

## **PHILIPPINE FILM: 1961-1992**

Filmmaking in the Philippines reached industry status in the decade of the 1950s. The total output of the various movie companies then in operation kept the two major outlets in Manila at that time—Life Theater on Quezon Boulevard in Quiapo and Cine Dalisay on Rizal Avenue in Santa Cruz—regularly supplied with new Tagalog films. The majority of the feature films were produced by four companies—Sampaguita, LVN, Premiere, and Lebran. Each of them had its own roster of stars and technicians and its own filming equipment and facilities to merit being called a studio.

### **Break-up of the Studio System**

The “studio system” was characterized principally by long-term planning based on business goals set by the investors. As indicated by the full-page advertisements that usually made their appearance in the yearend issues of the movie magazines of the time, planning meant lining up a predetermined number and variety of film offerings for the entire forthcoming year, consisting of action pictures, melodramas, comedies, musicals, fantasy films, and whatever else was deemed appealing to a variegated audience.

Under such a system, the audience was provided with alternatives. Not that the alternatives were severally stamped with quality as individual motion pictures. As a matter of fact, the studio system turned out mostly formula-oriented movies to ensure easy acceptability among audiences who were thought to be passive viewers seeking only to be entertained. Nevertheless, with four studios competing for the patronage of moviegoers, the array of film offerings was guarantee enough that the audience had a choice.

Quality standards were set up by the individual studios if only to be able to keep up with the competition. LVN, for example, took pains to avail of the newest technological developments in filmmaking. It pioneered in the production of color movies when black-and-white was still the standard format, in the processing of color movies when it was more convenient to simply send them out to laboratories abroad, and in developing its own wide screen in response to Hollywood’s Cinemascope.

More important, as far as the movie-goers were concerned, was the “specialization” each studio developed to outdo its competitors. Certain genres were cultivated as “specialties” that showed off to best advantage the superior skill and art of a particular studio. Sampaguita Pictures made youth movies employing the prettiest young ladies and the best-looking young men who were always dressed in the latest fashions from abroad and knew the latest dance steps. LVN Pictures was the outstanding producer of costume pictures, especially those that involved swordplay imitative of Errol Flynn or Jon Hall in Hollywood films popular among Filipino audiences. Premiere Productions specialized in action films and crime stories set in contemporary society that gave full play to its stars’ flair for dramatics. Lebran delved into Western classics, the Bible, and ancient history.

Outside of the four studios, there were other companies that made movies not much different from those of Sampaguita, LVN, Lebran, or Premiere. However, they did not have the services of the most glamorous and popular stars who were usually under long-term contracts with the studios. Two of these “independent” companies were owned by big stars like Fernando Poe Sr. and Manuel Conde, who flourished outside the studios by the sheer force of their personality and talent. Poe was already a big star during the pre-Pacific War period. In the years after the war, he was a much-admired action hero who could wield the saber with much flair as the legendary Pangasinan hero Palaris, and swing from tree to tree like Tarzan in his portrayal of the *komiks* hero Hagibis. Manuel Conde established a screen image as the humorous folk hero Juan Tamad, and then went on to portray great heroes from foreign adventure tales, like Genghis Khan and Sigfredo and one of the Siete Infantes de Lara.

Although the independent companies, like studios, were turning the formula-based mainstream films, once in a while they turned out some out-of-the-ordinary productions. Gerardo de Leon’s early masterpieces like *Tayug, Ang Bayang Api* (Tayug, the Oppressed Town), made for Pedro Vera Jr. Productions in 1947, about the Colorum uprising in the 1930s; *Ang Sawa sa Lumang Simboryo* (The Python at the Old Dome) for Manuel Vistan Jr. Productions in 1952, about an outlaw who outraged a community by robbing a sacred image of the Virgin of its precious crown; and *Hanggang sa Dulo ng Daigdig* (To the Ends of the Earth) for PMP in 1958, about another outlaw, based on the real-life figure of Nardong Putik of Cavite. Lamberto V. Avellana, later to become a contract director at LVN, made *Tandang Sora* (Old Woman Sora) in 1947, for Avellana and Company; *Ronquillo: Tiagong Akyat* (Ronquillo: The Burglar) in 1949, for Luis F. Nolasco Productions; and *Hacendera* (Lady of the Manor) 1947, for Philippine Artists League. It is also worth noting that the first Filipino film to make it to the Venice Film Festival was made outside the studios: Manuel Conde’s *Genghis Khan*, 1950, for the director’s own film company, Manuel Conde Productions.

