

RECOVERING THE ROLE OF THE MATRIARCHY  
AND MYTHOLOGY THROUGH ARELLANO'S *INSCAPES*:  
A RETROSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract: How much of Philippine society has actually progressed from the shackles of a patriarchal history? Through Arellano's *Inscapes*, these issues are pondered and actualized. Arellano, a renowned Filipino sculptor, celebrates 36 years of artistry in her 16-sculpture installation, *Inscapes: A Retrospective*. Previously exhibited in Arete's Ignacio B. Gimenez Amphitheater last October 13, 2019 until March 15, 2020. *Inscapes* retraces her journey as a woman, artist, and mother through sculptures culled from 1983 to 1996. *Inscapes*, as a narrative art form, tells the artist's stories of love and loss, of motherhood and midlife crisis. In my study, I will investigate how *Inscapes* comprehensively plots Arellano's life at different junctures in time as represented and actualized in the feminine and the divine, the erotic and the macabre, and the psychological and the mythological. Through Arellano's feminist *herstorical* perspective, I will argue that *Inscapes* achieves great feats in recovering the matriarchal roles in religion and mythology, in delineating the place of both sexes in history, and in evaluating the capitalist-patriarchal postcolony—a milieu that she has lived through, and we continue to live in, today. To further this reading, I will be applying religious, ecofeminist, and postcolonial theories to *Inscape* sections categorized into four groups in the installation while drawing from psychology and comparative mythology to identify the role of man and woman in an independent yet universal female historiography.

It was a moment of profound anguish that gave birth to *Inscapes*. In 1981, tragedy struck when Agnes Arellano, who was in a remote island in Spain, received news of her parents and her sister “perishing in a fire that razed their ancestral home to the ground” (Guillermo 15). This devastation by *agni* or fire marked her first experience of a “paradox” in an eerie annulment of contradictions, a time warp, and a feeling so distinct from the mundane that one could call it divine. She remembers standing on the beach, exploding inside from the bad news of Death, when suddenly, all she could hear were the waves crashing on the shore. All she could smell were the rosemary and thyme she had trodden the night before. All she could feel were the tiny flowers on her toes, growing in the sparse grass. In the cottage next door, a baby crying was heard. It was in this moment that the world acquired a supernatural clarity for Arellano (Guillermo 15).



Fig. 1: Guillermo, Alice. *Inscapes: the Art of Agnes Arellano*. Onion&Chives, 2008.  
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23111269-inscapes>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.

Most of Arellano’s artistry traces back to even before she was born. Raised in the genteel district of San Juan on November 21, 1949, Arellano was born into a family of prominent male architects, including her father Otilio, her grandfather Arcadio, and grand-uncle Juan (Guillermo 7). Arcadio was a builder and assistant to Juan Hervas, the Spanish consulting architect of the City of Manila in the late 19th century. Juan left his lasting presence on the Manila landscape with the Legislative Building (Old Congress), the Manila Post Office (See:

Fig. 1), and the Metropolitan Theater in Art Deco (Guillermo 9). Otilio, Arellano's father, on the other hand, was described more by Agnes as a "builder of men" who devoted his spare time to civic work (Guillermo 10). Arellano's mother, Liwayway Almario, was also artistically inclined. As a wife and a mother who devoted all her energies to home and children, Liwayway was known for playing the piano, singing on the radio, tending to her beautiful garden, and teaching in English (Guillermo 10). In contrast, Liwayway's father, Rosauro Almario, alias *Matanglawin* and *Batang Simoun*, was a newspaper editor and fictionist who wrote in Spanish and Tagalog and was exiled for writing critically of the American Regime (Guillermo 10).

Arellano, born four years after the second world war, lived through the imperial effects wrought by the years of colonization in the Philippines. Growing up as a good Catholic girl, "properly instilled with the fear of God and fear of sex" (Guillermo 11), Arellano's co-educational school, St. John's academy, made students aware of the nation's long Spanish history and proud to be English speakers. Any tendency which Arellano may have developed towards colonial mentality however, was counterbalanced by "an exceedingly intelligent aunt who hated the Church and America with equal venom" (Guillermo 11).

While Arellano's undergraduate studies were dedicated to learning psychology as she pursued her undergraduate studies and completed her major in psychology in the University of the Philippines in 1971, and later on enrolled in a master's degree in Clinical Psychology at the Ateneo de Manila University, Arellano, on account of the turbulence brought by Martial Law in the country, was eventually led to art as she travelled to Europe in 1975. Relishing Michelangelo's works in Italy, forfeiting her return flight home from Amsterdam to marvel more at the Van Gogh Museum, and taking a trip to Paris entranced and bewitched by its beauty, Arellano found herself staying behind for a year and a half and later pursued further



studies and graduated with the *Cours de langue et civilisation françaises (degré supérieure)* at the Université de la Sorbonne in Paris in 1976. Arellano then returned home to the Philippines, studied fine arts in earnest, and learned sculpture under the guidance of the pioneering modernist and National Artist, Napoleon "Billy" Abueva (Guillermo 14).

Arellano lived through a time when the Philippine art scene was a male-dominated field. When Arellano presented the first inscapes, *Temple to the Moon Goddess*, for example, in a group exhibition entitled "Six Artists" at the Museum of Philippine Art in 1983, Arellano was the only female and the only sculptor in a group of male artists comprised of Gerardo Tan, Nilo Ilarde, Soler Santos, B. Ert Antonio, and Raul Rodriguez (Guillermo 49). All the student artists were under the guidance of Roberto "Chabet" Rodriguez at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts, the father of Philippine conceptual art (Guillermo 14).

Amid an enriched journey in the arts, the family tragedy of *agni* in 1981 deeply influenced Arellano's outlook. From thereon, Arellano assumed an intense preoccupation with the dualities of life and death which predisposed her to a search; seeking for answers to the metaphysical questions that come in the form of paradoxes concerning "the problem of 'existence' or the juxtaposition of, but essential interdependence between, Creation and Destruction" (Arellano 19). Seven years after the family drama, in her first major exhibition, *Fire and Death: A Labyrinth of Ritual Art*, she expresses her "private landscape" of suffering (Luquin), which, 36 years later, in such endeavor and disposition, intrinsically unfolds in her magnum opus and oeuvre, *Inscapes*.

