

RAYJI DE GUIA

Rosas

after *Emiliana Kampilan*

Binibini, I used to
call you—from that song
we couldn't forget: a kundiman
to soothe the afternoon until
Lola turns the station to pray
rosary for absence of news
before she herself succumbed
to grief. An orchestra, a choir,
or a waltz, we danced
as lady and another
lady as man. Beneath
moonshine, I open my eyes
not to twirl out of your arms
but to take up arms in the country—
side unreachable. Binibini, I still call
you in my mind, a ballroom
for the eternal encore
before our parting. As women
coming of age, starry-eyed
in spite of war, the promised
last dance keeps the beating

of my feet across fields, over
mountains, praying for that day
I follow the steps back to you.
On that day, a song will begin,
as scriptures have promised, but
of trumpeting jazz and disco.
I will find you in the chanting
crowd, among comrades, blood-red petals
on the streets. Halina, binibini, I'll beckon,
hand-in-hand, we'll dance the swing
before their effigies
afame. A fulfilment
of retribution.

binibini: Filipino for "miss" or "lady"; generally refers to unmarried women

lola: Filipino for "grandmother"

kundiman: a genre of traditional Filipino love songs; the lyrics are written in Tagalog

halina: Filipino for "come here"

New Creation

Hailed as god he drops the word: Bodies
fall one by one, not by force of gravity
but by the whims of a few; a command as easy
as pointing at a star in any galaxy.

Which is to say there may not be enough
of us for the downpour of meteors
and meteorites into our sky.

Tell your friends and their friends,
tell the children and their parents
the horrors,

but do not stop
when they have sunk into a void.

Pull them up, whisper of love,
and bring them out in the sun
because when we chant our hopes,
a new universe unfolds from each syllable,
and the aftermath will outlive us.

War

after *Incendies* (2010)

In times of war, what is the worst
that can become of me? Is it death
of my son family or
lover? When I fight to avenge
what has been taken from me choose
a side seek a cause to shelter my grief
what is the sanction for my actions?
For fighting against men who fight
men against them, there is no place
for me, this is my transgression:
to be a woman in times of war.

In this country, the worst is not to be killed
it is to be raped again and again
until I break— but remember, the president
should go first. If that does not work,
then to be shot with a rifle
up my vagina because that
is where he finds
our humanity.