The slack in production in the 1960s, brought about by the break-up of the studio system resulting from Premiere’s labor problems, accelerated filmmaking activities among the independent companies. Of the independents already in existence in the latter years of the 1950s, People’s Pictures, Larry Santiago Productions, Cirio H. Santiago Film Organization, Dalisay Pictures, Vera-Perez Productions, and Everlasting Pictures supplied the main bulk of film entertainment. Two companies that later became the biggest producers of movies in the 1960s, were Lea Productions and Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions.

The same popular genres of past decades continued to provide the dramatic structure and themes of new movies. However, a change had come upon the industry as a result of the collapse of the studio system. Movie stars who were the most saleable items in mainstream films and around whom the studios had built their strategies for capturing audiences, were suddenly without long-term contracts binding them to a particular studio, except for those who were with Sampaguita Pictures. The change worked

adversely for the lesser stars and actors who were competent performers but did not have the glamour nor the charisma to draw crowds. These artists were to wander from picture to picture under different companies and were subjected to the exploitative demands of producers. Much later, the debasing requirements in an industry that puts a premium on looks and other physical attributes would drive some performers to semi-retirement or a change of career.

The fortunate ones were the big stars who were sought after as sure-fire box office attractions. Aware of their crowd-drawing capabilities, the big stars demanded incomes that were too high, making themselves accessible only to those producers who could offer contracts unimaginable under the studio system. It was this new system that ushered in the era of the superstars.

Under the new arrangement, the cost of production could only be reduced by spending less on things other than the superstar's fee. In most instances, the quality of the production suffered when producers scrimped on the screenplay, the rental of superior equipment or authentic costuming for the characters.

### **Mainstream Moviemaking**

Mainstream moviemaking in the 1960s, in lieu of planning under the studio system, took the cue mainly from movies from the United States. Action movies coming out of Europe and the United States were increasingly dependent on the sensationalism of violence. James Bond films spawned many "secret agents" similarly licensed to kill, allowed to raise mayhem at any pretext and given to extremes of violence. Made-in-Italy westerns encouraged Filipino producers to make Made-in-RP cowboy movies in which the hero found himself confronting land-owning warlords who terrorized entire towns through their goons and guns. From Hong Kong and Japan came movies about invincible masters of martial arts. Their local counterparts battled crimelords engaged in gunrunning, white slavery or the drug trade, in countless movies that boosted the stock of certain stuntmen who later became action stars.

The action films of the 1960s brought into the industry a new savage rhythm that made earlier action films seem polite and stage managed. The pacing of the new action films was fast, for the narrative had been pared down to the minimum to give more time to fight sequences, which had become more realistic and more violent. In the past, dialogue usually functioned as a device for advancing the narrative; in the new action film, the camera took over as storyteller. The result was not always coherent storytelling, but in expert hands like those of Cesar Gallardo, Cirio Santiago, Pablo Santiago, Armando Garces, or Efren Reyes, the cinematographer and the editor were coming to the fore as molders of a new experience in viewing Tagalog movies. The use of the zoom lens increased immediacy and impact, and the soundmen sustained the excitement of gunfights and fistfights by heightened sound effects. Thus, it could truly be said that the action picture is the genuinely cinematic contribution of the 1960s to the advancement of filmmaking in the Philippines.

In subsequent years, action pictures were to turn more violent as the special effects department made onscreen explosions more spectacular and destructive and car chases and smash-ups more dangerous and fearsome. The hero was to become less heroic, and purportedly more human as, in the name of greater realism, he abandoned himself to the same sadistic, lethal impulses that his enemies regularly indulged in. However, the original thematic pattern as evolved in the 1960s remained. Justice in its legal expression as policemen and soldiers, always prevailed over the forces of corruption and chaos, although one was made aware in the unraveling of the plot that the individual would need to act on his own to make it possible for good to triumph over evil.