Through sculptures culled from 1983-1996, *Inscapes* culminates Arellano's life journey and decades of artistic practice. Taken from the poetic parlance of Gerard Manley Hopkins, the term "inscape" refers to the underlying design of an object which gives it coherence, unity, or essence as words are fragmented, overlapped, and joined together to create compound units that project "brilliant splinters of affinities" (Arellano 17), eventually

subsumed into a larger and richer whole. Arellano would closely resemble the practice to the surrealist approach which juxtaposes disparate elements to create a third meaning or synthesis (Arellano 17). Surrealism as an artistic movement derived from the unconscious that shakes the foundations of both rationality and the conscious world (Museum of Modern Art) is captured in Guillermo's description of *Inscapes* as: "an interior configuration of the mind, a complex of intellectual and affective elements as distinguished from landscape which is an exterior view perceived by the senses" (2). In an encompassing and diverse array of influences, Arellano possessed an integral and coherent worldview faithful to the Surrealist fashion:

She has formed her iconography from various religious systems, mainly Hinduism, Buddhism, particularly Shiva as the Creator and Destroyer, Buddha and his various mantras or hand-gestures and asanas or positions, Tantra and its union of Yab and Yum, the erotic Hindu mithunas or loving couples of the Konarak temple, the yang and yin of Taoist art. These are fused with local mythologies and icons such as the Bicol Mebuvan and Haliya, the Ifugao bulol, as well as with Christian elements, such as the pervasive Angel of Death hovering over all. But what binds them together are the themes of Eros and Thanatos, Shiva as the god of Creation and Destruction, the many avatars of the Goddess. In her work, man and woman are universal beings, at ease with their bodies and within the world of nature; in the form of nudes, they are freed from shackling conventions, rediscovering themselves in their innermost being. (Guillermo 17)

Arellano found her answers by immersing herself in oriental philosophy. Myth, folklore, and history, as the fabric of her work, lent *Inscapes* its strong narrative element. (Arellano 19). As a psychological terrain drawn in this respect consistent with Arellano's background and the Surrealist practice, Arellano would then describe *Inscapes* as "satori-cal" (19), a term from Zen Buddhism, defined as a sudden enlightenment. In this cognitive dimension of her work, Arellano makes thus evident in her floor pieces and sound sculptures which render the installation as both a mental and a sensory experience. Among many mediums, Arellano chose

sculpture to plumb into these psychological depths. In her words, becoming a sculptor was, “the medium for the expression of my continued search” (19).

Much of Arellano’s person is imbued in *Inscapes*. The 16-sculpture installation, made of white coldcast marble and colorless plaster of Paris, were casted from her own body in a direct modelling technique which blurred the distinctions between reality and art (Arellano 2019). *Inscapes*, as the artist’s fantasy self-portraits, were made by Arellano in significant points of her life as a way of psychologically processing her experience at the time (Fabella).



Fig. 2: “Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano.” *Ateneo Art Gallery*.<https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

Displayed as a landscape surrounded by several pieces on the floor, freestanding on walls, or invisibly by sound (See: Fig. 2), *Inscapes* is a spatial device that challenges the conventional way of viewing sculptures in a 360-degree view where one walks into, rather than around, the installation in order to “gestalt” (i.e. or, in psychology, to organize the whole beyond the sum of its parts) the experience (Arellano, 2019). Beyond art, *Inscapes* as a rich conglomeration of influences unlocking deep-seated realities, fused with culture, history, and moments of heartbreak and wholeness, emanating from Arellano’s life, and situated today, at a time of conscious turmoil—in a detrimentally patriarchal regime and eco-crisis—recovers the role of the matriarchy by interposing the dialectical relationship formed between man and woman in

myth and religion, and explicates the historical ramifications of delineating the sexes in a capitalist-postcolonial era.

*Inscapes* is divided into four subsections that diversely explore this narrative. The first Inscape, *Temple to the Moon Goddess (1983)*, is a 24-piece treatise on the female element in religion. In her installation's official pamphlet, *Inscapes: A Retrospective*, Arellano explains that Inscapes 1 is an expression of the artist's "search for an alternative deity" (2019) and rebellion against an "unbalanced patriarchal religion imposed on us by our colonizers" (2019). In the preamble to the inscape, Arellano reckons how Nature comes in cycles and poses the curiosity: "there must have been a time when we were praying to a Mother Goddess instead of a God the Father" (2019). *The Temple to the Moon Goddess* consists of six sculpture pieces, namely, the "Hermaphroditic Homunculus," which is an arch that depicts a neurological diagram of the brain and how much of it is used to move different parts of our body. The "Yabyum," Arellano's favorite motif (Laquin), taken from the Tibetan term for father and mother in erotic embrace, a sacred love position where, instead of downward ejaculation, sexual energy is reversed as both partners become one in "cosmic consciousness" (Arellano 2019). The "Eternal Oval," the cosmic egg formed by Arellano's curled up body in a crouching position. The "Babboldibooda," a fat-bellied Buddha figure, and finally, "Haliya Bathing," the temple's central altar, which is a floor piece depicting the Bicol myth of Haliya, goddess from the moon.



Fig. 3: Guillermo, Alice. *Inscapes: the Art of Agnes Arellano*. Onion&Chives, 2008.  
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23111269-inscapes>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2020.

Haliya (See: Fig. 3) would “come down periodically to earth to bathe in our warm waters (ancient explanation for menstruation)” (Arellano 2019). As a woodsman realized however that her clothes were her vehicle to and from the moon, one night, he hid them, which thus left Haliya shipwrecked (Arellano 26). Haliya, then trapped in Her mortal guise, is wooed and won by the woodsman, until eventually, “she contemplates the impending birth of the demigod inside Her” (Arellano 2019). Espoused with the “Haliya Bathing” is the piece “Music for Watching the Moon Rise,” a sculpture composing music that encircles Haliya (Arellano 2019).



