippines when she was twenty-three, Fe pursued a master's degree in bacteriology at Boston University under a government scholarship granted by President Manuel Quezon. While studying, she worked as a resident at the University of Chicago's Billing Hospital and joined a two-year research fellowship on pediatric diseases at the Harvard Medical School's Children's Hospital.

When Dr. Fe returned to the Philippines in 1941, she discovered a country actively involved in World War II. A year later, the Japanese occupied Manila. Foreign nationals living in the capital were captured and imprisoned in a military camp at the

University of Santo Tomas. Dr. Fe leapt into action by joining the International Red Cross and establishing an improvised hospice within the camp.

Two years later, the Japanese closed the hospice. Upon the mayor's request, Dr. Fe took charge of the City Children's Hospital, which was housed in a school building, with only 100 beds. But under Dr. Fe's seven-year leadership, the hospital became a fully functioning medical center.

In 1945, the hospital was turned over to the Department of Health, making Dr. Fe the first Filipina to head a government general hospital. Three years later, she resigned to head the pediatric department of the Far Eastern University.

During this time, she was also receiving patients in her home clinic. Because of her growing clientele, Dr. Fe began making plans of putting up a modern hospital for children. Dr. Fe poured all her money into the project, to the point of selling her home and taking out a loan of ₱800,000.

Inaugurated on Dr. Fe's birthday in 1957, the Children's Medical Center was recognized as the country's first pediatric hospital. Later, the center would include the Institute of Maternal and Child Health, the first of its

kind in Asia. Until now, the institute remains an important partner of the government's Commission on Population and contributes to its family planning initiatives.

In her desire to fill the gaps in Philippine pediatric care, Dr. Fe came up with the BRAT (bananas, rice, applesauce, toast) diet, which, for a long time, became a global medical practice in curing diarrhea. She also initiated family planning centers and brought medical care to rural areas. Because remote communities did not have electricity, Dr. Fe invented an incubator made of bamboo baskets, hot water bottles, and a hood attached to oxygen. This simple invention saved many infants from jaundice.

But aside from treating diseases, Dr. Fe focused on preventing them. In 1962, she began conducting clinical studies of vaccines. Her findings led to a better comprehension of child diseases such as dengue, measles, chicken pox, and polio.

With her passion for making a difference, she founded the Philippine Medical's Women Association, and became the first woman president of the Philippine Pediatric Association. She was also the first Filipina recognized as a National Scientist

by the government. Outside the country, she continued to make waves as the first Filipina certified by the American Board of Pediatrics, and the first Asian elected as president of the Medical Women's International Association. She served in the World Health Organization, contributing to the studies of dengue and maternal and child health.

But it was her brainchild, the Children's Medical Center, which Dr. Fe probably considered as her big achievement. She lived on the second floor of the hospital, religiously making her morning daily rounds, even when old age prevented her from walking. Dr. Fe continued to check on her young patients in a wheelchair until her death at 99 years old.



Resources:

- "Fe del Mundo" (Elizabeth Blackwell Award, Hobart and William Smith Colleges)
- "Dr. Fe del Mundo: Pediatrician, Distinguished Scholar, and Humanitarian" (Leo Christian Lauzon, National Nutrition Council • December 2, 2020)



Art by
Nina Garibay

About the Artists

About the Author

Agay Llanera is a freelance writer for television and the web. She enjoys writing romance, and stories for children and young adults. She's a nanay to Kal and Bugs, a wife to Spanky, and a #romanceclass community member. She also hopes to watch one of her stories on the big screen someday.



Nina Garibay graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of the Philippines, Diliman with a degree in Visual Communication from the College of Fine Arts. She has participated in several group shows within Manila. In 2020, she marked her first solo exhibit in the midst of the lockdown. She is currently the program manager at the Punlaan, a program of the Linangan Artist Residency, located within the Alitaptap Artist Community in Amadeo, Cavite.

Artwork medium: Oil on paper

Securing innumerable accolades under her belt, **Abi Dionisio** was one of 5 National winners at the Philippine Art Awards in 2016. Since graduating from Bulacan State University with a degree in fine arts, she has mounted six solo exhibitions. Her work has also been featured in international exhibitions in cities such as Singapore, London, and Taiwan.

Artwork medium: Oil on canvas and hand embroidery thread floss on linen (enclosed with an acrylic glass frame)



Artist and musician **Lui Gonzales** considers her works as a visual representation of memory. She graduated as an Art Scholar majoring in Visual Arts from the Philippine High School for the Arts and obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. In 2010, she was chosen as one of the representatives of the Philippines for the ASEAN Youth Camp for Visual Arts held in Hanoi, Vietnam and in 2020, she was a finalist for Ateneo Art Gallery's Marciano Galang Acquisition prize. Her contemplative drawings and layered works have been exhibited at art spaces and art galleries both locally and internationally.