Melodrama during this period would assert itself in two forms. First, there was melodrama that grew out of the sentimental sarswela narratives about faithful wives and faithless husbands, misunderstood maidens and misinformed fiances. In the 1960s relationships suffered and broke up because the times had ushered in mores touched by Western permissiveness and candor about sexual desire, resulting in destabilized families and amorous liaisons. Gerardo de Leon's *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (Forget Me Not), 1960, and Cesar Gallardo's *Kadenang Putik* (Chain of Mud), 1960, were early intimations of domestic disharmony within the Filipino family brought about by tensions between individual desire and social demands. In more recent times, director Marilou Diaz Abaya and scriptwriter Ricardo Lee together probed the same theme in their film triptych *Brutal* (Brutal), 1980, *Moral* (Moral), 1981, and *Karnal* (Carnal), 1983, exploring its complexities and ambiguities as expression of a devastating cultural confrontation.

The other form of melodrama was that species most characteristic of the decade that witnessed the worldwide celebration of the sex urge in the arts as exemplified in the American hippie musical *Hair* (staged in Manila in the late 1960s). This was to be designated by the comic-erotic term *bomba*, with a hint of the taunting humor characteristic of the Filipino attitude toward sex. The bomba film was melodrama that was as moralistic as the traditional sarswela. Its values were as old-fashioned as those found in earlier forms of popular culture like the soap opera, the komiks novel, and the serialized novels of weekly vernacular magazines. What gave it its sensational character was the subject of sexual relations and the frankness with which the camera recorded bed scenes only coyly suggested in earlier movies.

*Uhaw* (Thirsty), 1970, was the first bomba. It is about a woman named Lorna, her carnal "thirst," and the two men who would quench it: her husband and her husband's friend. The movie was an instant hit, prompting every other producer in town to outdo its sexual acrobatics. This soft-porn trend did not produce anything that could qualify as a classic of the genre, but it was to indicate the social unrest that was reaching a peak with the advent of a new decade. The bomba was a symbolic revolt against the institutions of a corrupt society that were being attacked by young activists demanding immediate social change. Its impact on the form of subsequent Filipino films was to manifest itself in new candor in the handling of sex as an integral part of any true-to-life treatment of love relationships. Laurice Guillen's *Salome*, 1981, spins a tragic tale of a

rural woman destroyed by the clash between personal instinct and the moral impositions of a community. The film could now explore the psyche of the central character and present the woman's sexuality with candor in a mainstream movie, because the bomba film had already broken taboos about the topic.

Two more recent films that had derived much from the genre started by *Uhaw* illustrate the possibilities and limits of the sex film as this has evolved in the space of one decade. *Scorpio Nights*, 1985, by Peque Gallaga takes the structure of the hard-core porn and casts in it the story of an idle young wife. Her husband, a security guard, works the night shift.

A voyeur student boarder who lives upstairs is drawn into a lurid affair with the young wife that proves fatal in the end. When it was released in 1985, Peque Gallaga's *Scorpio Nights* was the ultimate "bold" film, bolder even than any of the bomba films of the early 1970s. First-rate production values gave the film the commercial gloss of mainstream products that the usual low-budget bomba film lacked. This was perhaps indicative of a serious effort to explore the boundaries between art and pornography.

A certain degree of moral earnestness characterizes Tikoy Aguiluz' *Boatman*, 1984, giving it an edge over the Gallaga film as another attempt to refurbish the bomba as a vehicle for serious filmic expression. Director Tikoy Aguiluz follows the moral decay of a *provinciano* (native) boatman from Pagsanjan. He gives up the rural life and the hand-to-mouth existence there, for life in the big city. In Manila, the grinding poverty leads him to accept work as partner to a young woman who performs in a live sex show. In time, he is reduced to a sex instrument and is eventually destroyed by the moneyed and the powerful. It is *Boatman's* socioeconomic perspective, perfunctory though it might be, that somewhat redeems its exploitative intentions.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Pacific War, the musical was a form of film entertainment well loved by Filipino audiences. Those were the years when the big Hollywood musicals were popular fare in Manila's moviehouses. During those years, the best Filipino composers and the best Filipino poets collaborated to turn out memorable movie theme songs that have become classics of Filipino popular music. The songs recall an era dewy-eyed with innocence and idealism. By the 1960s, the musical had degenerated into what might be characterized as a television variety show passing itself off as a movie. The affinity with television was perhaps inevitable, for the stars' audience appeal depended on exposure time on television. Nora Aunor was boosted to stardom by winning first prize in a radio-television amateur singing contest. She entered the film industry on the shoulders of fanatical young fans won over by her television appearances. So did Vilma Santos, who kept up with rival Aunor in her TV show by compensating for her inadequacies as a singer by being a better dancer.