Fig. 4: “Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano.” *Ateneo Art Gallery*.<https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

Arellano’s second inscapes, entitled *Myths of Creation and Destruction I* (1987), is a 2-part inscape composed of a musical piece and an upended headless female body hanging from slaughterhouse hooks based on Indo-Aryan myth that attributes Creation to the explosion of the first Bovine (Arellano 2019) (See Figs. 2 &4). This subsection features the “Carcass Cornucopia,” formerly identified as the dismembered female body and is described by Arellano accordingly:

From destruction comes new life. From Her carcass, the bounty of the Universe spills out: mound of unhusked rice and organic shapes, and Music Deeper inside Her is the lording bulol rice guardian of our brothers in the north, scion of the patriarchy. Her dismembered body parts become the moon, the planets- -the cosmos--her feet become the peasant class, etc. Reading from a feminist herstorical perspective, the matriarchy dies, patriarchy is born (Arellano 2019)



Accompanying “Carcass Cornucopia” is another floor piece that composes music entitled, “Music for Making the Sun Rise.” In this sculpture, the human skulls buried serve as notes on the raked stave. Drawn from the Orpheus myth in the film *Orfeu Negro*, the skulls of warriors in battle, producing a melody predominantly sung by male voices, are chanting to make the sun rise (Arellano 2019).



Fig. 5: “Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano.” *Ateneo Art Gallery*.<https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

As a stark counterpart and contrast of the Moon Temple or the first inscapes subsection, the third inscapes, given the name *Temple to the Sun God* (1990), is an inscape dedicated to the male element, the most prominent symbol for which is the phallus (Arellano 2019). This inscapes section, as described by Arellano in her installation pamphlet, is composed of five sculptures, namely: the “Angel of Death,” a door of two parts depicting a male upper torso with wings hovering above a mushroom cloud of the bomb that reminds us of the devastating effects of Hiroshima. The “Bronze Bullets,” 6 giant armalite bullets gleaming in bronze, made by Arellano after living near a camp during a coup d’etat sometime in 1980. The “Toad Goddess,” a headless, dismembered toad body and a symbol of regeneration originally found at the end of the Sun temple. “Phallic and Iambe,” the remaining pair of the former Army of seven pairs, is inspired from the story about the goddess Demeter (2019).

As the goddess was roaming in search of Persephone, who was then kidnapped by Hades, she came across a kingdom where she found the king's daughter, Iambe and her nursemaid Baubo, who would pull her out of her misery. Later on, the crone Baubo lifted up her skirt as Iambe told bawdy jokes. Arellano notes: to this day, we use the iambic pentameter for erotic or satirical verse (Arellano 2019). Finally, the "Obelisk," the last sculpture in the section, is a tall, freestanding piece and a monument of death made up of skulls and bones densely piled closely together as a reminder of the catacombs in Rome, Ifugao burial caves, and Extrajudicial Killings (Arellano, 2019).



Fig. 6: "Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano." *Ateneo Art Gallery*.<https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

The fourth and last section of Arellano's *Inscapes*, entitled, *Three Buddha Mothers and Eshu* (1996), embodies the three personas of Robert Graves's "Triple Goddess," (1996) identified in his book of the same name, serving as counterparts to the phases of the moon: new, full, and dead (Arellano 2019). Comprising the subsection are "Vesta," "Dea," and "Eshu." "Vesta" is a young mother-to-be, seated on her tree-stump pedestal as Graves' "White Raiser"; a vessel for milk and honey. She is depicted with an open palm on her left hand in the



"mudra of generosity" (Arellano 2019) (a symbolic hand gesture in Hindu and Buddhist ceremonies) and with the two fingers of her right hand squeezing out the first drop of milk. On Vesta's back, a monitor lizard or "bayawak" is found as a symbol of fecundity. "Vesta" is a goddess in her own right placed underneath the homunculus arch (Arellano 2019).



Fig. 7: "Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano." *Ateneo Art Gallery*.<https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

"Dea," on the other hand, is the "second Buddha in the trinity" (Arellano 2019) that Arellano identifies as "Ako." She is a fantasy self-portrait of Arellano that serves as a metaphor of her midlife crisis. Through "Dea" Arellano asks: "Is there still a me?" after years of devoting herself to husband and home (Arellano 2019). "Dea" is depicted with four pairs of breasts, corresponding to the artist's three stepchildren and one of her own, and with wings clipped in the back, no longer able to fly. Arellano however articulates that there is hope for "Dea" as her molting skin will soon be shed (Arellano 2019). "Dea" is seen looking down on her own image in the last of the three personas, "Eshu." (See: Fig. 7) "Eshu" is a floor piece encircled with garden lizards. In the words of Arellano, she is "the black, male Mediator, Lord of the Crossroads in Cuban Santeria, who needs to take alcohol and tobacco to be on the same astral plane as humans" (2019). As another fantasy self-portrait, "Eshu" was made at the time when Arellano needed to quit alcohol (hence, the wine bottle pointed downwards)

and turned to cigars as a way of quitting cigarettes.

### **Reverence to the Mother-Goddess**

The Mother-Goddess that Arellano harks back to in the journey of conception depicted in the first inscape, is none other than Mother Earth. In the artist's statement of Arellano on *Temple to the Moon Goddess (1983)*, Arellano puts forward that: "As Nature unfolds her cycles, so Life itself with all its ups and downs must come around again" (Guillermo 23). Her reclamation of Earth as the mother-deity in the first inscape informs not only humanity's first religion, but even more particularly, the aboriginal Filipino's animist faith system that receded in the imposition of the Roman Catholic worldview in the Philippines. In her artist's statement on *Temple to the Moon Goddess*, Arellano figures that "centuries of religious suppression and forcefeeding had led us with a certain schizophrenia" that manifested in our insane sense of morality (Arellano 23) that is, at its worst, double-standard and machoistic, yet weak (23). In the authoritative God the father's image that instilled the fear of one's sex, Arellano then searched for a different, more benevolent, embracing deity, and thus, remarkably pondered: "And so there must have been a time when people prayed to God the Mother instead of to an angry authoritative father with a long, white beard (23).

