

and enact advocacy and community projects that embody a dream for a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities. Tungohan inspires an understanding that recognizes these similarities, while not losing their contextual complexities, can lead to meaningful solidarity among the marginalized against capitalist, colonial, imperial, and heteropatriarchal global systems of oppression.

Lastly, *Care Activism* is equally accessible to undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, and the general public because it reads conversationally yet intellectually. As Tungohan narrates these migrant care workers' journeys of empowerment, community, and solidarity, she introduces readers to various concepts, such as "communities of care," without being too overburdened with abstractness and superfluous jargon. Tungohan also expertly guides readers through her arguments and evidence despite the broad scholarly engagement. Although it is an academic book, readers will become enamored by the narratives because of how emotionally bountiful and grounded they are.

As a methodological piece, *Care Activism* is an excellent example of feminist and migrant comparative work. While it emphasizes care, a feminist-rooted concept, its clear migrant focus deterritorializes care to demonstrate broader linkages between diverse localities and temporalities as well as local and national actors. The book's ethnographic work similarly exhibits Tungohan's commitment to being an activist scholar. She employs her work to highlight how the marginalized rehumanize themselves and in the process, empower one another through community, in which she partakes. As such, courses on comparative politics, gender and politics, and postcolonialism would truly benefit from the addition of this book to their syllabi, especially with its treatment of a marginalized group and its challenges to traditional political science scholarship.

Care Activism unequivocally offers a new way of thinking about and doing migrant activism. It inspires a recognition among students and scholars that a coalition of transnational, transtemporal care is possible once "care" is understood as an inclusive act of solidarity and support and of recognizing the humanity in others in the face of global structural and systemic failures.

Kad Mariano

Leeroy New's *Balete Bulate Bituka* at The Bentway

My first encounter with the work of Filipino artist Leeroy New was on the shores of Urbiztondo Beach in La Union, Philippines. It was the golden hour and I was accompanied by a gracious local surfer, JP. In fact, there were two local surfers who had invited me, separately and mid-surf, to see *Mebuyan's Vessel* (or just "Mebuyan" for short)—this affirmed to me that New's sculptural intervention was indeed a recognized landmark beyond the elite creative class in La Union's surftown community.

From the peak of *Mebuyan's Vessel*—an inhabitable multi-pod environment inspired by a Bagobo death and fertility goddess with many layers of breasts—I played broken telephone through plastic water jugs and admired the filtered light of the sun slipping into the sea. Two months later, I would

witness the unveiling of a new sculpture by Leeroy New in my hometown of Toronto, Canada. As a member of the Filipino/a/x diaspora, and a silent carrier of some of my ancestors' superstitions, I know that things in this life move in mysterious ways.¹

Balete Bulate Bituka is Leeroy New's sculptural installation at The Bentway in Toronto, his first commission in North America. It is a large-scale woven bamboo structure, consisting of hollow tubular appendages that taper and twist amongst each other and hover closely above the existing architecture of The Bentway. The skin of the appendages is partially see-through, and the wrapping woven bamboo encloses their spatial form like a sparsely-spaced cross-hatch. Together, these bamboo-clad appendages form what appears to be a curious and agile creature, tenderly exploring the terrain upon which it has landed and taken hold.

With its roots grounded firmly in the site, *Balete Bulate Bituka* alludes to the balete tree, a kind of fig that was believed in precolonial Philippines to be the home of supernatural beings. Like many aspects of Leeroy's work, the reference to the balete tree is a subversion—a reclamation of a mythological idea once deemed unholy by Spanish Catholic colonizers.

Balete Bulate Bituka also subverts our understanding of what is “natural.” Anna Gallagher-Ross, who curated the work at The Bentway, has described it as “demonstrating the entangled relationship between nature and our waste.”² The waste material cloaking the creature's bamboo skeleton (domestic waste sourced from around Toronto as well as used hardhats, donated by a local construction company) reminds us that the highway sheltering it sits on earth that is not natural, but rather human-made—infill comprised of household and construction waste dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Though this Balete looks alien, it is actually not too different from the firmament we take for granted below. Infill landscapes can be found all over Toronto: other than the ground beneath The Bentway, outdoor sites like the Leslie Street Spit and Beare Hill have reconfigured construction waste material into serving as lakeside bicycle paths and panoramic hilltop views. Even detritus from the construction of the Leslie Street Spit can be found on the site of The Bentway, and the concrete on-site is a mixture of recycled glass, porcelain, and construction debris—a citywide entanglement of material. (The full Summer 2023 program encompassing *Balete Bulate Bituka* was named *Beyond Concrete*, and invited closer inspection into, and speculation around, the concrete structure of the Gardiner Expressway.) In *The Inner Studio*, the late architect Andrew Levitt writes:

“...we began the spit and continued to allow debris from the demolished buildings and other urban excavations to be dumped here. Then a strange thing happened. Enormous numbers of migratory birds began inhabiting the place... The place is a cross between the apocalypse and a weekend

1. Patrick Alcedo, in his research creation activities surrounding the Ati-atihan Festival from Aklan, Philippines, has said that, “the need for investigating religions beyond their local borders and into the diaspora has become increasingly critical in the twenty-first century, a period defined by massive migrations of people and their settling into and changing the cultural, social, economic and political landscapes of host localities.” <https://ycar.apps01.yorku.ca/programmes-projects/ati-atihan/>.