It is not for lack of effort that the musical is dying as a genre. In 1971, Lino Brocka, then a beginning director, tried to weld the musical to melodrama in a movie about a young man corrupted and eventually destroyed by showbusiness. *Stardoom* was Brocka's indictment of the debauching and exploitation of the Nora-Vilma generation

of pop stars by an entertainment industry that sacrificed human values for profit. Ishmael Bernal has also experimented with the musical genre combining it with comedy in ***Pabling*** (Playboy), 1981. Bernal's narrative material concerns rural folk who move to an urban environment only to discover that the city can put them through many bewildering experiences without significantly changing their lives. ***Pabling*** puts its young stars through inventive comedy routines and frames musical numbers in witty mise-en-scenes, and the result is a minor masterpiece in the Bernal canon. The Bernal experiment notwithstanding, the musical seems to have irrevocably retreated before the onslaught of imported music television videos (MTV) in which contemporary youth have found the rhythm and imagery that reflect the temper of their time.

Comedy in the past two decades is best represented by Dolphy and Niño Muhlach. The first was an elderly actor who made his reputation playing an array of gay roles and the latter a child actor who caught the fancy of audiences young and old by portraying a gallery of brattish but loveable kid. Dolphy rose to fame as a parody of the quintessential Filipino gay, achieving legendary status as a box-office star who invariably won over the movie-going crowd with his repertoire of semi-improvised comic antics and his near-infallible sense of timing as a comic actor. Niño Muhlach, on the other hand, was the "wonderboy" who always managed to show up the shortcomings of adults and who never seemed to run out of energy. It might be significant to note that the presence of these two performers came at a time when fascist repression by a dictator put up a grim background against which comic laughter was always welcome relief.

Capitalizing on Dolphy's hilarious characterization of gays and Niño's endearing portraits of smart-alecky little boys, Lino Brocka brought together the two comedy stars in ***Ang Tatay Kong Nanay*** (My Father the Mother), 1978, which tells the story of an unwanted child whom a gay beautician takes under his wing and of the miseries and griefs that the beautician experiences for taking on the double task of father and mother. Filipino comedies suffer from the clichés perpetuated by scripts that have depended heavily for laughs on lead actors (Dolphy, Nida Blanca, Chiquito, and Joey de Leon) and their ability to improvise, adlib, and quip.

This is a carry-over from the comedy skit in bodabil shows of the popular tradition. The result has been hit-and-run comedies in which the number of punchlines and visual comic effects is determined by the richness of imagination and inspiration of the lead at any given moment. What ought to have been the task of the gag writer and the film editor has been entrusted to performers who might be enormously talented, but whose creative juices are normally limited by variable working conditions and personal quirks.

The industry has failed to cultivate the virtuosités of filmmakers through systematic tradition building. The touch-and-go efforts at effective comedy are a consequence of the absence of long-term production planning. The Filipino audience has a natural fondness for comedy. It is unfortunate, however, that ad-hoc planning by companies in a hurry to make a profit has only resulted in content-less slapsticks. In such comedies, the all-too-frequent reflex of resorting to toilet humor for laughs is traceable to an

unimaginative dependence on a popular stage tradition best abandoned in film.

The horror film which started out as a major genre in the early history of Filipino cinema has now become an occasional novelty that producers trot out as Halloween or Christmas treat for children. When the closure of LVN and Premiere dissolved the studio system in the early 1960s, the horror film ceased to be of any consequence. This is confirmed today by what seems to have been accepted as the commercial recipe for the horror film—a salad of thrills and laughs. The horror part is no longer meant to be taken seriously, either because scientific knowledge has made ordinary movie-goers less gullible or the grim times have made terror less saleable than before.