According to the feminist, religious, postcolonial theorists, Donaldson and Pui-lan, in the larger historical arena, women's intellectual, psychological, and political positions under the regimes of colonialism, gender, and religion have often been contradictory, since women exist both as "colonized patriarchal objects" (2) and "colonizing race-privileged subjects" (2). In the schizophrenic, religious position that Arellano describes in her first inscape, she captures these ramifications brought by the religious contradictions instilled in our national consciousness by Spain as a Christian country that, in the Donaldson and Pui-lan's words, "had the colonial project of conquering lands and seizing different parts of the earth," that" implemented 'a global colonial system upon which the sun has never set' (6).

Donaldson and Pui-lan further assert that the academic study of religion, emerging from European universities in the mid 19th century, “provided justification for the ‘civilizing’ mission of the West” (14), whereas, the study of myths and rituals from so-called “primitives” and “savages,” reinforced the cultural hegemony of Europe and undergirded the evolutionary view of humankind’s development” (14), thus reflected in Arellano’s formative years where such indoctrination is embedded in the academe as she learns our long Spanish history in elementary, and even in her later years confronting the contradictions of the Filipino’s religious position where one’s native, animist sensibilities battle with their imposed belief in God the father, the son, and the holy spirit.

In a similar respect, the Puerto Rican sociologist, Ramon Grosfoguel explains in his journal article, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” that the kind of “nature” formulated by Western conceptions have formed “ecological hierarchies” (14) where it is treated as a means towards an end with the destruction of human and non-human life (Grosfoguel 14). Such conception privileges itself over other non-Western conceptions of “ecology,” such as Pachamama, Tawhid, and Dao (i.e. ecology or cosmos as an end in itself), which “considers in its rationality the reproduction of life” (Grosfoguel 14). The passage illustrates the dichotomized religions that Arellano cites in her artist’s statement, with the imposed patriarchal father God as a product of Western conception and colonization, and the benevolent Goddess being the revered Mother Nature conceived from the East and encroached by colonial powers.

Central to her first inscape, Arellano explores how this conception of Mother Nature exemplifies the many ways in which women and nature are one, alike, and the same in the spirit of their life-giving capacities, a quality that historically nuanced the nation and humanity’s first religion. While the inscapes section opens with the “Hermaphroditic Homunculus” as the

neurological precursor of what is discernibly a journey of intercourse and pregnancy, the narrative of female primordiality begins with the “Eternal oval.” According to the classic text on the exploration of the reemerging Goddess religion entitled *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, written by the late Swedish artist, ecofeminist, and theoretician, Monica Sjoo, in the beginning, we were all created female. Citing the American psychiatrist and writer on female sexuality, Mary Jane Sherfey, M.D., in her text entitled *The Nature of Evolution of Female Sexuality*, Sjoo introduces Sherfey’s 1961 discovery called “the inductor theory” where Sherfey states that: “All mammalian embryos, male and female, are anatomically female during the early stages of fetal life” (3). The “Eternal Oval,” as an egg, is symbolic of female creation and female generative energy (Sjoo 55). According to Sjoo, at the pole of contraction, “our universe existed as an invisible point of dark light, of compacted potential and energy,” (55) and this world was an egg, that, when combined with gravitational contraction, created the solar system, the atom, and, on a large scale, the galaxy (66).

Over the course of a masculinized human evolution, particularly in anthropology’s assumption of the field’s “generic maleness” (Sjoo 7), Sjoo, in her text, reclaims the role of women by identifying their contributions in what became a male-dominated evolutionary process where “she mothers him, she mates him, she cooks his dinner,” (7) while “he evolves, she follows,” and, “he evolutionizes, she adjusts” (7). This, as Sjoo points out, despite the fact that 75-80 percent of the historic hunting-and-gathering people’s subsistence comes from the women’s food-gathering activities, that the oldest primal tools used by contemporary hunters found in ancient sites are women’s digging sticks, that worldwide legends citing women as the first domesticators and users of fire, and that women were the first to gather and study medicinal plants as the first doctors (Sjoo 7).

This effort of reclamation not only concretizes women’s capacities as producers and creators, but also directs to their role as procreators. The image of “Haliya Bathing” (See: Fig.

3), is all the more nuanced and enriched by Sjoos's assertion that: "It is woman who goes through the sacred transformations in our own body and psyche---the mystery--changes of menstruation, pregnancy, birth, and the production of milk" (51). In the same vein, these marvelous processes also extend to the way we identify "The Great Mother" (48):

Death is the powerful dramatic mystery equal to Birth- and both are overarched and contained by the Great Mother. This concept of a female earth as the source of cyclic birth, life, death, and rebirth underlies all mythological and religious symbology; it is the source of all religious belief. It is important to grasp the time dimension involved: God was female for at least the first 200,000 years of human life on earth. (Sjoos, 48-49)

In the rounded form of "Babboldibooda," and the serene image of an impending birth pictured in the bare "Haliya Bathing" these attributes are actualized. Sjoos characterizes The Great Mother as "the beauty of the green earth, the life-giving waters, the consuming fire, the radiant moon, and the fiery sun" who, as Star Goddess and Spiderwoman, "weaves the luminous web that creates the universe," and, as Earth and the great planetary Spirit-Being, "germinates life within Her dark womb" (Sjoos, xviii). As religion "binds our individual selves back to a larger, universal source" (Sjoos 51), Sjoos asserts that the source, in women's religion, is the Great Mother, whose substance, nature, processes, play, and work we participate in (52). As religious icons alluding to pregnancy, with "Babbooldibooda" as a fat-bellied Buddha figure and "Haliya Bathing" as a goddess from Bicol myth, the *Temple to the Moon Goddess* assents to God as female, thus unfolding Arellano's curiosity of God the Mother as a possible reality.



Fig. 8: “Inscapes: A Retrospective by Agnes Arellano.” *Ateneo Art Gallery*. <https://ateneoartgallery.com/exhibitions/inscapes-by-agnes-arellano>. 2020. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

This first inscape does not only retrieve our religious origins as female but also reconciles a gendered dichotomy through the “Yabyum.” (See: Fig. 8) In my personal feature on the installation, the interviewees, Leila Ramirez and Dr. Barbaza, explained by the former that it is a reminder of how a woman’s sexual energy need not be repressed and described by the latter as a depiction of a loving struggle between man and woman where neither one is overwhelmed, nor dominates the other (Agama). The “Yabyum” is an image of love and unity, where man and woman are treated as two halves of the same whole (Arellano 2019). In this respect, perhaps just as important to note is that the original version of “Yabyum”, that is, the “Recumbent Yabyum Sarcophagus” (Guillermo 32) is derived from how the bodies of Arellano’s parents were recovered after the fire in 1981 (Guillermo 32). The “Yabyum” is a composite figure of man and woman’s communion towards “cosmic consciousness” (Arellano 2019). Outside the sculpture found within the first inscape however, our religious realities are a far cry from what the “Yabyum” embodies. In this eventually dichotomized, religious hierarchy manifested in the tug-of-war between the Western dictum of Christianity and reverence to Earth as the first religion, the impact falls on women and nature who share in the plight of the Mother Goddess.