2. *Balete Bulate Bituka*, Leeroy New: <https://thebentway.ca/event/balete-bulate-bituka/>.

up north. It's become a great place by accident, a kind of Freudian slip of a place, and that is the way we like our places. Unintended, so no one has to declare a vision."³

Responding to context is paramount in the architectural field; New's architectural-scale artwork does the same. Like the ground at the Leslie Street Spit, *Balete Bulate Bituka* embodies an organic spontaneity, as planted vines have grown and spread across the bamboo with the passing of time.⁴ Like the migratory birds at the Spit, a wide range of users flock to the sculpture's terrain, as The Bentway is a public park. They rollerblade, host boxing classes, make TikToks, and meander, as above them bamboo tendrils weave between towering pillars and hover with caution around their concrete mass. The tendrils twist and braid and make their way to the Patkau + Kearns Mancini-designed Fort York Visitors Centre, where they adorn the weathered steel panels like a crown of thorns. It should be noted that the 7,500 pounds of bamboo will be mulched and donated to a farm outside Toronto after the conclusion of the installation, a move much aligned with New's ethic of creating low-impact works; *Balete Bulate Bituka* lives on even after the exhibition closes on September 24, 2023.

The architectural quality of New's work has its own history. It comes from a desire to use art to intervene within public space, the nature of which, New notes, varies greatly between Toronto and Manila. (New's origin story in this field involves wearing the uniform of municipal street cleaners in Manila, at one time self-starting his own work as well as alongside an "informal gathering of artists, Pilipinas Street Plan, that explored the streets and urban landscape," New shared with me.) He cites sci-fi as one of his inspirations, which opens a suite of futuristic architectural forms. After studying art in Laguna (on scholarship from the south of the Philippines), he was exposed to the imposing Brutalist architecture of Leandro Locsin, the architect of choice during the Marcos dictatorship. Reclaiming some of sci-fi's more whimsical visual artifacts, and recognizing the deep influence of public architectural forms throughout the Philippines' colonial and political past, New is creating his own visual vocabulary that allows his work to mark a time and place: anchors of memory unbound to interior space. In this vein, *Balete Bulate Bituka* has also served as a launching pad for new community connections with local Filipino organizations such as Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts and Culture, and for a range of community workshops involving the Filipino/a/x community in Toronto.⁵ On the opening night of The Bentway's summer season, *Balete Bulate Bituka* was celebrated as the event's centerpiece, as dancers from the Ballroom community donned New's bespoke costume pieces and vogued under the direction of local choreographer Dana Rosales. Aptly named *The Aliens of Manila*, these sculptural costume pieces were made from discarded domestic plastics from around Toronto and are part of a larger series by New calling attention to the "alien"-like experiences of overseas Filipino workers.

3. Andrew Levitt, *The Inner Studio* (Cambridge: Riverside Architectural Press, 2022), 190.

4. A planting workshop was conducted by The Bentway in partnership with the Waterfront Neighborhood Center, animating the *Balete Bulate Bituka* with growing vines.

5. Leeroy New conducted workshops with The Bentway where he taught local artists and creatives how to build his *Aliens of Manila* wearables. This included the Filipino community but reached local participants of diverse backgrounds.

The body-scale work of the costumes and the building-scale work of Balete Bulate Bituka fused together into an immersive presence.

Back to that day I first saw *Mebuyan's Vessel* in La Union—I found myself drinking Red Horse and eating balut at a live music bar with JP and Josh, the two Filipino surfers who I credit with having introduced me to New's work. At their encouragement, I went up to sing an acoustic rendition of "Linger" by the Cranberries, sharing the small stage with a massive mural of Bob Marley and the owner of the bar, who played guitar. I thought of the sunset I saw earlier on the beach and all the events and synchronicities that had transpired since, and then back to the silhouette of Mebuyan's bamboo-clad breasts against the sky and sea. This day is one of my favourite memories—a comedy, some sort of tadhana. The beachside world in which this memory was made, across seas and time zones, felt almost within reach again as I walked along the undulating bamboo hachure of Leeroy's *Balete*, a now-familiar sight for me in Toronto.

Bianca Weeko Martin

Prison Dancer: The Musical—A Nod to the Filipino as a World-Class Talent

Prison Dancer: The Musical has all the hallmarks of a hit musical: catchy tunes, perfectly executed choreography, and a storyline that captures the hearts of audiences, regardless of background. The show has the potential to equal or surpass the success of another all-Filipino cast musical, *Here Lies Love*, which premiered on Broadway in 2023.

Since Lea Salonga graced stages worldwide and became famous for starring in *Miss Saigon* in 1989, Filipino artists have followed her path to success. Indeed, the *Prison Dancer's* creators, Carmen Leilani De Jesus and Romeo Candido, played a crucial role in bringing *Miss Saigon* to Canada over thirty years ago as they were both part of the original Toronto cast. Now, De Jesus and Candido are instrumental in turning *Prison Dancer* into a sharp and sophisticated musical, a creative process that took over ten years to complete.

To add depth and authenticity to the storyline, the creators visited the maximum-security prison Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) to interview the prisoners who participated in the made-in-prison music videos that garnered millions of views on YouTube and subsequently became the basis for the musical. One might recall that the 1,500 prisoners performed an imitation of the well-choreographed zombie dance in Michael Jackson's hit song *Thriller* in one of the videos. Coming from a nation known to produce world-class singers as evidenced by Filipinos winning singing competitions on network shows and landing plum roles on Broadway and elsewhere, *Prison Dancer's* all-Filipino performers belted memorable songs ranging from toe-tapping dance tunes to emotional solos and duets. "Evermore" a set-piece ballad about belief in a happy ending, as sung by husband-and-wife characters Christian (an incarcerated husband played by Daren Dyhengco) and Cherish (the dedicated wife played by Diana Del Rosario), leaves a lasting impression in the audience's minds as both characters showed tenderness and vulnerability.

Prison Dancer's story centers around the fierce queer character Lola,