

# GMA fashion legacy a hit and miss



President Arroyo's fashion legacy is one of hits and misses, much like her presidency.

The most awaited of her fashion statements each year are her gowns for State of the Nation Address (SONA) events, where guests' and politicians' dresses sometimes become as talked about as national issues.

In almost all her SONA speeches, President Arroyo always wore Filipiniana clothing like *ternos* and "Maria Claras," except in 2001 and 2002, when she donned embellished pantsuits.

"In her first two SONA events, I believe she was trying to project

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an image of professionalism, competence, and a 'can do' image by choosing outfits that projected more of a 'dress for success' look," said Delby Bragais, a fashion designer and the only internationally certified image consultant in the country.

"The succeeding choices for her SONA outfits then shifted to the *terno* and Maria Clara gowns, perhaps in an effort to project a more Filipino image," she said.

### Best clothes forward

Arroyo also wore significantly less flashy jewelry during her 2008 SONA - a move that New York-based Filipino designer Marc Rancy and wedding couture veteran Joel Bautista attribute to the government's austerity measures.

That year, former Press Secretary Jesus Dureza sent out a press release stating that her pale fuchsia pink gown made with woven "sabang" was supposed to symbolize self-reliance, stability of the country, care of the environment, and concern for the poor and vulnerable.

Bragais said although fashion's message depends on who's looking, it is still an important aspect of projecting a good public image.

"Outfits of the head of state should be carefully thought of in terms of design, specific body type, her fashion personality, her best colors, her lifestyles, or where the outfits will be worn; in addition to a well thought-of branding strategy," she said.

"This way, she makes a strong and consistent fashion statement, as well as uses this image to further her political goals and objectives in the local and international arena," she added.

### Rating her SONA regalia

The designers interviewed by abs-cbnNEWS.com said Arroyo's Filipiniana attire for the SONAs were appropriate for the occasion, safe, and not over-the-top.

They said her gown color choices were bold (from a rich indigo to vibrant red), in shades that suited her moderately fair complexion. She carried her outfits well, despite her short stature, they said.

Rancy particularly liked her 2001 and 2002 pantsuits because they looked "Muslim-inspired." "I think it's important not to leave out the fashions of the Muslims," he said.

Her blue-green suit in 2001 had ethnic designs on the cuffs akin to Moro designs, while her 2002 gold pantsuit sported a veil-like sash near the ascot collar.

However, they noted that some of her outfits were "outdated" and were too repetitive, tending to sport elaborate embroidery.

"Of course, it represents the Filipino culture. The thing is, the [SONA] gowns are pretty, but it lacks the modern touch. From what I can see, everything's been done by several people already," Rancy remarked.

### Time for change

If they had an opportunity to dress Arroyo for the SONA, the designers opted for "traditional clothes with a modern twist."

Bragais said she would create a hand-embroidered three-piece set of dyed tunic-inspired *piña* jacket, top, and pants. Rancy would ditch the bolero-type "pañuelos" and go for simply embroidered tube-top *ternos* to give Arroyo's neckline some room.

Some of her outfits suited her figure more than others. For example, her deep red-beaded "pañuelo" in 2006, and her intricately beaded Persian blue cover-up in 2005, only emphasized her small shoulders and face, giving the impression that the clothes were engulfing her frame.

Bautista and Rancy said her gowns could use less embroidery like beads and sequins, and more of elegant accents like quality fabrics or tiny cloth rosettes. "Sometimes simpler is better," Bautista said.

Rancy recommends that Arroyo wear more classic modern jewelry, like diamonds or pearls, instead of the bulky heirloom antique pieces she wore in 2005 and 2006.

He also pointed out that Arroyo's hairstyle, short and swept slightly across her forehead, barely changed throughout her SONA speeches. "I think she should try something new. Maybe a longer bob cut would do," Rancy said.

### A fashionable President?

Often, a President's fashion choices are pieced together by a team of stylists who worry about what he or she will wear at a particular day and time, leaving heads of states to worry about "more important things."

Aside from her SONA *terno* outfits, Arroyo's day-to-day wardrobe include casual to corporate attire often fashioned by her loyal stead of designers JC Buendia, Ito Curata, Rem Divino, and Inno Sotto.

Hair and makeup is handled by Gen-er Miranda, jewelry is usually handled by Gabby Panlilio, while wardrobe and accessories are handled by Joanne Zapan-