## Subjugation of Women and Nature

Beginning with the first part of the second inscape, “Carcass Cornucopia,” (See: Fig. 4) from what was originally a cosmic embryo where the energy of the universe is concentrated in, the Mother-Goddess in Her developed limbs, become the partitions of the cosmos, which can be likened to one of the world’s first creation myths where the female god creates the world out of her own body:

At first Kujum-Chantu, the earth, was like a human being; she had a head, and arms and legs, and an enormous fat belly. The original human beings lived on the surface of her belly [...] Her head became the snow-covered mountains; the bones of her back turned into smaller hills. Her chest was the valley where the Apa-Tanis live. From her neck came the north country of the Nagins. Her buttocks turned into the Assam plain. For just as the buttocks are full of fat, Assam has fat rich soil. (Sjoo, 49)

Following from the concept of The Great Mother as the source and giver of life, the second inscapes not only contours the Mother Goddess’s exhausted giving of self, but also discloses the cause behind her demise. While there is no malice in her death, a dangerous aphorism is put forward as fact: in the words of Arellano, “from a feminist herstorical perspective, the matriarchy dies, the patriarchy is born” (2019). Through the feminist literature, *Woman and Nature*, written by the American poet and feminist writer, Susan Griffin, the aphorism can be unpacked and traced back to the reign of Catholicism--where God is man--and the advent of modernity as well as the anthropocentric paradigm--where man is God. Griffin explains how man considers women as material and closer to nature and, in another theorist’s words, treats her as “devoid of rationality” (Mies xxiii), whereas “God” is known as father Logos, who knows all things and does not need to learn; whose image is identified in man, and has created the laws of the universe, including Natural law; and who, thus, can claim himself superior to matter who need not obey the laws he created (Griffin 14-19). Such consistently resounds the

aforementioned project of our Spanish Christian colonization buttressed in the unsolicited call for conquering our part of the Earth in the name of an enforced superiority and imposition of civilization over nature.

Much of the ramifications of these patriarchal paradigms in the modern age are told in “Carcass Cornucopia” as a heavily allegorical piece. As her limbs are representative of the working class, the proletariat, and the peasantry, “Cornucopia” can be vividly taken as a symbolism of the woman seized and conquered like the earth as “colonized patriarchal objects subject to corporate rule” (Shiva xv). In the collaborative, text written by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, they draw the links to how the expansion of corporate rule has ravaged farms, displaced people, devastated ecosystems, created climate chaos, and intensified violence against women.

In the patriarchal construct of Gross Domestic Product or “GDP,” they explain how neoliberalism--as a liberalism that favors market capitalism--in which the GDP falls under--as an economic model that myopically focuses on growth, begins violence against women in its exclusion of their contributions to economy and society (xv). The GDP, which calculates growth based on production, follows the assumption that if producers consume what they produce, they then fall outside the production boundary; “hence all women who produce for their families, children, community and society are treated as ‘non-productive’ and ‘economically inactive’” (Shiva xv). Akin to Mies and Shiva’s argument in lieu of “Cornucopia” as an extension of The Great Mother’s narrative, Sjoon also claims that the irony of this is in how many basic industries invented by women such as cooking, food processing, weaving, and textile have been turned into “grossly alienated and profiteering mass-market industries” (33). As the patriarchy separates itself from nature, it has engaged in a resource-grabbing pursuit that has resulted in cultivating a culture of exploitation and rape of the Earth that is materialized in the carcass.



Similarly, “Carcass Cornucopia,” symbolic of the cosmos and the universe that works within the Mother-Goddess, is hollowed out as the patriarchy--represented in the lording *bulol*--takes the place of Her spirituality in sexuality; emulated in her unique capacity to give life and provide a sacred and abundant bounty as the “cornucopia.” From the other end of the spectrum, directly opposing free-market capitalism, Marxist ideology, in the process of its criticism of patriarchal religion, undermined this reality and denied this spiritual dimension of life (Sjoo 14). As Sjoo would explain, the tragedy of Marx and his followers is that they confused spirit with established religions:

They saw clearly, and historically, that established religion aligned itself with the oppressor [...]

They saw the seeds of oppression in religious doctrines: doctrines that rationalized poverty and enslavement [...] They saw the wealth and power of the churches [...] they heard sermons condemning "material wealth" and "earthly pleasures," while the churchmen and their rich supporters lived in opulent security, and the mass of believers lived on their stony knees, in rags (14-15).

As Marxist ideology narrowed the focus on economic and class reductiveness, they not only denied the reality of the human spirit, but also split the human being into two parts; in material existence at odds with spiritual existence, which, according to Sjoo, ripped the world apart in a “false dichotomy between ‘Godless communism’ and ‘divine capitalism’ (14-15). In this patriarchal war against itself, it has set out “to split material production from spiritual experience, science from magic, [...] and sexuality from the sacred,” among many other things at the expense of creating hierarchies and classes that posed more detriment averse to its objectives. As Sjoo would put it:

When it refutes or opposes the reality of human spiritual experience, Marxist communism does not resolve this destruction; it only compounds it, with a different rhetoric. It gets rid of "God" and "church" only to substitute another tyranny: that of "the state" or "the machine" or "the party" or "the production quota." It does not truly free human beings; it only changes the brand-name of the chains (16).

The second incapes, as an emblem and a paragon of the destruction and death of the matriarchy, is forthright in illuminating the tragedies of the earth espoused with the violence on women. The “Music for Making the Sun Rise” accompanies “Carcass Cornucopia” to signify the foreboding ingress of the patriarchy, whose means of acquiring power follow from the flag of the Sun God.