Early in the 1960s, the usual format of the horror picture was that of the anthology. Different segments of the movie were handled by different directors. *Gabi ng Lagim* (Night of Horror), 1960, brought together directors Felix Villar, Tommy David, Pablo Santiago, and Larry Santiago. *Mga Daing sa Libingan* (Groans from the Grave), 1961, was the product of the combined efforts of Jose Velasco, Jose Miranda Cruz, Gil de Leon, and Armando de Guzman. The format persists today in the example of the four horror anthologies of Regal Films, *Shake, Rattle and Roll I, II, III, and IV* in 1984, 1990, 1991, and 1992.

A notable experiment with the horror genre was *Haplos* (Caress), 1982. Director Butch Perez and scriptwriter Ricardo Lee combined elements of the ghost tale and the tearjerker to tell about the haunting of a young man from the city by the spirit of a provincial beauty who was killed by Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War. The film seemed more interested in making statements about love and loss in a time of war than in evoking thrills. Its ambiguous intentions weakened the impact of the film, in spite of superior production values and fine performances by lead stars Rio Locsin and Christopher de Leon.

The production cost of *Tiyanak* (Changeling), 1986, by Peque Gallaga may partly explain the scarcity of horror films nowadays. Gallaga's employment of expensive mechanized dolls to simulate the transformation of a normal infant into a gruesome preternatural creature, made it a very expensive production. Apparently audiences no longer scream in fright without credible special effects, expert prosthetics, or finely calibrated atmosphere. The economics of evoking terror among a more skeptical and sophisticated audience have become unaffordable.

### **Government and the Film Industry**

Since its early appearance in the Philippines, film has been seen by the government as a ready source of revenue. That it could be an effective educational tool and developed into an art form second to none in potential audience reach has not touched the consciousness of government policy makers. They have continued to see film merely as entertainment for which people pay an admission fee and, therefore, a source of income for the government.

Leaders of the film industry have repeatedly presented facts and figures to support

their appeal for relief from onerous taxation. But for as long as the Philippine government is in desperate financial straits, a situation that shows no signs of taking a good turn, relief seems to be a far-off dream.

But the industry continues to hope. A recent working paper reiterates the findings of previous studies: “. . . the tax burden of the film industry is simply exorbitant. These onerous taxes have marginalized the domestic film industry to a point where survival takes so much of the movie producer’s concern that the idea of coming up with a quality and sensible movie is ditched” (“Philippine National Cinema” 1991: Appendix V).

Perhaps the biggest favor ever received by the industry from government was the Manila Film Festival, first sponsored by the government in 1966 as part of the celebration of Manila’s Anniversary Day. For a period of 10 days in June, only Filipino movies would be shown in Manila theaters.

The festival was to become an annual affair. From 1966 onwards more first-run theaters in the city were to open their doors for the exhibition of Filipino films, thus correcting the earlier situation where only four theaters in the entire city showed local movies.

The increase in the number of reputable venues for Filipino movies was to broaden the audience for local films. College students and young professionals, who had hitherto stayed away from local movies began to watch them, at first out of curiosity. This was to develop later into genuine interest. The times, too, were conducive to such a development. The 1960s saw the resurgence of nationalism through a social movement which had begun to popularize among the youth such phrases as “national identity,” “colonial mentality,” and “national liberation.”

With the expansion of its audience to the middle-class, the movie industry found itself adjusting to the tastes and preferences of college-age youths in terms of subject matter and themes. It might be asserted, as a matter of fact, that the industry’s hospitality at this time towards young directors (Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Celso Ad Castillo, Joey Gosiengfiao, and Elwood Perez among them), was partly to accommodate the new college-educated audience.

The Martial Law government of President Ferdinand Marcos set up the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) to encourage the film industry to lend support to the fascist regime. One of the functions of the ECP was to administer a film fund to assist deserving movie producers and a film ratings board to give tax rebates to producers of quality movies.

