

1986 — 2010

Pio Abad

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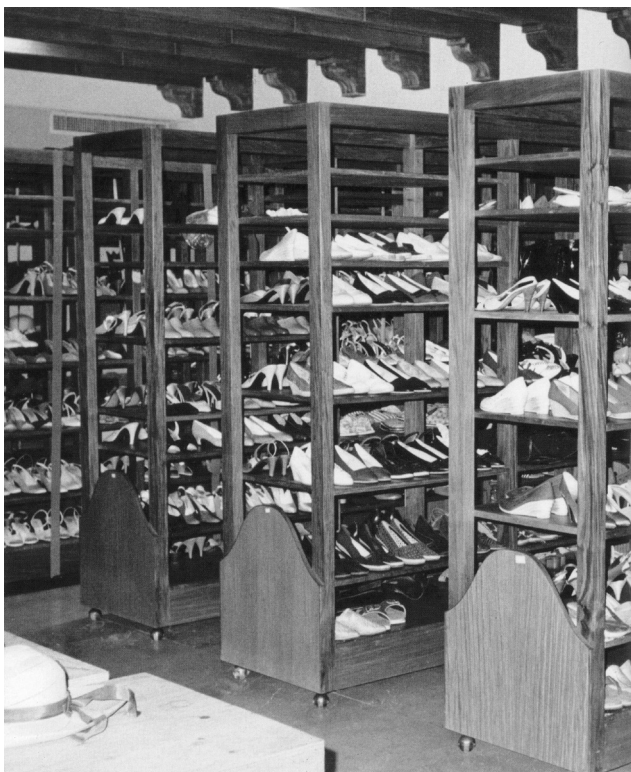
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1986

Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos fled Malacañan Palace on 25 February 1986 as a result of a military backed popular revolt. Over a million people took to the streets of Manila to demand an end to their twenty-year conjugal rule marred by allegations of plunder and human rights violations. On board a US Army helicopter provided by their friends Ronald and Nancy Reagan, the Marcoses and their supporters flew to what was thought to be a permanent Honolulu exile.

In the wake of the Marcos family's departure, people were able to enter the fifty-four-room palace that had been off limits and heavily fortified for decades. In the family dining room, they found a half-eaten banana and an unfinished piece of steak still in its silver service. Documents were strewn throughout, jammed in paper shredders and found clogged in a gold plated toilet bowl. One bedroom contained an oxygen tank, a dialysis machine and packages of Adamson's adult disposable diapers—proof of the president's long denied illness. In Imelda's dressing room, they discovered racks of bejeweled gowns, bullet proof brassieres, gallon size bottles of French perfume and one thousand and sixty pairs of size 8 ½ shoes, the most notable of which was a pair of plastic disco sandals with three inch high, flashing, battery operated heels.

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Malakas and Maganda

In local creationist folklore, Malakas (The Strong One) and Maganda (The Beautiful One) are the primordial couple from which the entire Filipino race is said to originate. According to the most popular form of the story, they enter the world fully formed when a magical bird splits a single stalk of bamboo open, revealing them cradled inside. Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos appropriated this image as the iconographic representation of their conjugal rule. Pictorial re-interpretations of the myth were fed into the propaganda machine and eventually proliferated as murals and relief sculptures throughout the city. Plans were even drawn up to build a monument of the couple as Malakas and Maganda taller than the Empire State Building. When foreign journalists entered the private chambers of the palace, they were baffled by the numerous depictions of the presidential couple as Tarzan and Jane.

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Semiramis

In an autobiography published in 1980, Imelda recounts the events following her assassination attempt in 1972 when a man named Carlito Dimahilig lunged at her with a bolo knife during an awarding ceremony, lacerating her arms and hands. While recuperating in the hospital, she had a vision of the ancient queen Semiramis leading a huge crowd praying for her recovery and invoking her to rejoin the stream of life.

Imelda would later reveal that, prior to this incident, an Indian mystic had once told her that she was the reincarnation of Semiramis, the Assyrian queen who became a ruler of the vast Neo Assyrian empire following the death of her husband, Shamshi-Adad V.

A painting commissioned by Imelda to commemorate this revelation mistakenly depicts Semiramis as another ancient ruler, the Egyptian queen Nefertiti—an error that was never rectified nor explained.

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A Party in Persepolis

In October 1971, Imelda Marcos and her 15 year-old daughter Maria Imelda flew to Iran upon the invitation of the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and the Shahbanou Farah Diba. They were the official Philippine representatives for the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great. Upon arrival in Shiraz, they were welcomed by Abdu Reza, the Shah's younger brother, and driven by motorcade to a star shaped luxury tent city constructed around the ruins of the old Temple of Darius. On the road to Persepolis, the Iranian government whitewashed buildings and constructed walls to obscure views of the slums.

Along with 5000 guests, among them fifty heads of states and their representatives, Imelda and Maria Imelda attended a five and a half hour long feast catered by the famous French restaurant Maxim's, who closed their Paris restaurant for two weeks for the event. Guests drank 25,000 bottles of fine wine and dined on poached quail eggs stuffed with golden imperial caviar and roasted partridge with foie gras and truffles, all served on golden platters mounted on taxidermy peacocks.

The party lasted for three days.

