

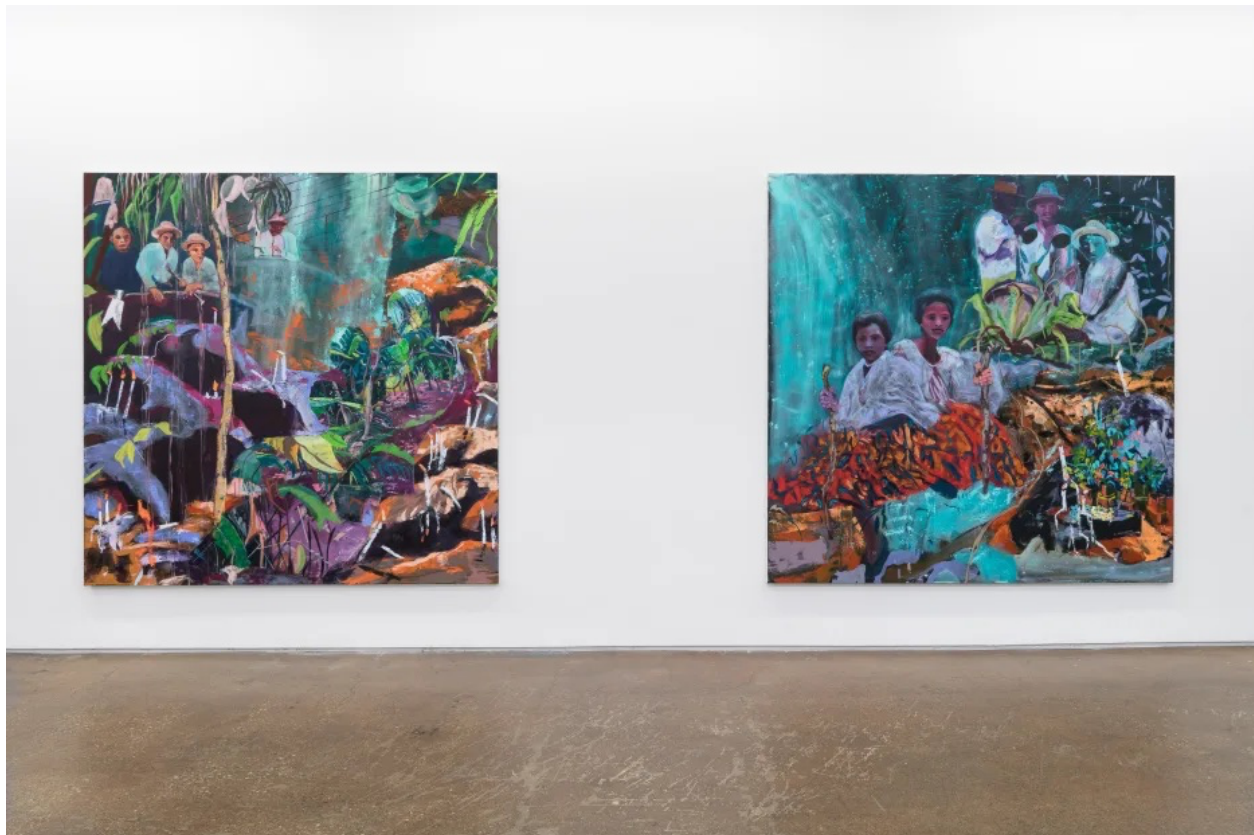
Cross-Cultural Historical Perspectives With a Side of Magical Realism: A Review of Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River" at moniquemeloche

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Installation view, Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River" / Photo: Courtesy the artist and moniquemeloche

Strange and wonderful flora and fauna illustrated in a dark palette clash against the shade becoming unexpectedly brighter. Silhouettes of animals and people stare at you deeply through the canvas. Dark greens, deep purples and vast whites make for a sublime experience. "Days Later, Down River" offers a glimpse into Maia Cruz Palileo's Filipino American heritage in the form of vividly colored paintings and ceramic sculptures. In a mashup of memory and imagination, family photographs and oral histories are recontextualized. Between the cultural and the historical, Palileo's work is best described in the words of compatriot writer and journalist Nick Joaquin as having a "tropical gothic" aesthetic. The juxtaposition between the real and the unreal attests to that. But as the artist allows the fantastical to slip into the everyday in such a matter-of-fact way, magical realism comes to mind.



Installation view, Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River"/Photo: Courtesy of the artist and moniquemeloche

Influenced by the history of their family's arrival in the United States from the Philippines, their own childhood experiences growing up in the American Midwest (Chicago) as well as the history between the two countries, the Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist investigates the very things that make them themselves. Identity, belonging and the concept of home are omnipresent in paintings, installations, sculptures and drawings. Colonialism, migration and the diaspora are unequivocally part of Palileo's experience—whether through historical, cultural, autobiographical or collective memory. Intrafamilial and cross-generational differences further tangle their retrospective journey offering a less linear path to the Self. The lines between personal and shared blur.

The works on view reveal a geographical and spiritual topography of the artist's homeland—the Philippines—and are inspired by their recent residency at the University of Michigan, which houses one of the largest collections of Filipino artifacts outside of that country. Besides diving into the Bentley Historical Library photographic archives and exploring objects from the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology Philippines collection, it is important to note Palileo's past research at the Newberry Library in Chicago as well as their personal family archive.



Installation view, Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River"/Photo: Courtesy of the artist and moniquemeloche

Diwata, a figurine that in Filipino folklore appears as a fairy, a dryad or a spirit believed to inhabit and guard natural features such as forests, is prominently featured. They pose leisurely with a snake around their neck, show off their striped pants, go swimming or ride horses. Dusky landscapes add to the overall mystique. Palileo uses layers over layers of emerald, ruby and midnight blue to recreate the layering of memory and history. Can one ever really trace what lies beneath the surface?

"Days Later, Down River" evokes feelings of fear, vulnerability, fragility, and respect for nature, which is perceived as vast, powerful and mysterious. It also sheds light into the past—something we can't choose or rewrite but heavily informs our present and future forever shaping who we are. Caught in the haze of memory—the things we remember and those that we don't—we realize the smallness and ephemerality of our existence. It is right then and there that one finds a spirit of sacredness, serenity and oneness—a place of harmony with the universe and with oneself. With darkness comes calmness and a restorative relief. Ultimately, "Days Later, Down River" leaves the viewer in awe—of art, of nature and of humanity at large. Palileo's work possesses that kind of transformative power.

Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River" is on view at moniquemeloche, 451 North Paulina, through May 26.



Installation view, Maia Cruz Palileo's "Days Later, Down River"/Photo: Courtesy of the artist and moniquemeloche