Indicative of the potential of such government body in providing incentives for the production of quality films are Peque Gallaga’s ***Oro Plata Mata*** (Gold Silver Death), 1982, and Ishmael Bernal’s ***Himala*** (Miracle), 1982, the first two films funded by ECP. The scope is epic in both cases and the significance of subject matter marks out both films as non-mainstream. ***Oro Plata Mata*** is about two upper-class families in a provincial town during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, and how the

individual members cope with harsh war-time conditions in order to survive. *Himala*, on the other hand, is about a barrio girl who becomes the center of a faith-healing cult after a mystical experience during which the Virgin Mary appears to her. Bernal's film raises questions about skepticism and blind faith as well as tourism and religion in a rural community in the 1980s, revealing a microcosm of contemporary Philippine society.

ECP was scuttled in 1985, too soon to be able to prove its worth to the film industry. Under its new name as Film Development Foundation of the Philippines, the institution was to be identified, until the EDSA Revolution of 1986, as host for the exhibition of local erotic films that could not be booked in regular theaters for fear of outright legal prosecution.

The declaration of Martial Law in 1972 marked an era when government employed dual tactics in dealing with media which heretofore had enjoyed a wide latitude of freedom. Government tried to keep media in good humor even as they were being fettered. In the case of the film industry, state help was being dangled at the film producers in the meantime that the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures (BCMP) was tightening the screws that would keep movies from being "unfriendly" to the New Society.

Under the chairmanship of Guillermo de Vega, producers were made to submit finished scripts to the BCMP before they could begin to shoot a picture. Although improvised scripts were the notorious tradition in the industry, the producers dutifully complied with the regulation. Later Maria Kalaw Katigbak took over the job of Censors chief. Resistance to the dictatorship was growing in militancy and the Free-the-Artist Movement with Lino Brocka and Behn Cervantes at the helm challenged Katigbak's Board over decisions seen as contravening the rights of film artists. It was during this period that controversies over the exhibition abroad of certain films by Brocka like *Insiang*, 1976, and *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (My Country: Gripping the Knife's Edge), 1985, and by Bernal like *Manila By Night/City After Dark*, 1980, exposed the arbitrariness and devious logic of the Board of Review for Motion Pictures and Television (BRMPT) as a control body for the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos.

The militancy of filmmakers opposing the Martial Law government especially after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino in 1983, accounts for the defiant stance of a number of films produced during the closing years of the Marcos rule. Defiance was not always openly stated but it was definitely present in the images of incarceration, suppression, resistance, and struggle. It was explicit in Brocka's *Bayan Ko*, but it was also to be detected in Marilou Diaz Abaya's *Karnal*, 1984, where parricide ends a tyrannical father's domination. Resistance was the theme of Mike de Leon's *Sister Stella L.*, 1984. The director's near-obsessive treatment of the theme of power and tyranny in *Batch '81*, 1982, and *Kisapmata* (Split-Second), 1981, already presaged De Leon's later antifascist stance. In 1980, Bernal exposed the underside of the dictatorship's beautified Manila in *Manila By Night* (later changed to *City After Dark*),

in effect saying that the City of Man was a big hoax. At about the same time, Brocka was extolling in *Bona*, 1980, the act of revolt of the fanatical movie fan who decides to get back at her callous exploiter.

## **Film as Art**

The 1970s was a phenomenal period in the history of Philippine Cinema. Filipino films were attracting the serious attention of the intelligentsia. This was partly due to the influence of the national soul searching induced by the nationalist movement of the 1960s, partly as an effect of the interest shown in film festivals abroad in the works of Filipino directors, and partly as a consequence of the increasing ranks of mass communication majors in Philippine Schools.

The proliferation of awards groups since the mid-1970s attests to the widespread acceptance of the Filipino film as art that deserves comment, analysis, and reward.

Of these groups the most significant was the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (Critics of the Filipino Film), if only because its founding members included film reviewers and college professors whose writings evinced familiarity with international film landmarks and a certain degree of immersion in film theory. The Manunuri conferment of honors through its annual Urian Awards night had been met with both rebuff and praise. Its standards have been challenged both by practitioners and commentators, thus provoking discussions in media and in academe on the status of Filipino cinema as art.