### **The Sun God, the Patriarch, the Paradigm**

The transition of powers elucidated in Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, begins with the manipulation of the language of poetic myth, wherein, the “magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies,” in honor of the Moon Goddess or in invocation of the muse, was tampered with in late Minoan times “when invaders from Central Asia began to substitute patrilinear for matrilinear institutions and remodel or falsify myths to justify social changes” (Graves 10). Following thereafter, the Greeks saw magical poetry as a threat to their “new religion of logic,” (10) in honor of the Sun God and God of Reason, Apollo, exemplified in an anecdote on Socrates specified by Graves.

In the words of Socrates: “the language of myth is irrelevant to self-knowledge” (11) and the “fields and trees will not teach me anything but men do” (11). In his “vulgar cleverness,” (11) as Graves would coin, Socrates, not only turned his back on poetic myths, but also the Moon-goddess who inspired the people to pay woman spiritual and sexual homage (Graves 11). Graves would argue that what the philosophers called Platonic love, as an escape from the power of the Goddess, was really an intellectual homosexuality in which man’s intellect tried to make itself “spiritually self-sufficient” (Graves 11).

In inscapes three, *Temple to the Sun God*, it is later discovered that these elusive attempts and re-appropriations did not just stay as standalone detriments, but eventually

culminated into a compounded paradigm that resulted from man's attempts to undermine, subdue, and override the influence of Mother-Goddesses and force himself into power. As Sjoo would put it: while the surviving moon religion in Egypt remained in the hands of women, "it was the Sun God and his stolen powers that publicly ruled" (257). The Sun God, otherwise known as the Sky Father of invaders who was, everywhere, imposing on the indigenous earth-and-moon-worshipping people, did not eliminate The Great Mother but instead, married her to the conquering Sky Father in epics and folktales where she was "retold" into a harmless and powerless wife (Sjoo 257).

The sun cult, as an all-male priesthood who worshipped the Sun God was established by the edict of a military dictatorship (Sjoo 253). The Greeks and Romans had eventually reached this religious stage by the time Christianity began, and as the Romans conquered Greece, they brought the God with them in Italy as a "military nation unashamed of their own rude poetic tradition" (Graves 392). Some of them however still took up Greek poetry seriously as part of their education in political rhetoric, an art which they found "necessary for consolidating their military conquests" (Graves, 392).

The cult of the Sun God and his troops, as Sjoo would explain, have hence been identified by their manipulative misogyny and political relation to women, not as partners, but instead as slaves (261). This characteristic of imperialistic armies then became a tool to "further demoralize and rob the energies of colonized people" which created two hostile classes, male versus female, in their imposition, as imperialists, of patriarchal law, religion, and customs (Sjoo, 261)

As the Sun God gained popularity and rose to power through war and conquest, it followed that mythology, popular epics, and religious doctrine stressed and glorified the virtues of warriors with "Fascism as its inherent worldview," (Sjoo 258) and life seen as a battleground in which "the victor deserves his spoils" (Sjoo 258). The patriarchy's inaugural

epics and myths such as the Mahabharata of Vedic India and the Greek Iliad alongside other Heroic Age epics from Hebrew, Teutonic and Celtic peoples all engaged in an endless glorification of war (Sjoo 257).

These power-grabbing and relentless war projects did not stay in myth. They also materialized in science, technology, and imposed civilization found in the *Temple to the Sun God*. The subsection, complementing *Temple to the Moon Goddess*, depicts poignant and phallic images of war and destruction conflated with the patriarchy and serves as a counterfoil to the conception of The Great Mother as the giver of life. Two of the most characteristic sculptures that are representative of the descriptions of the Sun God are the “Angel of Death” in conjunction with the “Bronze Bullets.”

Taking from the aforementioned German sociologist and feminist writer, Maria Mies, who co-authored *Ecofeminism*, the former, as a remembrance of the devastations of Hiroshima, with a mushroom cloud and a male torso emboldened in the piece, can look into the patriarchal insecurity of non-reproduction which hence necessitated using reason towards science and technology where such capacity is not needed. As Mies would explain:

Patriarchal civilization is the effort to solve one problem of the male gender, namely the fact that men cannot produce human life on their own. They are not the beginning. They cannot produce children, particularly sons, without women. Mothers are the beginning. This was still evident to the old Greeks. Mothers are arche, the beginning of human life. Therefore men invented a technology for which mothers are not necessary (xxvi).

“Angel of Death,” directly alluding to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in WWII, exemplifies this in being representative of man inventing technology to dispose of the reproductive need found in women. In *Ecofeminism*, Mies explains that the men in the Manhattan Project, who produced the world’s first atomic bombs, knew what they were doing and considered themselves as fathers of their creation, where “the bomb was their ‘baby’, their son” (xxii). Depending on the effects of their explosion, the ‘fathers’ codenamed Hiroshima as ‘Little Boy’

and Nagasaki as 'Fat Man' (Mies xxii). Mies then puts forward that: "Modern science was indeed a 'brainchild' of such modern 'fathers of destruction'" where they constructed new machines that do not need human women as mothers (Mies xxii). The "Bronze Bullets" that accompany the piece, further contour these images of war-driven motivations as the armalites lined up are highly phallic symbols that direct the path to the "Angel of Death."

The "Obelisk," "Phallic and Iambe," and "The Toad Goddess," depicting what follows out of these motivations, more comprehensively conflate death and destruction with the patriarch. These sculptures can be read from the articulations of Sjoo, who explains how patriarchal religions, political states, and institutions use warfare as its tool in the acquisition of wealth, done in raids and conquests (257). Sjoo argues that it is a powerful factor in dispossessing women (matriarchal cultures) and keeping them dispossessed (257), which can be seen in The Bronze Age warrior's world that neatly divided between the victorious male and his spoils, and everything from women, children, animals, lands, and resources--all the rest of life--constituted these spoils (Sjoo 257). "Phallic and Iambe," which, by themselves are phalluses with hideous expressions, as the remaining pair from an army--which are likewise the warriors in Sjoo's arguments--enhances a grotesque dimension that give these characteristics of the patriarchy a face.