Artwork medium: Lace, pen and ink on layered and torn tracing paper

MORE BOOKS FROM CANVAS

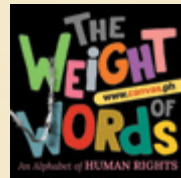
Art and culture



RENATO BARIJA'S CHILDREN'S STORIES
stories from some of Manila's children
Retelling by Daniel Palma Tayona and Gigo Alampay
Art by Renato Barja



WHY WORDS MATTER
poetic reflection and lyrical art
Text by Butch Dalisay
Art by Marcel Antonio



THE WEIGHT OF WORDS: AN ALPHABET OF HUMAN RIGHTS
an alphabet of human rights
Editing by CANVAS
Art by various artists



SILENT WITNESSES
anecdotes of Martial Law survivors
Retelling by Gigo A. Alampay
Art by Renz M. Baluyot

Community



A BRIDGE FOR SILAY
the legend of Talim Island's Devil Bridge
Retelling by Agay Llanera
Art by Ronson Culibrina



ANG AKLATANG PUSA
a story about a librarian and her cats
Story by Eugene Y. Evasco
Art by Jared C. Yokte



DAUGHTER AND THE GREAT FISH
a girl's quest to feed her village
Story by Loren Peria
Art by Jeho Bitancor

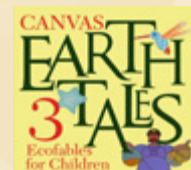


KAKATOK-KATOK SA BAHAY NI BENOK
a community saves itself through unity
Story by Mon Sy
Art by Faye Abantao

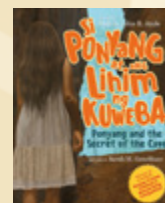
Environment and nature



MESSAGE IN THE SAND
a boy is determined to save the seas
Story by Charmaine Aserappa
Art by Roel Obemio



EARTH TALES: 3 ECO-FABLES FOR CHILDREN
three eco-fables for children
Stories by unknown authors
Art by Ilee Olivares-Mellor, Plet Bolipata, Liza Flores



SI PONYANG AT ANG LIHIM NG KUWEBA
two friends discovering nature's wonders
Story by Melvin John B. Atale
Art by Sarah M. Geneblazo

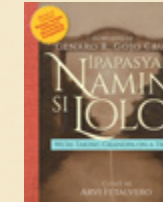
Family



A FISH TALE
a tribute to the family we choose
Story by Becky Bravo
Art by Daniel dela Cruz



MY BIG SISTER CAN SEE DRAGONS
two sisters and their big imaginations
Story by Rocky Sanchez Tirona
Art by Liza Flores

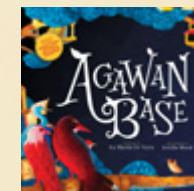


IPAPASYAL NAMIN SI LOLO
a grandfather's trip down memory lane
Story by Renato R. Gojo Cruz
Art by Arvi Fetalvero



ANG ANGHEL NG SANTA ANA
a story about supporting one's sister
Story by Josephine de Dios
Art by Johanna Helmuth

Self-care and self-discovery



AGAWAN BASE
a bird's self-confidence takes flight
Story by Jez Martin De Veyra
Art by Jericho Moral



MY SUPER HANDS
part of a campaign on handwashing
Written by Annette A. Ferrer
Artworks by BLIC



MGA MUNTING PATAK NG ULAN
a child decides on a dream
Story by Jessica Luciano Olmedo
Art by Alee Garibay



I LIKE WEARING RAINBOWS
a boy sees himself in many colors
Written by Agay Llanera
Art by Lui Manaig



SILIM, PRINSESA NG DILIM
a diwata finds beauty in darkness
Written by Mark Joseph Bacho
Art by Luis Lorenzana

Activity Books



BENCAB'S ACTIVITY BOOK FOR CHILDREN
Activities written by Karen Joy Desamparado-Foronda
Art by Benedicto Cabrera



I AM THE CHANGE IN CLIMATE CHANGE
an activity book for young environmentalists
Written by Alyssa M. Peleo-Alampay, Ph.D.
Art by Ang I.N.K.



I AM THE STORYTELLER
a storytelling activity book
Educational direction by Ana Maria Margarita Salvador
Art by various artists



KARAPAT DAPAT
an activity book on the rights of the child
Text by May Tobias-Papa
Art by I.N.K.



LOOKING FOR JUAN
an activity book about the Philippines
Activities by Annette A. Ferrer and Gigo A. Alampay
Art by John Paul Antido



MAMITA'S GARDEN: AN ACTIVITY BOOK
an activity book about plant care
Text by Nicolas Gabriel Garcia
Art by Pam Yan-Santos



SAFE SPACE
an activity book on internet safety
Text by Gigo Alampay
Design by Liza Flores, Abi Goy, Fran Alvarez, and Jamie Bauza



#YOUTHINK
a zine to combat fake news
Text by Gigo Alampay
Design by Studio Dialogo

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**The Center for Art, New Ventures
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a non-profit organization, works with the
creative community to promote
children's literacy, explore national identity,
and broaden public awareness of
Philippine art, culture, and the environment.



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CANVAS' 1 Million Books for One Million Filipino Children Campaign

aims to inspire in children a love for reading
by donating its award-winning books to public schools, hospitals,
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CANVAS, a non-profit organization,
works with the creative community to promote children's literacy,
explore national identity, and broaden public awareness
of Philippine art, culture, and the environment.

“The new Filipina... is a woman who has discovered the exalting realm of responsibility, a woman fully engaged in the making of history.”

—Lorena Barros

Throughout Philippine history, countless women have played significant roles in advancing our communities, developing our culture, and defending our nation. Their triumphs show not only their strength amid adversity, but also a deep commitment to community and justice.

From the stage to the laboratory, from the classroom to the battlefield, from diplomacy to resistance—here are eighteen Filipino women whose lives give us much to celebrate and aspire to.



www.canvas.ph

A child with art and stories can change the world.

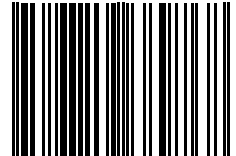
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