The House of Heinz

Imelda Marcos first met Andy Warhol in November 1974. The artist had convinced their common friend, the film producer Franco Rossellini, to arrange a get together in the First Lady's suite at the Carlyle Hotel.

Warhol was trying to pin down a portrait commission from Mrs. Marcos in his bid to become the official portraitist to the leaders of the world. Warhol's fantasy was for a single portrait commission that would be reproduced endlessly, with the silk-screened likenesses of Imelda and President Marcos occupying every government office, embassy and governor's mansion, and Imelda setting the trend for others to follow suit, the Pahlavis, Saddam Hussein and Imelda's new best friend, Madame Mao Tse Tung. Unfortunately, this first meeting never went beyond Imelda's usual platitudes about beauty and a stilted conversation about Archie, Warhol's pet dachshund. Warhol made three more attempts to get the commission, at the Chinese Mission to the United Nations, the disco club Hippopotamus and at the state dinner for the Marcoses at the White House. However, the portraits never materialised.

Although the state dinner was the last of their meetings, some hypothesise that these encounters secretly made a lasting impression on the First Lady. When the Marcoses fled the palace, the crowds of protesters who ventured further into the palace grounds came upon a sizable house hidden among tall trees in the garden. Inside, they found every room filled from floor to ceiling with catering size jars of Heinz sandwich spread.

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Coconut Palace

In 1981, Imelda Marcos commissioned the architect Francisco Mañosa to build a palace on Manila Bay for the impending visit of Pope John Paul II. The coconut palace was built almost entirely from a specially engineered and chemically treated type of coconut tree known as Imelda Madera. The palace is shaped like an octagon, the shape given to a coconut before being served, while the roof is shaped like a traditional Filipino salakot or hat. Some of its highlights are the 101 coconut-shell chandelier and the dining table made of 40,000 tiny pieces of inlaid coconut shells. Each of the suites is named after a specific region of the Philippines and displays some of the handicrafts these regions produce, among them, a portrait of the First Couple made out of pearls and seashells embroidered onto black velvet.

The Pope rejected Imelda's offer of using the palace as his official residence, finding it too ostentatious a place to stay. Undeterred, Imelda decided instead to open the palace the following year, during the inaugural Manila Film Festival, when the Coconut Palace played host to Hollywood film stars Brooke Shields, who stayed in the Iloilo Room, and George Hamilton, who stayed in the much larger Zamboanga suite.

In 1990, George Hamilton was named as a co-conspirator in a federal fraud and racketeering case against Imelda Marcos. Hamilton allegedly bought Charlie Chaplin's Beverly Hills home with money given by Mrs. Marcos. Imelda was later acquitted of all charges by the New York federal court.

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2010

The national elections of May 2010 marked the most significant return of the Marcos family to Philippine politics since their return from exile in 1991. Imelda Marcos was elected as the representative of the Second District of Ilocos Norte at the age of 80, Maria Imelda became the Governor of Ilocos Norte and Ferdinand ‘Bong Bong’ Marcos, Jr. won a seat in the Philippine Senate.

A few months earlier, The Cultural Centre of the Philippines held a gala in honour of Mrs. Marcos. The three-act show, entitled ‘Seven Arts, One Imelda’, extolled her patronage of the arts as founder and chair of the Cultural Centre from 1969 to 1986. Among the performers featured in the first act were pianists Cecile Licad, violinists Joseph Esmilla and Coke Bolipata, flutist Antonio Maigue, classical singers Aileen Espinosa Cura, Camille Lopez Molina, Rachelle Gerodias and Jonathan Velasco, accompanied by the Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Chino Toledo. The second act, a suite of songs, dances and images entitled ‘Muse and Madness’, featured 300 performers, composed of 10 choirs plus Ballet Philippines, The Bayanihan Dance Company, prima ballerina Lisa Macuja and mezzo soprano Clarissa Ocampo. The final act was a fashion show featuring the designs of Pitoy moreno, Inno Sotto, and Paul cabral, who all made their own versions of the terno, the Philippine national dress that Imelda popularized during her rule.

Twelve people turned up to protest outside the invitation-only event.

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A detailed description of the exhibited items

1. Enlarged photograph of the Presidential Study at Malacañan Palace, taken by my father on 25 February 1986.
2. Seashell decorated desk clock featuring the profile and insignia of IRM given to and promptly rejected by my father as a Christmas present from IRM in 2010.
3. Reproduction of oil painting found in the private chambers of Malacañan Palace depicting FM as Malakas.
4. Associated Press photograph of IRM and daughter looking at the ruins of the Apadana Palace in Persepolis with an audio commentary of the trip lifted from IRM's Youtube channel.
5. Replica of Heinz Sandwich Spread silk satin terno (Philippine national dress) commissioned by IRM, supposedly for a portrait sitting with Andy Warhol that never happened.
6. Silk twill scarf depicting IRM as the reincarnation of Semiramis, surrounded by Filipino artefacts and objects that mistakenly refer to Ancient Egypt instead of Assyria.

7. Actions of the First Lady Philippine postage stamp released in 1973 (purple).
8. Photographic portraits of George Hamilton and Brooke Shields in gold plated bamboo frames found on top of a grand piano in the Coconut Palace.
9. Reconstruction of seashell decorated CCTV camera allegedly installed in the private presidential chambers.

IRM: Imelda Romualdez Marcos

FM: Ferdinand Marcos

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