The remaining sculptures, the "Obelisk" and the "Toad Goddess," on the other hand, enflesh and crystallize the image of death in a post-war context. In Sjoo's arguments, they are the "lives" put to waste that constitutes the warrior's spoils. The "Obelisk," albeit colorless, is a bloodstained monument made up of skulls that represent the lives that had to perish in the name of erecting and establishing a new civilization. One of the deaths that the monument dedicates itself toward is the Ifugaos; native Filipinos who continue to hold a deep reverence for nature--and continue to participate in its creative being--across different eras of modernization and civilization. By reading the "Obelisk" in this respect, within the context of

*Temple to the Sun God*, the ills of a new society imposed in warfare, technology, and patriarchal religion are actualized. As the feminist and postcolonial theorist, Pui-lan would explain:

The imposition of Christianity in order to convert the so-called savages and barbarians in the 16th century, followed by the imposition of “white man’s burden” and “civilizing mission” in the 18th and 19th century, the imposition of the “developmentalist project” in the 20th century and, more recently, the imperial project of military interventions under the rhetoric of “democracy” and “human rights” in the 21st century, have all been imposed by militarism and violence under the rhetoric of modernity of saving the other from its own barbarianisms (14).



Fig. 9: “Agnes Arellano’s Inscapes declares a woman’s fiery history.” *Vantage*. 6 Feb. 2020. [http://vantage.theguidon.com/agnes-arellanos-inscapes-declares-womans-fiery-history/?fbclid=IwAR2Ia-Kkd0N\\_GMchjJRF8dK-umDDhxC3EO7Opm8pV1E3jBsRy51KjYklhGI](http://vantage.theguidon.com/agnes-arellanos-inscapes-declares-womans-fiery-history/?fbclid=IwAR2Ia-Kkd0N_GMchjJRF8dK-umDDhxC3EO7Opm8pV1E3jBsRy51KjYklhGI). Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

All these are at play in the “Obelisk,” (See: Fig. 9) not merely as a monument of death, but even more as a memorial of all these atrocities that make up a compounded patriarchal paradigm. With regard to the paradigm and in relation to the warrior’s spoils, akin to the “Obelisk,” “The Toad Goddess,”--a dismembered female body positioned and rendered as a toad--is reminiscent of the dead bodies found in war. Among all the sculptures in *Temple to*

*the Sun God*, it is perceptibly the only nature-based element and the only female component in the section, symbolic and revelatory of a deeper layer of problems behind the defense of the nation state vis-a-vis the abuse of female sexuality. As German postcolonial writer, Andrea Germer would cite in her journal article on female historiography:

Sexuality may form the very center of a realm called reproductive resources and—like women, family, nature, or cultural essence—would be the most in danger of being exploited/exported and in need of being ‘defended’ or ‘protected’ [...] the underlying image of ‘protector’ and ‘protected’ on which masculinized concepts of warfare, military build-up, and the nation-state depend for legitimacy [...] the ‘powerful rhetorical figure’ of defense referred not only to military operations but was used in practices of ‘internal colonization’ instituted against perceived dangers in the realm of sex and sexuality (52-53).

The “Toad Goddess” is representative of the reproductive resources, such as women, family, nature, and cultural essence, that are put in danger of exploitation in the face of war. These reproductive resources are doubly impacted by the two patriarchal hegemonies at odds with each other at a time of war; the national government and foreign colonial threats. From their position, they are doubly challenged as the nation-state capitalizes on framing them as “vulnerable” so as to rationalize and justify warfare and militarization, while colonial powers endeavor in a resource-grabbing pursuit that creates a culture of rape; of the Earth, of local, self-reliant economies, and of women (Mies xvi). The beauty in the “Toad Goddess” is in how, in spite of these atrocities it becomes subject to, much like how the earth can learn to heal itself, as a “Toad Goddess,” it also expresses a message of hope in regeneration.

### **The Original Trinity**

As a culminating inscape section, in *Three Buddha Mothers and Eshu* (1996), Arellano personalizes myth and religion in her own experience as a mother and her entire journey in motherhood. It is an amalgamation of the history of the Earth and her own reality. In a local

feature by Mara Fabella on the installation, she describes the inscape as “an example of how Arellano attempts to question the generalized perception of a deity as male.” Here, Arellano takes characteristics typically attributed to the masculine and reimagines them as the feminine (Fabella) through the many faces that the Goddess assumes in poetic myth before the Holy Trinity we come to know in the Catholic, postcolonial era came to be.

Apart from “Vesta,” “Dea,” and “Eshu” as Graves’s Triple Goddesses, The Great-Mother, in varying triumvirates, also took different forms in myth. The Heliconian Muses for example, as an indivisible Trinity, took on the appropriate names of Meditation, Memory, and Song (Graves 386). The medieval catholics recognized how they were also three in number when “they built the church of their own Holy Trinity on the site of the deserted shrine of the Heliconian Muses” (Graves 386). Another example, as Graves would cite, the English poet, John Skelton, in his poem, *Garland of Laurell*, described the Triple Goddess in her three characters as the Goddess of the Sky, Earth, and Underworld (Graves 386):

*Diana in the leaves green,*

*Luna that so bright doth sheen,*

*Persephone in Hell* (qtd. in Skelton)

Grave elaborates that Persephone, as the Goddess of the Underworld, was concerned with Birth, Procreation, and Death. Diana, as Goddess of the Earth, was concerned with the three seasons of Spring, Summer, and Winter; animation trees and plants while ruling all loving creatures (386). Luna, among the three, was most nuanced by Graves accordingly:

As Goddess of the Sky she was the Moon, in her three phases of New Moon, Full Moon, and Waning Moon [...] It must not be forgotten that the Triple Goddess, as worshipped for example at Stymphalus, was a personification of primitive woman--woman the creatress and destructress. As the New Moon or Spring she was girl; as the Full Moon or Summer she was woman; as the Old Moon or Winter she was hag (Graves 386).

Altogether, these varying versions of the Mother-Goddess are permeated in the whole of *Inscapes*. Whether it be meditation, memory, or song; or the leaves of the green earth; or Death



as a “dramatic mystery equal to Birth” (Sjoo 49); or a personification of the primitive woman as “creatress and destructress” (Graves 386)--all these elements weave a diverse and encompassing experience and portrait of The Great Mother.