Within the span of 15 years of honoring outstanding films, the MPP has made it possible for students of Filipino movies to speak with assurance about the quality of local filmmaking and to identify the artists in the industry. The MPP best of the 1970s included *Pagdating sa Dulo* (At the End), 1971, by Ishmael Bernal; *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* (This Was How We Were, What Happens To You Now), 1976, by Eddie Romero; *Insiang*, 1976, by Lino Brocka; *Itim* (Rites of May), 1976, by Mike de Leon; *Nunal sa Tubig* (Mole in the Water), 1976, by Ishmael Bernal; and *Jaguar* (Guard), 1979, by Lino Brocka. Chosen as the best of the 1980s were *City After Dark* by Ishmael Bernal, 1980; *Kisapmata* (Split-Second) by Mike de Leon, 1981; *Oro Plata Mata* (Gold Silver Death) by Peque Gallaga, 1982; *Himala* (Miracle) by Ishmael Bernal, 1982; *Batch '81* by Mike de Leon, 1982; *Karnal* (Carnal) by Marilou Diaz-Abaya, 1983; *Sister Stella L.* by Mike de Leon, 1984; *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (My Country; Gripping the Knife's Edge) by Lino Brocka, 1985; *Hinugot sa Langit* (Wrenched from Heaven), 1985, by Ishmael Bernal; and *Orapronobis* (Fight For Us), 1989, by Lino Brocka.

Unfortunately, many award-winning and other noteworthy films are fast disappearing because neither the industry nor the government is exerting effort to preserve artistic and historic films and to restore significant works from the past. Fortunately, through the generosity of the Federal Republic of Germany, Gerardo de Leon's *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not), 1961, has been restored and is now available for viewing. Other works

of De Leon need retrieving and restoring as do the works of the masters like Carlos Vander Tolosa, Lamberto V. Avellana, Gregorio Fernandez, Ramon Estella, and Manuel Conde.

The first, and so far, the only degree program in Film—that of the University of the Philippines (UP) set up in 1981—has been turning out potential filmmakers and film scholars to carry on the work that the artists in the industry and the researchers in the academe have started. The Film Department of the UP College of Mass Communication, along with other schools offering Mass Communication as a major, adds every year to the pool of youths interested in a career in filmmaking. How the industry will be able to absorb all the talents waiting to be tapped will depend on the ability of our national economy to recover from reverses suffered during the Marcos dictatorship and Aquino's post-EDSA regime. With the natural calamities that afflicted the country—the disastrous earthquake in 1990, the catastrophic eruption of Mount Pinatubo and the killer flood in Ormoc, Leyte—all of which worked together to reduce the number of moviehouses in the country, prospects for a bright future for the film industry are somehow not immediately forthcoming.

### **Alternative Films**

Fortunately, the industry is not the sole venue for the flourishing of filmmaking in the country. In 1977 Kidlat Tahimik gave up a career in business and industry to be a filmmaker. He made ***Mababangong Bangungot*** (Perfumed Nightmare) outside the film industry, and won acclaim as a world-class filmmaker at the Berlin Film Festival. In 1983 Nick Deocampo made a gay film called ***Oliver*** and attained honors abroad at festivals of short films without help from any film company. It was also in 1983 when Raymond Red made ***Ang Magpakailanman*** (Eternity) and forged ahead to make a name for himself as an internationally recognized creative artist in film, working outside the mainstream. Most recently, Emmanuel Reyes used personal funds to make ***Dreaming Filipinos***, 1990, in which he raised questions about nationalism, US neocolonial control, fascist professors, false consciousness, the brain drain, and other similar weighty themes that mainstream movies cannot ever carry.

Alternative filmmakers are products of film schools where students are exposed to specimens of art films created without the compromises of commercial filmmaking. The satisfaction they get from their work is of course quite different from that derived from the making of mainstream movies. Because the usual audience for alternative films consists of fellow artists and technicians, praise is specially prized, coming as it does from peers.

But if artists are seeking feedback on how their films have touched the lives of the individuals whose concerns are more basic than simple appreciation for a finely crafted object, then they should be looking to movie-making for the populace. They should recognize and be prepared for the compromises that commercial filmmaking demands and they should develop the will and the wile of working around them. Creating in a highly circumscribed society, artists like Gerardo de Leon, Lamberto V. Avellana, and

Lino Brocka learned how to surmount the walls erected by entrepreneurs, clerics, politicians, and bureaucrats and they survived in the industry and left Filipino viewers with certain moments of truth and beauty that only film can imprint and vivify in the people's consciousness. • B. Lumbera