### **Situating Arellano’s *Inscapes* as a Surrealist, Filipino Artwork**

It is a common thread among many female Filipino artists serving as Arellano’s contemporaries to have learned from male mentors and be educated in the Western tradition. Amita Magsaysay-Ho, recognized as one of the first modernists in the Philippines, for example was under the guidance of prominent male national artists, Fernando Amorsolo and Fabian de la Rosa, other artists on the other hand, like Brenda Fajardo, earned an art degree in Wisconsin-Madison, USA, while, similarlu, Pacita Abad, on account of political unrest in the Marcos regime, studied painting in Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C. in 1975.

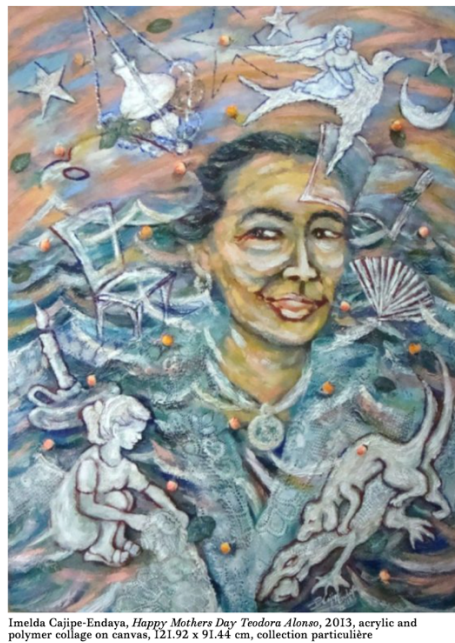


Fig. 10: “Imelda Cajipe-Endaya” *Archives of Women Artists Research and Exhibitions*. 2014. <https://awarewomenartists.com/>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

In the inadvertent force that tied them together, female Filipino artists also produced works of the same themes; of the same spirit; of the same woman. In Magsaysay-Ho’s *Two Girls with fruit baskets* (1943), in her idyllic portrayal of two female subjects in the field--

which can be mistakenly attributed as an Amorsolo (i.e. her former mentor) work at first glance--she predominantly features women in temporal oils. Imelda Cajipe-Endaya, who works with canvases and multimedia art, and deals with themes of cultural identity, gender, migration, and displacement, in her piece entitled, *Happy Mother's Day Teodora Alonso* (2013), (See: Fig. 10), starkly foregrounds a smiling female subject--presumably Teodora Alonso--who is enmeshed into a blue, celestial sky and dream-like backdrop with cosmic elements, like stars and crescent moons, juxtaposed with found objects such as chairs, fans, and books.



Pacita Abad, *Watching and Waiting*, 1979, oil on canvas, 89 x 127 cm, 35 x 50 in., © Pacita Abad Art Estate

Fig. 11: “Pacita Abad.” *Archives of Women Artists Research and Exhibitions*. 2014. <https://awarewomenartists.com/>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.

Pacita Abad, who has travelled across different countries across Asia, like India, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, in her work, *Watching and waiting* (See: Fig. 11), paints the context of the refugee crisis where she pictures women and children as the subjects of her canvas, crowding behind barbwire. Brenda Fajardo, known for her acrylic piece, *Baraha ng buhay pilipino: Major Arcana III [Cards of life: Major Arcana III]*, explores the plight of women, more specifically under colonial rule, in her other acrylic painting, *Masubo and Kasaysayan ni Mariya [Mariya's Story is Sad]*, where three women in black veils and thorned crowns with the Spanish, American, and Japanese flags as their background, ghastly

mimic. through their gestures, the proverb of the 3 wise monkeys--hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil--under their covered faces. In many of her other acrylic works, Fajardo characterizes the image of a female deity in *Nagasinang and adlao sa babaylan* [*The Sun is Shining Upon the Priestess*] (2008), *Babayi series* (2007), and *Portrait of the Artist as Babaylan* (2018).



Brenda Fajardo, *Masubo ang kasayasayan ni Mariya* [Maria's Story is Sad], 2009, acrylic on canvas, 91.44 x 121.92 cm

Fig. 12: "Brenda Fajardo." *Archives of Women Artists Research and Exhibitions*. 2014. <https://awarewomenartists.com/>. Accessed 8 Oct. 2020.

The longstanding patriarchal, Western paradigm, from which we have borrowed models of our art from has inevitably infiltrated both the way we consume and produce art in the local landscape today as they are saturated with vestiges of both our primordial intuitions and our later postcolonial dispositions that was once only imposed, but now ultimately inherent. In this predicament, we circle back to the inquiry: how much of Philippine history has actually progressed from the shackles of a patriarchal history? Through *Inscapes*, as a Surrealist, Filipino artwork, Arellano not only recovers the story of the colonized nation, the conquered earth, and the history of the Great Mother; in the process, she has also restored the Filipino woman's history. Arellano, much like her contemporaries, pieced together an image

of the Filipino woman's identity mirrored in the history of The Great Mother in *Inscapes*. The matriarchy that she recovered in her art is not only the individual, Filipino woman, but also the Filipino woman's experience in, and as, the motherland. Arellano's art, alongside the works of other female Filipino artists, have creatively participated in retrieving this portrait of the Filipino woman as they envisioned and actualized the woman in a postcolonial era, the woman in nature, the woman as a deity, and the woman in the cosmos.

The strength and magic then of *Inscapes* is not in its vulgar rejection of the detrimental patriarchy, but in its ability to give form to a long, repressed consciousness that is rich cognizant in the understanding of it. *Inscapes* thrives in its capacity to reinvigorate and empower the Filipino woman's identity outside and beyond the paradigm. Amid an era of historical turmoil brought by a remarkable eco-crisis wrought by phallic rules, regimes, and unbridled scientific advancements, *Inscapes* calls us to retrace the errs in history, rethink the way we move forward in a masculinized anthropocene, and rediscover the beauty that thrives in benevolence. *Inscapes* imparts to us that, in our creative participation in the past and our active reconstruction of a shared—rather than a dichotomized—future, that we can still find hope and emancipation for the earth, the woman, and the motherland.

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